



Department of
Education

Shaping the future

Submission to the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System

Government of Western Australia

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Overview

Western Australia welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Expert Panel's Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System (the Review).

This submission addresses the main foci of the Expert Panel's Consultation Paper, using the following structure:

- Information about school education in Western Australia, including geographical and demographic context.
- Overarching comments about national collaboration opportunities.
- Western Australia's key initiatives and strategies in public education, aligned to each focus area of the Consultation Paper.

Key points covered in this submission include the following:

- Western Australia's unique context, and the need to equip, empower and support schools to work with their communities to adapt and respond to the needs of their students.
- Western Australia supports the next National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) focusing on a small number of areas that address common challenges faced by all jurisdictions and will lead to better student outcomes, particularly for priority equity cohorts.
- Quality teaching underpinned by clear leadership and whole-school approaches, authentic partnerships with the local community and external support services, and additional targeted assistance for students who need it, is essential for raising student engagement and outcomes. The next NSRA should ensure schools and systems can scale-up quality teaching strategies, support school leadership to focus on improving student outcomes through whole school pedagogical approaches, and that additional targeted assistance (such as small group interventions) are evidence-based, funded and sustainable.
- Attracting sufficient teachers with the right skills to the right areas, particularly in secondary schools, regional areas, and in areas of specialised skill continues to be one of the greatest challenges and highest priorities for Western Australia. Not having enough teachers, or teachers with the right skills has flow-on workload implications on schools. National reforms need to be considered in the context of both the workforce challenges and the broad array of strategies already underway nationally and in each jurisdiction to address this.
- Meeting the needs of students with disability continues to be a priority for Western Australia, noting that the majority of students with diagnosed or imputed disability are in mainstream classrooms. Western Australia would welcome the Expert Panel considering what can be done collectively with the Australian Government, beyond more data collection and reporting, to better support the education of students with disability.
- The State Government looks forward to the Expert Panel's consideration of opportunities for national collaboration that support and align with Western Australia's efforts to support student mental health and wellbeing, including in partnership with other agencies and the community more broadly.
- Opportunities for greater sharing of data nationally require a strong rationale for how student outcomes will be improved and not add to administrative burden on schools and systems.
- Any national efforts to increase transparency and accountability must:
 - be consistent with the Principles of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations
 - be proportional, cost-effective and cost-efficient
 - not duplicate existing data collection or reporting mechanisms, nor add significant administrative burden on schools and systems.

Western Australian context

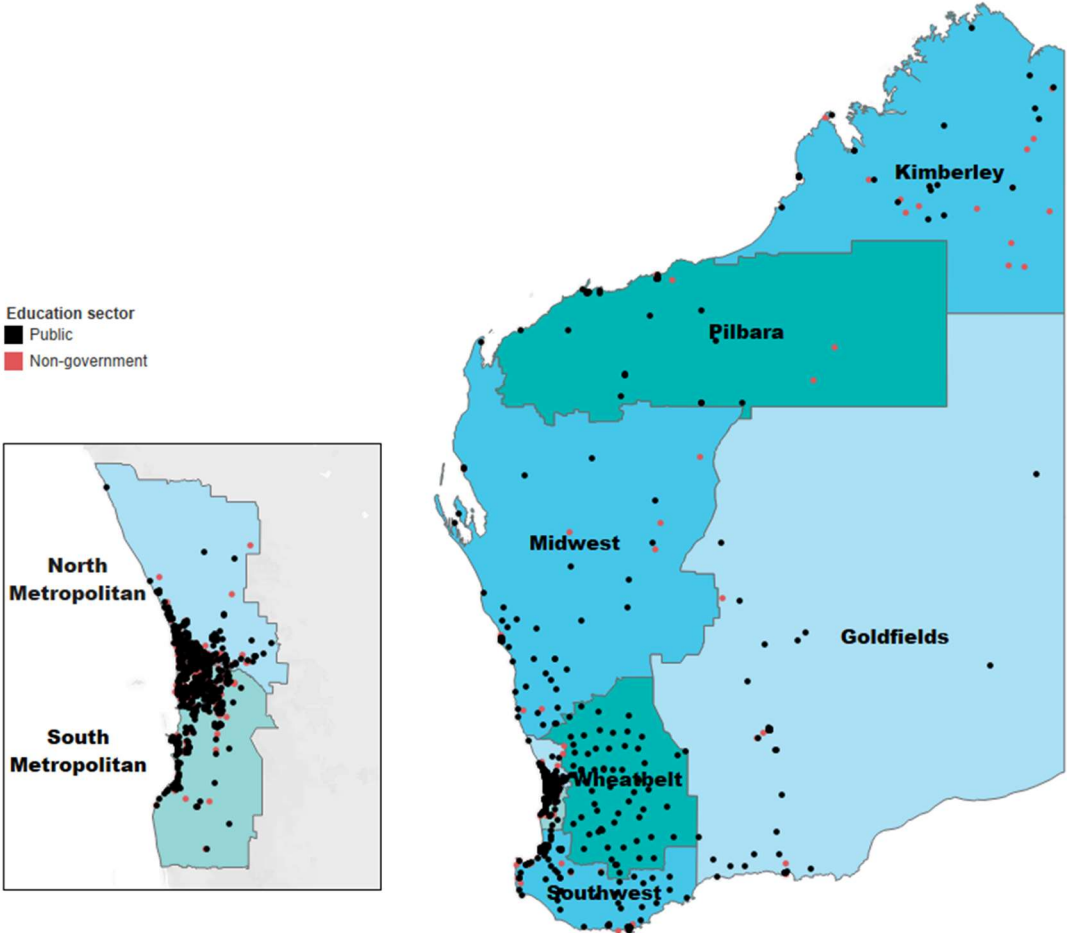
The State Government is committed to ensuring all Western Australian children receive a high quality school education, no matter where they live or their background.

There are 484,850 students enrolled in 1,144 Western Australian schools, including 322,294 (66%) students in 830 public schools and 162,556 (34%) across 314 Catholic and Independent schools.¹

Western Australia’s geographic size and isolation coupled with its low population density provide unique challenges in the context of delivering education.

Over a quarter (27%) of Western Australia’s schools are in outer regional, remote and very remote areas, as shown in Table 1. Such schools tend to be relatively small, educating 12% of the state’s school students (compared to 10% in such schools nationally). However, they educate 44% of the state’s 34,854 Aboriginal students.

Figure 1 – Locations of Western Australia’s public schools and non-government schools.



¹ Western Australian Department of Education: 2023 Semester 1 student census, including kindergarten students.

The percentages of Western Australian public schools and students in outer regional, remote and very remote areas are even higher, at 29% and 14% respectively. The vast majority (83%) of Western Australia’s Aboriginal students attend a public school.

The state comprises 8 education regions. Two regions cover the Perth metropolitan area and educate 79% of students, while 2 regions (Kimberley and Pilbara) comprise only remote and very remote schools. The Midwest and Goldfields education regions have outer regional, remote and very remote schools, and the Southwest and Wheatbelt education regions have inner regional, outer regional and remote schools.

Table 1 - Western Australian schools and students by remoteness^{2,3}

Remoteness	Schools		Students			Aboriginal students	
	#	%	#	%	Aust %	#	%
Metropolitan	719	63%	384,942	79%	73%	16,822	48%
Inner regional	116	10%	39,683	8%	18%	2,685	8%
Outer regional	137	12%	33,234	7%	8%	4,931	14%
Remote	83	7%	16,622	3%	1%	4,452	13%
Very Remote	89	8%	10,369	2%	1%	5,964	17%
Grand Total	1,144	100%	484,850	100%	100%	34,854	100%

Remoteness as per Australian Statistical Geography Standard. Major Cities reported here as Metropolitan. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. Western Australian figures are based on census 2023, Semester 1. Australia-wide student figures are based on the year 2022.

Western Australia has a diverse range of schools that cater for students’ and local communities’ needs – from primary schools and senior secondary schools, Kindergarten to Year 12 schools, district high schools (Kindergarten to Year 10), Agricultural colleges, senior colleges (Years 11 and 12), education support schools and centres, the School of Isolated and Distance Education, schools of the air, School of Special Educational Needs: Sensory and School of Special Educational Needs: Behaviour and Engagement.

These schools are in turn supported by a range of supplementary student-focused support services such as the School of Special Educational Needs: Medical and Mental Health, School of Special Educational Needs: Disability, School of Alternative Learning Settings and residential colleges.

Key state legislation underpinning school education in Western Australia is the *School Education Act 1999*, the *School Curriculum and Standards Authority Act 1997* and the *Teacher Registration Act 2012* and associated regulations. Schools in Western Australia deliver the Western Australian curriculum, which is adopted and adapted from the Australian Curriculum, to meet the needs and context of Western Australia’s students.

The State Government delivers public school education, and regulates and funds Catholic and Independent schools, through the Department of Education.

² Ibid.
³ Australian data: Australian Bureau of Statistics: Schools, Australia 2022, Table 46

Below are other key State Government funded entities involved in education:

- The School Curriculum and Standards Authority is an independent statutory authority responsible for
 - setting standards of student achievement and for the assessment and certification of student achievement according to those standards
 - developing an outline of curriculum and assessment in schools that sets out the knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes that students are expected to acquire and guidelines for the assessment of student achievement
 - developing and accrediting courses for schools
 - maintaining data on students' participation during their school years in education, training or employment and achievement and assessment records during those years.
- The Teacher Registration Board of Western Australia is the teacher regulatory authority in Western Australia. It is responsible for registering teachers, including renewing teacher registration, and administering the teacher disciplinary and impairment review processes. The Board is also responsible for accrediting initial teacher education programs delivered by Western Australian higher education providers.
- The Department of Training and Workforce Development manages Western Australia's investment in vocational education and training (VET), including state-funded VET delivered to school students in conjunction with the Department of Education and the Catholic and independent school sectors. It works closely with employers, business and industry and training providers to build a skilled workforce for the future.
- The Training Accreditation Council is the state's VET regulator, responsible for the quality assurance and recognition of VET services in Western Australia including training received by students while at school.

Under the *School Education Act 1999*, school-aged students in Western Australia are required to participate in full-time school, VET, an approved form of employment or a combination, until they reach 18 years of age, achieve the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) or reach the end of the year in which they would have completed Year 12.

This contributes to Western Australia's high rate of participation in education, with 95.5% of the state's 15 to 17 year old population in 2021 participating in school, VET, university or a combination.⁴

Most students finish school well prepared for further education, training or work, with a high proportion of public school Year 12 students achieving a nationally accredited VET qualification at Certificate II or higher while at school, and over 80% achieving the WACE.⁵

Most students in Western Australian public schools remain engaged in school through to the end of Year 12, achieve quality senior secondary outcomes and are satisfied with their school education. For example, results from 2021 show:

- 86% of Year 12 public school students surveyed were satisfied with the quality of teaching they received
- the apparent secondary retention rate, which indicates the extent to which students continue to participate in public school education from the start to the end of secondary schooling, was above 80%

⁴ <https://www.education.wa.edu.au/dl/1v9mqkk>

⁵ Ibid.

- 81% of full-time Year 12 public school students in Semester 2 subsequently achieved the WACE qualification, which requires students to meet stringent achievement standards including for reading, writing and numeracy
- 58% of Year 12 public school students achieved at least one VET Certificate II or higher qualification while at school, providing them with engaging, real-life, industry-recognised training and qualifications, and the skills and knowledge required by business and industry.⁶

Nonetheless, it is clear that more needs to be done to ensure every Western Australian student achieves successful outcomes at and following school, especially for priority equity groups such as Aboriginal students, students with disability and students in regional, remote or socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

Overarching comments about national collaboration opportunities

There is considerable diversity within the state's 8 education regions and between schools in the communities they serve.

For this reason, it is imperative that there is a focus on equipping, empowering and supporting schools to work with their communities to adapt and respond to the needs of their students.

Nationally prescribed strategies that do not give schools, regions and jurisdictions flexibility to choose and tailor their approaches to meet the needs and contexts of their local communities, do not work.

While each school's context is recognised, there is unequivocal evidence that quality teaching has the most direct impact on student achievement and progress, together with school leaders who create the necessary conditions for teachers to perform at their best. If we are to boost the achievement and wellbeing of our students, we need to support every teacher to use high-quality classroom practices in every classroom, in every school.

Schools and systems need to be supported to scale up quality teaching and high impact pedagogies, supported by whole-school approaches. There is also a need to build capability and the workforce to be able to intervene early and with intensity for students who require additional targeted support such as small group interventions. Such strategies need to be evidence-based, funded and sustainable.

For Western Australia, examples include the Kimberley Schools Project, a focus on early literacy, and the Quality Teaching Strategy (see page 9).⁷

Western Australia has a long history of collaborating nationally on education priorities and initiatives. Some of these have been National Policy Initiatives (NPIs) in the NSRA; others have been through mechanisms such as the Education Ministers Meeting and its subcommittees, or working in partnership with the Australian Government, other jurisdictions, or with national education Ministerial companies on specific initiatives and reforms.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ <https://www.education.wa.edu.au/kimberley-schools-project>

National collaborative reform efforts are most effective when they:

- are mutually beneficial – leveraging areas of shared responsibility, with a clear rationale for why national collaboration will lead to better efficiency or outcomes
- are evidence-informed
- focus on key drivers and enablers of improvement in educational outcomes, and are clearly within the education sector's remit and locus of control
- provide jurisdictional and sectoral flexibility
- are realistically achievable with regard to scope and stakeholder support
- are cost-efficient and cost-effective
- consider impacts on teachers' and school leaders' workloads
- leverage and articulate with existing systems, processes, 'infrastructure' and commitments.
- form a coherent reform package or strategy, rather than fragmented initiatives.

Western Australia supports these, or similar principles being used to inform national collaboration opportunities and efforts into the future.

It is also important that the ongoing implementation of yet to be completed NPIs in the current NSRA, and as expressed above, other national commitments such as in the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan are taken into account when considering future collaborative priorities and opportunities.^{8,9}

Full national implementation of the Unique Student Identifier, for example, is still some time away, with complex technical, legislative and data governance and privacy challenges to be addressed. Western Australia has also commenced work to progressively adopt and adapt the recently revised Australian Curriculum into the state's mandatory Western Australian Curriculum and Assessment Outline over coming years, and develop resources to support teachers' implementation in the classroom.¹⁰

Hereafter, this submission highlights some key initiatives and strategies in Western Australia, aligned to the focus areas in the Consultation Paper. The foundations for these strategies are already in place, and implementation is already evident in many schools across the state.

These initiatives and strategies are pivotal to driving further educational success and improvement into the future, and will require ongoing focus to further embed and ensure their sustainability in the years ahead. Successful implementation of future national collaboration efforts will ultimately hinge on how well they support, leverage and articulate with these existing state initiatives and strategies. Opportunities for national support to do so are highlighted in the sections that follow.

Improving student outcomes, including for students most at risk of falling behind

Student progress and outcomes are at the centre of the state's school education improvement efforts, which are underpinned by the following 6 improvement drivers:^{11,12}

- Providing every student with a pathway to a successful future.
- Strengthening support for teaching and learning excellence in every public school classroom.

⁸ <https://www.education.gov.au/teaching-and-school-leadership/resources/national-teacher-workforce-action-plan>

⁹ <https://www.education.gov.au/quality-initial-teacher-education-review/teacher-education-expert-panel>

¹⁰ <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/McGowan-Labor-Government/Record-investment-in-boosting-WA-education-outcomes-20230511>

¹¹ <https://www.education.wa.edu.au/dl/oelpev>

¹² <https://www.education.wa.edu.au/dl/qe03re>

- Building the capability of our principals, our teachers and our allied professionals.
- School autonomy within a connected and unified public school system.
- Partnering with families, communities and agencies.
- Using evidence to drive decision-making at all levels of the education system.

The following strategies are pivotal to Western Australia's drive to improve student outcomes in public schools, including for students most at risk of falling behind:

- Quality Teaching Strategy
- student-centred funding model
- school improvement architecture
- multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)
- support for students with disability
- literacy and numeracy system-level support for students that need it
- free universal access to preschool
- vocational education and training
- supporting Aboriginal students to succeed as Aboriginal people
- Student Wellbeing and Care Taskforce (see page 18)

The state is also investigating opportunities to expand services and programs to support students, families and the wider community to improve educational and social outcomes for students. This could include an expansion of a full service school approach.

Western Australia would welcome greater national support to:

- attract and retain teachers
- scale up our Quality Teaching Strategy
- provide more targeted assistance as part of multi-tiered systems of support for students that require it
- better support the education of students with disability, including how we can collectively ensure a sustainable workforce in schools to support teachers to teach all students
- clarify the expectations of schools and teachers and assist them to work in partnership with other agencies and the broader community to meet the needs of students with complex mental health and wellbeing needs.

Quality Teaching Strategy (QTS)

Western Australia's recently released QTS recognises that quality of teaching is the most important in-school variable for student engagement and outcomes.^{13,14}

The QTS is designed to drive improvements in student engagement and outcomes by creating school cultures that expect and support schools and teachers to improve teaching practices.

It does this by:

- providing teachers with clear guidance on the practices shown in research to have the greatest impact on student learning
- bringing together programs, services and supports for principals and teachers to build a culture of teaching excellence that develops, implements and sustains effective classroom practice.

¹³ <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/school-agreement/report>

¹⁴ <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/McGowan-Labor-Government/New-initiatives-to-support-high-quality-teaching-in-WA-schools-20221027>

The QTS has 3 components:

- Teaching for Impact, which outlines what effective teachers believe, what they know and what they do to maximise impact on student learning
- School Culture Survey, a tool for principals to assess the culture of their school to help create the conditions needed for optimal quality teaching
- Leading Cultures of Teaching Excellence professional learning program, to enhance principals' capacity to understand the critical elements of a high performance and development culture, how to measure it and how to lead improvements that maximise student achievement and progress.

Western Australia considers that scaling up the QTS, alongside small group intervention (see 'Multi-tiered systems of support' page 11) would be beneficial and highly impactful.

Student-centred funding model

The Department of Education's student-centred funding model is a needs based funding model which coupled with a one-line budget mechanism, empowers public schools to implement teaching and learning strategies, responsive staffing profiles and learning support teams that best meet the needs of their students and school context. It provides per-student base funding to public schools as well as targeted funding to help them meet the needs of:

- students with disability
- Aboriginal students
- regional and remote students
- students in socio-educationally disadvantaged areas
- students for whom English is an additional language or dialect.

The student-centred funding model also includes two school characteristic funding allocations, Enrolment Linked Base (ELB) and locality allocations, to ensure that public schools are not disadvantaged due to their size or location.

The ELB is responsive to differences in school types and in the year groups enrolled at the school and seeks to promote equity within the funding model in recognition of the different administration structures and fixed operational costs for each school type. The locality allocation is provided to public schools in outer regional, remote and very remote areas of the state to help meet the complexities unique to their location such as the higher cost of utilities.

The student-centred funding model was independently evaluated in 2018 and was recognised as a contemporary needs-based funding model. Since then, the Western Australian Department of Education has established a group to identify enhancements and refinements to the student-centred funding model as a part of its continuous improvement process. One such example has been changes to the educational adjustment allocation. From 2023, an extra \$8.5 million per annum has been provided to public schools through the targeted student with disability ('educational adjustment') funding allocation, to support more students with undiagnosed disabilities and learning difficulties.

School improvement architecture

Western Australia has strengthened its public school improvement, support and accountability processes in recent years through 6 important, complementary system-level initiatives:

- Regional Director of Education positions, with a renewed focus on student attendance, achievement and progress in the regions
- Statements of Expectations for every school, which provide clear expectations with regard to student achievement and progress, and schools' strategic planning, self-assessment and improvement strategies
- Collegiate Principals, 16 exemplary principals to support colleagues across the state to lead school improvement and enhance connectedness across the system

- Strengthened Public School Reviews by highly experienced principals, provide independent validation of each public school's improvement plan, self-assessment and student achievement and progress, and identify where additional support is required
- Principal Professional Reviews promotes principal development while assuring quality leadership in Western Australian public schools.
- Reconfiguration of the Western Australian Department of Education's Statewide Services to provide more accessible, targeted and responsive system support to schools that need it the most.

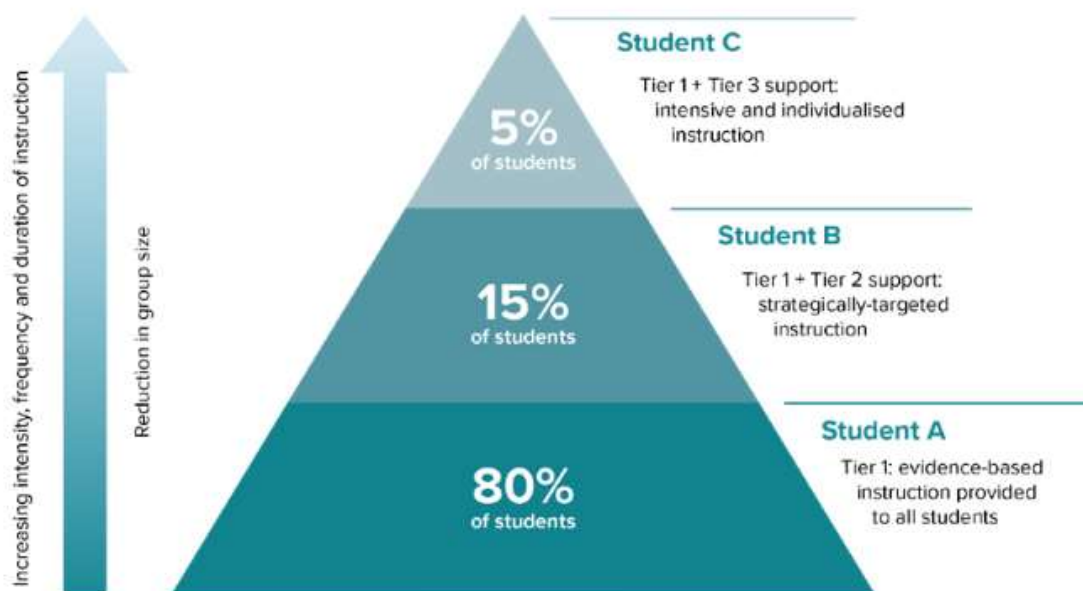
Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)

MTSS is fundamental to the state's efforts to ensure all students receive the support they require to succeed. It is a framework that encourages and supports schools to:

- consider student needs holistically
- provide high-quality instruction for all students (for example, explicit teaching)
- regularly test students to identify gaps in learning
- provide supplementary evidence-backed targeted or intensive interventions to specific students to address their learning gaps
- use data to track student progress to ensure interventions deliver real gains.^{15,16}

Schools often implement a 3-tiered (universal, targeted and intensive) MTSS approach, as illustrated below.¹⁷ They often work in partnership with specialist services and other agencies for students in any tier but especially for the provision of targeted and intensive learning support for students with disability or significant mental health needs.

MTSS underpins the state's key strategies such as the Quality Teaching Strategy, the Student Wellbeing and Care Taskforce, Public School Reviews, the student-centred funding model, and the reconfiguration of the Statewide Services to provide greater system support to schools and students that need it the most.



Source: Australian Education Research Organisation.¹⁸

¹⁵ <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/resources/intro-multi-tiered-system-supports>

¹⁶ <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/resources/supporting-secondary-students-lacking-foundational-literacy-and-numeracy-skills-research-summary>

¹⁷ <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/resources/supporting-secondary-students-lacking-foundational-literacy-and-numeracy-skills-research-summary>

¹⁸ <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/resources/intro-multi-tiered-system-supports>

Extra support for students with disability and additional needs

Western Australia's public schools have access to a range of additional support to assist them to meet the educational needs of students with disability and/or additional needs. These include:

- increased targeted funding from 2023 under the student centred funding model to support more students with undiagnosed disabilities and learning difficulties
- the Students with Disabilities and Complex Behaviour Framework, which supports schools to better support the needs of students with disability
- free access to Abilities Based Learning Education Western Australia (ABLEWA) curriculum materials and assessment tools, enhancing the resources available to teachers to support the teaching and learning of students with disability and additional learning needs¹⁹
- access to system-level support from including the 4 Schools of Special Educational Needs (Sensory, Behaviour and Engagement, Medical and Mental Health, and Disability) and the School of Alternative Learning Settings
- Specialist Learning Programs for students with autism spectrum disorder.

Additional supports and initiatives are outlined in the 'supporting student mental health and wellbeing' section.

Western Australia's Department of Education works collaboratively with external agencies, including the National Disability Insurance Agency to ensure a successful interface with schools and National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) service providers. The expansion of the NDIS has seen parents increasingly seek interconnected approaches that consider both the educational and therapeutic needs of their child. As a result, parents often request that the NDIS funded supports, such as therapy providers, be delivered to students during school hours, on school sites.

Planning for the educational needs of students is typically undertaken in partnership with parents and considers the therapeutic goals aligned with educational outcomes. Full integration of NDIS services on school sites is sometimes challenging due to: differences in intended outcomes and/or practical approaches to therapy implementation on school sites; availability of suitable accommodation; logistical management; and staff understandings.

Information is also available to principals to support informed decisions regarding the provision of therapy on school sites during school time, based on student need and the educational program. This information was developed in consultation with school leaders, parents, disability advocacy peak organisations and therapy provider peak organisations. Parent and provider information and resources are also available on the Department's website to enhance the connection between therapy approaches at home and at school.

We need to continue to strengthen the interface between the NDIS and mainstream education responsibilities. Given the comparatively recent transition to full implementation of the NDIS in Western Australia, there is a need to further explore responsibilities in relation to early childhood supports, transition to schooling, and post-school leaver supports.

The state is also considering additional core and discretionary services that can be provided by external providers and government agencies to support students with disability at targeted schools, as part of a possible full service school model delivery.

Western Australia would encourage the Expert Panel to give greater consideration to what can be done collectively with the Australian Government, beyond more data collection and reporting, to better support the education of students with disability.

¹⁹ <https://k10outline.scsa.wa.edu.au/home/resources/ablewa>

There are children with disability and/or additional needs in almost every classroom in every school. The needs of students are becoming more complex and ubiquitous, and we need to build teachers' capability to support them.

We must improve our mindset and understanding, and the specific pedagogical, curriculum and assessment needs of students with a disability. This includes building the metrics that articulate exactly how they're going and whether these students are reaching their potential.

The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) collects data from all Australian schools about students with disability who receive reasonable adjustments at school. In doing so, it represents an important shift from a deficit based medical model, to one focussed on meeting the functional needs of students with disability. Western Australia would welcome further Australian Government leadership and investment in Functional Needs Assessment approaches for disability resourcing in public schools, to assist systems to better meet the learning needs of their students.

An examination of whether current federal funding arrangements to support students with disability is sufficient to meet their needs would be welcomed by Western Australia.

Extra literacy and numeracy system-level support for students that need it

Improving the literacy and numeracy outcomes of all students continues to be a priority for Western Australia's schools.

Through ongoing concerted effort, Western Australia has achieved strong improvement in National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results. NAPLAN mean scores have increased substantially for Western Australia's public school students in Reading, Numeracy, Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation between 2022 and the baseline year of 2008. The percentages of students at or above national minimum standards have also increased substantially since 2008 in Reading in Years 3 and 5; Numeracy in Years 5 and 9; Spelling in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9; and Grammar and Punctuation in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.²⁰

Western Australia's teachers have access to a range of quality-assured resources, including evidence-based instructional practices, curriculum-aligned phonics programs, and assessment tools to monitor, assess and support early literacy intervention. System-level support includes for example:

- extension of the educational adjustment funding allocation to public schools (\$44.4 million over 5 years from 2023) to better support who need the most help to improve, particularly with their literacy and numeracy skills
- the Year 1 Phonics Initiative, whereby all Western Australian public schools from 2023 will assess Year 1 students' phonics skills and have access to evidence-based phonics programs to support those students requiring extra help learning to read²¹
- the Centre for Excellence in the Explicit Teaching of Literacy continues to strengthen and expand the use of whole-school explicit literacy practices across Western Australian public primary schools
- Brightpath for all K-10 Western Australian schools, supporting teachers to make reliable professional judgements, record assessment results, and efficient and systematically collect school-wide data to support rigorous evaluation of teaching and learning across a range of areas such as Persuasive and Narrative writing and Mathematics.

²⁰ <https://www.education.wa.edu.au/dl/1v9mqkk>

²¹ <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/McGowan-Labor-Government/Record-investment-in-boosting-WA-education-outcomes-20230511>

Free universal access to preschool and targeted early education programs

In Western Australia, preschool for children who turn 4 in the year before compulsory full-time school is normalised in the schooling sector as Kindergarten. There is almost universal participation in Kindergarten in Western Australia, even amongst children in remote and socio-economically disadvantaged communities.²² Delivery of Kindergarten by a qualified early childhood teacher is guaranteed, and children also have access to school education support services, such as school psychologists, disability support funding and services, and specialist literacy and numeracy teachers.

More children in Western Australia are developmentally 'on track' (57.5%) in their first year of full-time school across the five domains measured by the Australian Early Childhood Development Census (AEDC) than the national average (54.8%). However, the AEDC results also highlight the additional challenge experienced by some children when starting full-time school, with 31.4% of Aboriginal children in Western Australia being developmentally "on track" across the five domains for example.²³

To facilitate improved enrolment, attendance, and preparation for Kindergarten, Western Australia also provides targeted pre-Kindergarten programs for Aboriginal children, children living in remote and very remote communities, and children experiencing disadvantage:

- 59 KindiLink programs across the state provide 6 hours per week of free, high quality play-and-learn sessions for Aboriginal children not old enough to enrol in Kindergarten, who attend with their parent/carer, at no cost to families
- Child and Parent Centres operate in 22 locations on or near public school sites, offering a range of early learning, child health, parenting support, health promotion and wellbeing programs and services (from pre-birth to 8 years of age) to families in socio-economically disadvantaged communities
- The Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Early Years Link (CaLDEYLink) pilot program, based on KindiLink, operates in 2 metropolitan primary schools with a high number of culturally and linguistically diverse families.

Together, these programs and Kindergarten engage children and parents in high quality education from an early age, and support a smoother transition and better preparedness and engagement during the early years of full-time school.

Western Australia would welcome greater national support to leverage and expand the state's Quality Teaching Strategy to assist more children in the early years of school to get a better start, as well as extra, targeted assistance for students that require it as part of multi-tiered systems of support.

Pathways to post-school success

In June 2023, a review of senior secondary school pathways was launched in a bid to help all Western Australian students reach their full potential through their post-school study, training, or employment pursuits.

Pathways to Post-School Success is being led by the Western Australian Department of Education in partnership with Catholic Education Western Australia and the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia.²⁴ It will explore whether current pathway options are effectively preparing students for the full range of further study, training, and work options available to them.

²² <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2023/child-care-education-and-training/early-childhood-education-and-care>

²³ <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/socioeconomic/outcome-area4>

²⁴ <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/Cook-Labor-Government/Experts-to-review-post-school-options-for-secondary-students-20230621>

The review will also examine:

- the needs of higher education, VET, employers, and education communities
- emerging practices in Western Australia and elsewhere
- the needs of Aboriginal students, those from rural and remote areas, students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, students with a disability and other students at risk of not making a successful transition from school to further education, training and/or work
- innovative practice in other jurisdictions in Australia and beyond; and
- future proofing approaches given wider and national conversations about the future of the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).

The pathways review will run alongside refreshments to the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) being considered by the School Curriculum and Standards Authority to ensure it continues to meet the needs of senior secondary students at school and as they move into further education, training, and employment.

These initiatives are occurring within the broader context of:

- VET being central to many Western Australian students' senior secondary school programs, as well as their aspirations post-school.
- a highly skilled workforce being pivotal to the state's plans to grow and diversify the economy for the benefit of all Western Australians.^{25,26}
- strong investment by the State Government in recent years to strengthen VET and career counselling in schools^{27,28}
- the State Government's Lower Fees, Local Skills initiative, providing more targeted training opportunities by keeping TAFE fees low and annual fees capped across high priority courses.²⁹

The Consultation Paper makes limited reference to the senior secondary pathway options that are available, including with respect to assessing how well they are supporting greater student achievement, equity and effective post-school transitions and pathways.

Western Australia would welcome further national consideration on ways to improve students' secondary and post-school pathway options that build on the state's efforts to better prepare students for the full range of further study, training, and work options available to them.

Supporting Aboriginal students

In addition to the strategies outlined, the Department of Education's Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework is supporting public schools to be more culturally responsive to Aboriginal students and to build stronger partnerships between families and the school.³⁰

This includes creating culturally responsive classrooms that build on the strengths of Aboriginal students, engage them in learning and enable them to thrive academically and socially.

²⁵ https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2021-10/2108-083_Diversify_WA-Web.pdf

²⁶ <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/future-jobs-future-skills#:~:text=The%20STEM%20skills%20strategy%20aims,million%20to%20kick%2Dstart%20initiatives>

²⁷ <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/McGowan-Labor-Government/Industry-backed-career-taster-program-launched-for-schools-20211130>

²⁸ <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/McGowan-Labor-Government/Dedicated-career-specialist-teachers-to-guide-students-to-success-20210922>

²⁹ <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/McGowan-Labor-Government/Lower-Fees,-Local-Skills-delivers-TAFE-and-training-surge-20210617>

³⁰ <https://www.education.wa.edu.au/dl/jjpzned>

It is driving systemic cultural change at school, regional and system levels, as evidenced by:

- a substantial increase in the teaching and learning of Aboriginal languages in Western Australian public schools – with 24 Aboriginal languages being taught in 92 Western Australian public schools, to almost 12,800 public school students in 2022
- initiatives such as Two-way Science, which supports schools to build partnerships with Aboriginal communities to connect local Aboriginal knowledge with the science curriculum in an integrated teaching and learning program
- professional learning such as the Culturally Responsive School Leadership program for principals, co-designed in partnership with Danjoo Koorliny Elders and community leaders, and the Centre for Social Impact.

The Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework reflects the intent of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, through which the Australian and all state and territory governments are committed to working in close and genuine partnership with Aboriginal people to overcome the inequality they experience and to achieve life outcomes equal to all Australians.

It forms part of the state's Closing the Gap Implementation Plan and is closely aligned with Western Australia's Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy 2021–2029, which articulates the State Government's high level strategic approach for working with Aboriginal people towards empowerment and better outcomes.^{31, 32}

The importance of ensuring that national efforts to address issues of equity and educational achievement, particularly with respect to Aboriginal students, align with, complement and support jurisdictions' Closing the Gap commitments cannot be overstated. To this end, the Expert Panel's expressed intent to ensure alignment across the next NSRA and key national strategies and agreements, including the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, is acknowledged and welcomed.

Supporting student mental health and wellbeing

The Expert Panel's recognition that wellbeing and learning are interconnected and are essential to student achievement, is acknowledged.

Western Australia would welcome national consideration on ways that schools can be better supported to understand student wellbeing needs, and to engage with other agencies and the broader community to meet the needs of students with complex mental health and wellbeing needs.

Education is a protective factor for students' current and future mental health and wellbeing. Schools promote wellbeing by providing connected, inclusive and culturally safe school communities, teaching mental health literacy and helping to connect students who have more acute needs with specialist clinical services.

Quality teaching is also fundamental to student wellbeing, given the importance of students experiencing mastery and success as learners for their wellbeing.

Western Australia is committed to the care and wellbeing of all students in public schools, including our most vulnerable students. Promoting the social and emotional competence of children and adolescents is part of the day-to-day business of improving educational outcomes in schools and building happy, motivated, and resilient young adults.

³¹ https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2021-09/Implementation%20Plan%20-%20CtG_1.pdf

³² <https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2021-09/Aboriginal-Empowerment-Strategy-POLICY%20GUIDE.pdf>

Effective schools and teachers ensure that student learning, wellbeing and care is at the centre of everything they do.

The General Capabilities in the Western Australian Curriculum encompass the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that will assist students to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century. They support students to have a strong sense of identity and wellbeing, connect with and contribute to their world, and be confident and involved learners and effective communicators.

Schools providing learning opportunities that enable students to develop their Personal and Social Capability, thereby supporting students to learn to understand themselves and others, and manage their relationships, lives, work and learning more effectively. The capability involves students recognising and regulating emotions, developing empathy for others and understanding relationships, establishing and building positive relationships, making responsible decisions, working effectively in teams, handling challenging situations constructively and developing leadership skills. These attributes are fundamental to supporting students' mental health and wellbeing during their school years and beyond.

Student wellbeing is also best supported in schools through:

- a whole-school approach that makes student wellbeing a priority in school planning to address the needs of all students with additional support in place for vulnerable students
- positive relationships between students and their teachers, underpinned by teachers' knowledge of students' strengths and interests, and use of data to understand student needs and select evidence-based approaches
- the provision of multi-tiered systems of supports (MTSS) that are responsive to student needs, including teaching social and emotional skills, and proactive identification of students who need additional support including from specialist and/or clinical services as appropriate
- partnerships with families/carers and interagency collaborations and specialist support services (referral and liaison).

Schools are but one part of a broader system that contributes to student mental health and wellbeing. Student wellbeing is a responsibility shared by students, their families and friends, their schools, and the services that support them. These services span a vast array of systems beyond education, including child protection, disability, health and mental health, housing and justice.

Effective approaches to student wellbeing and learning also incorporate cultural perspectives and concepts of wellbeing, such as those reflected in the National Strategy Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017–2023.³³

All Western Australian public schools have access to Department of Education evidence-based programs and supports to promote positive student mental health, wellbeing and behaviour, including:

- school psychologists to provide specialist mental health support including consultation on preventative measures, risk assessment and intervention for students with identified needs, and referring students to appropriate mental health services as required
- school chaplains or student wellbeing officers to support the social and emotional wellbeing of students

³³ <https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/indigenous-affairs/national-strategic-framework-mental-health-social-emotional-wellbeing-2017-23>

- Youth Mental Health First Aid professional learning that equip school staff to help adolescents who may be developing a mental illness, or in a mental health crisis, to access appropriate support
- Teen Mental Health First Aid that teaches high school students in Years 10 to 12 how to provide mental health first aid to their friends.
- Gatekeeper Suicide Prevention training to increase staff awareness and skills in recognising and responding to suicidal behaviours in students
- social and emotional learning programs including Aussie Optimism and Friendly Schools Plus and the range of support on the *Be You* website
- a range of teaching resources on the *Bullying. No Way!* website, the Student Wellbeing Hub, and the Growing and Developing Healthy Relationships website
- the School of Special Educational Needs: Medical and Mental Health, which provides educational support for students whose medical or mental health prevents them from participating in their enrolled school programs.
- professional learning, resources and support provided by the School of Special Educational Needs: Behaviour and Engagement, to assist schools to implement the Western Australian Positive Behaviour Support program.

The State Government is investing an extra \$104 million over 4 years from 2021–22 to:

- employ an extra 100 full-time equivalent school psychologists by 2025 to provide support for students and promote positive mental health
- expand the Alternative Learning Settings program across Western Australia for students who have committed violent acts, to provide separate learning environments where students are taught self-regulation skills to cease these behaviours
- provide additional funding for public schools to purchase chaplaincy or student wellbeing officer services to support the social and emotional wellbeing of students and staff.

A Student Wellbeing and Care Taskforce was established by Western Australia’s Department of Education to ensure public schools do the best they can to support student mental health and wellbeing. The Taskforce will:

- clarify the expectations on schools in relation to the wellbeing of all students
- develop support and guidance for schools to implement effective whole-school approaches to the wellbeing of all students
- improve the support for schools to implement effective case management processes, including interagency liaison and referral for vulnerable students such as children in care, students not attending school and those identified as at risk of suicidal behaviour
- consider the role and practice of school psychologists and school staff with student service responsibilities
- identify and implement a common approach to student wellbeing measurement across the state’s public schools.

The Department also continues to work with other agencies and across education sectors to provide support to vulnerable students. For example, it is funded by the state’s Mental Health Commission to coordinate the Response to Suicide and Self-harm in Schools Program.

Western Australia’s Commissioner for Children and Young People has a statutory responsibility to monitor the wellbeing of all children and young people living in the state, and to advocate on their behalf. The Commissioner has developed a Wellbeing Monitoring Framework (WMF) to monitor and report on the wellbeing of Western Australian children and young people. Indicators of wellbeing, which are one component of the WMF, are organised into 3 domains: learning and participating, healthy and connected, and safe and supported.³⁴

³⁴ <https://www.ccyp.wa.gov.au/our-work/wellbeing-monitoring-framework/>

The Young People's Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drug Use: Priorities for Action 2020–2025 (YPPA) is an important collaboration across Western Australian government agencies, such as the Mental Health Commission and the Department of Education, and the community sector to support the needs of young people aged 12 to 24 years experiencing mental health, alcohol and drug use challenges.³⁵ The YPPA encompasses more than 140 initiatives that range from prevention to primary care to specialist treatment.

The At Risk Youth Strategy 2022–2027 is a whole-of-government approach to supporting vulnerable young people aged 10 to 24 years, led by the Department of Communities.³⁶ It articulates how agencies will work together to drive greater coordination across government and the community services sector to deliver the services and supports that vulnerable young people most need. It aligns with and supports other key initiatives occurring across government to better support and improve the lives of at-risk young people, including the YPPA, the State Disability Strategy 2020–2030, All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030 and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Western Australia's Closing the Gap Jurisdictional Implementation Plan includes a series of strategies and actions to better support social and emotional wellbeing in schools, under Priority Reform One (working in partnership) of Outcome 14: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing. Partnerships and Aboriginal community control and engagement are guiding principles in the Western Australian Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Framework 2015–2030, which sets the strategic directions and priority areas to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people in the state.³⁷

The State Government has also committed to implement the recommendations of the Ministerial Taskforce into Public Mental Health Services for Infants, Children and Adolescents aged 0–18 years in Western Australia, which will underpin system-wide reform of infant, child and adolescent (ICA) mental health services.³⁸

Notwithstanding, meeting the needs of highly vulnerable students remains a complex challenge for Western Australia's schools, interagency partners and the community.

Our current and future teachers

Attracting teachers with the right skills to the right areas at the right time continues to be one of the greatest challenges and highest priorities for education in Western Australia, particularly in secondary schools, in regional locations, and in areas of specialised skill.

The Western Australian Government continues to implement a range of strategies to address this need, including recruitment campaigns, retraining programs and providing incentives to staff choosing to work in regional and remote areas of the state.

In August 2022, the Western Australian Government delivered a newly registered bargaining agreement for teachers and principals that provides a 3% wage increase, \$3,000 cost-of-living payment, and additional measures to address wellbeing and workload matters including:

- implementation of a modern, flexible personal leave entitlement in 2023

³⁵ <https://www.mhc.wa.gov.au/about-us/major-projects/young-people-priorities-for-action/>

³⁶ <https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2022-08/At-Risk-Youth-Strategy-2022.pdf>

³⁷ <https://www.health.wa.gov.au/Improving-WA-Health/About-Aboriginal-Health/WA-Aboriginal-Health-and-Wellbeing-Framework-2015-2030>

³⁸ <https://www.mhc.wa.gov.au/about-us/major-projects/infant-child-and-adolescent-system-transformation-program/ministerial-taskforce-ica/>

- additional flexibility and consideration for the provision of time off based on additional hours worked
- one existing school development day dedicated to curriculum support
- improvements to support graduate and regional teachers, principals and deputy principals, including compensatory leave for principals
- reducing administrative red tape, including performance management and improvements to staff transfer arrangements.

In November and December 2022, the State Government announced a range of further initiatives to attract and retain teachers including:

- additional financial incentives for teachers and school administrators to work in 48 remote and regional public schools where demand for staff is the greatest
- additional Attraction and Retention payments to new and existing teachers and school leaders with a teaching load, across all 59 public education support schools and centres
- changes to Western Australia's teacher qualification requirement to allow schools to employ teachers who have a recognised 3-year teacher qualification and are registered with the Teacher Registration Board of Western Australia. Additional support is provided to schools who employ new 3-year trained teachers under this arrangement
- new or additional stipends of up to \$700 per week for final-year pre-service teachers undertaking a science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) placement in metropolitan and regional areas
- a pre-service teacher recruitment pool to fill fixed-term public school vacancies in 2023, enabling schools to have access to final-year pre-service teachers for part-time (up to 0.8 FTE) positions. Schools making appointments from this pool are provided with additional funding to support the pre-service teacher, who must finish their teaching degree.

These additional measures support those that were already in place in Western Australia to attract and retain teachers, and complement actions being taken as part of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan.³⁹

Western Australia's Department of Education develops and offers a range of high quality, evidence-based professional learning programs to ensure they facilitate real changes in teachers' and school leaders' practices and improve student outcomes.

- The Quality Teaching Strategy, for example, is the result of extensive consultation, research evidence and collaboration with the teaching profession
- Western Australia Centre for Excellence in Explicit Teaching of Literacy continues to support improved literacy teaching in Western Australia's public schools
- Classroom Management Strategies and Positive Behaviour Support professional learning, resources and support available to all public school teachers, provided by the School of Special Educational Needs: Behaviour and Engagement
- The Department of Education's Graduate Teacher Induction Program, Graduate Teacher Allowance and the In-Class Coaching Program, are available to all graduate teachers employed in public schools to support them during the important first 2 years of their teaching career.

³⁹ <https://www.education.gov.au/teaching-and-school-leadership/resources/national-teacher-workforce-action-plan#:~:text=National%20Teacher%20Workforce%20Action%20Plan%20The%20National%20Teacher,profession.%20It%20includes%20actions%20across%20five%20priority%20areas>

However, there are no quick fixes. The next NSRA must acknowledge the substantial body of work being undertaken in each jurisdiction, and nationally through the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan and more recently, the Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel, which will continue to be a priority and key focus.

The impact of teacher shortages on schools cannot be underestimated. Not having enough teachers, or teachers with the right skills, has significant flow-on workload implications and creates additional work in schools to urgently fill classroom vacancies both immediately and in the longer-term.

Collecting data to inform decision-making and boost student outcomes

Any national reforms of data collection and reporting must be done in consultation with states and territories, consider their context and work already underway, and ensure flexibility.

Western Australia's Department of Education and schools have access to a range of local data, collected internally or by other government agencies, to assist with identifying, planning for and meeting the learning, safety and wellbeing needs of their students. The sharing and use of such data is facilitated and also appropriately governed and restricted, by legislation.

Opportunities for greater national data collection or sharing, require a strong rationale for how it will improve student outcomes and not add to the administrative burden on schools or jurisdictions. It must provide useful, timely, accurate and actionable information that is not currently available to schools.

As experienced under the current NSRA, there are significant legal, privacy and technical challenges associated with sharing student-level data nationally.

Western Australia would be cautious about the next NSRA including commitments for more large scale national data sharing 'platforms' or initiatives, given the challenges associated with some similar initiatives (e.g. the Online Formative Assessment Initiative) under the current NSRA.⁴⁰

However, consideration could be given to the potential value of greater sharing with schools and/or education systems of de-identified Australian Government post-school destination (VET, higher education and social security) and outcomes data, linked to school enrolment and outcomes (e.g. NAPLAN) data, to provide valuable, timely information for schools and systems about student pathways and success.

Potential changes to data or key performance measures for the next NSRA should be considered as part of a comprehensive review of Australia's National Measurement Framework for Schooling and other national education reporting arrangements, and not done in isolation.

⁴⁰ <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/school-agreement/report>

Funding transparency and accountability

As noted in the Consultation Paper, there are already a variety of national publications that provide transparency to the public on national, state and territory and school-level outcomes across multiple performance measures. These include the:

- My School website managed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)
- annual National Report on Schooling in Australia, produced annually by ACARA to report against the National Measurement Framework for Schooling
- the Productivity Commission's online Performance Reporting Dashboard, annual Report on Government Services and annual Closing the Gap Data Compilation Report.

States and territories also have their own mechanisms for public transparency and accountability, including through school annual reports, School Board requirements and State Parliament and State Budget public accountability mechanisms. For example, the funding received by every Western Australian public school under the student-centred funding model is publicly reported via the Western Australian Department of Education's Schools Online.⁴¹

Any national efforts to increase transparency and accountability should:

- be consistent with the Principles of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations, including with regard to retention of state budget autonomy and service delivery flexibility
- be proportional, cost-effective and cost-efficient, recognising that the Australian Government is the minority funder of public school education
- not duplicate existing data collection or reporting mechanisms, nor add significant administrative burden on schools and systems.

Conclusion

Western Australia welcomes opportunities to continue contributing to national collaborative efforts that are in the best interests of the state's students, families and schools.

We look forward to further engagement with the Expert Panel and the Panel's final report. Western Australia reaffirms its commitment to work with the Australian Government and other states and territories to promote excellence and equity in our schools and support all students to unlock their potential and have successful, fulfilling lives at school and beyond.

⁴¹ <https://www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolsonline/home.do>