



Dr Lisa O'Brien
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Department of Education



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Dear Dr O'Brien,

**RE: CATHOLIC EDUCATION CANBERRA GOULBURN (CECG) SUBMISSION IN
RESPONSE TO THE REVIEW TO INFORM A BETTER AND FAIRER EDUCATION SYSTEM**

I write in response to Better and Fairer Consultation paper. I am pleased to provide a submission on this important matter on behalf of Catholic Education, Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn (CECG).

Catholic schools have provided education in the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn for more than 160 years, educating hundreds of thousands of students during that time. CECG educates over 22,000 children and students in 56 schools and eight early learning centres across the ACT and much of southern NSW, covering a geographical area of 88,000 square km.

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with members of the panel to discuss your work and reflect on recent initiatives in Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn. Further reflections follow on what we regard as key areas to continued increases in educational attainment.

A REVIEW TO INFORM A BETTER AND FAIRER EDUCATION SYSTEM

The review to inform a Better and Fairer Education is ambitious in its scope. There is a significant risk that as a nation Australia does not focus the role of schools with respect to their critical role in student learning. There are many competing societal aspirations and objectives in relation to school education. Where desired outcomes from schooling are unclear, difficult to define and measure and school activity is not guided by clear understandings of what represents effective practice it is likely that questions will continue to intensify regarding the effectiveness of schools in achieving the outcomes desired by the government and the wider community.

From our perspective it is critical that the main objective of schooling is to ensure the learning of students is sufficient to support them to fully participate in society and the wider world.

FOCUS ON LEARNING



Many myths surround student learning. Our assessment is that the best available evidence supports the proposition that most students, over 80% and perhaps as high as 95%, are reliably able to be effectively supported in their learning through high quality in classroom instruction.

Evaluation of schooling policy should have as a priority being desperately efficient with the time available for student learning. Every available minute at school should ideally be efficiently and effectively deployed to the priority of advancing student learning. Teaching and classroom practice should prioritise efficient and effective approaches to make the best use of the available time.

TEACHING

What happens in the classroom initiated by the teacher is arguably the most important aspect of schooling within the control of the school and the teacher. Too often this is neglected in schooling policy. In recent months Education Ministers have provided in principle support for the recommendations of the Teacher Education Expert Panel (TEEP). These recommendations have significant implications for what teachers should know as a result of their initial teacher education and therefore the knowledge that should inform their classroom practice.

The acceptance of the TEEP recommendations should draw scrutiny to other elements in the school education landscape as to how they reinforce the important concepts identified for teachers to know and apply. These include teacher registration requirements; content and specificity of teacher professional standards; progression to Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher status; and the content or other requirements for the accreditation of professional learning.

There is an opportunity for each of these elements in school education to be harnessed to promote effective and efficient teaching methods that reliably provide the best learning for the overwhelming majority of students.

THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

There are advantages to having a national curriculum. At this time much that is implied, encouraged and entailed by the Australian Curriculum is not adding to or is neutral with respect to student learning.

Several directions are worthy of pursuit in relation to the Australian Curriculum in future iterations. The Australian Curriculum, where possible, should seek to be more precise about what students need to know. Increased precision in this way has the potential to reduce workload for teachers and reduce variation in curriculum that does not assist student learning.

Future iterations of the Australian Curriculum should also prioritise knowledge or content rich expectations. Knowledge rich curriculum has the potential to lift the learning expectations for students, more consistently expose students to high expectation vocabulary and conceptual knowledge, and take the student beyond the vocabulary they might be exposed to in their home and community context.

Taking account of these two priorities there is an opportunity for the Australian Curriculum to make a greater contribution to the learning of students.

LEARNING AND WELLBEING

The dominant purpose of schooling should be learning for students. Displacing learning with a priority for wellbeing or mental health or other objectives risks further diminishing the effectiveness of schools to assist students to achieve in their learning. If schools are effective at supporting students to learn the students experience success. This experience of success has significant benefits for student wellbeing, motivation and other psycho-social attributes.

Any greater emphasis on other objectives for schools must be carefully targeted and evaluated for their potential to diminish or fragment the focus of the school on the learning of students.

ADDITIONAL DATA COLLECTION

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) could potentially provide further information on important policy issues. It may provide a useful platform to collect data on issues raised in the consultation paper. For example, a question might easily be added to NAPLAN about disruption in classrooms. Alternatively given the regulatory requirement for schools to conduct staff and student satisfaction surveys over time, the specificity of these surveys could be regulated to cover important policy issues such as classroom disruption.

TARGETS

There is reason to be wary of targets for student achievement. It is questionable as to whether the existence of a target for educational achievement will provide an effective incentive for higher learning achievement in schools. A number of government education systems have adopted targets at a school and system level. If these were effective there would presumably be evidence for their efficacy available from state and territory governments.

A major impediment to targets on student outcomes providing a genuine incentive for higher student achievement is the lack of clear and shared understanding of cause and effect relationships between pedagogy and curriculum and student outcomes.

Unless the targets assist in the widespread adoption of efficient and effective learning and teaching practices, targets will be of questionable value.

DIVERSITY

Education has a critical role to help overcome inequality and disadvantage. Policy design must continue to prioritise the contribution that effective schooling can make to overcoming disadvantage and addressing unjust inequality. Policy proposals should be faithful to the premise that every child can learn. In our local experience it is often the case that every child is likely to be able to exceed the expectations we currently have for them if they experience effective and efficient learning and teaching in their school and classroom.

In this context labelling can be non-neutral with respect to the expectations of students. The full implications of labelling students should be carefully evaluated and understood. Labelling students can too often have the result of lowering expectations for the student because of the characteristics described by the label as understood by teachers of the community.

No background or label should predict the opportunities or expectations for any student from the learning and teaching in a school.

By focussing on the provision of reliably effective classroom learning and teaching opportunities for all students, the contribution of school education to equity can be advanced.

WORK DESIGN OF TEACHERS

A common assumption in school education today in Australia is that a 4-year trained teacher should be tasked with designing and delivering an entire educational program for students. This assumption is problematic in many ways. The work of teachers should be focussed on the activity which makes the greatest, most efficient, contribution to student learning. This implies teachers, schools and systems should make careful decisions about the resources available to teachers, and where the effort of teachers is deployed in the value chain of learning.

In our own system teachers have been provided with significant resources, tools and supports to help them deliver high quality lessons characterised by effective and efficient instruction. For example, scripted lessons can be helpful for teachers to focus their effort and energy into the most important classroom activity. For example, monitoring the understanding of student

learning. The voluntary uptake of scripted programs amongst our teachers has been extremely positive with many teachers greatly appreciative of the support it gives them which then enables them to focus on learning and teaching.

CONCLUSION

The National School Reform Agreement should contemplate how best to pursue the following:

- Encouraging professional learning in schools and systems to align with the recommendations in the [Teacher Education Expert Panel report](#);
- Encourage teacher accreditation and registration authorities to take account of recommendations in the Teacher Education Expert Panel report in recognising professional learning and recognising quality in teaching practice;
- Update the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) teacher professional standards in accordance with the Teacher Education Expert Panel recommendations to ensure they are more precise in defining quality practice.
- Moving the Australian Curriculum, in future iterations and resource development, to be genuinely knowledge rich and more precise in the knowledge expectations;

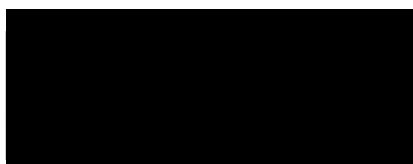
REFERENCES

- [Catalyst Website](#)
- [Catalyst Brochure](#)
- [SMH Opinion Piece Ross Fox – How to help children learn: the evidence is in](#)
- [ABC – Universities given two years to overhaul teaching degrees](#)
- **Equity Economics Report - [Raising the grade](#)**: How schools in the Australian Capital Territory can lift literacy outcomes for students and the economy
- **CECG Media Statement**: Report endorses Catholic Education efforts to lift literacy (*attachment*)
- **Catholic Education Canberra Goulburn Podcast**: [Teacher Insights from Catalyst](#)
- [Catalyst in the Classroom](#)
- **Churchill Fellowship Jessica Colleu Terradas CECG - [Report on Effective Practices for at Risk Students](#)**

Catholic Education Canberra Goulburn have instigated a system wide change in the approach to learning and teaching in Canberra Goulburn through the [Catalyst](#) program in the last four years. We are seeing positive results on NAPLAN and other measures.

As always, I can be contacted directly on  should you wish to discuss any aspect of our work.

Yours sincerely



Ross Fox
DIRECTOR
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