

7 August 2023

Dr Lisa O'Brian AM
Chair, National School Reform Review Panel

Dear Dr O'Brien,

Please find below Jabiru Community College's response to the Consultation on a Better and Fairer Education System. We have prepared this submission drawing on our shared experiences of working in Special Assistance Schools in South East Qld for over 20 years.

We have referenced some of our responses and some come from our first hand experience of working directly with highly marginalised and disadvantaged young people for whom the mainstream education system does not appropriately support. We aim to work with the 20% of young people who are not engaging in the education system.

Throughout our work in this area, we have actively engaged in research with local Universities to help ensure that our experiences and work can contribute to the research and policy development of education.

Jabiru Community College is a Special Assistance School located in Zillmere, (Meanjin) Queensland. We work with approximately 80 young people aged 15 to 20 years.

Improving Student Outcomes including for students most at risk of falling behind

Having young people attend school is an important step in our best chance of helping them to learn new skills and ensure they have foundation skills for a good and prosperous life.

Funding a range of school models could help our education system begin to see what are good practices for engaging very disengaged cohorts of young people. Special Assistance School and Special Schools are two types of funded schools that are trying to work with more disadvantaged young people.

Our Australian school system should be open to a wide range of schools with a range of curriculum frameworks that help connect young people to learning and the Australian Curriculum to improve their skills and give them a better chance in life. [The Big Picture Design Principles](#) are one model that can work with young people with a wide range of skills and abilities. This approach was noted as innovative in the Gonski Report.

A few practical ways to engage disengaged young people:

- Fund schools directly to work with non-attending young people and the local community with measures that are not connected to attendance but worker outputs like connection to local organisations, family connections, and workplace support.

- Learn from Special Assistance Schools and Inclusive Education models. Reference: **te Riele, K., McGregor, G., Mills, M., Baroutsis, A. & Hayes, D. (2020). Learning From Alternative Schools to Enhance School Completion. In Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education,. Oxford University Press.**
- Remove the pressure off young people to have to study so many different subjects at once. Let young people choose a few areas to focus on (see Big Picture Australia for an innovative way this can be done.) There will be other innovative models available that can help this such as project based learning.
- Provide learning opportunities that are skill based rather than content based. Ie. self organising/creative writing/scientific enquiry. And let schools be creative with how time is managed for learning rather than prescribing set amounts of time for different subjects.
- Reduce the frontline engagement ratio of young people to adults to 2:16. (plus administration staff). This would enable a more personalised learning experience for young people and mirror more real life situations such as work team sizes.
- Support young people to learn executive functioning, interpersonal and self care skills as part of school. These directly impact young people's day to day lives and there are less places where young people are learning these (particularly for young people coming from stressed and time poor homes). Supporting young people to master their executive functioning can support them to self-regulation and could assist school cultures to shift from power over/top down control models to more democratic/power-with learning environments. **(p.169 McGregor, G., Mills, M., te Riele, K., Baroutsis, A. & Hayes, D. (2017). Re-imagining schooling for education: Socially just alternatives (Palgrave Studies in Alternative Education). Palgrave Macmillan UK.**
- Fund more hands-on and real life based learning opportunities in schools and in workplaces.
- Pay families and young people well for attending school through our social security system. (We see young people leave school to get work so they can support their families).

Improving Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing

Evidence is showing that many young people are suffering from poor mental health and wellbeing, and that there is a lack of services for young people, particularly for those unable to pay for psychological and other supports. Given the significant role that schools play in young people's lives it is important that the schooling community considers how we impact young people's wellbeing.

We propose that the structures we have created in schools are critically examined so we can understand how they impact on young people:

- Class sizes where a range of young people with different skills and abilities and needs are all together with limited one to one support.



- As proposed above, we need to bring down the size of classes to a 2:16 ratio. Team teaching could help this and having a wider range of adults participating in school can also help.
- Competition and grades driving schools rather than learning and supporting young people to work collaboratively.
 - Investigate competency based reporting rather than 5 point scales. (How does achieving an E help a young person's wellbeing?)
- Mandatory 5 Point grading Scale.
 - Review the purpose of a 5 point scale in relation to learning.
<https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/case-grades/>
- Asking young people to learn across 5 or more subject areas at any one point. This does not necessarily help young people engage in meaningful and deep learning and has them rushing from subject to subject which creates additional stress in their lives.
 - Investigate innovative models that allow young people to focus on a few areas over a period of time, not multiple subjects at one time.
- Having a curriculum model that dictates young peoples learning progressions rather than their own learning pace and needs.
 - Look to Inclusive Education that centres the young person and what it is that they need to learn next.
- Schools being judged on student outcomes which can have them move on young people who do not 'fit' (ie in Queensland Schools are judged on the number of young people who graduate with a QCE).
- Funding more hands-on and real-world connected learning experiences so young people can learn through doing.
- Proving funding that supports schools to engage in community building and wellbeing for their young people and staff. It could also enable external agencies to liaise and work closer with schools. This needs to be in addition to classroom and administration staff.

Current and Future Teachers

Teachers are part of the network of adults who can help young people be their best selves. Teaching is an enormously rewarding role given the change and growth that a teacher can be part of. However, as people who work in a school, the workload of teaching and school staff feels unsustainable.

Some possible ways to help this:

- Lower frontline staff to young people ratios to 2:16.
- Support collaboration between teachers and schools by enabling schools to share curriculum resources and assessments (currently in Queensland each school has to create its own curriculum and assessments for QCAA).
- Support teachers' collaboration by giving them time to plan with each other.
- Make teaching a post graduate pathway and pay teachers well - in line with other professions like doctors, lawyers, and engineers.



- Have a range of school programs that can meet the diverse range of young people - such as programs that focus on wellbeing and working through trauma alongside basic skill development, and for hands-on learning experiences. Let both teachers and young people find the school type that best works for them.
- Support all schools to believe in the capacity and potential in all school members to ensure that all school types are valued and respected in the community.
- Help teachers to work with families and communities by training them in approaches like community development, group work and strengths-based ways of working.
- Move away from funding “deficits”, to funding innovation and good practice that is developed in collaboration with families and communities.
- Move away from ideas of “classroom and behaviour management” to less power over ways of working with young people. Support young people to learn the skills of executive functioning, group work and collaboration from the early years.
- Provide break out spaces and support for young people who do not want to be in a subject - let young people choose a few things to focus on rather than doing 5 or more subjects.
- Fund schools to work with a set number of young people, rather than counting heads and having specific definitions of who can and cannot be counted. The administration work for supporting a young person with limited attendance and complex needs is more than a young person who attends full time and is eager to learn.
- Look at the inconsistencies in funding and government information. For example:

(Mparntwe) Education Declaration.	2023 Student Eligibility Criteria for Commonwealth Census Funding 2023
<p>Young Australians are at the centre of the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration.</p> <p>Our vision is for a world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face.</p> <p>Goal 2: All young Australians become:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • confident and creative individuals 	<p>4. Student eligibility</p> <p>Students are eligible to be reported in the Census if they meet all the following criteria. The student:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is enrolled at the school on Census Day (4 August 2023) • is enrolled in a year level the school is approved to provide at that location • has a pattern of regular attendance at the school, or at school generally, during the year • attends the school for at least one day during the Census <p>Reference Period.</p> <p>You must only report students who attended during the Reference Period. For all schools (excluding approved distance education providers), attendance means the student must physically attend and receive education at an approved school location.</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • successful lifelong learners • active and informed members of the community. 	<p>Ineligible students</p> <p>Students are ineligible to be reported in the Census if they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • did not attend for any part of the Census Reference Period • are enrolled, but did not attend in the year leading up to and including Census Day • last attended the school location before Census Day and will not be returning until 2024 or later • unenrolled or ceased attending the school location before Census Day • are not eligible to enrol at a school location based on the relevant state and territory requirements • did not study school subjects (Foundation to Year 12) • are on a visa which prohibits them from engaging in studies as a condition of their visa • are on a visitor's visa and in Australia for less than 6 months • are on exchange and at the school location for a period shorter than 6 months • are on exchange and have completed their formal schooling in their own country • do not study any normal school subjects and only participate in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ apprenticeships ○ English as a second language courses ○ TAFE courses ○ tertiary subjects, work placements, or a combination of such activities.
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- Note that the highlighted areas are inconsistent. Creating a relevant and multi-dimensional learning plan for a young person is one way to help meet a young person where they are at and support them be the best they can be. This kind of individualised learning plan requires time and coordination. If a school cannot receive funding to create individually tailored, student centred learning approaches that connect young people to the world beyond school, it is difficult to actualize the (Mparntwe) Education Declaration.

Collecting data to inform decision-making and boost student outcomes

- Student wellbeing data is important. This could be collected by an independent body across Australia. It should include both Qualitative and Quantitative data.
- Looking at data for 20 to 25 year olds could be a more useful place to measure the impacts of the Australian Education System. Perhaps USI data can help with this. Many young people take time to find their way after school and a slightly later snapshot could give a better understanding of how the education system is performing.
- Consider the impact of the most marginalised and disadvantaged when looking at Data and how it is used. For example, it is our experience that some schools will exit year 12 students at the beginning of their final year if they will not be able to obtain a



QCE at graduation. This practice is good for the school's data but not good for the young person.

- Longitudinal data collection should be collected by an independent body so it can stay connected with the young person and their family, and not be put back onto schools to manage. Longitudinal data should also include both qualitative and quantitative information.
- Draw on different data for measuring disadvantage - not ACARA parent background data. Look at Health Care Cards and other situations of families such as poverty, domestic and family violence, contact with the child protection system and youth justice. This may help improve the baseline funding to some schools.
- Audit school facilities and resources across all school sectors and use this data to prioritise capital works. This may mean that some very well established schools will not receive Block Grant Capital until all schools have quality learning facilities.

Thank you for considering our College's submission. We would welcome further discussions if it will assist with your review.

Yours sincerely

Danny Field
Board Chair
Jabiru Community College
Community Learning Limited