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## Teach for Australia has great merit

**T**HIS week, 45 top-ranking university graduates will begin a two-year teaching stint in some of Victoria's most disadvantaged schools. They do so as the first recruits of Teach for Australia, a program the Government believes will help tackle the teacher shortage and lift quality. The graduates will learn largely on the job, at the end of which they emerge with a postgraduate diploma of teaching. It is a bold experiment, albeit one that has been tried with apparent success in several countries, most notably Britain and America. After all, parachuting individuals with no teaching experience into the state's toughest classrooms after only six weeks of training — however intensive it is, and however gifted the graduates concerned — is a gamble of sorts.

But *The Age* believes it is a gamble with the potential to

yield great dividends for generations of students. Education Minister Bronwyn Pike last year said the program “will bring some of our state's brightest graduates into the classroom where they will not only pass on their knowledge, but also act as role models for other students”. This is indeed the right measure of success, and the program deserves broad community support as it seeks to deliver on this promise.

In an ideal world, every regular teacher would be one of “our state's brightest”. But teaching as a profession has been so undervalued in recent years that lifting the standards and the diversity of teaching graduates emerges as one of the biggest policy challenges. There is every reason to try something new, notwithstanding the usual resistance from teacher unions. These high-achieving recruits, who may have taken a pay cut on sign-

ing on, demonstrate an obvious passion and commitment to teaching. Many people can testify to the life-changing influence of an outstanding teacher. And education, we know, is a ticket out of poverty. Unleashing the state's brightest on the state's most disadvantaged schools, in Melbourne's north and west and in country Victoria, is an exciting prospect.

The \$22 million program, funded mainly by the Federal Government, clearly will not solve the teacher shortage problem and nor has it been designed for this purpose. It should be seen as part of the wider effort to increase the teaching pool, reward teaching excellence and lift student performance, both in struggling schools and across the board. On this last point, the evidence from similar programs overseas is encouraging. We wish this year's recruits the best of luck.