

Improving Outcomes for All

The Report of the Independent Expert Panel's
Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System



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The document must be attributed as the *Improving Outcomes for All: The Report of the Independent Expert Panel's Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System*.

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Letter of transmission

The Hon Jason Clare MP
Minister for Education
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

On 15 December 2022, Commonwealth, State and Territory Education Ministers agreed to establish a panel of experts (the Panel) to inform the next intergovernmental schools agreement, with a focus on driving real and measurable improvements for students most at risk of falling behind, improving wellbeing, attracting and retaining teachers and improving the use of data and transparency.

In accordance with the Terms of Reference, I am pleased to transmit *Improving Outcomes for All: The Report of the Independent Expert Panel's Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System* to all Education Ministers on behalf of the Panel undertaking this review.

Australia has a professional and committed teaching workforce which is the foundation for our strong system; however, the system as a whole can be better and fairer to meet the needs of all students, regardless of their geographic location or background. When implemented, the reforms and targets outlined in this report will enliven the Mparntwe Declaration's vision for schooling equity and excellence.

The Panel considers the Commonwealth's commitment to work with States and Territories to get all schools on a path to full and fair funding is essential to strengthening Australia's education system.

Over the six months of the review, the Panel was committed to hearing from as many teachers, students, parents and stakeholders as possible. The Panel visited 92 schools, across every state and territory, held over 130 meetings with stakeholders, received 266 submissions to the Consultation Paper and heard directly from over 50 people through three virtual workshops. In addition, the Panel commissioned research on policy interventions to increase socio-economic diversity and improve learning outcomes. Finally, the Panel undertook a survey of parents, teachers and students which elicited 24,968 responses, which provided a rich picture of our community's priorities. The Panel were also keen to hear from First Nations educators, communities and students and met with several First Nations stakeholders throughout the course of the Review, including through a First Nations educators' virtual workshop. The Panel also visited schools in several remote First Nations communities and visited over 30 First Nations majority schools nationally.

This extensive consultation process informed the Panel's recommendations across six key reform directions. These are supported by a small set of seven targets. The reform directions are underpinned by extensive evidence to ensure they have the best chance of lifting outcomes for all students. In developing this report, the Panel has also given careful consideration to recent and concurrent processes that interact with the school education system.

The key strength of this Panel is the diversity of views and experience among its members, which drove a thorough consideration of the recommendations, findings and targets. While the Panel holds differing views on some of the issues, it shares a common appreciation for the deep complexity of the education policy landscape. The Panel is unanimous on the vital role education plays in setting all Australians up to reach their full potential, and the imperative to build a better and fairer education system.

The Panel urges Education Ministers to implement the reform agenda in this review to ensure Australia's school system delivers high-quality and equitable education to all students.

The Panel would also like to sincerely thank all jurisdictions, schools, organisations and individuals who contributed to this process through the various channels of engagement, and the outstanding Secretariat from the Commonwealth Department of Education.

Yours Sincerely

Dr Lisa O'Brien AM
Chair

On behalf of Expert Panel members:

Ms Lisa Paul
AO PSM
Deputy Chair

Ms Dyonne
Anderson

Dr Jordana
Hunter

Prof Stephen
Lamb

Prof Pasi
Sahlberg

Executive summary

Box 1: The Review to Inform the next school funding agreement

The Commonwealth Government is committed to working with States and Territories to get all schools on a path to full and fair funding.

This Report is for consideration by Education Ministers as an input to inform the development of the next school funding agreement. It identifies seven priority areas for reform and the sort of things that any additional Commonwealth funding for schools could be tied to.

“Australia has a good education system, but it can be a lot better and a lot fairer”¹ This is the ambition that the Expert Panel (the Panel) embraced in developing this report – the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System (the Review).

The *2019 Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Mparntwe) sets out a shared vision for Australia’s education system which the Panel has placed at the centre of its deliberations:

Our vision is for a world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face.

Mparntwe reiterated two fundamental shared commitments: that Australian schooling should promote excellence and equity, and that all young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.

Australia’s professional and committed teaching workforce ensures most young people receive a good education in their schools. However, despite strong capability and significant goodwill too many students are not receiving an education that sets them up to succeed, leaving the vision of Mparntwe far from being realised. This has been compounded by the challenges that both COVID-19 and ongoing workforce pressures have brought to bear on Australia’s education system. It is critical that governments, school systems and approved authorities continue to build the capacity of the system to ensure every student is supported to thrive and transition to further education, training and employment post-school.

Critical to realising this is for all governments, school systems and approved authorities to ensure all schools have access to 100 per cent of Schooling Resource Standard funding as soon as possible.

This Review outlines a roadmap to strengthening Australia’s school education system, including both government and non-government sectors, to ensure it delivers excellence and equity for the whole Australian community. The roadmap outlines the reforms that will support Australia to realise the Mparntwe vision and to enhance the capacity of all schools to improve student outcomes and wellbeing, with a focus on meeting the needs of every individual student.

In its 2023 review of the current National School Reform Agreement (NSRA), the Productivity Commission identified a lack of focused attention on equitable student outcomes as a key factor limiting the efficacy of current effort and investment in boosting student achievement. In Australia’s diverse, multi-jurisdictional approach to schooling, addressing the need for focused attention on outcomes is a fundamental responsibility of all governments, school systems and approved authorities. This must be urgently addressed if positive change is going to be achieved.

The Panel acknowledges that system reform cannot be achieved by governments, school systems and approved authorities alone. In order to achieve meaningful reform across all sectors, Australia needs to rely not only on the negotiation and funding of a fit-for-purpose national agreement. We need to support our committed educator workforce and promote the profession to ensure highly effective teachers are attracted to and remain in schools. We also need to reform and renew the wider governance and implementation systems that underpin the provision of effective schooling, and enable innovations in practice, partnership and evidence to be systemically applied over the life of the next national school funding agreement (the Agreement).

The Terms of Reference for this Review require that the Panel report on five focus areas (see Appendix A):

1. targets and reform areas to drive measurable improvements for all students, particularly those most at risk of falling behind
2. improving student mental health and wellbeing
3. attracting and retaining teachers
4. using data collection to best inform improvements to student outcomes
5. ensuring transparency and accountability of public funding.

The recommendations identified in this Review set out reforms that when implemented with fidelity, will help bring the Mparntwe vision to life and support all Australian students to reach their full potential.

The Panel consulted closely with educators, school leaders, system leaders, parents, communities and governments throughout the review process to ensure they had the opportunity to inform the reform agenda. The unifying theme of these consultations was the common desire to make Australia's good education system better for students, teachers, parents and the nation. Stakeholders expressed a variety of views to the Panel on the pathways to a better and fairer education system which have been considered in formulating the Review's recommendations, findings and targets.

The Panel strongly believes that a shared commitment to making progress is needed, backed by action and open to learning from evidence throughout its implementation. This means redoubling efforts to support the educator workforce and attract more people to the profession, strengthen effective system governance and community commitment, and utilise knowledge, evidence and innovation for the purpose of improving student learning outcomes. The pathway to achieving this in the context of the next Agreement is addressed in the reform directions outlined below.

Reform directions

The Productivity Commission called for bilateral agreements in the next Agreement to systematically set out a 'theory of change linking reforms to long-term outcomes and arrangements for collecting data to enable monitoring and evaluation over time', including for each priority equity cohort.² With this in mind, the Panel has identified seven reform directions underpinned by specific, measurable and evidence-based recommendations that could be prioritised through the next Agreement to create a better and fairer education system (see Box 2). The recommendations are supported by findings and targets which create a clear pathway through which governments, school systems and approved authorities can better focus their efforts and investment to improve student learning outcomes. The Panel envisages that the reform directions can be implemented over the life of the next Agreement, which they recommend be extended to be a 10-year agreement.

Box 2: Reform directions to inform the next Agreement

The Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System was established by all jurisdictions and the Commonwealth Government to advise Education Ministers on what reforms should be included in the next Agreement.

The Terms of Reference asked the Panel to report on five focus areas:

1. targets and reform areas to drive measurable improvements for all students, particularly those most at risk of falling behind
2. improving student mental health and wellbeing
3. attracting and retaining teachers
4. using data collection to best inform improvements to student outcomes
5. ensuring transparency and accountability of public funding.

The Panel undertook extensive consultations and heard clearly that Australia's school education system delivers high-quality education to many students, with significant work underway by governments, approved authorities, educators and school leaders across all jurisdictions to support the needs of all students.

There is opportunity however, to continue to strengthen the school education system. The Panel has recommended seven reform directions to be considered by all parties to the next Agreement, and by all sectors in their ongoing planning and improvement agendas. The seven reform directions have been designed to:

1. lift student outcomes
2. improve equity
3. improve student wellbeing
4. attract and retain teachers
5. reduce data gaps and limitations
6. enhance funding transparency and accountability
7. support innovation and achieve reform.

The Panel acknowledges that this report forms a key input into the negotiation of the next Agreement, and that parties will consider other inputs when prioritising reforms and investments.

Some recommendations made by the Panel will inform the overarching direction and national priorities in the next Agreement, while others will support jurisdictions to address specific areas of need including through bilateral agreements. Accordingly, implementation of the reforms and targets in this report will be subject to negotiations between the Commonwealth and jurisdictions to ensure actions included in the next Agreement best respond to needs and priorities at the national and local levels.

The Panel has not considered issues of funding as this was outside the Terms of Reference for the Review.

One: Lift Student Outcomes

Australia performs above the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and has fewer underperforming students than the OECD average.³ Australia's relative international performance as measured by PISA improved between 2018 and 2022.⁴ Further, the impact of students' socio-economic status had a lower-than-average impact on reading performance in PISA 2018, and average impact on mathematics performance in 2022.⁵ Australia's enrolment rate in upper secondary vocational education for 20 to 24 year-olds is above the OECD average,⁶ as are the attainment rates in upper secondary education and tertiary education.⁷ However, while Australia is performing well, there is significant opportunity to strengthen our education system.

Since the 2011 Gonski report, efforts to improve student outcomes have had mixed results.⁸ The school education system is performing well for some students: for example, between 2011 and 2022, the proportion of 20 to 24-year-olds who attained Year 12, Certificate III or higher increased.⁹ However, Australia's overall performance in national and international school-age assessments has shown mixed results and the proportion of students regularly attending school continues to fall, in a trend that pre-dates COVID-19.¹⁰ Academic outcomes for students from priority equity cohorts are consistently below those of the broader student population, with gaps that have not significantly narrowed, pointing to ongoing systemic barriers to achievement.¹¹ At the same time, the knowledge and skills that young people will need to master in order to thrive in adult life and succeed in the Australian economy continue to evolve.

To improve student outcomes, the Panel considers it vital that governments, school systems and approved authorities put in place mechanisms to ensure all students receive evidence-based instruction in the classroom and that this be structured around a multi-tiered system of supports (**Recommendation 1A**). Noting the particular importance of targeting effort at students most at risk of falling behind, the Panel advocates for all approved authorities to support schools to embed the 'assess, teach, assess and adjust' approach they have seen in action across the country to support early identification of student needs, provide targeted and intensive support so students can catch up, and monitor students to ensure they keep up with their peers. Many teachers and schools across Australia already embed such an approach in their classrooms to track understanding and progress of their students and the Panel recommends that systems and approved authorities support all teachers to embed such practice.

In order to reach their full potential, students must be equipped with a sophisticated repertoire of knowledge, skills and general capabilities spanning the breadth of the curriculum. Supporting students to access and attain core literacy and numeracy skills is crucial to their ability to develop this wider repertoire. Strengthening existing and effective universal screening for literacy, including phonics, and numeracy in Year 1 is good practice which ensures students who are at risk of falling behind can be identified early and provided the supports they need to catch up and keep up (**Recommendation 1B**).

All educators should have access to the highest quality evidence-based professional development and curriculum resources to enhance their teaching expertise, empower them to use their professional judgement and exercise the full repertoire of pedagogical tools to support the individual needs of their students (**Recommendation 1C**). This should align with the core content in *Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel* and include the establishment of a national framework for professional development accreditation and quality-assuring curriculum materials.

The Panel heard that more needs to be done to support the post-school outcomes of students. Some jurisdictions are already working to reform their pathways, curriculum, and assessment systems to support more students to make a successful post-secondary transition. For example, reviews such as the Gonski–Shergold review of the New South Wales vocational education and training sector and the Firth review of vocational and applied learning pathways in senior secondary schooling in Victoria have informed reforms. However, a more rigorous and targeted approach during school is needed. Jurisdictions should outline specific actions and initiatives they will take to ensure all students can transition successfully to further training, education and employment when they finish school (**Recommendation 1D**).

Two: Improve Equity

All students should have access to a high-quality education, irrespective of their circumstances, background or postcode. The Panel heard that far too many students face barriers to participation and achievement, particularly those who come from priority equity cohorts. The needs of priority equity cohorts, including First Nations students; students living in regional, rural and remote locations; students with disability; and students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, must be urgently addressed, including actions and partnerships focused on addressing entrenched and compounding disadvantage, to support them to reach their full potential. A first step must be to ensure that all schools have access to 100 per cent of Schooling Resource Standard funding as soon as possible.

Australian schools have some of the highest levels of social segregation¹² and this trend has worsened over time. The quasi market-based nature of the Australian education system leads to limited socio-educational diversity in some schools and entrenches disadvantage for many students. The Panel considers that significant further work is required by governments, school systems and approved authorities to ensure all students can learn in a socio-educationally diverse environment (**Recommendation 2A**). Schools with concentrations of disadvantage should also be supported to attract and retain highly effective teachers and leaders, accompanied by high-quality curriculum resources and effective professional development, who can provide education that meets individual student needs.

Many students and their families have difficulty in navigating and accessing the services students require to effectively engage in education. The Panel believes governments should support schools to better connect students to a wide range of community and health services (including allied health services). The Panel has seen the success of 'full-service school' models in connecting students to services and believes that such models must be more widely implemented to better meet the needs of students experiencing disadvantage (**Recommendation 2B**).

Far too many First Nations students are not being supported to reach their full learning potential. To better support these students, there should be a First Nations led approach to developing a First Nations Education Policy (**Recommendation 2C**). The policy should support governments, school systems and approved authorities to implement evidence-based approaches to build the cultural responsiveness of teaching staff, assessments and assessment tools. The policy should also inform the design of curriculum, projects and language resources to ensure they are culturally appropriate.

In 2022, over one in five students receive an educational adjustment in Australian schools¹³ Further, in 2018, nearly nine in ten school students with a disability attended a mainstream school.¹⁴ This requires that inclusive education be embedded across the school system to support the needs of students with disability. Recent reviews including the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, and the National Disability Insurance Scheme Review, show that more could be done to strengthen the quality of inclusive education, and that there is an urgent need to better support students with disability. The Panel considers that governments, school systems and approved authorities must commit to continuing to build the capability of schools and educators to embed inclusive education in their school culture and teaching practices (**Recommendation 2D**). This would ensure every student with disability receives an education that values their strengths and capabilities. Further, the Panel supports calls for the design and implementation of inclusive education policies to be co-designed with students with disability.

Three: Improve Student Wellbeing

Positive mental health and wellbeing is a crucial foundation for lifting student achievement, engagement and attendance. However, data shows increasing prevalence of psychological distress among young people over the last 10 years.¹⁵ While governments, school systems and approved authorities have made substantial investments in student mental health and wellbeing initiatives, there is a cluttered and fragmented landscape of supports which can be difficult for students, families and schools to navigate.

The drivers of poor wellbeing in school-aged children and young people are varied, and improving student wellbeing cannot be the work of schools alone.

The Panel regards developing a national wellbeing measure to be a priority for the next Agreement (**Recommendation 3A**). This will allow governments, school systems and approved authorities to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of efforts and investments aimed at improving wellbeing outcomes at a national and cohort level. Importantly this measure should not be used to compare the performance of schools or schooling systems.

Many aspects of student wellbeing are well outside of the control of any school. This is why the measure should focus only on domains squarely within the remit of schools: belonging, safety, cultural safety, engagement, and classroom disruption. In addition, investments in specialist staff, professional development, and evidence-based resources for staff could better place schools and systems to meet the wellbeing needs of students (**Recommendation 3B**).

Four: Attract and Retain Teachers

Australia's teachers are skilled, knowledgeable and committed individuals who are committed to creating positive and meaningful school experiences for all students. The teaching profession is multi-faceted, requiring broad expertise, deep pedagogical and content knowledge, and the ability to manage challenging classroom and school situations.

Teaching is the most influential in-school factor in improving student outcomes,¹⁶ however the Panel also acknowledges that teachers do not work in isolation. Highly-effective teaching must be accompanied by effective support and training for educators, a positive learning environment that promotes a culture of learning, access to high quality resources, and supportive partnerships with parents and communities.

However, expectations and workloads of teachers have grown over time, along with changing economic, cultural and demographic conditions. Despite the dedication and efforts of teachers, these demands are taking a huge toll on the workforce and are undermining the sector's ability to attract and retain teachers. Impacts are more acute in schools serving students who experience disadvantage, and in regional, rural and remote communities. It was also reiterated to the Panel through consultation the challenge of implementing reform in the context of workforce shortages.

Reducing teacher workloads and building educator capability is necessary to support attraction and retention. The Panel considers that many of the recommendations across the seven reform directions will reduce workloads while empowering teachers to lift student outcomes (see Box 13). In addition, giving more teachers and school leaders greater access to specialised training in managing complex educational settings; providing more quality professional development, including mentoring and coaching; and continuing to implement the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan will lift educator capability (**Recommendation 4A**).

More must be done to ensure the classroom workforce is diverse. The Panel heard about the lack of diversity among classroom teachers, and the need to address cultural safety and racism in schools in order to attract a workforce that better reflects the diverse communities they serve (**Recommendation 4B**). The Panel also heard that many teachers do not feel adequately recognised or valued, despite competitive starting salaries. Better incentives, enhanced career pathways and better employment conditions are needed to attract and retain teachers and school staff (**Recommendation 4C**).

Greater national registration consistency would support school systems to more effectively plan and deploy a national teacher workforce. The Panel believes that jurisdictions should further work together to drive the harmonisation of teacher registration across Australia, encourage teacher mobility, and allow for greater data sharing (**Recommendation 4D**).

Five: Reduce Data Gaps and Limitations

The use of and opportunities provided by data to inform learning, decision-making and system organisation are growing. While there are important innovations taking place and new technologies are available to support educational decision-making, significant data gaps and limitations remain. In particular, the Panel heard from stakeholders that data gaps for priority equity cohorts are profound, especially for students with disability. This constrains the ability of governments, school systems and approved authorities to understand system performance, promote accountability, and support real improvements in student outcomes.

Reporting on current NSRA priorities and targets is dispersed, with no standalone source where the public and stakeholders can gain a 'clear read' of progress against NSRA outcomes. This impedes the community's ability to hold governments, school systems and approved authorities accountable. The Panel recommends that an existing independent body take on the role of data custodian and be tasked with the development of a more mature approach to data governance and sharing, which would support coordination of both existing and new education data (**Recommendation 5A**).

The Panel heard concerns from stakeholders on additional data collection, including the potential for unfair comparisons between schools and systems, and the burden it could place on teachers and schools. Rather than recommend additional data collections, the Panel believes there are opportunities to better use existing data that is collected by governments, school systems and approved authorities, including through linking data and improving access to information about student outcomes and experiences.

For example, the Unique Student Identifier (USI) remains a key opportunity to develop a solid foundation for enhanced data linkage by establishing a clearer picture of each student's education journey. The Panel urges governments, school systems and approved authorities to accelerate and broaden implementation of the USI and align it with the development of a robust digital infrastructure for Australia's skills and lifelong learning system, as outlined in the recent Employment White Paper (**Recommendation 5B**).

The Panel has identified actions needed to ensure the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia is equipped to track national priority outcomes and objectives (**Recommendation 5C**). Student-level disaggregated data on the achievements and outcomes of students, including students in priority equity cohorts, and data on other outcomes of national interest is needed. Setting and using consistent definitions for students from priority equity cohorts in data collection activities will also reduce data limitations and improve the capacity of all stakeholders and systems to better meet the needs of these students.

Six: Enhance Funding Transparency and Accountability

The Productivity Commission expressed concern that the absence of a standalone report on Australia's performance against sub-outcomes of the current NSRA diminished transparency.¹⁷ There is a lack of transparency and accountability in current funding arrangements tracing back over decades.¹⁸ Families and communities do not have visibility of how public funding is allocated and expended, particularly in relation to how needs-based loadings flow through to schools. Data collected and evaluations undertaken are often not published. These issues mean our system is falling short of community expectations of transparency and limit our understanding of how investment or policy changes may impact student outcomes.

Past national school agreements have required schools and systems to take a needs-based approach to student resourcing; however, the current constraints on transparency prevent the community from having confidence in the needs-based models used. A more comprehensive and coherent level of funding transparency across all schools is essential.

School systems should be required to publish nationally consistent, detailed, and accurate information on their school funding models, annual funding allocations to schools, and school expenditure. This will improve transparency and drive the most effective use of recurrent and needs-based funding (**Recommendation 6A**). Critically, the Panel is proposing that this additional funding transparency be provided by governments, school systems and approved authorities from existing data sources, ensuring it would not be an additional burden on schools, educators and leaders. The Panel also sees a particular need for greater transparency regarding students with disability, with a focus on increasing school-level accountability with respect to meeting their obligations under the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*, including current levels of adjustment and outcomes for students with disability (**Recommendation 6B**).

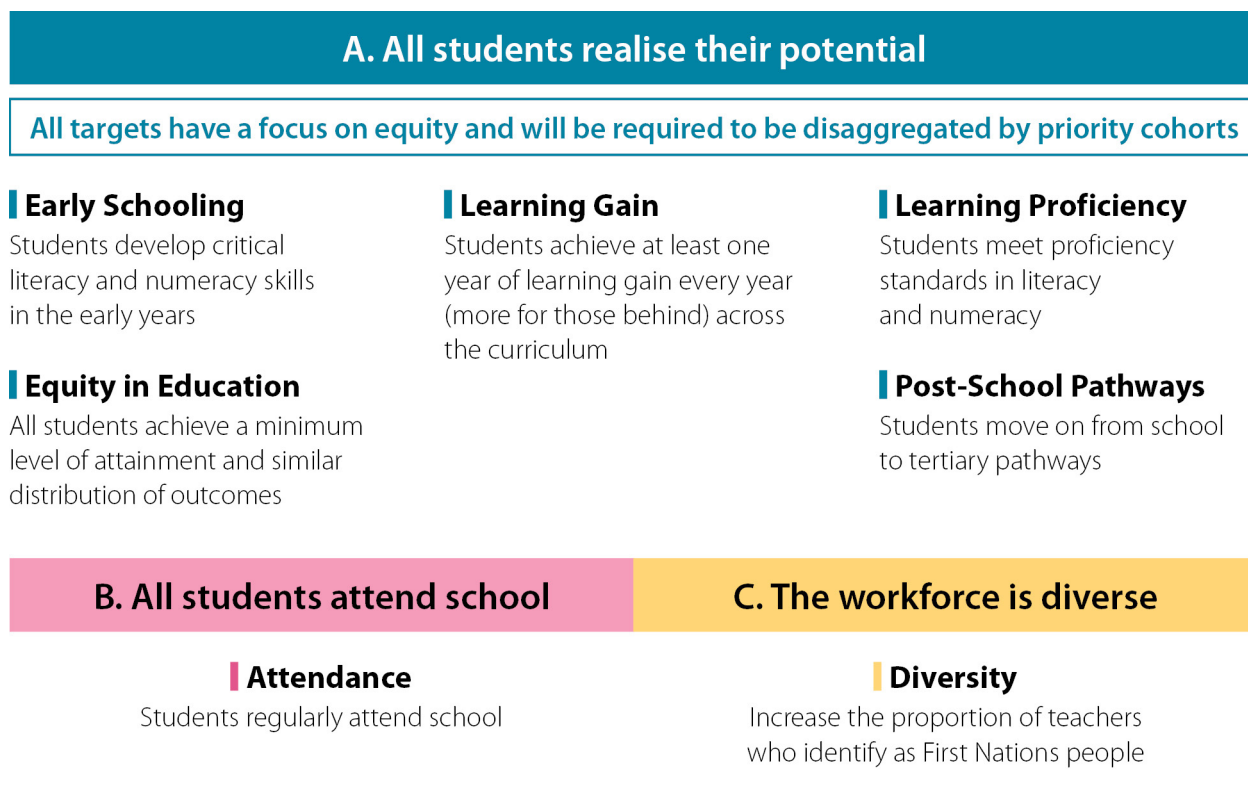
Seven: Support Innovation and Achieve Reform

The Panel heard from educators and system administrators about the toll that relentless change and instability take on the workforce, including their capacity to improve student outcomes. It is critical that the reforms laid out in this report are given time to be designed, implemented, measured, and evaluated. The next Agreement should therefore have a 10-year operation cycle, balanced with shorter bilateral agreements and a midpoint review to adjust direction as required. This would provide the education system with the time and consistency needed to implement reforms and learn from practice, research, and evidence to realise shared national objectives (**Recommendation 7A**). Importantly, the targets and measures should mature in line with timeline to fully fund schools.

Under the current NSRA, the relationship between targets, outcomes and National Policy Initiatives is often vague, and national and bilateral reform initiatives do not work together to systematically address key priorities. It is essential that governments use the next Agreement to clearly set out their theory of change as recommended by the Productivity Commission¹⁹ and ensure monitoring, reporting, and knowledge-sharing mechanisms best support effective implementation of reform. This includes setting and monitoring appropriate targets for student outcomes.

National targets are essential to focusing effort, directing investment, holding governments, school systems and approved authorities to account, and building public awareness of education priorities.²⁰ The Panel proposes a small number of focused targets for the next Agreement designed to direct effort to the fundamental building blocks of educational equity and excellence (see Figure 1). The targets proposed in this report should replace the existing targets and sub-outcomes in the current NSRA.

Figure 1: Overview of the proposed targets



To successfully measure progress against the targets in the next Agreement, governments and education agencies need to develop and implement robust measurement tools, including those with capacity to disaggregate data (**Recommendation 7B**). Where no nationally consistent data against a target is currently available, interim measures will need to be used. Moreover, the Panel believes that an interactive public reporting tool should be developed, and annual reports tabled in the Australian Parliament to ensure every family, educator, and administrator can easily find and access information to understand how their schooling system is performing and how reform objectives are being realised (**Recommendation 7C**).

In relation to First Nations Australians, all governments have committed to the Priority Reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (CTG). Given this commitment, the Panel believes that the next Agreement should be developed in partnership with key First Nations education representatives, including with organisations such as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association, and the Coalition of Peaks as appropriate (**Recommendation 7D**). The Panel recommends making an explicit connection between the bilateral agreements for the next Agreement and the corresponding CTG Implementation Plan. The next Agreement should also require governments, school systems and approved authorities to build their schools' capacity to undertake shared decision-making with First Nations parents and community leaders, working with educators and school leaders to determine the approaches that will best support the needs of First Nations students.

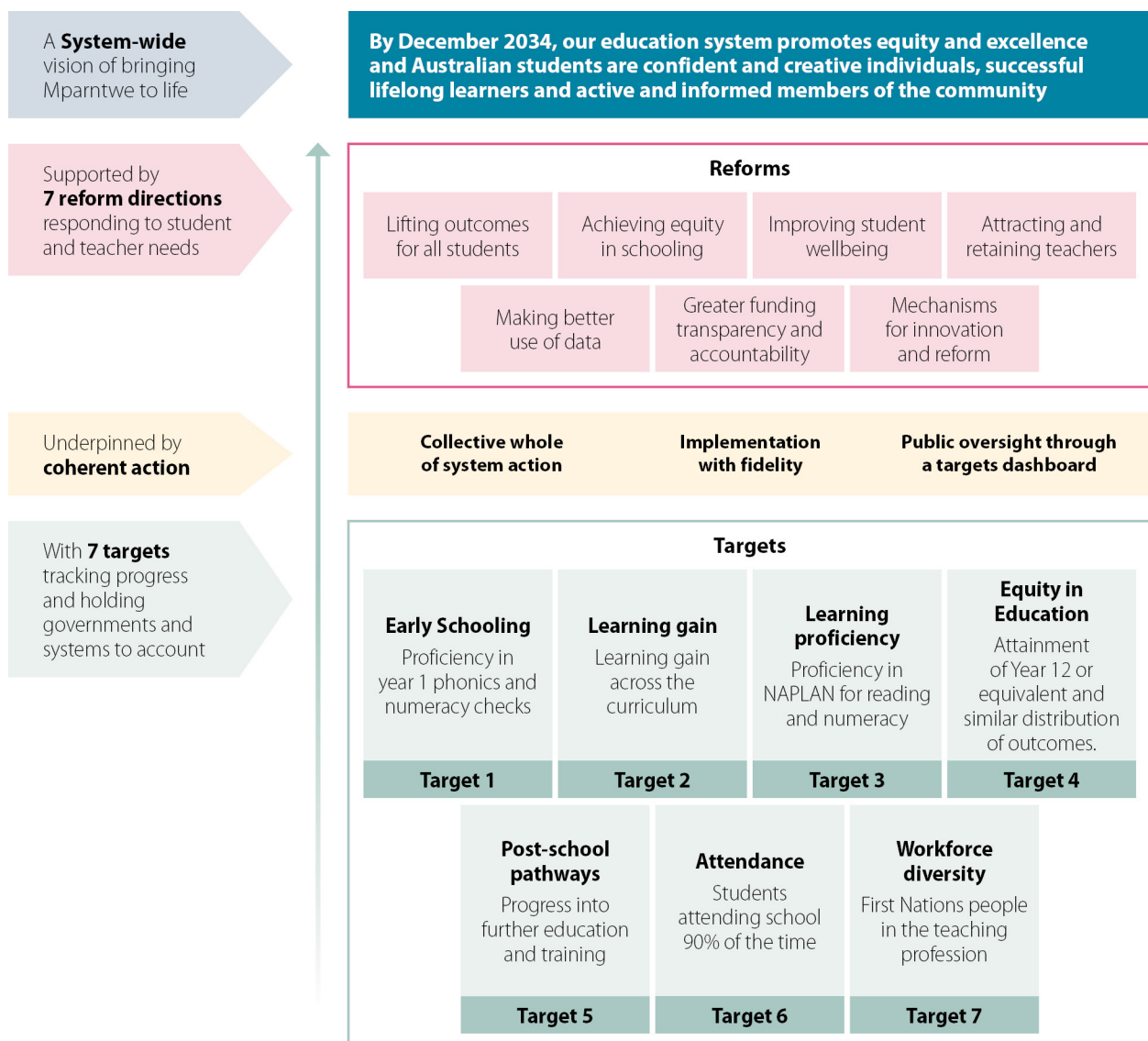
Lastly, to realise the full benefits of reform, a structured approach to funding trials and evaluations of innovative models is needed. This will ensure that approaches to teaching and learning, schooling organisation, and workforce design remain relevant and informed by robust and independently evaluated evidence. The Panel believes that a structured innovation fund should be established to support projects that align with this vision (**Recommendation 7E**). To complement this, there is a need for governments to publicly celebrate and share success and best practice, to build community understanding of the vital role of education and shine a light on all the ways in which the system is improving.

Call to action

There is a moral and economic urgency to strengthen the Australian schooling system so that it better supports the needs of all students. This cannot be achieved by taking a piecemeal approach. Implementation of the full reform agenda outlined in this Review is necessary to ensure Australia's school system supports high quality, equitable education for all students.

The Panel has outlined the logic underpinning the reform directions and has deliberately focused on the elements necessary for successful implementation – being a clear vision, specific and measurable recommendations, and targets for tracking progress and promoting transparency and accountability. Together, these elements form a roadmap for parties to the next Agreement to take to help bring the Mparntwe vision to life (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: A system-wide roadmap to bring the Mparntwe vision to life



Through the Panel's consultations, all stakeholders have demonstrated their shared commitment to bringing the Mparntwe vision to life. Given this common purpose and the high degree of goodwill and urgency expressed, the Panel believes that stakeholders have demonstrated a willingness to work together to drive meaningful change and support Australia's next generation to reach their full potential.

Critical to the successful implementation of the reform agenda by all jurisdictions, school systems and approved authorities will be appropriate sequencing and prioritisation. Some recommendations in this Review include dates to indicate their urgency and the desire for a national approach to be taken. Others, however, do not have a timeframe, allowing governments to prioritise reforms in a manner that reflects the needs of their school systems. As such, the Panel urges governments to consider the theory of change, prioritisation and sequencing as part of negotiations for the next Agreement.

The Panel has emphasised throughout the report the holistic development of all students (anchored in the foundation skills of literacy and numeracy), the importance of collaboration among educators and school leaders with community, the criticality of continuing to enhance educator's skills and knowledge, and the importance of positive, culturally safe learning cultures, and opportunities for pedagogical innovation anchored in evidence. This approach to reform must be seen by governments, school systems and approved authorities as systemic change and be adapted and embedded in a way that has regard for local context and lasting sustainable change.

The Panel acknowledges the ambition of the reform agenda outlined in this Review. Implementation will require effort, investment, and patience from all stakeholders. We urge Education Ministers to heed our call to action when negotiating the next Agreement and commit fully to the recommendations, investments, and system changes in the reform package. The Panel is confident that the nation's dedicated educators, school leaders, and administrators, when resourced appropriately, are equal to the challenge of making the changes that are required to create a better and fairer education system. The nation's future – our children – are depending on all of us.

Recommendations

Lifting student outcomes for all students (Chapter 1)

RECOMMENDATION 1A

To improve student outcomes, the Panel recommends that all governments, school systems and approved authorities embed the use of a multi-tiered system of supports framework for student learning across all schools to ensure that:

- i. all students receive high-quality Tier 1 classroom instruction
- ii. all students are regularly screened from Foundation Year, with systems nominating their screening methods to identify where additional support is required
- iii. all students who need additional support to catch up will access targeted and intensive evidence-based Tier 2 and 3 supports, including small-group or individual 'catch-up' tutoring with adequate dosage.

To support implementation fidelity, all governments should implement *Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel*, to ensure teachers have knowledge of the evidence-based practices that have the greatest impact on student learning.

RECOMMENDATION 1B

The Panel recommends that governments, school systems and approved authorities institute the Year 1 Phonics Check across all schools by the end of 2026. In addition, a similarly robust and nationally consistent screening check should be agreed and implemented for numeracy by the end of 2028. The data should be reported nationally to support an understanding of early literacy and numeracy improvement.

RECOMMENDATION 1C

The Panel recommends that governments, school systems and approved authorities ensure all educators and school leaders have access to the highest quality evidence-based professional development and curriculum resources by:

- i. updating guidance on effective teaching practice to ensure it is aligned to *Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel*
- ii. investing in highly effective and evidence-based professional development, including micro-credentials, that aligns with the core content in *Strong Beginnings*
- iii. establishing an agreed national framework for professional development accreditation by the end of 2025 with strengthened criteria to ensure professional development is high quality and evidence based, and commit professional development accreditation authorities to applying these criteria, including for micro-credentials
- iv. investing in and promoting evidence-based and quality assured curriculum resources that are easily available and will help to reduce workload, which schools can adopt if they choose
- v. establishing an independent process to quality assure comprehensive and sequenced curriculum materials against rigorous criteria, including materials created by education departments and institutions, and the commercial and not-for-profit education sectors, by the end of 2026.

RECOMMENDATION 1D

The Panel recommends that governments, school systems and approved authorities outline specific actions and initiatives they will take, including relevant timeframes, to prepare all students to transition to further training, education, or employment when they finish school. These should be included in bilateral agreements for increased accountability. Actions, which should be evaluated for efficacy, may include enhanced career education for students, targeted programs for students from priority equity cohorts, and strengthened partnerships with local employers and with vocational education and training and higher education providers.

Achieving equity in schooling (Chapter 2)

RECOMMENDATION 2A

The Panel recommends that governments, school systems and approved authorities commit to increasing socio-economic diversity by:

- i. incentivising, or continuing to incentivise, highly-effective teachers and principals to work in schools with high numbers of students experiencing socio-economic disadvantage
- ii. reviewing existing policy settings by the end of 2027 and implementing new policy levers to increase socio-economic diversity in schools and lift student outcomes
- iii. tracking (and annually publicly reporting on) the socio-economic diversity of schools and systems by the end of 2025, to monitor the level of diversity and support further work to increase diversity as part of the next Agreement and its implementation framework.

RECOMMENDATION 2B

To ensure that all students come to school ready and able to learn, the Panel recommends that all governments take steps to embed and strengthen linkages between schools and other services, such as community, family, health (including speech and occupational therapists), and disability support services, by:

- i. implementing full-service school models that better integrate these services within schools and improve partnerships between schools and external agencies, institutions and community members. Priority should be given to schools with a high concentration of students experiencing disadvantage, and care should be taken to avoid cost-shifting from other portfolios to education
- ii. committing to a 12-month whole-of-government review of the interactions between education and other key Commonwealth and state-based services, with recommendations to National Cabinet by the end of 2026 focused on improving the effectiveness of service delivery to school-aged children through streamlining referral pathways, improved uptake of screening and services before and during school years among priority equity cohorts, and greater preventative investment.

RECOMMENDATION 2C

The Panel recommends that governments work together in partnership with key First Nations education stakeholders, including education and community leaders, students and organisations such as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association, and the Coalition of Peaks as appropriate, to develop a national First Nations Education Policy before the end of 2026, which should include:

- i. implementing evidence-based approaches to build the cultural responsiveness of all teaching staff and inform the design of curriculum, projects and language resources in collaboration with communities and an evaluation of the effectiveness of the policy
- ii. building culturally responsive frameworks to prepare teachers for schools with high proportions of First Nations students
- iii. developing culturally appropriate assessments and assessment tools.

RECOMMENDATION 2D

The Panel recommends that all governments, school systems and approved authorities jointly develop an implementation plan to deliver on their commitment under *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031* to build capability in delivery of inclusive education for students with disability.

Improving student wellbeing (Chapter 3)

RECOMMENDATION 3A

To support improvements in wellbeing, the Panel recommends that governments, school systems and approved authorities work together to develop a national measure of student wellbeing by the end of 2028, which:

- i. collects, aggregates and reports on consistent and comparable national wellbeing data covering (at minimum) the in-school domains of belonging, safety, cultural safety, engagement and classroom disruption, in a way that builds on jurisdictions' existing data collection where available
- ii. provides a structured framework to support the efforts of schools, systems, researchers and governments to evaluate the impact of policies, inform policy design, and improve accountability and reporting at the school, system and national levels
- iii. enables disaggregation of data by priority equity cohort and school type, intersectional and longitudinal analyses, and linkage to other data sets relevant to student wellbeing.

RECOMMENDATION 3B

The Panel recommends that governments, school systems and approved authorities prioritise investment in evidence-based resources for preventing, identifying, implementing and evaluating wellbeing outcomes in schools, such as:

- i. dedicated in-school functions (e.g. 'wellbeing coordinators') to assist with referrals, support whole-school capability and monitor and evaluate outcomes
- ii. access to professional counselling and psychology services consistent with the needs of individual schools, including via clear referral pathways to affordable and timely services outside of the school gate or the provision of these services within the school
- iii. professional development for educators and school leaders to help identify students at risk, provide appropriate adjustments, and promote safe and inclusive school environments, including a-zero-tolerance approach to racism
- iv. system-wide and whole-school policies and frameworks to improve culture and behaviour, address racism and other discrimination, and reduce bullying and harassment.

Attracting and retaining teachers (Chapter 4)

RECOMMENDATION 4A

The Panel recommends that governments, school systems and approved authorities commit to further enhance the capability and impact of educators and school leaders by:

- i. addressing workload challenges through relevant reforms outlined in Box 13 with specific strategies to be outlined in bilateral agreements, including timeframes, and reported on publicly
- ii. building educator and school leader capability in complex educational settings, such as specialised training focused on managing complex behaviour and trauma-informed practice
- iii. providing universal access to mentoring for teachers and school leaders, and supporting principals with quality professional development (aligned to the Australian Professional Standard for Principals)
- iv. commissioning the Australian Institute for Teachers and School Leaders, in consultation with the Australian Education Research Organisation, to recommend further strategies to boost the impact and quality of the schools workforce to Education Ministers by the end of 2026
- v. continuing to implement the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan.

RECOMMENDATION 4B

The Panel recommends that governments commit to improving the diversity of the classroom workforce, with a specific focus on First Nations staff, by:

- i. jurisdictions taking actions in partnership with First Nations peoples to address racism and cultural safety
- ii. better recognising the professionalism, value and experience of First Nations assistant teachers by the end of 2026 by:
 - a. recognising First Nations assistant teachers in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers with clearly defined roles and scaled progression that confirm leadership, with flexibility for roles to reflect local school contexts
 - b. ensuring First Nations assistant teachers have remuneration commensurate with their roles, qualifications and capability
 - c. improving access to pathways that accelerate them into teaching, including through teacher regulatory authorities better recognising prior learning – for example, a streamlined two-year initial teacher education offering to recognise the prior knowledge and experiences of Aboriginal Education Officers and enable them to acquire formal qualifications to teach without teacher supervision
- iii. collecting and reporting data on the First Nations teacher workforce, to support measurement against Target 7 (see Recommendation 7B).

RECOMMENDATION 4C

The Panel recommends that governments develop and adopt new national career pathway frameworks by the end of 2027 to better recognise and deploy teaching expertise and enhance the status of the profession. This should include:

- i. establishing two new subject-specific roles for teachers (a school-based 'instructional specialist' and region-based 'master teachers') which are limited in number, selected via a rigorous competitive process to identify candidates with the required skills and level of expertise, remunerated appropriately, and ideally sit alongside Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher qualifications
- ii. clearly defining the roles, responsibilities and core capabilities of all teaching roles in the framework, including teaching assistants, mentors, tutors, support staff and school leaders, to support professionalisation and establish clearer career pathways
- iii. ensuring all educators receive greater recognition and reward for their expertise, including pay commensurate with their role, skills, qualifications, and the complexity of their school
- iv. considering reforms to the tertiary education sector to ensure that initial teacher education students do not face financial hardship when undertaking mandatory teaching practicums, subject to recommendations by the Universities Accord Expert Panel.

RECOMMENDATION 4D

The Panel recommends that jurisdictions work together to drive:

- i. national harmonisation of teacher registration requirements, including internationally qualified teachers, high-quality professional development, assessment of teachers against the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, and Teacher Performance Assessments
- ii. teacher mobility and improved child safety across jurisdictions through automatic mutual recognition and reduced red tape
- iii. data sharing for workforce planning, identifying national workforce issues, and filling temporary teaching positions.

Making better use of data (Chapter 5)

RECOMMENDATION 5A

To facilitate a more mature approach to data governance and data-sharing arrangements, the Panel recommends that an independent data custodian be tasked with:

- i. developing a coordinated, system-wide national approach to the collection and sharing of education data
- ii. developing consistent data collection principles and metadata standards
- iii. managing the secure sharing and linkage of relevant data sets
- iv. improving access for approved policymakers and researchers to data linkage projects, including access to integrated school and de-identified student-level data
- v. supporting further data linkage projects aimed at enhancing the shared understanding of what works to lift student progress and inform the development of government policies.

RECOMMENDATION 5B

The Panel recommends governments, school systems and approved authorities implement the Unique Student Identifier as a matter of urgency to enable links to student-level data on progress and performance to show student education and transition pathways, including linking early childhood through to higher education/vocational education and training, to commence from 2027.

RECOMMENDATION 5C

To understand the progress of students and report on Australia's education goals, the Panel recommends governments commit to revising the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia to ensure it collects essential data, including:

- i. student-level, disaggregated data on the achievement and outcomes of students, including:
 - a. reporting progress of students who were assessed by NAPLAN as 'needs additional support' or 'developing' in subsequent NAPLAN assessments by the end of 2025
 - b. measuring progress of students against the key learning areas of the Australian Curriculum by the end of 2029
 - c. collecting national outcomes data for students with disability, including developing a nationally consistent approach to measuring the learning progression of those students with disability for whom standard assessment methods (such as NAPLAN) and progression against the annual learning growth targets of the Australian Curriculum are not appropriate measures, by the end of 2029
 - d. identifying and defining priority equity cohorts clearly, by replacing 'language background other than English' (LBOTE) with 'English as an additional language or dialect' (EAL/D) and including students in out-of-home care by the end of 2027
 - e. report First Nations student outcomes, with reporting on these data to be scrutinised by First Nations experts to give effect to Priority Reform 4 from the Closing the Gap Agreement, by the end of 2026
- ii. data on other outcomes of national interest:
 - a. key agreed indicators through the Post-School Destinations data linkage project by the end of 2026
 - b. the implementation fidelity and impact of major reforms undertaken as part of the next National School Reform Agreement in a transparent and comparable way.

Improving funding transparency and accountability mechanisms (Chapter 6)

RECOMMENDATION 6A

The Panel recommends that by the end of 2026, an existing independent resourcing body is strengthened and is tasked with collecting and reporting nationally consistent, detailed and accurate information on approved system authorities' school funding models, annual funding allocations, and expenditure to improve transparency of funding arrangements. This should include:

- i. allocation information reported by school, broken down by base, size, location and equity loading across both 'nominal' allocations (budgeted staffing salary) and actual allocations (actual staffing salary)
- ii. expenditure information by school reported across agreed categories
- iii. information regarding allocations and expenditure on centralised and regional support programs
- iv. reporting this information, including by requiring all schools, including government schools, to complete a modified version of the School Financial Questionnaire.

RECOMMENDATION 6B

The Panel recommends that concrete steps be taken to review and strengthen the support for students with disability and provide more transparency on current levels of support. This should include greater accountability and reporting on supports needed by students with disability, including through:

- i. the Commonwealth Government conducting a post-implementation review of the operation of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD), with outcomes reported to Education Ministers by the end of 2025
- ii. the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, with support from all governments and approved authorities, publishing school-level NCCD data by educational adjustment level on the MySchool website from 2025, with the collection of disaggregated data to allow for intersectional analysis
- iii. governments agreeing on actions by the end of 2026 to strengthen the accountability of approved authorities for compliance with the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*.

Implementing mechanisms to support innovation and achieve reform (Chapter 7)

RECOMMENDATION 7A

The Panel recommends that the next Agreement should operate for 10 years to provide the education system with sufficient time and consistency to realise the reform objectives. This should be supported by a mid-point review to inform five-year bilateral agreements, creating the opportunity to gauge progress and strengthen system learning throughout the 2020s and 2030s.

RECOMMENDATION 7B

The Panel recommends that the next Agreement measure progress against six national student focused targets and one workforce-focused target (outlined below), centred on the reforms proposed in this report. To facilitate monitoring and reporting of progress against these targets, governments will need to:

- i. develop and implement robust, nationally consistent measurement tools to accurately measure and report against all targets, including for:
 - a. Year 1 phonics and numeracy skills (as per Recommendation 1B)
 - b. curriculum-wide learning gain (as per Recommendation 5C)
 - c. measuring student outcome gaps across social groups (as per the definition of equity in Finding 7)
 - d. post-school pathways (as per recommendation 5C)
 - e. student learning engagement (as per Recommendation 3A)
 - f. workforce diversity (as per Recommendation 4B)
- ii. enhance capacity to disaggregate by priority equity cohorts
- iii. remain open to refining existing data collection or moving to superior data sources as these become available.

RECOMMENDATION 7C

The Panel recommends that enhanced accountability be supported through the following reporting mechanisms:

- i. an accessible and interactive public reporting tool on progress against the targets and reforms in the next Agreement, similar to the Closing the Gap dashboard, to be developed by the Productivity Commission or other appropriate body by mid-2025
- ii. from the commencement of the next Agreement, the delivery of annual reports, prepared with input from governments, school systems and approved authorities, tabled in the Australian Parliament, focused on clearly articulating progress against reforms, including implementation updates.

RECOMMENDATION 7D

The Panel recommends that all governments operationalise their commitment to partnership and shared decision-making under the Closing the Gap (CTG) Agreement by ensuring the next Agreement is developed and implemented in partnership with First Nations organisations. This should include:

- i. establishing and supporting a mechanism that allows governments to work in a genuine formal partnership with key First Nations education stakeholders including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association and the Coalition of Peaks as appropriate at the system level, embedding the CTG Priority Reforms to help transform ways of working, and creating an explicit connection between bilateral agreements and CTG
- ii. systematising models that enhance First Nations parental and community engagement and move towards co-design or shared decision-making.

RECOMMENDATION 7E

The Panel recommends that governments establish a co-funded 'structured innovation fund' to drive disciplined research, support school improvement, and encourage the development of new models and forms of schooling, subject to robust criteria and independent and publicly reported evaluation, including randomised controlled trials where appropriate. Projects should include:

- i. cost-effective full-service school models which reduce workload for educators and school leaders
- ii. remote teaching of subjects that are hard to staff
- iii. culturally responsible and inclusive teaching practices that provide the best outcomes for First Nations students
- iv. alternative school settings and delivery models that might better support student engagement and achievement for students with complex needs
- v. innovative school operating models within government systems or across school sectors, which test different modes of delivery (including bilingual schools), staffing models, and governance frameworks (including networks of schools).

Introduction

About the Review

On 16 December 2022, all Education Ministers announced their intention to establish an expert panel to inform the next national school agreement. On 29 March 2023, the Commonwealth Minister for Education, the Hon Jason Clare MP, announced the Expert Panel and Terms of Reference for the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System (the Review), with the following five focus areas:

- i. targets and reform areas to drive measurable improvements for all students, particularly those most at risk of falling behind
- ii. improving student mental health and wellbeing
- iii. attracting and retaining teachers
- iv. using data collection to best inform improvements to student outcomes
- v. ensuring transparency and accountability of public funding.

The Terms of Reference (see Appendix A) explicitly stated the Review would not revisit how the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) is calculated.

Box 3: The role of a national agreement in system reform

The Terms of Reference asked the Panel to focus its recommendations on targets and reforms to inform the next national school agreement. National agreements focus on mutual accountability and national action to improve outcomes for students, parents and teachers. The Panel has focused its recommendations on actions parties should consider in negotiating the next national agreement. Some recommendations will support the next national agreement to set the overarching direction for school education in Australia. Other recommendations will support jurisdictions to identify the specific actions they may commit to in their bilateral agreements, over and above existing efforts.

However, there is a lot of work to be done outside of the national agreement, both within the education sector and in other sectors that impact on whether students come to school ready and able to learn. Many learning gaps and barriers to education are driven by factors outside of the school system. A strong focus on addressing these barriers through the school system is essential but will not be sufficient to achieve equity.

Many stakeholders will need to be involved in the efforts to continue to strengthen our education system. This will include, educators, school leaders, parents and communities across the government and non-government sectors. This report includes case studies to highlight the exemplary work happening in schools and communities. The desire to build on this and ensure all students have the knowledge, skills and capabilities they need to fully participate in society and be successful lifelong learners is the driving force behind this report. A new dynamic is needed to achieve this. A renewed spirit of cooperation and shared endeavour is necessary to uplift Australian educational performance and rival international peers in the future.

Immediate, systemic and long-term action is necessary to achieve the Review's ambition

The 2010 Review of Funding for Schooling and the 2017 Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools, led by David Gonski AC, envisioned an education system where every school received a minimum level of funding and every Australian student received a world-class education tailored to their needs. Thirteen years on from the Review of Funding for Schooling, and despite significant additional funding and reforms, the aims of these two reviews have not been fully achieved. While most non-government schools are at or above the minimum funding standard, many government schools are still not being funded to this benchmark.

The transformative potential of high-quality education and its impacts on life outcomes has been the driving influence behind the reviews of Australia's school education over the last decade. This Review focuses on policies and reforms to support student development, outcomes and wellbeing, with an emphasis on meeting the needs of individual students. This is the central theme the Panel has encountered throughout the Review: Australia offers high-quality education to many students, but not to all.

The Panel acknowledges the rich and detailed work of previous reviews and the fact that many valuable recommendations were not implemented completely or with fidelity. The Review of Funding for Schooling laid the groundwork for Australia's current education system by recommending a national commitment to addressing educational disadvantage through a needs-based funding model that ensures adequate financial resources for all schools.

The 2013 National Plan for School Improvement established a new funding approach linked to reforms based on evidence about what makes a difference to school performance and student outcomes. The Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools backed this up in 2018 with a call for a national commitment to address performance slippage by investing in evidence-based interventions that promised to achieve concrete gains for all students, in all parts of the country.²¹

Over the last decade (since the first Gonski review), Australian student outcomes have been mixed.²² There have been some improvements – for example, the proportion of 20- to 24-year-olds who have attained Year 12, Certificate III or higher has increased from 82.7 per cent in 2011 to 90.1 per cent in 2022.²³ First Nations young people have experienced an even bigger increase, from 51.8 per cent in 2011 to 68.1 per cent in 2021.²⁴

However, despite areas of improvement and that Australia still performs above the OECD average, Australia's overall performance in national and international assessments has not improved and the proportion of students regularly attending school continues to fall – a trend that pre-dates COVID-19.²⁵ Academic outcomes of students from priority equity cohorts are consistently below those of the broader student population, pointing to ongoing systemic barriers.²⁶ These learning outcomes have real and lasting impacts on the lives of Australians and on the economy. Better educational achievement results in high individual incomes and higher national income overall.²⁷

There are many complex, interlinked factors that may be contributing to limited progress on student outcomes since the first Gonski review. These factors could include most government schools (and a very small number of non-government schools) not being funded at 100 per cent of the SRS; implementation challenges and delays; and out-of-school factors that impact student outcomes. The Productivity Commission also identified a lack of a theory of change and the absence of targeted, comprehensive and new initiatives aimed at supporting students from priority equity cohorts in the current National School Reform Agreement (NSRA).²⁸ Another key factor that was reiterated to the Panel in its extensive consultations was the challenge of implementing reform in the context of workforce shortages and increasing teacher workload. Importantly, system reform is challenging and iterative, and requires time for results to flow through. The Panel acknowledges these challenges as potential contributors to the limited progress made since Gonski and has considered these factors in formulating the recommendations in this report.

With this in mind, this report builds on the work of previous reviews, particularly the Productivity Commission Review of the National School Reform Agreement, the Quality Initial Teacher Education (QITE) Review, the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (NTWAP)²⁹ and, most recently, the Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP): *Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel*, released on 6 July 2023. The Panel recognises the role of existing government strategies and aims to address any gaps rather than create duplication (e.g. with the Closing the Gap Agreement and *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031*). The Panel has also been cognisant of the outcomes and recommendations of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

With respect to *Strong Beginnings*, which provides advice on how to improve initial teacher education (ITE) to better prepare beginning teachers for the classroom, Education Ministers have provided in-principle support for all 14 recommendations.³⁰ These are designed to:

- strengthen ITE programs to deliver confident, effective beginning teachers (Recommendations 1 to 3)
- draw a stronger link between performance and funding of ITE (Recommendations 4 to 7)
- improve practical teaching experience (Recommendations 8 to 11)
- enhance postgraduate ITE programs for mid-career entrants (Recommendations 12 to 14).

The Panel recognises the Commonwealth Minister for Education's ambition for this review and the concurrent reviews into the early childhood education system and universities, to reform the end-to-end education experience for Australians. This ambition to "Make our education system so much better and fairer. And our economy stronger and more productive"³¹ has informed the Panel's deliberations. To that end, the Panel has deliberated on the inadequacy of the national data set on early literacy and numeracy. Recommendation 1B and Target 1 aim to build this national data set and support better transitions between early childhood education and school through systematising Year 1 literacy and numeracy screening checks. Recommendations 1D and 5C, and Targets 4 and 5, support better transitions to post-school education or employment, by improving data linkage and tracking of post-school destinations with the aim of closing the gap between students from low socio-economic status (SES) and high-SES backgrounds.

A diverse range of stakeholders have informed the recommendations to benefit all students

The Panel acknowledges the extensive stakeholder consultation that informed previous reviews. The Panel's aim was to avoid duplicating previous consultation efforts while ensuring stakeholders, including students, educators, school leaders and parents, had the opportunity to contribute their views. The Panel sought to achieve this by focusing consultation on its Terms of Reference and the solutions to the challenges facing Australia's schools.

To ensure the Panel captured the views of a wide range of stakeholders, several methods of consultation were used, including direct meetings with stakeholder groups, virtual workshops and roundtables, school visits, a survey, and a consultation paper (see Figure 3).

The Ministerial Reference Group, established by the Commonwealth Minister for Education and supported by all Education Ministers, provided an important sounding board for the Panel. This included students and teachers from across the country, system leaders, academics, First Nations educators and mental health practitioners. This, and the virtual workshops, allowed the Panel to hear directly from Australians involved in education on a daily basis.

The Panel would like to particularly acknowledge the school leaders, educators and students of the 92 schools visited, who made time in their busy schedules to speak to the Panel and share their experiences.

Figure 3: Summary of stakeholder engagement



Stakeholders have a shared desire to improve student outcomes

The Panel held over 100 stakeholder meetings, including with educators, school leaders and support staff, education unions, national education agencies, non-government sector school stakeholders, parents, youth and student bodies, and other key groups (a complete list of stakeholders consulted is at Appendix D).

The unifying theme of these consultation activities was the desire to make Australia's good education system the best it can be for all students, teachers, parents and the nation. Stakeholders expressed a wide variety of views to the Panel on the pathway to a better and fairer education system. The Panel has considered these views and the broader evidence in its deliberations and in formulating the recommendations for this report.

School visits were critical to developing the Panel’s understanding of the issues and different contexts across Australian schools

The Panel visited 92 schools across every state and territory, including government, Catholic, and independent schools in major cities, regional communities and remote areas (see Figure 4). Institutions offering boarding facilities, distance/isolated education, and/or flexible models of alternative education were also included. The schools the Panel visited had a range of cohort characteristics such as differing socio-economic backgrounds, language backgrounds other than English, and First Nations representation.

These visits were invaluable and showed the Panel the very diverse contexts in which Australian schools operate. Many stakeholders the Panel met emphasised the need to allow schools to tailor their approaches to the needs of their students and the communities they operate in. The Panel thanks the educators and school leaders, as well as the students, for being so generous in sharing their time and experiences (see Box 4).

Figure 4: School visit map



Box 4: Acknowledgement of the immense efforts of all school staff and their role in informing the Review

The Panel would like to acknowledge Australia's educators and school leaders for their dedication to their craft and their students. To ensure the voices of these experts were heard, the Panel undertook visits to schools in every jurisdiction, including those in regional and remote areas, to understand the diverse contexts and needs of schools across the country.

The school visits afforded the Panel the opportunity to speak to many staff and students; our recommendations, findings and targets have been shaped by their valuable insights into both the challenges and the opportunities in education. We saw many examples of the passion and dedication that drives staff to make a difference every day and heard their ideas on what would help them continue to do this. We saw educators driving improvements to the way they teach and learn, and benefited from their views on what they need to be able to fulfil their commitment to lift student outcomes. We witnessed the diversity of ways in which schools engage meaningfully with their broader communities, adding richness and meaning to their students' educational experience and fostering a sense of belonging. This has been key to informing our view that improving belonging and wellbeing are critical to realising all other educational goals. We visited schools that were understaffed, seeing first-hand the pressure this was placing on staff and school leaders, and hearing their accounts of the impact this had on students; and we were also privileged to hear compelling examples of what had worked to keep great teachers in the schools that needed them most.

These consultation activities highlighted that we should strive to provide consistently high-quality teaching and learning for all students regardless of their postcode or background and provided clarity on the national direction required to achieve this. The visits have underscored the equity issues within the current system and the importance of addressing these as a matter of urgency. The visits also kept the diversity of Australia's schools front of mind, prompting the Panel to continually consider how to balance the national objectives of excellence and equity with the need for local responsiveness. Overwhelmingly, we heard that any reform direction undertaken by governments should seek to address teacher workloads and build the sustainability and diversity of the workforce.

The Panel thanks all educators, school leaders and students who took the time to share their experience, expertise and insights with us. We seek to repay your generosity by delivering a report that prioritises reforms that will help you continue making a difference for every student.

FINDING 1

The Panel acknowledges the diversity across schools in Australia, with differing locations, student numbers, characteristics, and workforce needs. As part of the Terms of Reference for the Review, the Panel was asked to make recommendations at a national level. The Panel acknowledges that the recommendations in this report will need to be implemented according to local contexts.

The challenges facing Australia's school education system are complex and interlinked

Seven thematic challenges have framed the Panel's thinking

Through its extensive consultations, the Panel heard about the strengths of Australia's school system, but also that more could be done to support the needs of all students. The Panel identified seven thematic challenges that have informed the Panel's recommended reform directions, underpinned by specific measurable and evidence based actions (recommendations) that could be prioritised through the next Agreement to achieve the vision of a better and fairer education system. These reform directions are broadly consistent with the Terms of Reference.

For some Australian students, **learning outcomes (theme one)** have continued to strengthen while others have been flat or in decline for many years. Too many students are starting school educationally unprepared or are falling behind in foundational knowledge and skills such as literacy and numeracy. Fewer than one in five students who are below the minimum standard in Year 3 catch up and keep up by Year 9.³² In the 2023 NAPLAN results, one-third of students were not meeting expectations of proficiency in literacy and numeracy.³³ Attendance levels³⁴ in Australia have been in steady decline, falling from 77.8 per cent in 2015 to 73.1 per cent in 2019.³⁵ Following the COVID-19 pandemic, attendance levels dropped further to 71.2 per cent in 2021 and 49.9 per cent in 2022.³⁶ In addition to declining attendance levels, high school apparent retention rates from the start of secondary school to Year 12 dropped from a peak of 84.8 per cent in 2017 to 80.5 per cent in 2022. Attendance is an inadequate proxy measure for engagement, however it is the best data available to provide a sense of students' belonging in a school environment. The Panel notes that there may be many factors that impact attendance that are not correlated with engagement and changing societal attitudes post COVID to attendance when unwell.

The **equity gap (theme two)** in learning outcomes between cohorts of students is growing and inequality is entrenched. In particular, learning gaps are widening for students from low socio-educational backgrounds, negatively impacting education attainment and later life outcomes, including income. NAPLAN data shows that the learning gap for students of low socio-educational status compared to their high socio-educational status peers has risen from 1.4 years in 2008 to 2.3 years in 2022 for Year 3 reading.³⁷

Australia has one of the highest levels of social segregation across schools in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. The impacts of concentration of disadvantage can be severe and result in poorer education outcomes. An OECD report also shows that social segregation that clusters students from a low socio-economic backgrounds in schools where the majority of students are from a low socio-economic background dampens student expectations for the future, weakens levels of student confidence, reduces community engagement of school leavers, and undermines social cohesion.³⁸

Mental health and wellbeing (theme three) has a significant impact on student learning and poor mental health and wellbeing is increasing among Australia's children and young people, which impacts student outcomes. As many as one in five children and young people experience poor social and emotional wellbeing.³⁹ National mental health and wellbeing data shows high prevalence of poor and declining mental health and wellbeing in children and adolescents, with 38.8 per cent of people aged 16 to 24 experiencing a mental health disorder in the 12 months prior to the survey (taken in 2020 to 2022).⁴⁰ Adding to deteriorating outcomes, a cluttered and fragmented landscape of supports makes it difficult for students, educators and families to get the support students need. This can have a profound impact on student learning, with evidence showing that by Year 9, students experiencing poor mental health are on average 1.5 years to 2.8 years behind their peers in literacy and numeracy outcomes.⁴¹ There is also a growing body of evidence which shows students with reading difficulties are more likely to report mental health and wellbeing problems.⁴²

Teachers are committed and focused on supporting their students, and more needs to be done to support and recognise teachers to encourage them to enter into and stay in the profession. Challenges in **attracting and retaining teachers (theme four)** have led to workforce shortages. Attrition rates are high, with around one in five beginning teachers leaving within the first three years of entering the teaching profession,⁴³ and almost 45 per cent of teachers aged 50 and over intending to leave the profession in the next five years.⁴⁴

Recent reviews of the teaching profession suggest, despite the efforts of school systems and approved authorities, teachers feel overworked and have an unsustainable work/life balance, complex workloads, high levels of stress, and a heavy administrative load. The Panel has also heard this through stakeholder consultations and on many school visits.

Despite the widespread nature of current teacher workforce issues, the impacts are felt disproportionately by government schools, schools in regional and remote areas, and schools with high levels of socio-educational disadvantage. Noting the significant work already underway to support the teaching workforce, this report aims to align and build upon these efforts, and focus resources where they are most needed.

Governments, school systems and approved authorities currently collect a lot of data with the aim of improving student outcomes. However, **gaps and limitations in data (theme five)** remain which limit opportunities to better understand system performance, promote accountability and drive real improvements in student outcomes. The Panel heard from stakeholders that data gaps for priority cohorts were profound, in particular for students with disability, and some data is collected but not published. Reporting on current NSRA priorities and targets is also dispersed across several sources, with no standalone source where the public can gain a 'clear read' of progress against the current NSRA outcomes, which impedes the community's ability to hold governments accountable.

In considering recommendations and this report, the Panel took into account the concerns it heard from stakeholders on additional data collection, including the potential for unfair comparisons between schools and systems, and the workload burden it could place on teachers and schools. The Panel supports data collection only where it has a clear purpose, where it contributes to improving student outcomes or transparency, and where benefits outweigh the cost of collecting the data.

There is a **lack of transparency and accountability (theme six)** in funding arrangements, limiting policy opportunities and public awareness. Families and communities do not have visibility of funding allocations, particularly how student loadings flow through to schools. Data is often collected, but this information is not always published. This limits the ability of the school system to meet community expectations of transparency in education and how investment or policy changes impact student outcomes.

The **settings of the current NSRA do not support long-term reform or innovation (theme seven)**.

The five-year timeframe for the current NSRA limits the potential for longer-term, strategic reform. Commitments such as Closing the Gap Priority Reforms are also not captured in the current NSRA, preventing governments from being held to account for implementing them in the education system. Progress of the reforms is also not shared publicly, impeding public trust and appetite for improvement and innovation.

Some issues cut across multiple thematic challenges

The Panel has identified issues that cut across all seven themes identified above, including the principle of subsidiarity, student complexity and school funding.

The SRS was developed based on the **principle of subsidiarity and flexibility**, with the acknowledgement that systems and schools are best placed to know and meet the needs of their students. Subsidiarity provides approved authorities with the ability to re-allocate SRS funding across their schools according to their own needs-based funding model.

Some stakeholders noted that a national approach was important to ensure consistency and a focus on certain issues, such as student outcomes. Many stakeholders also called for greater transparency in system-level funding models to provide confidence as to how funds are invested, particularly the additional loadings provided for equity cohorts. However, the Panel also heard that approved authorities, schools and teachers needed flexibility to implement initiatives and respond to local contexts.

The Panel considers that there is an attainable balance between subsidiarity and greater consistency which would deliver improved outcomes and transparency. Some practices will be relevant regardless of location – for example, adapting teaching to individual student needs – but certain elements of these supports could be tailored at the local level. In developing the recommendations and this report, the Panel maintains the principle of subsidiarity while also looking to address issues of consistency, funding transparency and accountability to ensure the system works effectively and delivers not just better outcomes but also public confidence.

There has been an increase in the **number of students identified as having a disability**. In 2022, 22.5 per cent of school students in Australia received an educational adjustment due to their disability, up from 18 per cent in 2015.⁴⁵ The majority of students with disability are enrolled in government schools,⁴⁶ and attend mainstream schools.⁴⁷

There has also been an increase in the number of students identified as having complex needs and many children have also experienced trauma. For example, the Australian Child Maltreatment Study found that over 62 per cent of Australians experienced maltreatment in childhood, highlighting the need for trauma-informed practice within schools.⁴⁸ Complexity can also be compounded by disruptive behaviour in schools, with 37 per cent of Australian lower secondary school principals reporting weekly intimidation or bullying among students.⁴⁹

The combination of increasing numbers of students requiring adjustments, increasing numbers of students with complex needs, disruptive behaviour, and students being exposed to trauma can create a complex environment for leaders, teachers and students. The Panel heard that this increase in student complexity can result in higher workload and mental load and affect the ability of teachers and schools to prepare for and teach effectively.

Although the Commonwealth and states and territories committed to the SRS funding model following the first Gonski Review, **some schools are still not being funded to the minimum standard**. This is most pronounced for government schools, with 98 per cent still being funded below the SRS on average.⁵⁰

The Panel notes the commitment from the Commonwealth Minister for Education and the Australian Government to work with state and territory governments to get every school to 100 per cent of its SRS. While the Australian Capital Territory is at 100 per cent, and New South Wales has committed to get every school to 100 per cent⁵¹, other states and territories do not currently have agreed trajectories or commitments to reach 100 per cent of the SRS.

Underfunding of schools, and government schools in particular, is undermining other reform efforts, with real implications for student educational and wellbeing outcomes, teacher attraction and retention, and ultimately confidence in the public education system. Governments should work together to address this issue as a priority and fund government schools to 100 per cent of the SRS. Governments should also work together to get the small number of non-government schools who are not fully funded to their full SRS.

Bringing the Mparntwe vision to life will improve Australian schools

The challenges set out above are not insurmountable. Change is possible and is already happening in many schools and jurisdictions across the country because of the skill, passion and determination of the educator workforce, the genuine goodwill from system administrators, partnerships with communities and families, and inspirational young Australians striving to reach their full potential. National progress requires a renewed effort by governments, school systems and approved authorities to systematise new policies and good practice across all schools and jurisdictions, with local adaptation to support success. The *2019 Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Mparntwe) sets out a vision for Australia's education system, which the Panel has placed at the centre of its deliberations.⁵²

Our vision is for a world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face.

This vision is not a reality yet because of the lack of strong follow-up actions and funding to embed good practice in every classroom, school and system following Mparntwe. The recommendations in this Review set out the policies and reforms that will ensure good practice is implemented across the system, intentionally and not by chance. This will help bring the Mparntwe vision to life and support Australian children to reach their full potential by making progress against its two goals:

1. The Australian education system promotes excellence and equity.
2. All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.

These two goals capture the purpose of education in Australia. Strong foundational literacy and numeracy skills support students to develop deep knowledge across broader curriculum areas however students need much more than this; they need to be able to thrive in the context of rapid social, technological, environmental and economic change. Students need to develop their cultural, intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and wellbeing skills and identities to keep learning throughout life.

Australia is not alone in pursuing a broad and ambitious purpose for education. The OECD Learning Compass 2030 sets out an aspirational vision for the future of education. It emphasises the need for students to learn to navigate themselves through unfamiliar contexts by developing a broad range of competencies, core foundations and transformative competencies. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Futures of Education report similarly envisions an ambitious purpose of education for the future, identifying several proposals and calls to action in pursuit of a new social contract for education.

The Productivity Commission called for the next school funding agreements to clearly articulate a theory of change linking reforms to the long-term outcomes. With this in mind, the Panel has identified seven reform directions underpinned by specific measurable and evidence-based actions (recommendations) that could be prioritised through the next Agreement to achieve the vision of a better and fairer education system. These reforms, recommendations, targets and measures create a clear pathway through which governments, school systems and approved authorities, in collaboration with system stakeholders, can better target their efforts and investment to improve student learning outcomes.

Critical to the successful implementation of the reform agenda in all jurisdictions, school systems and approved authorities will be appropriate sequencing and prioritisation. The Panel have outlined the logic underpinning the recommendations and have deliberately focused on the elements necessary for successful implementation – being a clear vision, specific and measurable outcomes, tangible interventions and mechanisms for measurement.

The Panel has emphasised throughout the report the holistic development of all students (anchored in the foundation skills of literacy and numeracy), the importance of collaboration among educators and schools leaders with community, the criticality of continuing to enhance educator's skills and knowledge, and importance of positive, culturally safe learning cultures and the opportunities for pedagogical innovation anchored in evidence. This approach to reform must be seen by governments, school systems and approved authorities as systemic change and be adapted and embedded in a way that has regard for local context and lasting sustainable change.

Seven reform directions from the seven themes should be considered by both the government and non-government sectors to collectively support progress towards the Mparntwe goals:

1. Provide all students with the support they need to lift their learning outcomes.
2. Improve equity so that all students access an excellent education and the supports they need.
3. Improve student wellbeing by prioritising investment and measuring impact.
4. Recognise and support educators and school leaders by prioritising high-impact reforms and monitoring progress.
5. Collect and use data to inform evidence-based decision-making with a focus on lifting outcomes.
6. Establish transparency and accountability mechanisms that build public trust and provide a foundation to improve student outcomes.
7. Establish governance mechanisms to support a structured approach to continuous improvement.

Across the seven reform directions, the Panel has made 24 recommendations to create a better and fairer education system.

Some recommendations are designed to be implemented within a short- or medium-term horizon because of the presence of a strong evidence base, a supportive stakeholder environment or a low cost and relatively straightforward implementation.

Other recommendations are more complex and will require more groundwork to achieve. Stakeholders have emphasised the need for long-term commitment and sufficient time for reforms to gain traction and impact to be monitored. For this reason, the Panel recommends that the next Agreement be set over a period of 10 years, with shorter bilateral terms and an opportunity to formally review after 5 years.

The Panel has also identified a number of findings which align with the seven reform directions. The findings reflect feedback received during the consultation process as key areas for action, however have not been included as recommendations as they were either outside the Terms of Reference for the Review, or there was not a clear pathway to implementation.

The reform directions are supported by measurable and achievable targets, which are designed to be national in scope. Bilateral agreements can augment the national targets with jurisdiction-specific targets and reforms. Trajectories for the achievement of targets should be identified in bilateral agreements and reported publicly.

With a unified purpose of bringing the Mparntwe vision to life, and placing students at the centre of all deliberations, the Panel believes there is a real opportunity for the next school agreement to set up our next generation and the Australian economy for success (see Box 5).

Box 5: The reform agenda presented in this Review outlines a pathway to bringing the Mparntwe vision to life

The reforms in this Review will strengthen Australia's school education system and bring the Mparntwe vision to life. Addressing inequalities through the school system is essential to achieving this vision but will not be sufficient to achieve equity of education. Implementation of the full reform agenda is necessary to ensure Australia's school system provides high-quality and equitable education to all students.

The seven reform directions outlined in this Review respond to challenges currently facing the school system as heard from stakeholders across Australia. The reforms will support the needs of all students, with a strong emphasis on improving student achievement and wellbeing and supporting Australia's education workforce. The recommendations that support the reform directions set out policies and actions that will improve the school system, intentionally and not by chance, and should be embedded in the next national school agreement.

To ensure these recommendations are effectively implemented, it is crucial that governments, school systems and approved authorities work collaboratively to uplift educational excellence and equity in all jurisdictions and in all sectors. In addition, it is crucial that the reform directions are effectively measured and reported on by embedding targets in the next national school agreement.

Targets are essential to focusing effort, holding governments, school systems and approved authorities to account, and building public awareness of the reform agenda. The targets outlined in this Review are ambitious national measures that have been designed to focus effort and investment on ensuring educational equity and excellence.

If implemented systemically and with fidelity, this reform agenda will help bring the Mparntwe vision to life and support all Australian students to reach their full potential.

Chapter 1: Lifting student outcomes for all students

Key points:

- Australia's school education system is performing well for many students; however, academic performance remains mixed, with too many students falling behind and persistent achievement gaps for students from priority equity cohorts. The performance of high-potential Australian students could also be improved, in line with stronger outcomes in other high-performing countries.
- Greater use of high-impact, whole-school evidence-based teaching approaches is key to maximising student achievement, particularly for ensuring students have a strong grasp of foundational skills like literacy and numeracy.
- Every classroom should embed a continuous teaching and learning cycle incorporating an 'assess, teach, assess and adjust' approach to support early identification of student needs, provide targeted and intensive support so students can catch up, and monitor students to ensure they keep up with their peers.
- Providing educators with strengthened professional development and collaboration opportunities and better access to robust evidence-based curriculum resources will set them up for success by empowering them to use their teaching expertise more effectively and address individual student needs.
- Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence should be harnessed where appropriate to enhance the use of new and evidence-based teaching approaches to engage students.
- In addition to developing strong foundational literacy and numeracy skills, schools should also teach students knowledge and general capabilities spanning the breadth of the curriculum, along with a range of enriching experiences, to provide students with the best opportunity to reach their full potential.
- Students will be empowered to make informed decisions about further education, training and employment if they understand their individual strengths, interests and aspirations and are provided clear advice about the range of post-school pathways early in their schooling.

1.1 Context

The highest performing education systems are those that combine excellence with equity, providing students with the same knowledge, skills and capabilities regardless of their background.⁵³ While Australia's school education system is performing well for many students, it could be better and fairer for all students.

Increasingly, schooling must equip individuals with the skills to pursue further training or education, as more than nine in 10 jobs are projected to require post-school qualifications in the future.⁵⁴ Research demonstrates that improved educational outcomes and higher educational attainment can lead to a range of positive health, economic and social benefits, contributing to a more equitable, cohesive and productive society.⁵⁵

Australian students perform strongly in international assessments and compare favourably to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average in many domains. Australia's enrolment rate in upper secondary vocational education for 20 to 24 year-olds is above the OECD average.⁵⁶ The attainment rate for Australians who at least have an upper secondary qualification is above the OECD average as is the tertiary education attainment rate.⁵⁷ Australian students' most recent mean scores in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reaffirms Australia as a high performing country in this assessment. Australia's PISA 2022 results were above the OECD average for all three domains (reading, mathematics and

science).⁵⁸ There are also more high performing students and fewer low performing students in all domains than the OECD average.⁵⁹ Socio-economic status had a lower-than-average impact on reading performance in PISA 2018, and average impact on mathematics performance in 2022.⁶⁰

However, the 2023 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results show that around one-third of students fall short of Australia's new measures of literacy and numeracy proficiency, and that certain students are more likely to face challenges in developing these core skills.⁶¹ While NAPLAN does not reflect the full suite of skills and knowledge a student needs to be successful in all facets of life, a focus on literacy and numeracy skills is warranted given the importance of these skills to accessing the full curriculum, engaging with training and employment opportunities, and community participation.

Research indicates that literacy and numeracy achievement gaps can be prevented and addressed by responding to individual student needs using the best available teaching practices grounded in evidence. In addition, school and classroom learning environments can have a significant impact on learning outcomes. A culture for learning, students' sense of safety (including physical, emotional, cultural and psychological safety) and the level of classroom disruption have implications for learning outcomes, as well as implications for equity, wellbeing and teaching (further discussed in Chapters 2 to 4). Determining learning progress at key points in the schooling process provides an opportunity to identify and support students at risk of falling behind. Each student's learning gain should be recognised as success irrespective of whether they meet learning benchmarks (measuring learning gain is discussed further in Chapters 5 and 7). It is important that educators are supported to engage with evidence-based professional development and have professional agency to use the full repertoire of pedagogical tools to gauge and respond to individual student need. Further work to support students to bring their skills and knowledge together to pursue meaningful pathways beyond schooling is also required. Together, these reforms would ensure that all students have the best chance of obtaining critical foundational skills, including reading, writing and numeracy.

1.2 Key consultation themes and analysis

1.2.1 Student academic performance is mixed and many students who fall behind do not catch up and keep up

Student educational attainment is improving but there is still a large gap between certain students

The current measure of educational attainment in the National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) is defined as completing Year 12 or equivalent or gaining a non-school qualification at Certificate III level or above. There is a well-established link between attainment of a Year 12 certificate, or equivalent qualification, and positive life outcomes for students. Evidence suggests that young people who complete secondary school have, on average, annual incomes 14 per cent higher and an unemployment rate 2.2 percentage points lower than people who do not complete secondary school.⁶² It also found that they tend to exhibit higher levels of civic engagement and trust and healthy behaviours such as increased exercise and reduced incidence of smoking.⁶³

The percentage of students attaining their Year 12 certificate or equivalent, or a non-school qualification at Certificate III level or above, have steadily increased from 80.3 per cent in 2004 to 90.1 per cent in 2022.⁶⁴ The remaining 10 per cent of young people aged 20 to 24 (without a Year 12 certificate or equivalent, or a non-school qualification at Certificate III level or above) are more likely to be experiencing disadvantage than their peers and may need additional support to achieve this goal.⁶⁵

In 2021, just over two-thirds (68.1 per cent) of First Nations people aged 20 to 24 years had a Year 12 or equivalent qualification, well below the total population (90.7 per cent; see also Chapter 7).⁶⁶ There is also a significant difference in attainment depending on socio-economic status. Nationally, in 2021, around 85 per cent of students from a high socio-economic status (SES) area obtained a Year 12 or equivalent certificate, in contrast to 74 per cent of students from low-SES areas.⁶⁷ A similar disparity is apparent based on regionality. Nationally, in 2021, 82.1 per cent of students from major cities obtained a Year 12 or equivalent certificate – in comparison to students in inner regional (71.0 per cent), outer regional (74.4 per cent) and remote and very remote (63.2 per cent) locations.⁶⁸

Student achievement data shows that Australian performance internationally is behind top-performing countries and some students need additional support to catch up and keep up

In Australia, student achievement is measured annually through NAPLAN. It is important to note that NAPLAN was revised in 2023 and student achievement is now reported against four levels of proficiency: Exceeding, Strong, Developing and Needs Additional Support, with the first two equating with proficiency.⁶⁹ These changes, which created a higher threshold for proficiency than NAPLAN from 2008 to 2022, affect comparability with previous years. This report includes references to both the 2023 NAPLAN and the 2008 to 2022 NAPLAN series, the latter of which is useful when looking at student progress over time.

A measure of the performance of an education system is the share of students who do not meet year-level expectations.

Equity Economics report in the Code REaD submission

In the 2023 NAPLAN, between 32 and 34 per cent of students (across Years 3, 5, 7 and 9) did not meet the higher expectations for literacy and numeracy.⁷⁰ Nearly 10 per cent of students on average, across years and domains, were at the Needs Additional Support proficiency level.⁷¹

NAPLAN is intended as a broad, aggregate measure of student progress. According to the OECD, national scale evaluations and assessments generally reflect the need for capability to assess how education systems are contributing to broader social and economic development, providing the public, educators and policymakers with information to assess whether their decisions and investment are based on evidence.⁷² NAPLAN focuses on the core skills of literacy (including reading, writing, and conventions of language) and numeracy needed to engage with the full curriculum.

However, it is important to note that any form of standardised assessment or test will have inherent limitations and gaps, and this includes NAPLAN. Firstly, NAPLAN does not measure proficiency across all areas of the curriculum itself; nor does it measure other general capabilities (discussed later in this chapter) required for many of the further education and employment opportunities and civic engagement that students aspire to. The importance of developing measures of progress against key learning areas of the Australian Curriculum is discussed in Chapters 5 and 7.

Secondly, although NAPLAN tests are intended to be taken by every Australian student in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, not all students sit the tests. Students from remote and very remote locations, students from low-SES backgrounds (as measured by parental education), and First Nations students have lower rates of participation than the average.⁷³ While adjustments are available for students with disability to undertake NAPLAN, some of these students may also be exempt if their disability severely limits their capacity to participate in standardised testing. This reflects a lack of suitable assessments for these groups of students and leads to reductions in the accuracy and interpretability of results for these groups of students, particularly when coupled with broader data gaps. It indicates that other existing or new tools would be more suitable to support educators in

measuring learning progress (discussed in Chapter 5). It also does not reflect the regular and sustained student achievement that educators observe every day in classroom environments which are more conducive to students demonstrating the full range of knowledge, skills and capabilities.

Thirdly, while work has been done to limit biases, some First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) stakeholders consider that there is room for improvement to ensure that NAPLAN is culturally appropriate for all students. NAPLAN uses a tailored test design to adapt to students' performance and match questions to their achievement level.⁷⁴ Each year's questions are also developed via an 18-month review process, including trialling potential questions with representative samples of students (both First Nations and non-First Nations) from each jurisdiction, sector and geolocation.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, it is likely that NAPLAN will continue to under-assess the skill levels and progress of some First Nations and CALD students.⁷⁶

Notwithstanding these issues, NAPLAN is Australia's only national assessment tool to monitor whether the education system is serving all students. It allows schools and systems to analyse student learning growth as they move through school, and informs policy design and decision-making, including for students most at risk of falling behind. It is not intended to replace the need for assessment of students' individual learning needs or targeted teaching interventions. Ideally, NAPLAN should form one component of a broader assessment system.⁷⁷

Australia also engages in international assessments, in which our recent results demonstrate that Australia has been a strong performer in some domains but indicate a decline overall, relative to past performance and many comparable countries. As outlined below, Australia's performance in these assessments tells a picture of broadly improving performance in primary school but plateauing or declining performance at the secondary level. We have a system where the proportion of low performers is growing⁷⁸ and there are persistent achievement gaps, with average student performance for equity cohorts remaining behind the Australian average for all students.

- The OECD's PISA tests 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge in real-life scenarios. Australia remains a relatively high performer in PISA, performing above the OECD average in all three domains in PISA 2022 and increasing its international performance relative to other OECD countries.⁷⁹ This reflects that Australia's mean scores and proficiency across domains remained relatively stable between 2018 and 2022, but the performance of some other countries declined over this period. However, the proportion of Australian students who attained the National Proficient Standard has decreased in each domain since PISA assessments were first conducted for each domain.⁸⁰ In 2022, between 42 to 49 per cent of Australian students did not meet Australia's National Proficient Standard (set at Level 3, higher than the international proficiency of Level 2, and representing a 'challenging but reasonable' standard) across PISA's three domains.⁸¹
- Recent results (2019) in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) (which assesses mathematics and science knowledge at the Year 4 and Year 8 levels) show that Australia's average performance has improved, but we remain well behind the leading country, Singapore. There is also a proportion of students with low achievement (approximately 20 to 30 per cent of students do not meet the national proficient standard, varying by year level and domain).⁸²
- In the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), which measures reading achievement in Year 4, Australia's gains between 2011 and 2016 were sustained but not improved on in the five years to 2021, when 20 per cent of students did not meet Australia's proficiency standard (compared with only 14 per cent in England, and 8 per cent in Hong Kong).⁸³

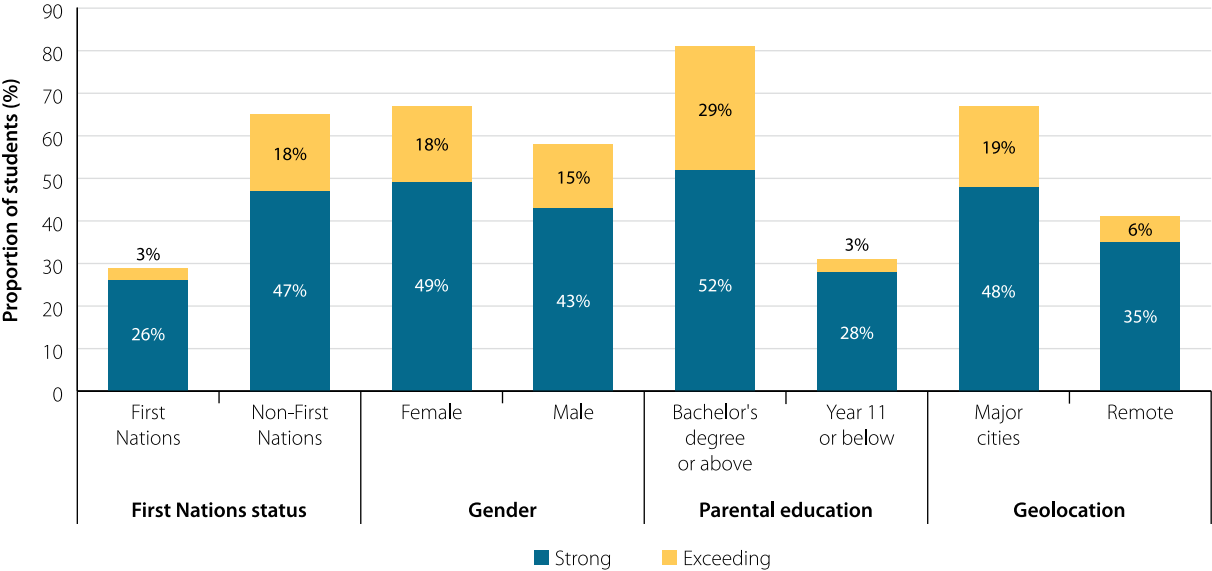
Students from priority equity cohorts are over-represented among those students who fall behind in school

There continues to be persistent achievement gaps between students from a priority equity cohort and students who are not from a priority equity cohort. Priority equity cohorts are defined in the current NSRA to include First Nations students, students living in regional, rural and remote locations, students with disability and students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.⁸⁴

Productivity Commission analysis of 2021 NAPLAN data found that of the 10 per cent of students falling below the minimum standard, only 3 per cent were counted in one of the priority equity cohorts identified in the NSRA.⁸⁵ However, students from priority equity groups are more likely to perform below learning expectations. They are also less likely to catch up by Year 9.⁸⁶

Many factors impact on the learning experience, attainment and achievement of students from priority equity cohorts, discussed further in Chapter 2. The 2023 NAPLAN data shows that parental education is by far the most influential determinant of educational proficiency (see Figure 5).⁸⁷ It is worth noting that many students belong to more than one priority equity cohort, which can have a compounding effect on outcomes for those students. For example, only 18 per cent of First Nations students in remote areas received a Strong or Exceeding proficiency level for reading in the 2023 NAPLAN, compared with 43 per cent of First Nations students in major cities.⁸⁸ While this is a sizeable gap, many students falling behind are not from a priority equity cohort.⁸⁹ This highlights the broad range of students needing support and the importance of early assessment to ensure that targeted learning interventions are based on the context and proficiency of each student rather than targeting student cohorts.

Figure 5: Proportion of students in strong and exceeding levels for Year 9 reading by First Nations status, gender, parental education, and geolocation, 2023



Source: Department of Education internal analysis of NAPLAN 2023 results.

It is concerning that performance gaps tend to increase across the school years. Students whose parents have not completed secondary education have an average Year 9 reading score similar to that of Year 5 students whose parents have a tertiary qualification.⁹⁰ Longitudinal analysis of NAPLAN results by the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) found that most students with low performance do not catch up and keep up to their peers, with fewer than one in five students (17 per cent and 19 per cent for reading and numeracy respectively) who perform at or below the National Minimum Standard in Year 3 catching up to their peers by Year 9.⁹¹ Many students who improved their performance between Year 3 and Year 5 did not maintain this higher performance in secondary school, demonstrating that while early intervention is effective, there is a need for continued monitoring to ensure that students who have caught up, keep up.

While NAPLAN does not disaggregate data by disability status, it is important to note that the increasing number of students with an imputed disability reflects the growing need to have adjustments and learning support in schools to address this concern (discussed further in Chapter 2).

Student attendance and engagement is linked to academic achievement

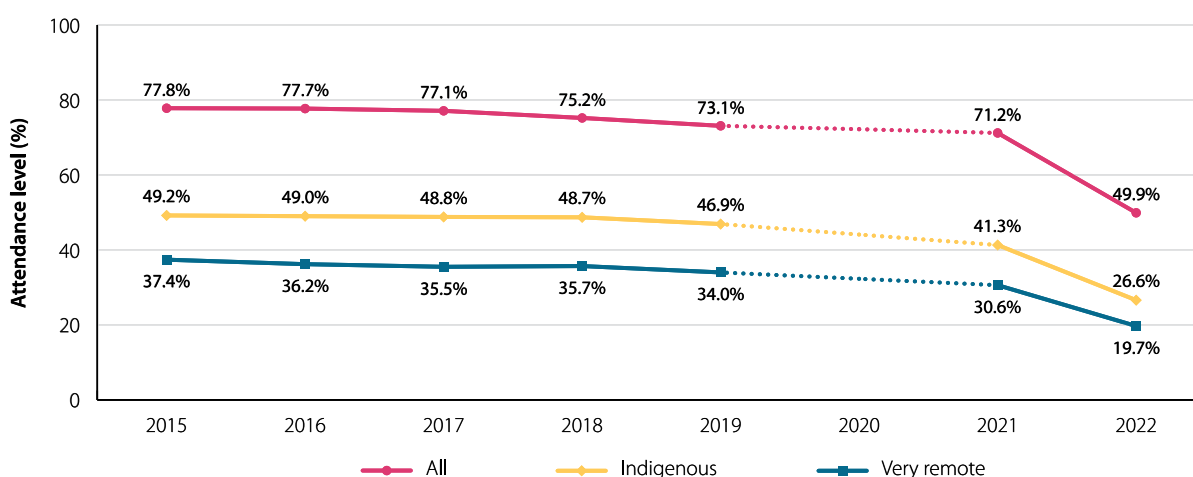
There is a well-established link between positive student engagement with school, individual student outcomes and longer-term social and economic success.⁹² Although some student absences, such as for illness, are unavoidable, regular absence can sometimes be an indicator of disengagement.⁹³ A variety of factors such as student characteristics, quality of teaching and teaching methodology, classroom environment and peers can influence the level of student engagement. At a school level, engagement usually stems from increasing motivation and aspiration, students attaching value to their education, feeling safe and welcome in their learning environment, and having supportive and respectful relationships.⁹⁴ Many of these engagement drivers will be more comprehensively discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

If students feel that they have a voice and that they belong in school, they are more likely to attend school. Almost 70 per cent of students who participated in the Review's survey indicated that their school puts in effort to make them feel like they belong at school, with students who speak a language other than English at home more likely to say this (over 78 per cent).⁹⁵

However, engagement is difficult to measure because it involves subjective factors that are specific to individual students and are not within the control of schools, educators and school leaders. For this reason, student attendance is used as a proxy measure of student engagement in the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia, which is used to report against the NSRA's current outcome that all students are engaged in their schooling.

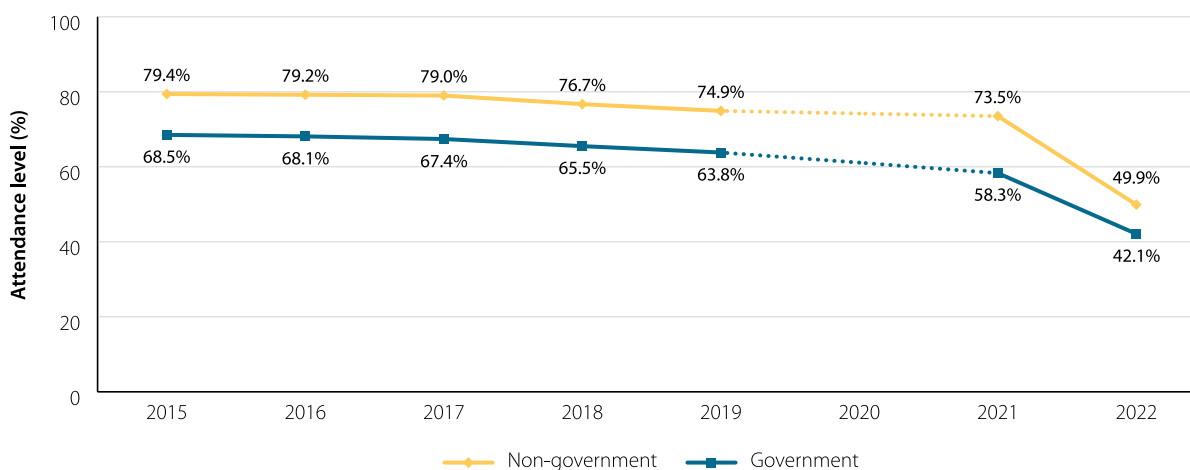
School attendance in Australia has been in steady decline since at least 2015. Attendance levels have decreased for all students and for certain student cohorts (Figure 6). The national decline in attendance level is also apparent across government and non-government schools (Figure 7). The Panel recognises the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student attendance and the potential for it to have lasting effects on how school education is delivered and student and parent expectations, all of which will influence school attendance levels. In addition, for reasons discussed further in Chapter 2, there have also been increases in the number of students undertaking schooling via part-time or hybrid learning options,⁹⁶ although exact numbers are unclear due to data gaps⁹⁷ and differences in legislative and policy requirements in each jurisdiction.

Figure 6: Attendance level of all students, Indigenous students and students living in very remote areas (2015–2022)



Source: ACARA, National Report on Schooling in Australia data portal.⁹⁸

Figure 7: Secondary school attendance level by school sector (2015–2022)



Source: ACARA, *National Report on Schooling in Australia data portal*.⁹⁹

Any absence from school can constitute a loss of educational opportunity. For example, students absent from school one day a week throughout their schooling will miss the equivalent of three years of school in Australia.¹⁰⁰ There is a link between low levels of school attendance and achievement.¹⁰¹ Previous research conducted by The Smith Family shows that students with higher attendance were more likely to receive satisfactory or above English grades in subsequent years.¹⁰² The relationship between attendance and achievement was similar for maths. This aligns with a 2013 Queensland report on attendance and student performance for Year 5 students which found that students achieved an average of 2 to 3 NAPLAN scale points higher in numeracy, reading, spelling, writing, grammar, and punctuation for every 1 percentage point increase in attendance, although the report acknowledges the results were likely influenced by a range of other factors.¹⁰³

Evidence highlights that disengagement from school can start early and become more entrenched over time.¹⁰⁴ It is therefore important to ensure that students are positively engaged throughout their schooling and that additional needs for support are identified, met early, and sustained through school. There are several approaches which can be used to influence student engagement and increase school attendance. Multiple factors influence engagement, so approaches which recognise individual student needs and provide tailored strategies are more likely to be effective. This can be through a tiered model of support (see section 1.2.2) in combination with universal strategies that create inclusive learning environments and promote student belonging and engagement.¹⁰⁵ Several submissions to the review also identified the positive impact that community and parent engagement can have on student attendance in addition to other student outcomes.¹⁰⁶ Catholic School Parents Australia suggested there be more focus on embedding parent engagement practices in all schools. The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth have developed a guide to implement successful family engagement practices to help schools work more collaboratively with families and support student outcomes.¹⁰⁷

Although student attendance is important, it is not a measure of student engagement. Firstly, it does not assess other aspects of student engagement important for learning, such as emotional and cognitive engagement, or alternative ways in which students may be engaging in learning. Secondly, it provides no understanding of the drivers of an individual student's non-attendance. The University of Tasmania submission identified measures which provide greater insight on student attendance, such as social inclusion and perceived connectedness to school, both aspects of student engagement. Submissions also raised the value of delineating the reasons for school absences as part of the measure.¹⁰⁸ How measurement of student engagement could be improved under the next Agreement, via a new national wellbeing measure which includes engagement, is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. Targets for student attendance are considered in Chapter 7.

1.2.2 Lifting student outcomes starts with all students receiving high-quality classroom instruction

Implementing a multi-tiered system of supports will lift achievement for all students

The Australian education system in both the government and non-government sector is working well for most students, however persistent achievement gaps between some students is a concern and should be a focus for systemic reforms. While these gaps reflect a range of drivers, including outside of school factors, a concerted effort by governments, school systems and approved authorities to increase support inside the school gate is needed to ensure students who start school behind, or who fall behind, are provided with more effective supports so that they catch up to and keep up with their peers. This would complement and build on the strong systems already in place that are working well for other students.

Teachers have the biggest impact on student achievement inside the school gates¹⁰⁹ and have a critical role in lifting achievement, but they cannot improve student outcomes in isolation. Teachers require system support and the right resources if they are to create effective learning environments using their broad repertoire of tools including a variety of effective pedagogies, approaches and skills to cater to different student needs and different school contexts. This would have a range of positive impacts in providing students with a sense of success, care and engagement, making it more likely that they finish school with the foundational skills they need to pursue further education, training and employment.

Many schools are already implementing tiered intervention support models successfully, including the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) model. Governments, school systems and approved authorities should focus on further enhancing implementation of support models systemically and with fidelity across all Australian schools in the government and non-government sectors.

There is evidence that a MTSS model is effective at lifting outcomes for all students. The submission from Dr Kate de Bruin, Dr Eugénie Kestel and Dr Mariko Francis outlined the findings of the systemic review of this model, including improved academic and behavioural outcomes for all students.¹¹⁰ Some Australian schools are implementing MTSS models with positive student outcomes. The Western Australian (WA) Government submission noted that 'MTSS is fundamental to the state's efforts to ensure all students receive the support they require to succeed'.¹¹¹ These demonstrate how the government and non-government sector can build on the strong systems in place to improve outcomes.

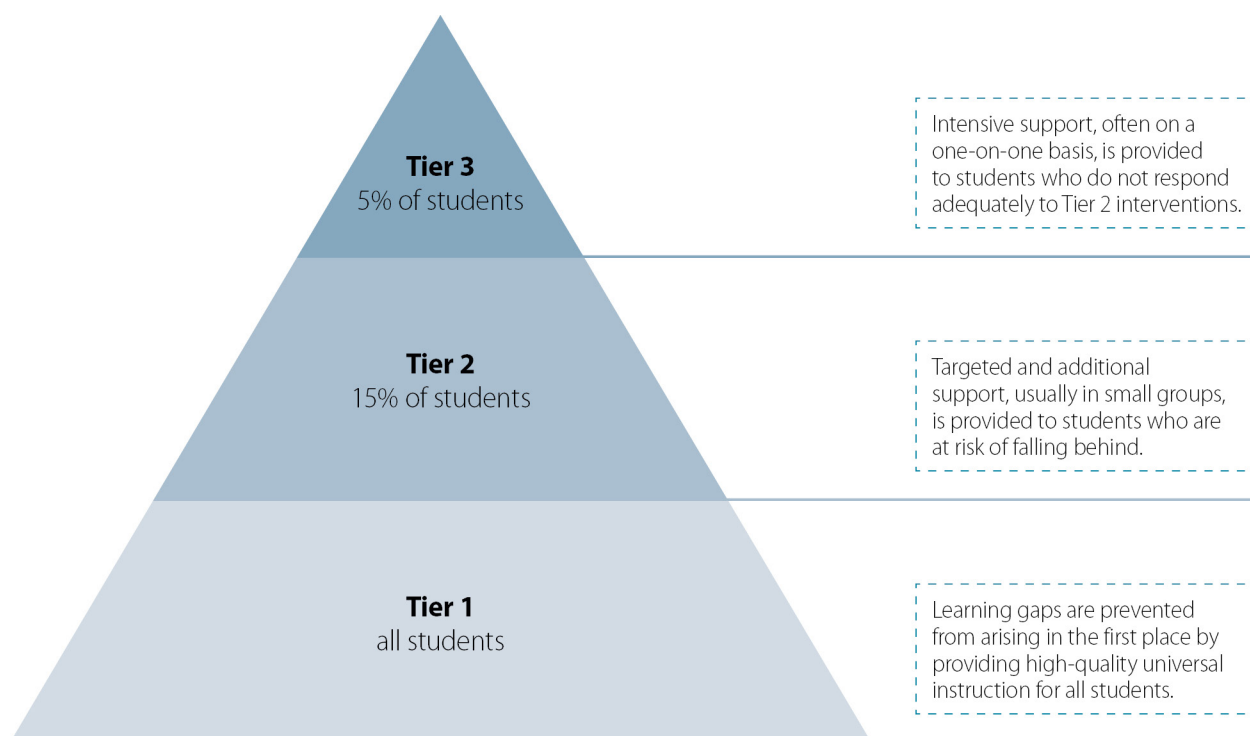
Evidence-based practices should be implemented within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). This system operates on a public health framework with prevention as a fundamental principle across all tiers of support.

Faculty of Education, Monash University

MTSS is generally characterised by a number of core components:

1. a coordinated system of supports across a sliding scale of increasingly intensive tiers (usually three – see Figure 8)
2. the use of evidence-based practices at each tier
3. universal screening of all students' academic progress, behaviour and wellbeing
4. progress monitoring to ensure tiered supports are having the desired impact on students
5. data-based decision-making for the determination of additional tiers of support.

Figure 8: MTSS model – a coordinated system across three tiers of support



Source: Code REaD Dyslexia Foundation submission; Dr Kate de Bruin, Dr Eugénie Kestel and Dr Mariko Francis submission.

All three tiers are aligned so that there is a coordinated approach to teaching, determined by student need. The foundation is high-quality instruction in Tier 1, designed to effectively provide a positive and engaging learning environment, efficiently teach the widest and most diverse cohort, and foster connection and pro-social interactions between students. It maximises the number of students learning and thriving and minimises the number who require additional support. Tier 2 and Tier 3 offer more intensive instruction to students needing additional academic, social-emotional, or behavioural support.¹¹²

Under the MTSS model, students are regularly assessed in all tiers to identify if they need further support across all domains (academic, behavioural and wellbeing), the type of support they may need to address individual risk factors, and if they are making progress against their learning objectives. This individualised student teaching approach supports student engagement and can help reduce the prevalence of disruptive behaviours resulting from disengagement. This enables teachers to focus more of their time on classroom instruction and planning. As noted in the submission from Dr de Bruin, Dr Kestel and Dr Francis, the intention is always to return students who need additional support back to Tier 1, noting that more sustained support may be required depending on the complex learning needs of some students.

Several stakeholders supported the MTSS model including the Code REaD Dyslexia Network, Australian Association of Special Education, University of Tasmania, Centre for Inclusive Education, Northern Territory Principals' Association, MultiLit, Independent Schools Australia, Flinders University, and Monash University Faculty of Education.

AERO's submission recommended the adoption of a systemic approach to help students catch up (e.g. through small-group catch-up tutoring) within an MTSS model. The MTSS model encourages the integration of a support package within schools by providing a clear structure aligned to evidence, starting with high-quality universal classroom instruction.¹¹³

A student-centred approach would prioritise early intervention plus targeted support in order to bridge the learning gap for students. The sooner learning gaps are identified and supported, the better the educational outcomes a student will have.

Independent Schools Australia

While many stakeholders raised the benefit of MTSS models for students who have fallen behind, it is important to note that this tiered approach can also support high-potential students. The Tasmanian Association for the Gifted submission suggested that disengagement and underachievement for some high-potential students begins in primary school. This highlights that early identification and response with appropriate pedagogical practices and support strategies, including MTSS models, is important to ensure that high-potential students are identified and encouraged to reach their full potential.

Critical to the success of the MTSS model is regular monitoring and evidence-based teaching and learning. All tiers of the MTSS model require educators to assess whether students are proficient or require additional support and then leverage their expertise to choose and apply high-impact pedagogy¹¹⁴ and curriculum materials to suit the needs of the students. School systems and approved authorities should continue to provide educators with the resources and support to perform these critical functions. These two issues will be explored further in sections 1.2.3 and 1.2.4 respectively.

1.2.3 Students who fall behind should be identified early and receive targeted and intensive support

Identifying students who fall behind early is important, including during periods of transition

Implementing high-quality Tier 1 classroom teaching supports learning outcomes for all students. It is important that students who start school behind or fall behind are identified as early as possible so they can receive targeted and intensive support under Tiers 2 and 3. As noted earlier, early and regular assessment is a key feature of the MTSS model and one that is familiar to schools using similar models for the implementation of Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) and languages.

Establishing a baseline of how students are performing is particularly important when students start school. As there is limited information sharing from preschools and early childhood education and care services about children's learning, it is crucial to identify children who start behind early. Most jurisdictions and systems already implement Foundation Year literacy and numeracy screening to identify students who require additional support. For example, government systems use a range of screening tools including BASE (Australian Capital Territory (ACT)), Best Start Assessment (NSW), English Online Interview (Victoria), On-Entry Assessment (WA), Early Start (Queensland), Phonological Awareness Skills Mapping (some schools in South Australia), Progressive Achievement Tests (Tasmania) and the Foundations of Early Literacy Assessment (Northern Territory (NT)). Another tool used by some schools is the Early Language and Literacy Development Index (see Case Study 1).

However, the significant proportion of students who are falling behind indicates that despite the significant efforts of systems and schools, current approaches are not providing all students with foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Submissions, including from the Centre for Independent Studies and Code REaD Dyslexia Network, raised concerns that the additional needs of students were not being identified, hindering school's ability to develop teaching strategies best suited to meet students' needs.

Case Study 1: Measuring oral language and early literacy in early primary school with the Early Language and Literacy Development Index

An example of the efficacy of early literacy screening and targeted literacy intervention is the implementation of the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (ALNF) Early Language and Literacy Development Index (ELLDI) at a regional government primary school. The ELLDI is a formative assessment tool which places students at one of four points on a scale measuring their early language and literacy development.

In 2020, 23 children across two transition classrooms participated in the ELLDI at the school. The ELLDI complemented the school's existing use of the ALNF's Early Language and Literacy (EL&L) Program, which provides educators with 'speech-pathology-meets education' resources and strategies to support students at risk of falling behind in their literacy skills. Data gained in the ELLDI interviews enabled ALNF to provide feedback and resources to educators to support a data-driven tailored approach to student learning under the EL&L Program. Classroom teachers, intervention staff, special education teachers and a member of the school leadership team attended regular co-planning sessions with the ALNF staff throughout the year.

Educators reported that the implementation of the ELLDI index allowed the school to track individual student literacy development and target their strategies, activities and language to the needs of individual students. Educators also noted a stronger understanding of early language and literacy development, increased and more intentional use of EL&L strategies, and greater confidence in supporting student literacy growth.

Source: Groom S, Mendel M, Brace E, and Pryor P (2022) [Evidence-informed early language and literacy practice: Implementation of a new formative assessment for early language and literacy development](#). The Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation, paper presented at the 2022 ACER Research Conference, accessed 27 October 2023.

School systems and approved authorities should ensure that schools that do not have a Foundation Year screening check are supported to nominate their own robust screening approach and implement this as soon as possible to eliminate screening gaps across the school system. All school systems and approved authorities should also adopt the same Year 1 Phonics Check and agree on the design and implementation of a national numeracy check as part of the next Agreement to ensure a national measure of early literacy and numeracy development in Year 1 (discussed later in this section).

As there is currently limited student-level data sharing between schools, jurisdictions should commit to either making screening data more easily shared or implementing screening tools for incoming students – with a particular focus on the transition to secondary school or between school sectors, to ensure Tier 2 or 3 interventions are in place as soon as a student commences in a new environment. This should be completed in close consultation with the non-government sector to ensure smooth transitions for students moving between sectors.

Improving information on childhood development would support transitions into school

The early years, between birth and five years, is a key time for building developmental and educational outcomes for Australian children, including for preparation for school. There is currently limited information available on outcomes for children in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and their readiness to transition into formal schooling. Often there is not a 'warm handover' for students between ECEC and preschool or between preschool and school. This section explores two measures:

- the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), which provides an assessment of outcomes in early childhood development on a national level¹¹⁵
- the Preschool Outcomes Measure, a tool for preschool teachers and educators in development under the Preschool Reform Agreement.¹¹⁶

The AEDC is a nationwide developmental assessment administered every three years to children enrolled in their first year of full-time school. The AEDC measures development against five domains: language and cognitive skills (school-based), social competence, emotional maturity, communication skills and general knowledge, and physical health and wellbeing, using over 100 questions that have been developed by adapting a Canadian tool.

The AEDC is a population-level census and designed to support an understanding of early development at the individual level. The AEDC is not validated as an individual screening tool, so it cannot be used as a diagnostic assessment and individual results are not provided to students and parents. School-level data is not published publicly but is available to school principals to help inform school-level planning. As a point-in-time measure held every three years, the AEDC cannot track whether students or cohorts found to be developmentally at risk or developmentally vulnerable catch up. Moreover, some of the domains, such as physical health and wellbeing, while critical to informing school responses, are often beyond the capacity of schools to address.

For these reasons, the AEDC is not well suited to serving as the foundation for a target or indicator of student progress in Foundation Year.

In the longer term, governments, should explore possible options to track early childhood development at an individual level. This would help establish an evidence base for how schools, in collaboration with other services and systems, can best support children who are found to be at risk or vulnerable to catch up.

Governments have committed to work collaboratively to improve the preschool evidence base through a range of data reforms under the Preschool Reform Agreement, including a new national formative assessment tool known as the Preschool Outcomes Measure and a national research agenda in preschool outcomes. In October 2023, Education Ministers agreed that the measure will be developed throughout 2024 and trialled nationally on a voluntary basis in 2025.¹¹⁷ The measure will focus on two priority areas, executive function and oral language and literacy, and be trialled using either the new measure under development or any aligned tool already in use by states and territories.

The Preschool Outcomes Measure is designed to support educator practice. It is not a test and cannot be used to benchmark children, educators, services or jurisdictions. The Panel considers that the development of the Preschool Outcomes Measure, combined with the accompanying national research agenda in preschool outcomes, will deliver a greater understanding of children's learning and development and that this, in turn, could be used to provide useful insights upon school entry.

The trial will be evaluated in late 2025 to support decisions on next steps for future implementation. Subject to outcomes from the trial, and over the longer term, governments could also consider opportunities to enhance the Preschool Outcomes Measure, including the potential to include additional domains or age cohorts.

In addition, there is potential further intersection with the Australian Government's Early Years Strategy, which will seek to support improved coordination between Commonwealth programs, funding and frameworks impacting early childhood development, and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy, which aims to improve outcomes for First Nations people over their life course.

FINDING 2

Governments should consider options to leverage the work being undertaken through the Preschool Outcomes Measure, including through the national research agenda in preschool outcomes, to establish effective early screening mechanisms and better understand transitions into school.

Targeted and intensive support can be instrumental in helping students to catch up

Once identified as having fallen behind, students need support to catch up to their peers. The implementation of systematic provision of additional support for students who have fallen behind is essential for lifting student outcomes and building an education system with high levels of excellence and equity.¹¹⁸ A number of submissions further noted that high-performing systems like those of Singapore, Finland and Hong Kong all offered catch-up supports and that the high visibility and availability of these supports reduced the stigma around their take-up.¹¹⁹

MTSS offers a coordinated approach, meaning that improvements can be achieved for priority equity students within the context of supporting achievement for all, rather than as separate add-ons.

Dr Kate de Bruin, Dr Eugénie Kestel and Dr Mariko Francis

Educators want to help all students to succeed. Of the 13,684 educators surveyed for the Review, 39.8 per cent identified helping students who are falling behind, especially those experiencing disadvantage, as a key priority for the next Agreement.¹²⁰ But many educators do not feel that current supports are adequate. An AERO survey found that around half of the secondary school teachers surveyed, are regularly providing additional support (beyond tailored teaching in the classroom) for students who struggle with literacy and numeracy while a further 33 to 40 per cent indicated additional support was only provided sometimes; however, two in five teachers and leaders surveyed were not confident this support was effective.¹²¹ It is important to note that more than half of the survey respondents cited a lack of available staff as a barrier to providing additional support, highlighting the challenges and impact of workforce shortages.

There is clear evidence to support the efficacy of small-group tutoring as a Tier 2 strategy to support students.¹²² The Grattan Institute's submission noted the research summary by Evidence for Learning, which showed that the average impact of small-group tuition is *four additional months' progress* over the course of a year.¹²³ Panel members saw examples of its success in schools supporting students from various backgrounds in different school contexts to improve their learning outcomes. In the Review's survey, the most frequently mentioned investment that parents wanted to see to help their children learn was small-group or individual tutoring to help those who had fallen behind, which was nominated by over 54 per cent of parents and guardians.¹²⁴

Evidence tells us that for success to be achieved with small group tutoring, targeted interventions should be delivered to small groups of students (e.g. 2–5), at frequent intervals (e.g. 3 or more times per week) with each session running for close to an hour, for a defined period.

AERO

Many schools already use catch-up tutoring (or equivalent). This has been a focus in many schools in recent years; for instance, both NSW and Victoria implemented catch-up tutoring programs in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and both governments have committed to the continuation of these programs. The NSW Government's early evaluation of cross-sectoral small-group tutoring indicates that it improves student confidence and engagement in learning. They found the program had a significant impact on student development, resulting in growth that would not have been achievable in the classroom alone.¹²⁵

In some cases, organisations have provided targeted support to help students catch up outside of school settings – for example, The Smith Family's Catch-Up Learning program (see Case Study 2).

Case Study 2: The Smith Family's Catch-Up Learning program

The Smith Family conducted the Catch-Up Learning program in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The program was:

- an online home-based tutoring program for students in Years 4 to 8
- delivered by qualified teachers who provided one-on-one sessions in literacy and numeracy three times a week over a 20-week period
- aimed at students experiencing financial disadvantage who were part of The Smith Family's Learning for Life program and were struggling in literacy and numeracy
- trialled in late 2020 to mid-2021 and then expanded into a second trial in 2022.

Students were from across Australia. One in five were First Nations students and almost half of participating students had "health or disability issue/s." By the end of the Catch-Up Learning pilot, 67 per cent of students achieved higher than expected progress in numeracy, and 53 per cent of students achieved higher than expected progress in literacy. Program completion was also high, at 83 per cent, and average program attendance for students who completed the program was also high, at 86 per cent. The evaluation of the Catch-Up Learning program trials shows the impact that catch-up tutoring can have for students who fall behind.

Source: The Smith Family (2022) [The Catch-Up Learning program: supporting students experiencing disadvantage through online tutoring at home](#), The Smith Family, accessed 27 October 2023.

Some students will require Tier 3 support, which is more intensive instructional support and can be provided through increased frequency and longer periods of instruction. It is generally provided to smaller groups or one on one, so that teaching can be tailored to the individual. It may also involve the use of more specialised teachers to provide this additional support, such as literacy specialists or qualified special educators depending on the student's needs.

The provision of targeted and intensive support can also be an effective part of an inclusive model of education, as it can be used to adapt teaching practices and layer support according to student need. This approach was strongly supported as effective for lifting outcomes of students with disability in submissions from the Centre for Inclusive Education, Australian Association of Special Education, Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion, and Code REaD Dyslexia Network.

It is crucial that targeted and intensive support is provided within a school's core comprehensive and coordinated approach to supporting students and improving learning outcomes. A standalone catch-up tutoring program that is not part of a fully implemented model is insufficient to achieve the change required to close learning gaps. The effectiveness of small-group catch-up tutoring can be influenced by the fidelity of implementation, such as how it is staffed, the frequency of sessions, effective student grouping and regular assessment to monitor student progress.¹²⁶ This type of reform can be particularly challenging in the context of workforce shortages and already high teacher workloads. Systems and schools should factor in these issues when considering the most effective ways to implement MTSS, including catch-up tutoring, and this can be an area of focus as MTSS is rolled out systematically across schools.¹²⁷

RECOMMENDATION 1A

To improve student outcomes, the Panel recommends that all governments, school systems and approved authorities embed the use of a multi-tiered system of supports framework for student learning across all schools to ensure that:

- i. all students receive high-quality Tier 1 classroom instruction
- ii. all students are regularly screened from Foundation Year, with systems nominating their screening methods to identify where additional support is required
- iii. all students who need additional support to catch up will access targeted and intensive evidence-based Tier 2 and 3 supports, including small-group or individual 'catch-up' tutoring with adequate dosage.

To support implementation fidelity, all governments should implement *Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel*, to ensure teachers have knowledge of the evidence-based practices that have the greatest impact on student learning.

Universal literacy and numeracy screening would support a nationally consistent understanding of how students are developing their literacy and numeracy skills

School systems, approved authorities and individual schools recognise the importance of universal screening as a fundamental diagnostic tool to inform effective teaching practice. They support educators to use screening tools to monitor student progress and identify students who have fallen behind in literacy and numeracy skills. The screening tools vary by system and by sector, but often are used in Foundation Year to establish a baseline when students start school, with follow-up screening in early primary school to see if students catch up and keep up.

As the screening tools vary, national reporting on universal literacy and numeracy screening tools would support a national snapshot of progress on early literacy and numeracy skills. Universal screening would also embed a consistent focus on early literacy and numeracy skills across schools and support students who transition between schools.

Phonics is a key component of learning to read, with studies showing that systematic phonics instruction is the most effective way of teaching the majority of children to decode words on a page. This is an essential skill for making sense of text. Evidence-based phonics programs have been continually recommended by international reviews looking into methods for the teaching of reading to lift reading results.¹²⁸ These findings have been confirmed by other research in the intervening years.¹²⁹ Most systems and approved authorities recognise the value of phonics and use phonics assessments as one of several effective screening tools.

It is important to note that while effective phonics instruction is important, the development of oral language proficiency, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension (which, alongside phonics, are known as the 'big six' components of successful reading) are also important, as is nurturing an enjoyment of reading. Ensuring an effective focus on phonics implemented in a systematic way across all schools, with assessment and national reporting of results of a phonics screening check to monitor progress in early primary school, would support students to develop essential early reading skills. The Panel notes that this does not detract from the importance of culturally appropriate teaching and learning. Evidence-based phonics instruction aligned with the science of how students learn should be part of a rich, broader literacy curriculum that is responsive to the diversity of student backgrounds.

Stakeholders identified the need for reforms which improve the literacy and numeracy standards of Australian students across primary and secondary school, with early student achievement important for students to properly engage with the full curriculum content and achieve their potential in later years. This was evident from the Review's survey, which showed that a large proportion of parents and guardians identified numeracy (70.6 per cent) and reading (60.6 per cent) as the top two most important learning areas for their child at school.¹³⁰

In an open letter to all Education Ministers, a coalition of 44 academics and education leaders raised their concerns about the number of Australian children without the literacy skills to effectively engage in the modern world.¹³¹ This letter identified six policy reform initiatives, based on robust research, to improve literacy outcomes. These reforms included universal screening through the Year 1 Phonics Check, supported by the provision of high-quality literacy instruction and access to tiered learning interventions for students who need extra support. Other proposed reforms included supporting teachers to further develop their evidence-based teaching practices and improving access to reliable, evidence-based literacy instruction materials. Lastly, the letter stated that the proposed reforms should be supported by national literacy benchmarks which recognise that 95 per cent of students can reach proficiency when they are supported.

The reforms put forward by the coalition of academics and education leaders align with the Equity Economics report in Code REaD Dyslexia Network's submission, which made five similar recommendations to improve literacy. The economic impact of illiteracy was estimated by Equity Economics to be as high as \$44 billion annually from lower employment and earning and increased health costs. The cost of the recommended support is estimated to be \$942 million per year, with an estimated return on investment (based on higher future earnings) of \$12 billion.¹³²

Universal screening is the most effective and cost-efficient way to ensure any student at risk of falling behind in their learning is identified early and given the help they need to catch up.

Grattan Institute

Screening can be a useful tool in ensuring that phonics skills, as an essential building block of literacy, are on track. The United Kingdom (UK) Government implemented its own mandatory Year 1 Phonics Screening Check in 2012, and an evaluation in 2015 showed that proficiency had improved in three years.¹³³ Proficiency has continued to improve over time (even with a decline during the COVID-19 pandemic), with 79 per cent

of students meeting the expected standard in 2023 in Year 1 and 89 per cent by the end of Year 2.¹³⁴ The strongest predictor of the performance of English students in PIRLS 2021 was performance in the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check, for which a 1-point increase was associated with nearly a 4-point gain in PIRLS 2021.¹³⁵ This positive correlation may have helped reading performance in England remain stable for Year 5 students, when the international median dropped 19 points between PIRLS 2016 and PIRLS 2021.¹³⁶

The South Australian (SA) Government developed a paper-based phonics check based on the UK version, which was implemented in public schools in 2018. Proficiency in the Year 1 Phonics Screening Check has improved over time (see Case Study 3).

Case Study 3: South Australian Phonics Screening Check

The Year 1 Phonics Screening Check is a short assessment (five to seven minutes) which indicates how Year 1 students are progressing in decoding and blending letters into sounds. It was implemented across all Year 1 students in SA public schools in 2018.

Classroom teachers conduct the assessment individually with students in a quiet room. Students are asked to read up to 40 real and made-up words aloud. Reading made-up words demonstrates that students can use phonics skills rather than just their memory or guessing strategies. The phonics screening check is conducted in Term 3 and updated each year with a different set of words to those used in the previous year. Teachers analyse the results and, if necessary, plan for any additional support students might need. Teachers and school leaders are supported with training and resources to use the phonics screening check to ensure the quality and consistency of its application.

Results from the check from 2018 to 2022 show that:

- the total number of students meeting the benchmark rose by 25 percentage points
- students with a verified disability who met the benchmark rose by 27 percentage points
- students in the most disadvantaged schools who met the benchmark rose by 23 percentage points
- First Nations students who met the benchmark increased by 19 percentage points.

Source: Department for Education (2023) [Phonics screening check for student understanding of letters and sounds](#), Department for Education, South Australian Government, accessed 27 October 2023.

In 2017, an Australian Government Expert Advisory Panel (the Expert Advisory Panel) recommended a consistent national Year 1 literacy check focused on phonics and a Year 1 numeracy assessment focused on number sense and position/location.¹³⁷ The Australian Government subsequently developed an online version of the South Australian Year 1 Phonics Screening Check, called the Year 1 Phonics Check.¹³⁸

A Year 1 phonics testing process is mandatory for government schools in NSW, Victoria, WA, SA and Tasmania. In October 2023, the Queensland Government announced a consistent statewide approach to teaching reading, including the adoption of the Year 1 Phonics Check to strengthen key screening points.¹³⁹ The ACT and NT have not mandated a phonics check for students in Year 1, although the NT conducted a Year 1 Phonics Check trial in 2022. Most of the phonics checks used by jurisdictions align with the Australian Government's Year 1 Phonics Check; however, there is some inconsistency. For example, the WA Government supports individual schools in selecting a phonics assessment from a WA Government endorsed list. The Victorian Government's phonics assessment forms part of its English Online Interview assessment, and students are assessed against a much smaller word sample than in the Year 1 Phonics Check.

The Australian Government's 40-item Year 1 Phonics Check aligns with existing approaches to phonics assessment for most jurisdictions and is the appropriate screening tool to obtain a national picture of student progress before Year 3. The Year 1 Phonics Check should be administered in Term 3. Year 1 students who are not assessed as proficient or who do not take part in the Year 1 Phonics Check should receive supports to catch-up and participate in a resit assessment in Year 2. As outlined in Chapter 7, national reporting of results should also be part of implementation.

The Panel is aware that school systems and approved authorities support the use of other high-quality screening tools to assess the literacy progress of students as part of teaching practice, as outlined earlier in this section. The recommendation of the Year 1 Phonics Check should not displace these valuable tools; rather, it should be a supplementary assessment which teachers can also use to identify students who need additional support and inform their teaching practice accordingly. It will also provide a national picture of student progress.

In addition, governments, school systems and approved authorities should work together to develop a Year 1 numeracy check to similarly assess early maths skill development. The Expert Advisory Panel in 2017 recommended the development of a new screening tool and there has been subsequent work by governments that could be leveraged. For example, the MultiLit submission proposed the 'Year 1 Number Check' on the Australian Government's Mathematics Hub.¹⁴⁰ This assessment, which is funded by the Australian Government, should be explored to determine its validity, reliability, and fitness for purpose as a systemic assessment.

RECOMMENDATION 1B

The Panel recommends that governments, school systems and approved authorities institute the Year 1 Phonics Check across all schools by the end of 2026. In addition, a similarly robust and nationally consistent screening check should be agreed and implemented for numeracy by the end of 2028. The data should be reported nationally to support an understanding of early literacy and numeracy improvement.

1.2.4 A system-wide approach is needed to strengthen evidence-based practice, with educators supported through clear guidelines, effective professional development and high-quality curriculum resources

Teachers should be supported to further use evidence-based practice

Teachers want to have the greatest impact on their students' learning and should be supported with system and school level support, including effective training and tools to update their knowledge about the instructional practices that are more effective than others, and when and how to implement them appropriately. Over three-quarters of teachers report regularly using evidence-based practices in their classroom.¹⁴¹ However, evidence-based teaching practice could be used more consistently, confidently or comprehensively by teachers and leaders in every classroom.¹⁴²

The work of the Teacher Education Expert Panel in *Strong Beginnings* provides a comprehensive overview of the 'core content' that ITE students should be taught (see Box 6).¹⁴³ The core content includes evidence-based pedagogical approaches like how the brain works to optimise learning, as well as contemporary best practice for classroom management and responsive teaching. In July 2023, Education Ministers provided in-principle agreement to the recommendations of the Teacher Education Expert Panel.

The next step is to ensure that in-service educators are similarly equipped to support student learning by improving access to high-quality professional development, collaboration and teaching tools. This would improve consistent and effective use of evidence-based pedagogies across the teaching profession and is key to enhancing professionalisation, minimising workloads and building public confidence in the system. The Panel spoke with school leaders who are implementing a whole-school approach to increasing the uptake of high-impact and consistent teaching practices. Many of these leaders supported greater consistency in effective approaches across schools, to increase opportunities for staff collaboration and minimise the time and effort required to induct new students and staff into whole-school approaches to teaching and learning. The benefits of increased consistency in effective approaches could be greater for schools where staff and students are more mobile or transient, or where a high proportion of students experience socio-educational disadvantage.

Educators and school leaders have the expertise and professional judgement to identify the individual needs of students and ensure that the pedagogy and materials on offer are well targeted, and they can be supported by greater consistency in teaching approaches. One of the most effective ways that school systems and approved authorities can support educators in applying effective teaching practices is to develop clear policy direction and expectations about the use of highly-effective practice and provide resources which would support implementation in schools. This would empower schools to develop whole-school approaches to teaching, including curriculum planning. A whole-school curriculum approach can facilitate teacher collaboration and reduce teacher workload associated with teaching the curriculum.

Governments, school systems and approved authorities should update their guidance on effective teaching practice to ensure it aligns with what has been recommended in *Strong Beginnings*. For example, this could include conducting audits of departmental programs, policies and professional learning to ensure they are consistently promoting and supporting implementation of the core content in *Strong Beginnings* (see Box 6). Educators should be engaged early in planning to ensure that implementation approaches are effective and do not have unintended consequences for the workforce or students.

Students' sense of safety (cultural, psychological and physical) and sense of belonging are both prerequisites for learning and critical to learning outcomes.¹⁴⁴ Previous analysis of the relationships between engagement, classroom practices and NAPLAN reading performance found that a Year 7 student who is attentive in class could be six months ahead in their learning by Year 9, compared to a student who is disruptive or breaks school rules.¹⁴⁵ Evidence also shows that classroom disruption can negatively impact the learning outcomes of other students,¹⁴⁶ that classroom management (minimising disruptive behaviour) maximises students' on-task learning time,¹⁴⁷ and that reduced classroom disruption may benefit students' sense of belonging at school.¹⁴⁸ In addition, over 34 per cent of parents and guardians in the Review's survey identified classroom disruption as a barrier to student learning.¹⁴⁹ It was also the second most common area (over 40 per cent) identified by students when asked what they wanted schools to invest in to lift student outcomes.¹⁵⁰ This is further discussed in Chapters 2 to 4.

A number of jurisdictions have implemented programs like PBL, an evidence-based approach to creating a safe and positive learning environment. As with evidence-based teaching practices, the effectiveness of these models is highly dependent on the fidelity of implementation at a school and classroom level. How classroom disruption can be addressed in the next Agreement is discussed in subsequent chapters.

Box 6: The core content learning areas in *Strong Beginnings*

The Teacher Education Expert Panel defined four types of core content in *Strong Beginnings*:

<p>1. The brain and learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Novice versus expert learners • How the brain learns and retains information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Short- and long-term memory – Cognitive load • How the brain masters knowledge • Neuromyths 	<p>2. Effective pedagogical practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and sequencing • Explicit modelling and scaffolding • Assessment and feedback • Literacy, including early reading/ phonics, and explicit reading and writing comprehension • Numeracy, including the six strands of mathematics, and explicit instruction • Multi-tiered systems of support
<p>3. Classroom management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rules and routines • Proactive practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – High expectations – Goal setting – High-quality and explicit teaching – Predictable environment • Managing behaviour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Pre-planning and using calm, consistent, proportional responses – Modelling desired behaviour – Responding to persistent misbehaviour • Whole-school behaviour frameworks 	<p>4. Responsive teaching:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Nations peoples, their cultures and perspectives • Cultural responsiveness, including EAL/D • Family engagement for learning • Diverse learning needs, including students with disability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Legislation and obligations for students with disability

Source: Adapted from Scott M, Loudon B, Simons M, Donovan J, Peach A, and West R (2023) *Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel*, Department of Education, Australian Government, accessed 27 October 2023.

Note: EAL/D = English as an additional language or dialect.

Explicit instruction is an important pedagogical tool that all teachers should be equipped to use

Educators have extensive expertise and a broad suite of tools and should be trusted to use agency in determining the most effective teaching approaches to lift the outcomes of the students in their classroom. The submission from the Teachers and Teaching Research Centre (University of Newcastle) noted that a range of teaching approaches are valid, impactful and can be complementary, including explicit instruction and inquiry-based learning.

The use of explicit teaching is supported by extensive empirical research and should therefore occupy an important place within a teacher's repertoire.¹⁵¹ However the Panel is not recommending that explicit instruction be the only pedagogical approach used in all Australian classrooms. The Panel is recommending that there should be a reform focus by governments, school systems and approved authorities to include embedding explicit instruction as part of a whole-school approach to effective teaching in their schools.

Explicit instruction is part of the core content recommended in *Strong Beginnings*, and so should be incorporated into the guidance on effective teaching practice at the jurisdictional level (see Box 6). It involves fully explaining and effectively demonstrating what novice learners need to learn – for example, breaking down the content, providing comprehensive explanations and providing step-by-step guidance until students are ready to learn an area independently.¹⁵² Explicit instruction goes beyond teachers imparting content; it includes teachers supporting rich whole-class student discussions, and students working together to share and break down ideas with other students under guidance.¹⁵³

Explicit instruction closely aligns with cognitive load theory, which looks at the best ways to support students to transfer new information from short-term working memory to long-term memory.¹⁵⁴ In effect, this means breaking down what students need to learn into smaller parts and in short sessions to prevent excessive demands on working memory ('cognitive overload'). Effectively managing cognitive load helps students retain information and build on that knowledge over time.

There was strong support from many stakeholders for the use of explicit instruction to teach novel skills. Learning Difficulties Australia's submission called for explicit instruction to be a standard approach to all new learning, and AERO's submission supported the use of explicit instruction as part of an MTSS model.

Many governments, school systems and approved authorities have already made commitments in this area. The Tasmanian Government is implementing explicit instruction in all government schools by 2026 as part of its push to improve literacy.¹⁵⁵ The NSW Government has also committed to adopting effective teaching practice including explicit teaching in the NSW Plan for Public Education.¹⁵⁶

Case Study 4: Educators use explicit teaching to boost reading, writing and numeracy results

In an effort to improve student engagement and literacy and numeracy results, an inner regional government primary school shifted in 2018 to a whole-school teaching approach based on the science of how students learn. Explicit and structured teaching of fundamental reading, writing and numeracy skills is practised consistently throughout the school to provide students with a solid foundation for broader learning. Explicit teaching is practised as part of a comprehensive learning curriculum, which includes excursions, engaging with rich texts, and immersive experiences to build background knowledge and vocabulary as part of the literacy program.

Since the change in approach, students have achieved improved literacy and numeracy results and are performing well against national standards. The school principal and staff noted the positive effects of this achievement on students' engagement and sense of wellbeing.

An outer regional government primary school demonstrated a clear commitment to improving student outcomes through the use of small-group explicit teaching of reading, writing and maths. The school has implemented a whole-school program with all students participating in age- and level-appropriate learning experiences. Students are grouped according to competencies and regular testing occurs to ensure materials are pitched at appropriate levels and students are highly visible in small groups. This approach has resulted in significant improvements in the school's NAPLAN performance.

Educators should also be supported to develop the pedagogical skills to support students to engage in play-based learning, open-ended problems or inquiry projects as appropriate for particular stages of learning or different contexts. The submission from the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) provided interesting examples of inquiry-based learning and its application to teaching science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects in a variety of contexts, including in a First Nations context.

Any evidence-based teaching practice needs to be responsive to context (place-based) and the specific students (personalised) in that context.

School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University

Another practice highlighted by stakeholders is two-way learning. Montessori Australia's submission and the many visits to schools with high numbers of First Nations students highlighted the efficacy of two-way learning approaches, which value the knowledge and languages that First Nations students and staff bring to the classroom. Two-way learning can be applied to all curriculum areas, with examples seen by the Panel in science, history and geography, the arts and literature, and is best executed when First Nations staff and community are at the centre of the lesson design process from the outset.

A professional development framework is needed to quality assure and support high-impact learning

Like all professions, teachers are at their strongest when they are up-to-date with the latest research and quality practices. Sixty-eight per cent of teachers report having regular opportunities for professional development, but only around 35 per cent of teachers say that most professional development opportunities help make them a better teacher.¹⁵⁷

Systems, approved authorities and schools should provide better access to, and invest in, the professional learning of educators and school leaders through a structured professional learning framework which is evidence based and supports whole-school teaching approaches. These frameworks should be developed in consultation with teachers and school leaders to ensure consistent and quality professional development opportunities which are tailored to the educator's experience, interests and individual school context. Some teacher registration authorities have a process for accrediting professional development, including to determine if it counts toward compulsory professional development hours for teacher registration, but there are opportunities to adopt a stronger universal approach.

There is a clear need for further Professional Development in this space to support teachers and the broader school network to elevate a basic level of understanding of MTSS and to build their capacity to work in and across multi-disciplinary teams.

Flinders University

This could be achieved through the development of an accreditation framework for professional development. This framework should be accompanied by increased investment in quality-assured micro-credentials to support consistency and access to high-quality learning. The approach in the UK with National Professional Qualifications (NPQ) provides an example of how this model could work. The UK's NPQ are a suite of professional learning courses designed to develop the knowledge, skills and capabilities of teachers and school leaders in specific areas of expertise and align with the experience of individual teachers and school leaders. Accredited training providers deliver NPQ, and the UK Government schools inspector – the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) – regulates the providers to ensure the quality of training.¹⁵⁸

Quality assurance of literacy, mathematics and behaviour professional development should be prioritised to support the implementation of evidence-based practices recommended in this chapter. It is not necessary for all professional development to be through micro-credentials; it is only essential that all professional development opportunities are of a high quality.

There should be scope for informal and formal learning opportunities, leveraging the expertise of teachers, who are highly skilled in a particular area, within their school and across their geographic area. For example, opportunities for teachers to collaborate within their school and with teachers in neighbouring schools can support sharing of best practice and peer learning. However, many submissions, including the submission from the Teachers and Teaching Research Centre, highlighted that teachers do not always have the required time to collaborate, plan, and participate in evidence-based, pedagogy-focused professional development. Further investment in the workforce (outlined in Chapter 4) would provide teachers with more time to engage in formal professional development and collaboration with their peers, both within school and broadly across the system network.

The professional development of casual teachers should also be a focus. Students have, on average, one full year with a casual teacher across their schooling, so there is considerable benefit in providing casual teachers with support to undertake professional development in schools.¹⁵⁹ Typically, casual teachers are responsible for maintaining their own registration and professional development, which can be costly depending on the number of days they work. They may also miss out on opportunities to engage regularly in other collaborative activities including mentoring.

Similarly, teaching assistants, Aboriginal Education Workers, and other support staff should have access to high-quality professional development, as they play an increasingly significant part in the educator workforce. The important role of these educators was noted in submissions and during school visits, including in the provision of tiered and targeted support. Further discussion of this workforce is in following chapters.

High-quality curriculum materials would support effective teaching

Research shows that when teachers use high-quality curriculum materials – that is, coherent, evidence-based curriculum materials aligned with curriculum standards – in their classrooms, they can boost student achievement.¹⁶⁰

Teachers do a tremendous amount of work planning their lessons to cover the curriculum and engage all students in their classrooms. To do this, they are already accessing curriculum resources from a variety of sources, including social media websites that host materials of highly variable quality. There are also several commercial and not-for-profit providers and education institutions which produce a range of curriculum resources to support teachers. However, the quality of these materials and resources is variable, and school leaders and educators who are already time-poor may find it difficult to determine which are best to use or which require explicit training and support to enliven them.¹⁶¹ Without any quality assurance processes in place to regulate them, schools and teachers are required to spend a significant amount of time determining whether the available resources are appropriate for use, and may not always have the evidence to determine which ones are suitable.

Additionally, teachers have identified gaps in the curriculum materials currently available, including for:

- primary school history, social sciences and sciences
- supporting differentiated teaching of students with disability
- building the First Nations cultural capability of educators and students, to effectively and confidently cover First Nations curriculum content
- enabling teaching in remote and online settings
- science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

The idea of providing high-quality, comprehensive and well-sequenced curriculum resources to fill these gaps and support teachers to provide highly effective instruction and lessen teacher workloads received mixed responses from stakeholders across the education sector.

Many teachers tell us they struggle with this choice; that they can access thousands of curriculum resources online but they want guidance on which ones are high-quality, the precise content to teach and how to sequence content across subjects and year levels.

Learning First

Some stakeholders expressed concern about resources which disempower teachers. For example, the Australian Education Union submission expressed the view that while evidence-based practices are developed with best intentions, the reality of their implementation can be de-professionalising.¹⁶²

There were varying opinions on the impact on workloads, too. The Grattan Institute submission noted survey evidence that shows teachers spend three hours less each week sourcing and creating materials when they have access to high-quality shared resources for all of their subjects.¹⁶³ Other submissions, such as from the Teachers and Teaching Research Centre, considered that while there is merit to providing teachers with such resources, they are not a panacea for getting back time.

Several submissions have supported the notion that improving access to high-quality curriculum materials can better support the uptake and implementation of effective teaching approaches and improve student outcomes, with some submissions recognising the South Australian Government's Literacy Guarantee Unit as an effective model in providing high-quality curriculum materials and professional development for schools.¹⁶⁴ The Literacy Guarantee Unit offers a comprehensive program, including a team of literacy coaches who provide intensive support to teachers and an extensive suite of professional learning covering the key components of reading. The OECD has recently reported its view that the provision of high-quality evidence-based curriculum resources could reduce teacher workload and improve student outcomes.¹⁶⁵

The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) was tasked¹⁶⁶ to bring forward a proposal to Education Ministers for the development and delivery of curriculum resources in response to Action 19 of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan. This work should be consistent with Recommendation 1C to ensure there is no ambiguity in implementation.

Given that teachers are already accessing a plethora of curriculum materials from a wide range of sources, the Panel considers that there should be an independent quality assurance mechanism in place to review comprehensive and sequenced curriculum materials, including digital and print textbooks and instructional programs. This would ensure that school leaders and educators are confident that the materials they select are effective, and they can easily identify materials suitable to their students. It would also reduce the time that teachers spend finding suitable resources or developing materials themselves.

The United States provides an example of how to achieve independent quality assurance of curriculum materials. EdReports is an independent not-for-profit organisation that engages expert educators such as classroom teachers and principals to conduct evaluations of comprehensive instructional materials.¹⁶⁷ Evaluations are available to students and teachers without charge due to the financial support from multiple charity and philanthropic organisations and from government. Then it can be up to schools to decide how and when to use these materials, and whether they would offer workload reduction, consistency or other benefits to themselves and their students.

There is also scope for school systems and approved authorities to develop their own comprehensive, high-quality materials to address identified gaps or support implementation of key priorities. These materials should also be quality assured.

RECOMMENDATION 1C

The Panel recommends that governments, school systems and approved authorities ensure all educators and school leaders have access to the highest quality evidence-based professional development and curriculum resources by:

- i. updating guidance on effective teaching practice to ensure it is aligned to *Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel*
- ii. investing in highly effective and evidence-based professional development, including micro-credentials, that aligns with the core content in *Strong Beginnings*
- iii. establishing an agreed national framework for professional development accreditation by the end of 2025 with strengthened criteria to ensure professional development is high quality and evidence based, and commit professional development accreditation authorities to applying these criteria, including for micro-credentials
- iv. investing in and promoting evidence-based and quality assured curriculum resources that are easily available and will help to reduce workload, which schools can adopt if they choose
- v. establishing an independent process to quality assure comprehensive and sequenced curriculum materials against rigorous criteria, including materials created by education departments and institutions, and the commercial and not-for-profit education sectors, by the end of 2026.

1.2.5 Digital technologies and artificial intelligence can assist educators to support personalised student learning and improve outcomes

Many submissions expressed views on the use of digital resources in school classrooms, and several of these submissions expressed support for the use of digital technologies and digital innovation, including generative artificial intelligence (AI), in schools as a tool to support both educators and students.

Generative AI is a type of computer-based model that can generate new content, such as text, images, audio and video. It utilises machine learning, a process in which it is trained to recognise complex patterns in large data sets, producing outputs that can closely resemble human-generated content, without further explicit programming.¹⁶⁸

Generative AI and the application of this innovative technology in education is a rapidly developing space. The South Australian and Queensland Governments have announced they have developed AI tools and are trialling them in schools across the states.¹⁶⁹ Further, in May 2023, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training established an inquiry into the use of generative AI in the Australian education system. The Committee will inquire into the issues and opportunities presented by generative AI, and comprehensively explore current and future impacts on Australia's early childhood education, schools, and higher education sectors.¹⁷⁰

The Panel heard that innovative digital technologies provide many opportunities – for example, that they can help educators identify the learning needs of students and design targeted and personalised support for them.

Education Services Australia (ESA) noted that technology can support teachers in assessing student progress and inform their teaching approach to help students catch up.¹⁷¹ The submission from Leslie Loble stated that 'Evidence shows that student-oriented applications, such as adaptive and personalised learning tools and intelligent tutoring systems, can create learning paths for students that adapt as they progress and encourage them to reflect on their learning.'¹⁷²

In addition to enabling personalised student learning, some stakeholders suggested digital technologies, including generative AI, could benefit students by enhancing creativity, increasing student engagement and enjoyment, and helping students to understand how they are progressing and what they might want to focus on to improve their performance. Generative AI may also increase accessibility and inclusivity, including for students with disability and CALD backgrounds, and address equity divides by providing universal access to resources.¹⁷³

While the use of technologies can increase accessibility of high-quality resources and teaching, Australia's digital divide also drives further inequality across the system. During the COVID-19 pandemic, disadvantaged students were 40 times more likely to lack a computer than their better-off peers.¹⁷⁴ Australia's Digital Inclusion Index shows that students from low-SES backgrounds and in regional areas experience lower levels of digital access, and First Nations peoples experience even lower levels of digital inclusion.¹⁷⁵ As surmised in the submission from Leslie Loble, unless we address the digital divide, there is a risk that disadvantage will be further entrenched in Australia's school system.¹⁷⁶

FINDING 3

Governments, school systems and approved authorities need to support the digital inclusion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds to prevent the use of digital technology in education settings from further entrenching inequality.

The Panel also heard of risks which need to be mitigated to ensure generative AI can be used safely in schools. These can include plagiarism and academic integrity, undermining the validity of take-home projects and essays as an indicator of student learning, misinformation, bias and stereotyping, privacy and data security, emotional and psychological impact, and ethical use and accountability.¹⁷⁷

Several submissions received by the Panel also expressed concerns about the increasing use of digital technologies, with respondents cautioning that technology is not a cure-all, especially for reducing teacher workloads, and should not be used to replace the expertise of teachers. As noted by Leslie Loble, 'Edtech has the potential to support both improved student learning and teacher experience, providing that it is ... in service of, not seeking to replace, the teacher as the learning professional with a holistic understanding of the young people in their class.'¹⁷⁸

AI-enabled education technology can become a powerful tool in creating a more equitable and effective education system that benefits students and teachers. However, the risks associated with the misuse of data, perpetuating biases and undermining the role of educators, cannot be ignored.

Education Services Australia Limited

Notwithstanding these risks, the use of innovative digital technologies, including generative AI, will likely accelerate and, therefore, mitigations are needed to ensure it is used safely and effectively. In its submission to the House of Representatives inquiry, the Tasmanian Department for Education, Children and Young People noted that 'AI within education is here to stay. As educators and policy makers, we must continue to be proactive and forward-thinking in our response and approach. It is in the best interests of Tasmanian students that AI be harnessed as a learning and teaching tool!'¹⁷⁹

Two mitigations to support the safe and effective use of generative AI were heard consistently by the Panel. The first is the need for governments to establish a framework to guide the use of generative AI in schools.¹⁸⁰ On 1 December 2023, Education Ministers released the Australian Framework for Generative AI in Schools (the Framework). The Framework will be implemented from Term 1 2024 and will guide the responsible and ethical use of generative AI tools in ways that benefit students, school and society. The Framework supports all people connected with school education including school leaders, teachers, support staff, service providers, parents, guardians, students and policy makers.¹⁸¹

The second mitigation is to upskill teachers to be able to integrate generative AI in their teaching practice.¹⁸² The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia recommended the development of free online short courses so that teachers have the opportunity to fill skills gaps created by technological disruption.¹⁸³

With the use of generative AI in education increasing, teachers and school leaders will require training and support if this is to be used ethically, effectively and be a support to teaching and learning and not another added burden.

Independent Schools Australia

FINDING 4

As part of the implementation of the reforms in the next Agreement, governments should focus on the potential for digital technologies and digital innovation, including generative AI, to support teaching, learning and assessment approaches to improve the learning experience of students and drive powerful learning and progress in student achievement. Governments should develop appropriate safeguards in advance to mitigate associated risks with the use of these technologies in education settings.

1.2.6 General capabilities are essential skills for students who will need to be lifelong learners in a complex world

The 2019 Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration states that 'education plays a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion.'¹⁸⁴ It recognises that students need to be equipped with a broad array of knowledge, skills and capabilities for a world that is undergoing transformation and be prepared to not only participate in society but also formulate solutions to address future economic, social and environmental challenges.

General capabilities (also sometimes referred to as transversal skills or 21st century skills) are essential skills that are not specifically related to a particular job, task, academic discipline or area of knowledge, such as critical and innovative thinking, interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, global citizenship, and media and information literacy.¹⁸⁵ It is important that students build these skills and can use them effectively in complex and uncertain situations.¹⁸⁶

International organisations are placing increased importance on the acquisition of skills in general capabilities. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation¹⁸⁷ and the OECD (see Box 7) have both developed their own vision of the integrated sets of knowledge, skills and competences students will need to engage in an unpredictable and rapidly changing world.

Box 7: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – Learning Compass 2030

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has developed a vision for the future of education which recognises the need to equip students with an integrated range of knowledge, skills and competences to be active, responsible and engaged members of society.

The OECD Learning Compass 2030 articulates the types of skills students need to thrive in the future. These include cognitive and meta-cognitive skills (e.g. critical thinking, creative thinking, learning to learn and self-regulation); social and emotional skills (e.g. empathy, self-efficacy and collaboration); and practical and physical skills (e.g. using new information and communication technology devices).

Students will also need transformative competencies which enable them to be self-aware and learn how to contribute to an evolving society. Three key transformative competencies are:

- creating new value, which develops students' innovation, enabling them to be creative, adaptable and collaborative
- reconciling tensions and dilemmas, which enables students to manage competing demands and diverse perspectives and think about broader implications and issues
- taking responsibility, which ensures students can consider the impact of their actions in the context of societal values, goals and norms.

The Learning Compass also recognises the importance of building a learning environment which recognises individual student strengths and needs to develop student agency. Students with the broader range of knowledge, skills and competences outlined in the framework will be better prepared to engage in a variety of contexts, deal with complex situations and create positive change in society – outcomes that align strongly with Australia's Mparntwe.

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2018) [The Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030](#), OECD, accessed 27 October 2023; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2019) [OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 – Conceptual learning framework: Learning Compass 2030](#), OECD, accessed 27 October 2023.

In a 2019 survey by the then Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, 75 per cent of employers identified 'employability skills', including skills relating to resilience and flexibility, and managing tasks and staffing logistics outside more conventional and established working arrangements, to be as important as, if not more important than, technical skills.¹⁸⁸ 'Employability skills' do not displace the importance of foundational literacy and numeracy skills, which are recognised as key elements underpinning workforce participation, classroom impact, and social inclusion.¹⁸⁹ Rather, general capabilities complement and build upon literacy and numeracy skills to help students reach their full potential.

The Australian Curriculum has a focus on developing general capabilities, designed to equip students with an array of skills, behaviours and dispositions to live and work successfully. The general capabilities are taught across all learning areas throughout school. They include literacy, numeracy, information and communications technology (ICT), critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, ethical understanding and intercultural understanding. These capabilities are addressed through the content of the discipline-based learning areas, where there is an opportunity to add depth to student learning. Many individual schools and sectors are already making a concerted effort to support the teaching and assessment of general capabilities but the challenge is the absence of a strong research base to inform teachers on how to best teach these skills.¹⁹⁰

Another challenge is how to assess student competency and progress. Additionally, traditional assessment methods are not suitable because these skills operate together, rather than in isolation, which means measuring them in isolation is not valid.¹⁹¹ The Centre for Assessment Reform and Innovation at the Australian Council for Educational Research has completed initial work to develop an assessment framework for measuring and monitoring general capabilities. It found that critical thinking, creative thinking, and collaboration can be assessed through a multiple skills assessment within domain-orientated problem-based tasks.¹⁹² However, there were inefficiencies with the assessment process and more work is required to fully develop a suitable approach. Moreover, it suggested that advancement will only occur if embedding the skills can be aligned across the curriculum, assessment and pedagogy.¹⁹³

Currently, the National Assessment Program includes sample assessments for Science literacy, Civics and Citizenship and ICT literacy. These assessments were established in 2003, 2004 and 2005 respectively, and are conducted on a rolling three-yearly cycle to provide information about students' proficiency against each knowledge area. The proficient standards represent a reasonable expectation of student achievement on the scale and were set at the time each assessment was established. The most recent results for each assessment show that between 53 and 58 per cent of students in Year 6 were at or above the proficient standards.¹⁹⁴ There is a distinct decline in the proportion of Year 10 students attaining the proficient standard for the most recent Science and ICT literacy assessments, with 50 per cent and 46 per cent of students respectively at or above the proficient standard.¹⁹⁵ There was a more pronounced decline in the Civics and Citizenship assessment with only 38 per cent of Year 10 students at or above the proficient standard, indicating potential knowledge gaps about core democratic and social systems, principles and institutions.¹⁹⁶

A limitation with these assessments is that despite testing a broader range of skills, they do not cover all the general capabilities in the curriculum and are only conducted periodically on a representative sample of Year 6 and Year 10 students. Governments could also consider if the proficient standards need updating to reflect a contemporary expectation of student proficiency in these learning domains and if more focus should be directed to monitoring student progress with the aim of improving results in these assessments.

Given the importance of general capabilities to future employment prospects and ensuring students can be lifelong learners, governments should consider how to support teachers in using effective teaching and assessment practices in relation to developing students' general capabilities.

FINDING 5

The Commonwealth should work with jurisdictions to further explore options for developing new, robust and effective methods of assessment of students' general capabilities, given the established importance of critical, creative and collaborative skills to Australia's future prosperity and democratic resilience.

1.2.7 Students need practical measures to support their aspirations and transition to further education, training and employment

There is a well-established link between attainment of a Year 12 certificate, or equivalent qualification, and positive life outcomes for students.¹⁹⁷ Research highlights that students with a Year 12 certificate or equivalent qualification are in a strong position to obtain further qualifications, either through higher education or through vocational education and training (VET), and that individuals with these further qualifications are more likely to be employed and work in high-skill occupations.¹⁹⁸

However, it is important to ensure flexible pathways exist for young people to attain a Year 12 or equivalent qualification, particularly for students experiencing disadvantage, because not all students thrive in traditional school learning environments. As will be discussed further in Chapter 2, the Panel has heard that First Nations students require a culturally appropriate and responsive learning environment that allows students to see themselves as successful learners and promotes better engagement in the classroom.¹⁹⁹

Gaining access to quality secondary education can be challenging. For example, it is estimated that around 13,000 remote First Nations students and families have no or limited access to secondary schooling (discussed further in Chapter 2).²⁰⁰

Stakeholders have highlighted that it is students from priority equity cohort groups who often face the greatest difficulties staying engaged and whose attainment and transition pathways beyond school are more likely to be limited as a result. It is important to note that this is not about individual aspiration or capability. There is clear evidence that students from these cohorts who are able to overcome barriers demonstrate they are just as capable of succeeding in their chosen pathways as other students.²⁰¹ Advocacy groups for students with disability highlight that educational attainment and engagement for these students is affected by a number of challenges, including facing exclusionary school practices as well as limited access to appropriate supports (as discussed further in Chapter 6).²⁰² Similarly, it is evident that students experiencing socio-economic disadvantage face compounding disadvantage and often a lack of information about and stewardship of pathways and options, which can undermine their capacity to plan and follow meaningful post-school pathways.

The contemporary job market demands a highly skilled and adaptable workforce. However, a growing skills gap exists between what schools offer and what employers seek. Career education endeavours to address this gap by aligning educational programs with the job market demands.

Career Industry Council of Australia

Evidence highlights that disengagement from school can start early and become more entrenched over time.²⁰³ It is therefore important that preparation for successful post-school transitions should begin early and continue throughout schooling, rather than only being considered during the senior secondary years. Young people should be supported to make informed decisions about education, training and career pathways so they can make a successful transition from school to further study and work.

Post-school transitions can be supported through better career education and cross-sector partnerships. Individualised career guidance should be provided before senior secondary school and parents should also have access to career advice so they can support decision-making.²⁰⁴ A 2017 survey found that 48 per cent of teenagers say their parents were the primary influence on their career planning.²⁰⁵

Looking to the future: Report of the review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training (the Shergold review) heard that career advice nationally is inadequate. It suggested that teachers have limited career education knowledge, especially on non-university or blended pathways, and that improvements were needed to increase information on the future labour market, apply new models to decision-making, and employ the right people to work face to face with students.²⁰⁶ The Smith Family's submission said that high-quality and appropriately sequenced careers support is a key contributor to encouraging young people to complete Year 12 or equivalent and to their being in work, training or further study post school.²⁰⁷

The NSW and Victorian Governments commissioned reviews aimed at improving their VET systems.²⁰⁸ In 2020, Professor Peter Shergold AC and David Gonski AC were commissioned to lead a review of the NSW vocational education and training sector. In 2019, the Victorian Government commissioned John Firth to conduct a review into vocational learning pathways in senior secondary schooling. In response, they each committed to reforms which support students to make successful secondary school transitions to further education, training and employment, such as improving the quality of vocational education and providing more vocational pathways in high schools.

Several jurisdictions are also undertaking work to improve career education, and this could inform further reforms across jurisdictions. For example, the Victorian Government provides a comprehensive approach to career education. Its policy has a focus on early career exploration and building students' awareness of their strengths, interests, skills and values. This knowledge can inform students' choice about subjects and courses which align with their career aspirations. The Victorian Government is investing in the workforce to build career education capacity within schools. The framework also includes targeted programs for First Nations students, students with disability, and students in out-of-home care or in youth detention, and to engage parents in career planning. The South Australian Government has adopted a similar model to Victoria's. Other jurisdictions may consider how to strengthen their approaches to ensure students are provided with a broader scope of career education activities integrated into their schooling.

James Cook University's submission emphasised a need to provide students in areas with significant non-school-leaver populations who are underprepared for further education with greater access to post-school pathway courses to support students to transition successfully to further education and training. Independent Schools Australia's submission supported the use of targeted transition plans for at-risk students that are codesigned with the student and (where possible) their family to assist them in making informed decisions about achievable future pathways, based on their goals, interests and individual circumstances.

There may be opportunities to better use technology to support students' choices about pathways. ESA's submission identified the importance of high-quality career guidance to ensure students can make an informed choice about their career pathway and suggested digital technologies could be used to address existing gaps in the provision of career resources. ESA also highlighted the value of providing students with pathways to undertake a variety of work experience opportunities, particularly students who face geographic and socio-economic barriers to engaging in a broader range of industries.

The Panel also observed (see Case Study 5), and heard about from several stakeholders, programs underway to better prepare students transitioning beyond school. The Australian Schools Plus submission highlighted the program at Beenleigh State High School, which supports students to develop critical skills for work and build a portfolio of micro-credentials and training from agencies and businesses. More students signed up to full-time school-based apprenticeships and vocational modules while still at school and transitioned into employment.

Case Study 5: Supporting flexible post-school pathways

Realising the importance of focusing on post-school pathways to enhance student engagement and support outcomes, a large regional government secondary school has established alternative pathways for students who have become disengaged from the mainstream curriculum.

The school provides an academy that has a strong focus on employability for Year 10 to Year 12 students who have become disengaged. The academy's focus is to support students to attain VET qualifications, with students engaging in work experience, gaining apprenticeships or traineeships and undertaking school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. The school supports the students to research areas of interest to them and seek out work experience in those areas. The academy has high rates of success with students developing the skills they need to succeed after school, whether that be through further education or through employment.

For students who want to keep a pathway to further education open, the school also offers the Big Picture Education model, which encourages the students to take responsibility for their learning by supporting them to explore their own topics of interest. Around 10 per cent of the students opt into the model. They can receive a Big Picture Learning Credential, an internationally recognised accreditation that can be used as an alternative pathway to university, further education and employment, rather than obtaining a Year 12 certificate.

A metropolitan government secondary school similarly provides meaningful engagement and employment pathway programs to its students, with positive results. The school caters to a culturally diverse student population, with over 95 per cent of students having a language background other than English. The school also has a high proportion of students from a low socio-economic status background.

Engagement and employment pathways are a strong focus for the school, and a key part of this is its barbering program. With support from community donations, the school built an industry-standard barbershop on site and provides barbering classes to students from a qualified barber. The purpose of these classes is to provide visibility of post-school employment options, as well as a pathway to a career after school.

The school's gaming classroom is also industry standard and is used to support students to develop digital and information technology skills such as coding, which are relevant for a variety of careers. Staff build practical links to literacy and numeracy in these classes and have seen a significant improvement in student academic results. Following the implementation of these programs, the school has seen a dramatic increase in attendance rates, as well as a decrease in the need for disciplinary interventions for behaviour.

Both of these schools demonstrate the critical value that an emphasis on post-school pathways can offer to support student engagement and outcomes, particularly for students from priority equity cohorts.

Students who are able to make informed decisions about education, training and career pathways are more likely to make a successful transition from school to further study and work. Evidence and experiences presented through stakeholder submissions have indicated the need for a variety of learning opportunities to support students to effectively transition from school. This includes elevating employability skills within the curriculum, upskilling teachers, and embedding appropriate curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and reporting.

Governments should expand on existing work to support all students to transition to further training, education or employment through investments in the next Agreement. Attainment and post-school outcomes should be tracked, including through targets (see Chapter 7).

RECOMMENDATION 1D

The Panel recommends that governments, school systems and approved authorities outline specific actions and initiatives they will take, including relevant timeframes, to prepare all students to transition to further training, education, or employment when they finish school. These should be included in bilateral agreements for increased accountability. Actions, which should be evaluated for efficacy, may include enhanced career education for students, targeted programs for students from priority equity cohorts, and strengthened partnerships with local employers and with vocational education and training and higher education providers.

Chapter 2: Achieving equity in schooling

Key points:

- Some students, including those from priority equity cohorts, face barriers to participation and achievement.
- A shared definition of equity in education would allow jurisdictions to focus policies and measure outcomes of students from priority equity cohorts.
- All jurisdictions should fully fund schools within a comparable timeframe to ensure students and educators in all schools have access to 100 per cent of Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) funding.
- The Panel considers that significant further work is required to ensure students learn in a socio-educationally diverse environment. Policy options to increase socio-educational diversity and to address segregation within and between schools should be implemented as a priority.
- Systems should ensure schools with concentrations of disadvantage have highly effective teachers and leaders who can ensure students receive a high-quality education.
- Systems should adopt full-service school models which support the needs of students at school so they can reach their learning potential, with the school acting as a hub for community and health services.
- To enable First Nations students to reach their potential, there should be a First Nations led approach to developing a First Nations Education Policy, and systems should strengthen cultural capability in all schools.
- Schools need to better support students with disability to achieve through inclusive education, by adapting the environment and teaching practices to support students with disability in partnership with families and communities.
- Students living in out-of-home care should be recognised as a priority equity cohort, reflecting the significant barriers they face to attending and engaging in school, and the resulting gaps in achievement for students living in out-of-home care.

2.1 Context

All students deserve to have access to a high-quality education and be able to thrive in school. High-quality education opens pathways to further education, training and employment post-school. This chapter focuses on the experience of students from priority equity cohorts, particularly students from socio-educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, First Nations students, students with disability, and students living in out-of-home care.

Building a more equitable education system for all students has long been a goal of governments, school systems and approved authorities, and an objective of education agreements. However, the Productivity Commission's 2022 review of the National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) found that governments have not been successful at ensuring equity in outcomes across cohorts, as is reflected in metrics such as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and Year 12 completion.²⁰⁹ Many submissions highlighted the urgency of addressing the needs of students from priority equity cohorts, including initiatives targeted at compounding and entrenched disadvantage.

A precondition of ensuring equity in the Australian school system is full funding for all schools. Full funding will ensure schools can offer well-resourced and well-staffed learning environments, as envisaged in the original Gonski report.²¹⁰ Funding schools in accordance with the proportional amounts estimated under the original SRS would inject more funds into government schools, particularly the government schools which have higher proportions of students from priority equity cohorts, and address inequities across jurisdictions.

The quasi market-based nature of the Australian education system entrenches disadvantage. Compared to similar Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, Australian schools have some of the highest levels of social segregation, and this trend has worsened over time.²¹¹ This has a direct impact on outcomes: students from educationally and socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be behind in learning when enrolled in schools with high concentrations of disadvantaged students than when enrolled in schools with a more diverse student profile.²¹²

Concentrating students experiencing disadvantage in particular schools also places greater pressure on the educators in these schools. In effect, the current system entrenches educational disadvantage and makes it less likely that other reforms will realise Australia's longstanding ambition of equity and excellence. Governments need to commit to reviewing historic and current policy and funding settings (both within and outside the education sector) and to collaborating with the non-government sector on the changes needed to improve diversity in school.

In addition to funding and improving the diversity in schools, targeted approaches are also needed to level the playing field. The experience and outcomes of students are significantly impacted by life outside school, and students often have no control over events which shape the pathways they take through education. Not all supports needed by students in equity cohorts sit within the education system. Wider adoption of full-service school models can help connect students to the services and supports they need to come to school ready and able to learn.

To ensure First Nations students learn in a culturally responsive and safe learning environment, governments need to make space for genuine partnership and First Nations led approaches to education policy, including in embedded Closing the Gap (CTG) priorities and reforms. To support students with disability and students in out-of-home care, governments need to implement inclusive education initiatives, including increasing educators' capability to assess students and provide educational adjustments.

2.2 Key consultation themes and analysis

2.2.1 Students from priority equity cohorts can require additional support

Opportunities and outcomes in education are still too often determined by the background and characteristics of students and which school they attend. Some, though not all, students from priority equity cohorts need more support to achieve minimum or basic skills, and this is reflected in the needs-based loadings in the school funding system.²¹³

Students from priority equity cohorts experience disadvantage when systems and schools fail to provide the opportunities required to allow all students to flourish. Within and across priority equity cohorts, there are significant differences in student outcomes and the educational needs of students. For many students, their background, community, culture and characteristics are a source of pride and an integral part of their identity. They can provide strength and a drive to succeed.

However, for reasons beyond the control of children (and often their families), students from priority equity cohorts may be coming to school from a complex and sometimes traumatic environment. Some research suggests the impact of these out-of-school factors could account for up to 60 per cent of the variability in student test scores.²¹⁴

Berry Street's submission raised the importance of safety and wellbeing at home for how students present in the classroom. This includes things such as access to breakfast and adequate nutrition, restorative sleep, and a stress-free morning. The submission from the Victorian Council of Social Service also raised the direct role that child poverty, hunger, poor nutrition, housing stress, family violence, racism and inequality, and structural inequalities in our society have on a student's participation and attainment in learning.

These factors make it more likely that students from priority equity cohorts will start school behind. Students from the lowest socio-economic status (SES) quintile, for example, are more than four times as likely to be developmentally vulnerable in language and cognitive skills than students from the most advantaged quintile in the Australian Early Development Census.²¹⁵ These students are more than three times as likely to be developmentally vulnerable in communication skills and general knowledge than students from the most advantaged quintile.²¹⁶

Even those students from low-SES backgrounds who start school on track are more likely to fall behind after they start school. Looking at student progress over time in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, students from low-SES backgrounds were more likely to drift from early success in literacy and numeracy to be struggling in the middle years of primary school. In the lowest SES quartile, 20.5 per cent of students drifted down over time, compared with 6.5 per cent of students in the highest SES quartile.²¹⁷ This reinforces the need for continuing monitoring and a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) model (recommended in Chapter 1) but also points to the fact that schools are not always serving the needs of this cohort of students.

In addition to taking the national steps outlined throughout this Review, governments should consider the targeted support needed that enables students from low-SES backgrounds to catch up, stay on track and reach their potential. Governments should consider investment in reforms to implement supports for students from low-SES backgrounds as a matter of urgency. The need for governments to act is supported by findings from the Review's survey, in which teachers reported more support to manage students with complex and diverse needs as the second highest rated factor needed for lifting student outcomes (62.3 per cent).²¹⁸

FINDING 6

A range of out-of-school factors impact engagement, achievement and attainment for all students, and governments should consider in particular how to best support students from low socio-economic status backgrounds as part of the implementation of relevant reforms in the next Agreement.

Governments, school systems and approved authorities should focus on how schools can improve outcomes for students from priority equity cohorts by looking at the strengths and potential of every student.²¹⁹ One way to do this is for governments to agree to a shared definition of equity in education in the next Agreement. This definition could encompass the outcomes in the current NSRA – that is, ensuring equity in minimum or basic skills such as literacy and numeracy, and ensuing equity in outcomes across students.²²⁰ Accompanying this shared definition of equity should be an equity target that reports on both student attainment and student achievement.

FINDING 7

All parties should agree on a shared definition of equity in education to be used in the next Agreement. For example, that definition could state that:

- i. all students should achieve at least a minimum level of education that enables them to realise their talents and to be active, informed citizens, which in the Australian context means successfully completing Year 12 or equivalent level of education, or a non-school qualification at Certificate III level or above
- ii. students from different social groups achieve a similar level and range of outcomes, which means students in priority equity cohorts should achieve a similar average and similar distribution of outcomes to those of more advantaged students.

2.2.2 Fully funding schools up to the Schooling Resource Standard is critical

Currently, government schools in all jurisdictions except the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) are, on average, yet to be funded to 100 per cent of the SRS. In contrast, non-government schools in all jurisdictions except the Northern Territory (NT) are, on average, funded at or above their full funding level.²²¹

The SRS is an estimate of how much total public funding a school needs to meet its students' educational needs. It is made up of a base amount and up to six needs-based loadings and calculated by the Commonwealth Department of Education for each school every year. In 2023, the Commonwealth funded at least 20 per cent of each government school's SRS and 80 per cent of each non-government school's SRS. The NSRA bilateral agreements set out the minimum funding contributions jurisdictions are required make in order to receive Commonwealth funding.²²²

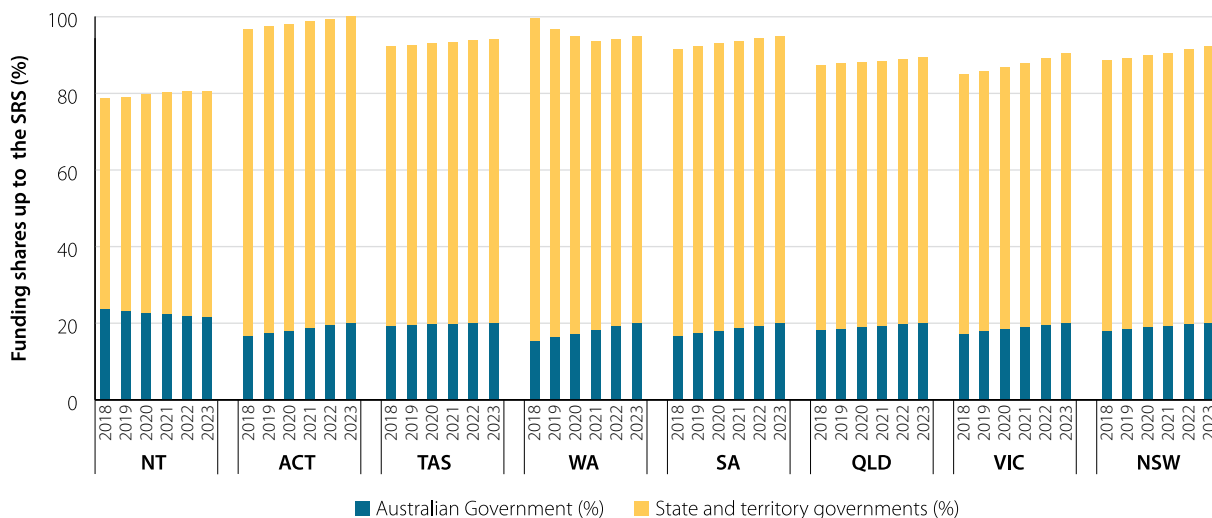
Many submissions identified the negative impacts of the failure to reach 100 per cent of the SRS on schools. This includes submissions from the Australian Education Union, Australian Council of State School Organisations and Save Our Schools. There is clear support for ensuring that all schools are fully funded to 100 per cent of the SRS.

Full funding of public schools is the only way to ensure that the teaching profession is properly supported to deliver high-quality teaching and learning programs that ensure every child has the opportunity to succeed.

Australian Education Union

The fact that inequality in funding persists – and is predicted to persist in nearly every jurisdiction – is an issue that requires urgent action. The issue of funding gaps is particularly acute in the NT, which has a socio-economically diverse population and geographic context. The Australian Government has provided additional transition support to the NT for distribution to individual government schools since 2018, but significant funding gaps persist compared with the SRS.²²³ At present, NT government schools will only reach 80.5 per cent of the SRS in 2023 (see Figure 9) and the NT Government has not made any commitments to increase its funding shares further.

Figure 9: Share of funding for government schools from the Australian and state and territory governments up to the Schooling Resource Standard (2018–2023)



Source: Department of Education (2023) Internal analysis of agreed government funding for government schools 2018–2023, Department of Education, Australian Government.

The NT Government’s submission identified the challenges of providing a quality education across a highly regional and remote environment with a diverse student population. Panel members visited schools across the NT and observed first-hand successful initiatives in many schools but also the challenges that some schools and communities face in providing an equitable and culturally responsive school experience. The consistent issues identified were insufficient funding and a lack of qualified personnel.

Funding challenges are complex. One driver is the NT’s ‘effective enrolment’ formula for allocating school funding which combines school enrolment data and attendance data (an average of the two highest non-consecutive weeks in each term over one year). In 2022, the NT Government commissioned Deloitte Access Economics to review this policy. The review found that effective enrolment does not align with school resourcing needs as it provides insufficient support to schools with high educational needs and low or fluctuating attendance.²²⁴

The Panel notes that the NT Government has accepted all the recommendations of the Deloitte Access Economics review and committed to move away from effective enrolment as part of a broader school funding reform package.²²⁵ The Panel considers that the NT must accelerate action on this commitment, and that the Commonwealth should assist the NT to do so.

Many of the schools visited by the Panel in the NT predominantly serve First Nations students and remote communities. Significant resources often go into supporting attendance and meeting the staff-intensive needs of students at these schools. Workforce challenges become more acute as remoteness and community complexity increase. The importance of attracting highly-skilled staff to schools with high proportions of students from priority equity cohorts is discussed further on in this Chapter and in Chapter 4. The Panel considers that supporting the NT to reach 100 per cent of its SRS as soon as possible is key to ensuring that resources are not a constraint.

However, more funding is not a panacea. How the funds are spent is arguably more important. Changes in the use of existing funding may be required to close the gaps in achievement and attainment for students from equity cohorts. For example, while the ACT is at full funding, some ACT students continue to need additional support to meet proficiency levels. This is not unexpected given that increased funding is necessary but alone not sufficient to improve outcomes, and that there are many out-of-school factors which influence learning.²²⁶

FINDING 8

All jurisdictions need to take action to deliver commitments on the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) and ensure full funding of schools as soon as possible. In particular, the Panel notes the special circumstances of the Northern Territory, which may require additional support to reach 100 per cent of its SRS.

Many stakeholders also raised the issue of gaps in resourcing between government and non-government schools, and the perception that resourcing is aligned to the quality of education. This incentivises families with the means to do so to choose non-government schools. As will be explored in the next sections, this has led to a socio-economic divide across Australia's schools which has many negative impacts on student outcomes, but it is also relevant to a discussion of funding. The call to action around reaching full funding for government schools – across all jurisdictions – is all the more urgent because of the full funding arrangements that already exist in the non-government sector.

2.2.3 Increasing the socio-educational diversity across Australian schools would improve outcomes for those most at risk of falling behind

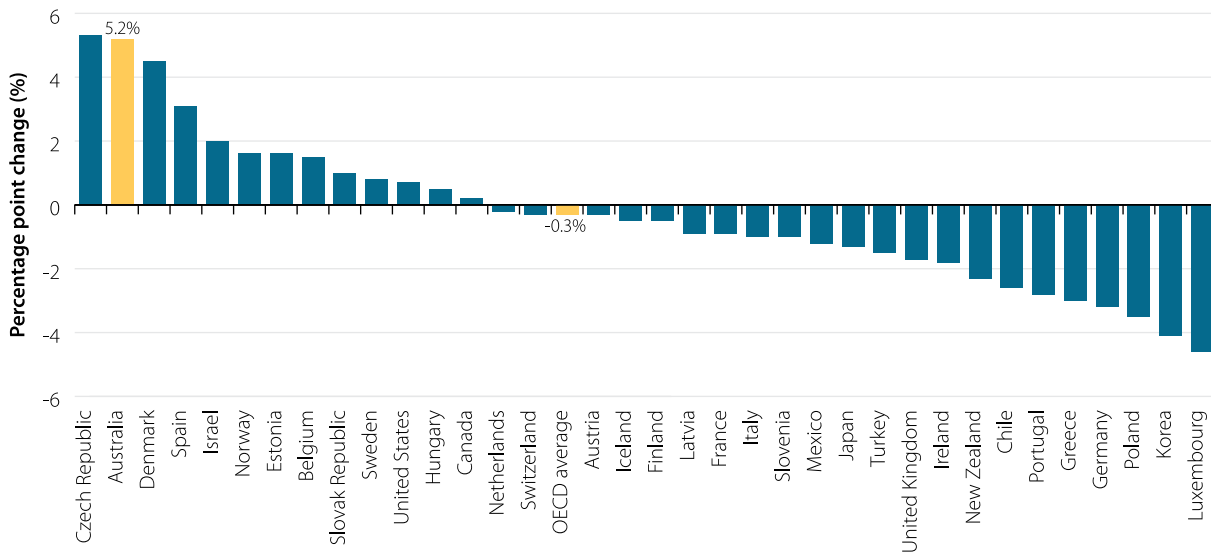
Concentrations of socio-educational disadvantage in government schools is increasing

Beyond being places of academic learning, schools are universal community-based touchpoints which bring together people from many different backgrounds. The system's ability to realise the goals of *Mparntwe*, including for students to have the capacity to relate to others, prepare for being community and workforce members, and understand their role as global citizens, is highly dependent on schools being sites of diversity.

When diversity is absent, and particularly when students from highly-advantaged or highly-disadvantaged backgrounds are concentrated into schools, students have limited opportunities to learn with and from people who are different to them. Schools with concentrations such as this are said to be 'residualised'. This can be defined as schools where 50 per cent or more of students are in the lowest or highest Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) quartile. Residualisation entrenches social divides and fragmentation and widens gaps in outcomes and opportunities between different groups of students.²²⁷

In Australia, 51 per cent of socio-educationally disadvantaged students attend schools with students from similar backgrounds.²²⁸ This is one of the highest concentrations in the OECD.²²⁹ Concentrations of disadvantage have also been worsening over time and at a higher rate in Australia than in most other OECD countries (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Change in the concentration of disadvantaged students in disadvantaged schools across the OECD from 2006 to 2015

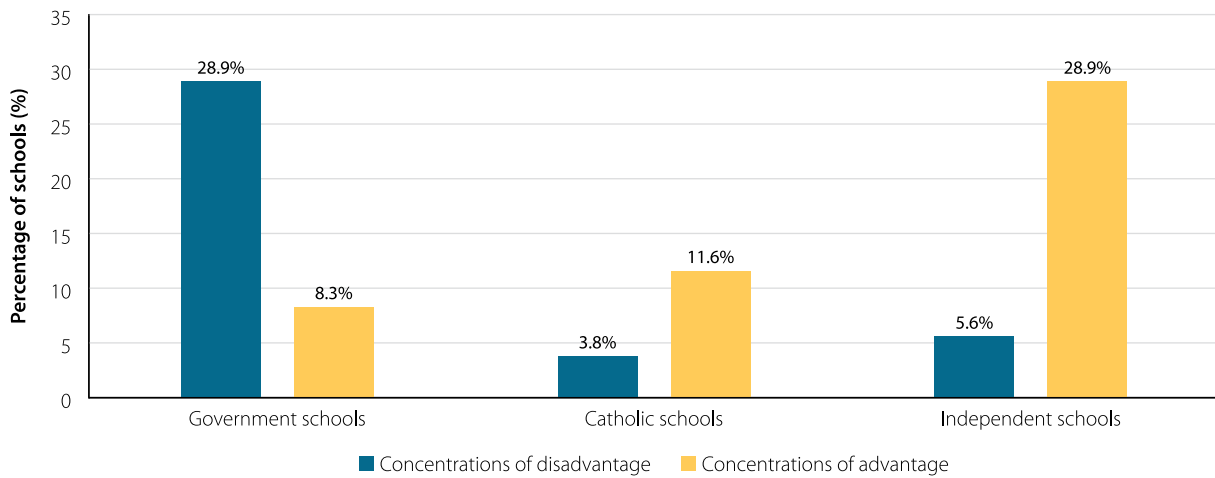


Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2018) [Equity in Education: Breaking Down Barriers to Social Mobility](#), OECD, accessed 27 October 2023. Department of Education internal analysis using data from PISA. The OECD defines disadvantaged students as students in the bottom quarter of the national distribution of the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). Disadvantaged schools are schools in the bottom quarter of the national distribution of the school-level ESCS index, which is calculated as the average ESCS index among students in a school.

At the national level, data suggests that residualisation has increased over time. Between 2015 to 2017 and 2018 to 2022, the Duncan Segregation Index scores of concentrations of disadvantaged students increased in all jurisdictions except the ACT and the NT.²³⁰ During this period, the NT and New South Wales (NSW) had higher scores than the national average.

Residualisation occurs across all sectors of Australia’s education system. Schools with high concentrations of students who are socio-educationally disadvantaged are mostly in the government school sector. In contrast, schools with high concentrations socio-educationally advantaged students are mostly non-government (see Figure 11).²³¹ Around 14 per cent of all students (around 545,000 students) attend a school with high proportions of socio-educationally disadvantaged students; nearly all of these students attend government schools. Between 2018 and 2022, over 38 per cent of schools with high concentrations of disadvantage experienced an increase in its concentration of disadvantage, meaning segregation in these schools had become more severe over time.²³²

Figure 11: Proportion of schools with concentrations of advantage and disadvantage by sector (2018–2022)



Source: Australian Government Department of Education internal analysis using ACARA schools data (2015–2022). Percentages represent the proportion of schools in each sector with concentrated disadvantage or advantage, based on student socio-economic advantage (SEA) quartile proportions within schools and change in these proportions over time. Due to missing data on SEA, approximately 10 per cent of schools could not be categorised as reflecting the absence or presence of concentrated disadvantage or advantage.

Patterns of concentration vary across geographical areas and jurisdictions. Schools with high concentrations of advantage are over-represented in major cities, with over 96 per cent of these schools located in a major capital city.²³³ Schools with increasing concentrations of advantage are also largely located in major cities, indicating that this trend is continuing. Across jurisdictions, over 90 per cent of all students in schools with high and increasing concentrations of advantage were in either NSW or Victoria,²³⁴ whereas these jurisdictions account for only 56 per cent of all students.²³⁵

Residualisation in our education system is driven by a variety of factors. Some lie beyond the education system – for example, social housing concentrations or transport routes and options creating barriers to physical mobility. However, school enrolment policies are also a factor. Among government schools, enrolment boundaries can act as barriers that entrench existing social disadvantage arising from housing and social exclusion issues. Sectoral concentration is driven by a high proportion of students from advantaged backgrounds in fee-paying non-government schools, where enrolment depends on familial means to pay or on securing a scholarship based on familial ties to the school or excellence in academia, music or sport, which students experiencing disadvantage may encounter barriers to attaining. Residualisation also contributes to entrenching disadvantage. That is, as schools with higher levels of advantage appear to perform well, they become more desirable, and people with the means to enter will have more incentives to do so.

Residualisation in Australian schools leads to poorer student outcomes

Concentrations of disadvantage not only undermine the capacity of schools to build diverse communities of future citizens but also lead to poorer learning outcomes for students experiencing disadvantage.

Students from priority equity cohorts demonstrate, on average, less learning growth if they attend a school with a high concentration of disadvantage.²³⁶ In contrast, OECD analysis suggests that students experiencing disadvantage who attend advantaged schools score 86 points higher in PISA 2015 science testing, the equivalent of three years of school, than their peers experiencing disadvantage who attend disadvantaged schools.²³⁷ In general, the SES profile of the school may be a stronger predictor of academic achievement than the student's individual family socio-economic status.²³⁸ This is true in the Australian setting too, with research suggesting that 78 per cent of low-SES students in high-SES schools performed at or above NAPLAN's National Minimum Standards in 2017; that proportion fell to 38 per cent for low-SES students in low-SES schools.²³⁹

These gaps in student achievement translate into different post-school outcomes. Students in schools with concentrated disadvantage are significantly less likely to pursue higher education. About 19 per cent of students in schools with high concentrations of disadvantage continue on to higher education after leaving school, compared to 78 per cent of students in schools with high concentrations of advantage and 39 per cent of students across all schools, on average.²⁴⁰ Increasing levels of both Year 12 or equivalent attainment and pathways into tertiary education for students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds is important given that nine out of 10 future jobs are projected to require post-school qualifications.²⁴¹

The Productivity Commission identifies peer effects and less experienced teachers in schools with high concentrations of disadvantage as drivers of poorer student outcomes.²⁴² Concentrations of disadvantage can also lower the expectations of achievement and participation among some students, parents and teachers, which compounds the barriers faced by students. Learning environments are also impacted. The Panel spoke with teachers who reported greater difficulties with classroom disruption in schools with concentrations of disadvantage, increasing the cognitive load for students, increasing teacher workloads and thereby reducing teaching time for students. Across most OECD countries, high concentrations of disadvantage are also linked to increasing complexity of student needs and challenging behaviours.²⁴³ This further impacts educator workloads, with teachers and school leaders stepping in to coordinate supports for students.²⁴⁴

Changes to existing policy settings could improve socio-educational diversity

A range of policy levers exist which could be used to increase the socio-educational diversity of schools. Australia can learn from international experience, as there are a number of countries which have been able to effect change. Research commissioned by this Review has provided analysis of how these policy levers could transfer to the Australian setting (see Box 8). Governments, school systems and approved authorities should commit to taking national steps to increase socio-educational diversity in schools, and this will require careful consideration of which policies are most effective overseas and which might be most effectively transferred to the Australian context.

Box 8: International examples of policy levers to increase socio-economic diversity across schools

Governments and school systems around the world use different policy interventions to address the risk or appearance of segregation between schools along racial or socio-economic lines. These interventions fall into 10 broad categories, with no option able to solve the issue of segregation on its own. The interventions outlined below have successfully resulted in desegregation in a range of countries. They have achieved this by diversifying enrolments in schools with concentrations of disadvantage, and by making disadvantaged schools more attractive to advantaged students.

Interventions to diversify enrolments at schools with concentrations of disadvantage

No.	Intervention type	Description and examples where applied
1.	Legislated quotas	Stipulate the minimum number or percentage of students from vulnerable cohorts that high-demand schools must accept or prioritise in cases of excess capacity. Quotas are administered independently, with penalties for noncompliance (e.g. as used in Belgium and Chile).
2.	Removal of fees	Requires governments to fully fund schools on the condition that they cannot charge fees. Typically, this involves bringing schools into the public system while allowing them to maintain special characteristics (e.g. being faith based). For instance, Canadian provinces fully fund religious non-government schools which no longer charge fees. In Chile, private school fees were removed to reduce social segregation and lift achievement.
3.	Reducing academic selectivity and tracking¹	Can be achieved by making public funding contingent on removing academic filters in selecting students (e.g. as in Chile) and by delaying tracking (also known as streaming) of students into different secondary school streams (e.g. Poland's extension of comprehensive schooling).
4.	Fee capping	Regulations that set the upper limit for school fees, requiring schools to seek approval of fees, or that attach conditions to the imposition of fees. For example, New Zealand allows private schools integrated into the public system to charge modest 'dues' for use on approved capital projects. Private schools in Hong Kong can receive public funding on a sliding scale but must set aside 10 per cent of fee income for scholarships. Quebec caps private school fees at around \$A5,000.
5.	Zone flexing (including with enrolment lotteries)	Redefining school zones or building exceptions to allow out-of-catchment enrolments in schools. Flexing can be done in conjunction with lotteries which allocate places at in-demand schools to out-of-zone students (e.g. as in the US and Europe). Lotteries can also be used to fill quotas.
6.	Controlled choice (including preference matching)	Families express ranked preferences of schools they want to enrol in, including out-of-catchment schools, and an algorithm determines the best match. Tied results are resolved through random allocation. Schools may express priority for students from equity cohorts to increase diversity or to meet quotas (e.g. as in the US and France).

¹ Tracking, also known as streaming, is the process of placing students into different types of secondary or senior secondary schools based on assessments of their academic aptitude.

Interventions to make disadvantaged schools more attractive to a diverse range of students

No.	Intervention type	Description and examples where applied
7.	Financial incentives to schools	Additional public funding provided to schools based on the number or proportion of disadvantaged students enrolled – for example, the UK's Pupil Premium. Disadvantage is determined in different ways (e.g. eligibility for free lunch as in the US and UK, or a combination of SES and academic indicators as in Hong Kong).
8.	Incentives to educators	Quality educators are incentivised to move to and remain in schools with higher concentrations of disadvantage. These incentives can be direct (such as a bonus or salary increase) or indirect (such as prioritisation for promotion). For example, in Canada educators receive 'Welcome to Community' bonuses for moving to rural British Columbia, and in England educators in challenging schools receive professional development and leadership training through the Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund.
9.	Alternative teaching, assessment and delivery models	There are a variety of alternative teaching models that reconfigure student learning to provide more personalised and community-based education. For example, schools in Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere offer online and extension programs that expose students to a much broader and more diverse range of peers and enable personalised learning that improves engagement and agency.
10.	Networked schools and teaching capacity exchange	When two or more schools pool resources, share facilities, collaborate in professional learning communities and/or share responsibility for teaching the curriculum. This enables teachers and school leaders to move between schools, and to bring students from different schools and backgrounds together to take part in common curricular and co-curricular activities. For example, in England, Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) (non-profit companies) operate multiple schools. MATs identify common approaches to teaching across their schools, and teachers interact to share knowledge and practices. In China, school districts contract high-performing and low-performing schools to work together for two years. In this period they are required to implement programs and practices to address underachievement. Teachers and school leaders are also able to move between the two schools to share knowledge.

Source: Nous Group (2023) Review of policy interventions to increase socio-economic diversity and improve learning outcomes, report to the Australian Government Department of Education for the Expert Panel leading the Review for a Better and Fairer School System.

The evidence of success for each of the policy options outlined in Box 8 varies in strength and it is hard to isolate the impact of one intervention from another. Countries that have seen the most significant impacts have generally employed multiple strategies, supported by clear evidence and robust and respected governance structures. Overall, evidence suggests that no single policy intervention can solve the issue of segregation, and that the greatest impact can be achieved by employing a combination of interventions.²⁴⁵ This should include interventions in both the government and non-government sectors, and collaboration between the sectors, to ensure students have pathways to enrol in high-quality schooling and diversity can be increased in both sectors.

Translating one or more of these interventions to an Australian context requires consideration of questions about scalability, the degree of departure from current approaches, likely reactions among system stakeholders, and the practical implementation hurdles to overcome. Consideration should also be given to the potential impact each intervention will have on increasing socio-educational diversity and student outcomes (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Considerations for implementing policy levers to increase socio-economic diversity in Australian schools.

	Impact on SES diversity	Impact on educational outcomes	Transferability to Australia
1. Legislated quotas	Mixed	Mixed	Low – Medium
2. Removal of fees	High	Mixed	Low – Medium
3. Reducing academic selectivity and tracking	Mixed	Unclear	Low
4. Fee capping	High	Mixed	Medium
5. Zone flexing (including with enrolment lotteries)	Mixed	Mixed	Medium
6. Controlled choice (including preference matching)	High	Medium	Low
7. Financial incentives to schools	High	High	High
8. Incentives to educators	Unclear	Mixed	High
9. Alternative teaching, assessment and delivery models	High	High	High
10. Networked schools and teaching capacity exchange	Unclear	High	High

Source: Nous Group (2023) Review of policy interventions to increase socio economic diversity and improve learning outcomes, report to the Australian Government Department of Education for the Expert Panel leading the Review for a Better and Fairer School System.

Consideration should also be given to the different contexts and cohorts present in schools with concentrations of disadvantage, and whether these policy levers would be effective in these contexts. For example, Nous does not recommend reducing concentrations of First Nations students in schools; rather, it recommends ensuring the schools they attend are fully equipped to meet their educational needs in a culturally safe way.²⁴⁶

Enrolment and fees policies in non-government schools affect socio-economic diversity

Non-government schools and systems can play an important role in increasing the socio-economic diversity within their schools through enrolment policies. In New Zealand, the UK and Canada, for example, governments regulate non-government school enrolment policies to increase the diversity of the students.²⁴⁷ Applying inclusive enrolment policies in Australia is one way in which non-government schools can increase enrolments of students from diverse backgrounds and reduce concentrations of disadvantage.

Some non-government schools charge high fees, which naturally limits access to students from low-income and middle-income families. In addition, fees charged by non-government schools have continued to increase at faster rates than wage growth and inflation, indicating that some families are willing and able to pay these fees, even if it means putting themselves under financial pressure.²⁴⁸ Providing recurrent public funding to high-fee non-government schools exacerbates the resource gap between government and non-government schools further.

In the current funding model, governments provide a minimum public contribution to the best-resourced schools, even when the private tuition fees alone would exceed the SRS.²⁴⁹ Providing public funding to high-fee non-government schools likely provides minimal measurable educational benefit.²⁵⁰ In a context where most government systems are not at 100 per cent of the SRS, and students experiencing disadvantage are less likely to achieve minimum standards, this situation raises the question of whether resources should be targeted to schools most in need.

Some submissions proposed that non-government schools could choose between implementing inclusive enrolment policies and receiving public funding, or applying their own enrolment policies. For example, the submission from Professors Jane Kenway, Fazal Rizvi and Barbara Preston suggested that public funding for non-government schools should be conditional on amending their fee structures, entry policies and governance practices to be more accessible, as is the case in several other countries and systems where non-government schools receive recurrent public funding. This view was also supported by several stakeholders convened by the Paul Ramsay Foundation to discuss this issue in September 2023.

It is important to note that some non-government schools try to keep fees attainable for low-income and middle-income families. Others go further, by fully subsidising large proportions of their student cohort, in effect divorcing capacity to pay from enrolment and creating exceptionally diverse learning environments (see Case Study 6).

Case Study 6: Inclusive enrolment policies can increase diversity in schools

A visit to a large metropolitan K-12 non-government school demonstrated the impact that inclusive enrolment practices and strong teaching and learning can have on creating socio-educationally diverse school environments that successfully cater to a broad spectrum of needs.

Since 2005, the school has taken a non-discriminatory approach to enrolment. This has meant a full fee discount to any student with a Health Care Card, and no religious affiliation requirements. As a result, around 50 per cent of students enrolled at the school do not pay any fees and the school community is also very culturally and linguistically diverse (63 per cent of students come from a language background other than English, including many from humanitarian visa backgrounds). The school survey results show that the school community and its emphasis on inclusion are viewed positively and are highly valued by staff, parents and students.

These inclusive enrolment policies are then supported by a rigorous approach to identifying and meeting the needs of the students. The school invests in teacher-led screening to identify students who require additional support. It estimates that around 50 per cent of students require targeted Tier 2 supports to gain the literacy and numeracy proficiency required to engage in the broader curriculum. NAPLAN data shows the approach works: while Year 3 NAPLAN students who require additional support start well behind the national average, by Year 9 they have caught up.

Success should be measured in terms of reducing school-based disadvantage and the ability for children experiencing disadvantage to go to school with peers from socio-economically mixed backgrounds and feel safe, valued and a sense of belonging.

Brotherhood of St. Laurence

Other consultations suggested scholarship programs aimed at equity cohorts as another mechanism for diversifying enrolments at non-government schools. For instance, the Catholic Schools Scholarship Program in South Australia offers full-tuition scholarships to primary and secondary school-aged students in out-of-home care. It is important that schools allocate these enrolments on a fee-free and non-selective basis where possible. International evidence shows that schools that are selective in their enrolment policy tend to attract students with greater ability and higher socio-economic status, leaving the schools they came from further residualised.²⁵¹

Attracting and retaining highly effective teachers in disadvantaged schools will improve student outcomes

As outlined in Box 8, there are many international examples of governments implementing incentives for teachers to move to, and remain in, disadvantaged schools as a mechanism to improve socio-educational diversity in schools. Further, the Panel heard of the importance of attracting and retaining highly effective teachers to schools with high concentrations of disadvantage to improve student outcomes, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Schools with concentrations of disadvantage need to be magnets for all students and the best principals and teachers.

A Ministerial Reference Group member

Disadvantaged schools often experience high staff turnover, including school leaders.²⁵² This influences teaching consistency and continuity, student engagement and ultimately learning outcomes. Even the most experienced teachers need time in the school to understand the individual needs of each student and the influence of their family, community and cultural background. Regular turnover prevents teachers from building mutual trust and understanding of these issues, which has been identified as particularly important for teaching First Nations students.

Staff shortages are a chronic issue for many schools with high concentrations of disadvantage. Submissions from the Northern Territory Principals' Association and the Centre for Research in Educational and Social Inclusion noted that schools with concentrations of disadvantage can find it harder to fill educator and school leader roles. This is supported by OECD data showing that 34 per cent of students enrolled in a disadvantaged Australian school attend a school whose principal reported that instruction is hindered by a lack of teaching staff, compared to 3 per cent of students in an advantaged school.²⁵³ Shortages can result in increased instances of out-of-field teaching and higher workloads, leading to teachers feeling overworked or burnt-out and limited in the quality of teaching they can provide.²⁵⁴ Teachers in schools with high concentrations of disadvantage need more support and resources so they can grow and stay in their roles, and continue to support the students who are most at risk of falling behind.

Australian research suggests that schools with high concentrations of disadvantage also typically have fewer experienced teachers.²⁵⁵ The prevalence of out-of-field teaching in these schools can have a detrimental impact on early-career teachers who do not have deep knowledge or training in some of the subjects they are teaching, and can reduce their self-efficacy, confidence and commitment to remain in the school or, worse, the profession.

When staffing and leadership issues are addressed, schools with disadvantaged students can flourish and support improved outcomes for their students (see Case Study 7).

Case Study 7: Quality teaching and leadership drive student outcomes

The Panel was able to see first-hand the enormous impact that high-quality leadership can have on lifting student outcomes in schools with high levels of socio-educational disadvantage.

One metropolitan government high school demonstrated how the journey to lifting outcomes, which has taken over a decade, began with a strong leadership team that had a clear and ambitious vision for its students. The vision centred around two overarching goals – that every student would have a pathway into something meaningful after Year 12, and that this would make the school a ‘school of choice’ for people in the area.

School leaders identified early that the key challenge to achieving this vision was low literacy; as a first action they engaged a literacy specialist as an assistant principal to work in consultation with staff to design and drive a whole-school approach to lifting literacy skills and improving the quality of teaching across all subjects. They developed a whole-school instructional model encompassing both learning and classroom behaviour. The school also put in place a very robust intervention stream for students in Years 7 to 10 with complex needs who needed intensive additional support to engage in learning and build core skills. Staff say this has meaningfully improved skills and trajectories for participants.

They also identified aspiration as an issue. To lift aspiration they set solid targets (e.g. that 90 per cent of students would achieve their Year 12 certificate) and dedicated staff resources to achieving these goals, including establishing a dedicated senior school pathway role within student services and introducing a suite of specialist and excellence programs for academics, music, STEM, and Aboriginal leadership. These measures improved aspiration among students – even those not participating in these programs – and fostered a strong sense of school pride and identity.

The results have taken time but are clear: a continuous lifting of outcomes. NAPLAN results demonstrate that while incoming Year 7 students are starting behind students from a similar background, the school’s approach means that by Year 9, students are above or well above students from similar backgrounds in other schools. In fact, the school’s 2019 Year 7s had essentially caught up to the Australian average in reading and numeracy by 2021. The school is also very close to achieving its 90 per cent Year 12 certificate attainment goal (88 per cent in 2021, up from 69.7 per cent in 2016).

The Panel heard that increasing complexity of student needs in schools with concentrations of disadvantage is placing growing pressure on educator workloads.²⁵⁶ There is opportunity to use greater funding and resources to trial innovative models which can reduce workload pressures and attract educators to work in schools with a concentration of disadvantage, as is already happening in some schools (see Case Study 8).

Case Study 8: Increasing time for teacher collaboration to support students

The use of innovative teaching models was evident at a metropolitan non-government secondary school. This school aims to engage and reignite the interest of vulnerable students who have disengaged from mainstream education. The school receives philanthropic funding as well as Commonwealth and state funding.

The school outlined that it has implemented several initiatives, such as giving teachers and youth workers additional time to plan and collaborate with other staff or to undertake professional development. In addition, youth workers are integrated into the classroom model alongside teachers to increase student to teacher ratios.

The combination of these two approaches has relieved some of the pressure on teachers, especially those working with students who have complex needs arising from trauma, mental health issues and other special circumstances. Giving teachers more time to design programs which best accommodate students' needs, as well as higher student to teacher ratios, is working well to ensure classes are engaging and tailored and to support staff wellbeing, which is critical to retention and sustainability.

Governments, school systems and approved authorities should commit to increasing socio-educational diversity in schools by considering policy options that could be implemented in the next Agreement, and in the longer term. Reporting on the socio-educational diversity of schools, at the jurisdiction- and system-level, will support understanding of whether current policies are working and inform future reforms.²⁵⁷ Experiences from other countries show that governments, school systems and approved authorities need to take concrete action to increase socio-economic diversity, reduce residualisation, and ensure that all students are in a school where they can fulfil their potential.

Many governments, school systems and approved authorities have implemented incentives to continue to encourage highly-effective teachers and school leaders to work in schools with concentrations of disadvantage. Effective teaching is the most influential in-school factor in improving student outcomes,²⁵⁸ however the Panel also acknowledges that teachers do not work in isolation. Incentives for teachers should be accompanied by effective support and training, a positive learning environment that promotes a culture of learning, access to high quality resources, and supportive partnerships with parents and communities, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Incentivising, or continuing to incentivise, highly effective teachers to work in schools with concentrations of disadvantage and supporting a culture of high achievement through whole-school strategies to improve outcomes and wellbeing will help improve student outcomes in these schools and give greater choice to parents and students. This could work in concert with the implementation of full-service school models (as discussed in section 2.2.4), which will support access to the wraparound services that students need to thrive.

RECOMMENDATION 2A

The Panel recommends that governments, school systems and approved authorities commit to increasing socio-economic diversity by:

- i. incentivising, or continuing to incentivise, highly-effective teachers and principals to work in schools with high numbers of students experiencing socio-economic disadvantage
- ii. reviewing existing policy settings by the end of 2027 and implementing new policy levers to increase socio-economic diversity in schools and lift student outcomes
- iii. tracking (and annually publicly reporting on) the socio-economic diversity of schools and systems by the end of 2025, to monitor the level of diversity and support further work to increase diversity as part of the next Agreement and its implementation framework.

2.2.4 Schools need better linkages to external services, families and communities to support student attendance, engagement and outcomes

Student outcomes depend on many factors including the health and social needs of children being met before they enter the classroom. Evidence demonstrates that when these pre-conditions for learning are addressed, student engagement and learning outcomes improve.²⁵⁹

Many students and their families have difficulty in navigating and accessing the services students require to effectively engage in education, leaving them without the support needed to realise their potential. This can range, for example, from ensuring students have breakfast and lunch each day to supporting access to allied health or community services. The need to improve access to non-education supports and services to help address student needs, whether located within or externally to schools, was raised consistently during school visits, in consultation meetings and through the submission process.

For example, in the Review's survey, educators identified 'More school counselling, psychologists or mental health support officers' and 'Making other support services, such as nurses, speech pathologists and occupational therapists, available within the school context' as the first and second top areas for government investment.²⁶⁰ The submission from the Community Public Service Union also noted the need for public funding in school infrastructure to enable allied health services such as speech pathologists and occupational therapists to support students within schools.²⁶¹

While the Panel acknowledges that responsibility for provision of many of these needs lies predominantly beyond the school gate, in practice, many schools are having to take on service coordination and advocacy roles for which they are not adequately resourced or equipped. Moreover, given the lack of socio-educational diversity across schools, this issue disproportionately impacts certain student cohorts and schools with higher proportions of students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds who may face more inherent challenges and be less able to access required support services (e.g. see Case Study 9).

Full-service school models could strengthen connections with communities and support students to access the resources they need to learn

Full-service schools, also known as extended schools or community hub models, work in partnership with other service providers to provide third-party and government services to students and the community to complement the educational role of schools. While there is no single definition of full-service schools, the following explanation is useful: 'Schools that provide a range of services and activities, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of children, their families and the wider community.'²⁶²

Full-service schools have been found to improve students' school readiness, engagement and motivation, and researchers have also noted that they improve equity of access to essential services, which is particularly important for people experiencing disadvantage.²⁶³ Further, integrating full-service models into early childhood education and preschool settings provides children better access to services needed to participate in early learning, setting them up for starting school with the social and foundational skills they need to flourish.

Australian researchers have described a range of positive outcomes from full-service schools. These include improved educational outcomes, self-confidence and wellbeing for young people; better communication between schools and families; and earlier identification of additional needs and quicker access to services for students.²⁶⁴ These benefits have further positive impacts, such as increasing a school's ability to manage complex classroom behaviours, benefiting all students (and educators). Moreover, by systematising roles to link services to need, the model reduces pressure on educators and school leaders to fill this role, ensuring they can focus on teaching and learning.

The Panel considers full-service school models are one way to harness and coordinate efforts to address student needs and support student learning. Full-service schools already exist in Australia but could be implemented more widely across government and non-government sectors, with a strong focus on schools with a high concentration of students experiencing disadvantage. Importantly, not every school needs to be a full-service school, and there is no one right way to develop a full-service school model (the approaches taken by two schools are discussed in Case Study 10). In addition, it is important that resources are prioritised to support the schools most in need. Where the full model is not appropriate, other options to strengthen linkages with external services exist, some of which are discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to student mental health and wellbeing.

Case Study 9: The need for a systemic approach to improving access to external services

Evidence of schools having to take the lead on facilitating access to external services was apparent in many schools the Panel visited, including a regional government primary school. The school services a student cohort with a high level of complex needs, including a high proportion of students with disabilities and/or individual learning requirements. Many of these students are struggling to access the allied health and community supports they need, exacerbating the educational disadvantage they experience.

The school's strong leadership identified the need to take a strategic approach to investing in the services that will make the greatest impact for its students. This includes prioritising engaging extra classroom staff, which could be challenging given the complexity of the school, and creating composite classrooms to support targeted education interventions for students with similar learning levels and needs. In line with Recommendation 2A(i), the school leaders believe that there is a need to create better incentives for highly-effective teachers to work in their school, suggesting complexity loadings for remuneration.

However, out of necessity, the school is also using its budget to bring funded allied and community services into the school to help students get the supports that will make them better able to learn. This is challenging for the school on many levels, including the challenges faced in finding health or social workers to work in school settings. It also requires the school's leaders to make difficult choices which do not arise for their colleagues working in less complex settings. The investment in these services is critical to addressing needs that are pre-requisites for learning; but every dollar invested in these supports is a dollar not going to supporting high-quality teaching and learning, which is also critical to improving student outcomes.

These issues occur in schools across the country. The experiences of these schools emphasise the need for a more systemic approach to improving access to these services.

The implementation of full-service models needs to take into account how schools can be sites for service provision while maintaining their focus on learning, not adding to the workload of educators and school leaders, and being cognisant of workforce shortages and pressures across the education health and allied health sectors. For example, schools looking to develop into full-service schools may need to recruit the expertise of a coordinator or partnership broker to manage cross-sector collaboration.

Importantly, full-service schools aim to be a 'hub' of services (either physical or virtual), not to take on the funding and delivery of all services. It is essential that full-service schools and similar models are not used to 'cost shift' from other portfolios into the education portfolio. This is a call to action to health, community and family services (amongst other) portfolios to lean in to this critical issue, given the future prosperity of Australia depends on the education of our young people.

Case Study 10: Full-service schools support students to connect with services that support learning – whether done at scale or in spirit

The impact that a full-service school model can have in supporting high-quality teaching and learning was evident at a large government primary school in the outer suburbs of a major capital city. The school services a high-needs student cohort, with many students experiencing disadvantage, coming from trauma backgrounds, or having health issues or disabilities.

Many parents and guardians had not had positive experiences of school and needed more assistance to enable them to support students at home and foster student engagement. Many students had undiagnosed health issues or disabilities, meaning they were unable to engage effectively in learning. Staff were seeing a high degree of challenging behaviours in their classrooms because the underlying needs of many children were not being met.

School leaders identified that the school needed to bring wraparound services on site to address these needs and ensure that students were able to engage and succeed in their learning. The model in place starts from birth and includes co-locating a parenting and early learning centre on school grounds to build relationships with families early and help parents develop knowledge about child development and learning. To support earlier diagnosis of health and disability issues, the school also has a range of health and allied health staff (including a full-time child health nurse, speech therapists and occupational therapists) on site, while social workers, student support officers and family support officers help families navigate complex diagnosis and support referral pathways.

A smaller government school very close by, servicing the same community, is also bringing a full-service and community development mindset to bear on its approach to addressing the needs of families and students. This school's leadership takes the view that schools are publicly funded sites of child-centred infrastructure and should therefore be available for any service that can support one of their students or families. The school proactively builds relationships with universities, non-education services and non-governmental organisations to offer on-site child development and health services (including speech and occupational therapy); autism support services; breakfast clubs; alcohol and other drug treatment and prevention services for parents; counselling for domestic violence; and engagement and extension programs for after school and on weekends. The school takes a nurture group approach to implementing evidence-based targeted interventions directly in the classroom.

There is widespread support for the full-service school model. The Western Australian Government noted in its submission that it is investigating opportunities to expand services and programs to support students, which may include an expansion of a full-service school approach. The Queensland Government in its submission highlighted its Partnership Initiative, which provides holistic whole-of-government partnerships to schools in communities with a high degree of complexity and vulnerability. The NSW Government announced a similar partnership between its Department of Education and Department of Health which will see health professionals from Local Health Districts deliver free health and development checks to children in participating preschools.²⁶⁵

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association submission recommended implementing full-service school models that incorporate education and health services to meet the diverse needs of First Nations students. The submission from Catholic Schools NSW highlighted the 'community hub' approach which provides students and families with greater access to referral and wraparound services. Other submissions called for coordinated support for community and health services, including allied health, without specifically calling for a full-service model – for example, the submission from the Australian Government Primary Principals Association.

This place-based approach to schools as community hubs will increase their role as holistic learning places for all. In terms of families of refugee-background and other culturally diverse students, the community hub model increases educational engagement, family/school relationships, language acquisition and intercultural connectedness across the community.

Refugee Education Special Interest Group

Development of full-service schools should be based on known success factors

Three overarching principles appear to lay the groundwork for success in the development of full-service schools: locally driven design; cross-sector collaboration; and support for partnership development to better coordinate services while reducing workload for educators.

Full-service schools are most effective when the nature of extended services and the mode of operation are determined at the local level, informed by those with an understanding of local circumstances and the needs of students and the community. The importance of locally-led design is well illustrated by a regional community school that the Panel visited. At this school, one of the roles of the wellbeing coordinator is to coordinate local resources, including resources donated by the community, to address the needs of families. Having the coordination of community resources managed by the school's wellbeing coordinator has built trust with families and increased the ability of students and their families to easily draw on the resources of the community when needed.

There is clear value in the education, health, disability and community sectors working collaboratively and facilitating connections at the local level. The cornerstone of the full-service school is the collaborative partnerships formed with a wide range of government agencies, non-profit organisations, educational institutions, businesses and members of the community.²⁶⁶

Full-service schools rely on a collaborative approach but developing and sustaining effective cross-sector partnerships is not easy. To support collaboration in a way that reduces workload pressures on educators and school leaders, an independent intermediary with expertise in partnership development (e.g. a partnership broker or coordinator) can provide the support needed to maximise the efficiency, sustainability and impact of full-service schools.

One of the great strengths of partnership brokers operating at a local level is the flexibility to tailor partnerships to meet the needs of specific communities and their young people. Rather than doing things 'for' or 'to' communities, partnership brokers are well placed to build the capacity of communities to work together to design and implement locally relevant solutions.

Challenges to implementing full-service schools should be carefully considered

A key challenge associated with full-service schools is the difficulty of collaborating effectively across different sectors. This may be exacerbated by workforce pressures across education, health and community sectors. Sustaining the support that extended schools can offer students and families also requires planning for, and managing, change. Partnerships must have an agreed governance structure in place and a shared understanding of the model with multiple stakeholders, so that when individuals leave, partnerships are maintained.²⁶⁷ Researchers have also discussed the need to consider privacy, as some members of the community may be uncomfortable accessing services through the school.²⁶⁸ As discussed in Chapter 3, there are also issues in some sectors, such as mental health, that create barriers to students accessing external supports even when schools have strong linkages and partnerships in place.

There has been limited monitoring of outcomes in relation to school community partnerships in Australia.²⁶⁹ A broader rollout of the full-service school models should be accompanied by robust evaluation to ensure implementation issues are identified and can be addressed. This could be considered in relation to the structured innovation fund discussed in Chapter 7. Findings should be shared across jurisdictions and systems to support effective and consistent implementation of these approaches.

There is a need for a review of the intersections of education and other key service delivery portfolios to ensure student needs are met

The extent of unmet need for services for school-aged children is significant and will not be resolved through initiatives in the education portfolio alone, even in a full-service model. There are issues beyond the scope of this Review requiring careful consideration, including levels of investment, workforce allocation, waitlists, referral pathways, and support for families to navigate complex systems.

The need for better linkages between sectors has been recognised as part of multiple national strategies and inter-governmental agreements. For example, actions under the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention National Agreement; the National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which highlights the crucial role schools play in early intervention and the need for increased coordination; Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031; and the National Health Reform Agreement, which has a strong focus on the need for local coordination and innovation.

In its 2023 review of the current NSRA, the Productivity Commission proposed that actions to improve linkages should be built into the design and implementation of the next Agreement.²⁷⁰ The Panel believe that jurisdictions should work together to review the interactions between education and other sectors to strengthen linkages between schools and services, such as community, family, health, and disability support services.

RECOMMENDATION 2B

To ensure that all students come to school ready and able to learn, the Panel recommends that all governments take steps to embed and strengthen linkages between schools and other services, such as community, family, health (including speech and occupational therapists), and disability support services, by:

- i. implementing full-service school models that better integrate these services within schools and improve partnerships between schools and external agencies, institutions and community members. Priority should be given to schools with a high concentration of students experiencing disadvantage, and care should be taken to avoid cost-shifting from other portfolios to education
- ii. committing to a 12-month whole-of-government review of the interactions between education and other key Commonwealth and state-based services, with recommendations to National Cabinet by the end of 2026 focused on improving the effectiveness of service delivery to school-aged children through streamlining referral pathways, improved uptake of screening and services before and during school years among priority equity cohorts, and greater preventative investment.

2.2.5 A First Nations led approach and greater cultural capability and safety in schools is key to ensuring First Nations students reach their potential

Further work is required to support First Nations students to succeed

Far too many First Nations students are not realising their full learning potential (see Figure 5 in Chapter 1) and Target 5 under CTG is yet to be achieved. This has devastating consequences for First Nations students, their families and communities. One of the drivers of the learning gaps is that many schools are not providing highly effective, culturally inclusive, safe and respectful learning environments for First Nations students and staff.

The Interim Truth and Treaty Body's submission highlighted the enduring impact of colonisation on education outcomes of First Nations students, including through deficit thinking. Racism can also prevent First Nations students from being engaged with learning, as noted by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association (NATSIPA) submission.

First Nations students are also disproportionately represented in other equity cohorts, including low SES, regional and remote, disability, out-of-home care, the youth justice system, and English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D).²⁷¹ Therefore, some First Nations students require tailored support and reasonable educational adjustments to support engagement, wellbeing and learning outcomes. These support needs and educational adjustments may not always be identified or addressed by schools, and this can compound barriers to the engagement of First Nations students. In some communities, children start school with limited or no English. Honouring a child's first language and incorporating a bilingual and bicultural approach when teaching the curriculum is key to ensuring these children are engaged in learning and achieve foundational skills. It provides an opportunity to recognise their existing language skills and build on these as a strength.

The Panel heard of the importance of ensuring engagement, teaching and assessment are culturally responsive. For example, there is a diversity of views around the role and appropriateness of standardised screening and testing for First Nations students – and students from other equity cohorts. Noting that exemptions can be applied to NAPLAN, many see value in applying a standard assessment to all Australian students to better identify and understand the points at which intervention may be required. However, other stakeholders noted that screening and assessment tools needed to be improved to eliminate cultural bias and ensure they accurately measure skills and proficiency.

An example pointed to by stakeholders was the work undertaken on the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to ensure it measures the development of First Nations children in an appropriate way. The AEDC is completed by teachers every three years, and teachers are supported by a cultural consultant with deep knowledge of First Nations cultures to assist in measuring the development of First Nations children.²⁷²

The Panel has clearly heard the message that schools need to reflect the community that they serve, becoming an extension of it. The Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting submission raised the diversity of First Nations cultures and languages, celebrating them and acknowledging their strength. Given this diversity, the Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting's submission warned against one-size-fits-all approaches, claiming that the diversity of cultures and languages means that an understanding of context is essential to implementing culturally responsive practices. This can mean different practices from one community to the next, depending on the local history, experience, strengths and challenges of specific communities.

First Nations histories and culture is a cross-curriculum priority in the Australian Curriculum and it is important for all students to be well versed in. However, there are shortfalls in the understanding and confidence of educators when it comes to these key topics. The Australian Teachers' Survey 2023 found that over half (51 per cent) of teachers aged 35 years and over felt unprepared to deal with First Nations histories and culture and student diversity (another priority area), compared with 32 per cent of teachers aged 18 to 34 years old who felt unprepared.²⁷³ This may indicate that recent graduates have received more comprehensive training in teaching these priority areas to all students. Embedding First Nations staff into the design and teaching of curriculum is critical to improvement in this area (see Case Study 11).

A First Nations Education Policy, developed in partnership, would bring governments and communities together to improve education for First Nations students

First Nations students flourish when they are in school environments that celebrate the strengths of their cultures and communities and empower them to develop the skills, confidence and aspiration needed in their school and post-school life.²⁷⁴ Despite the broad recognition of the importance of culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogical approaches, systemic reform has been difficult to achieve.

The Panel acknowledges the work of First Nations peoples to develop and influence education policies, including in line with the Closing the Gap Agreement, and the shared frustration that more progress has not been made to improve service delivery and the experience of First Nations students in schools and systems.²⁷⁵ The Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting noted in its submission that many of the long-term goals of First Nations peoples in the 1989 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) are yet to be achieved. These goals and lessons learned from past policies and action plans, including the 1989 AEP and the 2015 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy, should be considered when developing a new First Nations Education Policy.

Case Study 11: Culturally responsive teaching improves engagement

At a remote government F-12 school, teachers work collaboratively with First Nations educators from the local community, both in the classroom and as part of the school leadership, to teach a culturally relevant curriculum to the students they serve. First Nations educators have a key role in the classroom and in leadership, working in partnership to support students with language and learning engagement.

The school library program engages students through meaningful texts that reflect their backgrounds. The resources include Solutions for People Experiencing Learning Difficulties (SPELD) decodable readers that feature local topics and pictures of the school and surrounding communities. Library sessions include local First Nations stories, which support students to develop reading and writing skills in a meaningful context. The school uses a data wall to track the students' literacy achievement progress, supporting teachers to make judgements about future learning needs.

The school has also embedded a culturally responsive approach to the science curriculum using two-way learning. Regular on-Country learning sessions are led by First Nations educators, which complement and enrich classroom-based science learning experiences. Students have the opportunity to learn about local places of significance and traditional knowledge about the land. Classroom teachers then amend lessons to build on these experiences.

Teachers spoke to the Panel about how this was the most exciting day of the week for the students as they would get to leave the traditional school environment and learn about the language, culture and history of the local area.

Governments should work together in partnership with key First Nations education stakeholders, including education and community leaders, students and organisations such as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC), NATSIPA, and the Coalition of Peaks as appropriate, to develop a national First Nations Education Policy. This aligns with the calls from the Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting and Reconciliation Australia in their submissions for partnerships with First Nations peoples which respect the right to self-determination. Including NATSIEC, NATSIPA, and the Coalition of Peaks, among other key First Nations representatives, will ensure the First Nations Education Policy is informed by the peak body on lifelong learning for First Nations peoples and by representatives of First Nations school leaders and teachers.

In developing the First Nations Education Policy, consideration should be given to building in an evaluation framework that will allow governments and system stakeholders to assess the impact of the policy on First Nations student outcomes. Findings should be shared across jurisdictions and systems to support effective and consistent implementation of the policy. Consideration should also be given to ensuring the policy can be adapted by educators and school leaders to suit local needs and contexts.

The First Nations Education Policy should include consideration of culturally responsive pedagogies which embrace First Nations ways of learning and support educators to adapt the curriculum in culturally responsive ways.²⁷⁶ This aligns with commitments by governments to support First Nations cultures and to embed and practise meaningful cultural safety, recognising First Nation peoples' strength in their identity under the Closing the Gap Agreement. There is also an opportunity to connect the First Nations Education Policy to the First Nations Teachers' Strategy being developed under the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (NTWAP), and the Closing the Gap Agreement. This work would be supported by greater representation from First Nations teachers in the teaching workforce.

The First Nations Education Policy should also include approaches to build the cultural capability of educators and school leaders to ensure that all First Nations students are taught in a safe environment with high levels of engagement, belonging and expectation. All non-First Nations educators should have the tools to teach in a culturally respectful and culturally appropriate manner, including strengths-based approaches, and to build high-expectation relationships with students and communities.²⁷⁷ To develop these tools, all educators should have access to:

- professional development that builds the culturally responsive teaching capability of all-service teachers and an awareness of trauma-informed practices, building on current work to improve access to high-quality First Nations cultural responsiveness resources under the NTWAP and *Strong Beginnings*²⁷⁸
- micro-credentials on cultural responsiveness that are quality assured under the professional development accreditation framework outlined in Chapter 1
- culturally responsive frameworks that prepare educators for schools with high proportions of First Nations students prior to starting in the role. This work could draw on the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) project on building a culturally responsive teaching workforce.²⁷⁹

Improving cultural capability and accountability within schools for culturally safe environments will also support First Nations educators. In a 2021 NSW Department of Education survey, 58 per cent of First Nations staff respondents reported that they had known of racism from a member of staff towards First Nations peoples in the previous year.²⁸⁰ Having a more inclusive environment with a zero-tolerance approach to racism may reduce First Nations teacher attrition.²⁸¹

The Panel also recognises the workload pressures on First Nations staff, who often are called on to lead on school initiatives and build relationships with First Nations students and families in addition to their professional roles and the roles they may hold in their broader community.²⁸² One aim of increasing the cultural capability and expectation that all educators build relationships with First Nations students and communities should be to reduce this pressure on First Nations staff.

Noting the issues canvassed above regarding the need to improve the cultural appropriateness of assessment tools and the need to embed First Nations content into the curriculum, the First Nations Education Policy could prioritise these as projects.

RECOMMENDATION 2C

The Panel recommends that governments work together in partnership with key First Nations education stakeholders, including education and community leaders, students and organisations such as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association, and the Coalition of Peaks as appropriate, to develop a national First Nations Education Policy before the end of 2026, which should include:

- i. implementing evidence-based approaches to build the cultural responsiveness of all teaching staff and inform the design of curriculum, projects and language resources in collaboration with communities and an evaluation of the effectiveness of the policy
- ii. building culturally responsive frameworks to prepare teachers for schools with high proportions of First Nations students
- iii. developing culturally appropriate assessments and assessment tools.

There are a growing number of First Nations school models that prioritise learning that is culturally responsive for First Nations students. First Nations led models of schooling provide an opportunity to build the community-controlled sector, which is the focus of Priority Reform 2 of the Closing the Gap Agreement. The Panel's view is that this could be an area for further research and that a better understanding of what works in these models may support improved education for First Nations students in mainstream schools too, including for schools with bicultural/bilingual settings.

FINDING 9

Governments should consider further research to explore the operation and impact of First Nations school models in place and the interactions with building the First Nations community-controlled sector under Priority Reform 2 of the Closing the Gap Agreement.

Access to secondary schools for First Nations students in remote communities and adequate resourcing for boarding remains challenging

As noted by the Stronger Smarter Institute submission, many First Nations students from remote areas have limited or no access to secondary school close to home.

Where there are no secondary schools accessible in remote areas, boarding schools and live-in residential colleges offer students the opportunity to access the secondary education best suited to their interests and aspirations. This can provide educational opportunities but can be challenging, particularly for First Nations students who leave Country, family and community.

Many First Nations students who attend boarding schools require additional support to ensure they maintain strong connections to culture and community, and have the required academic, social and emotional wellbeing support to succeed. Some jurisdictions noted that efforts to build on-Country boarding options have had mixed results, with these services often operating well under capacity. An example of a First Nations led boarding approach designed to offer culturally responsive education to its students is discussed in Case Study 12.

Case Study 12: Innovative approach to boarding for First Nations students

The Panel observed an innovative approach to boarding for First Nations students at a non-government boarding school. The boarding school is designed specifically for young Indigenous mothers and their babies to live and learn together and was initiated and developed through yarning circles and community consultation with local First Nations women.

This First Nations led approach is evident in the school's culturally centred curriculum, which continues connection to ancestral language and cultural practice. First Nations input has also shaped the focus on providing each student with a tailored pathway to tertiary education or employment based on their values and dreams. Students are provided with an individual learning program based on their academic level and age and are also given the opportunity to complete a vocational qualification. Students are also encouraged to undertake work experience and school-based traineeships. Students are empowered to become community leaders, including through school-based leadership positions that aim to promote cultural learning.

The boarding facilities include an early learning centre and health centre, and the boarding school provides health and wellbeing support to the students and their babies, including mental health support, drug and alcohol counselling, family planning, and support to raise healthy children. The purpose of the boarding school is to break the cycle of disadvantage and empower its students to become future leaders in their community. The school has successfully supported students to attain Year 12 qualifications.

The NT Government's Review of Secondary Education notes that boarding schools, while giving students and families the ability to engage in aspects of secondary education that may not be viable to provide in every community, do not work for many students. It recommends that quality assurance of boarding schools should be undertaken to ensure they provide culturally appropriate and safe environments, and meet the educational, cultural and health needs of students.²⁸³

The Panel heard from First Nations students and staff about the risks of mental ill-health, self-harm and suicide in boarding schools and residential colleges when students do not have adequate support. Moreover, the Panel heard that many residential service providers that support First Nations students from remote areas are under-resourced and rely on students' ABSTUDY entitlements, which do not adequately cover boarding costs and other basics such as uniforms and culturally appropriate wraparound support. Additionally, the Panel heard that the standard approach often taken to resourcing residential colleges does not adequately capture the different levels of need between residential services across locations.

The Panel notes that the Australian Government committed \$21.6 million in 2023–24 to support quality boarding for rural and remote students for an additional year, while a design review is undertaken to identify systemic reform options to better support First Nations boarding students from rural and remote areas.²⁸⁴ This important work should inform broader consideration of access for First Nations students to secondary schools in regional and remote communities. This should include consideration of alternative models of delivery, such as online modes (as discussed in section 2.2.8), which allow First Nations students to remain on Country.

FINDING 10

Governments should:

- i. commit to actions to improve access to secondary schools in regional and remote communities, noting the relevance of Finding 13 to this issue
- ii. work together to implement a needs-based approach to resourcing residential colleges to ensure that students and staff in these settings are appropriately supported.

2.2.6 An inclusive education is essential to ensuring students with disability thrive

Every student with disability should receive an education enabling them to achieve their full potential, which includes getting access to any support and educational adjustments required. In 2022, over one in five students enrolled in Australian schools were receiving an educational adjustment due to disability.²⁸⁵ Further, in 2018, nearly nine in ten school students with a disability attended a mainstream school.²⁸⁶ This is a large proportion of students; therefore it is imperative that resources and supports are available across the systems to embed inclusive education in schools.

Support is provided to students with disability through the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (DSE), which detail the obligations that education and training providers must adhere to according to the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA). The DSE aims to ensure that students with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as students without disability.²⁸⁷ This means that students with disability should have the same opportunity as students without disability to receive admission to or enrol in an institution, participate in courses or programs, and use facilities and services.²⁸⁸ Building capability to embed inclusive education in schools and teaching practice to improve educational outcomes for school students with disability is one of the key policy priorities of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031.

The proportion of students identified as having disability is growing. The Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC), which has a different definition of disability than that of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) (which relies on self-identification), found that 7.7 per cent of children under 15 were reported as having disability in 2018, up from 6.9 per cent in 2012.²⁸⁹ The SDAC also reported a 25.1 per cent increase in autism spectrum disorder prevalence from 2015 to 2018, with the highest prevalence rates among children and young people.²⁹⁰

The proportion of students receiving educational adjustments in school is also growing. The NCCD was established under the DDA and DSE to capture all students receiving an educational adjustment, based on an evidence-informed judgement by educators. As such, the NCCD does not require that students have a diagnosed disability to be recognised, moving away from the medical definition of disability. The NCCD shows that in 2022, 22.5 per cent of enrolled students received an educational adjustment due to disability, up from 21.8 per cent in 2021 and 18 per cent in 2015.²⁹¹ Eighty-six per cent of these adjustments were provided to students with cognitive or social-emotional disability. Further details regarding the level of educational adjustments recorded for the purposes of the NCCD can be found in Chapter 6 of this report.

As explored further in Chapter 5, there is a paucity of data on the outcomes of students with disabilities, making it difficult to know how systems are performing and what works. The Panel has heard of persistent challenges in relation to schools providing necessary supports for students with disability. This can stem from barriers to identification or diagnosis for school-aged children, limited assistance for teachers, and fragmented connections with government and community supports. Recent reviews have similarly found that students with disability are not being provided the support they need, and that there is an urgent need to embed inclusive education across the system.

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability noted that major reforms are needed to ensure mainstream schools are equipped to offer safe, equal and inclusive education. The Royal Commission made 15 recommendations in relation to access to inclusive education for students with disability.²⁹² The recommendations include amending the DDA to cover suspensions, exclusions and expulsions; expanding complaint management processes to be nationally consistent with strengthened enforcement of inclusive education practices; and improved funding for educational adjustments.

While the Commissioners did not come to agreement on all recommendations, demonstrating the complexity of implementing a single approach to inclusive education, they did conclude that reforms are urgently needed to give students with disability choice and control over their education.²⁹³ For example, there were differing views on whether special/segregated schools should be phased out, or whether inclusion could be achieved by retaining non-mainstream schools but strengthening partnerships with mainstream schools. Education Ministers have committed to continuing to listen to, and collaborate with, people with disability and their families as the response to the Royal Commission progresses.²⁹⁴

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Review found that foundational supports for children with disability should be located in mainstream and community settings such as their school,²⁹⁵ and that the education system needs to be much more inclusive of all children with disability to support them to reach their full potential.²⁹⁶ The NDIS Review identified that there is a lack of supports for children with disability in mainstream settings and that, as a result, students with disability who do not receive funding from the NDIS miss out on the supports they need.²⁹⁷

The Panel heard that access to and use of NDIS supports varies across schools. Some schools provide greater access to NDIS providers during school hours while seeking to balance any disruption to learning, and other schools limit access. Some submissions, including from the Victorian Council of Social Services, identified the interface issues between the NDIS and schools as a barrier to the full participation of students with disability.

Education and disability officials should work together on guiding principles to support educators and school leaders to effectively manage and coordinate NDIS supports within the school gate. This work should also consider contingencies to ensure students continue receiving support during periods of remote learning, and could draw on the Australian Government's review of the impact of COVID-19 on school students with disability.

The different criteria to access funding and support for students with disability under the NCCD, the NDIS and state-based disability funding programs create complexity for families navigating multiple systems to find the best supports for their children. Educators are also caught up in trying to navigate multiple approaches to inclusive education, creating confusion and increasing the risk of students with disability slipping through cracks. For instance, the 2020 Review of the Disability Standards for Education heard that there was 'significant confusion about whether the NDIS or the education provider is responsible for funding supports and adjustments. This confusion extends to the providers themselves, with parents and carers reporting that the education and NDIS providers often claim that the other is responsible for the support.'²⁹⁸ Similarly, the Review's survey found that nearly 20 per cent of parents cited 'not providing my child's reasonable adjustments' as a key barrier to their child's learning.²⁹⁹

Outside of the NCCD, targeted funding for education support often uses categorical and threshold-based criteria rather than need, and some types of support require a diagnosis, involving high costs and wait times.³⁰⁰ Categorical and threshold-based approaches, while necessary, also tend to exclude common disorders and less severe presentations, regardless of a diagnosis. This results in a 'grey zone'³⁰¹ where students with disability experience difficulties but are viewed as 'naughty' or 'lazy' rather than in need of adjustments.

These data and system complexity issues create obstacles to schools providing students with disability with evidence-based, reasonable educational adjustments. This can lead to behaviour management challenges and the overuse of school disciplinary measures, as noted in submissions from Square Peg Round Whole and Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion. The Centre for Inclusive Education submission noted the research finding that disability is a prominent underlying factor in suspensions. Evidence indicates, however, that suspensions are ineffective for many students with disability and may actually increase challenging behaviours.³⁰² Crucially, evidence also shows that suspensions can exacerbate the risks of disengagement from education for this cohort.³⁰³

It is important to use an intersectional lens when considering the experience of students with disability. For instance, the rate of disability among First Nations people, including children, is twice as high as that among the general population.³⁰⁴ This over-representation is also present in data on suspensions and exclusions. For example, analysis of suspension data in Queensland government schools between 2016 and 2020 shows that First Nations students with disability and in out-of-home care were at the greatest risk of suspension, with disability being the most prominent underlying factor.³⁰⁵

An implementation plan is urgently needed to embed inclusive education across the system

Inclusive education supports all students to engage in school genuinely and fully by adapting the environment and teaching practices for each student. The Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education in its submission defined inclusion as 'a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures, and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences.'³⁰⁶

Inclusive education is crucial to support the aspirations and experiences of students with disability, which can be limited by the perpetuation of negative attitudes and stereotypes. The submission from Children and Young People with Disability Australia noted that ableist attitudes can result in students with disability being excluded or marginalised in classrooms and in social situations, while the Centre for Disability Research and Policy submission highlighted the high rates of bullying experienced by students with disability.

Ableism can manifest in a range of ways within school environments. It is important for schools to actively work to create inclusive and accessible environments for all students, regardless of ability.

Children and Young People with Disability Australia

The Panel's view is that governments, school systems and approved authorities could improve teaching of students with disability across all settings and that there is great value in choice. Building on examples of best practice (see Case Study 13), the Panel supports calls from several stakeholders for the design and implementation of inclusive education policies to be co-designed with students with disability.³⁰⁷

Case Study 13: A variety of approaches to meeting the needs of students with disability – resourcing and staffing are key

One metropolitan government primary school has invested significant resources into providing a fully inclusive environment. Students with disability work within classrooms alongside students who do not have disabilities. The success of this model depends on intensive resourcing (some students have a dedicated support worker with them at all times); a whole-school approach to disability inclusion, with training for all staff; and proactively hiring and supporting the retention of staff who themselves have disability or are neurodiverse. This fully inclusive model, which moves beyond a medical model of disability, ensures that all students benefit from the diversity and strengths of their peers, while students with non-diagnosed disability who nevertheless require adjustments are already in an environment where individualised approaches are the norm. As well as the resources and staffing required to support this model, the school identified the importance of having flexible spaces to allow for integrated service delivery on site.

Another model was in place at a remote government primary school, which serves as a regional hub for students with disability. The school offers an education support program providing highly individualised learning to students with diagnosed disabilities. It has a dedicated classroom with a high teacher-student ratio staffed by people with experience and expertise in disability. The classroom is adapted (as best possible, given limited infrastructure) to meet the sensory and physical needs of students, and all students are receiving evidence-based teaching and learning tailored to the needs of students with disability. The model is so successful that families are relocating hundreds of kilometres to enrol their children and the school is in danger of exceeding capacity without further investment and staffing: the infrastructure is old and was never fit for purpose, and finding qualified staff remains a challenge.

The Panel also visited special schools such as a metropolitan government special education school. It was evident that by having a large number of students with specific needs, the school is able to pool and scale resources, so students benefit from having a fully accessible playground, hydrotherapy pools and therapeutic rooms. The school attracts staff with expertise in and passion for teaching students with special needs, making it very likely that students will consistently get the support and pedagogy that will support them. However, this model has challenges too. Recent shifts away from on-site allied health services to working with each child's NDIS service provider have undermined consistency and created a logistical challenge (and additional workload) for teachers and leadership. And even here, staff shortages are biting, with an increasing reliance on staff with no special education qualification.

The Panel believes that continuing to strengthen the capability of educators to embed inclusive education in schools and teaching practice, including through professional development and communities of practice to share what works, would support students who choose to engage in mainstream schooling to engage and flourish. The submission from Children and Young People with Disability Australia highlighted its survey result which found that only 35 per cent of families felt that teachers and support staff had adequate training and knowledge to support the student.³⁰⁸ Better use of specialist staff with knowledge of special education would assist teachers to individually support students with disability.³⁰⁹ Better training and understanding of individualised approaches would assist in breaking down the negative stereotypes which limit learning of students with disability. The responsibility to ensure schools and educators have access to this rests with governments, school systems and approved authorities. Students with disability need to have their aspirations nurtured by schools, through a strengths-based approach.³¹⁰

Along with building the capability of educators and schools, the Panel considers that a number of initiatives need to be implemented to embed inclusive education across the system. This should include developing a common understanding of best practice in inclusive education; effective ways of improving the capability of educators to embed inclusive education in their teaching practice; measuring and monitoring access, participation and outcomes for students with disability (see Recommendation 5C); and developing a national framework for measuring inclusion.

The responses to the Disability Royal Commission and the NDIS Review should be considered in parallel to work with jurisdictions on approaches to embed inclusive education through the next Agreement. The voices of people with disability should be central to this work, so it should be developed in consultation with students and other people with disability and with disability experts, consistent with the commitments in Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031.

Governments, school systems and approved authorities need to support schools to engage inclusively with families and the community, as strengthening partnerships would build trust and support educators to understand the experience of students and what supports they need in the classroom. Bringing together a student's 'circle of support' to establish reasonable educational adjustments and support individualised learning may improve student behaviour and wellbeing.³¹¹ The voices of students with disability and their families should be heard when designing school-level inclusion policies.³¹²

RECOMMENDATION 2D

The Panel recommends that all governments, school systems and approved authorities jointly develop an implementation plan to deliver on their commitment under *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031* to build capability in delivery of inclusive education for students with disability.

2.2.7 Students in out-of-home care experience significant educational disadvantage and would benefit from being included as a priority equity cohort

While there were some mixed views from stakeholders on whether the list of priority equity cohorts should be expanded, there was strong support for the addition of students in out-of-home care (OOHC) due to the barriers they experience in education. For example, submissions from Berry Street, the National Catholic Education Commission, Save the Children Australia and 54 Reasons, and the University of Tasmania recommended including students in OOHC as a priority equity cohort.

There is significant evidence of educational gaps for students in OOHC. The Productivity Commission recommended including students in OOHC as a priority equity cohort, reflecting the significant barriers for students in OOHC to attending and engaging in school, and gaps in achievement outcomes.³¹³ A few submissions also pointed to the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare's 2015 analysis of NAPLAN data linked with child protection data. In this analysis, students in OOHC had consistently and considerably lower rates of achieving National Minimum Standards in NAPLAN than all students, ranging from 13 to 39 per cent lower on average across domains and year levels.³¹⁴

The Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study in NSW, the first large-scale longitudinal study in Australia, also provides evidence of the educational disadvantage experienced by students in OOHC. Participation in NAPLAN was lower for students in OOHC than other students, and those students who could be matched in NAPLAN scored substantially lower on average than all children in NSW.³¹⁵ One of the key findings of this study was that wellbeing was directly related to educational engagement and performance. Students in OOHC who experienced clinical symptoms or difficulties getting on with other students scored significantly

lower on engagement and were at risk of receiving poorer grades and more suspensions and exclusions.³¹⁶ The connection between wellbeing, engagement, and learning outcomes is further explored in Chapter 3.

There was also recognition that students in OOHC are more likely to face compounding disadvantage and barriers to learning. First Nations children are much more likely to be represented in the child protection system, and the submission from the University of Tasmania noted that this is a contributing factor in the achievement and attainment gaps for First Nations students. In 2022, the rate of First Nations children aged from birth to 17 years in OOHC was almost 12 times the rate of non-First Nations children.³¹⁷ The submission from Berry Street highlighted the negative impact of trauma on students in OOHC. While trauma is not a disability, it can be detrimental to behaviour, wellbeing and engagement. In addition, the likelihood of frequent moves and changes in support outside of school can delay identification of disabilities which require specialist support or reasonable educational adjustments.

Other stakeholders felt that the addition of priority equity cohorts may result in greater segregation or weaken the emphasis on assessing all students based on their needs. Many of the recommended reforms in this report, including the MTSS model, emphasise the need to assess all students as individuals and respond with tiered and targeted support, regardless of whether the student is from a priority equity cohort.

The Panel believe that including students in OOHC as a priority equity cohort would be an important recognition that many of those students require greater investment and support so they can engage with and finish school. Governments should consider including students in OOHC as a priority equity cohort in the next Agreement to bolster the resources at the school-level to support them. Data should also be collected on students in OOHC to better understand their experiences of the education system and inform targeted policies and programs (see Chapter 5 for further discussion of this data gap).

FINDING 11

Governments should consider including students living in out-of-home care as a priority equity cohort in the next Agreement, noting the recommendation to revise the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia to include this cohort (see Recommendation 5C).

2.2.8 Supporting schools with flexible approaches to teaching and managing individual student needs, and offering the full range of the curriculum and programs, would lead to greater educational equity

Alternative teaching and delivery models have been found to be effective ways to improve socio-economic diversity in schools and better support the learning needs of some students (see Box 8). The 2023 Senate inquiry into the national trend of school refusal recommended that governments and the non-government school sector investigate ways to increase the flexibility of education, including through online learning, distance education, and specialist school settings.³¹⁸ Moreover, in the Review's survey, 40.9 per cent of students nominated 'responding to individual needs, including adjustments' as the top area for governments to invest in.³¹⁹

The Panel heard from stakeholders about different approaches to teaching and learning that have successfully supported students across different equity cohorts, such as special assistance schools and online classes.

Measuring progress of students in special assistance schools

Special assistance schools (also known as curriculum and re-engagement in education (CARE) schools) support students in the government and non-government sectors who are unable or find it difficult to access mainstream secondary education. This includes students experiencing significant disadvantage and disengagement from education – for example, students with mental illness, young parents, and students who are interacting with the justice and social security systems.

The Independent Schools Australia submission stated that the shift to needs-based funding has supported the growth in the number of special assistance schools, which often have larger staffing profiles and use of specialist staff such as youth workers. Hester Hornbrook Academy's submission noted that funding the needs of students with disability through the NCCD supported a multi-disciplinary team to work with each student.

The Panel visited several special assistance schools and saw the holistic approach to learning and wellbeing required to support students to engage with learning and with the curriculum (see Case Study 14). The Victorian Council of Social Service submission outlined the role special assistance schools have in providing wraparound support services to students who have fallen behind and who may require trauma-informed inclusive education and support to develop life skills. For example, Jabiru Community College's submission described supporting students to learn executive functioning and self-care skills.

Case Study 14: Alternative models that work for highly disengaged and disadvantaged students

The Panel's visit to an independent school in the suburbs of a major capital city provided evidence of the important work being done by some alternative models of schooling to serve the needs of students who have disengaged from mainstream schooling, and of the need to ensure the success of these schools can be identified and celebrated.

The school takes a student-led approach to identifying what each individual needs to re-engage with their education and training, and the staff work collaboratively with the students to build the skills and confidence needed to plan each person a pathway to a meaningful future. The students at this school are facing a variety of challenges including substance abuse, homelessness, becoming young parents, mental health concerns, and contact with the justice system, and nearly all have trauma backgrounds.

The school employs a mix of teaching and support staff to ensure a trauma-based approach with a focus on ensuring that the health, housing and early childhood education needs of students are met (the latter on-site) and building positive relationships based on trust and aspiration.

The school offers a variety of learning environments to build capacity for engagement, including a mobile bus-based classroom for students who are unable to be safely on the campus. Students' progress to a classroom where teaching focuses on building core literacy and numeracy skills and on building a sense of success and high expectations for behaviour and engagement. The school also offers facilities that facilitate hands-on, skills-based learning to support students to develop the confidence to gain micro-credentials and TAFE-based qualifications and to pursue further education, training and employment. Staff support students to find pathways into a meaningful future.

We heard from students who said the care and personalised approaches offered by the school were central to their improved outcomes. One student credited the school with 'literally sav[ing] my life – and the life of my little girl. I went from having no support and no future to having a pathway to becoming a nurse so I can help other people'; another said 'I was a "bus boy". You couldn't even get me into the class. I was just filled with rage. But they never lost hope in me. I've got an apprenticeship now. I am a leader'.

The achievements of students in special assistance schools can be hard to measure in standardised tests, which was noted in the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia submission. The Panel considers that measuring different models of success would support students and schools to monitor progress and celebrate achievements. The growth in the number of special assistance schools makes this an important next step for understanding learning gain and wellbeing in students in special assistance schools. The broader decline in school engagement and attendance in recent years may lead to an increase in the number of students and families interested in special assistance schools, who would benefit from understanding key metrics for student progress.

FINDING 12

Governments should consider developing measures that can track key metrics (including outcomes, attendance, engagement, wellbeing and learning progressions) for schools designed to support cohorts with high levels of complex needs (e.g. special assistance schools or curriculum and re-engagement in education (CARE) schools).

Supporting access to online learning approaches can improve access to the full school curriculum and help re-engage students

The Panel also heard of the benefits of providing students access to online classes to enable them to access specialist subjects and teachers, particularly for students in regional, rural and remote areas. Online classes also create opportunities for students to engage directly with teachers and their peers, supporting the wellbeing of students who cannot attend classes in-person.

Students can have limited access to subjects because of geographic distance, small school sizes and workforce challenges. Workforce shortages can be exacerbated in specialist subjects, such as STEM, which can limit subject access, especially as many disadvantaged schools face difficulties filling educator vacancies, despite financial and other incentives to attract and retain staff.³²⁰ Existing avenues available to students to access subjects delivered by teachers online should be further strengthened and made more accessible. Examples are WA's School of Isolated and Distance Education, Queensland's School of the Air, and Victoria's Virtual Learning Network (outlined in Case Study 15).

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA) submission highlighted the success of Aurora College, a virtual selective high school which provides opportunities for gifted and talented students across NSW to access specialist subjects. Students at Aurora College must also be enrolled in an NSW Department of Education school which is classified as rural and remote. ICPA also noted, however, the importance of ensuring students in regional, rural and remote areas have access to high-speed internet and technology in order to access online subjects. In addition, the Regional Education Commission submission noted existing resource-sharing initiatives and virtual education delivery such as programs through university partnerships.

As noted in Chapter 1, there are also a growing number of alternative delivery models where students can attend school online in a full-time capacity, which often attracts students who have become disengaged from their local school. Often these schools provide the flexibility for either full-time attendance or a dual enrolment, where students continue to attend their local school. The demand for alternative models has been increasing, reflecting the fall in attendance and concerns around school refusal.

Internationally, New Zealand's state-run Te Kura school serves almost 30,000 students per year through mostly online delivery of subjects by teachers. Approximately 40 per cent of students are dual-enrolled, so they access subjects through Te Kura which are not available to them at their local school. For full-time students, Te Kura has provided support for students at risk of disengagement from education, and students report higher levels of engagement and achievement at Te Kura than at their former schools.³²¹

Case Study 15: Victoria's Virtual Learning Network improves student access to the curriculum

Victoria's Virtual Learning Network (VVLN) has provided 2,200 students from 120 secondary schools across Victoria with access to specialist subjects not available at their local public school over the past decade. The VVLN is an initiative of Bendigo Senior Secondary College, which has developed online classes for business studies, science and mathematics courses in line with the Victorian Curriculum.

The VVLN incorporates features to ensure students receive the instruction, support and feedback essential to their successful completion of the subject, including:

- Subjects are delivered online using the VVLN Moodle learning management system.
- Students can access their subject at any time, providing flexible timetabling for schools.
- Online lessons are instructional and incorporate resources including video, audio, text, simulations, and high levels of interactivity, monitoring and feedback.
- Students receive individual support through regular online contact with their teachers.
- At least once during the school year VVLN teachers visit each school for face-to-face meetings with students.

Source: Victorian Virtual Learning Network (n.d.) [Victorian Virtual Learning Network](#), Victorian Virtual Learning Network, accessed 27 October 2023.

It is important that governments, school systems and approved authorities work to promote access to hybrid and online learning approaches. This will support students to have greater access and choice in schooling and subject selection, including subjects that will support students to transition to their preferred post-school training or employment. To facilitate delivery of hybrid and online learning, students and schools must have the digital, physical and human resources required to flexibly deliver subjects.

FINDING 13

Governments, school systems and approved authorities should enable and promote access to online and alternative delivery models, particularly for students in regional, rural, remote and low Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage schools, and students at risk of disengagement. This should include strategies to ensure students are aware of the opportunities to access subjects or school delivered online, and that schools have the necessary educational facilities, human resource capability and flexibility to offer and integrate with online and alternative delivery models as far as practicable.

Chapter 3: Improving student wellbeing

Key points:

- Wellbeing and learning outcomes are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Positive mental health and wellbeing is a crucial foundation for broader efforts to lift achievement, engagement and attendance outcomes. Poor learning outcomes can also cause poor mental health and wellbeing at school and beyond.
- Student mental health and wellbeing have declined over recent years, with these declines often more pronounced for certain student cohorts who already face a range of challenges and barriers to learning.
- All levels of government have substantially invested in student mental health and wellbeing, reflecting the shared recognition of its importance and the central role of schools.
- Including a national wellbeing measure in the next Agreement is an important opportunity to develop a more cohesive understanding of national student wellbeing, monitor outcomes and ensure the effectiveness of policy design and intervention programs.
- Schools are a crucial touchpoint for supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, but they need access to appropriate information, training and resources to identify, understand and support students' wellbeing.
- Guidance about effective wellbeing programs will support governments, school systems and approved authorities to prioritise investment in wellbeing resources that are effective and accessible to educators.

3.1 Context

Learning and wellbeing are inextricably linked, making the reported decline in mental health and wellbeing among students a significant area of concern. There is extensive agreement on the importance of mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, their influence on long-term health and on economic and social outcomes, and the crucial role of early intervention, all of which are embedded within national and intergovernmental policy frameworks for mental health.³²² Many submissions pointed to the body of national mental health survey data showing concerning declines in young people's mental health and wellbeing outcomes and alarming increases in suicide rates among people aged 15 to 24.³²³ Poor student mental health and wellbeing is also having significant impacts on teachers, who are at the front line of supporting students in addition to their core responsibilities (discussed in further detail in Chapter 4).

The Productivity Commission proposed that wellbeing be placed on par with student achievement, attainment and engagement as an outcome of the next Agreement.³²⁴ Catholic School Parents Australia's submission suggested that parents are now as concerned about their child's wellbeing as they are about their academic outcomes. Whilst the vast majority of stakeholders agreed on the importance of wellbeing and the need to better support schools, there was considerable variation in views on *how* wellbeing should be incorporated into the next Agreement and the role of national outcomes, targets, and measures. Underlying these differences were concerns about placing onerous expectations on schools to manage issues outside of their control and arising from beyond the school gate, and the appropriate balance between the need for national consistency and the need for local autonomy in supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools.

Developing nationally shared definitions and consistent measures for student wellbeing across Australia is essential to enable better understanding of how student wellbeing is changing over time and how it might be influenced by policy settings and intervention programs. Students in every school deserve to feel included, connected, safe and respected – but these goals can only be achieved if they are measured. A national wellbeing measure should be agreed by all jurisdictions, build on existing data sets to develop comparable data/indicators and inform consistent approaches to implementation to help governments, educators and families to better understand how students are faring.

The *Australian Education Act 2013* requires schools to place high priority on identifying and addressing the needs of school students, including reducing barriers to learning and wellbeing and providing additional support where required.³²⁵ The importance of student wellbeing is also reflected to various degrees across a range of policy and legislative frameworks. Powell and Graham (2017) found that, at the most fundamental level, the efforts of schools to support student wellbeing arise from their legal obligation to provide a basic duty of care and minimise harm. Beyond this, guiding frameworks and policies for student wellbeing are ad hoc and highly variable, including the context in which they occur (e.g. as a standalone focus or in relation to health, safety or learning objectives), their purpose and their implementation.³²⁶

Evidence heard by the Panel was consistent with these findings. Agreement on the importance of schools as a universal touchpoint and their role in prevention, early identification and intervention was consistent across a range of stakeholder groups, as was evidence of the lack of consistency and coordination in understanding, implementing and assessing the effectiveness of wellbeing interventions. The Panel also heard that the underlying drivers of poor wellbeing are highly complex and variable, often overlap, and arise from a combination of external and internal factors, including how schools respond to students who are at high risk of or already experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing. Students from priority equity cohorts or other disadvantaged and marginalised groups are particularly at risk and may be more likely to experience trauma and bullying, including cyber bullying through social media.³²⁷

The nature of the role means educators often help to identify and support students when mental health issues arise in the classroom. Several submissions pointed to the extensive body of research showing that mental health issues predominantly emerge in childhood and adolescence, with 50 per cent emerging before the age of 15 and 75 per cent before the age of 24.³²⁸ Left untreated, poor mental health in childhood can lead to a higher risk of poor outcomes in adulthood, pointing to the importance of early identification and support.³²⁹ For governments, addressing mental health and wellbeing early is likely to be highly cost-effective relative to later interventions.³³⁰ Headspace's submission highlighted that educators have a professional responsibility to foster students' sense of school belonging and are uniquely positioned to notice changes in students' mood and behaviour.

The Review's survey found that most students and parents thought that schools are doing well, with 81.5 per cent of students agreeing or strongly agreeing that their school made them feel welcome.³³¹ However, this figure was notably lower for First Nations students, with 74.9 per cent agreeing that their school made them feel welcome, compared to 82 per cent for non-First Nations students.³³² Stakeholders also noted the body of evidence demonstrating the links between mental health, wellbeing and learning outcomes, including the reciprocal relationship between wellbeing and academic performance,³³³ increased engagement, positive peer relationships and behaviours and a stronger sense of belonging.³³⁴ However, there were a range of views on what the scope of schools' role should be, including the limits of their responsibility versus that of health, community and other allied service providers, as well as the role of families of vulnerable or at-risk students.

All levels of government have substantially invested in a wide range of student mental health and wellbeing resources and programs, reflecting the shared recognition of its importance and the key role of schools. Stakeholders identified several ways to enable schools to better support student wellbeing, including placing trained mental health professionals in schools, improving access to allied health services, upskilling teachers and school staff, and implementing student-driven improvement initiatives. However, the Panel has heard that schools are struggling to navigate an overcrowded space; lack the resources, skills, and guidance needed to identify and implement effective and evidence-based interventions; and need a more clearly defined role. The continued difficulties in accessing necessary services within and outside the school gates amplifies the importance of supporting students and educators by prioritising investment in the resources and services that improve wellbeing and the overarching frameworks needed to support their implementation in schools.

3.2 Key consultation themes and analysis

3.2.1 Many factors are driving increased complexity and contributing to poor mental health and wellbeing among students

As discussed in Chapter 2, student and community expectations of schools and teachers, as well as students themselves, have become increasingly complex. Schools support students with significant variations in attributes, circumstances and backgrounds that influence their baseline ability to engage and thrive within the education system and beyond. The baseline mental health and wellbeing challenges faced by some students can be ameliorated or exacerbated depending on how schools respond.³³⁵

Multiple submissions reiterated the findings of national mental health and wellbeing surveys showing increasing prevalence of poor and declining mental health and wellbeing in children and adolescents. Several also noted increasing rates of self-harm and suicidal ideation, with suicide the leading cause of death among 15- to 24-year-olds.³³⁶

Data indicates that the prevalence of psychological distress in young people has been increasing over the last decade, from 18.6 per cent in 2012 to 26.6 per cent in 2020.³³⁷ Recent events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have further exacerbated mental health and wellbeing concerns among young people, particularly those with pre-existing anxiety or depression.³³⁸ For example, in August 2020, 74 per cent of young people reported worse mental health since the outbreak of COVID-19,³³⁹ and almost three-quarters of students who rated their mental health and wellbeing as poor also reported negative impacts on their education as a result of COVID-19.³⁴⁰ These findings have been confirmed in the most recent National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing summary statistics, showing that 38.8 per cent of people aged 16 to 24 years have experienced a 12-month mental health disorder – 45.5 per cent of females and 32.4 per cent of males in this age group. Prevalence of disorders was also consistently higher for people aged 16 to 24 compared to the general population, including prevalence of anxiety disorders (31.8 per cent versus 17.2 per cent), affective (mood) disorders (13.5 per cent versus 7.5 per cent) and substance use disorders (7.9 per cent versus 3.3 per cent).³⁴¹

The reasons for the increased prevalence of poor mental health and wellbeing are multifaceted. They can be partly attributed to increased awareness and more accurate diagnosis (a trend also observed in increasing rates of students with disability), as well as to a complex interplay of individual, social and structural stresses and vulnerabilities, including the impact of climate change.³⁴² For example, students consider social media as a factor that negatively impacts their wellbeing: 57 per cent of young people believe their mental health is getting worse, with 42 per cent citing social media as the main reason for the decline.³⁴³ Stakeholders also raised concerns about the impact of bullying, including cyber bullying – which has become more prevalent as we transition to increasingly digital lifestyles.

These drivers of poor mental health and wellbeing occur against a background of other, better-known stressors. Childhood and adolescence have long been challenging times for peer relationships and self-esteem. Similarly, academic pressure remains a significant source of stress for students, in particular 'high-stakes assessments' that are used to make decisions about promotion, admission or graduation.³⁴⁴ International evidence shows that these are correlated with increases in depressive and anxiety symptoms. Reported rates of suicide, mental health related hospital presentations and self-harm are also higher during school terms than school holidays.³⁴⁵ Similar results are evident in the Australian context, with National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)³⁴⁶ and Year 12 exams³⁴⁷ both key contributors to high levels of stress and anxiety for students.

There are also contrary views on the drivers of increased rates of poor mental health and wellbeing. Some researchers, such as Foulkes and Andrews, have proposed that 'prevalence inflation', where milder and more transient forms of distress are overinterpreted as mental health problems, is a driver. Foulkes and Andrews further concluded that risks of prevalence inflation should be considered in the design and implementation of mental health interventions, particularly for more susceptible populations such as adolescents.³⁴⁸ Overall, the Panel considers that this risk needs to be balanced against the overwhelming body of evidence on mental health and wellbeing, with the most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data showing that mental health disorders among young people have soared by nearly 50 per cent over the last 15 years.³⁴⁹

It is important to note that the likelihood and consequences of poor mental health and wellbeing are not limited to any specific cohort or stage of schooling. However, students who are developmentally vulnerable or face challenges such as trauma, maltreatment or marginalisation have been shown to be at higher risk of poor mental health and wellbeing, and consequently at higher risk of poor learning, engagement and attainment outcomes.

The Centre for Community Child Health noted that over 20 per cent of children start school as developmentally vulnerable according to the five key domains significant for child development identified in the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), meaning they are already at risk of facing challenges related to learning and school engagement.³⁵⁰ This risk is particularly pronounced for children who did not participate in early childhood education prior to school.³⁵¹

Many students have also experienced trauma, with multiple submissions noting its negative effects on wellbeing, academic and behavioural outcomes, and the need for more trauma-informed approaches to learning. Berry Street's submission outlined that impacts of trauma include significantly lower IQ scores, lower memory and attention capabilities, and negative academic and social-emotional outcomes. Students who have experienced trauma are more likely to receive suspensions and repeat grade levels.³⁵² The Australian Child Maltreatment Study found that over 62 per cent of Australians experienced maltreatment in childhood, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and exposure to domestic violence, highlighting the need for trauma-informed practice within schools.³⁵³

The wellbeing of First Nations students is negatively impacted by racism and a lack of cultural safety, with repeated exposure to racism and racist microaggressions leading to low teacher expectations and disengagement.³⁵⁴ Data from *Footprints in Time: The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children* found that students, families and carers continue to face racism in schools and that experiences of racism were associated with poorer mental health and sleep difficulties for students and families.³⁵⁵

The wellbeing of students with disability is also a key issue. In some cases, a lack of resources and training in identifying and supporting students with disability (whether imputed or diagnosed) mean that adjustments provided by schools can fall short of what students with disability need to engage and learn effectively. This can result in increased levels of stress for students with disability, which can present as disruptive and challenging classroom behaviours. It can also contribute to poor wellbeing outcomes. While legislative and policy settings for student suspensions, exclusions and expulsions vary across jurisdictions, as noted in Chapter 2, evidence indicates that students with disability are consistently overrepresented. For example, available data

on suspension rates in New South Wales,³⁵⁶ Queensland³⁵⁷ and South Australia³⁵⁸ show that the majority of suspended students are also receiving adjustments under the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD). In addition, in some cases data excludes those students in the NCCD category of 'Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice' – meaning that overall suspension rates for students with disability may be underestimated.³⁵⁹ Overall, these trends exacerbate an already high risk of disengagement and poor mental health and wellbeing for students with disability.

Poor mental health and wellbeing is also more pronounced for cohorts not currently included in the NSRA, including students in out-of-home care and students identifying as LGBTQI+. As discussed in Chapter 2, students in out-of-home care face significant barriers to education, poorer learning and engagement outcomes, and substantially poorer mental health and wellbeing. Data for students identifying as LGBTQI+ also consistently shows higher levels of psychological distress, suicidal ideation and attempted suicide relative to the general population.³⁶⁰ There is also variation within the LGBTQI+ community, with trans and gender-diverse young people reporting higher levels of psychological distress, and bisexual people tending towards poorer mental health outcomes than single-gender-attracted people.³⁶¹ Intersectionality also influences mental health and wellbeing for this cohort, with First Nations LGBTQI+ young people facing multiple forms of marginalisation and discrimination and high rates of psychological distress.³⁶²

3.2.2 Measuring student wellbeing nationally would support efforts to ensure students feel included, safe and respected at school

A national measure of wellbeing would support students and educators

The Productivity Commission proposed that student wellbeing should be included as an outcome in the next Agreement, supported by sub-outcomes focused on the development of a new national wellbeing measure. It further noted the potential to develop a new national measure by collecting and collating data from existing data sets held by jurisdictions.

Throughout the Review, the Panel heard widespread support for the need for some sort of monitoring of wellbeing in the next Agreement, but a range of different views on how best to achieve this. Some stakeholders, such as the submission from the Institute for Positive Psychology and Education, supported targets as a means to prioritise and monitor wellbeing at a national level, proposing that they focus on students most in need. The Centre for Community Child Health submission also proposed that a wellbeing focus in the next Agreement be underpinned by measures reflecting key domains of student wellbeing (including belonging, safety and resilience); national targets against the areas of learning, wellbeing and engagement; and the development of a nationally consistent mechanism that enables schools to collect data to inform reporting.

Jurisdictions uniformly supported an increased focus on wellbeing in the next Agreement but were more conditional in their support for a national wellbeing measure. The New South Wales (NSW) Government submission noted that national-level collaboration could facilitate improved wellbeing outcomes at lower cost to individual jurisdictions and their local schools. However, most considered that the case was yet to be made for a national focus – in particular, how a national measure would improve student outcomes and not increase administrative burdens on teachers – and noted the need for significant preparatory work before agreement could be reached. All jurisdictions emphasised the need for any national wellbeing measure to retain relevance to local contexts, needs and circumstances.

The Panel must consider whether the highly contextual nature of wellbeing means that local schools are best equipped to determine how to address these in-school factors, as opposed to a standardised, national implementation approach.

New South Wales Government

The strong preference of those in support of a new national wellbeing measure was that it reflect factors relevant to learning and within schools' ability to influence (such as belonging, safety, cultural safety, engagement and classroom disruption). It should also allow schools and jurisdictions to retain their ability to implement wellbeing initiatives most relevant to their needs.

A consistent area of consensus across all stakeholder groups was that any new national measure for wellbeing must build on existing efforts and be balanced against teacher workloads and school or system-level administration requirements. For example, the Victorian Government proposed the development of a national framework of wellbeing indicators to guide best practice for jurisdictions and school systems in measuring wellbeing and to inform a national evidence base. It also noted that any new national reforms should recognise significant work on wellbeing already underway in states and territories and not constrain early movers and innovators in this space.

The Panel considers that the inclusion of wellbeing as an overarching outcome, and the development of a national wellbeing measure in the next Agreement, would lead to a better alignment of existing efforts to lift student wellbeing. Measuring wellbeing is a way to unlock and enhance the efforts of all governments, which will in turn support a range of other learning outcomes. Measurement would also support evaluation and decision-making at the national, system and school levels.

However, the Panel sees *targets* for student wellbeing as premature given the current absence of a cohesive national framework for student wellbeing. Setting targets is also not currently possible for the next Agreement given current data limitations, including the lack of baseline data, national consistency, and understanding of what appropriate targets could be.

The wellbeing measure should be national and focused on in-school factors

Governments should consider the development a national measure of student wellbeing in the context of the next Agreement. A national measure should:

- collect and collate nationally consistent data on student wellbeing to allow for national tracking of outcomes
- include appropriate de-identification and other controls to protect student privacy while also allowing analysis by cohort, sector and other variables
- deepen understanding of the factors driving student wellbeing and of its influence on other learning indicators (e.g. literacy, numeracy, attendance, engagement)
- improve policy and planning to support student wellbeing, particularly for the most vulnerable.

A strong theme across all stakeholder groups was that wellbeing measures in the next Agreement should focus on the in-school factors that can be directly influenced by schools, rather than subjective measures, which are strongly influenced by outside factors and which schools have limited ability to address. Across the submissions, the key wellbeing domains raised were belonging and connectedness, safety, cultural safety, socio-emotional skills, physical health, and engagement (including cognitive engagement). Cultural safety was consistently raised in the context of belonging and connectedness for First Nations students and as part of embedding First Nations cultural capability into mainstream education settings and support programs, including for mental health and wellbeing.

Classroom disruption was also raised, particularly in relation to socio-emotional development and the need to better equip teachers with training to manage disrespectful behaviours and classroom disruption. As discussed in Chapter 2, classroom disruption can arise from trauma, disability, or poor mental health and wellbeing. Classroom disruption, particularly physical and verbal aggression, property destruction and sexualised behaviour, also has significant impacts on the wellbeing of other students and teachers.

All schools have obligations under Commonwealth and state-based legislation, as well as a common law duty of care, to protect their students and staff. The Panel recognises that this will sometimes necessitate schools placing limitations on the rights of some students; it also recognises the difficulties schools have in balancing their inclusion and duty of care obligations. Nonetheless, as discussed above and in Chapter 2, it is important that the approaches used to address classroom disruption are reasonable, proportionate and non-discriminatory. There is also a need for governments and systems to support schools by providing them with the resources and tools to recognise the role environmental factors play. For example, the noise and disruption of mainstream classrooms are a common disruptor of behaviour for some students with disability, particularly those with autism spectrum disorder, who are also less likely to be able to self-regulate.³⁶³ This means that managing classroom disruption is not just about managing undesirable behaviours but also about providing inclusive environments to help minimise occurrences of these behaviours. Consequently, in developing a domain to measure classroom disruption as part of a national wellbeing measure, it will be important that it is designed in a way that enables linkage with other wellbeing domains (such as safety and cognitive engagement). It is also important that it is designed to enable linkage to broader data on disability and any potential new data set on exclusions or suspensions, both discussed in Chapter 5.

Another potential long-term benefit of a national wellbeing measure is supporting improved capacity to assess student engagement. As discussed in Chapter 1, student engagement is a difficult concept to measure, with attendance used as a proxy in national reporting. The key wellbeing domains identified in the submissions, although developed for the purposes of assessing student wellbeing, could also support the development of meaningful measures of student engagement to inform national reporting.

The majority of stakeholders also supported leveraging existing data to develop a national wellbeing measure to avoid duplication of effort. However, gaps and incompatibilities in existing data collections will require further work and resourcing. Noting that the Australian Government was planning to develop a national wellbeing measure,³⁶⁴ the next Agreement presents an opportunity to do so in collaboration with jurisdictions and in a way that complements and supports existing efforts. The Panel's view is that this is achievable based on the demonstrated appetite for data linkage and national collaboration; research identifying wellbeing domains common to all jurisdictions;³⁶⁵ and ongoing projects that serve as precedents (Box 9).

Box 9: Research and collaboration on national wellbeing measures

National Student Wellbeing Project

The National Student Wellbeing Project was an initiative under the current NSRA National Policy Initiative C(iii), Improving national data quality, endorsed by Education Ministers in June 2020 and led by the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Education Directorate. The project sought to develop a national approach to understanding student wellbeing and measurement tools that could support decision-making at both the system and school levels. The project was completed at the end of 2021 and recommended to Ministers that all jurisdictions and non-government schools prioritise the measurement of student wellbeing.

Australian Research Data Commons

South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT have partnered with the University of South Australia to create a data set linking comparable components of their state-based student wellbeing and engagement surveys with demographic, attendance and NAPLAN data.

National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031

Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031 is a 10-year national strategy to reduce rates of child abuse and neglect through national collaboration across the systems and services supporting vulnerable and/or disadvantaged children and families. A key component of the National Framework is the Child Protection National Minimum Data Set (CPNMD), managed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The CPNMD was developed by the Australian, state and territory governments to enable a shared approach to the collection, sharing and use of child protection data and comparability across jurisdictions.

The CPNMD includes data-linking projects that have improved governments' understanding of the experiences of children in out-of-home care and in relation to other systems (such as education, justice and health) and improved reporting on National Framework indicators. Overall, the CPNMD has allowed for a more comprehensive and accurate picture of children in the child protection system and increased capacity to identify and prioritise vulnerable groups in need of additional support.

Sources: Australian Education Research Organisation Submission, Appendix 2, pp. 10, 14; Productivity Commission (2022) [Review of the National School Reform Agreement: Study Report](#), Australian Government, p. 150, accessed 27 October 2023; Australian Research Data Commons (ARDC) (n.d.) [Leveraging Data to Support Young People's Education and Wellbeing](#), ARDC, accessed 27 October 2023; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2022) [National framework for protecting Australia's children indicators – Web report](#), AIHW, accessed 27 October 2023; Department of Social Services (DSS) (2021) [Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031](#), Australian Government, pp. 8, 32, accessed 27 October 2023.

Consistent with the principle of leveraging existing efforts, South Australia's Wellbeing and Engagement Collection (WEC) provides a strong example of what a national wellbeing measure could look like, which includes most of the in-school domains identified throughout the Review (see Box 10). The WEC does not cover classroom disruption and cultural safety. The Panel considers that the WEC could be modified to include these (or similar) measures. For cultural safety, there are instruments that could be adopted, but the Panel considers that this work should be led by First Nations education, wellbeing and data experts.

Box 10: South Australia's Wellbeing and Engagement Collection

The South Australian Government's Wellbeing and Engagement Collection (WEC) is a survey that collects information from students in Years 4 to 12 about non-academic factors relevant to learning and participation. The results of the survey provide schools, the community and government with insight into what needs to occur to ensure students are provided with the resources and opportunities to reach their full potential. Schools receive a de-identified electronic report based on the survey findings, and the results published in a way that prevents comparisons across schools, classrooms or students.

While the WEC is not mandatory for schools to complete, the participation rate is around 90 per cent of South Australia's public-sector schools. It is designed to take 25 to 45 minutes to complete during school. The survey asks how students think and feel about their experiences inside and outside of school, including questions related to areas of development linked to wellbeing, health and academic achievement. The four key areas and associated domains assessed through the survey are:

- **Emotional wellbeing** – Domains of happiness, optimism, satisfaction with life, emotional regulation, sadness, and worries. For Years 10 to 12, the survey includes additional domains of distress and resilience.
- **Engagement with school** – Domains of important adults at school, connectedness at school, emotional engagement with teachers, school climate, school belonging, peer belonging, friendship intimacy, physical bullying, verbal bullying, social bullying and cyber bullying.
- **Engagement in learning** – Domains of perseverance, cognitive engagement and academic self-concept. For Years 10 to 12, the survey includes the additional domains of learning practices, meeting expectations, expectations for success, motivation to achieve goals, future goal planning, feelings about the future, and feelings about after-school study or work.
- **Health and wellbeing out of school** – Domains of overall health, nutrition, sleep, music and arts, sports and organised activities. For Years 10 to 12, the survey includes the additional domain of feelings about your body.

Sources: Department for Education (2023) [Wellbeing and engagement collection overview and results](#), Department for Education, South Australian Government, accessed 27 October 2023; Department for Education (2022) [Key areas of the wellbeing and engagement collection survey](#), Department for Education, South Australian Government, accessed 27 October 2023; Telethon Kids Institute (n.d.) [The Wellbeing and Engagement Collection \(WEC\): promoting the importance of students' wellbeing and mental health in schools](#), Telethon Kids Institute, accessed 27 October 2023.

National measurement of student wellbeing could be achieved through use of a composite index or an equating process to ensure data is comparable across jurisdictions and can build a national picture of student wellbeing. A key benefit of these kinds of tools is that they provide a way to identify general patterns across different sets of indicators. Consequently, they would provide a way to develop a national measure while also retaining autonomy for government, school systems, approved authorities and schools and their ability to tailor wellbeing interventions to local circumstances. In addition, these tools provide a mechanism for leveraging wellbeing initiatives already underway and existing data. In the longer term, there could also be scope to link a national wellbeing measure with other data sets such as the Child Protection National Minimum Data Set and (once implemented) a national Unique Student Identifier. Including the development of a national wellbeing measure in the context of the next Agreement would provide an opportunity for national collaboration and help achieve these longer-term objectives.

In making this recommendation, the Panel has carefully considered the concerns raised by stakeholders about national wellbeing objectives, targets and measures. The Panel is confident that these concerns can be addressed and managed by leveraging the significant work undertaken to date, as well as through robust governance and custodial arrangements to ensure a national wellbeing measure meets privacy and data protection requirements and minimises reporting burdens for schools, teachers and systems. Governance arrangements will also need to ensure that the tracking of student wellbeing takes place at an aggregated, systems level to prevent the risk of school-level comparisons. The Panel considers time is required to develop and refine a national measure but that all jurisdictions should be contributing data to the measure as soon as practicable.

RECOMMENDATION 3A

To support improvements in wellbeing, the Panel recommends that governments, school systems and approved authorities work together to develop a national measure of student wellbeing by the end of 2028, which:

- i. collects, aggregates and reports on consistent and comparable national wellbeing data covering (at minimum) the in-school domains of belonging, safety, cultural safety, engagement and classroom disruption, in a way that builds on jurisdictions' existing data collection where available
- ii. provides a structured framework to support the efforts of schools, systems, researchers and governments to evaluate the impact of policies, inform policy design, and improve accountability and reporting at the school, system and national levels
- iii. enables disaggregation of data by priority equity cohort and school type, intersectional and longitudinal analyses, and linkage to other data sets relevant to student wellbeing.

3.2.3 Schools play a key role in supporting student wellbeing but educators need more clearly defined boundaries and the appropriate resources and skills

The Panel's view is governments, school systems and approved authorities have a role in ensuring that schools, school leaders and educators have the tools they need to ensure students are safe and included at school. Students and educators should be supported by prioritising investment in evidence-based resources proven to improve wellbeing. In the Review's survey, 84.1 per cent of educators considered student mental health and wellbeing as part of their duty of care as an educator, while 99.1 per cent of educators considered it important to some extent to support student mental health and wellbeing as part of their role.³⁶⁶ The survey also found that 80.2 per cent of students indicated that support was available from their teachers, with 49.2 per cent indicating they had received wellbeing support from teachers in the previous year.³⁶⁷

In response to the question posed by the Panel of what good mental health and wellbeing looks like in schools, a common theme was the preventative role of schools and providing students with skills related to learning outcomes such as perseverance through difficult tasks, social resilience, and learning to work well with others. Headspace's submission noted that mental health and wellbeing literacy for students and their families during the school years provides tools and strategies that young people can later draw upon when they experience challenging life events and transitions. Orygen's submission also viewed the development of social and emotional resilience as an essential element of student education and preparation for adulthood. Others saw the role of schools as creating a culture in which students feel confident in seeking support from school staff, teachers are empowered and equipped to guide students, and school staff are able to refer students to appropriate professional support services (whether on or off site).

Multiple submissions also reiterated that the mental health and wellbeing space is crowded and difficult to navigate. The call was not for more to be done, but for streamlining, guidance and information on the most effective use of what is already available. The Panel consistently heard that schools and educators need assistance to select evidence-based and effective programs, resources and interventions, including guidance on best-practice implementation and evaluating outcomes.³⁶⁸ The impact of high-quality interventions on long term wellbeing outcomes was evident from a school visit in South Australia (see Case Study 16).

Case Study 16: Wellbeing Supports and School Leadership

The Panel visited a metropolitan government primary school, located in an area of socio-economic disadvantage (including emergency accommodation for families) and with a high proportion of students experiencing emotional, social and behavioural difficulties and at risk of disengagement.

The school's principal told the Panel that the school had been doing its best to address the various needs of students, for example, running a breakfast program to encourage students to attend school as well as engage in learning. The school also applied a model that aimed to support children to reach age-appropriate wellbeing and academic development milestones using a prescribed framework to identify and understand the strengths and development needs of each child, then provide targeted teaching to accelerate learning and remove 'gaps'. For children with complex barriers to learning, the model includes more intensive, smaller group work for approximately 50 per cent of the child's time (called a nurture group). The model can be customised and implemented to reflect a school's local context.

The school's principal spoke highly of the positive impact of their participation in the project. Prior to the trial, the school had experienced regular incidents of violence from students. Although violent incidents still occurred, they were less frequent and less severe. Teachers also felt more confident in addressing behaviours and in their ability to assist students with more complex needs, including those living in emergency accommodation.

Implementing evidence-based policies and programs that are appropriate for their audience is critical to ensure that school-based wellbeing interventions will be effective and not cause unintended harm, particularly for vulnerable students. For example, the Centre for Disability Research and Policy submission noted that some school-based mental health programs focus on developing social skills for neurodivergent children being bullied rather than teaching neurotypical students not to bully, which can informally sanction bullying of students with disability.³⁶⁹ Research has also found that dominant approaches to individual subjective wellbeing can tend to shift responsibility to individuals, detracting attention from deep-rooted structural inequalities and social determinants of wellbeing³⁷⁰ that are more prevalent for students from priority equity cohorts.

The effectiveness of some approaches will also vary depending on how they are implemented, as shown by the mixed wellbeing outcomes from the use of mindfulness in schools. For example, the University of Oxford's MYRIAD Project assessed the effectiveness of teaching students mindfulness to help them manage stress. It found that mindfulness had a negligible impact on preventing mental health problems or promoting wellbeing, and in some cases was harmful (see Case Study 17). This points to the need to carefully assess wellbeing interventions that are applied to all students, as well as the need to balance universal approaches with interventions that are targeted, nuanced and responsive to the needs of different student cohorts.

Case Study 17: The MYRIAD Project evaluation of school-based mindfulness

The MYRIAD Project, led by the University of Oxford in the UK, assessed the effectiveness, costs, accessibility and scalability of school-based mindfulness interventions to support the mental health and wellbeing of adolescents. The trial involved several studies and more than 28,000 children, 100 schools, 650 teachers and 20 million individual points of data.

The trial found limited evidence that universal mindfulness interventions for early teens were more effective than the usual social and emotional approaches in preventing mental health problems or promoting wellbeing. In addition, some students who participated in the trial reported feeling worse, particularly those with underlying mental health difficulties.

The project found that universal mindfulness training in school – while an inexpensive intervention to implement – has limited effectiveness in improving young people’s mental health or wellbeing when implemented across schools. Overall, the results caution against implementing universal, one-size-fits-all interventions in schools to support student mental health and wellbeing.

Sources: *The MYRIAD Project (2023) [What did we find?](#), University of Oxford, accessed 27 October 2023; Henebery B (2022) [Deep dive: mindfulness education could be doing more harm than good](#), University of Melbourne, School of Psychological Sciences, accessed 27 October 2023.*

Making it easier for schools and teachers to understand which wellbeing interventions are most effective would reduce the pressure on educators to support students (for which they are often not resourced) and minimise the risks of ineffective or harmful practices being implemented in schools. The Panel considers that the best way to achieve this is to accelerate the existing commitment to develop national guidelines for the accreditation of mental health and wellbeing programs delivered in schools. Once developed, national guidelines would support schools in choosing mental health and wellbeing programs from a range of high quality, evidence based and accredited options, retaining flexibility for schools to choose programs relevant to their needs and circumstances.

FINDING 14

The Australian Government should prioritise the development of national guidelines for the accreditation of mental health and wellbeing programs delivered in schools, as announced in the March 2022–23 Budget.

First Nations approaches to social and emotional wellbeing could improve outcomes for all students

Traditional Western approaches to mental health and wellbeing are derived from a Western medical model, which sees mental health from an illness or clinical perspective and focuses on an individual's levels of functioning in their environment.³⁷¹ In contrast, First Nations cultures have, for thousands of years, seen 'health' as grounded in social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB). This more holistic concept encompasses physical health, mental health, being strong in culture and community, spirituality and connectedness to Country, and centres individual wellbeing in the context of the wellbeing of families and communities. SEWB models also take into account the historical, political, social and cultural determinants of health.³⁷²

The cultural validity of taking a SEWB approach to supporting First Nations student wellbeing is well supported by evidence and is advocated by the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing, 2017–2023.³⁷³ Education is also within the scope of the Agreement to Implement the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Partnership, being co-led by the Department of Health and Aged Care and Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia.³⁷⁴ The Stronger Smarter Institute's submission advocated for SEWB approaches to be embedded as part of school culture, emphasising that any implementation of SEWB models should centre on cultural identity, establish high expectations and recognise local context.

Broader adoption of First Nations approaches to wellbeing would help ensure that schools are able to provide a more culturally responsive school environment for First Nations students. It would also deliver benefits to all learners, by aligning with existing national objectives and commitments. For example, the holistic approach enshrined in SEWB models aligns with the eight principles of the National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which underpin the four focus areas of the strategy, including education.³⁷⁵ The Panel also heard directly from stakeholders, including the Stronger Smarter Institute and the Black Dog Institute, on the value of providing First Nations SEWB models to all students.

Support should also be provided to schools in linking students to clinical services, to ensure these are both clinically and culturally validated. The Panel notes the work of the Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention in reviewing standard mental health assessment and SEWB assessment instruments (including those developed by and for First Nations peoples) and providing advice on their cultural validity.³⁷⁶

Policies are effective when implemented at the system and whole-school levels

The diversity and complex needs of students mean that many schools are struggling to implement and assess the outcomes of wellbeing interventions. It is important that schools have choice and can access tailored interventions relevant to their circumstances; however, the current piecemeal approach is inefficient and overwhelming. The Panel's view is that providing schools with the resources and guidance needed to improve student wellbeing should form part of a broader, systems-level framework that articulates a clearly defined role for schools relative to other sectors, and sets clear expectations on implementing structured, whole-school approaches to wellbeing. Expectations for schools should include addressing all aspects of mental health and wellbeing, including culture and behaviour, racism and other forms of discrimination, and reducing bullying and harassment. However, governments and systems have the responsibility to support schools in tackling this task.

A clearly defined role for schools should be a crucial element of all national and system-level frameworks for student wellbeing. Several stakeholders proposed that the primary responsibility of schools is *preventative* – that is, their duty of care/key responsibility centres around the creation of safe, secure environments where everyone can reach their learning potential (i.e., environments that do not harm mental health or wellbeing). Beyond this, the responsibility of schools encompasses early intervention and targeted support, and referral pathways for at-risk students. A number of stakeholders³⁷⁷ proposed tiered or multi-level models as a way of providing a more structured approach to the delivery of wellbeing interventions in schools. For example, the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) model discussed in Chapter 1 includes screening and monitoring of

students' wellbeing as one of its core components. Several submissions also raised the Victorian Government's Schools Mental Health Menu and Fund as an example of a multi-level approach that provides guidance to schools on different levels of mental health and wellbeing supports depending on students' needs.³⁷⁸ Broadly, multi-level approaches to wellbeing include:

- **Level one:** *Preventative interventions*
 - Promotion of universal positive mental health, supportive and respectful school culture, positive behaviour, evidence-based wellbeing education and programs.
- **Level two:** *Targeted support*
 - Early identification and intervention and cohort-specific (targeted) support.
- **Level three:** *Intensive support*
 - Provision of or access to referral pathways for professional support services for high-risk students.

Whilst noting that standalone mental health and wellbeing programs can be useful, several submissions also noted that a multi-level approach would address the problem of short-term funding and one-off programs. A multi-level framework for student wellbeing would provide the scaffolding for ongoing, sustained improvements in student mental health and wellbeing. Like the MTSS, it would be proactive rather than reactive and support improved outcomes for students with poor mental health and wellbeing in the context of improving outcomes for all students. It would also align with the proposal to develop a national wellbeing measure, consistent with the emphasis on data-based decision making, monitoring and evaluation inherent in the MTSS model.³⁷⁹ A tiered approach does not preclude the use of standalone interventions but enables schools to be more selective in how they allocate their resources, potentially leading to cost savings. At the system level, a multi-tiered approach would also enable economies of scale across schools and systems and, by increasing the efficiency of schools' resources, enable greater scope for co-design and student-led approaches, discussed further in section 4.2.4.

Making it easier to access resources and training about what works will also reduce the pressure on educators to discover effective approaches to supporting students by themselves.

Professional development is essential for supporting educators to enhance wellbeing in schools

A strong theme throughout the review was the need for professional development to support school leaders and educators to identify, understand and implement appropriate adjustments for students at risk of or experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing, and to support them to promote safe, inclusive and supportive school environments. Further professional development should be implemented as part of a whole-school and multi-tiered approaches and underpinned by strategic, system level support and guidance.

In particular, teachers are not provided with adequate training to manage complex issues like the provision of trauma-informed care and the needs of priority cohort groups, including the impact of racism on First Nations students. The need to differentiate wellbeing interventions for vulnerable or marginalised students was a common theme throughout the review. Multiple submissions noted the need to increase skills in trauma-informed practice and the need to increase teachers' capacity to recognise learning difficulties and behaviours arising from disability, including through initial teacher education.³⁸⁰ Better training in mental health and wellbeing to support First Nations students, including creating culturally safe environments and culturally appropriate interventions, was also a strong theme. For example, the Partners of the Northern Territory Learning Commission's wellbeing model involves students and teachers collaboratively working on improvement initiatives in schools, with teachers guiding the process rather than taking sole responsibility.³⁸¹ The Stronger Smarter Institute's submission supported the need for wellbeing frameworks to recognise racism as a form of trauma and its significant implications for how school wellbeing programs are framed and funded. The Berry Street Education Model is another example of trauma-informed professional development for teachers (Box 11).

Box 11: Trauma-informed wellbeing resources – Berry Street Education Model

The Berry Street School is a specialist independent school in Victoria for students in Years 7 to 12 that supports vulnerable students with a history of adverse childhood experiences and/or at risk of disengaging from their education. Operating across four campuses (Narre Warren, Morwell, Shepparton and Ballarat), it is the seventh most disadvantaged secondary school in the state. Students at the school require extensive adjustments for their socio-emotional needs, reflected in its high funding rate per student (as per NCCD loadings). Most students also face multiple educational barriers related to their individual circumstances and backgrounds, and a large number have also spent time in, or are currently in, out-of-home care.

The success of the Berry Street School's approach led to the development of the Berry Street Education Model (BSEM), created to address the knowledge gap across all education settings regarding complex trauma and trauma-informed care. The BSEM is an educator-designed and evidence-led framework providing educators with the tools and strategies to create classrooms where all students are ready to learn and able to thrive, and where students are supported to meet their own learning needs. The BSEM empowers educators to:

- better understand the benefits of trauma-informed teaching for child development and ability to learn
- create a supportive and trauma-informed positive education classroom
- bolster student–teacher relationships
- apply positive relational classroom behaviour management strategies
- instil strengths-based practices across the school.

The BSEM is relevant for both mainstream and specialist schools to support better engagement of all students, including those with complex unmet learning needs. To date, more than 48,000 Australian educators and staff across more than 2,000 schools have completed the BSEM foundation course.

Source: Berry Street submission; Berry Street (2023) [About BSEM](#), Berry Street, accessed 27 October 2023.

Mental health and wellbeing are core components of the health and physical education learning area of the Australian Curriculum, which includes components focused on mental health and wellbeing.³⁸² In addition, the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority recently released a 'Curriculum Connections' online resource for teachers to help students develop their understanding of mental health and wellbeing across additional areas of the curriculum, including in the areas of digital technologies, English, humanities and social sciences, and the arts.³⁸³ However, as discussed in Chapter 1, schools have a large degree of flexibility in the tools, resources and programs they are able to use in each curriculum learning area, which can result in inconsistent outcomes.

Consequently, several submissions proposed that existing programs, models and resources be scaled up and/or rolled out nationally to support wellbeing outcomes under the next Agreement. These include several well-established programs focused on students, teacher skills, trauma, and peer-led approaches (see Box 12 for examples).

Box 12: Evidence-based wellbeing programs and resources

Several evidence-based wellbeing programs and resources were identified by stakeholders.

- Trauma-informed practices and teacher training programs:
 - The Berry Street Education Model, which works on the ground with educators and school leaders to build safer, trauma-informed school cultures (see Box 11)
 - The Australian National University's BRACE Framework, which is a whole-school approach to trauma-sensitive practice. The key components are belonging, routine, attachment, capacity and emotion
- Programs and resources aimed at supporting wellbeing and student mental health:
 - The National Student Wellbeing Program, which provides schools with pastoral care and organises volunteer activities within the school community and other extracurricular activities
 - Headspace's Mental Health Education Program, which delivers mental health education workshops in secondary schools
 - The SAFEMinds training program through Headspace, which focuses on early intervention
 - Be You: Beyond Blue's national school-based mental health training program, which promotes a whole learning community approach, supports the wellbeing of educators and equips educators to embed social and emotional learning into their pedagogical approaches
 - Digital wellbeing resources, such as Education Services Australia's Student Wellbeing Hub, which provides quality-assured information and resources.

Leadership is key and dedicated in-school staff have an important role

Multiple submissions also identified the role of leadership and the need for dedicated resources *within* schools, such as coordinators, specialised support staff, and partnerships with local services. Wellbeing coordinators or facilitators can play a key role by connecting students and families with local community health and external support services and providing guidance on navigating the system, a process that many families find daunting.

Several stakeholders, including the Australian Psychological Society and the Australian Education Union, supported the provision of psychologists in schools. In the Review's survey, the majority of educators, parents and students identified the provision of counselling services and psychologists, as well as other health professionals, as one of the most effective ways schools could support student mental health and wellbeing.³⁸⁴ Orygen's submission suggested a model similar to the UK's Trailblazer program, which involved the development of a mental health practitioner workforce and embedding of mental health support teams in schools. Several submissions also raised Victoria's Mental Health in Primary Schools program as a successful model of in-school support in the Australian context (see Case Study 18).

Case Study 18: In-school resources – Mental Health in Primary Schools (Victoria)

The Mental Health in Primary Schools (MHiPS) model was developed by the Centre for Community Child Health at Murdoch Children's Research Institute in partnership with the Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne and the Victorian Department of Education. MHiPS began with a co-designed pilot in 2020 with 10 schools, expanded to an additional 100 schools in 2022, and is currently being scaled up statewide to all government primary and low-fee non-government primary schools in a phased approach to implementation between 2023 and 2026.

MHiPS is based on a Mental Health and Wellbeing Leader (MHWL) model that aims to increase the capacity of schools and educators to address children's mental health and wellbeing. The core elements of the model are upskilling educators, building capacity of school staff, in particular classroom teachers, to identify and support students with mental health concerns in the classroom; support the school to create clear referral pathways internally (within school) and externally (to community services) for students identified as requiring further assessment and intervention; coordinate targeted mental health support for students by working with regional staff, school wellbeing and leadership teams, teachers, parents/carers, and external agencies.

A MHWL is a state government funded, school-based staff member whose role is to implement a whole school approach to mental health and wellbeing. The role involves, but is not limited to, supporting referral pathways for students identified as requiring further assessment and intervention, working with a range of staff both within and outside the school to engage appropriate mental health supports, supporting social and emotional learning, classroom-based adjustments, connecting wellbeing initiatives, and helping schools to utilise existing mental health investments.

Implementation of the MHWL model involves developing a context-specific, whole-school plan for supporting student mental health and wellbeing, and the use of evidence to inform decision-making on interventions to ensure they meet the overarching objectives of the plan and student needs. Embedding the use of evidence in MHiPS at a school level helps inform evidence-informed decision-making about school-based mental health approaches and interventions at a local level.

MHWLs receive training from the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne, and professional development through communities of practice. The statewide expansion is being evaluated by Murdoch Children's Research Institute in partnership with the Department of Education's Performance and Evaluation Division.

The Panel heard that both leadership and whole-school approaches were needed for the success of mental health and wellbeing efforts in schools.³⁸⁵ The Institute for Positive Psychology in Education submission noted that identifying the factors that support teachers' professional development, resilience and wellbeing is positively related to students' experience, including their engagement, motivation and achievement. Consistent with the Panel's findings on multi-level approaches discussed above, the submission also noted it is crucial that efforts to support educators and school leaders are underpinned by system-level support and guidance, and that multi-level approaches to student wellbeing are necessary.³⁸⁶

In the absence of a unified model (for wellbeing), school policy makers lack a strong empirical basis for making strategic decisions about strengthening the wellbeing of teachers and students ... in such a climate, school principals and teachers are faced with eclectic strategies with sparse empirical basis.

Institute for Positive Psychology, Australian Catholic University

While schools have an important role in supporting wellbeing, they must be able to do so in a way that does not detract from the key learning focus of schooling. The inclusion of wellbeing in the next Agreement should be done in a way that supports clear delineation of the role of schools appropriate to their sphere of influence, core purpose and expertise. It should also aim to develop system-level, coordinated frameworks to support schools, including guidance on evidence-based interventions and whole-school implementation approaches. These frameworks should also support a more strategic approach to the allocation of resources to schools, including professional development, support staff, streamlined access to support services and greater cross-portfolio collaboration.

Better access to and linkages with external services are crucial to supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools

As noted in Chapter 2, the acute need to improve service integration was a strong theme throughout the Review. The Panel consistently heard that schools lack access to suitable internal and external resources to support mental health and wellbeing and help students reach their learning potential, including key primary health, disability, social and community services. Better linkages across sectors would provide both government and non-government schools with the ability to refer students to the support they need and significantly reduce the pressure they face to address mental health and wellbeing issues that they are not resourced or qualified to manage.

The need to better leverage partnerships with allied health and social services was noted by multiple stakeholders.³⁸⁷ Supporting these partnerships via the full-service school model, discussed in Chapter 2, was also strongly supported.³⁸⁸ Other stakeholders noted the need for better referral pathways and partnerships between sectors generally – which do not necessarily require these services to be co-located within schools. For example, the Centre for Community Child Health submission proposed a model of funded partnerships between school clusters and Local Health Networks/Primary Health Networks.³⁸⁹ Other stakeholders noted that support for schools could be in the form of other allied supports such as youth workers, social workers or other support staff who act as intermediaries between schools and services, as well as the potential to cluster these services for groups of schools. Overall, the Panel heard that there are many ways to improve these linkages. The crucial element, regardless of the form, is a clear mechanism for all schools to identify, triage and refer when needed.

The scale and complexity of mental health and wellbeing needs of young people can only be effectively addressed by a systems approach which involves schools, services, governments and communities working together

Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia

There are several key challenges in improving schools' access to external services that are outside the scope of this Review, including the impact of workforce shortages in the mental health sector, significant wait times and high unmet need. Australia's population and demand for services continue to increase in the midst of significant shortages across all areas of the mental health workforce, driven by high staff turnover, undersupply of new workers and the relatively high rates of casualisation in the sector.³⁹⁰ Related to this is the lack of mental health support in the public health system. The Panel heard this is a significant barrier to students getting the support they need, particularly for low socio-economic status students who are unable to afford private treatment. Families and young people also find navigating the mental health system daunting and overwhelming, partly due to the lack of consolidated services and the need to access multiple different mental health professionals and systems.

With sufficient training and guidance, school staff can successfully and confidently deliver universal wellbeing education programs and coordinate formal mental health care for those students who require increased levels of support. However, they should not be required to exceed the scope of their role to cover workforce gaps in other sectors.

Orygen

Orygen noted that dedicated and ongoing collaboration between different levels of government, departments and relevant sector representatives is required to support schools in identifying and establishing these links.³⁹¹ As noted in Chapter 2, the need for cross-portfolio collaboration between the education, health and disability sectors has been acknowledged in a number of national agreements and strategies and should also be reflected in the next Agreement. In addition, as outlined in Recommendation 2B the Panel recommends further whole-of-government consideration of how cross-portfolio linkages can be improved to support a range of student outcomes, including mental health and wellbeing.

RECOMMENDATION 3B

The Panel recommends that governments, school systems and approved authorities prioritise investment in evidence-based resources for preventing, identifying, implementing and evaluating wellbeing outcomes in schools, such as:

- i. dedicated in-school functions (e.g. 'wellbeing coordinators') to assist with referrals, support whole-school capability and monitor and evaluate outcomes
- ii. access to professional counselling and psychology services consistent with the needs of individual schools, including via clear referral pathways to affordable and timely services outside of the school gate or the provision of these services within the school
- iii. professional development for educators and school leaders to help identify students at risk, provide appropriate adjustments, and promote safe and inclusive school environments, including a zero-tolerance approach to racism
- iv. system-wide and whole-school policies and frameworks to improve culture and behaviour, address racism and other discrimination, and reduce bullying and harassment.

3.2.4 Student agency and voice are important measures of wellbeing

The Panel considers that a framework for the inclusion of wellbeing in the next Agreement, as discussed above, should implement and expand models to encourage greater student collaboration, agency and voice within schools. Student voice was identified as a way to monitor the implementation of inclusive education practices and students' sense of belonging,³⁹² including via 'inclusion scorecards' to assist with reporting outcomes for vulnerable student populations.³⁹³ In the Review's survey, students identified opportunities to talk and connect with peers as one of the best investments schools could make to support mental health and wellbeing.

Student voice can be a key part of teaching approaches for vulnerable students. The Northern Territory Learning Commission saw student voice as a key element of its pedagogical approach of 'students as partners in their learning'. An evaluation of this approach found that enhanced student voice and agency contributed to improvements in critical outcomes such as writing, reading, growth and inclusion.³⁹⁴ Student voice is also a key component of the Victorian Government's School Mental Health Planning Tool, which was designed to help schools better understand the mental health and wellbeing needs of their students. The tool provides a framework to simplify decision-making for schools in selecting interventions from the Schools Mental Health Menu. It also supports a logical planning process and highlights the importance of student voice informing school planning and approaches.³⁹⁵

The importance of student voice was also evident from the Panel's school visits, particularly at schools in remote and rural areas. The Panel visited schools where student voice and agency were placed at the forefront of education. This included the establishment of student councils and students being taken through and signing agreements on their behaviour and learning goals. In these instances where the voices of students were amplified, staff felt that they were able to effectively communicate with students and address their needs, and that benefits could be seen in engagement and wellbeing, which flowed through to learning outcomes.

FINDING 15

All governments, school systems and approved authorities should look to implement and expand models that build student collaboration, voice and agency at the school and system levels.

Chapter 4: Attracting and retaining teachers

Key points:

- Australia has skilled and committed educators who work in diverse contexts across the country to positively shape the lives of their students. Teaching is a challenging and complex profession requiring broad expertise, deep pedagogical content knowledge, and the ability to manage challenging classroom and school situations.
- Expectations of teachers have extended beyond their core role, and despite teachers' dedication and efforts, these demands are taking a huge toll on the workforce and undermining the sector's ability to attract and retain teachers, with impacts more acute in schools serving regional, rural, remote and disadvantaged students.
- Teachers and school leaders need to be supported to access additional time for planning, collaboration and continuous quality professional development, including mentoring, to keep pace with these expectations.
- Teacher workload is high; therefore reducing workload and building teacher capability can lead to improved teaching impact as well as attracting and retaining teachers.
- Despite competitive starting salaries, teachers do not feel adequately recognised or valued, and better incentives, enhanced career pathways and improved employment conditions are required to attract and retain teachers in the profession.
- The issue of cultural safety and racism in schools needs to be addressed to improve the diversity of the teaching and school leader workforce and better reflect the diversity of the student population.

4.1 Context

Australia has highly knowledgeable and skilled educators and school leaders who are committed to the important role they play in shaping the lives of young people. The Panel visited schools with diverse contexts and needs across Australia and witnessed educators and school leaders dedicated to creating positive and meaningful school experiences for students. There is extensive evidence showing that quality teaching is the most influential in-school factor in lifting student outcomes,³⁹⁶ and the Panel considers that educators and school leaders are our most important asset for achieving the reform objectives outlined in this report.

Whilst quality teaching is the most influential in-school factor in student outcomes, it is important to acknowledge that teachers do not work in isolation. Teachers require effective support and training, a positive working environment that promotes a culture of learning, access to high-quality resources, and supportive partnerships with parents and communities. Teachers also have the challenge of working in the context of workforce shortages which was reiterated to the Panel throughout consultations.

Over the last decade, governments have agreed to and implemented significant reforms to support the teacher workforce and enhance teaching quality. These reforms have assisted in professionalising the workforce, and this is reflected in high graduate salaries³⁹⁷ and the degree of public trust in both the sector (teaching was the highest rated profession in 2023) and its professionals (teachers are consistently in the top 10 of the Ethics Index).³⁹⁸

The core task of teaching requires professional skills such as deep subject and curriculum knowledge, the ability to plan and teach content by applying a range of pedagogical approaches appropriate for each individual student's learning needs, and the ability to assess whether learning gain is occurring at the pace required. Teaching also requires understanding students' social-emotional development and advanced behaviour management skills.

As discussed in the Introduction and Chapters 2 and 3, teachers are managing increasingly complex student needs (including poor mental health and wellbeing, disability, and trauma) to meet their core teaching responsibilities. Teachers are required not only to teach but also to collect data, handle administration, undertake supervision and extra-curricular activities, support student wellbeing, manage behaviour, and continuously communicate with parents.³⁹⁹ The last of these should not be underemphasised. One teacher told the Panel "20 years ago, I would initiate nearly all conversations with parents, and these would be formal discussions I judged were necessary and could prepare for. Now I have 60 families in my pocket [via email and applications], constantly requiring engagement including after hours. It is exhausting."⁴⁰⁰

Despite teaching being a highly rewarding profession, these expectations are undermining the attractiveness of the profession both for people looking to enter it and those already within it. Evidence heard by the Panel was consistent with research findings that these unfavourable working conditions, when balanced against perceived low status and perceived low pay of teachers, were deterrents for many school leavers to enter the profession,⁴⁰¹ driving a decline in initial teacher education (ITE) commencements and graduates.⁴⁰² However, perceptions are not always accurate: the Review's survey confirmed the Ethics Index's finding that educators are held in high public esteem, indicating that parents and students highly value support from teachers and want more investment in teachers.⁴⁰³ In addition, competitive starting salaries and school holidays are relative advantages the profession continues to offer prospective workers.

Retaining teachers who are already in the profession is another challenge. It is estimated that around 25 per cent of teachers intend to leave the profession for reasons other than retirement.⁴⁰⁴ These intended attrition rates are similar to those in other professions such as nursing and midwifery.⁴⁰⁵ In the Review's survey, teachers nominated reduced workloads, support to address classroom disruption, and greater reward and respect as priority reforms to boost retention.⁴⁰⁶ These views were echoed in the Australian Education Union (AEU) submission. This points to retention being one component of a broader teacher supply issue that needs to be addressed.

These attraction and retention issues are compounded by demography: Australia has a growing student population⁴⁰⁷ and an ageing teacher and leadership workforce.⁴⁰⁸ The Panel observed that in some instances teacher shortages were also exacerbated by policy settings which can constrain efficient workforce utilisation, including class size limits, role limits for non-teaching staff, release time, and the freedom of teachers to select their own school and settings around the right of return after leave, which can limit the ability of schools to grant teachers permanency. The Panel also notes that attraction and retention issues are far more acute in the government school sector, particularly in schools where there are higher numbers of students with additional needs, including rural and remote schools and areas with high levels of socio-economic disadvantage.⁴⁰⁹

The Panel acknowledges additional work being undertaken by governments, school systems and approving authorities. As noted throughout this chapter, significant work has gone into attracting and retaining teachers in diverse contexts around the country. This includes the extensive amount of work happening in each jurisdiction and nationally through the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (NTWAP). The NTWAP was agreed by all Education Ministers on 15 December 2022. It sets out a pathway to addressing the national issue of teacher workforce shortages and builds on a range of initiatives already underway in jurisdictions, sectors and individual schools. The NTWAP includes actions to improve teacher supply, strengthen ITE, retain teachers already in the workforce, elevate the teaching profession, and better understand teacher workforce needs. Implementation of the NTWAP is a priority for all governments and systems, and the Panel has focused its recommendations on reforms that build on existing actions.

4.2 Key consultation themes and analysis

4.2.1 Reducing workloads and supporting teachers in teaching would enhance retention

Teacher workload is high, and reducing workload pressures would help attract and retain teachers in the profession

Workload was one of the most significant concerns raised by educators through the consultation process. It was raised in over 70 submissions to the Review and the Review's survey found 80 per cent of educators felt that reducing teacher workloads would help support and retain teachers.⁴¹⁰ Jurisdictions were also cognisant of teacher workload and emphasised in consultations how important it is that reforms avoid unnecessarily adding to workloads. The Panel has taken that to heart in determining the recommendations throughout this report (see Box 13).

The pressure on principals and teachers has never been greater and workload is the single biggest issue that teachers face. The volume and complexity of their work has increased, along with the needs of their students, but the resource and time available to teachers has been continually eroded by the increasing complexity of the job and the entrenched underfunding of Australia's public-school systems over the last decade.

Australian Education Union

These observations are backed by data. Analysis of teacher workloads by different organisations has demonstrated that Australian teachers work longer hours than the average working time for Australians and for teachers internationally. The Australian Teacher Workforce Data reported average working hours for full-time classroom teachers was 53.7 hours per week in 2022, equivalent to more than 15 hours per week above the standard 38-hour working week.⁴¹¹

There are a range of drivers of workload pressures. In the AEU 2023 State of Our Schools survey, 85 per cent of teachers reported excessive administration duties as the main reason for their unsustainable workloads.⁴¹² Teachers also reported increasing student complexity and complex support needs, lack of clarity of effective and evidence-based pedagogy, and lack of support as factors that diminish their capacity to be their best.

Teachers and school leaders have also reported that increasing workloads are affecting their health and wellbeing. The 2022 Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey (the Principal survey) found that a high workload continues to be the most significant stress factor identified by leaders, followed by teacher shortages, which itself contributes to high workloads⁴¹³ (see Case Study 19). Poor teacher mental health and wellbeing not only undermines a teacher's ability to do their role effectively but can also compromise the quality of teaching, including their ability to support student wellbeing and model mental health and self-care.

The Australian Catholic University (ACU) Institute for Positive Psychology and Education highlighted in its submission the importance of principals' and teachers' wellbeing in enabling them to support student outcomes. Moreover, a 2023 meta-analysis found that teachers' wellbeing is significantly associated with the quality of students' wellbeing and student engagement.⁴¹⁴ Research has also shown that higher levels of poor mental health in teachers are associated with poorer student wellbeing and psychological distress.⁴¹⁵ The Panel notes that investment in resources and programs for preventing, identifying, implementing, and evaluating wellbeing outcomes in schools (as per Recommendation 3B), will go some way to reducing workloads and supporting the wellbeing of teachers and students.

Case Study 19: The impact of teacher shortages

At one large regional school, the highly experienced principal described having a 10 per cent vacancy rate at any one time, exacerbated by frequent absences due to health and workload pressures. Classes were often combined or taken by out-of-field teachers due to insufficient staffing, with clear impacts on the quality of teaching occurring in these instances.

Nearly all the staff had been in the profession for fewer than five years, and many needed more intensive support than could be provided to ensure that they learned the pedagogical and classroom management skills they would need to thrive (and remain) in the profession. The complexity of the school saw many staff leaving for less complex schools, resulting in high turnover, creating more pressures for remaining staff and the school leaders.

These staffing issues had a negative impact on the leaders' capacity to improve teaching and learning, which they saw as their biggest challenge to improving student outcomes. These issues were also impacting leadership retention. The principal stated that they were feeling burnt out and felt like they may need to consider leaving the school and the profession earlier than expected.

The workload challenge impacts retention. Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) data shows that intentions to stay in the teaching profession declined between 2020 and 2022, with 35 per cent of classroom teachers in 2022 intending to leave prior to retirement, and those who are leaving intending to remain for shorter periods of time before leaving.⁴¹⁶ In 2022, 92 per cent of classroom teachers who completed the Australian Teacher Workforce Survey cited workload as their main motivation for intending to leave.⁴¹⁷ Consistent data from exit interviews with teacher employees would be valuable in better understanding why teachers have left the profession.

Stakeholders indicated that government investment in additional support staff in the classroom, including increased access to qualified specialist staff (e.g. speech pathologists, psychologists and counsellors) to assist students with additional needs, would make a real difference in reducing teacher workload. In the Review's survey, around 54 per cent of educators identified more specialist classroom support for students as the biggest area for government investment to improve outcomes. This was the most common response, followed closely by funding for more teachers.⁴¹⁸

The Panel notes the coordinated national effort to address workload and teacher shortages through the NTWAP, including specific actions targeted at reducing teacher workload such as the Workload Reduction Fund (Action 12); identifying the most effective use of ITE students, teaching assistants and other non-teaching staff (Action 21); and other commitments which build on work underway to reduce unnecessary teacher workload (Action 13).

However, more could be done to reduce workloads. The Panel has heard consistently from school leaders and educators that additional resources would provide staff with the time and resources to link students with support services where needed and free up teachers to focus on providing quality instruction. For example, staff in schools the Panel visited in North Queensland spoke positively about the Queensland Government's recently introduced Student Wellbeing Package, which provides funding for schools to employ additional wellbeing professionals such as psychologists, guidance officers, social workers and youth workers.⁴¹⁹ Staff noted that these professionals provided dual benefits: reducing pressure on teachers while improving support to students and connection with local communities. These sorts of measures could be considered for more widespread rollout.

Teacher responses to the Review survey also identified support to address classroom disruption, programs to support students with complex needs, and improved mentoring and support for teachers as priorities to improve retention. While professional development (outlined in section 1.2.4) would be critical to delivering this, improving access to mentors is also important.⁴²⁰

Box 13: Panel recommendations to reduce teacher workload

The Panel is acutely aware of the persistent workload challenges faced by teachers and school leaders nationally. Stakeholders have told us through submissions, meetings and school visits that any education reform should seek to reduce the burden on teachers. The Panel considers that many of the actions recommended across the reform directions in this report could reduce workloads while empowering educators to improve student outcomes.

Panel recommendations with workload reduction impacts

Theme	Recommendations
Lifting outcomes for all students	1A, 1C
Achieving equity in schooling	2B, 2D
Improving student wellbeing	3B
Attracting and retaining teachers	4A, 4C, 4D

Improving the uptake and consistency of evidence-based teaching in schools, accompanied by high-quality professional development and curriculum resources for teachers which build on the recommendations of *Strong Beginnings* (Recommendations 1A and 1C), would help address many issues that contribute to teacher and school leader workload. These will also create time for teachers to do the planning and collaboration activities that help them feel supported and effective.

Recommendations to improve equity and student wellbeing (Recommendations 2B, 2D and 3B), once implemented, will similarly free up teachers time to focus on what they do best and ensure they are better supported in their role.

Attracting and retaining more teachers is an urgent national priority and has been a significant focus of this Review. The Panel witnessed the effects of staffing shortages on existing staff, who may need to take on extra classes, out-of-field teaching, additional administration, or recruitment activities to plug staffing gaps. The Panel has made a number of recommendations within this chapter to address this, including greater recognition and reward, more targeted support and mentoring, and better career pathways that recognise teacher expertise and confirm the roles of this workforce.

The Panel acknowledges the work already underway by all jurisdictions to reduce the workload of teachers and school leaders, and encourages governments, school systems and approved authorities to continue these efforts. Reducing the additional burdens on teachers is essential to attracting more suitable people to the profession, and retaining the skilled and passionate teachers we have.

Strong leadership is crucial to improving outcomes, school culture and staff retention

Across the diverse contexts and needs of schools across the country, the Panel witnessed the skill and commitment of school leaders and their passion for creating school environments that support their students and educators. School leaders play a crucial role in establishing a school culture which supports effective teaching and learning, in setting clear direction and priorities, and in managing workload. Developing a supportive and inclusive school culture is critical to improving student wellbeing and learning outcomes and attracting and retaining staff.

Good leaders (principals, deputy principals and leading teachers) are able to provide a consistent vision for their school that meets with community approval, create a harmonious and productive teaching and learning culture, and set up processes that enable everyone to concentrate on teaching and learning without dealing in constant crises.

Albert Park College

School leaders are critical to creating a culture of collaboration by supporting teachers to establish partnerships between schools and within school. Managing workloads to allow sufficient time for peer collaboration can help teachers and school leaders improve professional practices and think collectively about issues and challenges, leading to solutions and innovation in teaching,⁴²¹ and encourage further use of evidence in education.⁴²² This makes teachers more efficient and effective by addressing workload issues while also making staff feel more supported through improved professionalisation.⁴²³ This can in turn improve the status and desirability of the teaching profession. Whilst enhancing individual professional capacity is important, supporting and investing in collaborative professional networks is one of the most effective ways to enhance teacher and school capacity.⁴²⁴

Just like the teachers they manage, school leaders are managing high workloads, which reduces the time they can dedicate to building an effective learning environment. In the Principal survey, school leaders pointed to the sheer quantity of work and lack of time to focus on teaching and learning as their two top stressors. Comments indicating a willingness to leave the profession early also tripled from the 2021 survey.⁴²⁵ School leaders are now responsible for increased financial and regulatory compliance, driving system-level reforms, and regular reporting and assessment. Furthermore, in some jurisdictions, principals in small schools still have full-time teaching loads. Teaching principals have to meet the complex needs of their teaching role while also performing the demanding principal role. Factors such as limited out-of-class time, no executive staff, a small teaching team, isolation and thinly spread advisory staff can make it difficult for teaching principals to function as instructional leaders while also meeting the other requirements of their dual role.⁴²⁶

The Australian Secondary Principals' Association submission raised the issue of the increasing threats of violence that school leaders are exposed to.⁴²⁷ This aligns with the Principal survey findings on increased threats of verbal and physical violence, from both students and parents.⁴²⁸ These challenges affect the health and wellbeing of principals,⁴²⁹ and they would benefit from additional support to help them manage occupational violence safely and effectively.

The Australian Professional Standard for Principals (Principal Standards) and the Leadership Profiles outline the leadership capabilities required at different career stages and across different contexts. School leaders need to continue to develop their expertise in line with the Principal Standards and equip themselves with the capabilities to build an effective learning culture in the school and adapt to the changing demands of their role. Submissions highlighted the need for additional professional development and learning on mental health and wellbeing, and the integration of wellbeing into pedagogical practices to support students' and whole schools' wellbeing.⁴³⁰

It is worth noting that school leaders are diverse and can encompass principals of large schools, teaching principals, deputy principals, senior First Nations educators, and a growing contingent of middle leaders. AITSL estimates suggest that one in 10 members of Australia's teacher workforce hold leadership responsibilities that are distinct from those of main role leaders (principal and deputy principal) and that these teachers typically continue to have classroom responsibilities.⁴³¹ Middle leaders have the most interaction with teaching staff and are therefore most likely to influence teachers' job satisfaction and sense of belonging at school.⁴³² There is increasing recognition of the value of providing strong middle leadership development programs to strengthen their capabilities and adequately equip them to prepare for more advanced leadership roles to build a strong leadership pipeline. The Queensland Government has recognised this and partnered with AITSL to develop professional standards for middle leaders in schools, as outlined in their submission.

The Panel considers that improved access to mentoring, provided by retired leaders or experienced peers, could support school leaders in different and challenging requirements of education leadership. It would be important to ensure that school leaders are supported with adequate time to participate in mentoring programs so that this does not add to their existing workloads.

The Panel recognises the need for school leader professional development to be quality assured. Accordingly, professional development for school leaders should be included in the framework for professional development accreditation outlined in Chapter 1.

FINDING 16

Schools with a low Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) face significant complexities and the leadership of the school is critical to meeting the needs of the students. It is key that leaders have the time, mentoring and support to lead these schools effectively. For example, principals in small, low-ICSEA schools should be enabled to not have a teaching load, noting that the size of the student population at some schools may not make this feasible.

FINDING 17

Collaboration is important for improving professional practice, and systems, where possible, should support time for school leaders and teachers to collaborate both within schools and between schools as appropriate.

4.2.2 Schools need more support to manage complex behaviour and boost the impact of teaching

As noted in previous chapters, there is increasing complexity in the student cohort due to a range of factors. This includes complex student behaviours that are challenging for educators,⁴³³ trauma as a contributor to complex behaviour in classrooms,⁴³⁴ and increasing disruption in Australian school classrooms.⁴³⁵ In the Review's survey, 38.2 per cent of educators selected 'addressing classroom disruption' as an effective investment that governments could make to support and retain teachers (making it the second most effective investment identified by educators).⁴³⁶ Chapter 3 also highlights that classroom disruption should be included as one of the domains that would be assessed as part of a national wellbeing measure. As well as requiring additional support and resources to ensure teachers have the capability to respond to this complexity (see Chapters 1 and 2), this complexity also creates additional workload pressures, beyond those outlined in the previous sections. Some schools have more complexity than others, meaning this increased workload disproportionately impacts teachers in schools with high concentrations of students experiencing disadvantage and complex and diverse needs. This in effect creates additional workload for staff working in these schools, which must be addressed as a matter of urgency to resolve the more acute attraction and retention issues faced by these schools.

Evidence shows that beyond providing practical support to teachers to assist them in creating engaging classrooms, school leaders can support teachers through implementing an evidence-based, whole-school approach to making decisions about interventions through a consistent set of values and guidelines. A whole-school approach may include emphasis on a positive school culture or giving consistent acknowledgement and rewards for good behaviour.⁴³⁷ It is important that these solutions are developed in collaboration with students, to ensure they have a voice.

Research has consistently found that proactive evidence-based approaches, focusing on teaching and reinforcing expected behaviours, are more effective than reactive approaches (which focus on dealing with behavioral issues after they happen).⁴³⁸ Focused classrooms in which teachers have an established system of rules and routines, use explicit teaching, model appropriate behaviour, hold students to high standards, and actively engage students in their learning maximise students' on-task learning time by minimising disruptive behaviour and disengagement.⁴³⁹ This yields dividends in reducing teacher workload and stress.

Systems can support schools to implement evidence-based classroom management practice by delivering professional learning programs and providing additional guidance through school improvement frameworks, policies and processes. For example, the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) is working with teachers to design a suite of resources to support classroom engagement and professional learning for teachers and school leaders. Specialised resources will also be developed for supporting certain groups of students, including First Nations students, students with disability, neurodiverse students, and students experiencing trauma.

The Panel believes that more work can be done to build educator and school leader capability in complex educational settings. A key mechanism for this is high-quality professional development (as discussed in Chapter 1), including whole-school approaches to ensuring practices are trauma informed, and professional development that equips teachers to support students with disability and meet the growing need for educational adjustments (as discussed in Chapter 2).

Further strategies to boost teaching impact should be considered

Boosting the impact of the teaching and school leadership workforce is critical given workforce pressures within schools. Supporting teachers to work effectively may not only assist in addressing workload but also give teachers a high degree of self-efficacy and satisfaction. As outlined previously in this chapter, streamlining administrative tasks, effectively deploying support staff in classrooms, quality assuring curriculum materials, and improving professional development for teachers and school leaders are strategies that can be used to reduce workload for teachers. However, further strategies to boost teaching impact by supporting teachers to work effectively should also be explored.

There is an opportunity for AITSL to conduct further work on increasing the impact of teaching, including how teachers can be best supported to work effectively that considers their individual circumstances and career stage. This work may include defining the roles, responsibilities and core capabilities for roles as outlined in Recommendation 4C. More specialised roles within the teacher workforce may result in greater classroom impact as teachers' skills match more specifically with their core role.⁴⁴⁰ This may also include the effect of industrial relations agreements on classroom impact and flexibility. Ultimately, further work should be supportive of individual teachers to allow flexibility and ensure they have the maximum impact.

RECOMMENDATION 4A

The Panel recommends that governments, school systems and approved authorities commit to further enhance the capability and impact of educators and school leaders by:

- i. addressing workload challenges through relevant reforms outlined in Box 13 with specific strategies to be outlined in bilateral agreements, including timeframes, and reported on publicly
- ii. building education and school leader capability in complex educational settings, such as specialised training focused on managing complex behaviour and trauma-informed practice
- iii. providing universal access to mentoring for teachers and school leaders, and supporting principals with quality professional development (aligned to the Australian Professional Standard for Principals)
- iv. commissioning the Australian Institute for Teachers and School Leaders, in consultation with the Australian Education Research Organisation, to recommend further strategies to boost the impact and quality of the schools workforce to Education Ministers by the end of 2026
- v. continuing to implement the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan.

4.2.3 Efforts to attract and retain teachers must focus on building and supporting a diverse workforce

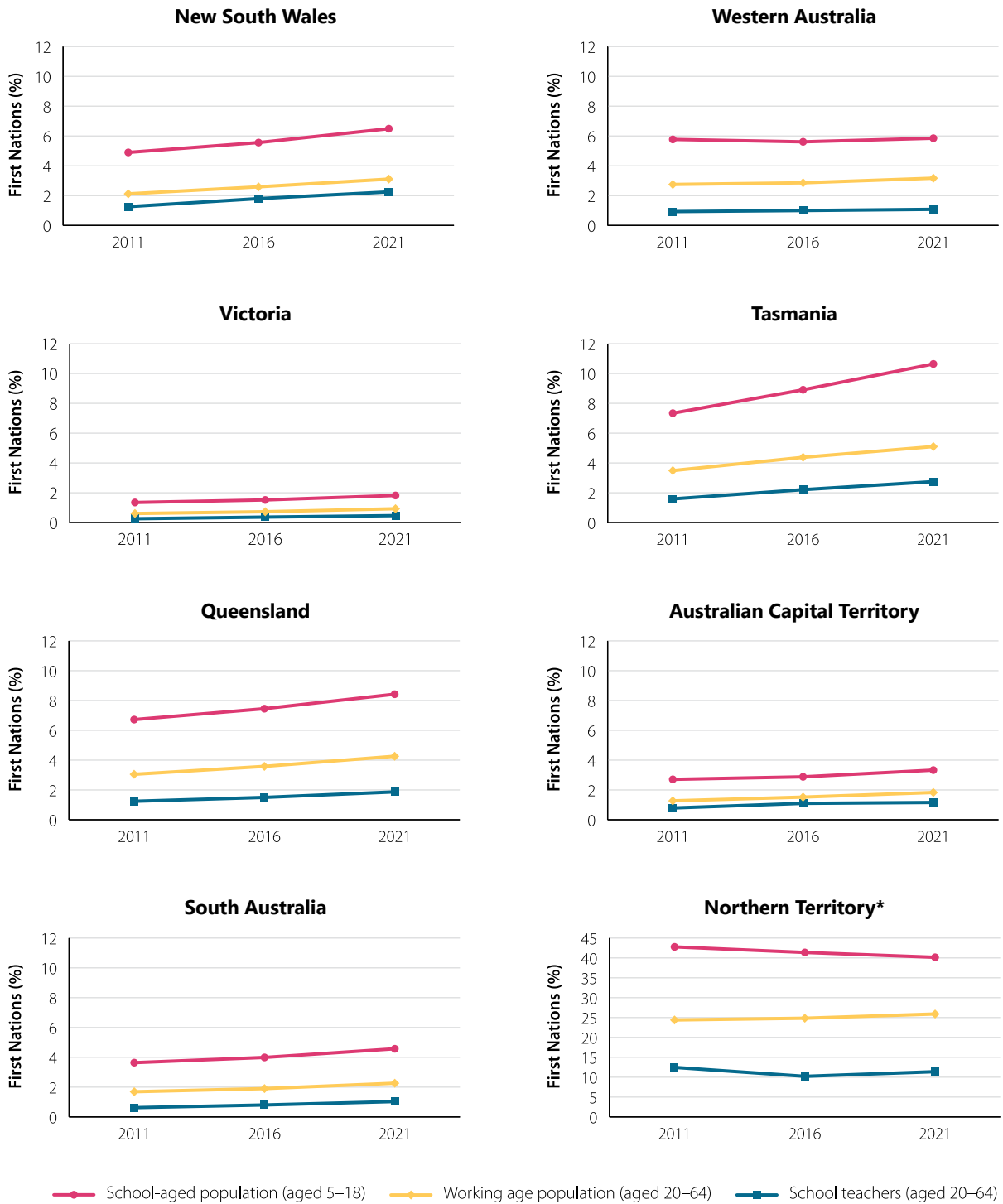
Diversity benefits everyone, including by making teams smarter, increasing innovation and improving performance.⁴⁴¹ A diverse workforce is also better positioned to recognise, develop and foster the skills and capabilities of a diverse student body.⁴⁴²

The University of Melbourne's 2023 *Seeing ourselves at school* report found that the work of teachers from minority groups 'supports student achievement, engagement and retention'. Teachers from minority groups improve outcomes for all students, have higher expectations of minority group students, and can act as role models to minority group students. Teachers from minority groups have also been found to have greater sensitivity to and understanding of cultural issues, and are better at building relationships with students and parents from similar backgrounds and at building connections to minority groups in local communities. Importantly, they also bring multicultural and ableism awareness to all students in their classes.⁴⁴³

Australia is a country which values diversity and promotes a culture of inclusion. Australian schools support these values, providing students of all cultures, religions, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds with the best education possible. However, the teaching workforce does not reflect the diversity of the student population or the community that it serves. Groups currently under-represented in the Australian teaching workforce include First Nations peoples, those from rural and remote areas, people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and people with disability.⁴⁴⁴ There is also a gender disparity in the teaching workforce, with men making up only 22 per cent of the teaching workforce in 2018. This disparity is more evident in primary school (16 per cent) than in secondary school (around 33 per cent).⁴⁴⁵ In 2018, only 31 per cent of school leaders were male.⁴⁴⁶

The current proportion of First Nations teachers has been estimated using 2021 Census data (see Figure 13). The target in Chapter 7 has been set to lift the proportion of First Nations teachers up to the proportion of the First Nations working-age population in each jurisdiction. Nationally, the proportion of First Nations people in the working-age population (20 to 64) was 1.9 times higher than the proportion of First Nations teachers (20 to 64). The proportion of First Nations people in the school-age population (5 to 18) was 3.7 times higher than the proportion of First Nations teachers, reflecting the younger age structure of the First Nations population. Around one-third (33.1 per cent) of First Nations Australians were aged under 15 years in 2021, compared with 18 per cent of non-First Nations people in the same age group.⁴⁴⁷

Figure 13: Proportion of teachers identifying as First Nations, by jurisdiction



*Graph uses alternate scale for Y-axis.

Source: Department of Education internal analysis using Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Tablebuilder Census 2011, 2016 and 2021 Census data.

There are similar concerns about school leader diversity. In 2018, there were approximately 19,712 school leaders working in Australian schools, comprising 6 per cent of all teaching staff. However, the demographics of school leaders do not match the gender or cultural diversity of Australia's student community.⁴⁴⁸

Stakeholders offered strong support for creating a more diverse teacher workforce. It was viewed as an important aspect of strengthening inclusion, increasing student engagement, and improving student outcomes. This was particularly evident in submissions from the Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association (NATSIPA), the Stronger Smarter Institute, the AEU, and the Regional Education Commissioner. Stakeholders also saw improved diversity as critical to addressing workforce shortages and transience.

One of the problems faced by rural and remote schools and schools with high percentages of First Nations students is the transience of the teaching workforce ... [T]here is a strong relationship between the Indigeneity of a school and its rating of undesirability. Negative attitudes toward Indigenous Australians by the majority of white Australians will continue to promote negative attitudes toward teaching prospects in remote Indigenous communities.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association

The value of a diverse workforce was emphasised in rural and remote areas with high proportions of First Nations students, where First Nations educators can apply their cultural knowledge effectively to build strong partnerships with local families and communities.

Teacher and non-teacher workforce diversity is critical to achieving improved outcomes, particularly in regard to the Northern Territory's remote context and proportional levels of vulnerability and disadvantage.

Northern Territory Government

Challenges to creating a diverse workforce need to be addressed

ITE is the major supplier of the teacher pipeline and has been considered by several reviews over the past 10 years. Access to and support to engage in ITE was identified as an issue requiring further development – in consultation with First Nations peoples – by a number of submissions including those of NATSIPA and the Independent Education Union of Australia (IEU).

Some stakeholders contended that previous ITE reforms have had a negative impact on the diversity of the workforce. For example, the introduction of the Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education students (LANTITE) can act as a barrier for some First Nations people and people with a language background other than English to enter ITE courses. There is work underway through the NTWAP to enable prospective ITE students to sit the LANTITE before they begin their studies, with initial assessments of literacy and numeracy in their first year and targeted support if they need it.⁴⁴⁹

Creating a culturally safe work environment was a key challenge identified in consultations. Cultural safety goes beyond stamping out overt racism (though this is critical) to moving to a system where First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) staff are recognised and valued for the cultural expertise and viewpoints they bring. The Centre for Inclusive Education (Queensland University of Technology) submission suggested that a safe and inclusive workplace culture is an essential factor to support workforce diversity where discrimination and exclusion can be common. Their view aligns with those expressed in other submissions that raised concerns about the impact of racism and lack of cultural safety in schools, which impact First Nations teachers and students alike.⁴⁵⁰ People who feel valued and included are more likely to engage.

The ACU submission noted 'grow your own' strategies which have been effective in several countries. These are place-based models that focus on attracting and developing local residents to work in schools within their community while they study and can increase retention after graduation (see Case Study 20). Some jurisdictions have programs that target First Nations teachers. For example, the Northern Territory Government's Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education program provides support for Aboriginal educators through delivery of a targeted suite of professional development opportunities, including non-accredited training; vocational education and training; and tertiary education qualifications.⁴⁵¹

Case Study 20: Attract and develop local residents to teach

One government school the Panel visited is finding success in building its First Nations workforce by drawing from the local community. Of the 20 support staff in the school, eight identify as First Nations people. In addition, the principal noted that six support staff had recently gained a teaching diploma, meaning they were able to teach in the classroom alongside another qualified teacher. This is easing some of the impacts of teaching shortages, as well as empowering First Nations support staff in the classroom.

The school actively seeks to build a pipeline from among its own students by providing viable employment pathways; many students return to work in the school in classroom or administration support following graduation. This deepens the connection between the school and the local community and ensures students have employment options within their community when they finish school. The school is also conscious of the importance of local Indigenous leadership working with the school and local community, and recently employed a First Nations educator with experience of working in government to co-design school policy and programs with students and families.

The school leaders also spoke positively about the approach to teacher recruitment in the regional education office. The existence of a specialised remote education recruitment officer who knows the community well has had a positive impact on the recruitment of more diverse staff, and especially staff who are capable of moving to and integrating with the local community.

Jurisdictions should prioritise improved diversity in the classroom workforce, with a specific focus on First Nations educators. This includes jurisdictions taking action in partnership with First Nations peoples to address racism and cultural safety and reporting publicly on this. The First Nations Education Policy (recommended in Chapter 2), the First Nations Teachers' Strategy (being progressed under the NTWAP) and the nationally consistent indicators for ITE courses, recommended by the Teacher Education Expert Panel, are avenues for this work. The proportion of teachers who are First Nations people should be a target for the next Agreement to drive a focus on increased diversity, which is further discussed in Chapter 7.

The roles, remuneration and pathways of First Nations assistant teachers should be strengthened

First Nations assistant teachers play an integral role in supporting the learning outcomes of students and the broader communities they live in, and the Panel observed the immense value they bring to schools during their visits. First Nations assistant teachers help to provide cultural knowledge, language experience and they work alongside registered teachers in schools with high numbers of First Nations students. First Nations assistant teachers are critical in rural and remote schools because they provide continuity for students due to the transient nature of the teaching workforce, including school leaders, in these locations. First Nations assistant teachers are known by various titles across Australia, including Aboriginal Education Workers, First Nations educators, education support workers, and community education counsellors.⁴⁵²

The variation of titles speaks to the ambiguous nature of these roles. This is particularly apparent in regional and remote locations, where the Panel observed First Nations assistant teachers performing a variety of functions to support the school. While this individual flexibility was appreciated and sometimes needed on the ground, it demonstrates the prevalence of role ambiguity in the system. While students and colleagues often highly value the skills of First Nations assistant teachers and recognise their importance, this can result in highly experienced and capable First Nations assistant teachers performing duties outside the scope of their classification and responsibilities without formal recognition or appropriate financial reward. Both pay and access to housing and other benefits for First Nations assistant teachers are vastly inferior to the pay and benefits for teachers, despite the fact that some First Nations assistant teachers may be doing the work of a fully trained teacher or leader.⁴⁵³ Conversely, First Nations assistant teachers may be undertaking roles they are not qualified or equipped to perform, with potential implications for the quality of the teaching, student outcomes and wellbeing of the individuals involved.

The Panel heard from First Nations assistant teachers that support is required to better define and recognise their roles. Some expressed a desire to see more specialised roles that differentiated between classroom-based roles and student support services roles, though this would need to be done in a way that did not stifle the flexibility often needed on the ground. There was also a call to professionalise the workforce by building progression (of pay and seniority) into the roles and recognising experienced First Nations assistant teachers with formalised leadership roles within schools.

The Panel notes that some jurisdictions are already considering this issue – for example, the Western Australian Government are currently reviewing how to better utilise the knowledge, skills and experience of their Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer positions – and considers that all jurisdictions should do likewise. This should include reviewing the best approach to recognising the specific experience and ongoing leadership these educators provide to students. In some cases, rewards can be provided through increased leadership opportunities or professional development in addition to conventional financial payments and incentives.

Some First Nations assistant teachers are interested in becoming teachers, and some may wish to pursue careers as school principals. NATSIPA's submission proposed greater recognition of prior experience and learning of First Nations assistant teachers pursuing teaching qualifications, and more support including on-Country training, provision of housing and remuneration for practicums and study leave.

The Panel believes that this support could help build the pipeline of First Nations assistant teachers into teaching and should be developed in partnership with First Nations education representatives, as suggested by the IEU submission. This could build on the work under the NTWAP to attract and retain more First Nations teachers, including the investment in teaching of First Nations languages,⁴⁵⁴ while not imposing additional requirements for First Nations people looking to become First Nations assistant teachers.

The Panel's view is that the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers should be updated with clearly defined roles and scaled progression for First Nations assistant teachers, with flexibility for roles to reflect local school contexts. In addition, teacher registration authorities should consider alternative authorisations and pathways to support First Nations assistant teachers to teach language, as occurs in South Australia,

the Northern Territory, and Victoria.⁴⁵⁵ The submission from the Regional Education Commissioner proposed elevating First Nations assistant teachers to partner teachers, to reflect their cultural knowledge and its importance for student learning. This work could draw on the Northern Territory Government's Assistant Teacher Professional Standards, which have five levels of teacher career pathways and aim to raise the status and professionalism of First Nations assistant teachers.⁴⁵⁶ The increasing professionalisation should be accompanied by higher remuneration and extended pay scales to recognise the expertise, qualifications, and capability of First Nations assistant teachers.

RECOMMENDATION 4B

The Panel recommends that governments commit to improving the diversity of the classroom workforce, with a specific focus on First Nations staff, by:

- i. jurisdictions taking actions in partnership with First Nations peoples to address racism and cultural safety
- ii. better recognising the professionalism, value and experience of First Nations assistant teachers by the end of 2026 by:
 - a. recognising First Nations assistant teachers in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers with clearly defined roles and scaled progression that confirm leadership, with flexibility for roles to reflect local school contexts
 - b. ensuring First Nations assistant teachers have remuneration commensurate with their roles, qualifications and capability
 - c. improving access to pathways that accelerate them into teaching, including through teacher regulatory authorities better recognising prior learning – for example, a streamlined two-year initial teacher education offering to recognise the prior knowledge and experiences of Aboriginal Education Officers and enable them to acquire formal qualifications to teach without teacher supervision
- iii. collecting and reporting data on the First Nations teacher workforce, to support measurement against Target 7 (see Recommendation 7B).

4.2.4 Enhanced career pathways and employment conditions will better incentivise, reward and deploy teaching expertise

Teachers are not adequately recognised or rewarded for their roles

Australia has a skilled teaching workforce that is committed to providing students with the best possible education and supporting them to achieve their full potential. Many submissions highlighted the need for higher pay and better working conditions along with more recognition of the professionalism and value of teachers to boost attraction and retention.

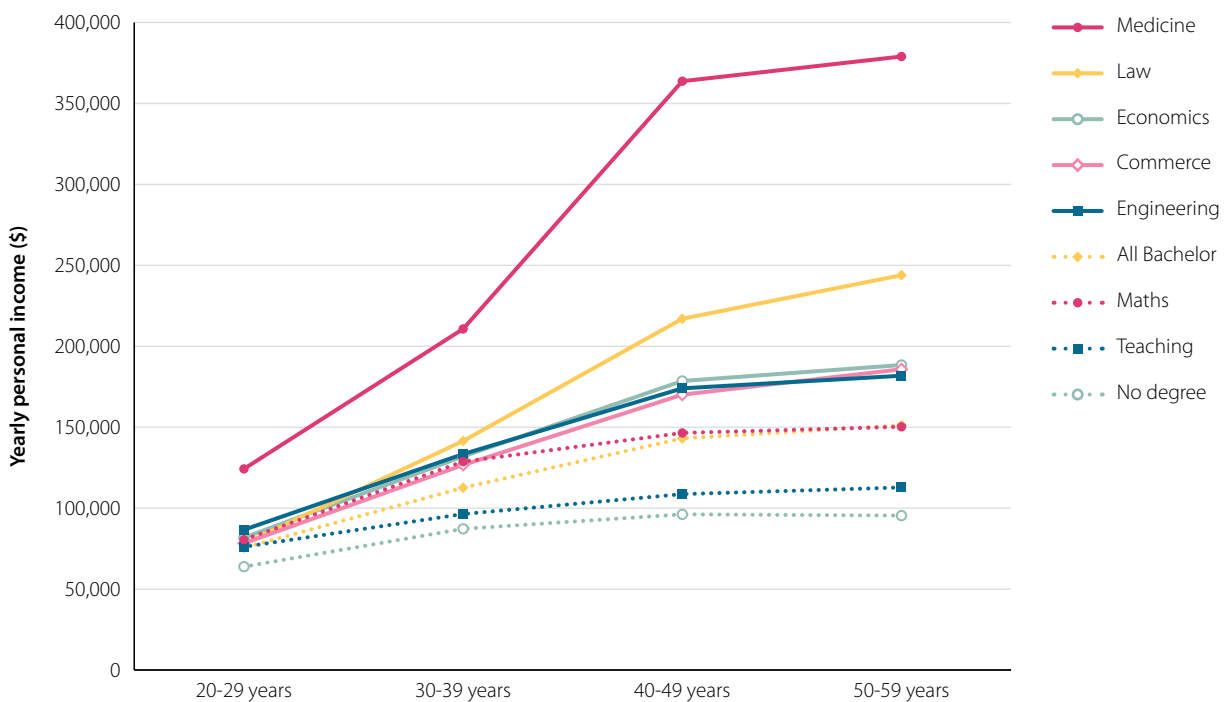
Many submissions argued that teacher pay needs to be higher. The AEU submission suggested that pay no longer reflects the complexities of the role, such as increasing workload demands and skill requirements. Although school systems may provide additional remuneration for teaching positions in regional and remote locations, these additional pay loadings do not necessarily reflect student complexity (which may vary significantly across regional and remote Australia), and there is no loading for complex schools within metropolitan areas.

It is the view of the Secondary Principals Council that the pay and working conditions of teachers must be commensurate with those of other professions, which require equal levels of skill and qualifications, in order to attract high-quality candidates into the profession.

New South Wales Secondary Principals Council

Australian teachers begin their career on a competitive salary in comparison to international counterparts. Across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Australian primary teachers have the eighth highest starting salary and lower secondary teachers have the 10th highest starting salary.⁴⁵⁷ Australian teachers also begin on a competitive salary in comparison to Australian graduates in other professions. In 2022, graduate teacher salaries were the fourth highest in Australia.⁴⁵⁸ However, teacher pay scales are flatter than in comparable countries and teachers often reach top pay points within 10 years. As Figure 14 below indicates, teachers' income falls behind other professions as they age. As such, older teachers earn substantially less than their peers in other professions, despite small differences in income between professions for younger age groups. This not only impacts the attractiveness of the profession to school leavers but also critically reduces the attractiveness of a career change into teaching for mid-career professionals, who would likely face a significant pay reduction which could not be recovered with experience.

Figure 14: Total yearly personal income of full-time workers holding a bachelor's degree, by field of study and age group, 2021



Source: Department of Education analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census data (ABS, 2021).⁴⁵⁹

The Panel notes substantial commitments made by some jurisdictions to increase teacher pay. Jurisdictions with lower pay scales may find it harder to recruit and retain teachers relative to other jurisdictions, notwithstanding the barriers to the mobility of teachers through registration requirements.

Remuneration is not the only issue. Many submissions highlighted a need for better marketing of the profession, including the submission from Albert Park College, which proposed a prolonged public campaign to build a culture of respect for teaching. Increasing the standing of teaching can support teachers to feel valued and respected. The Panel notes the national campaign to increase the status of teachers agreed through the NTWAP,⁴⁶⁰ which was released on 31 October 2023 and may have long-term benefits for the profession.

Moreover, status is often correlated with pay and conditions. In countries where teaching is viewed as a high-status profession, pay and other incentives tend to be more competitive. For example, in some East Asian countries, teachers' pay is fixed to make sure they are among the highest paid civil servants. In Singapore, the salary of working teachers is regularly reviewed to ensure teaching remains as financially attractive as other professions.⁴⁶¹ However, it is important to note that the relationship between pay and the perceived status of the teaching profession is not always clear cut.⁴⁶²

Higher pay and status need to be accompanied by better working conditions, including reduced workloads. Several submissions supported more flexible working arrangements, including greater opportunities for job sharing and part-time roles.⁴⁶³ The IEU's submission advocated that more widespread use of flexible work arrangements may support staff to remain in teaching while balancing caring arrangements or preparing to transition to retirement. Retaining staff for longer may unlock additional labour supply, even if hours worked decline.

Providing secure employment will support attraction and retention

One of the working conditions raised by stakeholders is the importance of secure and permanent employment in attracting and retaining teachers. The Panel has heard examples where some schools appear reticent to hire permanent teachers and instead prioritise hiring casual educators, even in cases where there is funding to hire more permanent staff. Job insecurity is an issue across schools, and the United Workers Union submission highlighted the significant growth in the number of teacher aides and education assistants, some of whom are employed casually on low hours.

Although casual and temporary employment is preferred by some teachers, there is a large cohort of teachers who prefer permanent employment arrangements. This mismatch in preferences may lead educators to exit the profession altogether to find more secure and flexible employment.

However, evidence suggests that the insecure employment trend for teachers is slowly changing. In 2019, 22 per cent of registered classroom teachers reported they were employed on a fixed-term contract of one year or less in duration; this dropped to 15 per cent in 2022.⁴⁶⁴ The proportion of early-career classroom teachers on contracts longer than one year or in ongoing/permanent positions increased from 61 per cent in 2019 to 69 per cent in 2022.⁴⁶⁵

Some jurisdictions are taking action to increase job certainty. The New South Wales Government's initiative to offer temporary teachers and school-based support staff conversion to permanent staff resulted in almost 5,500 temporary staff accepting offers of permanent employment in less than two months.⁴⁶⁶

Existing career pathways are limited

Stakeholders have raised limited career progression as a fundamental problem, particularly for teachers who want to stay in the classroom rather than transition to administration or leadership roles. Other professions typically have more options for career progression (with roles that reward expertise and professional growth, and roles that emphasise responsibility for developing the expertise of new professionals and peers), and more options for specialisation, with roles that have a different focus of expertise.⁴⁶⁷

Teachers identify the lack of similar pathways as a driver for leaving the profession.⁴⁶⁸ It may also limit the attractiveness of the profession to people considering teaching, including mid-career changers.⁴⁶⁹ The limitations on career progression and specialisation, particularly while remaining in the classroom, also limit opportunities for more highly paid roles.

Existing career frameworks often reward excellent teachers through administrative and leadership positions. There is a recognised absence of career options for teachers if they want to 'progress' with regards to seniority and remuneration, which allow them to remain proximate to the classroom

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Existing career pathways are linked to a teacher's progression through the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Teacher Standards) and correspond to the practice and expertise a teacher develops over four career stages. The final two career stages relate to 'highly accomplished teachers' and 'lead teachers'. Achievement of these final stages is formalised through a nationally agreed certification framework for Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers (HALTs).

There has been low engagement in HALT certification to date, with only 1,211 HALTs certified across Australia as of 31 December 2022.⁴⁷⁰ Some jurisdictions have opted to establish their own equivalent arrangements as an alternative to implementing the framework. For example, Western Australia has an alternative accrediting process, and Victoria has the Teaching Excellence Program, alongside already established Learning Specialist and Leading Teacher classifications within its career structure.

Onerous application requirements, application costs, limited positions in schools and, in some cases, low remuneration for HALT roles are some of the common reasons why HALT does not provide adequate incentive or reward for teachers to develop their practice and seek formal recognition through the accreditation process.⁴⁷¹ For example, multiple submissions called for more funding and financial incentives for teachers to undertake HALT certification, to address the cost to individual teachers. This could be provided through professional development, financial assistance and scholarships, or centralised funding which recognises HALT status as a highly regarded career pathway for becoming a middle or senior leader.

Stakeholders also highlighted the need for school systems to be funded to create career pathways for HALTs, and that different employment opportunities should be available to teachers once they have completed HALT certification. This suggests that designated HALT positions and roles are not widely publicised or are ambiguous. Moreover, stakeholders consider that specialist teacher positions need to be appropriately remunerated to ensure longevity of careers and retention. AITSL's submission indicates that HALT certification does not necessarily lead to expanded roles and likely contributes to reduced job satisfaction and teachers leaving the profession. This highlights problems with role definition for some HALT-certified teachers.

The Panel is aware that AITSL has developed a new Framework for the Certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers which outlines the essential elements of HALT certification and supports streamlined certification processes. This work will support efforts to reach 10,000 HALTs nationally by 2025 under the NTWAP and provides more incentive for teachers to pursue HALT certification.

However, further action is required to ensure that HALTs are used more systematically to perform specific roles such as supporting pre-service teachers, mentoring, induction, observation of individual teaching practice, and diffusion of evidence-based pedagogies. The existing career pathways, including HALT, fail to maximise extensive teaching expertise within the workforce. Some of Australia's most effective teachers are 'under-utilised today in sharing their expertise and supporting others to improve. They are often confined to their own classrooms or stretched with "add-on" instructional leadership responsibilities without adequate time, guidance, or support to improve teaching in their school.'⁴⁷²

Additional specialist teaching roles can extend the teacher career pathway and reward teaching expertise

When supported to be effective instructional leaders, highly-skilled teachers can have a powerful impact on teaching practice by strengthening the teaching expertise of their peers if they are deployed effectively.⁴⁷³ Australia has effective teachers but lacks the systemic structure and, importantly, the incentive to encourage more teachers to pursue specialised teaching roles which leverage their deep subject knowledge and pedagogical expertise.

AERO's submission to the Productivity Commission's review of the National School Reform Agreement noted that an integral component of high-performing school systems, such as those of Singapore and Shanghai, is the use of Master Teachers to lead and coordinate professional learning.⁴⁷⁴ In these systems, Master Teachers are intended to be the pedagogical leaders in their subjects, working across a network of schools in their region to identify teacher needs, coordinate training, and connect schools with research. The Grattan Institute submission also recommended introducing Master Teachers (pedagogical leaders working across a network of schools, coordinating training and teacher development), as well as Instructional Specialists (instructional leaders supporting and guiding teachers within their school, alongside their own classroom teaching load).

The Panel suggests the creation of two specialised teaching roles to increase the range of career pathways for effective teachers and maximise their skills and capabilities to develop the teaching workforce more broadly and increase student learning over the long term. This approach recognises an individual teacher's expertise and raises the level of their authority when providing instruction to other teachers. These specialist roles should build on the existing HALT certification framework. The new roles would focus on subject specialisation, with a core function being the development of other teachers across the school network. A competitive recruitment process would ensure that teachers with strong pedagogical subject knowledge and leadership qualities are selected to fill these roles.

Providing clearer definitions of roles and responsibilities, including the competencies required to perform these roles, would support more efficient use of the overall school workforce. Teachers and school leaders could focus on core teaching tasks and delegate other responsibilities to support staff, thereby reducing the some of the workload pressures they have been experiencing. This would also provide an opportunity to clearly define some of the high-value functions of HALTs, which could provide greater understanding of the roles and expectations and thereby encourage more teachers to pursue certification. This work can be informed by Action 21 of the NTWAP, which is exploring the optimal use of teaching assistants.

A clear career pathway for teachers that allows for continual progression and rewards teaching expertise should bolster teacher retention and present teaching as a more attractive career option for ambitious high school graduates and mid-career changers.

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

The current Teacher Standards and elaborations to them have been developed as discrete entities over the last 13 years, to promote excellence in teaching and school leadership.⁴⁷⁵ AITSL may be an appropriate authority to manage the development of core principles to underpin the new pathways. The core principles should include consideration of defined responsibilities and mandatory selection criteria for each role, the skills and capabilities required by subject, how these new pathways interact with and complement HALT positions, and if changes to the Teacher Standards are necessary. Updates should align the Teacher Standards with the professional standards for school leaders, providing greater clarity as to career pathways and professional learning needs across a teaching career.

Teachers in these roles would be recognised with additional pay and supported with generous release time, training and mentoring from experts in the same field to ensure the roles are attractive to teachers, including people considering teaching as a profession. For this to be effective, governments, school systems and approved authorities need to appropriately resource this reform.

Teaching assistants and support staff should be formally recognised

Similar to First Nations assistant teachers, teaching assistants and other support staff⁴⁷⁶ perform a critical role in many schools across Australia. Teaching assistants are already in schools observing teaching practice and contributing to student learning outcomes. Research shows that when teaching assistants and support staff have clear job roles, receive relevant training, are integrated into the school community, have adequate opportunities for planning with teachers, and have access to information, they improve student outcomes and help students catch up.⁴⁷⁷

However, these support roles vary across jurisdictions and are not always clearly defined. Nationally, they have a variety of names and the breadth of the role and responsibilities varies in complexity. They are also remunerated differently through different industrial arrangements and may be subject to different qualifications. Some of them are formal teaching roles while others may be classified as non-teaching roles.

The appropriate scope of practice for teaching assistants and support staff should be outlined so that every individual knows their role and what they are responsible for. This would enhance workforce cooperation, remove duplication of effort and, critically, ensure that expertise aligns with the tasks or functions where it will have the most benefit. This work should be informed by existing work through the NTWAP which is exploring the optimal use of teaching assistants.

The Panel sees value in formally recognising teaching assistants and support staff roles in their own professional standards, to recognise the skills and expertise of these roles and drive professionalisation of the workforce. Robust research on the appropriate scope of work and the interaction of support staff with teachers would need to be conducted. Then, the intention would be to create career pathways for these educators, articulating the skills and capabilities for each career stage. These should include pathways to teaching and consider how recognition of prior learning interacts with the framework. This would provide a basis for greater recognition of these roles and for remuneration to be adjusted accordingly to reflect their expertise. This change has the potential to increase the diversity of the teaching workforce through better pathways and greater attraction into education support roles.

It is critical that the development of formal career structures for these roles is conducted in close consultation with affected individuals to avoid creating unintended barriers for those currently working in these roles.

Supporting initial teacher education students through high-quality, paid professional experience could boost retention and support a more diverse workforce

Stakeholders also raised the importance of professional experience, in preparing graduates for the classroom. Research tells us that the most effective and efficient method to maximise ITE student learning is to ensure the use of evidence-based teaching practices in all classrooms.⁴⁷⁸ It is important that ITE students learn core knowledge and evidence-based practices that will prepare them to meet the Graduate Teacher Standards, including the opportunity to put them into practice through high-quality professional experience. Teachers who are well prepared for the classroom are more confident and effective in their teaching.⁴⁷⁹

The Panel notes that professional experience can be a barrier for many ITE students. A National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education funded study determined that while 7 per cent of ITE students experienced financial hardship during the semester, this increased to 56 per cent during professional experience.⁴⁸⁰ Additional upfront costs such as transport, childcare and forgoing paid work during professional experience can result in ITE students changing courses or withdrawing from study entirely.⁴⁸¹ In some cases, the cost discourages ITE students from enrolling in classes.⁴⁸²

The pressure of unpaid professional experience is exacerbated for students from low socio-economic status (SES) and regional backgrounds and students who have caring responsibilities.⁴⁸³ One study found that 12 times as many students from priority equity cohorts struggled financially during their professional experience compared to during the semester.⁴⁸⁴ This can have implications for workforce diversity and addressing shortages in hard-to-staff schools and locations, including for remote schools.

It has been suggested that ITE students should be paid for their professional experience or alternatively, that the practical component of their course should be part of a paid internship.⁴⁸⁵ The Panel strongly supports the *Strong Beginnings* recommendation to develop national guidelines for high-quality professional experience. Providing greater assistance with the financial, relational and academic implications of the current professional experience practices may reduce some of the barriers experienced by ITE students and better support equity cohorts who may otherwise leave the profession. Quality paid professional experience is important to building the teacher workforce, particularly for attracting and retaining students from diverse cohorts and building the workforce in remote schools.

Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities outlines that the Government will undertake scoping work on approaches to mitigate financial hardship experienced by tertiary students completing unpaid mandatory practicum placements as part of studies in care and teaching professions.⁴⁸⁶ Additionally, the *Australian Universities Accord: interim report* states that there should be consideration of a support or a stipend for students while on professional experience – with particular urgency for nurses and teachers. The Report states that there is merit in exploring the development of principles and standards for this financial support, which will require working with teacher employers, and that careful consideration of these arrangements is needed, including whether changes are required to provisions within the *Fair Work Act 2009* relating to payment for vocational placements.⁴⁸⁷

RECOMMENDATION 4C

The Panel recommends that governments develop and adopt new national career pathway frameworks by the end of 2027 to better recognise and deploy teaching expertise and enhance the status of the profession. This should include:

- i. establishing two new subject-specific roles for teachers (a school-based 'instructional specialist' and region-based 'master teachers') which are limited in number, selected via a rigorous competitive process to identify candidates with the required skills and level of expertise, remunerated appropriately, and ideally sit alongside Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher qualifications
- ii. clearly defining the roles, responsibilities and core capabilities of all teaching roles in the framework, including teaching assistants, mentors, tutors, support staff and school leaders, to support professionalisation and establish clearer career pathways
- iii. ensuring all educators receive greater recognition and reward for their expertise, including pay commensurate with their role, skills, qualifications, and the complexity of their school
- iv. considering reforms to the tertiary education sector to ensure that initial teacher education students do not face financial hardship when undertaking mandatory teaching practicums, subject to recommendations by the Australian Universities Accord Expert Panel.

4.2.5 Bespoke approaches are needed to attract and retain teachers for specialist subjects including science, technology, engineering and mathematics and for regional, rural and remote schools

More science, technology, engineering and mathematics teachers are needed to improve science and maths skills

An increasing proportion of jobs require a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) capable workforce. There are a range of government reviews and commitments underway which intersect with STEM issues and workforce matters. These include the Australia, United Kingdom and the United States (AUKUS) commitments; the Diversity in STEM Review; the update to Australia's Science and Research Priorities and the National Science Statement; the Migration Review; implementation of *Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities*; and other actions arising from the 2022 Jobs and Skills Summit. Stakeholders are increasingly concerned about the pipeline of STEM learning and the future workforce required to support Australia's growing economy and global priorities.

Student participation in STEM subjects has declined over recent years, with a noticeable drop in enrolments in senior secondary mathematics, technology and science subjects.⁴⁸⁸ Australian students' performance in mathematical literacy has declined significantly since Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2003, and Australian students' performance in scientific literacy has declined significantly since PISA 2006.⁴⁸⁹

Digital literacy is now an essential competency, recognised in Version 9 of the Australian Curriculum. Given the rise in cyber-attacks, misinformation and data leaks and increasing concerns around artificial intelligence (AI), digital literacy is more important than ever. However, National Assessment Program – Information and Communication Technology Literacy data shows that rather than increasing, digital literacy in Year 10 students has significantly decreased.⁴⁹⁰

In its submission, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) identified teaching 'out of field' in STEM subjects as a significant issue in Australia: one in three technology teachers and almost one in five mathematics teachers are currently out of field. Attracting and retaining more teachers from STEM specialisations is critical to boosting student engagement and performance in these subjects and reducing out-of-field teaching.⁴⁹¹

There is a raft of resources to support STEM teachers; however, not all are curriculum aligned, evidence-based, quality-assured resources. Some jurisdictions have made substantial investments to develop their own STEM initiatives and to retrain their teachers, to support those teaching out of field to become 'in field'. However, access to these initiatives and opportunities tends to be unbalanced between the jurisdictions. In addition, there are key differences in levels of support for learning areas between primary and secondary teaching (e.g. primary teachers are generally less well supported across STEM learning areas than secondary teachers).

Ensuring enough specialised STEM teachers and primary level teachers able to teach STEM skills (or '21st Century skills') across the curriculum and subjects, will be vital to maintain and build the STEM talent pipeline. Teaching STEM in a cross-disciplinary and integrated way requires specialised training at the initial teacher education stage.

Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation

Actions underway from the NTWAP include a focus on STEM, and a greater focus on STEM is recommended for others. The Panel notes Actions 3, 14 and 19 as particular actions relevant to STEM. *Strong beginnings* also includes two indicators as part of Recommendation 4 that specifically relate to STEM (Indicators 5 and 13).

There is an opportunity through the next Agreement to continue to develop national STEM initiatives and resources (through partnerships with states and territories) to support teachers from smaller jurisdictions with access to high-quality resources, as recommended in Chapter 1 (Recommendation 1C). This may also be supported by the work the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is doing under Action 19 of the NTWAP to examine the development and availability of curriculum support resources to assist teachers in implementing the Australian Curriculum. In addition, this would continue to support the current and future teacher workforce, through initiatives that provide professional development opportunities to upskill out-of-field teachers. Key examples of areas where ongoing support is needed for students and teachers are digital technologies/digital literacy and emerging technologies, particularly as sectors are looking at the potential impacts and advantages of using AI in educational settings (as discussed in Chapter 1).

Regional, rural and remote schools have significant difficulty attracting and retaining teachers and leaders

Emeritus Professor John Halsey's 2018 Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education stated that 'attracting and retaining teachers for regional, rural and remote (RRR) schools continues to be one of the most persistent challenges on the education agenda.'⁴⁹² The Independent Schools Australia submission indicated that their schools in regional and remote locations consistently report few or no applicants for teaching and administrative positions, and high staff turnover.

The Panel also heard this first-hand while visiting regional and remote schools around the country. For example, school leaders at a number of schools in regional Far North Queensland noted the difficulty of recruiting teachers into their communities, especially to stay long term. There is a need to expand existing policies and programs to find teachers who are willing and able to live and work in a RRR community. Many educators the Panel met with noted the culture shock experienced by teachers moving into a teaching role in a small remote community, having relocated from the metropolitan centre where they completed their teaching degree. In addition, the Panel heard instances of RRR communities experiencing high turnover of staff, as young teachers often choose to return to the city after one or two years, especially as they prepare to start a family. Turnover can be exacerbated by system policies, which sometimes require staff to move schools after a period of time. Jurisdictions should consider relaxing or waiving these requirements for high-performing staff at RRR schools.

Rural and remote schools face significant challenges in attracting qualified and experienced teachers and rely heavily on 'new teachers' to fill vacancies.⁴⁹³ Many of these schools have highly complex cohorts who would benefit from experienced teachers. Graduate teachers landing in these schools, often with little or no induction, may find the context – away from their support structures back home – exceptionally challenging. Teachers and school leaders in outer regional, remote and very remote areas also have less experience and have spent less time at a school by their first and second promotion than teachers and principals in major cities.⁴⁹⁴ This can lead to poor student outcomes and poor staff retention outcomes.⁴⁹⁵ Early-career teachers in remote locations are more likely to leave the profession, while their peers in metropolitan locations are least likely to leave.⁴⁹⁶

Teachers working in RRR communities highlighted many benefits of their situation – closer connection to students and communities, the capacity to engage in leisure activities and 'see the country', enormous potential for personal and professional growth, and the ability to learn from passionate and exceptional education and community leaders.

However, they also raised a number of challenges that are key to understanding the difficulty many RRR schools encounter in attracting and retaining teachers. These include geographical location, limited personal and professional supports, working in small schools that are part of a small and tight-knit community, working in culturally diverse schools and communities that require an understanding of cultural practice, being isolated and having access to limited resources. Access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) was raised repeatedly as a barrier – an issue that full-service school models recommended in Chapter 2 could potentially address if these services were offered to all staff on site. Older staff pointed to obligations to care for elderly parents living in metropolitan areas as a key reason why they would need to leave the communities they were serving. Submissions also noted that limited access to housing, transport and infrastructure can deter teachers from taking roles in RRR areas.⁴⁹⁷

All jurisdictions are implementing strategies to address teacher supply, which include targeted initiatives for RRR and some low-SES schools. Government initiatives have mostly been focused on financial incentives or other enticements such as additional pay/bonuses, relocation allowances, transfer ratings, enhanced leadership opportunities, permanent employment status, extra leave/holidays, and/or subsidised accommodation. For example, South Australia has incentives and support for country teachers and leaders. These incentives include removal and relocation expense compensation, fortnightly country incentive zone allowance payments, and government employee housing concessions.⁴⁹⁸ Case Study 21 outlines an example of an effective school-university partnership that is successfully attracting teachers into a remote school.

Case Study 21: School-University Partnerships

The Panel visited a remote government school with around 80 per cent First Nations students. The school's senior leadership team is 100 per cent First Nations peoples who have created a caring, stimulating, and culturally affirming environment. Students are supported and encouraged to achieve their full potential, including as future educators and leaders.

The school is part of a strategy designed to address the educational and social aspirations of First Nations children and young people. The school works closely with parents, local government, and the community to deliver key services from birth through school into further training, study, and employment.

The school has also partnered with a university to lift outcomes and strengthen career pathways. This partnership provides school students with the opportunity to visit the university, encouraging students to see university as a viable option.

Reciprocally, the school provides initial teacher education students at the university with the unique opportunity to complete their practical experience at the school. Many pre-service teachers return as graduate teachers because of their experience in the school and community.

Some initiatives to attract teachers to RRR schools have negative consequences and actually contribute to increased transience. For example, the transfer rating system promotes short-term professional experience in some of these schools to obtain the transfer points needed to move to more desirable schools or locations. Independent analysis by consultants engaged by the Australian Government found that many retention initiatives are based on first principles rather than on evidence from previous high-quality evaluations in Australia in other jurisdictions or sectors.⁴⁹⁹ Steps should be taken to support evaluation of these initiatives to understand their impact, their success and any unintended consequences.

Research has indicated that financial incentives and programs which diversify pathways into teaching have been somewhat successful in increasing recruitment and short-term retention in hard-to-staff schools. However, further longitudinal data collection is necessary to develop a more thorough understanding of which incentives might be effective.⁵⁰⁰ The Panel heard that promoting RRR teaching as a distinct career pathway requiring specialist teaching expertise may demonstrate the value and opportunities of teaching in these locations. This approach could be complemented by additional incentives and supported with targeted professional development which equips individuals with the knowledge and skills to engage effectively with these communities and meet the individual needs of the diverse student population.⁵⁰¹

4.2.6 National teacher registration could support mobility and consistency for teachers, and support systems to more effectively deploy a national workforce

Registration is an important aspect of many professions, helping to certify and signal the safety, competency and quality of a profession. Professional registration is underpinned by the theme of aiming to 'set and uphold high standards of professional practice'.⁵⁰² Therefore, teacher registration can aid in enhancing the status of the teaching profession as a high-quality registered profession.

Teacher registration is currently managed by the teacher regulatory authorities in each of the jurisdictions. This allows for local policy contexts and legislative and regulatory differences to be considered in the approach taken to teacher registration. This is in line with the principle of subsidiarity and the constitutional responsibility that jurisdictions have for education.⁵⁰³ While it is important to allow for local policy contexts to be considered, there is scope for greater harmonisation between jurisdictions to enable greater mobility in the national teaching profession and consistency of standards.

A national system or approach would lead to better mobility across jurisdictions as a result of reduced time and administrative burden for teachers who move interstate. The Panel acknowledges the submission from the Australasian Teacher Regulatory Authorities (ATRA), which states that 'administrative and regulatory burden for teachers transitioning across jurisdictions is minimal' due to the *Mutual Recognition Act 1992*. ATRA details that teachers with registration or accreditation in one jurisdiction can notify a second jurisdiction that they wish for the recognition of their registration in that second jurisdiction.

Under the current legal framework however, jurisdictions can require teachers to meet requirements before they receive mutual recognition, so it is often not as straightforward as notifying a second jurisdiction and receiving recognition. Submissions from the Northern Territory Principals' Association and the Australian Secondary Principals' Association both claimed that burdens in relation to teachers moving between jurisdictions restrict teachers from wanting to try different educational settings across the country. They claimed that the experiences that teachers can gain from working in different educational settings can help them to improve their learning, skills, and knowledge of teaching in a variety of contexts.⁵⁰⁴ Monash University's Faculty of Education raised the similar but innovative point that a nationally consistent registration system would enable teachers travelling across the country to take part in casual relief teaching roles as they travel. This would bring many benefits to a teacher's skill set and knowledge, while also providing opportunities for experienced teachers to benefit rural and remote schools as they travel through these regions, helping to raise outcomes in those schools and creating opportunities for stints of support and mentorship for permanent teachers.⁵⁰⁵

Noting the work underway to harmonise working with children checks, a national registration system could also improve child safety by removing barriers to data sharing between jurisdictions. These barriers can create significant administrative burden for teachers and regulators, which may have safety implications.⁵⁰⁶ The risks to children from inadequate information sharing about teachers were illustrated in the final report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The Royal Commission found that despite the sharing of information between teacher registration authorities, inconsistencies in laws across jurisdictions can pose a risk.⁵⁰⁷

The Panel has also heard that a national teacher regulatory system would ensure consistency of standards across the country, resulting in the harmonisation of eligibility requirements for the registration of teachers.⁵⁰⁸ ACU noted in its submission that national registration would limit inconsistencies in registration requirements and ensure rigour in the accreditation process for teachers.

The Association of Independent Schools of South Australia submission acknowledged the benefits of more harmonisation in teacher registration, but raised the point that this should not come at the expense of lowering standards in South Australia. It asserted that through any move to a national registration process, the South Australian Teacher Registration Board must maintain regulatory authority of teacher registration in South Australia. The Panel understands concerns that may be felt about reduced standards in some jurisdictions through a national registration system, and therefore believes that any harmonisation of standards needs to take this into account and ensure that a national approach does not result in reduced standards for jurisdictions.

In line with more consistent standards, the Brotherhood of St Laurence submission suggested that a national approach to teacher registration could ensure harmonisation and strengthening of quality teaching through ensuring that registration requirements across the country are backed by evidence. The Centre for Inclusive Education submission similarly raised the point that a national teacher registration system could provide benefit by placing registration as part of a wider framework supporting teachers' career progression and professional learning, which would be guided by the Teacher Standards.

Along with greater mobility of the workforce, a national approach to teacher registration would bring workforce planning benefits. It would provide the option to mobilise a national workforce, as compared to jurisdictional workforces, to cover areas of staffing shortage. While teachers should not be required to move across the country to cover shortages, there would be the potential to communicate better with the over 300,000 full-time-equivalent teachers to seek expressions of interest to temporarily aid in planned workforce initiatives.

The Panel recognises that submissions have proposed a national teacher registration body that would replace the current jurisdictional teacher registration authorities as an option for harmonisation of teacher registration.⁵⁰⁹ While the Panel recognises the benefit that a single registration body at a national level would bring, it also appreciates the concerns raised around decreased standards and a loss of subsidiarity.

Hence, the Panel is proposing that jurisdictions work together to harmonise teacher registration across the country, including through automatic teacher registration and more consistent standards. This would provide opportunities for teachers to move between jurisdictions more easily and could improve child safety through harmonising working with children checks while also ensuring that the benefits gained from subsidiarity are maintained. Investigation of a single, unified teacher registration body that operates at the federal level should be considered in the future.

RECOMMENDATION 4D

The Panel recommends that jurisdictions work together to drive:

- i. national harmonisation of teacher registration requirements, including internationally qualified teachers, high-quality professional development, assessment of teachers against the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, and Teacher Performance Assessments
- ii. teacher mobility and improved child safety across jurisdictions through automatic mutual recognition and reduced red tape
- iii. data sharing for workforce planning, identifying national workforce issues, and filling temporary teaching positions.

Chapter 5: Making better use of data

Key points:

- A significant amount of education-related data is already being collected, which helps students, parents, educators and communities understand how systems and schools support students. However, there are differences across the country in how data is collected, held, evaluated and used to inform reporting on student and school performance.
- Shared and linked data can be used to build a profile of student experiences, transitions, pathways and outcomes that can inform research, policy and decision-making.
- An existing independent body should be used to facilitate a more consistent and mature approach to data governance and data-sharing arrangements.
- There are considerable gaps in existing data sets, limiting capacity to understand how investments are benefiting students.
- The Unique Student Identifier (USI) remains a key opportunity to develop a solid foundation for enhanced data linkage by establishing a clearer picture of each student's education journey.
- Setting and using consistent definitions for students from priority equity cohorts in data collection activities will improve the capacity of governments and systems to better meet the needs of these students.
- Where data collection or reporting includes priority equity cohorts, it is essential that safe and appropriate arrangements be in place. For example, data for First Nations students should be collected and used in accordance with First Nations data sovereignty principles.
- A noted concern related to the collection of education data is the potential impact on workloads for teachers and principals. The Panel has been cognisant of this in making its recommendations.
- Improving data outcomes will require preparation, cooperation and goodwill between all levels of government to balance the needs of national consistency and local autonomy, leverage existing resources, minimise costs and manage risks.

5.1 Context

A robust data framework is a critical pillar of holding governments, school systems and approved authorities to account for their commitments to improve educational outcomes in Australia. The importance of collecting and analysing data to help measure improvements in student outcomes and to inform the development of evidence-based policy has been a consistent focus in education reviews, including the 2011 Review of Funding for Schooling and the 2017 Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools (the Gonski reviews).

There are clear gaps in data collection, analysis, evaluation and reporting which are stifling capacity to understand what is working and where further effort or investment are needed. The Panel has outlined options to address priority gaps through strengthening the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia (MFSA). However, it is critical that data be collected only if its value outweighs the costs of acquiring it, including any impacts on teacher and principal workloads.

Accordingly, the Panel has highlighted opportunities to use existing data better, including encouraging better linkages between existing data sets and data infrastructure. Central to this is the need for governments to finalise the implementation of a national USI, which will provide a foundation to better understand students' transitions through school to future education or employment. A national USI also provides the foundation architecture for a more comprehensive longitudinal data set that can incorporate a broader range of student outcomes over time.

5.2 Key consultation themes and analysis

5.2.1 Strengthening data governance arrangements would support better use of data and understanding of education outcomes

An independent data custodian would support a more mature approach to data governance

In response to questions about data collection, sharing and reporting, stakeholders raised a number of challenges, spanning both the existing system and issues that would need to be considered for future reform.

Education data is collected and held by disparate agencies across jurisdictions, and different data is collected in different ways in each jurisdiction, resulting in siloed and fragmented data. While some efforts have been made to improve consistency, difficulties remain when trying to compare data between states and to gain a national picture.⁵¹⁰

It is essential that decisions regarding data sharing and linkage are made by authorities or bodies with the rights skills and experience. Many submissions endorsed the establishment of a single independent agency that could be responsible for collecting, managing and sharing data and, noting the resourcing and governance arrangements required, some suggested that the Australian Government would be better placed to manage this function. This type of arrangement could facilitate an increase in data linkage projects, provided the relevant authority has a clear remit and responsibility for creating and managing linked data assets to improve national education policy. Others, like the Australian Learning Lecture submission, instead suggested broadening the role of existing education institutions such as the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) as they perceived them to be far too limited in scope and reach. The importance of school autonomy and local decision-making to ensure students remain at the heart of school policy was also highlighted.⁵¹¹

At both the school and the system level, there are concerns that instead of driving improvements, reforms to data collection and reporting may lead to unfair school comparisons. The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing and reporting model was highlighted as an example of this.⁵¹² The Panel considers that there needs to be a balance between gaining insight into outcomes and setting appropriate comparative measures.

Noting current workload challenges (Chapter 4), there have also been consistent calls for a stocktake and rationalisation of current data collection, to prioritise the data most valuable in measuring school performance. These calls are accompanied by concerns that any additional data or reporting requirements would place an additional burden on the workload and capacity of schools and sectors. This issue is exacerbated by limitations in the established data infrastructure, with the independent school sector noting that it does not have a centralised data management system and there are varying levels of technological and administrative capacity at each individual school. Infrastructure challenges also affect smaller jurisdictions that, without the economies of scale, are challenged to effectively develop and maintain the systems to collect, maintain and utilise student data and information.⁵¹³ These system and infrastructure challenges will need to be considered when it comes to the implementation of data reforms.

Many stakeholders also noted that any processes to improve data sharing and linkages need appropriate data security and data privacy in place to make sure students and their families are protected.⁵¹⁴ Data governance arrangements must ensure that data is secure and protects the confidentiality of individuals. The Panel firmly supports requiring that any new data collection has a clear purpose and benefit that outweighs the burden of collecting the data, and backs the New South Wales (NSW) Government's suggested approach of 'single provision, multiple use' where possible, as is currently applied to the National Health Reform Agreement.⁵¹⁵ The Panel also considers that there would be merit in governments, school systems and approved authorities working towards an agreed national metadata standard.

It is essential that decisions regarding data sharing and linkage are made by authorities or bodies with the right skills and experience. One consideration is to use an independent custodian or mechanism to be responsible for national education data governance, under a set of guiding principles. This type of arrangement could facilitate an increase in data linkage projects, provided the relevant authority has a clear remit and responsibility for creating and managing linked data assets to improve national education policy.

The Panel supports the use of an independent data custodian to enable a more mature approach to data governance. This would allow a more coordinated approach to data collection and linkage and would support delivery of the recommendations outlined in this chapter. This is important to support a more data-informed approach to education while limiting the workload and administration requirements of data collection. An independent data custodian should not be established through new architecture, instead this responsibility should be tasked to an existing entity.

Existing data could be better used by linking data sets and improving access to richer information about student experiences

While this chapter identifies gaps in collection and data, the Panel firmly believes data is only useful if it can be used to inform policy decisions and implementation. Key to this is how data is linked. Enabling more effective data linkage can support governments, school systems and approved authorities to better understand young people's educational journeys, including a longitudinal view from early education through to post-school pathways. Jurisdictional submissions noted the importance of having a system that allows quality data to follow each child as part of a tailored education experience as students move geographically, through stages of schooling, and across flexible education settings.

From a school perspective, data linkage can support schools through more efficient transfer of student information as they move between schools and systems, as well as better identifying when students are at risk of disengagement. Getting the most out of the data that is already available may also reduce the workload impacts on educators and principals, as the data will be linked by education institutions rather than having to be pieced together locally.

From a research perspective, data linkage can provide greater access to student and school information, allowing the development of a coherent strategic agenda for research into early childhood and school education, and ensuring investment in research answers the questions that are important to better education policy and practice. Bringing the existing data together and allowing more policymakers and researchers to access this linked data would create a better understanding of best practice in supporting students, educators, and schools.

Submissions were strongly supportive of greater data linkage and accessibility, and offered a range of suggestions for data linkage projects. For example, Social Ventures Australia's submission noted that data linking across a broad range of education and health data sets could provide a more holistic view of student needs.

Improving the equity and inclusiveness of education is not possible without data and evidence. Data linkage (across national and state and territory datasets) should be prioritised to inform effective policy making, program design and research at a national scale.

Academy of the Social Services in Australia

The Panel believes that governments should improve access for data linkage projects, such as support for policymakers and researchers to link school-level and de-identified student-level data and undertake more data linkage projects across national and jurisdictional data. Better use of existing data will provide a more comprehensive understanding of student experiences, and likely reduce the need for the collection of new data.

RECOMMENDATION 5A

To facilitate a more mature approach to data governance and data-sharing arrangements, the Panel recommends that an independent data custodian be tasked with:

- i. developing a coordinated, system-wide national approach to the collection and sharing of education data
- ii. developing consistent data collection principles and metadata standards
- iii. managing the secure sharing and linkage of relevant data sets
- iv. improving access for approved policymakers and researchers to data linkage projects, including access to integrated school and de-identified student-level data
- v. supporting further data linkage projects aimed at enhancing the shared understanding of what works to lift student progress and inform the development of government policies.

Implementing the Unique Student Identifier would support understanding of student pathways

The USI is a lifelong education number which currently supports vocational education and training (VET) and higher education students to access their enrolments and achievements from a single source. The Panel notes that jurisdictions have agreed to implement a national USI as one of eight national policy initiatives under the current National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) to support better understanding of student progression and improve the national evidence base for primary and secondary school students.

Education Ministers have decided that the baseline use of the school USI will be to support the transfer of students' information when they move between schools and systems through linking the Student Data Transfer Protocol. Implementing a USI for school students will enable schools to better support students who transition between schools. Students will be able to use this number throughout their education journey and share it with post-school education and training providers.

Support for implementing the USI in schools as soon as possible is widespread, including from jurisdictions, peak bodies, advocacy groups, universities and research institutions, schools and teachers. Submissions highlighted the benefits that the USI could provide, which include:

- an enabling infrastructure to share information for the benefit of improving student outcomes across all cohorts⁵¹⁶
- supporting small jurisdictions/systems with high mobility between sectors and interstate⁵¹⁷
- enabling the evaluation of policies and initiatives to inform schools and policymakers about what works⁵¹⁸
- addressing the need for longitudinal data to identify the actual students at risk of falling behind, based on their performance, and to target support and initiatives to specific cohorts⁵¹⁹
- valuable, timely information for schools and systems about student pathways and success.⁵²⁰

The Panel notes there are a range of challenges for full implementation. The Western Australian Government's submission identified complex technical, legislative, and data governance challenges. The Panel understands that the generation and issuing of USIs for school students, within and across jurisdictions and sectors, is occurring in a phased manner reflecting each jurisdiction and sectors business, technical, and legislative readiness. Governments should consider setting commitments within the next Agreement that enable the USI to be established as quickly as possible.

The very long-awaited Unique Student Identifier is an essential component of an enhanced data agenda and once implemented, efforts should be made to maximise its value, including potentially linking it with similar initiatives, such as the tertiary USI and ideally data in the early years.

The Smith Family

Making the USI available for research purposes will enable a richer understanding of student pathways through education and training, particularly when linked to other data, and will support governments, school systems and approved authorities to meet the needs of students, educators and schools. For example, linked USIs would allow the preschool outcomes data currently under consideration to follow students into schooling and track their development, which would support early identification of students who may be at risk of falling behind.

A fully implemented USI can also reduce duplication and enable the principle of 'collect once, multiple use'. When combined with appropriate governance mechanisms and a consistent approach to data collection across jurisdictions, the USI can help ease the data collection burden on schools and teachers. Without the USI, data-linking activities will have an increased risk of linking the wrong records, as well as requiring more time to clean data and ensure records are matched appropriately.

With the potential benefits of and support for the USI clear, all governments, along with the independent and Catholic school sectors, should work to implement this as a matter of urgency to enable further application to student outcomes. The Panel's view is that full implementation of the USI should include using the USI to enrich existing data sets and to support a broader understanding of what works in education policy. Governments should look to align this with relevant efforts to support a lifelong learning approach and collaboration between the vocational and higher education sectors, as highlighted in the Employment White Paper.

RECOMMENDATION 5B

The Panel recommends governments, school systems and approved authorities implement the Unique Student Identifier as a matter of urgency to enable links to student-level data on progress and performance to show student education and transition pathways, including linking early childhood through to higher education/vocational education and training, to commence from 2027.

5.2.2 The Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia should be strengthened to improve understanding of student outcomes and the impacts of reforms

The MFSA is designed to provide the basis for Australian Education Ministers to report to the community on the performance of schooling, in accordance with the goals expressed in the *2019 Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration*. A significant amount of school-related data is already being collected across governments, sectors and individual schools through the MFSA.⁵²¹

The MFSA contains nationally agreed key performance measures (KPMs), which are reported via two mechanisms:⁵²²

- ACARA's annual *National Report on Schooling in Australia*, covering schooling contextual data, school funding data, schooling policies and priorities, and a discussion of KPM results
- The ACARA data portal, containing the KPMs for the Schooling in Australia dashboard and data set, which include time series data and an analysis of long-term trends.

Education Ministers have delegated the management of the MFSA to ACARA, including the assessment of data needs and a review of the framework at least every three years. ACARA can make minor changes to the MFSA but more substantial changes to the KPMs and data reported against them are considered by the Australian Education Senior Officials Committee and approved by Education Ministers. The next review is expected to be considered later in 2024.

The Productivity Commission noted the limitations of the MFSA, and the Panel's consultation has further highlighted issues in the selection of KPMs and reporting of outcomes (further explored below).⁵²³ These issues limit understanding of both how all students are progressing at a point in time and the outcomes for certain cohorts of students. In its submission, the Victorian Government suggested that current data gaps relating to priority cohorts, outcomes measurement, and reform activity could be considered as part of the next review of the MFSA, with the process to also take into consideration other national education reporting arrangements. The Panel supports this proposed approach.

Measuring and reporting of student achievement and outcomes can be broadened and strengthened

Tracking progress of students who have fallen behind in literacy and numeracy is critical

As highlighted in Chapter 1, students who fall behind all too often stay behind. The Panel considers that to better understand the effectiveness of efforts made to close the learning gaps, NAPLAN reporting should include information on how students who fall short of achieving proficiency perform in successive assessments. This means students identified as being in the 'needs additional support' or 'developing' categories have their performance in subsequent NAPLAN assessments tracked and reported on as a cohort. As this data is already collected, it is simply a matter of reporting it.

NAPLAN testing provides the ability to understand the literacy and numeracy learning trajectories of Australian students across jurisdictions and sectors by linking data at a cohort or individual level across years.

The Panel understands that due to the changes in assessment measures and testing timeframes, NAPLAN data from 2023 onwards can no longer be linked to prior testing undertaken between 2008 and 2022 unless further technical linkage work is undertaken. This means that it will take another 15 years to match the previous longitudinal data set, which will make it difficult to determine where reforms are positively impacting NAPLAN performance.

FINDING 18

Further exploration of workarounds to link the NAPLAN data from 2008 to 2022 to NAPLAN data from 2023 onwards is warranted to support a richer understanding of NAPLAN data over time, noting that this approach would likely have a range of limitations.

Measuring progress against the full curriculum is essential

The Australian Curriculum aims to ensure the same high-standard curriculum content is available to every student, regardless of where they live. It covers eight key areas of learning, a set of general capabilities, and cross-curriculum priorities.⁵²⁴

Currently we do not collect national data on how students are progressing against these key learning areas and general capabilities, which are considered essential to equipping students with the knowledge, skills, behaviours, and dispositions to live and work successfully. The second Gonski report indicated that this is because nationally consistent assessments focus mostly on literacy and numeracy, with jurisdictions then determining the extent to which the other areas are assessed and reported. Defining and assessing other general capabilities, such as social skills, is also more difficult (as discussed in Chapter 1).⁵²⁵ The Panel notes that there are other components of the National Assessment Program, including sample assessments in areas like Civics and Citizenship, Science literacy, and ICT literacy.

Submissions have articulated the need to broaden the outcomes reporting to include a focus on how students engage and perform across all of the curriculum. Music Education: Right From the Start's submission observed that despite an overarching emphasis on holistic education, schools and teachers are pressured to devote attention to a small number of key learning areas. The Panel's view is that governments should develop measures of student progress against key learning areas of the Australian Curriculum, as further discussed in Chapter 7.

Identifying trends in classroom disruption and disciplinary measures would provide important insights

Some submissions also articulated a need to collect data on progress measures beyond just academic results to instead capture broader student attendance, wellbeing and school experience data that can be disaggregated for priority equity cohorts and different age groups.⁵²⁶

Feedback has consistently indicated that student attendance measures in Australia are not generated in ways that enable an understanding of the types and levels of non-attendance, particularly for priority equity cohorts. In particular, the use of disciplinary measures can have a negative impact on how students experience school and disrupt learning, and there is evidence that students from priority equity cohorts are over-represented among students who receive suspensions, exclusions and the use of restraints. Statistics from the Queensland Department of Education provided under a Right to Information request provide an insight into suspensions and exclusions in Queensland public schools between 2016 and 2020 for students in some equity groups:

- In Queensland public schools, students with disability received between 46 per cent and 48 per cent of all short-term suspensions and between 41 per cent and 47 per cent of all long-term suspensions between 2016 and 2020, even though students with disability only make up about 17 per cent of the whole Queensland school population (according to Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) data).⁵²⁷
- Further, despite only constituting approximately 10 per cent of the Queensland public school population, First Nations students received around 23 to 30 per cent of all suspensions and exclusions.⁵²⁸

Over-representation of students in priority equity groups in school suspensions and exclusions is a critical and ongoing issue. However, there is limited publicly available data to determine the extent of this issue and which students it impacts most, which is an essential first step towards meeting unmet needs.

Students who are faced with school disciplinary actions experience the consequences of being denied access to learning opportunities and are socially isolated from their peers. Further, their parents also face stress and financial hardship.⁵²⁹ Inconsistency in maintaining a suspended or excluded child's right to education puts them at risk of becoming disengaged from education.

It is recommended to gather data on suspension rates, particularly for students with disabilities. There is a concern that these students may be unfairly suspended for difficult behaviour when reasonable adjustments have not been made.

Australian Council of State School Organisations

Several submissions raised concerns that students with disability may be unfairly suspended for difficult behaviour when reasonable adjustments have not been made; collecting data across all sectors can help determine if there is a systemic problem in providing support.⁵³⁰

The Grattan Institute noted that Australian students find their classes considerably more disruptive than students in other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and that classroom disruption is a concern for students and teachers. The Panel considers that disciplinary measures are closely linked to issues of classroom disruption, student needs not being identified or met, and school safety (explored in earlier chapters). Ideally, reforms recommended in this report would reduce the need for disciplinary and exclusionary measures; however, it is important to balance such a focus with ensuring classrooms and school settings remain safe places for all staff and students.

Consideration should be given to a new national, student-level data set on classroom disruption, suspensions, exclusions and restraints. This student-level data should enable analysis by gender, year level, priority equity group, and other key variables to identify if there is over-representation in both single and repeat incidents, for each group, and compared across sectors. This work should include consistent definitions across classroom disruption and disciplinary measures, including definitions of single and multiple disciplinary incidents to accurately capture the number of incidents. This student-level data set would complement the measurement of classroom disruption as part of the national measure of wellbeing recommended in Chapter 3.

FINDING 19

Governments should consider developing a new national, student-level data set on classroom disruption, suspensions, exclusions and restraints, which can be disaggregated by priority equity cohorts.

We need to improve data on students from priority equity cohorts

The Productivity Commission noted that the most significant reporting gap in the MFSA relates to outcomes among students from priority equity cohorts.

Jurisdictions have raised the point that a lack of national consistency in definitions, parameters and methodologies in education data collection hampers our ability to extract credible and robust national insights and make informed policy decisions to boost student outcomes nationally.⁵³¹ This is particularly true for students with disability, students for whom English is an additional language or dialect (EAL/D), and First Nations students. Moreover, the Productivity Commission and others have highlighted the fact that some groups who do not attract specific loadings (but for whom we know there are poor outcomes) are invisible in the data. This is most acute for children in out-of-home care. This data paucity is significantly limiting our capacity to focus on and assist these groups.

Measures of learning progression in students with disability should be developed

The Panel has heard the importance of being able to report on all priority equity students without exception. Many submissions to the Panel have recognised that students with disability are not consistently recognised in outcomes and engagement data. For example, NAPLAN results are not disaggregated by students with disabilities; and many students with disabilities may also be exempt if their disability severely limits their capacity to participate in standardised testing. This means that the outcomes for an entire priority equity cohort are unaccounted for.⁵³²

Stakeholders have been clear on the need to provide much greater transparency by publishing data on outcomes and developing a national minimum data set.⁵³³ Noting the limitations of current data sets to accurately assess outcomes for students with disability, the Panel's view is that we need a nationally consistent approach to measuring learning progression where standard assessment measures are not appropriate. This is in addition to the current standardised assessment, so students with disability should be able to participate in NAPLAN where appropriate and also have access to alternative approaches to measuring annual learning growth.

English as an additional language or dialect students would more accurately capture outcomes for students who have English as a second language

EAL/D learners are school-aged students who have language backgrounds other than English and who are learning English as their second or additional language at school. EAL/D encompasses students from both First Nations and migrant backgrounds who are at various levels of English language proficiency compared to their peer equivalents.⁵³⁴

The Australian Council of TESOL Associations submission noted the EAL/D cohort is not recognised as a priority equity group within the NSRA and that across jurisdictions, sectors and schools learner identification, assessment, data collection and reporting procedures are localised, inconsistent, inadequate and, in some cases, not undertaken at all.

Gaining nationally consistent data on what we estimate are 600,000 Indigenous, migrant and refugee-background learners of English as an additional language or dialect is indisputably of value at every level of policy-making and provision.

Australian Council of TESOL Associations

English language learners are a subgroup of the larger population of students from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE). Currently, 'disadvantaged LBOTE' is used as the measure for allocating English as a second language (ESL) funding. This measure and consequent reporting arrangements have resulted in the performance of EAL/D learners being hidden within the reported performance of LBOTE students on national literacy and numeracy tests. The range of literacy and numeracy performance of the LBOTE group reflects the diverse socio-economic characteristics of the group and consequently misrepresents the performance of the EAL/D learner subgroup.⁵³⁵

LBOTE has been highlighted as a difficult categorisation for guiding education responses as it is such a large and diverse category, covering full English speakers (whose parents speak a language other than English) as well as beginning to advanced English language proficiency levels.⁵³⁶ NAPLAN has been criticised for masking disadvantage among children and young people who speak languages other than English, with little difference at a national level between the results of LBOTE and non-LBOTE students on all domains of the test.⁵³⁷

The Panel supports making EAL/D a priority equity cohort for data collection and measurement under the NSRA and believes that progress and outcomes should be reported at jurisdictional and national levels.

Students in out-of-home care should be recognised as a priority equity cohort

As discussed in Chapter 2, children and young people living in statutory out-of-home care (OOHC) present to school with a diverse range of characteristics, needs, strengths and interests, and generally experience poorer life and education outcomes than their counterparts, with some of the lowest levels of educational attainment of any group of children.⁵³⁸ Students in OOHC are also likely to experience other forms of disadvantage.⁵³⁹

Several submissions support the idea that students in OOHC should be an additional priority equity cohort.⁵⁴⁰ These submissions have noted that NAPLAN data shows significant gaps in outcomes between children in OOHC and the general population, with 23 per cent fewer children in OOHC meeting the aggregate National Minimum Standards.⁵⁴¹ This gap could be even more substantial due to the higher rates of absenteeism for OOHC students and the fact that NAPLAN data only counts those who attended.

The data which highlights the poorer outcomes experienced by children in OOHC suggests that despite investment, the unique circumstances and experiences of trauma faced by children are yet to be fully addressed by educational institutions. Based on this, the Panel considers that this cohort would benefit from being added as a priority equity cohort for data collection.

We need more comprehensive and culturally appropriate data on outcomes of First Nations students

A large amount of First Nations data is available; however, it is largely framed through deficit narratives detailing inequalities and does not support meeting the needs of First Nations peoples. For example, data aggregated by First Nations status at the national level can imply homogeneity, whereas data that recognises cultural and geographic diversity may better support community-level planning and service delivery.⁵⁴²

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association (NATSIPA) submission expressed concerns about using NAPLAN as the key student assessment tool and the mechanism for comparing First Nations students to the 'mainstream norm'. NATSIPA noted high levels of non-participation by First Nations students, which can lead to misrepresentative data sets and lower the validity of data collected, which impacts its use for school comparison and student support needs. NATSIPA also raised concerns about the cultural appropriateness of NAPLAN.

We think it is also important to look at measures of academic success beyond NAPLAN, which has a deficit narrative around it. Measuring outcomes beyond NAPLAN opens up the possibility of gaining a better understanding of what is working in schools to ensure student success that may not be visible in NAPLAN results.

Stronger Smarter Institute

The Panel supports work to broaden and improve the collection and reporting of data relating to First Nations student outcomes, which will give effect to Priority Reform 4 from the Closing the Gap Agreement. This could include further work being undertaken as part of the work outlined in Recommendation 2C to make NAPLAN more culturally appropriate. The move to measures of learning gain, further outlined in Chapter 7, may also go some way to providing data that informs the individual learning needs of every student, as suggested in the NATSIPA submission.

Several submissions specifically stressed the importance of First Nations data sovereignty in the governance of any data collection or data-sharing initiative. First Nations data sovereignty is the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations to maintain, control, protect, develop, and use data as it relates to them.⁵⁴³ Throughout consultation it has been suggested that the next Agreement should establish an Indigenous data governance framework and governance model to provide First Nations peoples with control over First Nations education data based on the *Maiam nayri Wingara* principles, which include:

- informing when, how and why First Nations data is gathered, analysed, accessed and used
- ensuring First Nations data reflects First Nations priorities, values, culture and diversity.⁵⁴⁴

Governments have made commitments to First Nations data sovereignty to varying degrees through their Closing the Gap implementation plans. Yet concerns remain that both national and state legislative and policy settings are conflicting with principles of First Nations data sovereignty.⁵⁴⁵ The NSW Government and the National Indigenous Australians Agency both underscored that any future data collection should be conducted in line with Closing the Gap Priority Reform 4, which specifies the conditions under which data on First Nations communities and people is to be collected and used.

Data sovereignty is an issue of particular importance to our students and families – with considerable consultation needed to determine the appropriateness of further data collection and information sharing, particularly for Aboriginal families.

Northern Territory Government

Moving towards First Nations data sovereignty requires strong engagement and consultation with existing First Nations representative groups and promotion of strength-based narratives across all reporting and analysis. Increased transparency of existing data would support First Nations people and communities to have visibility of the data that is held and is used to make decisions. The Panel considers that where data involves First Nations peoples, governments should ensure that national data governance actively involves First Nations peoples and be protective and respectful towards First Nations individual and collective interests.

Improving the Measurement of system effectiveness

Better reporting on student transition pathways can be developed through data linkage

As discussed in section 5.2.1, data linkage can help governments, systems and schools to better understand the transition pathways for students once they leave school. This pathway data can help establish a picture of how effective schools are in transitioning their students into further education or the workforce.

Data on post-school transition and implementation of transition planning programs in all education sectors (Government, Catholic and Independent) and districts are lacking. This data could assist in understanding if schools are using evidence-based practices to support students making career choices, what are the current challenges schools are facing to provide services, support, and career information.

Centre for Inclusive Education (Queensland University of Technology)

The Panel notes work underway to better understand transitions through the Post-School Destinations data linkage project. This was established to create a proof-of-concept linked administrative data asset focused on post-school destinations and outcomes for Australian students, with the aim of examining the feasibility and suitability of using linked data to measure youth pathways and post-school destinations, including participation in tertiary education and employment.

The Panel believes that key agreed indicators through the Post-School Destinations data linkage project should be reported by the end of 2026 to support understanding of student pathways. This is particularly important given the work underway to ensure Australians have the skills for the jobs of the future, including through the Australian Universities Accord and the National Skills Agreement.

More work is needed to measure progress towards reform

With the exception of the Productivity Commission's Performance Reporting Dashboard (which is incomplete in its coverage of the current NSRA sub-outcomes), current national reporting mechanisms are not NSRA specific and there is limited capacity to track progress on commitments as part of the MFSA.

AERO's submission proposed that a commitment be made to a national program of research with the purpose of ongoing learning about the progress of reforms. This would provide insights about the relative effectiveness of variations in the implementation of the NSRA's agreed central policy reform, so that all systems' understanding of how to maximise the effectiveness of the reform continues to improve over time.⁵⁴⁶

As already stipulated, it is essential that any changes to data collection and reporting in the next Agreement are carefully considered in consultation with all stakeholders, particularly to manage risks related to teacher workloads, unnecessary duplication, and comparisons between jurisdictions and schools.

RECOMMENDATION 5C

To understand the progress of students and report on Australia's education goals, the Panel recommends governments commit to revising the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia to ensure it collects essential data, including:

- i. student-level, disaggregated data on the achievement and outcomes of students, including:
 - a. reporting progress of students who were assessed by NAPLAN as 'needs additional support' or 'developing' in subsequent NAPLAN assessments by the end of 2025
 - b. measuring progress of students against the key learning areas of the Australian Curriculum by the end of 2029
 - c. collecting national outcomes data for students with disability, including developing a nationally consistent approach to measuring the learning progression of those students with disability for whom standard assessment methods (such as NAPLAN) and progression against the annual learning growth targets of the Australian Curriculum are not appropriate measures, by the end of 2029
 - d. identifying and defining priority equity cohorts clearly, by replacing 'language background other than English' (LBOTE) with 'English as an additional language or dialect' (EAL/D) and including students in out-of-home care by the end of 2027
 - e. report First Nations student outcomes, with reporting on these data to be scrutinised by First Nations experts to give effect to Priority Reform 4 from the Closing the Gap Agreement, by the end of 2026
- ii. data on other outcomes of national interest:
 - a. key agreed indicators through the Post-School Destinations data linkage project by the end of 2026
 - b. the implementation fidelity and impact of major reforms undertaken as part of the next Agreement in a transparent and comparable way.

Chapter 6: Improving funding transparency

Key points:

- Transparency is crucial to ensuring that the people who use, provide, and administer education services can access and understand the basis for policy and funding decisions.
- Greater transparency of flows of funding to schools and how funds are spent will improve accountability and public trust in the system. Parents and communities have told the Panel that they have a strong interest in knowing how systems and schools support all children to reach their potential by better access to funding data.
- Enhanced transparency and accountability requirements will also provide a foundation to better target funding to improve outcomes for priority equity cohorts.
- Governments, school systems, and approved authorities already possess and collect a large amount of school level data. It is not necessary to impose any additional burden on school leaders and educators to improve transparency and accountability.
- There are opportunities to enhance the accountability of schools in meeting their obligations under the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* by increasing transparency about current levels of funding and educational adjustment for students with disability.

6.1 Context

Accountability and transparency mechanisms, when well designed and implemented, increase public confidence. Providing visibility of how public money is distributed and spent, in both government and non-government systems and schools, and linking to information about outcomes provides parents and communities with the means to engage in discussions on the effectiveness of investments and hold governments, school systems, approved authorities, and schools to account. Many parents regularly use the information that is available to make decisions about schools and their child's schooling needs, and improving the transparency and accountability of this information will support engagement and help shine a light on how systems and schools are supporting students.

The Productivity Commission found that the accountability mechanisms in the current National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) are of limited effectiveness,⁵⁴⁷ with reporting measures not delivering visibility of how public funding flows to schools. Australia's education system is underpinned by the principle of needs-based funding. This means allocating more funding for students from priority equity cohorts, reflecting their need for additional investments to overcome educational barriers. While the needs-based model was not designed to be fully allocated and expended at the student level – as there must be flexibility at a school or system level to pool resources to fund cost-effective supports that can benefit many students – it should be clear how the additional funding is supporting its intended recipients.

However, as many submissions noted, while some useful information is publicly available, current data does not build a clear and complete picture of how different schools and students are funded; nor does it show the models used by different governments and approved system authorities to determine funding allocations. It is often unclear to parents, communities and even school leaders how national and system-level needs-based funding models translate to actual allocations and expenditures. There are particular challenges with respect to funding and educational adjustments provided for students with disability, which is the focus of section 6.2.2. There are also meaningful differences in the information available for different school sectors, making it hard to see whether an approach being taken in any given system is either effective or equitable.

These gaps in funding information have significant impacts. For parents and communities, limited funding transparency reduces their capacity to engage with governments, school systems, approved authorities, and schools; hold them accountable; and make informed choices for their children. It may also undermine public trust. For governments, the lack of data and transparency obscures their line of sight about how money is spent, and their capacity to explain how spending supports student outcomes. For policymakers, school leaders, and researchers, the lack of consistent data limits their ability to analyse and understand the effectiveness of different approaches, policies, and programs to inform future decisions.

6.2 Key consultation themes and analysis

6.2.1 Greater funding transparency would support accountability and ensure funding 'glows in the dark'

There are gaps in funding information which limit transparency and accountability

Schools are funded through a combination of Australian Government funding, funding from jurisdictions, and funding from fees and parental contributions. Some schools also receive philanthropic donations, either as funds or as in-kind donations. The design of the school funding model is underpinned by four principles:

1. **Needs based** – Higher levels of funding are targeted to disadvantaged students and schools, with the objective of reducing educational inequity.
2. **Subsidiarity** – Approved authorities and schools have the flexibility to allocate and spend funding in a manner which they consider fit to meet educational priorities and needs. Approved authorities that decide to allocate funds to their member schools according to their own needs-based funding arrangement are known as approved system authorities.⁵⁴⁸
3. **Accountability** – Jurisdictions and non-government authorities are required to provide assurance that Commonwealth funding is spent for educational purposes outlined in the *Australian Education Act 2013* (Education Act) and the *Australian Education Regulations 2023* (Education Regulation).
4. **Consistency** – Commonwealth funding shares are clear and consistent within each sector, and funding changes predictably across time to minimise disruptions for schools.

These principles have various impacts for transparency and accountability. Most notably, subsidiarity provides approved system authorities the ability to re-allocate Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) funding according to their own needs-based funding models. This reflects the tenet that approved system authorities are 'better placed than the Australian Government to determine the most effective allocation of available resources in their particular circumstances', arising from their operational responsibilities and proximity to schools.⁵⁴⁹

The Panel has heard from various approved system authority and peak body submissions that subsidiarity is an essential principle of the school funding system.⁵⁵⁰ This flexibility enables systems and schools to meet local needs and priorities and tailor funding to diverse and challenging school contexts. The Panel supports the principle of subsidiarity and reaffirms the importance of giving systems and schools the opportunity to deliver services that best support their students. Subsidiarity is especially relevant for government schools, for which the jurisdictions provide the majority of SRS fundings.

Accountability currently occurs primarily through reporting on how funding flows from the Commonwealth Government to jurisdictions and school systems. The Education Act requires that approved system authorities make the needs-based funding models used in the redistribution of Commonwealth funding publicly available and transparent.⁵⁵¹ However, this requirement does not extend to the publication of information about the flow of funding from all jurisdictions. This is a significant limitation given Commonwealth funding is only part of the total funding that government schools receive, with jurisdictions providing the majority of remaining funding, and most schools receiving other forms of income.

A wide range of stakeholders, including the Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting, academics, and community organisations, identified that it can be hard to determine how closely approved system authorities' funding models align with the principles of needs-based funding.⁵⁵² Currently, public reporting via the MySchool website shows the total funding provided to each school, with no breakdown of the allocation according to the different loadings. Some jurisdictions require additional reporting of this information, but it is inconsistent and not centrally reported. As the Panel heard during school visits, many administrators of individual schools – across multiple sectors – are also unclear about the extent to which Commonwealth funds have been reallocated. This opacity may lead to reduced community confidence in the funding system.

The nature of school funding in the Australian federation means that while the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) provides a consistent measure for determining Commonwealth funding for schools, the diversity of models subsequently used by Approved Authorities to calculate and determine funding to schools results in no clear line of sight to understand how Commonwealth money flows to most schools ... we endorse the need for new initiatives, which at a minimum should include the need to make easily accessible to the public the models used to distribute funds to schools. We see potential in establishing an accessible public website where such information can be housed and where existing models can be compared.

Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne

There is also a data gap in understanding how funds are expended once they are allocated to schools, as raised by a number of submissions.⁵⁵³ Reporting on expenditure is essential to understanding the performance and priorities of schools, and stakeholders were clear about the need for greater transparency on expenditure to show how needs-based loadings are being used by systems and schools to support students from priority equity cohorts.⁵⁵⁴

It is important to note that needs-based loadings provided through the SRS are a mechanism to calculate the distribution of Commonwealth Government funding, but there is no requirement to spend this funding on particular cohorts or individual students from those cohorts. Approved system authorities may pool total funding to more efficiently meet local needs and the priorities of their students and schools, which could range from reasonable educational adjustments for individual students to system-level programs to support particular cohorts of students. However, it is possible to enhance the shared line of sight into school expenditure within these reporting parameters to help parents and communities understand the supports and services available at individual schools, ensure accountability for effective and equitable use of public funding, and choose schools that best fit the needs of students.

Clearer information on how funding is allocated and spent would further support transparency and accountability

There are a range of ways to improve funding transparency and accountability. They include greater clarity on the needs-based funding models government and non-government approved system authorities use to distribute funding to schools, as well as greater transparency on how that funding is spent. Nationally consistent reporting, regardless of the school sector, has been supported by stakeholders throughout the Review.

Greater transparency requires making the methodology that each system uses to allocate funds under their needs-based funding models public in a clear, consistent, and easily understandable way. This would include reporting the amounts provided to each school, broken down by base funding, equity loading, loadings for school size and location, as well as reporting both 'nominal' allocations (budgeted staffing salary) and actual allocations (actual staffing salary). To support this, all schools, including government schools, should complete a modified version of the School Financial Questionnaire. Funding provided as part of centralised or regional support programs should also be reported.

... Approved Authorities should be required to publicise their models and methodologies used to calculate and distribute funding. Visibility is crucial to ensuring funding models are effective and fit for purpose.

Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW

The Australian Government should also ensure there is nationally consistent reporting of needs-based funding models to enable a better understanding of different allocation approaches across systems and schools. The Panel wishes to highlight that while national consistency is the aim for *reporting*, this does not mean that every approved system authority must use the same needs-based funding model. Such consistency would work against the principle of subsidiarity and deny schools the benefit of funding models developed by approved system authorities that better understand their local contexts and needs.

Stakeholders also highlighted the inherent complexity of funding arrangements and the need to communicate information about funding models, allocations, and expenditure in consistent and accessible ways to build greater confidence in the school funding system. One approach to address this could be an expanded role for the National School Resourcing Board (NSRB) in reviewing the methodologies underpinning needs-based funding models and advising Education Ministers and approved system authorities on the extent to which they align with the principles of need-based funding. This overarching analysis would complement the proposals to increase the transparency of funding models and provide contextual information to help the public and system stakeholders better understand them.

Consideration should also be given to where the more transparent funding models should be published. One option for consideration is to continue to publish the funding models on each of the approved system authorities' websites. Alternatively, they could be published on the Australian Government Department of Education website or the MySchool website, to promote the ideal of national consistency.

The sheer complexity and obscure nature of funding structures render the financial situation of schools and sectors opaque ... If transparency is to be achieved the system needs to be more streamlined and the language simplified.

Professors Jane Kenway, Fazal Rizvi and Barbara Preston

There should also be greater transparency on school expenditure. Several submissions noted that this is essential to ensuring that investment is appropriately prioritised and has impact.⁵⁵⁵ The Australian Council of State School Organisations submission outlined further transparency measures such as making all school budgets publicly and easily available, regular financial reporting, audits, and establishing the means to follow money as it flows through the various levels of government and approved system authorities to schools.

The Panel considers that this additional financial transparency does not need to impose any additional workload on schools, leaders and educators. Governments and systems already collect a significant amount of school level data. What is being recommended is that this data be made more accessible to parents and communities to help them better understand their school and hold all levels of government to account on their commitments.

Providing the public with more accessible information on how schools, both government and non-government, spend their funds to support student outcomes could result in greater parental and community engagement. Providing a clearer understanding of school priorities would better enable parents to assess whether investments are having an impact and to make informed choices around schooling for their children. The Review's survey found that parents want more information on the academic programs and on-site services provided to support children,⁵⁵⁶ information that could be available through clearer reporting on school funding expenditure.

This level of accountability is critical to the success of the reforms recommended in this report. The Panel has heard that parental engagement in student learning has a positive effect on student outcomes.⁵⁵⁷ By providing parents and communities with the opportunity to better understand how funds are expended, they will be empowered to further engage with students' learning, as well as better advocate for their child and for the decisions they would like to see made within their school.

To ensure that public funding is used effectively in schools, [the Australian Council of State School Organisations] believes that it is essential for both government and non-government school authorities to be transparent and accountable to the community ... By working together, we can ensure that the funding is allocated wisely and benefits our schools positively.

Australian Council of State School Organisations

Some schools recognise the benefits of improved transparency and want national and system-level support to deliver it. Rooty Hill High School's submission called for 'a way of being able to report to our school community on how the funding we receive, including for "equity cohorts", is allocated, distributed and spent by the government, the Department of Education and the school!'⁵⁵⁸

The Panel also notes that some jurisdictions are publishing some of this information already. For example, annual reports for New South Wales (NSW) government schools provide school-level funding information and outline how needs-based funding is utilised to support students, as described in Case Study 22.

Case Study 22: Annual reports for NSW government schools

Approved system authorities have the right to mandate further reporting for the schools they are responsible for, beyond the requirements under the Australian Education Regulations 2023 (paragraph 60(1)), which stipulates that school income broken down by funding source must be published annually.

NSW stipulates that principals must 'complete an annual evaluation of the planned allocation of resources and the impact of needs-based funding' in their school's annual report.

This additional requirement placed on government schools in NSW results in schools publishing the total amount of additional funding they receive to support specific cohorts – for example, how much was received through each equity loading. Schools must detail which activities were partially or fully funded through each loading, and the results of the expenditure.

This information provides transparency to the community, clearly showing how much additional funding has been provided and how the school is investing these funds to support students.

Source: New South Wales Government submission.

NSW also recently announced a review of Section 83C of the *Education Act 1990* (NSW), which relates to non-government schools and the requirement that financial assistance not be provided to schools that operate for profit.⁵⁵⁹ The review will seek to provide greater clarity to the sector regarding Section 83C, seeking to 'prevent unnecessary investigations and litigation and [ensure] public money is spent appropriately'. It is expected that this review will provide the community with greater certainty that funds are used appropriately for the education of all students.

Such efforts are valuable, but there is a need to ensure *all* schools, parents and communities can benefit from clearer lines of sight. The goal is to promote improved transparency by ensuring the information is reported in a consistent, accessible way and accompanied by analysis of alignment with the needs-based funding model. Parties to the next Agreement may consider requiring school expenditure data to also be published in annual reports, or, alternatively, on the MySchool website.

RECOMMENDATION 6A

The Panel recommends that by the end of 2026, an existing independent resourcing body is strengthened and is tasked with collecting and reporting nationally consistent, detailed and accurate information on approved system authorities' school funding models, annual funding allocations, and expenditure to improve transparency of funding arrangements. This should include:

- i. allocation information reported by school, broken down by base, size, location and equity loading across both 'nominal' allocations (budgeted staffing salary) and actual allocations (actual staffing salary)
- ii. expenditure information by school reported across agreed categories
- iii. information regarding allocations and expenditure on centralised and regional support programs
- iv. reporting this information, including by requiring all schools, including government schools, to complete a modified version of the School Financial Questionnaire.

6.2.2 Greater funding transparency would support accountability regarding outcomes for students with disability

All governments have demonstrated their commitment to providing inclusive education. However, it was clear from consultations that experiences and outcomes remain uneven for students with disability, including access to educational adjustments and whether these adjustments are effective.

The Panel notes that the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission) highlights the importance of the education system being inclusive of students with disability.⁵⁶⁰ Recommendations addressed the need to improve transparency of disability funding models, the use of disability funding, as well as the collection and reporting of disability data, including publishing the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) on MySchool. The Australian Government response to the Disability Royal Commission should be considered as part of the development of the next Agreement (as outlined in the discussion of inclusive education in Chapter 2).

The operation of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability should be reviewed, with more data at the school level provided to support students with disability and their families

The primary mechanism to identify and support students with disability is the data collected through the NCCD. The NCCD collects information relating to Australian school students receiving educational adjustments due to disability.⁵⁶¹ This is achieved through teachers and administrators using their professional judgement to determine a student's needs and whether they should be included in the NCCD.⁵⁶² The NCCD has four levels of educational adjustment:

- Support provided within quality-differentiated teaching practice – educational adjustments conducted by teachers as part of their standard teaching practice. They are not greater than those used to meet the needs of diverse learners.⁵⁶³
- Supplementary adjustments – educational adjustments supplementary to the strategies and resources already available for all students within the school.⁵⁶⁴
- Substantial adjustments – educational adjustments occurring at most times on most days and involving considerable adult assistance.⁵⁶⁵
- Extensive adjustments – educational adjustments at this level provide extensive targeted measures and sustained levels of individualised intensive support.⁵⁶⁶

The NCCD informs the allocation of needs-based funding under the SRS to students with disability, which is a loading provided in addition to the base funding allocated to all students. The SRS only provides a disability loading to approved authorities for students who are identified as requiring either supplementary, substantial, or extensive adjustments (see Figure 15 for the 2023 figures). As mentioned in section 6.2.1, approved system authorities then have the flexibility to distribute school funding, including the Commonwealth's disability loading, according to their own funding models. This means that the school attended by a student with disability who requires an educational adjustment may receive a different loading amount from that shown in Figure 15, depending on the needs-based funding model used by the approved system authority.

Figure 15: Funding allocated to students with disability by level of educational adjustment in the NCCD

	Supplementary	Substantial	Extensive
Primary student	\$5,480	\$19,050	\$40,710
Secondary student	\$5,411	\$19,021	\$40,665

Source: Department of Education (2023) [Schooling Resource Standard](#), Department of Education, accessed 27 October 2023.

As stated in Chapter 2, the number of school students requiring an educational adjustment due to disability reported in the NCCD has increased. In 2022, the number of school students who received an educational adjustment due to disability reported in the NCCD was 911,131, representing 22.5 per cent of total student enrolments.⁵⁶⁷ This compares to 21.8 per cent of enrolments in 2021, 19.9 per cent in 2019, and 18 per cent in 2015.⁵⁶⁸ The Panel heard about different, and sometimes conflicting, pressure points in the NCCD process. Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) raised concerns that the data collected through the NCCD often focuses on the present level of educational adjustment that a student is receiving, not the actual level of educational adjustment that they need, which could lead to students and their schools being underfunded. CYDA made the related point that there are currently limited opportunities for families or allied health professionals, who may have extensive knowledge of the student and their needs, to provide input into the NCCD collection process.

On the other hand, the Panel heard that some schools and educators are requesting reports from medical professionals and specialists or confirmation that a student’s disability has been diagnosed before commencing the NCCD process. A diagnosis of disability is not required under the NCCD; disability can be imputed (regardless of impact or severity), in recognition that a social, rather than medical, model of disability is better able to focus on the functional needs of students. However, if these records are requested, the delay in access to specialists is likely to delay students with disability receiving the adjustments they need.

The Panel heard that the NCCD process can be onerous, especially where diagnoses are difficult to obtain and/or the disability is being imputed based on functional impact on a student’s learning. This finding was also observed by the Disability Royal Commission in its Interim Report.⁵⁶⁹ Schools with a greater proportion of students with disability also experience higher workload impacts from the requirements of the NCCD and would benefit from improvements in how it is implemented. For example, a school that focuses on the re-engagement of vulnerable and disengaged youth noted that it is required to complete NCCD forms for each of its students, even though the very nature of the school means the entire student cohort has a high level of need.

However, some educators, schools, and systems have found opportunities to align their assessment processes with the NCCD requirements, though this too can be fraught. One school noted that its educators were so used to making educational adjustments based on the needs of their students that they were often under-reporting the level of need in the NCCD. The National Catholic Education Commission submission noted the importance of continued training to support consistency in the quality of NCCD data – an observation the Panel considers important. However, some schools commented that although the resources provided to educators are high quality and very helpful, but that their educators and administrators simply struggled with finding the time to engage with the NCCD reporting requirements.

Given the importance of ensuring full funding for all students, the Panel sees an opportunity to further investigate, through a post-implementation review, the concerns about and experiences of the NCCD that have been raised by stakeholders since its implementation. The focus of a post-implementation review should be on improving the operational effectiveness and efficiency of the NCCD to ensure it is delivering support for students with disability and their families. Some stakeholders, including the Western Australian Government

submission, have suggested that the level of funding allocated to students with disability could also be considered, but it should be noted that SRS loadings are a separate issue to what would be considered under the proposed post-implementation review.

Better use of NCCD data would improve transparency for students with disability and their families

Improving the accuracy of NCCD data is necessary to ensure appropriate funding of adjustments for students with disability. However, it could also help improve transparency of and accountability for allocations, expenditure and outcomes. At present, ACARA reports the distribution of students with disability by level of educational adjustment and category of disability as a percentage of total enrolments nationally, jurisdictionally, and by sector,⁵⁷⁰ but there is currently no school-level public reporting.

This is a missed opportunity: the NCCD is an incredibly rich source of data about students with disability. The lack of school-level information limits transparency of and accountability for the effectiveness of the funding provided to schools to support students with disability. School-level data is especially important for students whose school is administered by an approved system authority. As approved system authorities can redistribute the disability loadings according to their own needs-based funding models, students and families in these schools may find it difficult to determine the quantity of funding provided to support students. NCCD data at the school level would be a starting point for empowering students and families with information pertaining to the types of adjustments students with disability are reported as receiving. Further to this, and as recommended in section 6.2.1 and Recommendation 6A, transparency and accountability should be increased through the publication of nationally consistent, detailed, and accurate information on approved system authorities funding models to enhance line of sight for communities into school expenditure. This information could be used by school communities to understand how much money has been allocated by approved system authorities to support students with disability and how schools spend funding to improve student outcomes.

There is also no mechanism for students and families to compare the educational adjustments reported in the NCCD with the educational adjustments that students require. The lack of public reporting restricts the ability of stakeholders to evaluate the extent to which NCCD reporting, funding allocation, and utilisation correlates with student outcomes. This is exacerbated by a general lack of reporting on outcomes disaggregated by students with disability, discussed in Chapter 5.

The submission from the Faculty of Education at Monash University noted that minor changes to the NCCD data collection methodology and reporting mechanisms could substantially improve the usefulness of the data collected. The Panel notes that the NSRB, in the report on its 2019 review of the loading for students with disability, recommended that NCCD student numbers (by educational adjustment level) be published on MySchool, bringing this collection of data in line with other SRS inputs such as First Nations status.⁵⁷¹ The NSRB noted that this would provide greater transparency, enabling public scrutiny and driving compliant behaviour and ongoing improvement. The NSRB stressed that due regard would need to be given to privacy issues, and that publication of the data would not add to the burden on teachers and school leaders as the information is already collected and reported to governments.⁵⁷²

The Panel agrees that school-level NCCD data should be reported to support students with disability and their families to make more informed decisions around school choice. Further, reporting of this information will encourage partnerships between schools and the community in understanding and implementing supports for students with disability.

Strengthening compliance with the Disability Standards for Education

The *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (DSE) review in 2020 found that there were few consequences for education providers that were non-compliant with the DSE.⁵⁷³ Participants in the review believed that non-compliant behaviour was occurring, including gatekeeping, a lack of access to reasonable educational adjustments, and bullying. This aligns with what the Panel has heard about the gaps in the provision of inclusive education, outlined in Chapter 2, and with the findings of the Disability Royal Commission.

Despite the requirements articulated in the DSE, stakeholders highlighted continued non-inclusive practices in schools. Surveys conducted by CYDA have found that only 54 per cent of students with disability felt welcomed and included at schools, 70 per cent reported exclusion from events or activities, 65 per cent reported that they had experienced bullying, and only 27 per cent reported that they felt supported to learn at school.⁵⁷⁴

Participation in education leads to participation in all areas of life and to the extent that the participation in education is denied, constrained, or provided on a discriminatory basis, this impacts the realisation of all other human rights and leads to marginalisation and disadvantage.

All Means All

As outlined in Chapter 2, the Panel believes that every student with disability should be provided with an inclusive education. One way to achieve this is greater compliance with the DSE. There are several ways to increase accountability for compliance with the DSE to support students with disability, such as building upon the complaints-based mechanisms that are already in place. For example, CYDA's submission recommended that accountability be driven through multiple initiatives, including an independently assessed school scorecard, a transparency improvement framework at the jurisdiction level and an independent tribunal or commission-led complaints process.⁵⁷⁵

In the first instance, jurisdictions should strengthen accountability for schools' and approved system authorities' compliance with the DSE. This could be achieved by incorporating performance audits related to implementation of the DSE into the regular work program of state auditors-general.⁵⁷⁶ This would support findings (both as to best practice and where there is room for improvement) to be shared across schools and would maintain a focus on improving systems, school leaders and educators' capability to embed inclusive education.

RECOMMENDATION 6B

The Panel recommends that concrete steps be taken to review and strengthen the support for students with disability and provide more transparency on current levels of support. This should include greater accountability and reporting on supports needed by students with disability, including through:

- i. the Commonwealth Government conducting a post-implementation review of the operation of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD), with outcomes reported to Education Ministers by the end of 2025
- ii. the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, with support from all governments and approved authorities, publishing school-level NCCD data by educational adjustment level on the MySchool website from 2025, with the collection of disaggregated data to allow for intersectional analysis
- iii. governments agreeing on actions by the end of 2026 to strengthen the accountability of approved authorities for compliance with the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*.

Chapter 7: Implementing mechanisms to support innovation and achieve reform

Key points:

- The reform directions outlined in this report are substantial and will require time for planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and refinement.
- It is particularly important to ensure that there is sufficient collaboration, resourcing and support within and between governments, school systems and approved authorities to support educators as the reforms are rolled out. The ambition of implementation of the recommendations in this report will need to be calibrated to the resources available to support their implementation.
- The next Agreement should therefore balance a longer-term view of the education system's reform directions with opportunities to review and assess progress and either confirm or adjust priorities and efforts where necessary.
- Progress against the reforms must be shared publicly, in easy to access and understand ways, to enhance accountability and build public trust in the education system.
- This will require the adoption of a focused set of targets that direct efforts and aspirations and enable measurement of progress against reforms, which is essential in holding governments to account and building public awareness of the direction of the education system.
- The next Agreement is an opportunity to place First Nations organisations and people in at the heart of design and delivery, to build a stronger, more culturally responsive education system.
- To realise the full benefits of reform, there is a need for a more structured approach to innovation, including funding to support trials and evaluations of new models of teaching and learning, such as full-service schools, subject to robust design and implementation criteria.

7.1 Context

The objectives of the reform agenda set out in this report are not new. Lifting student outcomes and making sure these are not determined by postcode or background have long been stated objectives of our education system. Many of the specific reforms recommended are also not new – having been recommended, or partially implemented, before. Many systems and schools are already delivering on the reforms set out in this report, and evaluating their effectiveness in supporting students and educators. Experience demonstrates that it is not just our aspirations or even our actions that will determine success – *how we work* is critical to ensuring that all students fully benefit from the power of education.

Governance is critical to the success of the next Agreement. Governments, educators, parents, communities must all work together more effectively. How the next Agreement is established and designed to ensure it successfully builds the long-term commitments, collective efforts, accountability and innovation required, is the focus of this chapter.

This begins with setting a longer timeframe for the next Agreement. The current agreement was set for a period of five years, as was the one before that. But reform takes time, both to implement and assess, particularly when the reform applies to education, an area of long-term investment. There is widespread appetite for a longer-term, more strategic approach that would provide greater certainty of strategic direction and ensure patience and discipline in implementation and evaluation. Longer-term agreements or plans are not unheard of – from the 10-year Closing the Gap Agreement to the 10-year national infrastructure pipeline, Australian governments are well practised at determining a set of priorities to be pursued over a decade. Education is social infrastructure and the pipelines are just as long.

The design and implementation of the agreement must also consider governance reform to ensure that the Priority Reforms of the Closing the Gap Agreement are enshrined in the way the next Agreement is negotiated and implemented so that it has the best chance of meeting the needs of First Nations people and communities.

Once the new Agreement is in place, there is a need to improve the way governments share information about progress against reforms and their objectives. This necessitates agreeing to a focused set of targets and better public reporting against them. The Productivity Commission identified that, under the current Agreement, the relationship between targets, outcomes and sub-outcomes, and National Policy Initiatives is often vague, and national and bilateral reform initiatives have not worked together to systematically address key priorities.⁵⁷⁷ It is essential that governments use the next Agreement to clearly set out mechanisms that best drive reform work and appropriate targets to achieve better outcomes for all students.

7.2 Key consultation themes and analysis

7.2.1 Robust and transparent governance arrangements can strengthen commitment to and accountability for reforms

A longer agreement would provide the sector with time and consistency to implement reforms

It takes time for reform to flow through systems and for the effects to be apparent in outcomes. Educators and system administrators have noted the toll that relentless change takes on workforce morale and their capacity to improve student outcomes. It is critical that the reforms laid out in this Review are given time to be implemented, measured, and evaluated.

There is precedent for longer-term agreements or plans, including the 10-year Closing the Gap Agreement, the 10-year national infrastructure pipeline, and long-term plans for reducing violence against women and their children. A 10-year operation cycle for the next Agreement would provide the education system with sufficient time to realise the reform objectives.

Something as important as education should not be dependent upon political funding or election cycles . . . Education needs our political leaders and our education leaders to commit to a long term (10 year plus) plan and a structure for regular review. The further challenge then is to commit to its sustainability by ensuring adequate funding.

Australian Secondary Principals' Association

A 10-year Agreement must not impact the pathway that jurisdictions are taking to reach 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS). A longer operation cycle should not be an opportunity to delay ensuring that all schools in Australia receive full funding – which, as outlined in Finding 8, the Panel considers to be urgent and critical.

Furthermore, it is important to ensure that flexibility and responsiveness are not traded off for stability. There must be the capacity to ensure that targets remain fit for purpose and that new evidence can be accounted for. Where developments allow for more nuanced measurement (e.g. of learning gain across the curriculum) or demonstrate that a more robust approach is required to support implementation, the 10-year Agreement should allow for these refinements to occur.

To provide the required level of flexibility, a review should be undertaken midway into the next Agreement and consideration should be given to negotiating five-year bilateral agreements. The mid-point review should inform the second five-year bilateral agreement by providing governments with an opportunity to understand how implementation could be enhanced and whether the interventions pursued are realising agreed reform objectives. The review should focus on continual progress rather than funding and ensure the reforms continue to focus on supporting dynamic learning and shared accountability. Shorter bilateral agreements will enable governments to adjust the actions they are taking to implement agreed reform and respond to lessons learned through monitoring and the formal mid-point review.

RECOMMENDATION 7A

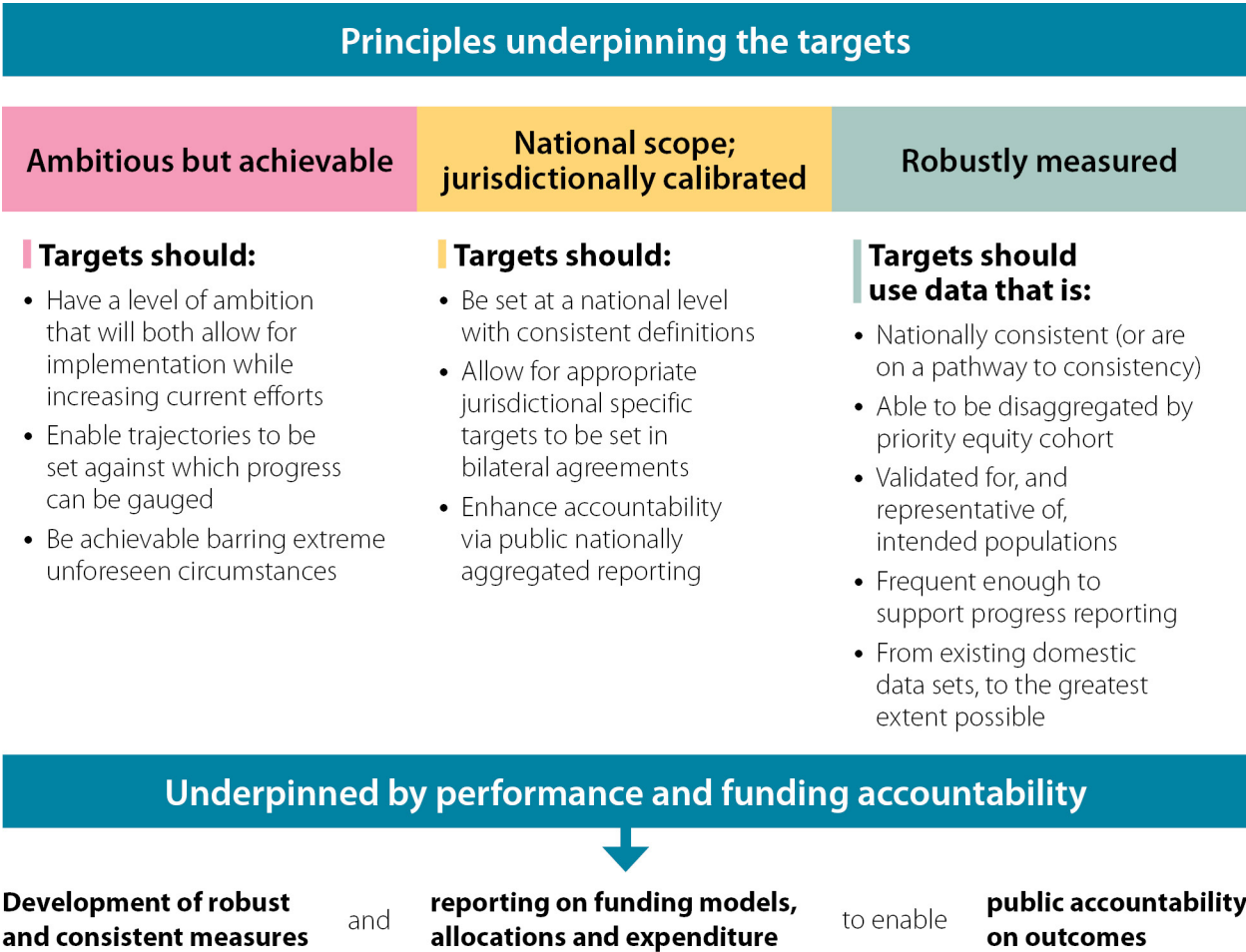
The Panel recommends that the next Agreement should operate for 10 years to provide the education system with sufficient time and consistency to realise the reform objectives. This should be supported by a mid-point review to inform five-year bilateral agreements, creating the opportunity to gauge progress and strengthen system learning throughout the 2020s and 2030s.

Targets should focus on educational equity and excellence

Targets, when designed effectively, can play an important role in focusing efforts to drive reform. The Productivity Commission, referencing a 2014 survey by Nous Group, stated that policymakers in Australian and jurisdictional agencies consider targets to be more effective in driving reforms than other levers, such as reward payments.⁵⁷⁸ Effective targets also provide the community with the opportunity to understand what governments aim to achieve and can be held to account for.

The Panel agrees with the Productivity Commission's review finding that current National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) targets are incomplete and do not provide specific directions to drive reform.⁵⁷⁹ The Panel considers that the suite of targets for the next Agreement need to align with the principles outlined at Figure 16, which aim to enhance accountability, focus efforts on the reforms that matter, and lay a credible pathway to realising these reforms.

Figure 16: Principles underpinning the targets



As several findings and recommendations in the report make clear, the purpose of education is broader than foundation behaviours and skills (including literacy and numeracy skills), and there is a need to be measuring domains such as learning gain across the curriculum and student engagement. However, given the current unavailability of data for these domains, the Panel has purposefully contained the number of targets to focus effort on the fundamental building blocks of educational excellence and equity, such as literacy, numeracy and attendance.

The Panel’s Finding 5 (*The Commonwealth should work with jurisdictions to further explore options for the robust and effective assessment of general capabilities*) highlights the importance of assessing general capabilities, where possible, if Australia’s students are to become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community, as envisaged in the *2019 Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Mparntwe).

Unfortunately, Australia's education system is not yet able to provide robust, nationally consistent data against all domains of interest. To remedy this, the Panel recommends the development of measures to track outcomes against several targets such as early schooling outcomes (see Recommendation 1B), key learning areas within the full Australian Curriculum by 2029 (see Recommendation 5C), gaps in student outcomes between advantaged and disadvantaged social groups (to support measuring equity in education as defined through Finding 7), student engagement (as part of the wellbeing measure; see Recommendation 3A), and workforce diversity (see Recommendation 4B). This is in addition to recommendations to develop other non-target measures to support reporting under the next Agreement, including tracking the concentration of socio-economic disadvantage (see Recommendation 2A) and monitoring student wellbeing (see Recommendation 3A).

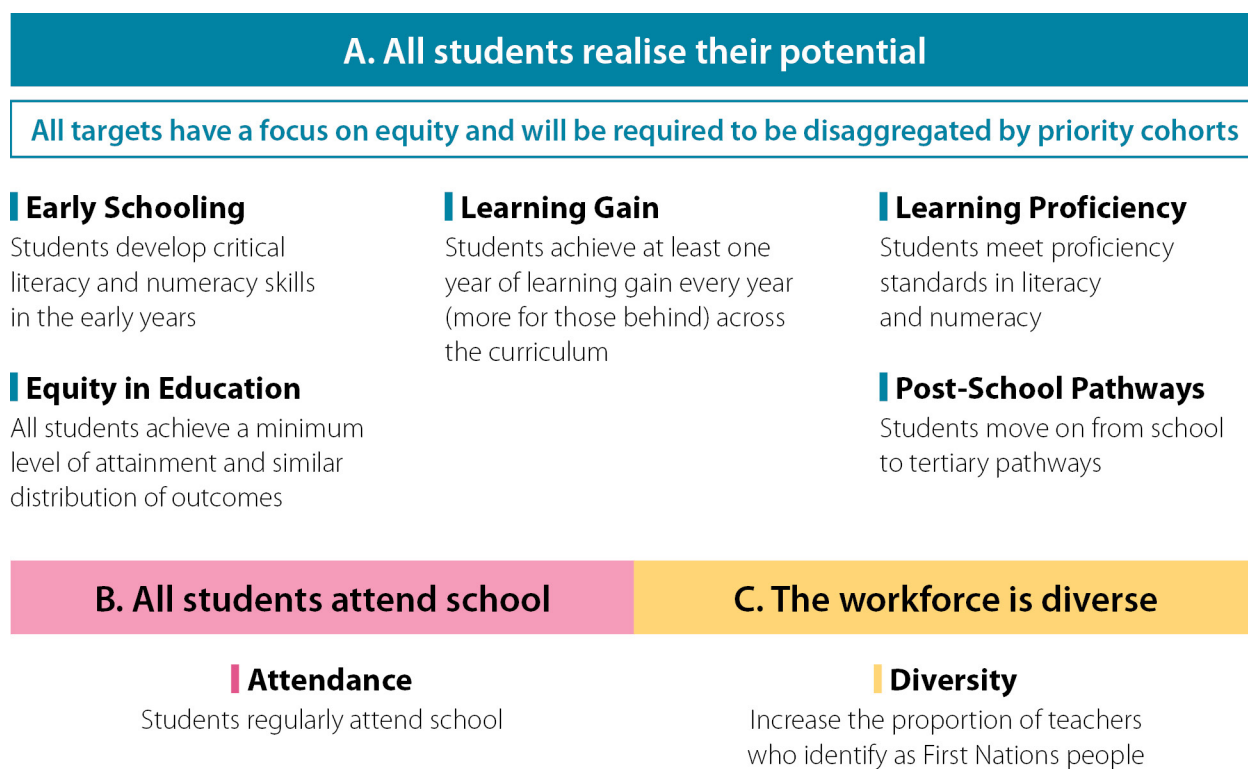
The Panel notes that there may be a lag between the commencement of reforms, their measurement and demonstrative improvement over time. For example, the systemic implementation of the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) model and other reforms recommended to lift student outcomes, especially in core literacy and numeracy areas, may take some time to bed down. So, too, will efforts to improve the diversity of the workforce. This may mean that little progress is seen initially against these targets. Reform efforts and tangible improvements will require patience and discipline, and the Panel urges jurisdictions to stay the course.

The Panel further recognises that measurement against targets does not displace the role of in-class assessment. As scholars such as Michael Fullan, Andy Hargreaves and Viviane Robinson have consistently emphasised, real-time, high-quality and classroom-based assessment provides teachers with immediate feedback about students' comprehension and skills, allowing for targeted interventions and personalised support.⁵⁸⁰ Fullan and Hargreaves stress the importance of nurturing a culture of high expectations for students, a culture of collaboration among educators, and a leadership focus on pedagogy leading to enhanced teaching quality.⁵⁸¹

In addition, as discussed in Chapter 1, there is a place for standardised national measures to be used in addition to the regular in-class assessment to track student progress. Standardised national measures create an independent, comparable foundation that provides insights into system effectiveness and underpins accountability.

The targets in this chapter (see Figure 17) are indicative and may require further analysis and validation prior to the development of the next Agreement. They are intended to guide the parties negotiating the next Agreement and replace the existing targets and sub-outcomes in the current NSRA.

Figure 17: Overview of the proposed targets⁵⁸²



RECOMMENDATION 7B

The Panel recommends that the next Agreement measure progress against six national student focused targets and one workforce-focused target (outlined below), centred on the reforms proposed in this report. To facilitate monitoring and reporting of progress against these targets, governments will need to:

- i. develop and implement robust, nationally consistent measurement tools to accurately measure and report against all targets, including for:
 - a. Year 1 phonics and numeracy skills (as per Recommendation 1B)
 - b. curriculum-wide learning gain (as per Recommendation 5C)
 - c. measuring student outcome gaps across social groups (as per the definition of equity in Finding 7)
 - d. post-school pathways (as per recommendation 5C)
 - e. student learning engagement (as per Recommendation 3A)
 - f. workforce diversity (as per Recommendation 4B)
- ii. enhance capacity to disaggregate by priority equity cohorts
- iii. remain open to refining existing data collection or moving to superior data sources as these become available.

A. All students realise their potential

Early schooling

The early years of schooling, from Foundation to Year 2, are a critical time for ensuring that students are getting the skills they need to be able to engage in their learning. Regular screening and assessment is essential to support the 'assess, teach, assess and adjust' approach and enable students to catch up and keep up. The importance of identifying all students falling behind early and providing them with targeted and intensive support under the MTSS model is outlined in Chapter 1.

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is the current national measure to determine whether young Australians are developing core literacy and numeracy skills and assess progression of these skills over time; the limitation of NAPLAN is that it commences in Year 3. The value of nationally consistent phonics and numeracy checks in Year 1 is discussed in Chapter 1. A nationally consistent phonics and numeracy screening check should be used as one of the tools for monitoring early-years core skill acquisition, and to assist educators to identify which students require tiered and targeted support (Recommendations 1A and 1B).

The Panel sees the Australian Government's 40-item Phonics Check as an appropriate tool for phonics screening in Year 1 to be adopted for national consistency and to obtain a national picture of student progress before Year 3. This is a valuable national diagnostic tool and should not be interpreted as a high-stakes test or for performance comparison purposes. In 2017, Education Ministers determined that the Phonics Check was best utilised as a diagnostic tool rather than for the purposes of national assessment or reporting.⁵⁸³ However, in light of the persistent challenges in early literacy, the Phonics Check data should be collected at a national level, to increase understanding of students' early acquisition of phonics skills as a key building block for learning to read. The persistent achievement gaps in NAPLAN demonstrate that the data should also be disaggregated by priority equity cohort status to indicate where targeted learning support is required. The Panel recommends that all governments, school systems and approved authorities institute the Year 1 Phonics Check across all schools by the end of 2026 and a nationally consistent numeracy screening check by the end of 2028.

School systems and approved authorities that already use the Year 1 Phonics Check or have an earlier implementation date should report data when it is available. Once these checks are established, governments, school systems and approved authorities would then work towards achieving a 90 per cent proficiency rate by the end of the Agreement in 2034. The Year 1 Phonics Check should be used in conjunction with other high-quality screening tools jurisdictions have already adopted to assess the literacy and numeracy capability of individual students, and to identify students who require additional support. Jurisdictions should nominate the regular assessments and screening tools they use as part of the next Agreement, which will help build a picture about what works to identify students who are falling behind (discussed further in Chapter 1).

To support consistency and comparability of results, the Panel recommends that jurisdictions should be administering the screening process in Term 3. Further, to ensure any students falling behind are catching up to their peers, students who do not meet expected achievement levels during the Year 1 screening should receive supports to catch-up and participate in a resit assessment in Year 2. School systems and approved authorities should aim to have as many students as possible pass the Year 1 Phonics Check and numeracy screening check by the end of Year 2. The Panel notes that as these screening tools are diagnostic, the intention of this target is not to establish a high stakes test. Instead, the aim is to have a national measure of early literacy and numeracy to ensure as many children as possible are getting the best start to their education journey.

To further strengthen the focus on early schooling, governments should also look to better understand the transition from preschool to primary school. This includes consideration of further work to expand existing or developing data sets and measures, such as the Australian Early Development Census and the Preschool Outcomes Measure, as discussed in Chapter 1.

TARGET 1 – Early schooling

By the end of 2034, 90 per cent of students in each jurisdiction will reach proficiency in the Year 1 Phonics Check and the agreed Year 1 numeracy screening check, including students in priority equity cohorts.

Learning gain

All students should make progress in their learning, year on year, across the curriculum; but currently there is no agreement on what it means for a student to gain a year of learning from a year at school, or how it could be measured.

While a focus on proficiency (as per the current NSRA and Target 3 below) remains important to building a picture of whether students are meeting minimum standards, there is benefit in balancing this with a measure reflecting the learning gains each student, and the educators they work with, have worked hard to achieve. Identifying success is critical to building aspiration and engagement for students, both of which foster better student outcomes and wellbeing.

Improving the capacity to define and measure learning gain is also key to recognising excellence in teaching practice, particularly for staff working with a high number of students with complex needs. By being a ‘starting-point neutral’ measure, it can better recognise individual progress – particularly important for students who have started behind and for gifted students who are starting well ahead of benchmarks.

Measuring learning gain should ideally cover the full curriculum to more holistically reflect the diverse talents and successes of our students. A whole-of-curriculum learning gain measure would enable recognition and celebration of the rich prior knowledge and experiences students bring with them to the classroom and support the aim of building lifelong learners.

Further work is required to develop measures of progress against key learning areas in the full Australian Curriculum and develop a robust methodology and shared understanding of what one year of learning gain looks like for students. Developing these measures will help students, parents and teachers understand the learning gain expected for each year level, and help teachers identify students who are at risk of being unable to progress satisfactorily at school without targeted and intensive support.

At present, jurisdictions have varying capacity to measure learning gain across the curriculum; for example, Queensland is currently using A to E letter-grade measures that are moderated across schools, leveraging NAPLAN to establish standardised measures for subjects (learning areas) across the curriculum.

In the UK, the key accountability measure for secondary schools is ‘Progress 8’, which looks at the amount of progress students have made between primary school and their Year 10 exams.⁵⁸⁴ This indicates how much a secondary school has helped pupils improve (or progress) over a five-year period when compared to a government-calculated expected level of improvement, considering all areas of the curriculum that the student has undertaken. Progress 8 scores aim to measure the contribution to academic performance, or effectiveness, of each school and incentivise schools to focus on all children.⁵⁸⁵

The Panel recommends that governments develop measures of student progress against key learning areas of the Australian Curriculum (including general capabilities) by the end of 2029 (see Recommendation 7B(i)), taking into consideration different local contexts across jurisdictions. These measures could then be used to inform targets in bilateral agreements commencing in 2030, to be achieved by the end of 2034. Development of these measures should include further work on how to measure learning gain, including what one year of learning growth looks like for students in Foundation Year to Year 10 across key learning areas and for students with disability (see Recommendation 5C(i)(b)). It should also include consideration of 'general capabilities' (discussed in Chapter 1), including critical and innovative thinking, interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, global citizenship, and media and information literacy.

Measures of student learning gain could build on existing assessments and resources. For example, the National Literacy and Numeracy Learning Progressions (NLNLPs) contain validated descriptions of the knowledge and skills students are expected to acquire, presented in a sequenced, granular progression of learning from Foundation Year to Year 10. The NLNLPs could be used as a basis for developing robust and validated learning gain measures in domains beyond literacy and numeracy across the full curriculum. For those students who have fallen behind, the learning gain measure can provide insights into how much they will need to accelerate.

TARGET 2 – Learning gain

By the end of 2029, jurisdictions will have:

- i. established a consistent measure to assess learning gain across all key areas of the Australian Curriculum from Foundation Year to Year 10
- ii. negotiated targets included within bilateral agreements under the next Agreement.

Learning Proficiency

Literacy and numeracy are not the only skills that students need to thrive in their education; however, they are key skills to enable students to engage with content, achieve satisfactory learning progress and take up post-school training and education opportunities. As outlined in Chapter 1, literacy and numeracy were the top-ranked skills that parents and educators identified in the Review's survey.

To gauge whether reforms are improving literacy and numeracy proficiency throughout schooling, this target proposes increases in baseline performance in reading and numeracy in NAPLAN by the end of 2029 and 2034. The focus on reading reflects that reading results tend to be a more reliable predictor of literacy proficiency than results in other domains. Using NAPLAN data will support measurement of learning proficiency using nationally consistent and robust census data that is already available. The use of NAPLAN to measure Target 3 should not exacerbate issues raised by some stakeholders regarding NAPLAN, including that it is a high-stakes assessment that results in pressure being applied to schools, parents, and students.

Requiring an increase in baseline performance of 5 percentage points for all students in Target 3a, instead of setting a percentage target, captures the range of performance outcomes across year levels and across reading and numeracy domains. This also enables targets to be set for each jurisdiction that are both nationally consistent and locally appropriate. For example, for Year 3 students in the reading domain in the 2023 NAPLAN, an average of 66.8 per cent of Australian students were proficient (assessed as 'Strong' or 'Exceeding'), ranging from 71.2 per cent of students in Victoria to 38.9 per cent of students in the Northern Territory.⁵⁸⁶

Target 3b requires an increase in baseline performance for students from priority equity cohort backgrounds of 8 percentage points. The higher increase in baseline performance for students from priority equity cohort backgrounds will support a stronger focus on ensuring all students achieve their potential.

Furthermore, to reflect the 10-year timeframe proposed for the next Agreement, percentage point increases to be achieved by the end of 2034 have also been set. The target proposes that there should be a 10-percentage point increase in the proportion of all students assessed as proficient in NAPLAN for reading and numeracy, and a 15-percentage point increase for those in priority equity cohorts.

Target 3c's focus on reducing the number of students achieving a 'Needs Additional Support' result in NAPLAN, including those across priority equity cohorts, will complement Targets 3a and 3b by focussing on improving outcomes for all students. This will help avoid any unintended incentives to focus only on NAPLAN results for students on the cusp of achieving proficiency.

Disaggregating data for priority equity cohort status would support analysis to be conducted for Target 3, including the ability to compare students from priority equity cohorts with other cohorts, including all students or with high socio-economic status students, to understand achievement gaps. For some students, English is their second, third or fourth language, and many of these students also walk in multiple cultures. Ensuring these students are supported and empowered to achieve proficiency in English literacy and numeracy is an important part of supporting engagement and achievement more broadly. Disaggregated data for some equity cohorts, notably students with disability and students in out-of-home care, is not currently available but should be collected and reported, as recommended in Chapter 5.

It is important to note that the proficiency levels changed between the 2008 and 2022 NAPLAN and the 2023 NAPLAN, so there are differences between these two data sets, and further work to validate this target during the development of the next Agreement would be valuable. This would help ensure that the numerical percentage point increase is ambitious and achievable. The Australian Education Research Organisation's longitudinal literacy and numeracy in Australia (LLANIA) project effectively linked NAPLAN data to show students' progress over time; this could be bolstered by further linking data from the 2023 and future NAPLAN results to the 2008 to 2022 NAPLAN data.⁵⁸⁷ This would provide a longer time series going forward and enable deeper analysis to understand how proficiency trends during the next Agreement differ from those during earlier Agreements.

TARGET 3 – Learning Proficiency

Target 3a

By the end of 2029, there is an increase of 5 percentage points in each jurisdiction in the proportion of students who are assessed as proficient (in the 'Strong' or 'Exceeding' category) in NAPLAN for reading and numeracy across Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, based on NAPLAN performance in 2023; and with a 10 percentage point increase by the end of 2034.

Target 3b

By the end of 2029, there is an increase of 8 percentage points in the proportion of students in each priority equity cohort who are assessed as proficient in reading and numeracy, based on NAPLAN performance in 2023; and with a 15 percentage point increase by the end of 2034.

Target 3c

By the end of 2029, reduce the proportion of students (including by priority equity cohorts) in each jurisdiction who achieve a 'Needs Additional Support' result in NAPLAN for reading and numeracy in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 by 15 per cent, with a 30 per cent reduction by the end of 2034, based on NAPLAN performance in 2023.

Equity in Education

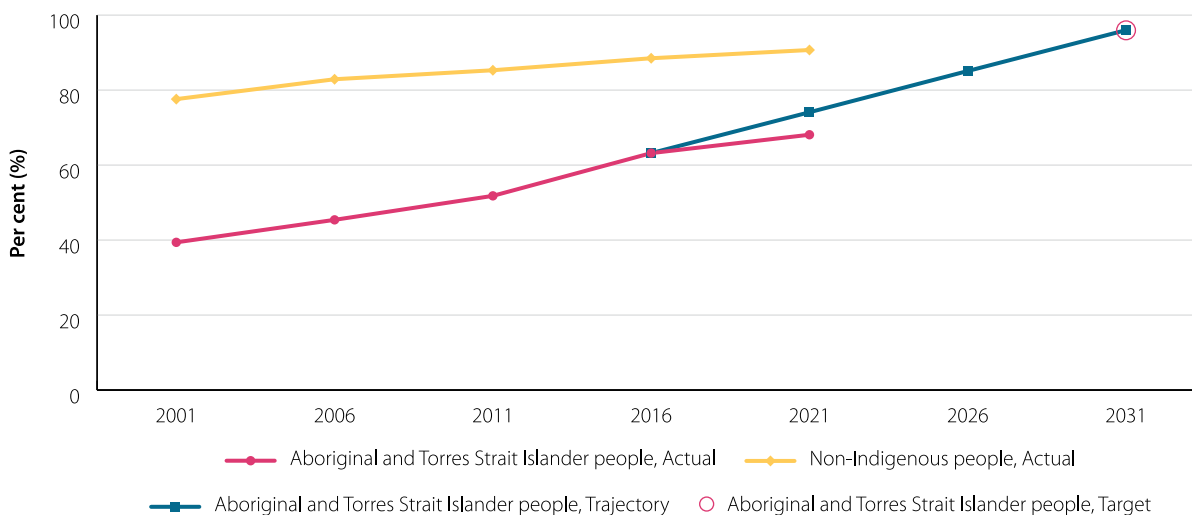
As set out in the Mparntwe, the ultimate goal of our education system is to see all young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community. To achieve this, we need to see greater equity in Australian education outcomes. As stipulated in Finding 7, the two limbs for the definition of equity include all students achieving at least a minimum level of education and students in priority equity cohorts achieving a similar distribution of outcomes to more advantaged students.

The Panel considers that in the Australian context attainment means successfully completing Year 12 or equivalent level of education, or a non-school qualification at Certificate III level or above. This acts as a useful proxy for determining whether the education system has provided students with the skills, confidence and attributes needed to forge a future life that is meaningful to them.⁵⁸⁸

In 2022, 90.1 per cent of people aged 20 to 24 had a Year 12 or equivalent qualification, or a non-school qualification at Certificate III level or above.⁵⁸⁹ Year 12 equivalents include Year 13, 6th Form, Higher School Certificate, matriculation, the International Baccalaureate, and overseas qualifications comparable to Year 12 in Australia, such as the German Abitur.

Target 4a is for 96 per cent of people aged 20 to 24 have a Year 12 or equivalent qualification, or a non-school qualification at Certificate III level or above, by the end of 2031. This target aligns with Target 5 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which calls for 96 per cent of First Nations people attaining a Year 12 or equivalent qualification, or a non-school qualification at Certificate III level or above, by 2031. Figure 18 below displays the current gap and required trajectory to reach this target. Better disaggregation of attainment data for other equity groups is also needed and should be prioritised.

Figure 18: Attainment of Year 12 or equivalent, or a non-school qualification at Certificate III or above, for First Nations and non-First Nations people aged 20 to 24 (2001–2021)



Source: Productivity Commission [Socioeconomic outcome area 5: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve their full learning potential](#), Productivity Commission, accessed 30 October 2023 referencing Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (unpublished) Census of Population and Housing, derived from ABS (unpublished) Census of Population and Housing, Joint Council National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

An option to measure attainment for 20-year-olds, rather than the 20- to 24-year-old age group, would focus on a cohort that has more recently finished secondary school. This analysis could be considered in parallel with the reporting on Target 4a.

As outlined in Finding 7 in Chapter 2, the second limb of the definition of equity is that students from different social groups achieve a similar level and range of outcomes, which means students in priority equity cohorts should achieve a similar average and similar distribution of outcomes to those of more advantaged students.

The Panel recommends that further work be undertaken to develop a nationally consistent measure of differences in student outcomes from different social groups. This work is particularly important to ensure consistency of the data and cohorts used, as well as to align with the development of measures of learning gain across the key learning areas of the Australian Curriculum in Target 2.

This work should also be informed by the work of jurisdictions that have implemented similar targets or are exploring equity targets, to learn what has been most effective in capturing and representing outcome gaps between different student cohorts. For example, the Australian Capital Territory Government's Equity of Educational outcomes indicator measures the difference in educational outcomes between more advantaged and less advantaged students over time,⁵⁹⁰ based on data of mean NAPLAN scores for reading and numeracy. Another option could be an index which combines data on all priority equity cohorts to identify trends and develop an aggregate measure of outcomes gaps.

The design of Target 4b will need to carefully consider potential unintended consequences, such as the chance that outcomes gaps will be narrowed because of declines in the performance of students at a higher skill level. In addition, all measures of equity and achievement in Targets 2, 3 and 4 should be accompanied by a focus on improving participation in assessment across all domains and key learning areas of the Australian Curriculum. This will ensure that data for these targets reflects the achievements of all students and is not skewed by gaps in participation, particularly for students with lower skill levels or from priority equity cohorts (as discussed in Chapter 1).

TARGET 4 – Equity in Education

Target 4a

By the end of 2031, 96 per cent of Australians aged 20 to 24 hold at least a Year 12 or equivalent level of education, or a non-school qualification at Certificate III level or above. This target should also be met by students from priority equity cohorts – noting that this target is in line with the target for First Nations students in the Closing the Gap Agreement.

Target 4b

By the end of 2029, there will be a nationally consistent measure of the differences in student outcomes between different social groups (if the reforms are effective students in priority equity cohorts should achieve a similar average and similar distribution of outcomes to those of more advantaged students).

Post-school pathways

Students who complete Year 12 or equivalent are more likely to continue on to study or complete Certificate III level or higher qualifications.⁵⁹¹ Given that nine in 10 future jobs are projected to require post-school education, focusing on post-school pathways is useful for determining whether the education system is successfully equipping students for the jobs of the future.⁵⁹²

Target 5 proposes that governments to establish a nationally consistent measure of post-school pathways to support work towards a greater number of students going on to further education and training. The Panel understands that higher education targets are being considered by the Australian Universities Accord Expert Panel, and it will be important to ensure that targets in the next Agreement are aligned with the outcomes of the Accord.⁵⁹³ Once established, further targets could be negotiated and agreed as part of the 2030 bilateral agreements, aiming to be achieved by the end of 2034.

The data collected through the Post-School Destination data linkage project (see Recommendation 5C(ii)(a)) could enhance the evidence base for understanding pathways when students leave school. This project was established as a proof-of-concept National Policy Initiative under the previous NSRA with the participation of all jurisdictions except South Australia and the Northern Territory. The project has so far demonstrated that linked data can be successfully used to explore and better understand the relationship between school performance and education and employment outcomes. While coverage of all jurisdictions and systems is limited, this project has the potential to significantly enhance the evidence base on post-school destinations, particularly for young people from priority equity cohorts, and should be used by more systems.

TARGET 5 – Post-school pathways

By the end of 2029, there will be a nationally consistent measure of post-school pathways into further education and training, to ensure governments can track and improve post-school outcomes.

B. All students attend school

Attendance

Students' capacity to learn starts with attending school and engaging in their lessons. Regular and consistent attendance is important for learning, engagement, and improving student outcomes. Students who attend school regularly are better placed to acquire the skills they need to engage and succeed in their learning, and build the relationships needed for a sense of belonging. Students requiring additional support are more likely to be identified early if they have regular attendance. In addition, the targeted and intensive support provided will be more effective.

Attendance has declined significantly over recent years, with the decline accelerating sharply since the COVID-19 pandemic began and due to increasing use of flexible learning options (as discussed in Chapter 1). The national Student Attendance Level (the proportion of full-time students in Years 1 to 10 whose attendance rate in Semester 1 is equal to or greater than 90 per cent) declined from 77.1 per cent of students nationally in 2017 to 49.9 per cent of students in 2022.⁵⁹⁴ Significant increases in student attendance will be important to drive improvements in student outcomes and wellbeing, which is why Targets 6 focuses on increasing attendance levels by the end of 2029 and 2034. Given the significant changes in attendance levels in recent years, the ambition in the target could be revisited if the 2023 data is significantly different than the 2022 data.

Attendance of First Nations students is significantly lower than attendance of all students. For First Nations students, the national Student Attendance Level declined from 46.9 per cent of students nationally in 2019 to 26.6 per cent in 2022.⁵⁹⁵ These attendance figures can be influenced by both school and compounding individual factors. This highlights the importance of ensuring schools and educators are culturally competent, and strengthening the connection between schools, First Nations students, and communities (discussed in Chapter 2).

It is important that schools and educators focus on increasing attendance for all students, including those students who are chronically absent or who are at risk of school refusal. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, for some students, particularly those in regional and remote areas or those attending alternative models of schooling, defining attendance as physical presence at school may not be suitable, indicating the need for jurisdictions to work together to harmonise definitions and measures of attendance for these students.

Attendance is used as a proxy for engagement; however, students can be in the classroom and still be disengaged from learning. The development of a national wellbeing measure, discussed in Chapter 3, provides a mechanism that could be used to support the development of more nuanced measures of engagement. This is already taking place in some jurisdictions, such as South Australia, where robust, representative data on cognitive engagement is collected as part of the wellbeing surveys. It is critical that other jurisdictions develop similar capability as part of establishing a national wellbeing measure, to facilitate development of a more robust target for learning engagement and therefore a more meaningful picture of student attendance.

TARGET 6 – Attendance

Target 6a

By the end of 2029, the proportion of Australian students in Years 1 to 10 (averaged across all years) attending school 90 per cent of the time (known as the Student Attendance Level) should return to 2017 levels in each jurisdiction, including for priority equity cohorts, to reach a national target of 77 per cent.

Target 6b

By the end of 2034, the proportion of Australian students in Years 1 to 10 (averaged across all years) attending school 90 per cent of the time (known as the Student Attendance Level) increases 5 percentage points in each jurisdiction from 2017 levels, including for priority equity cohorts, to reach a national target of 82 per cent.

**The Panel has noted that while attendance is an imperfect measure it is the best available data measure as a proxy for school engagement nationally until further work is done to establish and collect engagement data.*

C. The workforce is diverse

A strong and diverse education workforce is needed to achieve the above targets and implement the reforms recommended by the Panel. Parties to the next Agreement should improve and monitor workforce data to ensure that our most important resource remains a focus across the life of the Agreement.

Diversity

The Panel acknowledges that diversity has many dimensions – including ethnicity, gender, disability, and socio economic background – and urges all jurisdictions to take a holistic view with respect to increasing the diversity of their teacher workforce. However, for the purposes of targets for the next Agreement, the Panel recommends that the focus be on increasing the proportion of First Nations teachers.

Target 7 has been set to measure whether the actions taken in response to Recommendation 4B, alongside relevant actions already underway in response to the Quality Initial Teacher Education (QITE) review and the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (NTWAP), positively impact the proportion of First Nations teachers. The Panel considers that the proportion of teachers identifying as First Nations should be at parity with the First Nations working-age population. Nationally, the proportion of First Nations people in the working-age population (aged 20 to 64) was 1.9 times higher than the proportion of First Nations teachers in 2021 (aged 20 to 64) (see Figure 13 in Chapter 4).⁵⁹⁶

Given the younger age profile of First Nations peoples, matching the proportion of First Nations teachers to First Nations students at the jurisdiction level would require First Nations peoples to be over-represented as teachers and under-represented in other professions, occupations and industries, which is not a desirable outcome for the nation. For example, in New South Wales (NSW) 2.3 per cent of teachers (aged 20 to 64) are First Nations people, compared with 3.1 per cent of the working-age population (aged 20 to 64) and 6.5 per cent of school-aged population (aged 5 to 18) who are First Nations.⁵⁹⁷ The proportion of all populations who are First Nations people is much higher in the Northern Territory than in other jurisdictions. In the Northern Territory, 11.4 per cent of teachers are First Nations people, compared with 25.9 per cent of the working-age population and 40.1 per cent of school-aged population who are First Nations.⁵⁹⁸

The Panel heard that workload, classroom management, workplace safety, and cultural safety are among the key drivers of attrition among all teachers. Noting the current work underway through the NTWAP, the Panel does not recommend a target for retention or attrition of teachers; instead, it urges all teacher registration authorities to collect data on drivers of attrition and recommends that this data be aggregated nationally to inform responses that can support a sustainable workforce.

TARGET 7 – Workforce diversity

By the end of 2034, the proportion of teachers in each jurisdiction who are First Nations (aged 20 to 64 years) should align with the proportion of First Nations population aged 20 to 64 years in that jurisdiction.

Sustainability

The Australian Government's Annual Jobs and Skills Report (2023) found that both primary and secondary teachers were among the largest employing occupations in shortage.⁵⁹⁹ Previous modelling by the Australian Government has predicted that the demand for secondary teachers is likely to exceed the supply of new graduate teachers by around 4,100 between 2021 to 2025.⁶⁰⁰ Further projections of teacher workforce needs will be identified through the NTWAP.

In 2019, more than 87,000 students were enrolled in initial teacher education (ITE) programs in Australia, with a completion rate of 51 per cent for undergraduate and 78 per cent for postgraduate courses.⁶⁰¹ Data from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) suggest that completion rates for ITE students are similar to those for other courses. Approximately 34 per cent of new schoolteachers from 2016 to 2017 were no longer in the profession after the first five years.⁶⁰² It is difficult to compare attrition across professions, though tax data suggests that early-career attrition rates are similar in comparable professions such as nursing.⁶⁰³

The Panel notes existing recommendations from the QITE review and *Strong Beginnings* to increase the number ITE enrolments and reduce attrition among people studying to be teachers. These actions, together with those outlined in the NTWAP and the recommendations of this report, should help improve the attractiveness of the profession and address key retention issues.

The Panel considered recommending a workforce sustainability target but decided against doing so for a few reasons. Firstly, the levers for improving the attraction and retention of teachers straddle both the school and higher education systems, making it unsuitable for inclusion in the next Agreement. Secondly, further work would need to be undertaken across these two systems to draw together a data set that would align with the principles outlined in Figure 16 and facilitate measurement. Governments may wish to consider whether, when implementing Recommendation 4D(iii), actions that focus on improving data to better identify and understand workforce trends, especially in the ITE and early-career pipeline.

Reporting on progress against reforms and targets should be frequent and accessible

In its 2023 review of the current NSRA, the Productivity Commission found that sub-outcomes are reported across various sources, such as the *National Report on Schooling in Australia*,⁶⁰⁴ the *Report on Government Services*,⁶⁰⁵ and the Productivity Commission's National School Reform Agreement Performance Reporting Dashboard,⁶⁰⁶ with no standalone source that provides the public with a clear sense of the success, or otherwise, of the NSRA.⁶⁰⁷ The Productivity Commission found that the lack of a standalone annual report limits public scrutiny of progress against outcomes under the NSRA.⁶⁰⁸

Alongside improved funding transparency, as discussed in Chapter 6, the Panel sees greater transparency of progress against targets and reforms as an important feature of the next Agreement. Stakeholders need to be able to hold all governments to account for their collective commitment to improve educational outcomes in Australia. A standalone reporting source that details available data for agreed targets and reforms and how this compares to the goals set out in the next Agreement will provide governments and the public with the ability to determine the effectiveness of changes in policy or funding commitments.

The Panel has identified the Closing the Gap Dashboard, created by the Productivity Commission, as a model for the creation of a standalone reporting location that could provide the public with a clear read of the progress that is made against outcomes of the next Agreement.⁶⁰⁹ An interactive School Reform Dashboard would provide the public with access to the available data pertaining to each of the targets and reforms agreed through the next Agreement. This work could build on the existing National School Reform Agreement Performance Reporting Dashboard,⁶¹⁰ with additional functionality and data, including outcomes data for priority equity cohorts.

It would be essential that a School Reform Dashboard is interactive, accessible, and easily digestible for everyone. The public and other interested stakeholders could use the dashboard as a single source to measure how governments and sectors are tracking towards achieving reforms in the next Agreement.

The School Reform Dashboard should be supported by an annual report, with input from governments, school systems and approved authorities. This report should be tabled in the Australian Parliament, bringing it in line with other annual reports on other national agreements, such as the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.⁶¹¹ The annual report would use data from the School Reform Dashboard, and provide a point-in-time, consolidated update and further context and detail that cannot be presented in dashboard format.

RECOMMENDATION 7C

The Panel recommends that enhanced accountability be supported through the following reporting mechanisms:

- i. an accessible and interactive public reporting tool on progress against the targets and reforms in the next Agreement, similar to the Closing the Gap dashboard, to be developed by the Productivity Commission or other appropriate body by mid-2025
- ii. from the commencement of the next Agreement, the delivery of annual reports, prepared with input from governments, school systems and approved authorities, tabled in the Australian Parliament, focused on clearly articulating progress against reforms, including implementation updates.

7.2.2 First Nations partnership would improve decision-making and strengthen accountability to improve First Nations students' outcomes

Genuine partnership with First Nations communities and organisations should be central to the next Agreement

The Panel has heard and supports the message of empowering First Nations students to achieve their potential and meet the CTG targets, which is encapsulated in Target 5 and its goal to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (aged 20 to 24) attaining Year 12 or an equivalent qualification, or a non-school qualification at Certificate III level or above, to 96 per cent by 2031. As outlined in Chapter 2 and Recommendation 2C, the Panel believes that the next Agreement can and should be a driving force for achieving positive outcomes for First Nations students through delivering evidence-based, nationally consistent approaches in collaboration with First Nations peak bodies and organisations.

We know that the current Schools Reform Agreement is not working for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids ... Mainstream National Agreements are a critical funding and performance mechanism to be mobilised by Governments to 'closing the gap'.

Coalition of Peaks letter to Dr Lisa O'Brien

Key to this will be partnership. All governments have committed to the priority reforms of CTG. Priority Reform 1 requires governments to build and strengthen structures that empower First Nations peoples to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate progress against CTG.⁶¹²

Several stakeholder submissions raised the need for greater engagement between governments and First Nations organisations in the education space. First Nations organisations called on governments to establish partnerships with First Nations peoples and organisations, including through adequate engagement in efforts to improve educational outcomes, building and investing in trusting relationships, demonstrating respect for First Nations peoples' rights to self-determination, the inclusion of First Nations perspectives in education policy and program development, and ensuring that culturally responsive practices are undertaken.⁶¹³

The Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting submission noted that working in partnership – with students, families, or communities, or through Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies – will enable an understanding of these varying contexts, helping to develop practices which work for those communities.⁶¹⁴ The practices developed through partnership with First Nations communities can then help to ensure that schools reflect the communities they serve, becoming welcoming and culturally safe spaces for all.

In the education context, while a good portion of Australian schools and early learning services have achieved many of the 'safer' actions relating to reconciliation, the time has come to engage the broader Australian community in educational initiatives and deepen engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in which educational institutions are located.

Reconciliation Australia⁶¹⁵

The power of relationships, and the impact of individuals respectfully seeking to build connections, instead of stamping their authority or legacy on a school, cannot be underestimated. Communities talk about the experience of a new principal being like a house guest who wants to remodel because they don't like your taste. How many times must a house be remodelled before those living in that home have a say in how they would like to live?

Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting

Improving our system demands improving how we agree on what the education system should look like and what it should prioritise. The Panel has heard of instances where there was a lack of partnership between education systems, First Nations representatives, and First Nations communities.

The Panel believes that stronger partnerships with First Nations organisations, communities, and representatives can help to ensure that schools are extensions of the communities that they serve, becoming culturally safe and appropriate environments in which children can thrive and achieve their potential. This is consistent with the belief that underpins CTG: that when First Nations peoples contribute to the design and delivery of policies, programs, and services related to them, better life outcomes are achieved.⁶¹⁶

The Panel believes that at the national and system levels, the next Agreement should be developed and implemented in partnership with key First Nations education representatives, including with organisations such as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC), the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association (NATSIPA), and the Coalition of Peaks as appropriate. First Nations perspectives must be at the centre of the next Agreement – not only to give meaningful effect to the existing commitments under CTG but also because First Nations students – and indeed all students – will benefit from having the insights of First Nations peoples shape the design and implementation of the next Agreement. Genuine formal partnership should also be an essential part of the creation of the First Nations Education Policy discussed in Chapter 2.

Parties to CTG have each developed their own Implementation Plan detailing how policies and programs align to CTG and how planned actions will work towards achieving the goals laid out in the Priority Reforms and outcomes.⁶¹⁷ The Panel recommends that an explicit connection be created between the bilateral agreements for each party to the next Agreement and the corresponding CTG Implementation Plan. This will ensure parties consider in their bilateral agreements – which will articulate the interventions that each party is undertaking to support priority equity cohorts and the minimum contribution it will make to the funding of schools – how their interventions relate to their CTG Implementation Plan. This should ensure that partnership and shared decision-making with First Nations communities and organisations is a primary focus of the bilateral agreements and that the CTG Priority Reforms are instrumental within the next Agreement.

Connections between systems and schools and First Nations community-controlled organisations need to be strengthened

All governments have committed to building First Nations community-controlled sectors to support employment and self-determination of First Nations people under CTG Priority Reform 2.⁶¹⁸ The Panel has heard of some systems and schools contracting a non-First Nations provider to deliver services to First Nations students, which in turn contracts out the delivery of culturally responsive services to a First Nations community-controlled organisation. This places another layer of non-First Nations management and governance between the First Nations students and the community-controlled organisation and reduces the financial benefits of the contract for the community-controlled organisation.

Systems and schools should directly engage First Nations community-controlled organisations to co-design and implement in-school programs, instead of engaging them indirectly through non-First Nations organisations. If there is a need for a non-First Nations partner, it should be the sub-contracted party. The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) submission identified that there are opportunities to strengthen relationships between schools and First Nations community-controlled organisations to ensure culturally responsive health and wellbeing wraparound services.

Shared decision-making at the school level would improve accountability to local communities

The Panel heard from many First Nations experts, educators and communities that partnerships cannot just take a top-down approach. The next Agreement needs a systematic approach at the school level that invites First Nations parents and community leaders to work with educators and school leaders to address the needs of First Nations students and allow them to realise all their potential. This is particularly important for schools with a significant proportion of First Nations students. Clearer and more accessible information on funding allocation could also empower First Nations communities and organisations.

Approaches could be modelled on the former Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) program or on current Local Community Engagement co-design trials in Queensland, should this prove a successful model. The Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting submission noted that ASSPA had 'opened the school gates' to First Nations families, helping build a sense of cultural safety and enable shared decision-making through community-led ASSPA committees.⁶¹⁹ The Local Community Engagement through Co-design model in Queensland (see Case Study 23), is a model that can create meaningful opportunities for self-determination, improved accountability to local communities, and a forum for partnerships that would drive improved outcomes for First Nations students.

Case Study 23: Local Community Engagement through Co-design

The Queensland Department of Education's Local Community Engagement through Co-design (LCETC) model has been created to help elevate the voices of First Nations peoples and utilise cultural protocols and knowledge in Queensland government schools. It is being trialled in 13 pilot schools across Queensland over three years (2021–2023).

The LCETC model aims to assist schools to establish, maintain and leverage relationships with local First Nations communities. It includes seven phases of co-design:

1. Information sharing about opportunities, deliverables and engagement processes
2. Connection with community about how to improve First Nations students' educational outcomes
3. School and community consultation through the creation of culturally safe spaces
4. Response to community, including the formation of a community/school Local Community Education Body
5. Establishment of a co-design governance model, where project plans are drafted with First Nations peoples
6. Launch and implementation of programs which build and strengthen relationships between school and community
7. Evaluation and review of co-designed initiatives.

Implementation of the LCETC model is overseen by a project board, which includes representatives from First Nations communities; the Commonwealth Government National Indigenous Australians Agency; the Queensland Department of Treaty, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Communities and the Arts; and the Queensland Department of Education.

Source: Department of Education (2023) [Local Community Engagement through Co-design \(LCETC\)](#), Queensland Government, accessed 27 October 2023.

RECOMMENDATION 7D

The Panel recommends that all governments operationalise their commitment to partnership and shared decision-making under the Closing the Gap (CTG) Agreement by ensuring the next Agreement is developed and implemented in partnership with First Nations organisations. This should include:

- i. establishing and supporting a mechanism that allows governments to work in a genuine formal partnership with key First Nations education stakeholders including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association and the Coalition of Peaks as appropriate at the system level, embedding the CTG Priority Reforms to help transform ways of working, and creating an explicit connection between bilateral agreements and CTG
- ii. systematising models that enhance First Nations parental and community engagement and move towards co-design or shared decision-making.

7.2.3 Reforms can be strengthened through innovation

A structured innovation fund would support innovative practices and evaluation

The Panel believes that a better understanding of the practices and tools that can improve student outcomes is essential to realising opportunities for sharing best practice and supporting the wider adoption of effective models. During consultations, the Panel heard that some schools have a limited ability to trial innovative approaches due to the costs and risks of implementing approaches that may not be well established in the local school context.

The Panel believes that a structured innovation fund, co-funded by all governments and designed in partnership with NATSIEC, NATSIPA, and the Coalition of Peaks as appropriate, would accelerate the trialling of innovative practices and models and advance shared, systemic learning about strategies that can deliver better student outcomes in different contexts across the Australian community. Such a fund would facilitate robust and publicly reported evaluations to inform systems, schools, and stakeholders about practices and models that can be scaled up, including new models of student and professional learning. The Grattan Institute submission also recommended exploring more effective school operational models through investment in education research and development.

A structured innovation fund would provide an opportunity for different parties across systems to work together and share responsibility and accountability in testing new ideas and building a high-quality education system. Collaboration with universities and existing research functions – for example, the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (see Case Study 24) – could help build the evidence base about what works in an Australian context and promote wider uptake of high-quality research and evidence among schools and teachers. Projects under a structured innovation fund should align with reform and research priorities of the Australian Government and jurisdictions wherever possible.

Case Study 24: NSW Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

The NSW Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation provides analysis of educational programs in the state. This includes programs across early childhood education and care, school, training, and higher education. Its analysis is used to support evidence-based decision-making by the government and an understanding of what works best to deliver outcomes.

The Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation has various responsibilities, including to:

- conduct research and data analysis, and create papers and case studies that support understanding and uptake of evidence-based practices
- collect data to support research and statistics for the education and training sector
- conduct evaluations of key policies and programs with the aim of strengthening the quality of delivery and student outcomes
- improve data and evidence usage as part of everyday practice
- test innovative initiatives.

Source: Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (2023) [About CESE](#), Department of Education, New South Wales Government, accessed 27 October 2023.

A structured innovation fund aligns with the Australian Government's establishment of the Australian Centre for Evaluation within the Department of the Treasury. This function aims to build capacity to conduct rigorous evaluation across the Australian Government policy and programs, including through a small number of flagship evaluations each year.⁶²⁰ A structured innovation fund could also work with the Australian Centre for Evaluation on the best evaluation approaches for different projects.

Evaluation functions, such as the one described in Case Study 25, enable governments and systems to better use public funding, ensuring it is focused on practices and models that deliver better outcomes for students. As part of a structured innovation fund, they allow for trials of models that schools may otherwise not be able to implement and help build the evidence base on what works best to support students to reach their potential.

Case Study 25: International education evaluation of use of tutoring

The Education Endowment Fund, a charity that aims to ensure that a student's educational achievement is not predicated on their family's income through supporting schools to better use evidence, conducted an evaluation of three strategies to improve disadvantaged pupils' use of tutoring in England during the school closures of 2021. It evaluated three interventions to identify which had the greatest impact on student participation. The first intervention was reminder emails that were sent to students just before their tutoring session to reduce the number of students who forgot. The second intervention was a five-minute quiz completed by students and tutors about their hobbies. Answers were provided to both students and tutors, informing them of what they had in common. The final intervention was training provided to tutors on relationship building with their students.

Through the evaluation process, it was found that the only intervention that increased attendance rates at tutoring was the quiz. This knowledge is helpful in supporting governments to know what works and what does, not leading to a better use of public funds.

Sources: Education Endowment Fund (2023) [About us: Who we are, and what we do](#), Education Endowment Fund, accessed 27 October 2023; Tagliaferri G, Chadeesingh L, Xu Y, Malik R, Holt M, Bohling K, Sreshta P, and Kelly S (2022) [Leveraging pupil-tutor similarity to improve pupil attendance](#), Behavioural Insights Team, commissioned by the Education Endowment Foundation, accessed 27 October 2023.

The need to ensure culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogies to support First Nations students is well supported, both in the relevant literature and in submissions to the Review.⁶²¹ The Panel is aware of a number of schools that are being or have been established to teach First Nations students via 'two-way' learning, providing children with the literacy and numeracy knowledge that is a part of the Australian Curriculum and Western learning, alongside knowledge from their local communities, languages, and histories. The Panel sees a structured innovation fund as playing an important role in further developing knowledge of the culturally responsible and inclusive teaching practices that provide the best outcomes for First Nations students.

There is also a need for more innovative models for ensuring students living in regional and remote communities can access high-quality teaching, including ways to better pool resources and expertise across both schools and systems. A structured innovation fund could similarly support such initiatives, including further trials of this model and evaluation, building the evidence base to support schools undertaking these approaches and driving improvement in First Nations student outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION 7E

The Panel recommends that governments establish a co-funded 'structured innovation fund' to drive disciplined research, support school improvement, and encourage the development of new models and forms of schooling, subject to robust criteria and independent and publicly reported evaluation, including randomised controlled trials where appropriate. Projects should include:

- i. cost-effective full-service school models which reduce workload for educators and school leaders
- ii. remote teaching of subjects that are hard to staff
- iii. culturally responsible and inclusive teaching practices that provide the best outcomes for First Nations students
- iv. alternative school settings and delivery models that might better support student engagement and achievement for students with complex needs
- v. innovative school operating models within government systems or across school sectors, which test different modes of delivery (including bilingual schools), staffing models, and governance frameworks (including networks of schools).

Celebrating the achievements and strength of students, educators and school leaders is essential

In the Introduction, the Panel outlined that the challenge for the sector is not to identify best practice and excellence – it is to systematise this across all Australian schools.

To support this goal and as a final note, the Panel believes that the success and resilience of students, educators and school leaders should be celebrated, shared and adapted across the nation as originally envisaged in Mparntwe.

FINDING 20

The Commonwealth should host an annual schools forum (the Australian Schools Forum) with school leaders, educators, students and other key stakeholders to celebrate Australian education, explore new possibilities and make shared commitments. This should include:

- i. recognising progress made and accomplishments by teachers, leaders, students, and schools in their communities
- ii. opportunities to share and discuss innovations, experiments, and research on school improvement
- iii. highlighting examples of First Nations excellence across students, educators and schools
- iv. providing students opportunities to share their voices and experiences, as part of being significant partners in educational transformation
- v. advancing national dialogue about the goals, values and progress of Australia's national education agenda, as part of an ongoing national collaborative reform process.

Appendix A – Terms of Reference

The Australian Government is committed to working with State and Territory governments to get every school to 100 per cent of its fair funding level. The Australian Government and State and Territory Governments are committed to working together in good faith towards this outcome.

A decade on from the first Gonski report, it is essential that we conduct a Review to determine where national focus should be directed to deliver world-class schools to close gaps in educational outcomes.

The purpose of this Review is to inform the development and negotiation of the next National School Reform Agreement and Bilateral Agreements with individual states and territories. It will build on the work of the Productivity Commission's Review of the National School Reform Agreement, which recommended a focus on a smaller number of reforms where a coordinated national approach will help lift student outcomes. It will provide advice on the specific reforms that should be tied to funding in the next National School Reform Agreement.

The Review will focus on driving real improvements in learning and wellbeing outcomes for students. It will consider reforms that are evidence-based, leverage existing systems and high-impact initiatives, and consider the impacts on teacher and school leader workload. It will also consider how funding and reforms can be more transparent and better demonstrate links to student outcomes. It will not revisit how the Schooling Resource Standard is calculated.

After this Review is finalised the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments will start negotiations regarding policy and funding.

The current National School Reform Agreement will be extended for 12 months to 31 December 2024, subject to the agreement of First Ministers to enable sufficient time for this to occur.

Scope

The Review will advise Education Ministers:

1. What targets and reforms should be included in the next NSRA to drive real improvements in student outcomes, with a particular focus on students who are most at risk of falling behind and in need of more assistance – for students from low socio-economic backgrounds, regional, rural and remote Australia, students with disability, First Nations students and students from a language background other than English
2. How the next Agreement can contribute to improving student mental health and wellbeing, by addressing in-school factors while acknowledging the impact of non-school factors on wellbeing
3. How the next Agreement can support schools to attract and retain teachers
4. How data collection can best inform decision-making and boost student outcomes
5. How to ensure public funding is delivering on national agreements and that all school authorities are transparent and accountable to the community for how funding is invested and measuring the impacts of this investment.

In providing this advice, the Review will take into consideration the recommendations and findings of the Productivity Commission's Review into the National School Reform Agreement 2023, the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan and existing Government commitments under the other national agreements, including Closing the Gap where appropriate.

Membership

The Review will be led by an Expert Panel that will comprise six members and will be chaired by Dr Lisa O'Brien, Chair of the Australian Education Research Organisation, and former CEO of the Smith Family. Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM, former Secretary of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, will be the Deputy Chair.

Other members of the panel are:

- Ms Dyonne Anderson, President of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association and Principal at Cabbage Tree Island Public School
- Dr Jordana Hunter, Education Program Director at the Grattan Institute
- Professor Stephen Lamb, Emeritus Professor at the Centre for International Research on Education Systems at Victoria University and member of the National School Resourcing Board
- Professor Pasi Sahlberg, Professor of Educational Leadership at University of Melbourne.

The Expert Panel will be supported by a secretariat from the Australian Government Department of Education.

Consultation

The Expert Panel will consult closely with State and Territory governments given their role as school system managers and majority funders for government schools, and to reflect their unique delivery contexts and local expertise.

The Expert Panel will consult widely with stakeholders, including teachers, school leaders and support staff, education unions, national education agencies, non-government sector school stakeholders, parents, youth and student bodies, and other key stakeholder groups. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations from regional, rural and remote Australia, people with disability, and young Australians experiencing disadvantage.

Timing

The Expert Panel will deliver its final report to Education Ministers by 31 October 2023.

Appendix B – List of acronyms and abbreviations

Acronym	Full term
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
AEDC	Australian Early Development Census
AERO	Australian Education Research Organisation
AI	Artificial intelligence
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teachers and School Leaders
CTG	Closing the Gap
DDA	<i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992</i>
DSE	<i>Disability Standards for Education 2005</i>
Education Act	<i>Australian Education Act 2013</i>
Education Regulations	<i>Australian Education Regulations 2013</i>
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
ITE	Initial teacher education
MTSS	Multi-tiered system of supports
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NATSIEC	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation
NATSIPA	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association
NCCD	Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NSRA	National School Reform Agreement
NTWAP	National Teacher Workforce Action Plan
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
the Panel	Expert Panel to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System
the Review	Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System
SRS	Schooling Resource Standard
TEEP	Teacher Education Expert Panel
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
USI	Unique Student Identifier

Appendix C – Glossary of key terms

Term	Definition	Source
12-month mental health disorder	The definition of a 12-month mental health disorder is based on two classification systems: the <i>Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders</i> , 4th Edition (DSM-IV); and the <i>WHO international classification of diseases</i> , 10th Revision (ICD-10). It includes the sub-categories of anxiety, affective and substance use disorders.	Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2023) National study of mental health and wellbeing methodology , ABS, accessed 27 October 2023.
Approved authority	Each school has an approved authority, which is approved by the Minister. For a government school located in a State or Territory, the approved authority is the State or Territory. For a non-government school, the approved authority is a body corporate that is approved by the Minister for the school.	Federal Register of Legislation (n.d.) Australian Education Act 2013 , Australian Government, section 4, accessed 27 October 2023.
Approved system authority	Approved systems authority is defined as an approved authority for more than one school that decides to allocate funds to their member schools according to their own needs-based funding arrangement.	Department of Education (2023) Recurrent funding for schools , Department of Education, accessed 31 October 2023.
Attendance level	Attendance level is defined as the proportion of full-time students whose attendance rate in Semester 1 is equal to or greater than 90 per cent.	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (2023) Student attendance , ACARA, accessed 31 October 2023.
Concentration of advantage	A school is classified as having a high concentration of advantage when 50 per cent or more of its students are in the highest Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) Quartile. 25 per cent of Australian students fall within each ICSEA quartile nationally.	Nous Group (2023) Review of policy interventions to increase socio-economic diversity and improve learning outcomes, report to the Australian Government Department of Education for the Expert Panel leading Review for a Better and Fairer School System.
Concentration of disadvantage	A school is classified as having a high concentration of disadvantage when 50 per cent or more of its students are in the lowest ICSEA Quartile. 25 per cent of Australian students fall within each ICSEA quartile nationally.	Nous Group (2023) Review of policy interventions to increase socio-economic diversity and improve learning outcomes, report to the Australian Government Department of Education for the Expert Panel leading Review for a Better and Fairer School System.

Term	Definition	Source
Culturally responsive	Culturally responsive teaching reflects, validates and promotes students' culture and language. Schools and educators that are culturally responsive understand students' cultural context and respond appropriately for the benefit of each student.	Lloyd N J, Lewthwaite B E, Osborne B, and Boon H J (2015) 'Effective Teaching Practices for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students: A Review of the Literature', <i>Australian Journal of Teacher Education</i> , 40 (11): 12-14. Stronger Smarter Institute (2017) Implementing the Stronger Smarter Approach: A comprehensive reflection of the characteristics of a Stronger Smarter Approach in education , Stronger Smarter Institute, pp. 37-39, accessed 31 October 2023.
Duncan Segregation Index	The Duncan Segregation Index represents the arrangement of students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds within schools and is calculated as the relative ratio of educationally disadvantaged / non-disadvantaged students within a school versus this ratio of students within the context of the jurisdiction the school is situated in.	For index formulation, see Gutiérrez G, Jerrim J, and Torres R (2020) 'School segregation across the world: has any progress been made in reducing the separation of the rich from the poor?', <i>The Journal of Economic Inequality</i> , 18:157-179. doi:10.1007/s10888-019-09437-3.
Early career teacher	The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) defines an early career teacher as a teacher in their first five years of the profession.	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (2023) Spotlight: Australia's teacher workforce today , AITSL, accessed 27 October 2023.
Educational adjustment	Educational adjustments are actions taken to enable a student with disability to access and participate in education on the same basis as other students. Adjustments reflect the assessed individual needs of the student. They can be made at the whole-school level, in the classroom and at an individual student level.	Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) (n.d.) Step 1: Is there an adjustment , NCCD, accessed on 27 October 2023.
Educator	An educator is a professional in the field of education. This includes teachers, school leaders, teachers aides, assistant teachers and First Nations Educators.	The Panel has designed this definition to encompass the broad range of professionals in the field of education.

Term	Definition	Source
English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D)	<p>Australia has over 600,000 students across all years of schooling who are learning English as an additional language or dialect and are at varying levels of proficiency in English and other languages. This cohort includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • newly arrived and Australian-born migrant-background students, • refugee students (some with little or no previous formal schooling), • international students with age-equivalent education, • Pacifica students, • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who speak traditional Aboriginal Languages, creoles and/or newly emerging contact language/dialects, and who have varying degrees of exposure to Standard Australian English. 	<p>Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) (2022) National Roadmap for English as an Additional Language or Dialect Education in Schools, ACTA, accessed 27 October 2023.</p>
First Nations	<p>The term ‘First Nations’ is used in this report to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Australia is made up of many different and distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, each with their own culture, language, beliefs and practices.</p>	<p>Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) (2022) Australia’s First Peoples, AIATSIS, accessed 27 October 2023.</p>
Full-service schools	<p>Schools that provide a range of services and activities, often beyond the school day, to help meet the needs of children, their families and the wider community</p>	<p>Black R, Lemon B and Walsh L (2015) Literature review and background research for the National Collaboration Project: Extended service school model, Foundation for Young Australians, p. 4, accessed 8 September 2023, quoting the UK Government Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) report <i>Extended Schools: Building on experience</i>.</p>

Term	Definition	Source
General capabilities	<p>In the Australian Curriculum, capability encompasses knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions. Students develop capability when they apply knowledge and skills confidently, effectively and appropriately in complex and changing circumstances, in their learning at school and in their lives outside school. The Australian Curriculum identifies seven General Capabilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy • Numeracy • Digital Literacy • Critical and Creative Thinking • Personal and Social Capability • Ethical Understanding • Intercultural Understanding 	<p>Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (2022) The Australian Curriculum, ACARA, accessed 30 October 2023.</p>
Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA)	<p>The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is a scale created by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) specifically to enable fair comparisons of National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test achievement by students in schools across Australia. A value on the index corresponds to the average level of educational advantage of the school's student population relative to those of other schools. The higher the value, the more advantaged the cohort of students at the school is.</p>	<p>Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (2016) About ICSEA, ACARA, accessed 27 October 2023.</p>
Initial teacher education (ITE)	<p>Initial teacher education (ITE) is tertiary level education that prepares pre-service teachers to teach in Australian schools.</p>	<p>Department of Education and Training (2018) Through growth to achievement: report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools, Department of Education and Training, Australian Government, p. 127, accessed 27 October 2023.</p>
Intersectional	<p>Intersectionality refers to the way that different aspects of a person's identity intersect with and impact one another, and how the combined experience of multiple forms of discrimination is often greater than the sum of those discriminations alone.</p>	<p>Australian Human Rights Commission (n.d.) Racism. It stops with me: Key terms, Australian Human Rights Commission, accessed 27 October 2023.</p>

Term	Definition	Source
Language background other than English (LBOTE)	A student is defined as being of a language background other than English if either the student, the student's parent1/guardian1/carer1 or the student's parent2/guardian2/carer2 speaks a language other than English at home.	Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (2022) Data Standards Manual: Student background characteristics , ACARA, accessed 27 October 2023.
Multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS)	MTSS is a coordinated system of supports for students across a sliding scale of increasingly intensive tiers. The foundation is high-quality instruction in Tier 1. Subsequent tiers offer more intensive high-quality evidence-based instruction to students needing additional academic, social-emotional, or behavioural support.	Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) (2023) Intro to multi-tiered system of supports , AERO, accessed 27 October 2023.
National Plan for School Improvement	The National Plan for School Improvement was a partnership between the Commonwealth, states and territories and non-government sectors to implement reforms across five areas: quality teaching; quality learning; empowered school leadership; meeting student need; and transparency and accountability.	Commonwealth of Australia (2013) National Plan for School Improvement , Commonwealth of Australia, p. 8, accessed 24 November 2023.
Out-of-home care	Out-of-home care is residential care and control of a child or young person that is provided by a person other than a parent of the child or young person and at a place other than the usual home of the child or young person, whether or not for fee, gain or reward.	New South Wales Legislation (n.d.) Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 , New South Wales Government, accessed 27 October 2023.
Pedagogy	The function or work of teaching: the art or science of teaching, education instructional methods.	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2009) Towards a national quality framework for early childhood education and care: the Report of the Expert Panel on Quality Early Childhood Education and Care , Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, accessed 27 October 2023.

Term	Definition	Source
Phonics	Phonics is an approach to teaching some aspects of literacy, by developing students' knowledge and understanding of the relationship between written symbols and sounds. This involves the skills of hearing, identifying and using the patterns of sounds or phonemes to read written language. The aim is to systematically teach students the relationship between these sounds and the written spelling patterns, or graphemes, which represent them. Phonics emphasises the skills of decoding new words by sounding them out and combining or 'blending' the sound-spelling patterns.	Evidence for Learning (2021) Phonics , Evidence for Learning, accessed 30 October 2023.
Priority equity cohort	Priority equity cohorts are defined in the current NSRA to include First Nations students, students living in regional, rural and remote locations, students with a disability and students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds	Coalition of Australian Governments (2021) National School Reform Agreement , Department of Education and Training, Coalition of Australian Governments, p. 4, accessed 27 October 2023.
Professional experience	Professional experience is the component of an initial teacher education program in which pre-service teachers develop and demonstrate their skills in the classroom.	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (2015) Professional experience: Participant roles and responsibilities , AITSL, accessed 22 November 2023.
Proficiency	A proficient standard is a point on a proficiency scale that represents a 'challenging but reasonable' expectation of student achievement at a particular year level.	National Assessment Program (NAP) (n.d.) Proficiency levels – science literacy , NAP, accessed 27 October 2023.
Regional, rural, remote	The Australian Statistical Geography Standard Remoteness Structure defines five classes of relative geographic remoteness across Australia: Major Cities of Australia, Inner Regional Australia, Outer Regional Australia, Remote Australia and Very Remote Australia. These categories are characterised by a measure of relative geographic access to services.	Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2023), Remoteness areas , ABS, accessed 31 October 2023.
Retention rates	Retention rates measure the proportion of a year group (or cohort) that is still enrolled after one or more calendar years – in other words, the net change in the size of a cohort as students leave or join it.	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (n.d.) Apparent retention [data set], accessed 27 October 2023.

Term	Definition	Source
School Financial Questionnaire	A financial questionnaire is currently required to be completed by all non-government schools that receive Australian Government recurrent funding. It requires these schools to report income, expenditure, assets, liabilities, and other items. The requirement to complete the financial questionnaire is detailed in section 36 of the Australian Education Regulations 2023.	Department of Education (n.d.) Data collections: financial questionnaire , Department of Education, Australian Government, accessed 14 September 2023.
School leader	Leaders include principals, deputy and assistant principals, head, executive and senior teachers, among others.	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (n.d.) Spotlight: Middle leadership in Australian schools , AITSL, accessed 31 October 2023.
Socio-economic status	Socio-economic status (SES) refers to an individual / group of individuals' social and economic position, including in relation to income, wealth, education and employment, in the wider community. An individual is considered to have low-SES status if they are in the bottom quartile according to the ABS Index of Education and Occupation .	Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2011) Information paper: measures of socioeconomic status , ABS, accessed 30 October 2023.
Socio-educational status	Parental education and parental occupation is used as a proxy for the socio-educational status of students. For example, high socio-educational status is considered as parents with a bachelor's degree or higher and who are in senior management. Low socio-educational status is considered as parents who did not complete Year 12 and who have not been in paid employment for the last 12 months.	Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (2016) About ICSEA , ACARA, accessed 27 October 2023.
Stresses and vulnerabilities	Individual determinants include cognitive/ interpersonal abilities, genetics, pre-natal substance abuse, family, community, social and economic circumstances. Structural factors include broader socio-cultural, geopolitical, and environmental issues (inequality, social stability, environmental quality).	World Health Organisation (WHO) (2022) World mental health report – transforming mental health for all , WHO, pp. 10; 19-20, accessed 27 October 2023.

Term	Definition	Source
Student with disability	<p>This report uses the definition of disability as outlined in Section 4 of the <i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992</i> (DDA). The DDA reflects a social model of disability discrimination but uses medically based definitions of disability. Reflecting that disability can be a result of the interaction between physical barriers and impairments as well as social, attitudinal and environmental barriers.</p> <p>Section 4 of the DDA defines disability (in relation to a person) as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions; or • total or partial loss of a part of the body; or • the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness; or • the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness; or • the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body; or • a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction; or • a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgement or that results in disturbed behaviour; <p>and includes a disability that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presently exists; or • previously existed but no longer exists; or • may exist in the future (including because of a genetic predisposition to that disability); or • is imputed to a person. 	<p>Federal Register of Legislation (n.d.) Disability Discrimination Act 1992, Australian Government, section 4, accessed 31 October 2023; Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) (2022) Definitions of disability and the NCCD categories, NCCD, accessed 30 October 2023.</p>
Students in out of home care	<p>Students who are in residential care or in an arrangement where control of a child or young person is provided by a person other than a parent of the child or young person and at a place other than the usual home of the child or young person, whether or not for fee, gain or reward.</p>	<p>Section 135, <i>Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)</i></p>
Trauma-informed practice	<p>Trauma-informed practice is an approach where education systems, schools and school staff understand, recognise and respond effectively to the impact of trauma on students.</p>	<p>Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (2020) Trauma-informed practice in schools: an explainer, Department of Education, New South Wales Government, p. 4, accessed 27 October 2023.</p>

Appendix D – Consultations

Stakeholders consulted
ACT Minister for Education
NSW Minister for Education and Early Learning
NT Minister for Education
QLD Minister for Education
SA Minister for Education
TAS Minister for Education
VIC Minister for Education
WA Minister for Education
ACT Education Directorate
NSW Department of Education
NT Department of Education
QLD Department of Education
SA Department for Education
TAS Department for Education, Children and Young People
VIC Department of Education
WA Department of Education
13YARN
AEU ACT Branch
AEU NT Branch
AEU SA Branch
AEU TAS Branch
AEU VIC Branch
Associate Professor Glenn Savage (Melbourne Graduate School of Education)
Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia
Aurora Education Foundation
Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented
Australian Catholic Parents Association
Australian Council for Educational Research
Australian Council of Deans of Education
Australian Association of Special Education
Australian Council of State School Organisations

Stakeholders consulted

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

Australian Education Research Organisation

Australian Education Union

Australian Government Department of Health

Australian Government Primary Principals Association

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation

Australian Primary Principals Association

Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth

Australian Secondary Principals' Association

Australian Special Education Principals' Association

Barnardos Australia

Beyond Blue

Black Dog Institute

Catholic Education – Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn

Children and Young People with Disability Australia

Children's Ground

Coalition of Australian Principals

Dr Greg Ashman

Dr Jennifer Buckingham OAM

Dr Kate de Bruin (Monash University)

Dr Michele Bruniges AM

Dr Nathaniel Swan (Think Forward Educators)

Early Childhood Education and Care Commissioners (Productivity Commission)

Education Services Australia

Emeritus Professor John Sweller (University of NSW)

First Peoples Disability Network

Foundation for Young Australians

Group of certified Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers

Headspace

Healing Foundation

Independent Education Union of Australia

Independent Schools Australia

Stakeholders consulted

Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting

Isolated Children's Parents' Association

Korn Ferry

Lutheran Education Australia

Melbourne Graduate School of Education (Professor Sandra Milligan)

Menzies Foundation

Montessori Australia

Mr Glenn Fahey (Centre for Independent Studies)

Mr Robert Gotts (Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, ACT Government)

Ms Anne Hollonds (National Children's Commissioner)

Ms Elena Douglas (Knowledge Society)

Ms Fiona Nash (Regional Education Commissioner)

Ms Natalie Siegel-Brown (Productivity Commission)

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association

National Catholic Education Commission

National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition (NIYEC)

National Mental Health Commission

National School Resourcing Board

New Metrix Network

NT Learning Commission (Mr John Cleary and Ms Renee Lammon)

NPY Women's Council

NSW Education Standards Authority

NSW Teachers Federation Branch (AEU)

Ochre Education

Paul Ramsay Foundation

Police Citizens Youth Clubs NSW

Mr Michael Brennan, Dr Malcolm Roberts, Ms Dominique Lowe, and Ms Jessica Read –
Productivity Commission

Professor Pamela Snow (La Trobe University)

Professor Peter Buckskin

Professor Sharon Goldfeld

Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority

Queensland Teachers Union

Stakeholders consulted

Raise Foundation

Reach Out

Regional Education Support Network

Remote Indigenous Parents Association

SANE Australia

Save the Children

Schools Plus

Settlement Council of Australia

Social Ventures Australia

State School Teachers' Union of Western Australia

Stronger Smarter Institute

Teacher Education Expert Panel

The Australian Federation of SPELD Associations

The Refugee Education Special Interest Group

The Smith Family

Ms Pat Turner AM, Lead Convenor of the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Community-Controlled Peak Organisations

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

WA School Curriculum and Standards Authority

Appendix E – Submissions to the consultation paper

Disclaimer: Not all submissions received are listed below as some submission authors have requested to remain anonymous or for their submission not to be made public.

A New Approach	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
Abbotsleigh School	Australian Learning Lecture
Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia	Australian Primary Principals Association
Access to Music for Inclusion and Equity	Australian Professional Teachers Association
ACT Alliance for Evidence-Based Education	Australian Psychological Society
Albert Park College	Australian Publishers Association
Alberts The Tony Foundation	Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
All Means All	Australian Schools Plus
Amy MacMahon MP	Australian Secondary Principals' Association
Associate Professor Jae Yup Jung	Berry Street
Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia	Beyond Blue
Association of Independent Schools of South Australia	Big Picture Education Australia
Australasian Teacher Regulatory Authorities	Black Dog Institute
Australian Alliance of Associations in Education	Bloody Clever Australians Pty Ltd
Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented	Board of Treasurers (SA)
Australian Association of Special Education	Brotherhood of St Laurence
Australian Catholic Primary Principals' Association	Cambridge Education
Australian Catholic University	Career Industry Council of Australia
Australian Child Rights Taskforce	Carers Australia
Australian Children's Music Foundation	Catholic Education Canberra Goulburn
Australian Council of State School Organisations	Catholic School Parents Australia
Australian Education Research Organisation	Catholic Schools NSW
Australian Education Union	Centre for Community Child Health
Australian Government Primary Principals Association	Centre for Disability Research and Policy (University of Sydney)
	Centre for Inclusive Education

Centre for Independent Studies	Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW
Centre for Social Impact	Fiona Nash, Regional Education Commissioner
Centre for Sustainable Communities (University of Canberra)	First Peoples Disability Network
Children and Young People with Disability Australia	Flinders University
Coalition of Regional Independent Schools	Foundation House
Code REaD Dyslexia Network	Government of New South Wales
Community and Public Sector Union	Government of Queensland
Copyright Agency	Government of South Australia
CSIRO	Government of Tasmania
Disability Discrimination Legal Service	Government of the Australian Capital Territory
Dr Andrew Bills & Nigel Howard	Government of the Northern Territory
Dr Frank Malloy	Government of Victoria
Dr Greg Ashman	Government of Western Australia
Dr Kate de Bruin, Dr Eugenie Kestel & Dr Mariko Francis	Grattan Institute
Dr Lucie McCrory	Griffith University
Dr Michael Watt	Growth Coaching International
Dr Nathaniel Swain	Harshi Gunawardena and Rachel Wilson
Dr Rod Leonarder	headspace
DXP Consulting	Hester Hornbrook Academy
Eat Up Australia	Independent Education Union of Australia
Ecstra Foundation	Independent Schools Australia
Edmund Rice Education Australia	Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting (IECM)
Education Equity Alliance	Institute for Learning Sciences & Teacher Education (Australian Catholic University)
Education Services Australia	Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition (Deakin University)
Emeritus Professors Jane Kenway and Fazal Rizvi, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, and Barbara Preston, Educational Consultant	Institute for Positive Psychology and Education (Australian Catholic University)
Executive Council of Australian Jewry	Institute of Special Educators
Faculty of Education – Monash University	Interim Truth and Treaty Body
Faculty of Education – University of Melbourne	Islamic Schools Association of Australia
Family Advocacy	Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of Australia Inc.

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of New South Wales

J.P. Nuyttens – Learning Ability and Empowerment, Belgium

Jabiru Community College

James Cook University

Knowledge Society

Launch Housing

Learning Creates Australia

Learning Difficulties Australia

Learning First

Lefty's Left Handed Products & Resources

Leslie Loble AM

Literacy Impact

Little Dreamers

Lyndsay Connors AO & Dr Jim McMorro

Missing School

Montessori Australia

MultiLit

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association (NATSIPA)

National Association for the Visual Arts

National Catholic Education Commission

National Indigenous Australians Agency

National Student Voice Council

New South Wales Primary Principals' Association

Northern Territory Learning Commission

Northern Territory Principals' Association

NSW Secondary Principals' Council

Ochre Education

Orygen

Ourschool

P&Cs QLD

Parental Rights Committee Australia

Parents Victoria

Perth Modern School Student Council

Professor Sam Sellar & Associate Professor Joel Windle

Public Service Association of NSW

Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion

Raise Foundation

Rationalist Society of Australia

Reconciliation Australia

Refugee Education Special Interest Group

Refugee Student Resilience Study

Restacking the Odds

Rooty Hill High School

Save Our Schools

Save the Children & 54 Reasons

School Library Associations

Scyne

Social Ventures Australia

South Australian State School Leaders Association

Square Peg Round Whole

Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation

Stronger Smarter Institute

Tasmanian Association for the Gifted

Tasmanian Association of State School Organisations

Teachers and Teaching Research Centre (University of Newcastle)

The Association for Language Testing and Assessment of Australia and New Zealand

The Australian Association for Flexible and Inclusive Education (AAFIE)

The Australian Council of TESOL Associations

The Centre for Research for Educational Impact (Deakin University)
The Man Cave
The Smith Family
The Snow Foundation
The Song Room
Think Forward Educators
Transforming Education Australasia
Transforming InDigenous Education (TIDE)
United Workers Union
University of Melbourne
University of Tasmania
VicLLENs
Victorian Council of Social Service
WA Council of State School Organisations
Western Australian Student Council
Western Sydney Secondary Principals Council
Women with Disabilities Australia
Individual – Allison
Individual – Alpha
Individual – Amanda
Individual – Anam
Individual – Angela
Individual – Carol
Individual – Carol
Individual – Cassandra
Individual – Daniella
Individual – Elizabeth
Individual – Fatima
Individual – Freda
Individual – Gerald
Individual – Gina

Individual – Grant
Individual – Jane
Individual – Jeremy
Individual – Jo
Individual – Justin
Individual – Karyn
Individual – Kathryn
Individual – Ken
Individual – Ken
Individual – Kenneth
Individual – Ksenia
Individual – Lydia
Individual – Lynne
Individual – Marilyn
Individual – Maureen
Individual – Melanie
Individual – Melissa
Individual – Nethica
Individual – Rachael
Individual – Robert
Individual – Robert
Individual – Rose
Individual – Simon
Individual – Summer
Individual – Tameka
Individual – Tim
Individual – Vanessa
Individual – Vanlyn
Individual – Warwick
Individual – Wendy

Appendix F – Schools visited by the Panel

School	State	System
Aldercourt Primary School	VIC	Government
Aurukun State	QLD	Government
Aveley Secondary School	WA	Government
Balwyn Primary School	VIC	Government
Bayulu Remote Community School	WA	Government
Belmont City College	WA	Government
Boddington District High School	WA	Government
Boyare Primary School	WA	Government
Broken Hill Public School	NSW	Government
Broome Primary School	WA	Government
Broome Residential College	WA	Government
Broome Senior High School	WA	Government
Bwgcorman Community School	QLD	Government
Cable Beach Primary School	WA	Government
Canadian Lead Primary School	VIC	Government
Canley Vale High School	NSW	Government
Cape York Girl Academy Cairns	QLD	Independent
Centralian Middle School	NT	Government
Centralian Senior College	NT	Government
Challis Community Primary School	WA	Government
Charles Weston School	ACT	Government
Charters Towers Central State	QLD	Government
Charters Towers School of Distance Education	QLD	Government
Churchill Primary School	VIC	Government
Clontarf Aboriginal College	WA	Catholic
Communities at Work Galilee School	ACT	Independent
Dhupuma Barker School	NT	Independent
Djarragun College, Gordonvale	QLD	Independent
Dripstone Middle School	NT	Government
East Kimberley College	WA	Government
Elizabeth Park Primary School	NSW	Government

School	State	System
Elizabeth Vale Primary School	NSW	Government
Ernabella Anangu School	SA	Government
ET Secondary College	NSW	Independent
Fitzroy Valley District High School	WA	Government
Gapuwiyak School	NT	Government
Gillen Primary School	NT	Government
Gladys Newton School	WA	Government
Good Shepherd Catholic Primary School	ACT	Catholic
Goodwood Primary	TAS	Government
Gray Primary School	NT	Government
Haileybury Rendall School	NT	Independent
Henbury Special School	NT	Government
Hincks Avenue Primary School	SA	Government
Hobart City High School	TAS	Government
Homebush West Public School	NSW	Government
Hunter Sports High School	NSW	Government
Indulkana Anangu School	SA	Government
Katherine High School	NT	Government
Katherine South Primary School	NT	Government
Kingston High School	TAS	Government
MacFarlane Primary School	NT	Government
Manunda Terrace Primary School	NT	Government
Mark Oliphant School	SA	Government
Marsden Road Public School	NSW	Government
Marsden State High School	QLD	Government
Menindee Central School	NSW	Government
Mercy College	WA	Catholic
Millner Primary School	NT	Government
Mimili Anangu School	SA	Government
Moil Primary School	NT	Government
Moulden Park Primary School	NT	Government

School	State	System
Mount St Bernard College	QLD	Catholic
Mount Stromlo High School	ACT	Government
New Town Primary School	TAS	Government
Newman Catholic College	QLD	Catholic
Ngukurr School	NT	Government
Our Lady of the Sacred Heart	NT	Catholic
Parafield Gardens High School	NSW	Government
Pormpuraaw State	QLD	Government
Port School	WA	Independent
Prospect North Primary	SA	Government
Punchbowl Boys High School	NSW	Government
Rosny College	TAS	Government
School of Isolated and Distance Education	WA	Government
Serpentine Primary School	WA	Government
Specialised Assistance School for Youth	SA	Independent
Spinifex State College	QLD	Government
St Joseph's Catholic Primary	QLD	Catholic
St Mary's College	WA	Catholic
St Michael's Catholic School	QLD	Catholic
Tarremah Steiner School	TAS	Independent
Trinity Bay High School	QLD	Government
University High School	VIC	Government
Westfield Park Primary School	WA	Government
Whyalla Secondary College	SA	Government
Whyalla Stuart Primary School	SA	Government
Worree State	QLD	Government
Wyndham District High School	WA	Government
Y Vocational School	QLD	Independent
Yirrkala Homelands School	NT	Government
Yuille Park P-8 Community College	VIC	Government

Appendix G – Endnotes

- 1 The Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education, Australian Government, [Expert panel to inform a better and fairer education system](#) [media release], 29 March 2023, accessed 20 November 2023.
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- 29 Education Ministers Meeting (2022) [The National Teacher Workforce Action Plan](#), Department of Education, Australian Government, accessed 27 October 2023.
- 30 Scott M, Loudon B, Simons M, Donovan J, Peach A, and West R (2023) [Strong beginnings: report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel](#), Department of Education, Australian Government, pp. 17–21, accessed 27 October 2023.
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- 51 Henebery B (5 May 2023) [‘A significant moment’: All NSW public schools to be funded to 100% of their SRS](#), The Educator Australia, accessed 27 October 2023.
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The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records in a business setting. It highlights how proper record-keeping can help in identifying trends, making informed decisions, and ensuring compliance with legal requirements. The text emphasizes that records should be organized, up-to-date, and easily accessible to relevant personnel.

Next, the document addresses the challenges of data management in a digital age. It notes that while technology offers powerful tools for data collection and analysis, it also introduces risks such as data breaches, loss of information, and information overload. The author suggests implementing robust security protocols, regular backups, and employee training to mitigate these risks.

The third section focuses on the role of data in strategic planning. It argues that data-driven insights are essential for understanding market dynamics, customer behavior, and operational efficiency. By leveraging data, businesses can identify new opportunities, optimize their processes, and gain a competitive edge in their respective industries.

Finally, the document concludes by stressing the need for a data-centric culture within an organization. This involves fostering a mindset where data is valued and used to drive decision-making at all levels. The author encourages leadership to set the example by basing their own decisions on data and to create an environment where employees feel empowered to use data to improve their work.