



## **Australian Education Union**

### **Submission to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools**

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## ***Introduction***

The Australian Education Union (AEU) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools (The Review)*. The AEU represents more than 187,000 members including principals, teachers and allied educators in schools, TAFE institutes, Corrections Education, Adult Migrant Education Services, and early childhood education centres. Given that the majority of the AEU's members work in government schools, we are well-placed to provide insights gained from the considerable collective experience of our members that will be of great benefit to *The Review*.

In support of this submission, the AEU has undertaken a study exploring the experiences and perspectives of teachers and principals about core elements of a high quality public education system. The study includes a national survey of N=4069 respondents in the public school system. The survey was conducted between September and October 2017.

It is the view of the AEU that the formulation of effective educational policies cannot be achieved without substantial and ongoing input from those educators who are involved in the daily tasks associated with ensuring that students have every chance to learn and grow to their fullest extent. As noted by the Director of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Andreas Schleicher,

... one thing is clear, where teachers are not part of the design of effective policies and practices, they won't be effective in their implementation. Education needs to do more to create a teaching profession that owns its professional practice. When teachers feel a sense of ownership over their classrooms and their profession, when students feel a sense of ownership over their learning, that is when productive learning takes place. And when teachers assume that ownership, it is difficult to ask more of them than they ask of themselves. So the answer is to strengthen trust, transparency, professional autonomy and the collaborative culture of the profession all at the same time.<sup>1</sup>

This collaborative approach is supported by Canadian educational researcher, Michael Fullan who identifies the 'crucial elements for whole system reform' as 'intrinsic motivation, instructional improvement, teamwork and "allness"'.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, 'the key to system-wide success is to situate the energy of educators and students as the central driving force'.<sup>3</sup> For Fullan, the system is the locus of collaboration, improvement and motivation. To improve, systems need to be guided by an articulate, ambitious and rich set of educational goals. These goals go beyond merely improving achievement measured by standardised test scores; equity, well-being and inclusiveness are all traits that excellent school systems need to pursue. As Fullan points out, these can only be reached by improving the capacity of the system.<sup>4</sup>

The AEU identifies a range of core areas central to improving the capacity of this country's education system and attaining positive social outcomes in education and society:

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<sup>1</sup> Andreas Schleicher in Gomendio, M. (2017). *Empowering and Enabling Teachers to Improve Equity and Outcomes for All, International Summit on the teaching Profession*, OECD Publishing, Paris., p.3

<sup>2</sup> Fullan, M. (2011). *Choosing the wrong drivers for whole system reform*, Centre for Strategic Education. Retrieved from <https://michaelfullan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/13396088160.pdf> p.3

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.9

- Quality teaching, including: fully qualified teachers; systemic support for teachers; continuous professional development; teachers having control over their profession; student centred teaching; sustainable workload
- Quality learning: including a broad engaging and inclusive curriculum; targeted support for students with additional needs; professional control over student assessment; student centred learning; teaching and learning being at the heart of leadership; needs based funding and fully resourced schools
- Safe and inclusive schools: employers taking systemic responsibility for teaching and learning conditions to ensure safe and inclusive schools; comprehensive strategies and staffing to ensure student wellbeing; comprehensive strategies and staffing to ensure teacher wellbeing; structured connections with community agencies and programs
- Workforce planning (addressing supply and demand): a workforce that is diverse and reflective of the community; systemic workforce planning; secure employment; attraction and retention strategies; minimum qualification standards for employees
- Initial Teacher Education (ITE): 2 year postgraduate degree following 3 year initial degree; capping total enrolments; minimum entry standards; strengthening and raising the status of the practicum component
- Effective systemic direction and support: strong systemic support for schools, school leaders, teachers and educational support; employers responsibility for the provision of high quality professional learning; state and territory registration bodies; substantial and qualified non-school based teaching force to support schools through a head office and associated regional structures.

Intimately linked with all these facets of a quality education system are the basic principles of system equity and system resourcing.

The collective experience of AEU members has shown is that tools and policies designed to achieve educational excellence will not succeed unless backed by appropriate resources, whether they be human resources, time-allocations, materials, support structures and personnel, professional development, or physical infrastructure. Because of this fact, it is regrettable that the *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools Issues Paper (Issues Paper)* released in conjunction with *The Review* states that ‘school funding calculations and distribution’ will not be considered by *The Review*.<sup>5</sup> This is particularly concerning given that the *Issues Paper* goes on to say that *The Review* will ‘focus on the effective and efficient use of funding for primary and secondary schools’ in order to improve outcomes.<sup>6</sup> It is impossible to talk about efficient funding without examining whether that funding is being directed to where it is most needed and to where it is most effective. It is also limiting, to say the least, to talk about effective funding without discussing the level of funding required to achieve desired ends.

Resource levels matter; a recent OECD report of 2015 PISA data found that 15-year-old students performed better in science when they had access to ‘high-quality educational resources (including science teachers, laboratories and extracurricular activities), on average, after accounting for the socio-economic profile of students and schools’.<sup>7</sup> Data from the

<sup>5</sup> Commonwealth Department of Education and Training (2017). *The Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools Issues Paper*. Retrieved from [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/issues\\_paper\\_-\\_final\\_1.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/issues_paper_-_final_1.pdf), p.3

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> OECD (2017). *PISA in Focus #76: How do schools compensate for socio-economic disadvantage?*, OECD Publishing, Paris. Retrieved from [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/how-do-schools-compensate-for-socio-economic-disadvantage\\_a77ee9d5-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/how-do-schools-compensate-for-socio-economic-disadvantage_a77ee9d5-en), p.3

International Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) shows similar relationships, finding that ‘Australian Year 8 students who attended schools where mathematics instruction was not affected by resource shortages achieved an average mathematics score that was significantly higher than that for students attending schools where instruction was affected’.<sup>8</sup> The availability and quality of these resources are directly related to levels of funding. Similarly, the 2015 PISA report also found that

...About one-third of the variation in science performance across OECD countries is explained by the degree of equity in the allocation of education resources across advantaged and disadvantaged schools, with more equitable systems performing better, on average.<sup>9</sup>

The relationship between system quality and equity has also been found in other contexts (including other subject areas covered by PISA<sup>10</sup> and relationships revealed through data collected for TIMSS over 20 years<sup>11</sup>); however, it is difficult to examine educational equity without also examining how resources are distributed between schools and systems with varying levels of need and varying capacities to effectively address their needs. This is precisely the failure of the Turnbull Government’s decision to limit the Commonwealth’s share of funding to public schools to an arbitrary proportion of costs based on school sectors. As noted by Dr Ken Boston (AO) in a speech early in 2017:

...the view that government schools are a state matter, and that fee-paying, government-funded non-government schools are a Commonwealth matter, is outrageous: the Commonwealth of Australia has a role in relation to the education of all young people in Australia, and every state minister for education has responsibilities for the education of all young people in the state, regardless of the schooling sector they attend.<sup>12</sup>

In the same speech, Dr Boston also articulated the relationship between resources and outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged students. In doing so he also outlined some of the interventions required to the best outcomes for those students including,

...smaller class sizes, specialist personnel to deliver the appropriate tiered interventions, speech therapists, counsellors, school/family liaison officers including interpreters, and a range of other support. And that support requires money. You cannot deliver education as a genuine public good, without strategically differentiated public funding directed at areas of need. That’s what Gonski sought to achieve.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Thomson, S., Wernert, N., O’Grady, E., Rodrigues, S. (2017). *TIMSS 2015. Reporting Australia’s results*, ACER. Retrieved from [http://research.acer.edu.au/timss\\_2015/2/](http://research.acer.edu.au/timss_2015/2/), p.158

<sup>9</sup> OECD, (2017). op cit

<sup>10</sup> Sahlberg, P.(2012). Quality and Equity in Finnish Schools, *School Administrator*. Retrieved from [https://pasisahlberg.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Qualit\\_and\\_Equity\\_SA\\_2012.pdf](https://pasisahlberg.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Qualit_and_Equity_SA_2012.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Mullis, I., Martin, M. & Loveless, T. (2016), 20 Years of TIMSS. International Trends in Mathematics and Science Achievement, Curriculum and Instruction, TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center. Retrieved from <http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2015/international-results/timss2015/wp-content/uploads/2016/T15-20-years-of-TIMSS.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Boston, K.(2017). ‘Vision or hallucination? Some reflections on the Gonski Review’, Address to the TJ Ryan Foundation Brisbane, 14 February 2017. Retrieved from <http://apo.org.au/system/files/73736/apo-nid73736-29261.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

In contrast to the effective interventions listed by Dr Boston above, there are also a range of popular policy prescriptions that are either ineffective or even harmful depending on what outcomes are valued and measured in the pursuit of educational excellence. Fullan, outlines some broad characteristics of what he labels the ‘wrong drivers’ for effective education reform:

- accountability: using test results, and teacher appraisal, to reward or punish teachers and schools vs capacity building;
- individual teacher and leadership quality: promoting individual vs group solutions;
- technology: investing in and assuming that the wonders of the digital world will carry the day vs instruction;
- fragmented strategies vs integrated or systemic strategies.<sup>14</sup>

The remainder of this submission will address the Review questions in turn and in doing so will present evidence for which strategies and policies are effective, ineffective and even harmful in pursuing educational excellence. Responses to submission questions will be combined where they overlap significantly.

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<sup>14</sup> Fullan, op cit, p.5

## ***Recommendations***

### **Public Education System**

Recommendation 20: That achieving educational excellence in Australian schools requires a strong public education system where the formulation of effective education policies has substantial and ongoing input from education staff as the central driving force of teaching and learning. (p.32)

Recommendation 21: That a high quality education system must focus on the relationship between system quality, access and equity including how resources are distributed between schools and systems with varying levels of need and varying capacities to effectively address their needs. (p.32)

Recommendation 22: That tools and policies designed to achieve educational excellence must be backed by appropriate resources, including human resources, time-allocations, materials, support structures and personnel, professional development and physical infrastructure. (p.32)

### **Quality learning – access and equity (curriculum, attraction and retention of qualified staff)**

Recommendation 1: That a high quality, broad and inclusive curriculum must be accessible to all students. To achieve this, systems must ensure the availability of qualified teachers who have the appropriate skills to cater for students' needs; appropriate staffing levels and structures; technology and technical support and resource allocation. (p.10)

Recommendation 2: That a strong systemic response is required to ensure that non-metropolitan schools are able to access the same level of resources relative to need as metropolitan schools. This must include qualified teachers to address the issue of teaching out of field. (p.12)

### **Accountability and assessment**

#### *NAPLAN*

Recommendation 3: That standardised testing, NAPLAN for example, must be viewed as a snapshot of student learning at one point in time and is best used as a random sample over a large population to provide the system-wide information required to support planning and resource allocation and enable governments and education systems to fulfil their responsibility to provide funding for programs in areas identified as in need. (p.14)

Recommendation 4: That the Education Council should undertake a comprehensive review of standardised testing in Australian schools. Further, that measures to increase standardised testing such as the National Year 1 Literacy and Numeracy Check must not be adopted by the Education Council. (p.15)

#### *Assessment*

Recommendation 5: That assessment, reporting, teaching and learning are interrelated, and any changes to one have implications for the others. Assessment is an intrinsic element of good teaching practice and should provide teachers, students and parents with information

about the progress and achievements of students. Therefore systems must ensure teachers are deeply involved in developing and reviewing curriculum and assessment at all levels and; that assessment is authentic and integrated with teaching and learning. (p.15)

Recommendation 6: That the best forms of assessment rely on and value informed teacher judgement, as this ensures the integration of a range of factors including knowledge of the student and performance in a variety of forms of learning and assessment. Therefore systems should provide ongoing professional development for teachers on assessment; moderation practices within and among schools to improve the ability of teachers to make judgements of student work; time for teachers during the school day to assess, evaluate, moderate and report on student learning. (p.16)

### **Needs-based funding**

Recommendation 7: The public school system at a national, state and local level must be resourced to 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) in order to meet the teaching and learning needs of all students. (p.18)

Recommendation 8: In order for all public schools to reach 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) there must be a more balanced alignment of state and federal responsibilities for public school funding which reflects the federal government's greater resource revenue raising capacity. These resources must be targeted to where they are needed most across the entire education sector. (p.18)

Recommendation 9: The Federal Government's cuts to disability funding in 2018 must be immediately reversed and the disability loading reviewed as a matter of urgency by the National School Resourcing Board. That review should look to determine the real costs of ensuring all students with disability can access a high quality education. (p.18)

### **Professional development**

Recommendation 10: That a systemic approach to continuous teachers' professional learning is essential and should provide opportunities for collaborative professional development within and between schools. (p.21)

Recommendation 11: That greater systemic support should be provided for early career teachers with resources provided for mandated mentoring, induction and ongoing professional learning. This support must include time-release for both mentors and early career teachers. (p.21)

Recommendation 12: That research into effective pedagogy should be undertaken by systems and incorporated into professional development programs. These programs must be relevant and of high quality, including time and support for the implementation of professional learning in schools. (p.21)

Recommendation 13: That greater systemic support and improved access to continuous professional development for school leaders and particularly new principals is crucial to build and maintain effective educational leadership and must be supported and resourced by education systems. (p.22)

### **Initial Teacher Education**

Recommendation 14: That minimum entry requirements should be adopted for selection into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to recruit the top 30% of students into the profession, with equivalent measures for those seeking entrance to ITE from points/pathways other than completion of schooling. (p.25)

Recommendation 17: That the Education Council should develop a strategy and timeline to transition initial teacher education courses to two-year post graduate qualifications. Further, in order to protect the quality of school education, Commonwealth, state and territory governments should not fund or accredit 'fast-tracked' initial teacher education programs such as Teach for Australia or similar. (p.26)

Recommendation 18: That the ITE practicum component should be strengthened with a focus on regional, rural and remote placements and on working with students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, have a disability or identified learning need and those who exhibit behavioural needs. (p.26)

Recommendation 19: That all initial teacher education courses should include content that gives candidates an understanding of the importance of culturally appropriate curriculum and school culture when working in rural, regional and remote schools and in particular, Indigenous communities. (p.26)

### **Workforce planning**

Recommendation 15: That comprehensive workforce planning should be undertaken across the states and territories, to provide more focussed and better resourced delivery of ITE and maximise the retention of high quality entrants and graduates in the teacher workforce. (p.25)

Recommendation 16: That the funding and provision of ITE places be better coordinated in response to assessments of projected demand for teachers. (p.25)

## ***Submission questions***

### ***What should educational success for Australian students and schools look like?***

- ***What capabilities, skills and knowledge should students learn at school to prepare them for the future?***
- ***How should school quality and educational success be measured?***

School education is expected to fulfil a large and growing range of social and economic functions. In general terms, the goals of school education have been summarised in the Melbourne Declaration on Education goals for Young Australians. Goal 2 of the Declaration is that ‘All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens’.<sup>15</sup> The Declaration contains a rich description of the capabilities of successful learners which as well as including ‘essential skills in literacy and numeracy’, also covers the ability to learn actively; problem-solving; deep and critical thinking and reflection; the ability to plan and work individually and collaboratively; the ability to successfully choose future employment or education; and motivation for students to reach their full potential.<sup>16</sup> Educational success for Australian students will only be obtained when the requirements of the Declaration’s first Goal are met:

Provide all students with access to high-quality schooling that is free from discrimination based on gender, language, sexual orientation, pregnancy, culture, ethnicity, religion, health or disability, socioeconomic background or geographic location.<sup>17</sup>

### **Access and equity**

Two interrelated policy orientations prevent equal access to the type of quality school education described by the Melbourne Declaration. The first is an overall system of funding that reinforces existing cultural and economic stratification. For example, compared to other OECD countries, Australian students from low socioeconomic status (SES) families are more likely to attend under-resourced schools.<sup>18</sup> Problems with Australia’s school funding architecture will be discussed further below. Often related to issues around funding is an unequal access to a rich and inclusive curriculum. As stated in the AEU’s 2007 Curriculum Policy:

Curriculum must be inclusive and be able to cater for all students in public education including:

- Students learning in isolated situations;
- students in low economic circumstances;
- Indigenous students;
- Students from language backgrounds other than English;

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<sup>15</sup> MCEETYA (2008). *National Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians*. Retrieved from [http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/resources/National\\_Declaration\\_on\\_the\\_Educational\\_Goals\\_for\\_Young\\_Australians.pdf](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf), p.8

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.7

<sup>18</sup> OECD (2014). *How is equity in resource allocation related to student performance*. Retrieved from [https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/pisainfocus/pisa-in-focus-n44-\(eng\)-final.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/pisainfocus/pisa-in-focus-n44-(eng)-final.pdf)

- Special needs students;
- Gifted and talented students;
- Both girls and boys;
- GLBTI<sup>19</sup>

The policy goes on to say that curriculum ‘must be relevant to the needs of all students. It must be appropriate motivational and able to engage students from all backgrounds’.<sup>20</sup> To ensure that a high quality curriculum is accessible to all, it is vital that school systems ensure the availability of,

- quality teachers who have appropriate qualifications and skills to cater for students’ needs;
- appropriate staffing levels and cooperative structures to offer all students a broad curriculum;
- professional development for teachers which is appropriate, relevant and of high quality, including time and support for the enactment of new curriculum;
- technology and technical support;
- resource allocation including necessary aides, course offerings, the ability to communicate with other agencies, human resource assistance etc.<sup>21</sup>

*Recommendation 1: That a high quality, broad and inclusive curriculum must be accessible to all students. To achieve this, systems must ensure the availability of qualified teachers who have the appropriate skills to cater for students’ needs; appropriate staffing levels and structures; technology and technical support and resource allocation.*

Many Indigenous students suffer unequal access to a rich and inclusive curriculum; literacy and numeracy achievement, and school attendance for Indigenous students are still well below that of non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>22</sup> As the AEU pointed out in our Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs Inquiry into Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students, closing these gaps,

...is resource-intensive, and cannot be achieved in a political environment where actions by Federal, State and Territory governments undermine and diminish their responsibility for the provision of long-term sustainable public services. Equity for disadvantaged students cannot be achieved unless a high priority is given to addressing the achievement gaps which confront ATSI children.<sup>23</sup>

This submission outlined a range of initiatives and programs that have shown real results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. For example, Northern Territory schools funded under the National Partnership Program for low-SES schools saw funded primary schools make greater literacy and numeracy gains than unfunded schools. Often this funding

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<sup>19</sup> AEU (2007). Curriculum Policy 2007 As adopted at the 2007 Annual Federal Conference, p.2

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pp.2-3

<sup>22</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (j2017). Closing the Gap: Prime Minister’s Report 2017. Retrieved from <http://closingthegap.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/ctg-report-2017.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> AEU (2015). *AEU Submission to the Inquiry into Educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students*, pp.4-5

was used to implement specifically targeted programs and to employ staff to deliver a culturally appropriate curriculum.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately a withdrawal of Commonwealth Schools funding for the Northern Territory over the next 10 years under the Australian Education Amendment Act will make it much more difficult to capitalise on gains already made and jeopardise progress in remote and very remote schools in the Northern Territory — especially given the limited capacity to raise funds locally at a school or Territory level.

Students in regional, rural and remote areas also often lack equal access to a high quality curriculum. As Halsey observes, national and international large-scale tests consistently reveal sizeable average score differences between metropolitan and non-metropolitan students.<sup>25</sup> On average, non-metropolitan students are less likely to complete senior secondary education or enrol in tertiary studies; are more likely to report exposure to bullying; have lower levels of achievement motivation; have a lower sense of belonging to their schools; and are more likely to present with one or more developmental vulnerabilities in their first year of school.<sup>26</sup> Despite higher levels of need, PISA data shows that in Australia, non-metropolitan schools are more likely to report shortages in staff and other resources than metropolitan schools and that the magnitude of this difference is greater than the OECD average.<sup>27</sup> As Lamb et al note, the smaller schools that are more prevalent in non-metropolitan areas,

tend to have fewer resources, are often less able to employ specialist staff or offer specialist subjects or programs, have to use composite multigrade classes, provide fewer opportunities for professional development, have more difficulty recruiting and retaining teachers, provide less support for special needs students and offer fewer options for courses.<sup>28</sup>

Teachers surveyed by the AEU this year were more likely to report that that they taught a subject outside of their area(s) of qualifications/expertise this year if they were from non-metropolitan areas with more than half of the responding teachers from very remote areas reporting that they had taught out-of-field (Figure 1).

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.11

<sup>25</sup> Halsey, J. (2017). Independent Review into Regional Rural and Remote Education-Discussion Paper. Retrieved from

[https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/independent\\_review\\_into\\_regional\\_rural\\_and\\_remote\\_education.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/independent_review_into_regional_rural_and_remote_education.pdf), pp.16-17

<sup>26</sup> AEU, (2017). Submission to the independent review into regional, rural and remote education. Retrieved from <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/application/files/9215/0630/3811/subRegionalRural092017.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.6

<sup>28</sup> Lamb, S., Glover, S., Walstab, A. (2014). “Educational disadvantage and regional and rural schools”. *2009 - 2017 ACER Research Conferences*. Retrieved from [http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1228&context=research\\_conference](http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1228&context=research_conference), p.68

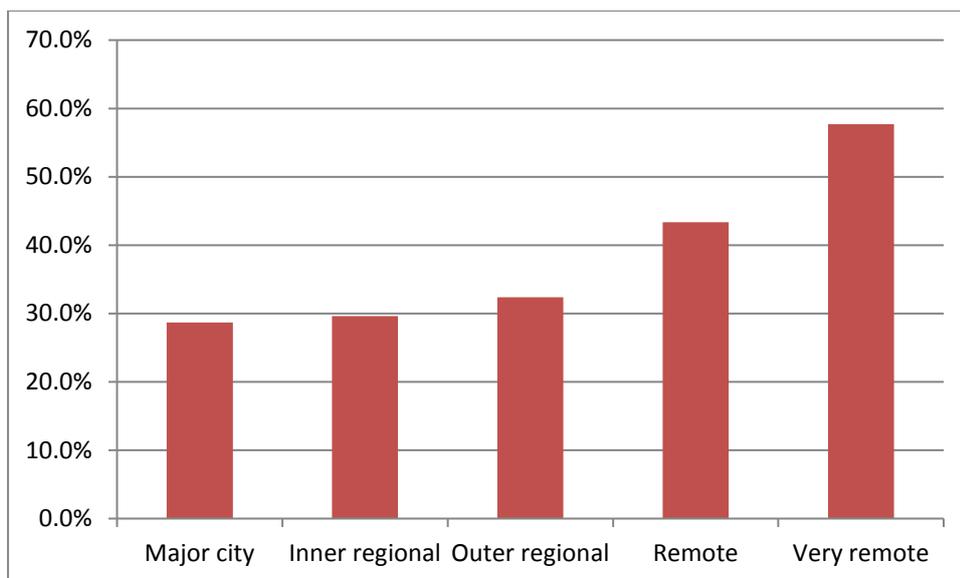


Figure 1: Percentage of teachers who have taught subject outside their area(s) of qualifications/expertise this year

A strong systemic response is required to ensure that non-metropolitan schools are able to access the same level of resources relative to need as metropolitan schools. Without this support and coordination, schools and students in non-metropolitan areas will continue to lag behind.

*Recommendation 2: That a strong systemic response is required to ensure that non-metropolitan schools are able to access the same level of resources relative to need as metropolitan schools. This must include qualified teachers to address the issue of teaching out of field.*

Equal access to high quality schooling for students with disability is, to some degree, mandated by legislation whereby schools are required to ensure that students with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as other students.<sup>29</sup> However, the reality is that schools regularly struggle to find the resources required in order to ensure that students with disability have the same level of access to quality schooling. More than 90 per cent of principals surveyed by the AEU this year reported that there were students with disability at their schools who had to be assisted using funds from other areas of their budgets. Only 13 per cent of the principals surveyed felt that they had sufficient resources to appropriately meet the needs of students with disability at their schools and 62 per cent felt that their state or territory education departments were not effective in providing support for students with disabilities. Eighty-two per cent of teachers surveyed felt that additional support for students with disabilities would be very helpful in improving student outcomes. Despite such a desperate situation, the Turnbull Government's changes to the Australian Education Act in June 2017 will see Commonwealth funding for students with disability cut in five states and territories next year. The funding cuts in Tasmania and the Northern Territory are particularly severe amounting to reductions of 46 and 35 per cent respectively.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (2005), Disability Standards for Education 2005. Retrieved from [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/disability\\_standards\\_for\\_education\\_2005\\_plus\\_guidance\\_notes.docx](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/disability_standards_for_education_2005_plus_guidance_notes.docx)

<sup>30</sup> Department of Education and Training (2017). Commonwealth funding for students with disability loading by state and sector, 2017-2027.

## Assessment and Accountability

Simplistic accountability frameworks that pit schools against each other and, via parental choice, create divisions between schools, reflect and maintain broader social inequalities. In this context, the relationship between what is taught and what is measured in the name of accountability is detrimental to both school quality and equity. There is strong evidence that an over-reliance on high-stakes, standardised tests is detrimental to disadvantaged students. Some of the reasons are outlined by Morgan, based on testing required by the No Child Left Behind policy in the USA:

Since teachers face pressure to improve scores and since poverty-stricken students generally underperform on high-stakes tests, schools serving low-income students are more likely to implement a style of teaching based on drilling and memorization that leads to little learning. This form of instruction leaves few opportunities for disadvantaged students to make progress and contributes to unscrupulous practices, such as lowering proficiency scores, holding students back to prevent them from taking tests, and even falsifying students' scores.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, Thrupp has observed that the introduction of national standards assessment process in New Zealand has led to a 'two-tier curriculum through incentivising a tighter concentration on numeracy and literacy in low socio-economic schools, while middle class schools were still able to retain a somewhat more generous primary curriculum.'<sup>32</sup> Polesel et al present evidence suggesting that the introduction of the National Assessment Plan – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in Australia has contributed to a narrowing of the curriculum and a shift to pedagogical styles designed to promote success in test-taking rather than motivating deep or independent learning.<sup>33</sup> One of the 7345 teachers surveyed by Polesel et al explained that NAPLAN "puts pressure on teachers to change the emphasis from teaching for learning to teaching for test success".<sup>34</sup> As Zhao notes, such approaches to pedagogy are demoralising to both teachers and students.<sup>35</sup> Hargreaves and Braun identify risks of an obsession with test-based data giving rise to Campbell's Law, where test results themselves become the goal of education rather than acting as indicators of educational progress.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, Wu has demonstrated that 'NAPLAN results do not provide sufficiently accurate information on student performance, student progress, or school performance. It is educationally unsound to publish the results and to call on parents to judge schools based on these results'.<sup>37</sup> It is perhaps for this reason that more than half of the teachers surveyed by the AEU felt that they spent too much time preparing for and administering standardised tests. Sixty-two per cent reported that the publication of NAPLAN data has led to 'a greater

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<sup>31</sup> Morgan, H. (2016). Relying on High-Stakes Standardized Tests to Evaluate Schools and Teachers: *A Bad Idea, The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, Vol. 89, Issue 2. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00098655.2016.1156628>

<sup>32</sup> Thrupp, M. (2017). New Zealand's National Standards Policy. *Teachers and Curriculum*, 17(1), p.13

<sup>33</sup> Polesel, J., Rice, S., Duffer, N.(2014). The impact of high-stakes testing on curriculum and pedagogy: a teacher perspective from Australia, *Journal of Education Policy*, 29:5, 640-657, DOI: 10.1080/02680939.2013.865082

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.648

<sup>35</sup> Zhao, Y. (2017), What works may hurt: side effects in education, *Journal of Educational Change*, 18, 1-19

<sup>36</sup> Hargreaves, A. & Braun, H. (2017). *Data-driven improvement and accountability*, National Education Policy Center. Retrieved from <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/data-driven-improvement-accountability>

<sup>37</sup> Wu, M (2010), Inadequacies of NAPLAN results for measuring schools performance. Submission to NAPLAN Senate Enquiry. Retrieved from <http://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=dab4b1dc-d4a7-47a6-bfc8-77c89c5e9f74>

focus on preparing for the test including pre-testing' and 55 per cent said that it had led to 'a reduced focus on other areas of the curriculum'; 63 percent noticed an increase in student stress levels in the lead-up to the test. According to one principal surveyed by the AEU,

The test [NAPLAN] is not reliable - it doesn't stack up against good assessment practices. You cannot guarantee that delivery of the test is the same across the country. It doesn't test 21st Century skills such as creativity and critical thinking. The writing has become very formulaic. It's driven by publishing companies looking to make money. It has led to 'checklist learning' and basic literacy and numeracy rather than open-ended, integrated programs. It is the ONLY way our school is measured by Education Directors, the government, the department and the media.

*Recommendation 3: That standardised testing, for example NAPLAN, must be viewed as a snapshot of student learning at one point in time and is best used as a random sample over a large population to provide the system-wide information required to support planning and resource allocation and enable governments and education systems to fulfil their responsibility to provide funding for programs in areas identified as in need.*

There are better avenues to accountability. Many high-performing international systems minimise their use of high-stakes, standardised testing and the publication of school results on those tests. Finland is the best known example. Finnish students undertake no high-stakes testing until the end of their secondary education. The Finnish approach is neatly described by Dianne Ravitch: 'the central aim of Finnish education is the development of each child as a thinking, active, creative person, not the attainment of higher test scores, and the primary strategy of Finnish education is cooperation, not competition.'<sup>38</sup> PISA data for OECD reveals no relationship (or a very small negative relationship) between performance in science and the proportion of students in schools where achievement data is shared publically (see Figure 2).

Finland's approach to ensuring high quality outcomes for their students is characterised by respecting and supporting teachers with a minimum degree of surveillance imposed by government. Finland exemplifies a system that has avoided Fullan's first 'wrong driver' (mentioned above) by focusing on building the capacity of teachers rather than pursuing crude accountability measures to punish or incentivise teachers.

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<sup>38</sup> Ravitch, D. (2012). *Schools We Can Envy*, *New York Review of Books*. Retrieved from <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2012/03/08/schools-we-can-envy/>

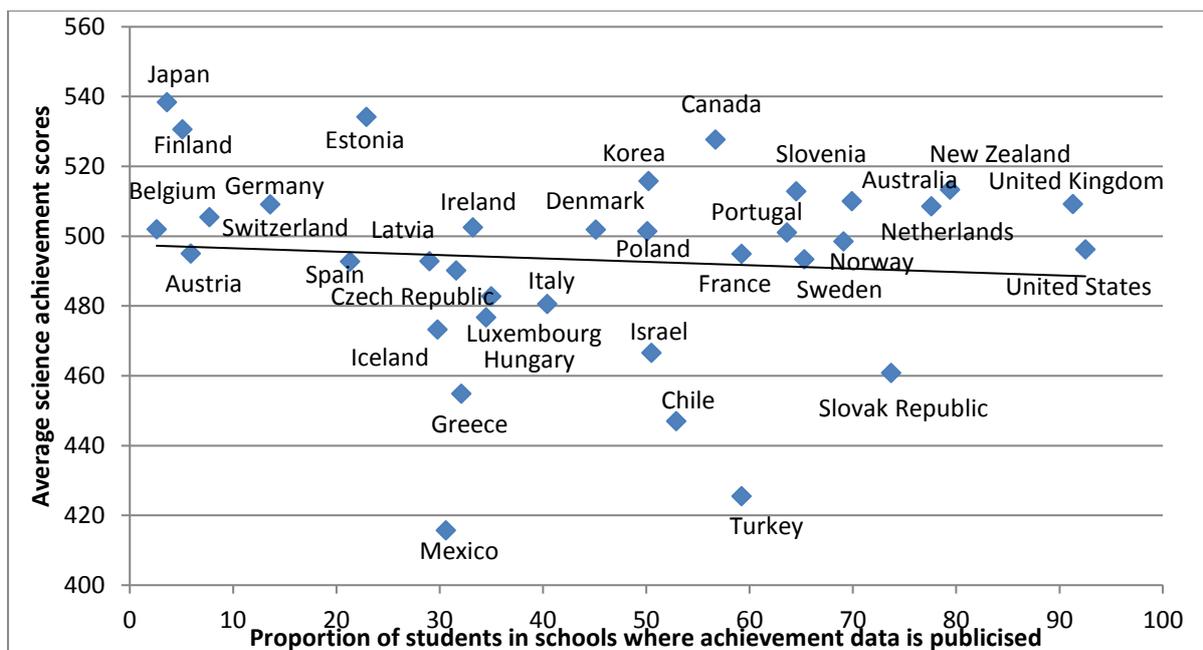


Figure 2. Proportion of students in schools that publicise achievement data by PISA science scores. Source: OECD 2015<sup>39</sup>

The Finnish approach is in stark contrast to that taken in Australia recently, typified by the proposed introduction of a Year 1 phonics test. This is an affront to teachers in two ways. Firstly, the policy imposes yet another standardised test upon teachers, creating an extra demand on primary teacher's already limited time whilst suggesting that they do not have the skills to identify and rectify literacy problems with their students. Secondly, the proposal prescribes a specific pedagogical approach that teachers already practice when appropriate to do so. To suggest that just one approach to literacy instruction and assessment is sufficient for primary teachers and students is either naïve or springs from a blinkered ideology. Unfortunately the Turnbull Government appears to have become captive of the extreme views of the right-wing Centre for Independent Studies. This approach to pedagogy is one that sees teaching as formulaic and has an isotropic conception of students and their learning contexts. It is precisely this viewpoint that has informed the decision to allow algorithms to assess NAPLAN writing tasks and it is a viewpoint that exemplifies the unsuccessful strategies adopted by the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM).

*Recommendation 4: That the Education Council should undertake a comprehensive review of standardised testing in Australian schools. Further, that measures to increase standardised testing such as the National Year 1 Literacy and Numeracy Check must not be adopted by the Education Council.*

*Recommendation 5: That assessment, reporting, teaching and learning are interrelated, and any changes to one have implications for the others. Assessment is an intrinsic element of good teaching practice and should provide teachers, students and parents with information about the progress and achievements of students. Therefore systems must ensure teachers are deeply involved in developing and reviewing curriculum and assessment at all levels and; that assessment is authentic and integrated with teaching and learning*

<sup>39</sup> OECD, (2015). Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), 2015 Reading, Mathematics and Science Assessment. Retrieved from <http://pisadataexplorer.oecd.org/ide/idepisa/report.aspx>

*Recommendation 6: That the best forms of assessment rely on and value informed teacher judgement, as this ensures the integration of a range of factors including knowledge of the student and performance in a variety of forms of learning and assessment. Therefore systems should provide ongoing professional development for teachers on assessment; moderation practices within and among schools to improve the ability of teachers to make judgements of student work; time for teachers during the school day to assess, evaluate, moderate and report on student learning*

Renowned Finnish education researcher, Pasi Sahlberg, describes GERM as ‘an unofficial education policy orthodoxy that many formal institutions, corporations and governments have adopted as their official program in education development.’<sup>40</sup> Although he acknowledges some benefits of GERM, including an emphasis on real world knowledge and skills, he is critical of its key characteristics:

GERM also has symptoms that indicate it may be harmful to its host; driving education reforms by competition, standardisation, test-based accountability, fast-track pathways into teaching and privatisation of public education... What has been the effect of GERM so far? PISA, dating from the year 2000, clearly shows that none of the GERM-infected school systems – England, the US, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the Netherlands or Sweden – has been able to improve educational performance, contrary to the policy promises made when these GERM solutions were chosen to be centrepieces in national education reform programs.<sup>41</sup>

Below we will present a range of policies and interventions that seek to build and support the capacities of all schools and to ensure that every student can benefit from high-quality schooling. At the same time we will expose some of the fads and simplistic ‘silver bullet’ solutions to policy issues arising around schooling; many of these policy prescriptions are those that characterise the GERM phenomena and should be rejected by the Review Panel.

***What can we do to improve and how can we support ongoing improvement over time?***

- ***How could schools funding be used more effectively and efficiently (at the classroom, school or system level) to have a significant impact on learning outcomes for all students including disadvantaged and vulnerable students and academically advanced students?***
  - ***What actions can be taken to improve practice and outcomes? What evidence is there to support taking these actions?***
  - ***What works best for whom and in what circumstances?***
  - ***What institutional or governance arrangements could be put in place to ensure ongoing identification, sharing and implementation of evidence-based good practice to grow and sustain improved student outcomes over time?***

## **Needs-based funding**

Large-scale international tests have shown that the quality of school systems improves with the equity of those systems. For this reason, successful school education reformers in

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<sup>40</sup> Sahlberg, P. (2014). Interview: Pasi Sahlberg, lessons from Finland/Interviewer: John Graham. *Professional Voice*, Vol 10, Issue 1, Australian Education Union Victorian Branch, Abbotsford, p.50

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

Ontario, Canada see ‘excellence and equity...as one goal not two’.<sup>42</sup> As mentioned above, any examination of more efficient and effective use of funding must take into account funding distributions and the level of funding. We also noted that the distribution of resources across schools is currently perverse in Australia with schools serving disadvantaged students more likely to report resource shortages in PISA and TIMSS data. One of the reasons that this situation exists in Australia is due to this country’s peculiar funding architecture. OECD data shows that the proportion of private expenditure for non-tertiary education in Australia is one of the highest of all OECD countries.<sup>43</sup> High levels of private expenditure leverage generous public subsidies to non-government schools that educate, on average, the least needy students (see Table 1). This funding system has served to radically change the socio-economic profiles of government and non-government schools (see Figure 3).<sup>44</sup> As noted by Ken Boston:

The charging of fees on top of being largely government-funded distorts enrolments between schools and sectors, which is the key factor causing our steepening socio-educational gradient. Given their level of fees, most of these [non-government] schools do not require the government funding to provide a quality education. The high level of government funding is quite out of proportion to parental capacity to pay.... Unnecessary government funding is therefore fuelling competition between over-funded non-government schools on the one hand, and between government and non-government schools on the other. This situation is now common in suburbs and towns across Australia, where adjacent schools can receive similar levels of taxpayer support yet operate under quite different obligations to the taxpayer, in facilities of sharply differing standards, and with clientele deeply divided on the basis of class, ethnicity and income. This is not where we want to be.<sup>45</sup>

As recommended by Gonski Review of Funding for Schooling, a rebalancing of school funding, and particularly from the Commonwealth, is required to address and reduce the social segregation that Australia’s internationally unique system of school funding has fostered.<sup>46</sup> This rebalancing is required to provide the resources and supports that disadvantaged students need, and to reverse the residualisation that affects the schools that many of them attend. The resources and interventions listed by Ken Boston in the introduction to this submission (see page 2, above) are all sensible and proven tools to address the needs of disadvantaged students, but there must be systemic policies to ensure that the resources required for their implementation are directed to where they are needed.

Table 1. Proportion of students with disability, the bottom two quartiles of the index of socio-educational advantage and indigenous students by sector<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> International Summit on the Teaching Profession, (2017). *Empowering and Enabling Teacher to Improve Equity and Outcomes for All*. Retrieved from <http://asiasociety.org/files/2017-istp-report-asia-society.pdf>, p.28

<sup>43</sup> OECD, (2017). *Education at a Glance*. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm>, p.193

<sup>44</sup> Preston, B. (2013). *The social make-up of schools*. Retrieved from <http://www.barbaraprestonresearch.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013-BPreston-Report-for-AEU-Social-make-up-of-schools-.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> Boston, op cit, p.12

<sup>46</sup> Gonski et al (2011), *Review of Funding for Schooling Final Report*. DEEWR.

<sup>47</sup> Senate Committee: Education and Employment (2017). Budget Estimates 2017-2018 Answer to Question No.SQ17-000750. Retrieved from [https://www.aph.gov.au/~media/Committees/eet\\_ctte/estimates/bud\\_1718/Education/Answers/SQ17-000750.pdf](https://www.aph.gov.au/~media/Committees/eet_ctte/estimates/bud_1718/Education/Answers/SQ17-000750.pdf)

Sector	Students with disability	Socio-educational advantage Q1	Socio-educational advantage Q2	Indigenous
Government	74%	82%	69%	84%
Catholic	16%	12%	20%	10%
Independent	10%	6%	11%	6%

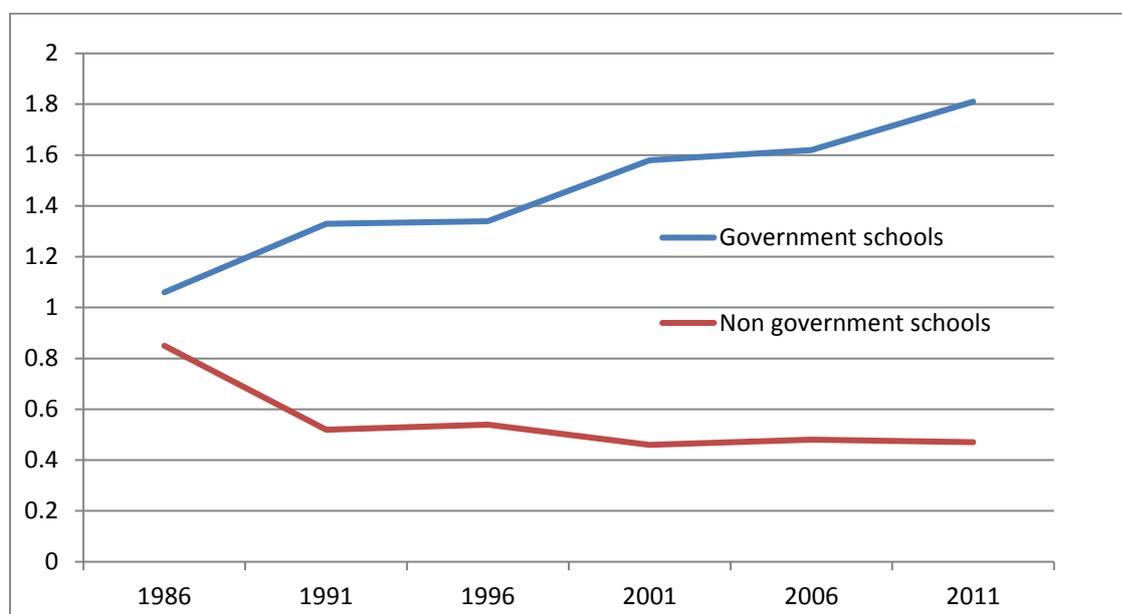


Figure 3: Ratio of low to high family income, government and non-government secondary school students, 1986 to 2011. Source: Preston (2013)

As mentioned above, the Turnbull Government’s decision to cap Commonwealth funding to government schools at just 20 per cent of the schooling resource standard (SRS) places the support that so many of Australia’s most disadvantaged students need, out of reach. Amendments to the Australian Education Act will see states and territories containing 87 per cent of Australian government school students still funded below their SRS entitlements by 2023. Under the original National Education Reform Agreement (NERA), government schools in all states and territories were to be funded at 95 per cent of their SRS by 2019, except for Victoria where this target was to be 92 per cent in 2019.

*Recommendation 7: The public school system at a national, state and local level must be resourced to 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) in order to meet the teaching and learning needs of all students.*

*Recommendation 8: In order for all public schools to reach 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) there must be a more balanced alignment of state and federal responsibilities for public school funding which reflects the federal government’s greater resource revenue raising capacity. These resources must be targeted to where they are needed most across the entire education sector.*

*Recommendation 9: The Federal Government’s cuts to disability funding in 2018 must be immediately reversed and the disability loading reviewed as a matter of urgency by the National School Resourcing Board. That review should look to determine the real costs of ensuring all students with disability can access a high quality education.*

## Alleviate excessive workloads for principals and teachers

An effective intervention that would support the capacities of teachers and principals to improve the outcomes of their students is the allocation of more time. For school principals this would mean more time to focus on educational leadership rather than administrative tasks and could be facilitated by central departments picking up some of those tasks and removing or streamlining some compliance requirements. Of the 478 principals surveyed by the AEU, nearly half reported that they worked for 56 hours or more per week. Principals reported that they spent the largest proportion of their time on complying with departmental requirements (21 per cent) but only 14 per cent of their time leading teaching and learning (see Table 2).

Table 2. ‘What proportion of your time is spent on the following?’

<b>Principal activity</b>	<b>Proportion of time spent (%)</b>
<b>Complying with departmental requirements</b>	21
<b>Leading teaching and learning</b>	14
<b>Developing self and others</b>	8
<b>Managing student well-being</b>	15
<b>Managing teacher well-being</b>	8
<b>Leading improvement and innovation</b>	8
<b>Leading the management of the school</b>	15
<b>Engaging and working with the community</b>	7
<b>Other</b>	3

Similarly, OECD data also show that teacher’s job satisfaction and self-efficacy are negatively related to the time they spend on administrative tasks, particularly in Australia.<sup>48</sup> Nearly three quarters of the 3591 teachers surveyed by the AEU (73 per cent) felt that they spent too much time on administrative tasks. Increased support from either central or regional offices or from extra staff within schools could free up teachers’ time to increase their focus on teaching and learning. Nearly 92 per cent of teachers reported they had insufficient time outside of classes for lesson planning, marking, report writing and administration work within their paid working hours. Seventy per cent of teachers reported that more time for lesson planning would be ‘very helpful’ in improving student outcomes whilst 67 per cent of teachers felt that more time to work collaboratively with colleagues would be ‘very helpful’ in improving student. Both teachers and principals stand to benefit from greater access to quality professional development which again requires space in educator’s working calendars that can only really be supported by improved staff/student ratios. Clearly the capacity of government school systems to deliver excellent and equitable schooling would be improved by lifting staff levels across schools as well as in regional and central offices.

Many schools used extra Commonwealth funding provided under the original Australian Education Act (2013) to bolster their staff numbers including extra teaching staff, learning specialists, support staff, speech therapists, social workers, integration aides and home/school liaison officers.<sup>49</sup> For example, Craigmore High School in the outer suburbs of Adelaide used extra Gonski funding to employ two literacy and numeracy support officers, a special

<sup>48</sup> OECD (2014). *Talis 2013 Results: An International Perspective on Teaching and Learning*, TALIS, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264196261-en>

<sup>49</sup> Australian Education Union (2017). *Getting Results (Vol.2)*. Retrieved from <http://aeu.unionsystems.com.au/application/files/4814/8780/4156/GonskiGettingResults2.pdf>

education liaison officer and the creation of numeracy and literacy coordinator positions. The results have been improved student performance on literacy and numeracy measures and higher levels of student engagement.<sup>50</sup>

Harristown State High in Toowoomba used their additional Gonski funding to employ an additional 2.8 full-time equivalent teaching staff ‘to create more flexible student groupings to get maximum benefits’ from a junior secondary numeracy program. There was also the provision of ‘significant additional teacher aide time...to provide daily in-class support for students who need to build their literacy and numeracy skills.’<sup>51</sup> As a result of these interventions, Harristown State High has made ‘tangible improvements’ in both NAPLAN results and Queensland Certificate of Education completion rates for Year 12 students.<sup>52</sup>

Of the 276 principals surveyed by the AEU who reported receiving extra funding under the Australian Education Act between 2014 and 2017, 58 per cent said that one of the main areas where extra funding was spent was for additional student support staff; 38 per cent reported spending extra funding on specialist literacy or numeracy teachers or coaches.

### **Improved access to professional development**

The need for more and better professional development was highlighted in the 2017 International Summit on the Teaching Profession Report:

Preparing our students to thrive in this fast-changing and highly connected world will place even greater demands on teachers. The knowledge base of the profession is becoming ever more complex. The rapid changes in content knowledge in many fields and educators’ broadening responsibilities for inculcating new competencies suggest that teacher policies now urgently need to take a career-long perspective on the development of teacher professionalism.<sup>53</sup>

The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) data has shown that teacher self-efficacy increases with access to professional development and that teacher self-efficacy is also positively related to student outcomes.<sup>54</sup> TALIS also found that for new teachers, access to mentors was beneficial for their self-efficacy and other outcomes:

When mentoring is considered, however, it seems that for new teachers specifically, time spent with a mentor, participation in mentor-facilitated professional development activities and the quality of mentors’ interactions are significantly related to the teachers’ self-efficacy and their development of effective collaborative relationships.<sup>55</sup>

Meaningful access to mentors for new teachers, however, can only be facilitated by time-release that is supported by appropriate staff/student ratios. In October 2017, the AEU surveyed 1405 teachers who had been mentors to early career teachers in the last three years. Only 15 per cent of these teachers had been provided with time release to support their roles

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, pp. 25-26

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 35

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p.36

<sup>53</sup> Asia Society (2017). *2017 International Summit on the Teaching Profession*. Retrieved from <http://asiasociety.org/global-cities-education-network/empowering-and-enabling-teachers-improve-equity-and-outcomes-all>

<sup>54</sup> OECD (2014). op cit

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p.194

as mentors whilst only 18 per cent the opportunity to share experiences and work with other mentors at their own or other schools. As one of the teachers surveyed by the AEU explains:

Mentor teachers need release time in order to properly coach their early career teachers. The two teachers need release time together specifically for discussing and acting upon mentoring related issues and topics. Mentors need to either receive training of some kind or have prior recognition. Mentors should not be chosen simply due to seniority within a school.

*Recommendation 10: That a systemic approach to continuous teachers' professional learning is essential and should provide opportunities for collaborative professional development within and between schools*

*Recommendation 11: That greater systemic support should be provided for early career teachers with resources provided for mandated mentoring, induction and ongoing professional learning. This support must include time-release for both mentors and early career teachers.*

*Recommendation 12: That research into effective pedagogy should be undertaken by systems and incorporated into professional development programs. These programs must be relevant and of high quality, including time and support for the implementation of professional learning in schools.*

Opportunities for collaborative professional development within and between schools are also vital to 'ensure ongoing identification, sharing and implementation of evidence-based good practice to grow and sustain improved student outcomes over time'. TALIS data also shows that these opportunities are beneficial for teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction. As the TALIS report notes:

The traditional picture of a single classroom with one teacher in isolation is not good enough for a variety of reasons. Relationship building and fostering collaborative practices in schools, whether these be through collaborative professional development activities, systems of peer feedback or collaborative teaching activities, are highly beneficial to teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction.<sup>56</sup>

Such an approach ensures that Fullan's second 'wrong driver', of providing individual rather than group solutions, is avoided. Central and regional offices must ensure that educators have access to frequent, high-quality, collaborative professional development opportunities and that staff levels are sufficient to facilitate this without the need for increased class sizes or grade-splitting. Ensuring that all schools, including those in remote and regional areas have equal access to professional development is a key role of education departments. Given that a higher proportion of Australian teachers felt undervalued than the average proportion for all countries participating in TALIS, prompt action to improve self-efficacy and job satisfaction is called for and this requires sufficient staff levels to allow time release for professional development and mentoring.<sup>57</sup>

Improved access to ongoing professional development is also crucial to build and maintain effective educational leadership. After summarising much of the available research on school

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p.199

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.187

leadership, Leithwood concludes that ‘leadership has very significant effects on the quality of the school organisation and on student learning. As far as I am aware, there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its student achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership’.<sup>58</sup> However system designs and resourcing levels often mean that school leaders are unable to fully develop their educational leadership skills.

A recent Roundtable Report from the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) quoted OECD figures showing that ‘Australian principals feel underprepared for the role, with 35 per cent reporting they received no instructional leadership training. In addition, only 56 per cent of Australian principals thought their preparation for the role was strong’.<sup>59</sup> Given that the workload constraints described above restrict the capacity of school leaders to engage in leadership of teaching and learning, being able to find the time to access suitable professional development in this area is challenging for many principals, especially those new to the role. The AITSL Report stated that Roundtable participants ‘advocated for a reduction in the demands on principals’ time, particularly around compliance issues that do not impact on student learning, and for greater system/sector support for principals to focus on instructional leadership’.<sup>60</sup> There is clearly a greater role for systems to play in ensuring that school leaders have equal access to the resources they need to access the professional development that they need. Systems need to actively ensure that this access is uniformly high across the government school sector. School leaders in non-metropolitan areas, and particularly in small schools, are not only more likely to be geographically further from program delivery locations, they are also more likely to be saddled with teaching loads and can tend to be less experienced than metropolitan principals when they initially accept leadership roles.<sup>61</sup>

*Recommendation 13: That greater systemic support and improved access to continuous professional development for school leaders and particularly new principals is crucial to build and maintain effective educational leadership and must be supported and resourced by education systems.*

### **Smaller class-sizes**

Smaller class-sizes offer a range of benefits for student outcomes and are also obviously supported by improved staff/student ratios. Ken Boston identifies ‘differentiated teaching, and tiered interventions to extend high achieving students and support those falling behind’ as ‘critical classroom factors for success’.<sup>62</sup> These factors are all more difficult to achieve in classes with high student to teacher ratios; large class sizes also make classroom management more difficult. As Mosteller notes, ‘Having fewer children in class reduces the distractions in the room and gives the teacher more time to devote to each child.’<sup>63</sup> Although there have been some high-profile studies suggesting that reductions in class size have minimal benefits for large financial outlays, most of these are cross-sectional or (even worse) cross-cultural, meaning that establishing links between cause and effect in these studies is difficult at best. In this respect, US researcher, Eric Hanushek’s work on class size has been influential on the

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<sup>58</sup> Leithwood K. (2007) What We Know About Educational Leadership. In: Burger J.M., Webber C.F., Klink P. (eds) Intelligent Leadership. Studies in Educational Leadership, vol 6. Springer, Dordrecht, p.46

<sup>59</sup> AITSL (2017). School Leadership Roundtable Report, p.5

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p.6

<sup>61</sup> Halsey (2017), op cit

<sup>62</sup> Boston (2017). op cit, p.2

<sup>63</sup> Mosteller, F. (1995). The Tennessee study of Class Size in the Early School Grades, Critical Issues for Children and Youths, Vol. 5, No. 2. Retrieved from [https://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/05\\_02\\_08.pdf](https://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/docs/05_02_08.pdf)

debate although the methodology behind his meta-analyses has been criticised by Krueger.<sup>64</sup> Dustmann et al found positive effects for smaller class-sizes on school completion and students' later earnings using a richer dataset and more sophisticated modelling techniques.<sup>65</sup> The most well-known large scale, randomised trial of class size reduction in primary schools (and therefore more capable of identifying causal relationships), is Project STAR (Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio) conducted in Tennessee beginning in 1985. As described by Schanzenbach,

The results from STAR are unequivocal. Students' achievement on math and reading standardised tests improved by about 0.15 to 0.20 standard deviations (or 5 percentile rank points) from being assigned to a small class of 13-17 students instead of a regular sized class of 22-25 students... Small-class benefits in STAR were also larger for students from low socio-economic status families, as measured by eligibility for the free- or reduced-priced lunch program... Importantly, small classes have been found to have positive impacts not only on test scores during the duration of the class-size reduction experiment, but also on life outcomes in the years after the experiment ended. Students who were originally assigned to small classes did better than their school-mates who were assigned to regular-sized classes across a variety of outcomes, including juvenile criminal behaviour, teen pregnancy, high school graduation, college enrolment and completion, quality of college attended, savings behaviour, marriage rates, residential location and homeownership.<sup>66</sup>

The effects of class size reduction for secondary students are not as well established (or well researched) as for primary students although there are studies suggesting significant negative effects of increased class size on academic achievement for secondary students<sup>67</sup> and on time spent by secondary teachers on classroom management over teaching.<sup>68</sup> It seems undeniable that the personalisation of student learning processes and outcomes as espoused by Yong Zhou would be more achievable in smaller, rather than larger classes.<sup>69</sup> However, the benefits of smaller class sizes will be maximised where there is 'professional development for all staff involved [to] increase their knowledge of, and preparedness to use, techniques that are particularly suited to small class environments'.<sup>70</sup>

***How can system enablers such as targets and standards, qualifications and accreditation, regulation and registration, quality assurance measures and transparency and accountability provisions be improved to help drive educational achievement and success and support effective monitoring, reporting and application of investment?***

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<sup>64</sup> Krueger, A. (2003). Economic Considerations and Class Size. *The Economic Journal*, 113: F34–F63. doi:10.1111/1468-0297.00098

<sup>65</sup> Dustmann, C., Rajah, N. and van Soest, A. (2003). Class Size, Education, and Wages. *The Economic Journal*, 113: F99–F120. doi:10.1111/1468-0297.00101

<sup>66</sup> Schanzenbach, D. (2014). *Does Class Size Matter?*, National Education Policy centre. Retrieved from <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/does-class-size-matter>, pp. 3-4

<sup>67</sup> Krassel, K. & Heinesen, E. (2014). Class-size effects in secondary school, *Education Economics*, Vol. 22, No 4, pp-412-426

<sup>68</sup> Rice, J. (1999). The Impact of Class Size on Instructional Strategies and the Use of Time in High School Mathematics and Science Courses, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Vol 21, Issue 2, pp. 215-229

<sup>69</sup> Zhao, Y. (2015). Outcome vs. Process: Different Incarnations of Personalisation. Retrieved from <http://zhaolearning.com/2015/07/20/outcome-versus-process-different-incarnations-of-personalization/>

<sup>70</sup> Zyngier, D. (2014). Class size and academic results, with a focus on children from culturally, linguistically and economically disenfranchised communities, *Evidence Base*, Issue 1. Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.694.6704&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Fullan's fourth 'wrong driver' is the implementation of fragmented strategies over integrated or systemic strategies in pursuing effective educational reform. According to Fullan:

Without a systemic mindset, countries fail to focus on the right combination with the right mindset. In the successful countries it is clear that there is an absolute belief that quality education for all is crucial to their future. These countries then approach the task with the knowledge that everyone must be part of the solution. They know that teachers are key to improvement and can only work effectively when they are supported. They make major, coordinated efforts to improve the quality of teachers through various forms of support: from recruitment to the profession at initial teacher education through the early years of teaching, continuous learning on the job, good working conditions including team development, and differentiated roles of leadership as the career evolves.<sup>71</sup>

Here Fullan is describing an educational environment that is similar to Finland's; one characterised by system-level accountability and high levels of trust based on highly qualified, professional and respected teachers.

### **Improved initial teacher education**

A crucial component of such high-trust systems is the development and maintenance of high quality initial teacher education (ITE) that can work to bolster the capabilities and status of the teaching profession. The worst case scenario in Australia's deregulated and under-funded higher education system would be one where ITE applicants are treated by cash cows by tertiary institutions. This would have dire implications for the status of the teaching profession and for Australian school students in the future. Unfortunately, low and declining average Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATARs) scores for ITE courses are consistent with just such a situation.<sup>72</sup> According to the most recent data from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), the number of students entering ITE via a secondary education pathway with an ATAR lower than 70 has grown from 25 per cent in 2006 to 42 per cent in 2015.<sup>73</sup> To improve teaching standards and teaching's status, the minimum ATAR for students' accessing ITE from secondary education must be 70. Minimum entry requirements should be adopted for selection into ITE to recruit the top 30 per cent of students into the profession, with equivalent measures for those seeking entrance to ITE from points/pathways other than the completion of schooling.

Research conducted by Ingvarson et al shows that high performing countries have strict controls over access to ITE. For example, in Canada ITE institutions 'select trainees from the top 30 per cent of cohorts and pre-service teachers must have high grade point averages to gain entry to teacher training'.<sup>74</sup> In Singapore ITE applicants are subjected to a meticulous screening process. Decent wages and conditions along with job security were also factors in bolstering demand in all of the countries studied. Demand for ITE places in Finland significantly outstrips supply: only 10 per cent of applicants are accepted into primary teacher

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<sup>71</sup> Fullan, op cit, p.16

<sup>72</sup> AITSL (2017), *Insights. Initial teacher education: data report 2017*, Retrieved from [https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/research-evidence/ite-data-report/2017/ite-data-report-2017.pdf?sfvrsn=a33fe93c\\_2](https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/research-evidence/ite-data-report/2017/ite-data-report-2017.pdf?sfvrsn=a33fe93c_2)

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p.21

<sup>74</sup> Ingvarson, L., Reid, K., Buckley, S., Kleinhenz, E., Masters, G., Rowley, G. (Sept, 2014). Best Practice Teacher Education Programs and Australia's Own Programs. Canberra: Department of Education. Retrieved from [http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1014&context=teacher\\_education](http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1014&context=teacher_education), p.53

training courses and consequently there are very high course completion rates, especially considering that the minimum qualification to become a primary or secondary teacher is a master's degree.<sup>75</sup>

*Recommendation 14: That minimum entry requirements should be adopted for selection into Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to recruit the top 30% of students into the profession, with equivalent measures for those seeking entrance to ITE from points/pathways other than completion of schooling.*

It is vital that ITE course standards are properly regulated. Unfortunately, as Ingvarson et al point out, the proliferation of ITE providers in Australia places state and national accrediting bodies under severe pressure:

The large number of small programs places a heavy burden on Australia's accreditation system. Countries such as Finland and Chinese Taipei concentrated teacher education in a smaller number of well-resourced universities some years ago, as part of a long-term strategy to lift the quality of teacher education and the status of teaching. Consideration should be given to the possible benefits of a similar policy for Australia. Consideration might be given to the model in England and Wales where funding has only been available for programs that are attracting students who meet a designated entry standard.<sup>76</sup>

They go on to point out that many of the systems described above engage in coordinated workforce planning of a type that would be incompatible with Australia's current uncapped and deregulated tertiary system. ITE places in these systems are allocated on the basis of projected demand.<sup>77</sup> Consideration should be given to a more regulated and coordinated approach to ITE funding and accreditation in Australia. There is scope to introduce at a national level a study similar to Victoria's Teacher Supply and Demand Report to inform such a system.

*Recommendation 15: That comprehensive workforce planning should be undertaken across the states and territories, to provide more focussed and better resourced delivery of ITE and maximise the retention of high quality entrants and graduates in the teacher workforce.*

*Recommendation 16: That the funding and provision of ITE places be better coordinated in response to assessments of projected demand for teachers.*

Such a process could also help to identify difficult-to-staff schools and subject areas. Often these are remote schools and schools in low SES and/or Indigenous communities; LOTE, mathematics and science, technology, Indigenous education and special education are often subject areas for which it can be difficult to obtain qualified teachers.<sup>78</sup> As mentioned above, teachers in these areas are more likely to be teaching out-of-field. Nationally and internationally there are a range of policies designed to address issues with difficult to staff schools and subject areas although there has been little rigorous evaluation of these. The AEU's submission to the Productivity Commission's study of the Schools, Education and Training Workforce lists some of these including 'Strong sustained nation-wide

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p.xv

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p.50

<sup>78</sup> AEU (2011), Australian Education Union Submission to the Productivity Commission Study : Schools Education and Training Workforce. Retrieved from <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/education-workforce-schools/submissions/sub028.pdf>, p.15

communications and public relations campaigns’, financial support for ITE for promising candidates in shortage subject areas, improved work conditions, and increased professional autonomy.<sup>79</sup> As in that submission, we repeat:

A differentiated annual salary remuneration scheme pays no regard to any known mechanism for wage fixation such as work value and has no regard to any measure of productivity. The work, for example, of teachers of Maths, Science, Languages Other than English or in low socio-economic or rural and remote locations is of no more or less value or is more or less productive than that of their colleagues elsewhere.<sup>80</sup>

Ingvarson et al also list a range of standards that should be met for ITE provider accreditation. We would add to that list a requirement for ITE providers to have substantial research capacity in order to effectively assess and develop their course material. It is the policy of the AEU that all Australian ITE courses should transition to two-year postgraduate qualifications to ensure that teachers have a superior capacity to meet an expansive range of student needs including those of Indigenous students, culturally and linguistically diverse students, and students with disability. The Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE) agrees and stated in their response to the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Board’s Issues Paper that ‘Graduate students have demonstrated achievement and persistence at tertiary studies and bring maturity and knowledge and skills that provide a solid platform from which to develop specific pedagogical understandings’.<sup>81</sup>

*Recommendation 17: That the Education Council should develop a strategy and timeline to transition initial teacher education courses to two-year post graduate qualifications. Further, in order to protect the quality of school education, Commonwealth, state and territory governments should not fund or accredit ‘fast-tracked’ initial teacher education programs such as Teach for Australia or similar.*

*Recommendation 18: That the ITE practicum component should be strengthened with a focus on regional, rural and remote placements and on working with students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, have a disability or identified learning need and those who exhibit behavioural needs.*

*Recommendation 19: That all initial teacher education courses should include content that gives candidates an understanding of the importance of culturally appropriate curriculum and school culture when working in rural, regional and remote schools and in particular, Indigenous communities.*

As noted by Darling-Hammond:

Preparing teachers as classroom researchers and expert collaborators who can learn from one another is essential when the range of knowledge for teaching has grown so expansive that it cannot be mastered by any individual and when students’ infinitely

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p.17

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, pp.22-23

<sup>81</sup> MGSE (2014). A response to the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Board’s Issues Paper on behalf of the Melbourne Graduate School of Education. Retrieved from <https://submissions.education.gov.au/Forms/TEMAG/layouts/SP.Submissions/ViewDoc.aspx?id=%7B0b89f457-18a0-48bd-832b-e837ad42cc1e%7D>, p.1

diverse ways of learning are recognised as requiring continual adaptations in teaching.<sup>82</sup>

It is because of this diversity and complexity that fast-tracked pathways into teaching such as the Teach for Australia (TFA) program are detrimental to the quality and status of the teaching profession. The program is expensive and saddled with high attrition rates. The most recent evaluation of the program found that less than half of the TFA associates remained in teaching after three years post their initial two-year placement and only 30 per cent were teaching in disadvantaged schools.<sup>83</sup>

***Are there any new or emerging areas for action which could lead to large gains in student improvement that need further development or testing?***

***Are there barriers to implementing these improvements?***

### **‘Solutionism’**

The appeal of untested, quick fixes to enduring educational issues for governments is particularly strong where these initiatives promise fast results and/or are inexpensive. Rundle equates this disposition with Evgeny Morosov’s concept of ‘solutionism’ – ‘the idea that complex social challenges can be solved by finding a simple, hidden solution. Essentially, it’s the idea that society is just a program to be debugged’.<sup>84</sup> Often these ‘solutions’ are misapplied market principles that neatly fit the descriptions of Fullan’s ‘wrong drivers’. A common thread with many of these solutions is a fragmentation or atomisation of educational functions or actors. Schools, teachers and students are seen as discrete locations of reform; the tasks of pedagogy are simplistically broken down into their basic components and reorganised into step-by-step procedures. Collective responsibility at a system level is frequently diverted to these atomised units. It is the appeal of these initiatives and reluctance to properly invest in the necessary resources that are some of the main barriers to achieving educational excellence and equity. An old idea that may be becoming new again is the concept of enhanced system capacity which, as Fullan points out, is the opposite approach to the fragmented and atomised strategies that are described below.<sup>85</sup> If we accept that ‘an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers’ then we must also acknowledge that ‘the quality of teachers is a result of the system that trains and supports them’.<sup>86</sup>

### **School autonomy**

The Commonwealth Government’s faith in school autonomy is reflected in its \$70 million Independent Public Schools (IPS) policy. Based on the Western Australian initiative of the same name, the initiative seeks to support states to encourage more autonomy for their government schools. According to the Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes policy document, the Western Australian initiative has ‘created strong foundations for empowered school

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<sup>82</sup> Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). Constructing 21st-century teacher education. *Journal of teacher education*, 57(3), 300-314, p.305

<sup>83</sup> Dandolopartners (2017). *Teach for Australia Program Evaluation Report*. Retrieved from [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/final\\_tfa\\_public\\_report.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/final_tfa_public_report.pdf), p.16

<sup>84</sup> Rundle, G.(2016). Myths and Illusions: the American charter school movement. *Professional Voice*, Vol 11.1, Australian Education Union Vic Branch. Retrieved from [https://www.aeuvic.asn.au/sites/default/files/PV\\_11\\_1\\_Complete.pdf](https://www.aeuvic.asn.au/sites/default/files/PV_11_1_Complete.pdf)

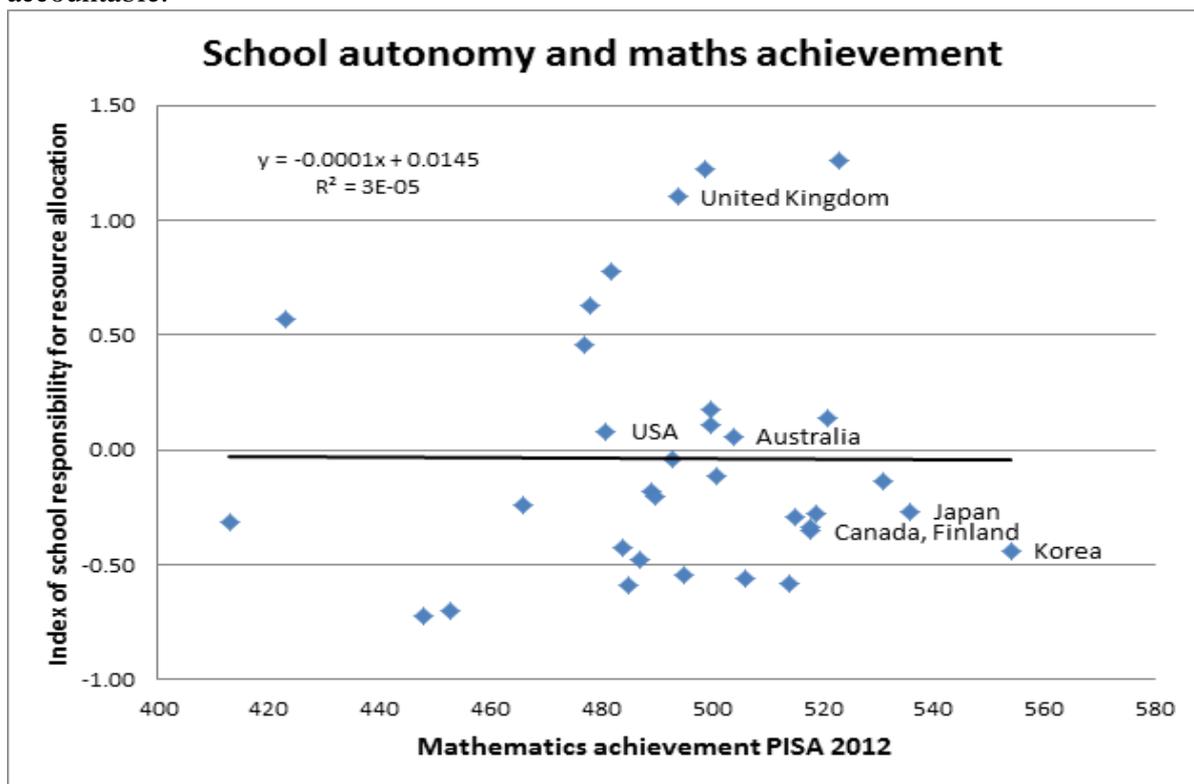
<sup>85</sup> Fullan, op cit.

<sup>86</sup> International Summit on the Teaching Profession, (2017). Op cit, p.13

communities, innovation in schools, and future improvement in student achievement’.<sup>87</sup> However, a 2016 report from the Western Australian Parliament’s Education and Health Standing Committee found the ‘IPS initiative has had no significant effect on the academic or non-academic performance of students, including those with additional needs.’<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, the report found that ‘The Independent Public School initiative has reinforced existing inequalities within the public education sector.’<sup>89</sup>

These findings are consistent with international comparisons based on 2012 PISA data. Figure 3 shows that there is no relationship between country level measures of school autonomy over resource allocation and mathematics achievement. However, as can be seen in Figure 4, countries with higher levels of school autonomy are also more likely to have school systems where maths achievement is more affected by student SES and, therefore, less equitable.

Riddle and Lingard observe that since the PISA tests began 2000 federal policy has ‘Increased emphasis on market measures for school provision, such as Independent Public Schools and school autonomy...over this time, the narrative of steady decline on PISA and TIMSS results continues while education inequality is on the rise.’<sup>90</sup> It is not surprising that when systems shift accountability to schools that the systems themselves become less accountable.



<sup>87</sup> Australian Government (2016). *Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes*, retrieved from [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/quality\\_schools\\_acc.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/quality_schools_acc.pdf), p.4

<sup>88</sup> Education and Health Standing Committee (2016), *IPS Report Card. The Report of the Inquiry into the Independent Public Schools initiative*. Retrieved from [http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/commit.nsf/\(Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID\)/56AF902F3A6948E648258010001500F6/\\$file/23820473.pdf](http://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/commit.nsf/(Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID)/56AF902F3A6948E648258010001500F6/$file/23820473.pdf), p.i

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p.38

<sup>90</sup> Riddle, S. and Lingard, B (2016). PISA results don’t look good, but before we panic let’s look at what we can learn from the latest test, *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/pisa-results-dont-look-good-but-before-we-panic-lets-look-at-what-we-can-learn-from-the-latest-test-69470>

Figure 3: The relationship between country-level school autonomy for resource allocation and mathematics achievement.<sup>91</sup>

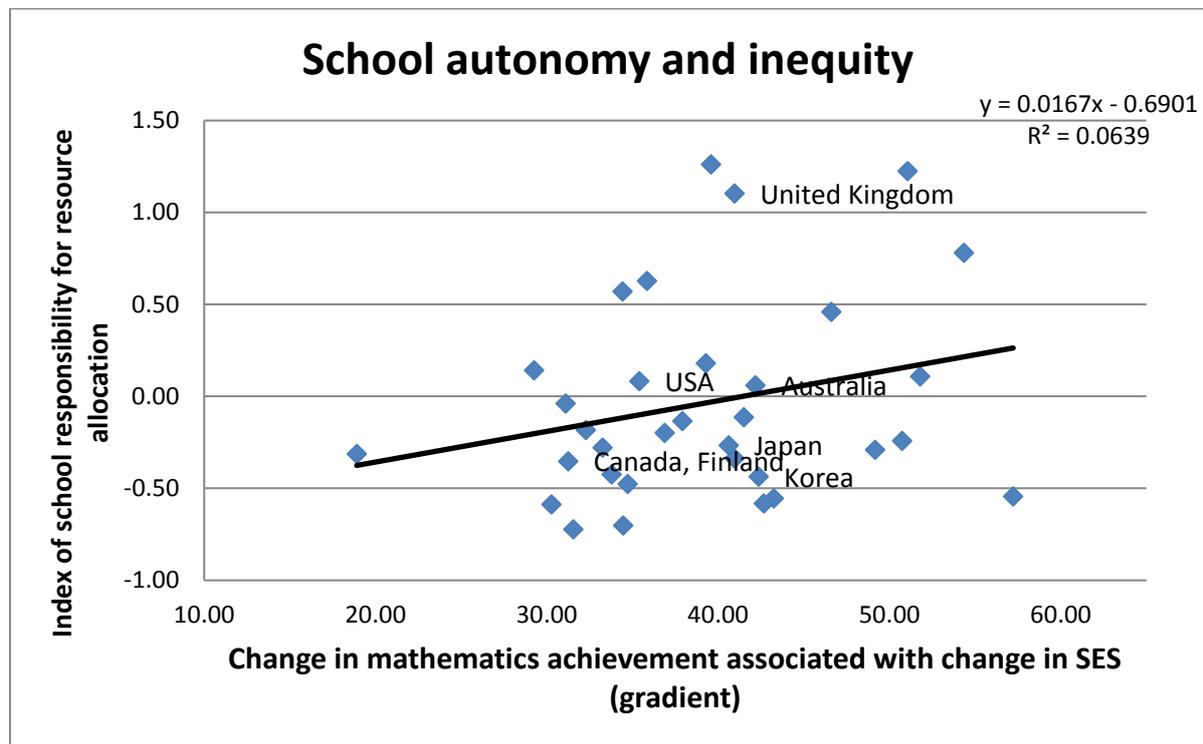


Figure 4: The relationship between country-level school autonomy for resource allocation and change in mathematics achievement associated with change in SES (measure of inequity).<sup>92</sup>

### Choice/Competition

Support for school autonomy is often accompanied by a belief that competition between schools will drive overall quality as schools compete for enrolments and status whilst allowing parents to exercise more choice. This perspective was originally popularised by Milton Friedman in the 1950s and has maintained its appeal with right-wing and centrist governments around the world. The introduction of the My School website and the publication of NAPLAN results along with other school data including schools' SES profiles is the result of this persistent ideology that seems to be impervious to the evidence that demonstrates its inadequacies. As mentioned above, these reforms have coincided with a decline in Australia's performance and equity levels on international tests. There are other international examples of where such policies have failed or are failing.

Education reform in Sweden provides a salient example of the consequences of pursuing such policies as parental choice-driven educational reform. In the 1990s the Swedish education system underwent a process of decentralisation whilst 'At the same time, changes were made to encourage the creation of independent schools [and] parents and students could choose which school to attend'.<sup>93</sup> This choice was facilitated by a voucher system that allocated public funding for independent schools whose numbers increased 'from around 60 in 1991 to 792 in 2014'.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>91</sup> OECD (2013). PISA 2012 Results: what Makes a School Successful? (Volume IV) Resources, Policies and Practices, Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-volume-IV.pdf>

<sup>92</sup> Ibid

<sup>93</sup> OECD (2015). *Improving Schools in Sweden: An OECD Perspective*. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/Improving-Schools-in-Sweden.pdf>, p.24

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p.93

According to the OECD, Sweden's PISA achievement levels have declined from 'around or above the OECD average in 2000 to a position significantly below the average. No other country participating in PISA experienced a steeper decline over the past decade than Sweden.'<sup>95</sup> As a result, the OECD's review of Swedish education recommended that Sweden should 'Revise school choice arrangements to ensure quality with equity'. It goes on to say that,

Providing full parental school choice can result in segregating students by ability and/or socio-economic background and generate greater inequities while not necessarily raising performance. Some of the intended benefits of competition – for example, greater innovation in education and a better match between students' needs and interests and what schools offer – are not necessarily related to student achievement. In addition, potential disadvantages in terms of equity and social inclusion can also have longer-term repercussions in society. Where parents can choose the school that their children attend, disadvantaged parents can end up having a more limited set of choices than more affluent parents. As a result, the benefits of school choice may not accrue to the same extent to disadvantaged students as to their more advantaged peers.<sup>96</sup>

Sweden's results have improved in the 2015 PISA tests although it should be noted that a process of re-centralisation had been occurring since 2012 including the introduction of teacher registration and induction periods for new teachers; more needs-based funding was introduced in 2014.<sup>97</sup>

In a similar vein, encouraging competition between teachers via performance-based pay schemes is also a harmful policy direction. Such schemes are detrimental to collaboration within and between schools and have a range of other negative effects that also manifest in other environments outside of teaching. Frey and Osterloh summarise these neatly:

1. In a modern economy, where new challenges emerge constantly, it's impossible to determine the tasks that will need to be done in the future precisely enough for variable pay for performance to work well.
2. People subject to variable pay for performance don't passively accept the criteria. They spend a lot of time and energy trying to manipulate the criteria in their favor, helped by the fact that they often know the specifics of their work better than their superiors do.
3. Variable pay for performance often leads employees to focus exclusively on areas covered by the criteria and neglect other important tasks. This is known as the "multiple tasking" problem.
4. Variable pay for performance tends to crowd out intrinsic motivation and thus the joy of fulfilling work. Such motivation is of great importance to business, because it supports innovation and encourages beyond-the-ordinary contributions.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p.27

<sup>96</sup> Ibid

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p.48

<sup>98</sup> Frey, B. and Osterloh, M. (2012). Stop Tying Pay to Performance. The evidence is overwhelming: It doesn't work, *Tackling Business Problems*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2012/01/tackling-business-problems>

## Direct instruction and phonics

Enthusiastic espousals of specific pedagogical approaches as blanket solutions to educational problems – especially relating to literacy – are disturbingly common in debates around schooling and the curriculum. However, as noted by Luke,

Effective teaching requires that teachers possess and deploy a repertoire of strategies, approaches and methods. The belief that there is a single effective strategy approach and method ignores the variability of kids, cultures, communities, ages and developmental, subjects, skills and knowledges that teachers face every day.<sup>99</sup>

The proponents of ‘back to basics’ instruction tend to reject, or are at least suspicious of any acknowledgement of the roles played by the range of social relationships and contexts in learning. They are more likely to see students as passive participants in regimented educational programs rather than active, creative and critical learners.

The programmatic approach to instruction is typified by the proprietorial model of Direct Instruction (DI) promoted and sold by the US-based National Institute for Direct Instruction and used by the Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy since 2010. The approach employs highly scripted lesson plans, the bulk of which is the ‘review and application of skills students have already learned but need practice with in order to master.’<sup>100</sup> However, a comprehensive review of the program failed to find that it had improved learning and that attendance rates had declined in the two years since the introduction of DI.<sup>101</sup> Renowned Indigenous educator, Dr Chris Sarra has described DI as ‘a wasteful off-the-shelf program’ that was ‘roaming the education debate, looking for which jurisdiction will be its next victim and trashing the morale of many Australian teachers’.<sup>102</sup> Professor Sarra went on to list some of the elements that actually worked to meet challenges in Australian classrooms: ‘hard work, quality teachers, quality learning programs, and high expectations relationships’.

As pointed out above, the proposed introduction of a national Year 1 phonics test is an affront to teachers. The proposal suggests that teachers are unable to tell when their students are struggling with early literacy and imposes yet another national, standardised test. Furthermore, research in England on the same test have found that the test is not able to predict later reading scores and does not improve comprehension; the test was also found to be ‘no more accurate than the teacher’s judgement in identifying children with reading difficulties’.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Luke, A. (2014). Direct Instruction is not a solution for Australia schools, *EduResearch Matters*, AARE. Retrieved from <https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=439>

<sup>100</sup> AEU Federal Office (2015). Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs Inquiry into educational Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students. Retrieved from [https://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=5&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwi-8bSmqIjXAhUBwLwKHQ2cADoQFghCMAQ&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.aeuact.org.au%2F2015\\_aeu\\_federal\\_conference&usg=AOvVaw3fEHF3ARyLubv8m7HeuYFz](https://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=5&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwi-8bSmqIjXAhUBwLwKHQ2cADoQFghCMAQ&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.aeuact.org.au%2F2015_aeu_federal_conference&usg=AOvVaw3fEHF3ARyLubv8m7HeuYFz), p.26

<sup>101</sup> Ibid

<sup>102</sup> Henebery, B. (2017). Indigenous education improving but challenges remain, *The Educator*. Retrieved from <http://www.educatoronline.com.au/news/indigenous-education-improving-but-challenges-remain-240526.aspx>

<sup>103</sup> Adoniou, M. (2017). England’s phonics test isn’t delivering – so why are we adopting it? *ABC Online*, Retrieved from <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-09-18/phonics-test-what-is-it-and-will-it-help-your-kids-read/8956360>

At its core, the promotion of ‘silver-bullet’ solutions to educational issues serves to de-skill and de-professionalise teachers. One-dimensional pedagogical approaches stifle teacher’s capacities to use their full complement of skills and are more amenable to be delivered by relatively untrained personnel or even compute programs. Standardised tests based on a single pedagogical approach imply that teachers are either unable or unnecessary to identify problems with their students’ learning. Both phenomenon also increase the scope for the private sector to increase its profile in school education either by facilitating standardised testing infrastructure and preparation materials; or in providing off-the-shelf pedagogies that neither require nor allow teachers to exercise their professional skills.

## ***Conclusion***

A strong and inclusive public education system is the only guarantee that all Australia school students are able to access the quality of education they deserve and require in the face of rapidly changing social, economic and ecological contexts. As shown above, in order for governments to implement effective educational reforms they must implement changes at a system level rather than isolating individual schools and teachers. This is not to say that effective education policy must be top-down, and one-size-fits all. As Fullan notes,

The key to system-wide success is to situate the energy of educators and students as the central driving force. This means aligning the goals of reform and the intrinsic motivation of participants... Policies and strategies that do not foster such strong intrinsic motivation across the whole system cannot be a source of whole system reform. Furthermore, strategies that do not develop increased capability (the skills to do something well) are similarly destined to failure. In other words, both strong motivation and enhanced skills on a very large scale are required.<sup>[1]</sup>

The conditions in which this collective motivation and capability can develop and thrive are characterised by high levels of trust and an acknowledgement that educators need sufficient time and the appropriate resources to ensure that every student can reach their full potential.

*Recommendation 20: That achieving educational excellence in Australian schools requires a strong public education system where the formulation of effective education policies has substantial and ongoing input from education staff as the central driving force of teaching and learning.*

*Recommendation 21: That a high quality education system must focus on the relationship between system quality, access and equity including how resources are distributed between schools and systems with varying levels of need and varying capacities to effectively address their needs.*

*Recommendation 22: That tools and policies designed to achieve educational excellence must be backed by appropriate resources, including human resources, time-allocations, materials, support structures and personnel, professional development and physical infrastructure.*

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<sup>[1]</sup> Fullan, op cit, p.3