

**Dr Terry Burke**  
**Eulogy by Dr Ken Boston**  
**St Mary's Church, North Sydney**  
**12 January 2022**

Dianne, Terry's family, friends and colleagues here at St Mary's Church, and on livestream.

We have lost a giant of a man.

Terry Burke filled the room with his presence, his humour, his kindness, his inclusiveness, his intelligence.

He was a tower of strength and integrity.

His sudden death has been a shock and loss to us all.

Terry's professional career fell into two parts.

First, his teaching and leadership positions within schools from 1960 until 1975, in primary schools (Connell's Point and Fairy Meadow Demonstration School), and central schools (Ashford, Barraba and Hillston).

Second, his leadership positions within the school system: as inspector; assistant director; director; assistant director-general for the South Coast; and finally, as Deputy Director-General, with responsibility for teaching and learning within the school system in its entirety (all 2200 schools).

He always said that his role as principal at Hillston Central School, from the early age of twenty-nine, was the most transformative stage of his professional life.

As his responsibilities for the public education system increased, so the educational priorities of the first stage of his career, as a teacher and principal, were reinforced rather than altered.

As Deputy Director-General, forty years after he began teaching, at heart Terry Burke remained a teacher and a principal, and he was admired and respected accordingly.

The principals' associations, and the Teachers' Federation, knew that Terry's keel had been laid during his time as principal of Hillston Central School in the seventies, not in Head Office in the later decades of his career.

The depth and ballast of that keel gave Terry his unerring professional centre of gravity; its centre-line and fidelity gave him his unwavering direction and purpose.

Terry never saw himself as a generic public sector manager, or a bureaucrat, or an administrator: he was an educational leader, leading teaching and learning within the public education system, in the interests of children and the public good. A public servant in the very best sense of the term.

Terry was about curriculum, curriculum support, high quality teaching, school leadership, the professional development of teachers and the provision of support services, to provide quality education for all children and young people, regardless of background or disability.

He questioned the latest educational fads and ephemeral priorities of the day. His focus was on proven and sustainable long-term school improvement, not the quick fix or the daily press release.

This was the source of Terry's great authority with Virginia Chadwick and John Aquilina, who trusted his judgement implicitly and respected him greatly; within Head Office; within the Board of Studies; with regions and districts; within schools; with parent and school council organisations; with principals and their associations; and with teachers and the Teachers' Federation.

He had the authenticity that comes from years of school experience, in good times and in bad, in some of the more remote and demanding schools in the state; he had immense knowledge and understanding; his wisdom and practical good sense were renowned; and his commitment to quality education for all was beyond doubt.

Terry was also a thorough gentleman, of the old-fashioned type. In meetings he responded to occasional hyperbole and histrionics with calmness, reason and evidence; he was considerate and friendly to all; he bore his power and authority with great humility; he cared greatly for the personal welfare of his staff; and he greeted everyone from the Premier to the cleaner with the same polite and warm affability.

At the same time, he could be resolute and immovable. He was a man of great principle. He never failed to speak truth to power, firmly but gently, and always with that crooked smile and the twinkle in his eye.

It has been a privilege not only to have worked with Terry, but to have had him as a close friend, for thirty years.

That friendship was far from unusual, and many have known him longer. Everyone here today, physically and on livestream, saw Terry as a friend. Those many friendships have been rich and fulfilling, and will be sorely missed by us all.

By none will Terry's friendship be missed more than by Cathy Johnstone, who for so many years so ably managed Terry's schedule, his papers and his office.

Looking back, I think that the last years of Terry's career, after we returned to Bridge Street, were among the most satisfying years to be in education and training. We faced some mighty challenges, but it was a good time to be alive and to be working with such a wonderful group of people.

With his good humour and friendliness to all, Terry himself was so important in setting the tone, the style and the culture of the Department at that time.

We will forever remember the Christmas Carols in the stairwell in Bridge Street, with everyone in the building ranged along the old cast iron banisters up several flights of stairs, which reverberated with song.

And – although it had nothing at all to do with Christmas – Terry would always lead us in a spirited rendition of 'Danny Boy'.

Dianne and family: We join with you in celebrating the life of this wonderful man, father and grandpa.

I hope that it is of some comfort to you to know of the love, respect and affection for Terry that will abide for years to come among his many friends and colleagues.