



## Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Submitter: Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia  
(AHISA)

Submitting as a:

State: ACT

### Summary

Key points and recommendations are included in the summary already offered. AHISA's full submission offers arguments, evidence and references that support AHISA's positions as generally described in the summary and key points and is available at [https://www.ahisa.edu.au/AHISA/Submissions/Gonski\\_2.0\\_Review.aspx](https://www.ahisa.edu.au/AHISA/Submissions/Gonski_2.0_Review.aspx)

### Main submission

The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA) welcomes the opportunity to submit to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools (the Review).

AHISA is submitting to the Review a summary version of its full submission. The summary lists key points and main recommendations. The full submission offers arguments, evidence and references that support AHISA's positions and is available at [https://www.ahisa.edu.au/AHISA/Submissions/Gonski\\_2.0\\_Review.aspx](https://www.ahisa.edu.au/AHISA/Submissions/Gonski_2.0_Review.aspx)

AHISA frames its submission in two parts: Part A deals with concerns in relation to the Review Terms of Reference; Part B responds to questions in the Review Issues Paper. In addition to the key points and recommendations made in Parts A and B, which are set out below, AHISA makes two overarching recommendations:

1. That the Review Panel's deliberations should acknowledge four key understandings:
  1. Recognition of teachers' and school leaders' professional expertise
  2. Recognition that most schools are already operating strategically within a continuous cycle of development or improvement
  3. Recognition of the value of school leaders' autonomy in determining the best strategies at any particular point in time in a school's cycle of development

4. Recognition that NAPLAN and PISA tests are very narrow measures of the capacities of students and of what schools actually do.
2. That the Review Panel considers shaping criteria for the evaluation of any policy measures it recommends in relation to school-based practice, including:
    - If regulated, would this policy support the evolution of Australian education to meet the needs of students in a rapidly changing global environment?
    - If regulated, would this policy support schools to be 'agile' organisations with innovative and entrepreneurial capacity, able to respond effectively to rapid social and technological change?
    - If regulated, would this policy support or enhance diversity in educational options for students and their families by supporting diverse educational philosophies and diverse pathways to student 'success'?

#### PART A

For some time AHISA has been concerned by prevailing public narratives of Australian school education which reflect deficit-model thinking about schools, that is, that schools (and teachers and students) are 'failing' and are in urgent need of repair or radical reform. These narratives are largely based on Australia's rankings in international testing regimes. AHISA presents evidence that the strength of Australia's school education system cannot be measured by rankings in international tests alone.

AHISA believes a strengths-based approach to reviewing Australia's school education system will lead to the development of policies that better support the recalibration of Australia's school education system as schools continue to respond to the profound effects of globalisation and rapid social and technological change.

AHISA also argues that a goal to improve Australia's ranking in international tests is not one which will engage all stakeholders in the necessary task of recalibrating Australia's education system. AHISA therefore invites the Review Panel to consider creating a new and compelling narrative to drive the evolution of Australian schooling.

AHISA also interrogates the assumptions underlying the term 'evidence of what works' and questions whether 'effective teaching and learning strategies and initiatives' can be adequately determined in a form that supports their mandated 'deployment' via regulations and/or as conditions to federal government general recurrent grants.

AHISA notes that while research into the impact on student achievement of various pedagogies is valuable to educators, that value must be understood as contextual, not absolute. Research by its nature must engage with past or current practice, and must therefore be understood as evidence of ‘what works’ with one cohort of students at one point in time. AHISA points out that, as organisations operating within a disrupted sector and tasked with preparing students for an uncertain future, schools more than ever need freedom to be sufficiently agile to innovate and explore new – and therefore untested – pedagogies.

As stated in the OECD’s report, *Education Policy Outlook 2015: Making reforms happen*, ‘Developing innovative learning environments is necessary today, as traditional educational approaches will not be able to deliver 21st century competencies for learners’.

#### Section A key points

1. To support the recalibration of Australia’s school education system as it responds to rapid social and technological change, national education policy making must be driven by a new and compelling narrative that engages a broad range of stakeholders. This narrative must:
  - Be strengths-based not deficit-based
  - Recognise teachers’ and school leaders’ professional expertise
  - Use terms and concepts that are well-defined
  - Express policy goals that engage stakeholders.
2. National policy making in education must be informed by a comprehensive investigation of available data – including data of senior secondary and post-school outcomes – to form a more accurate understanding of the strength of Australian education than is currently promoted from the results of narrow national and international testing regimes that do not measure student achievement beyond Year 9.
3. Evidence of ‘what works’ in terms of classroom practice is contextual not absolute. If schools are regulated to adopt practices that may have a short shelf life or which are less effective for some students, ‘evidence of what works’ – no matter how well researched – is unlikely to achieve the student gains assumed.
4. While there is great value in disseminating evidence of ‘what works’, this value can only be fully leveraged if schools have autonomy over the practices they choose to adopt or adapt.
5. Schools must have the freedom to be sufficiently agile to innovate and explore new – and therefore untested – pedagogies.

Recommendation 1: A new narrative for national education policy making

AHISA offers the following as an example of a new narrative to inform national education policy that engages a broad range of stakeholders:

A new strategic policy plan for Australian school education would be based on an overarching narrative that reflects the National Goals for Schooling, to be actioned through three key focus areas. Just as transformation within organisations is best executed through concentrated effort on just a small number of strategic goals at any one time, policy making aimed at transforming Australian school education should be focused on between three and five key areas to be delivered over a period matching the recurrent funding cycle, that is, 2018-2027.

Sample overarching narrative:

“Support for the recalibration of Australia’s school education system as it responds to the profound effects of globalisation and rapid social and technological change”

Sample strategic focus 1: Reducing Australia’s long tail of academic underachievement

Sample strategic focus 2: Encouraging and supporting all Australian schools to engage in a self-improving schools program

Sample strategic focus 3: Acceleration of the sharing and adoption of best practice in schools

## PART B

AHISA identifies an underlying key issue for the Review Panel in forming its recommendations to the Australian Government as:

- Identification of good practice (that is, pedagogical approaches that work in specific circumstances with particular groups of students)
- Promotion of good practice (that is, informing the wider education community and/or providing resources to demonstrate good practice) and continuous school improvement
- Amplification of good practice (that is, increasing the number of schools/teachers adopting good practice) and continuous school improvement
- Acceleration of good practice (that is, increasing the rate of adoption of best practice for faster impact on student learning) and acceleration of improvement within schools.

AHISA attempts to address this issue in framing its recommendations and responses to the Issues Paper questions.

AHISA invites the Review Panel to recognise that, as one would expect within a profession, teachers and schools are already actively engaged in identifying, sharing

and implementing good practice. Similarly, schools typically will be engaging in some form of improvement or development at any given point in time. A recurring theme in AHISA's responses is therefore that the Australian Government should seek to find ways to support professional endeavour and development rather than mandate specific practices.

AHISA offers specific examples of strategies schools are adopting to transform practice and improve student learning outcomes, including:

- Training and deployment of literacy coaches to ensure literacy practice is embedded across all subject offerings
- Whole of staff definition of skills acquisition goals in subject areas as a platform for ongoing formative assessment and academic achievement of students
- Appointment of dedicated staff for data analytics to track individual student progress
- Restructuring of discipline areas at the senior secondary level to create greater collaboration among teachers and opportunities for project-based or personalised learning for students.

AHISA argues that not only must schools have the freedom to continue to innovate they must also have the autonomy to determine the focus of improvement initiatives. AHISA suggests school effectiveness and school improvement research offers ready evidence to support the development of national tools for school self-evaluation and self-improvement in addition to the National School Improvement Tool already funded by the Australian Government.

AHISA also suggests that in taking a strength-based approach to policy development, the Review Panel should consider how the Australian Government can best support two key assets in transforming Australia's school education system: teachers and school leaders. AHISA recommends the introduction of a national program for training of teacher-mentors, and a national program for the mentoring of early career principals to amplify and accelerate teachers' and leaders' efficacy.

#### Section B key points

1. The Review Panel should seek to support, amplify and accelerate professional exchange and development already occurring within the teaching profession.
2. It is vital for the evolution of Australian education that schools have the autonomy to experiment, research and trial or adapt ideas and practice. The Australian Government could play a more active role in such experimentation by supporting the participation of schools in government-funded trial

projects auspiced by ACARA, AITSL or other government agencies or universities.

3. Principals must have the autonomy to make decisions on curriculum provisioning and pedagogical practice that are most appropriate for their school community.
4. The fluidity of education provision in a time of rapid social and technological change and the consequent demand for schools to be innovative and entrepreneurial should be reflected in the National Goals for Schooling.
5. Innovation in schools could be supported through the establishment of a National Schools Innovation Fund.
6. Most schools are already operating strategically within a continuous cycle of development or improvement. To accelerate this process the Australian Government could consider the development of school self-evaluation and self-improvement tools.
7. Support for schools in the collection and analysis of student data to inform individual differentiated learning is a means to accelerate improvement of student academic outcomes.
8. Teachers and school leaders are already actively engaged in the identification, sharing and implementation of good practice.
9. The Australian Government has invested in teacher and school leader professional development resources produced by AITSL. One way to amplify and accelerate use of these resources is to develop an associated system of micro-credentialing to align with teachers' professional development requirements.
10. As school education is rapidly evolving to keep pace with social and technological change, there are several areas in addition to data analytics that would benefit from further investigation and research, either for exploratory purposes or to discover means of amplifying or accelerating practice:
  - E-learning practices
  - The use of artificial intelligence in teaching, learning and assessment resources
  - Student engagement
  - Student wellbeing
  - Alternative credentialing for Year 12 students.

11. The primary focus of government action in school education must be to address Australia's 'long tail of underachievement'. Two key areas where gains must be made are in early childhood education and provision for students in rural and remote regions, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
12. Teachers and school leaders are key assets that the Australian Government must invest in to recalibrate Australia's school education system. Positive steps would be:
  - The introduction of a mentoring program for early career principals to accelerate the skilling of new school leaders
  - Establishment of a national scheme to train teacher-mentors to accelerate the acquisition of pedagogical and behaviour management expertise by newly graduated teachers as well as support skills acquisition by pre-service teachers on practicum placements and the ongoing development of experienced teachers.

#### Recommendation 2: Recalibrating the National Goals of Schooling

The National Goals of Schooling stipulate that Australian schools should deliver a 'world class curriculum'. In a period of rapid social and technological change, a more appropriate goal to recognise and support the need for schools to be agile and innovative organisations could be that 'teachers and school leaders exercise their professional capacity to ensure curriculum evolves at a pace to provide the best possible education for young Australians in a global context'.

#### Recommendation 3: Support for school self-evaluation and self-improvement

AHISA recommends that the Australian Government initiates a review of the application of the National School Improvement Tool and other improvement tools and programs in use in Australia and overseas to determine if further resources to support school self-evaluation and self-improvement can be developed.

#### Recommendation 4: Support schools in the use of student data to inform personalised learning

To support schools in the collection and analysis of student data to inform individual differentiated learning and accelerate improvement of academic outcomes for all students, the Australian Government could consider the following options:

- Tasking AITSL with producing 'illustrations of practice' in data collection and analysis. AITSL's video illustrations of practice of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers are an excellent example of national online resources easily accessed by schools and teachers for professional

development and are especially valued by schools in regional and remote areas.

- Tasking ACARA with production of an online or downloadable software tool for the interrogation of online NAPLAN data. While state and territory governments and non-government schools have already invested in data analysis software for NAPLAN (such as NSW's SMART system, Queensland's SunLANDA software application, Victoria's NAPLAN Data Service and WA's Student Achievement Information System), the shift to online NAPLAN testing is an opportunity for all schools to access a tailor-made analytical tool to interrogate the data. At the same time, the rapidly developing sophistication of student data analytics makes it increasingly important for schools to also have the option of downloading their students' data in a format much that they can apply commercially available or custom-developed tools to the data.
- Tasking ACARA with investigation of the feasibility of producing detailed learning frameworks for the Australian Curriculum, allied to assessment and data analysis software. Schools are already producing detailed learning frameworks either for cross-discipline literacy teaching and learning or for key subject areas allied to data analytics programs to track individual student progress and guide teacher interventions. To promote, amplify and accelerate this approach to personalised learning, template frameworks extrapolated from the Australian Curriculum and standards could be produced and made available online for all schools, together with data analytic tools and illustrations of practice to guide teachers and schools in their use.

**Recommendation 5: Support innovation in schools to help sustain cycles of continual school improvement**

In a period of rapid social and technological change, schools must be encouraged to exercise the same innovative and entrepreneurial capacities they seek to teach their students. To this end the Australian Government could establish a National Schools Innovation Fund. Grants under the Fund could be competitive and open to schools, clusters of schools and/or school systems or to schools partnering with other institutions.

**Recommendation 6: Consider ways to amplify and accelerate use of professional development resources already produced by AITSL**

AITSL's professional development resources for teachers are highly regarded. The Australian Government could consider application of a micro-credentialing system to these resources so that their use could count towards teachers' professional development requirements.



#### Recommendation 7: Training of teacher-mentors to support teacher professional development

To accelerate the acquisition of pedagogical and behaviour management expertise by newly graduated teachers and to support skills acquisition by pre-service teachers on practicum placements and the ongoing development of experienced teachers, AHISA recommends that the Australian Government task AISTL with developing a course for the training of teacher-mentors involving online components as well as some face-to-face instruction.

#### Recommendation 8: Mentoring of early career principals

To provide support for early career principals, AHISA recommends that the Australian Government task AISTL with developing a program to train mentors for early career principals and initiate a trial of a national principal mentoring program through principals' associations.