

Discussion Paper Submission to the New School Reform Consultation Paper

July 2023



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1 Introduction

"It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge."

Albert Einstein

The Mott MacDonald Education Consultancy (Cambridge Education, MMEC) is committed to making a difference through education. We build capacity. We engage stakeholders. We make global connections and increase impact.

We are a leader in the field of education, training and capability uplift – working with many government clients across high stakes projects, designing and providing quality professional learning, training, mentoring and coaching for those in their early, middle and senior stages of their career.

We deliver programs that drive success and improve learning for all.

Part of the global Mott MacDonald group, we bring extensive experience in working with educators around the world in designing, developing and facilitating targeted programs to build sector capacity. But more than this, we are passionate educators, school leaders and parents. This experience and who we are compels us to write this submission in response to the *Review to inform a Better and Fairer Education System:* Consultation Paper and contribute to the next National School Reform Agreement.

Our experience in designing quality and impactful professional learning for teachers at all stages of their careers, has compelled us to draft this submission and propose the following matters for consideration in response to the following Key Areas identified by the Consultation Paper:

- 1. Lifting student outcomes
- 2. Improving student mental health and wellbeing
- 3. Attracting and retaining teachers

We respectfully urge the Panel to consider the development, on a national scale, of a suite of capability uplift programs that expand on, complement or are in addition to key reforms to be identified through the consultation process. We believe doing so will support the federal government to achieve its goal of tying funding to reforms that maximise positive impact on teacher and student learning and wellbeing.

We propose further consideration of the place and value of the following, in response to the Consultation Paper:



Measures that consider equity



Improved outcomes for children and young people through teacher empowerment and collective efficacy via Professional Learning Communities



Providing rich and diverse opportunities for coaching and mentoring across all levels of schools



Addressing equity and the need for transformational change through pedagogy

You are what you measure, and we value what we assess. The introduction of high-stakes NAPLAN testing in Australia has not achieved its intention to "drive improvements in student outcomes" (ACARA, 2016). To date, high-stakes testing has not shown any noticeable improvement in student learning outcomes and since the introduction of National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing in Australia in 2008 (ACARA, 2016), results have decreased (Thompson, 2013; Johnston, 2017; Gardner, 2018; Turner & Pale, 2019). In an effort to measure student outcomes based on the narrow parameters of NAPLAN, many teachers and academics argue that high-stakes testing is not meeting the needs of children and has in fact turned deep learning into 'preparing for the test' (Frawley & McLean Davies, 2015; Minarechová, 2012; Thompson 2013). The Consultation Paper acknowledges that targets and reforms should be based on the best available evidence and support students to meet their potential, however there is no evidence to suggest that the current measures are improving student outcomes or promoting equity and excellence.

Bringing the *Mparntwe Declaration* (2019) to life requires confronting the dichotomy between the commercial principles governing Australian educational policy and systems and the need to approach education as a provider of holistic development. The goal of every learner is to become a thinker and a lifelong learner who contributes to a richer, kinder and more equitable society.

Goal 2: All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.

Mparntwe Declaration (2019)

There are over thirty aspirational outcomes for children and young people nested under the second goal of the Declaration, essential skills in literacy and numeracy (as a foundation for learning) is but one. Nested in the reform process is a critical need for a national agreement of the fundamental purpose of education that is deeply grounded in equitable principles and transformative pedagogies.

With this in mind we submit the following matters for consideration.

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2 Matters for Consideration



Measures that consider equity

Questions about equity are raised when we analyse the measures that are used to gauge student achievement. There is little to no evidence that shows the introduction of NAPLAN testing has resulted in improved learning outcomes for students. In 2013, after 5 years of testing, results from the administering body, ACARA, show that there "has been no statistically significant improvement in the number of students achieving at the minimum standard across Australia" (ACARA, as cited in Thompson, 2013). As an example of this is Gardner's 2017 analysis of NAPLAN data that found that there had been a decline in writing achievement since 2011, with the greatest decline at Year 7, followed by Year 9 and then Year 5 (Gardner, 2018). Gardner found that students' writing results declined based on their parent/carer's Occupational Group, with those whose parents were senior managers and qualified professionals (occupational group G1) performing at the highest levels, and achievement declining with each Occupational Group down to G4 (machine operators, hospitality staff, assistants and labourers) and even further for those whose parents/carers were not in paid work (Gardner, 2018).

Researchers (Thomas, 2020; Clary & Mueller, 2021) found that along with the general decline in writing achievement between 2011-2018, there were also gender differences, with males falling further behind female students over the testing years. Assessment should consider diversity and take into account students' gender, geographical location, cultural backgrounds and learning styles and needs. The premise that NAPLAN data would allow funding to be targeted to those who need it most has not eventuated in this instance, and this is just one example. Researchers have found that students in major cities outperform those in regional and rural areas; non-indigenous out-perform indigenous students, and native English speakers out-perform students who have a first language that is not English (Rose et al., 2020; Gardner, 2018; Harris et al., 2013). It seems the high-stakes NAPLAN test only highlights the disparities that exist in society more broadly and continue to privilege the urban, white, middle to upper class stereotype.

So, what is equity in education and how do we measure it? Expert Panel member, Professor Pasi Sahlberg, has written extensively about equity in education and the lack of a clear definition (Sahlberg, 2021; 2022a). If we assume Sahlberg's definition of

individual and social equity in education is what we are striving for, then our aim should be grounding future school reform in ways that address individual equity, that is "all students receive and education that enables them to realise their talents and fully participate in society in a way of their choosing" and social equity, "students from different social groups should achieve similar average outcomes and a similar range of variation in these outcomes" (Sahlberg, 2022a).

One of the means to achieving equity in education is to adopt a whole child approach to education (Sahlberg, 2022b). This approach, as its name implies, relies on governments and schools valuing the whole child, which is more than the current high-stakes assessments can measure. Turner and Pale (2019) have conducted one of the only studies into the correlation between NAPLAN results and Students' Attitude to School Survey data and found "that there are some statistically significant relationships between Students' Attitudes to School Survey results and NAPLAN scores". Thirty-five schools participated in this study, with school populations ranging from 68 to 580 students. The researchers found that there was a correlation between positive attitudes to school and academic achievement in some areas, most noticeably in Writing. The researchers went on to suggest that if teachers were looking to improve achievement results in NAPLAN, they should look to "address the student attitude to school factors of effective classroom behaviour, resilience, effort, attitudes to attendance and managing bullying in the classroom" (Turner & Pale, 2019, p. 296). Their results indicate that happier students, who feel more connected to school, perform better in NAPLAN testing than students who have less positive attitudes to school.

A step towards achieving a focus on the whole child is to equip systems, leaders and teachers with the capabilities to address the recommendations put forward in Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools (Commonwealth of Australia, 2018), which were:

- Equipping every student to grow and succeed in a changing world
- Creating, supporting and valuing a profession of expert educators
- Empowering and supporting school leaders

MMEC's experience in working with thousands of teachers – from those within the first five years of entering the profession to those working as system leaders – indicates that capability uplift programs focused on:

creating, supporting and valuing educators through mentoring and coaching

- providing customised and relevant professional learning sustained over time
- that are informed by comprehensive scaffolds for wellbeing and networking through establishing communities of practice, and
- that are informed by the best available evidence,
- make a substantial difference to educators' confidence, capability, retention and ability to engage the whole child in engaged learning.



Improved outcomes for children and young people through teacher empowerment and collective efficacy via Professional Learning Communities

Post pandemic responses to workforce attrition rates and ensuing teacher shortages have sought to add several palliative measures that have done little to address the undervaluing of teaching as a profession. Despite hope that the essential role played by teachers in our schools, communities and society would, alongside doctors and nurses, be held in greater regard there seems to be further erosion of teaching as a highly skilled and essential profession in an effort to ensure enough warm bodies to "make up the numbers". Shortening of graduate teacher training programs and alternative authorisation schemes such as "permission to teach" while making up the numbers does little to boost morale and positive regard for the profession. Continuing to suggest the further implementation of "scripted" curriculum resources serves to reinforce the notion that teachers are not capable of designing the learning needed by the students in their class.

The Monash University Australian Teachers' Perceptions of their Work in 2022 (Longmuir, F., et al) cites unmanageable workloads as a key theme for teachers leaving the workforce and a suggestion by teachers is to start trusting them to do the job for which they were trained, and remove the many layers of compliance and accountability, the "admin" that takes them away from the real work of responding to the needs of the children and young people in their care.

The development of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) promotes a view of the teacher as a designer of learning. PLCs enable and empower teachers to come together to collaborate, analyse data and discuss the problems of practice that are authentic and contextual to the needs of the individual students in their class. As a result, outcomes for students are improved. By working collaboratively in effective PLCs, teachers and schools, collectively develop a sense of belonging, efficacy and a shared moral

imperative to dream, design, create and implement transformative change from the bottom up. The concept of PLCs goes beyond connecting teachers to teachers within the school walls, to linking schools to schools, connecting regional and remote and forming national communities of practice that provide pathways to empowered, connected and transformational change (Murgatroyd, S., & Sahlberg, P., 2016).

At MMEC, we know the importance of supporting systems, schools, leaders and teachers to embed the cultural conditions that support effective PLCs within schools. We support individuals and teams to strengthen their leadership capabilities and confidence to lead impactful collaborative professional learning that focus on transformative school improvement. We know that PLCs support education professionals to adopt an inquiry mindset that facilitates the achievement of remarkable lasting success through a shared understanding of the purpose and nature of collaboration within a PLC (Fullan, M., & Quinn, J., 2015).

(E)

Providing rich and diverse opportunities for coaching and mentoring across all levels of schools at all career stages

At MMEC, we believe that coaching and mentoring of educational professionals at all stages of their careers is key to increasing teacher confidence, wellbeing and retention. Instituting comprehensive coaching and mentoring programs for school leaders, middle leaders and early career teachers to support them in their practice, helps them to plan and implement sustainable change and to lead and teach in complex times. Research indicates a strong correlation between the mentoring experiences and wellbeing of teachers (Kutsyuruba, Godden, Bosica, 2019). Mentoring (and coaching) in the education landscape continues to galvanise researchers' interest worldwide.

The importance of mentoring continues to be confirmed (Ingersoll & Strong, 2012) as one of the most effective mechanisms available to both whole systems and individual educational settings to retain and build the confidence of the teaching workforce. The link between teacher quality (confidence and skills) and mentoring support is noted as a rationale to the efforts to improve mentoring practice.

Our experience in designing and implementing mentoring programs for graduate (provisionally registered) teachers, early childhood educators, regional system leaders, literacy and numeracy leaders and middle leaders in schools indicates that when

personalised coaching and mentoring takes place, confidence and capacity grow. Retention soon follows.



Addressing equity and transformational change through pedagogy

'Yet, education does more than respond to a changing world. Education transforms the world "

(UNESCO) en.unesco.org

If Australia has a great education system but not for all...then it's not great. There is an underlying tone throughout the Consultation Paper that creates a mental image of specific "at risk" groups of children and young people as a problem to be fixed. One could argue that learning in an environment where there is a consistent group of unsuccessful and marginalised individuals continues to perpetuate the blame game and societal inequalities over fostering a system of all for one and one for all.

"A multitude of out-of-school factors are strongly associated with learning outcomes." (Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System - Consultation Paper (2023) p. 17). No amount of quality assured curriculum materials will help teachers support students to live with their trauma, to overcome racism, stigma and discrimination. It is not enough for us as educators to acknowledge the impacts of these factors. A moral imperative exists for us to actively address that which contributes to inequality in our society.

Poor performance is a matter of perspective and as mentioned earlier our measures of "success" are extremely limited. There is the need to move the narrative around "under" performing students from a deficit lens to an asset-based viewpoint and arm teachers with the skills, knowledge and values that empower both themselves and their students. It is true schools cannot fix existing inequities alone, but given the support, trust and empowerment, schools can be centers of change for equity and inclusion.

"Transformative pedagogy" is a construct with philosophical, psychological and social underpinnings (Farren, 2016). The challenges of teaching the 3 core dimensions of the Australian and State curricula demand preparing new teaching staff as well as experienced teachers by engaging in professional development opportunities to foster the knowledge and pedagogies necessary for social equity.

Developing critical thinking on social equity should go beyond teaching students about differences between individuals, societies and cultures but rather offer a holistic and indepth exploration of the complex and mobile spaces between these differences. If we truly want to educate for a changing world then responsiveness to global contexts, promoting teacher agency through the strengthening of professional identity and supporting teachers by developing knowledge and practical skills associated with transformative pedagogies that maximises student empowerment, leadership and agency for a more peaceful and sustainable world should be our goal.

3 Conclusion

There is a critical need for a philosophical shift in thinking and for education policy in Australia to put to rest the competing need for academic excellence and international competitiveness with social equity, individual wellbeing and a life-long love of learning. Sad, traumatised, alienated children cannot learn. Scared, disempowered, mistrusted teachers cannot teach. These realities are not limited to any one group, though more prevalent in some than others. Work towards addressing this and the rest will follow.

Ensuring school leaders and teachers are supported through high quality, evidence based professional learning that meets their needs by embracing their context is essential to driving school reform. Embedding rigorous Professional Learning Communities practices along with continuous coaching and mentoring for educational professionals at all career stages will support empowerment and lead to transformative change. This is not a time to keep the status quo. Current measures have shown no improvement in student learning outcomes for over a decade. It is time for true school reform that encourages each learner, regardless of their background or geographical location, to realise their true potential.

Mott MacDonald Education Consultancy is dedicated to partnering with multiple stakeholders to design, develop and deliver evidence-based professional learning programs for all Australian educators that focus on strength-based empowerment of school leaders, teachers and students with a forward vision of improved social outcomes.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our expertise and offerings to help make a difference through education with you.

About Us

The Mott MacDonald Education Consultancy currently manages high stakes major projects in education, training and capability uplift for government clients that target:

- 2000+ Graduate Teachers
- 1500+ Mentor Teachers
- Professional Learning Communities across hundreds of schools
- Building capacity of hundreds of school leaders to drive whole school improvement
- Middle Years Literacy and Numeracy Coaching for over 500 middle leaders in schools
- Professional learning for over 250 regional system leaders
- Professional learning for 480 teachers of Applied Learning

See the following Appendix for sample case studies.

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5 Appendices - Case Studies of MMEC's experience

Case Study 1: Providing guidance on varied and engaging delivery methods

Project Theme

Building Capacity for Excellence

Client Type

A Department of Education

The program - \$1m+

This program aims to equip school leaders and specialist teachers with knowledge and skills needed to motivate and enable their school communities to commit to sustained, long-term organisational change that leads to improvement in teacher practice and student outcomes.

As a delivery partner, we developed online modules, which were strategically designed to make use of a variety of delivery methods to maximise engagement from participants. As such, the modules were accessible through a digital learning environment consisting of a Learning Management System (LMS), the Office365 suite (Word, Excel and PowerPoint), and utilised a video-conferencing platform to enable synchronous and asynchronous discussions among participants, differentiated learning pathways, and a variety of learning and assessment activities.

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Project Theme

Coaching to build capacity

Client Type

A government department

The program \$900k+

This coaching program aims to provide one-to-one and group coaching to strengthen the professional development of participants. Mott MacDonald Education hosts a highly skilled and diverse coaching panel with extensive experience in focused setting, many of whom have led the strategies in their profession.

The coaching sessions include individual, small group sessions and a program targeting coaching-capability-building; tailored and adapted based of the individual's improvement focus and requirements.

Whether the focus is building capability or providing direct teaching support to students, or both; our coaches work closely with participants to identify practical steps and effective strategies that can be readily implemented in their professional environment.





Case Study 3: Instilling the importance of mentoring

Project Theme

Developing mentoring capacity in experienced teachers

Client Type

A Department of Education

The program \$2m+

This program aims to integrate our client's efforts to support early career teachers in their entry into the profession by providing a consistent message to participants from a variety of background about the importance of the mentoring role.

The program consists of state-wide teacher mentor programs that target participants across all education settings.

The programs are conducted as a two-day workshop incorporating an online blended learning approach, with another course as a one-day refresher course for participants who have previously completed the two-day course and require an update to refresh their knowledge and skills. The refresher course also includes online blended learning components.

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Project Theme

Supporting beginning teachers in the first and second years of their teaching career – two state-wide programs

Client Type

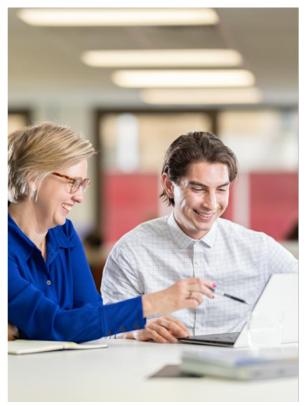
A Department of Education

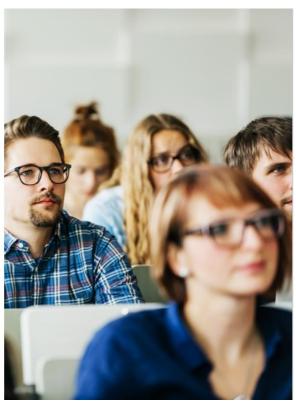
Two programs \$5.5m+

These state-wide program aim to support and develop beginning participants in the first two years of their teaching career.

The program includes over 3000 participants – graduate teachers and their experienced teacher mentors. The professional learning program provides a cutting edge and unprecedented focus on supporting, developing and inspiring the participants.

Included is the design and delivery of face-to-face and workshops, online learning modules, webinars and content expert videos. Leading teachers play a pivotal role in professional learning design through a collaborative co-design process. The program also provides support and learning for mentor and leading teachers through workshops and resources and includes evaluation and feedback loops, that are used to inform the development of deliverables through a cyclical, iterative process.





Case Study 5: Building the capability of the workforce

Project Theme

Building capacity of vocational education and applied learning

Client Type

A Department of Education

The program \$1.5m+

This program aims to build capability, resources and networking for participants in their professional field. The program consists of online modules, online workshops and webinars with a total of almost 500 participants overall.

Modules are accessible through a learning management system and allow for all participants to connect, engage and support one another throughout the program.

The professional learning program is designed to be relevant for participants today and for those dealing with curriculum changes in future years.

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Project Theme

Creating great leaders and resilient schools

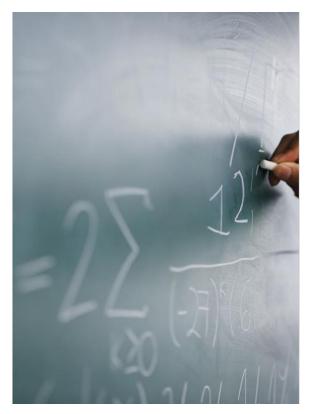
Client Type

A Department of Education

The program \$500k+

This program is designed for participants to build their knowledge on the processes and requirements of reviewing school processes, including Child Safe standards.

The project includes blended learning and provides additional resources in a learning management system which participants can access at any time.





Case Study 7: Implementing an improvement-focused approach

Project Theme

Building capacity for strategic improvement and impact

Client Type

A Department of Education

The program \$10m+

This model provides a system-wide school improvement-focused approach to professional learning including mechanisms for embedding this is school culture and practice sustainability, and with measurable impact.

The initiative includes professional learning and resources enabling participants to work collaboratively to share best practice and improve student learning.

Targeted professional learning sessions and in-school coaching support school leadership teams to address problems of practice and plan effective strategies for action.



