



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

Submitter: Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE)  
Submitting as a: Peak body  
State: SA

### Summary

AATE believes that the critical factor in improving student learning in Australian schools is providing teachers with access to a range of quality professional learning opportunities and resources. High quality English teaching requires the provision of continuing opportunities for professional development in the subject discipline of English, together with best practice in English instruction and pedagogies. Teachers need:

- access to new research and knowledge in the teaching of literacy, language development and an integrated curriculum;
- appropriate, up to date qualifications in both the subject content and teaching methodologies;
- access to high quality professional publications and resources;
- opportunities to share expertise and collaborate with other teachers leading to reflective practice;
- opportunities for professional renewal in the subject discipline of English for practising teachers whose teacher education took place some years ago;
- a commitment to provide time release to attend professional development and to collaborate in putting learning into practice.

There is a need for investment in leadership within schools, particularly for those in middle leadership positions. Funding needs to be directed towards the development of subject leaders such as English Coordinators who can lead teams of English teachers from those who are early career teachers, through to more experienced teachers. High quality leaders who are teachers of English need to lead English faculties ensuring that teachers continue to develop their knowledge and skills in the subject discipline of English, together with best practice in English instruction and pedagogies.

## Main submission

With a membership representing over 10,000 teachers of English, AATE (together with its state and territory member associations) has a commitment to English teaching. AATE has history of cooperation with curriculum and resource developers, teacher registration bodies, government agencies, teachers, statutory authorities and employing bodies.

AATE considers that teachers and students are entitled to access relevant and appropriate curriculum, resources regardless of experience, location and jurisdiction.

In order to ensure quality support for teachers, AATE makes the following commitments to:

- promote exemplary practice in the teaching of literature, language and literacy;
- ensure that there is equity and access in all matters relating to teaching and learning;
- lobby employing authorities, curriculum bodies and accreditation agencies to take an appropriate role in the development of curriculum, policies, resources and in-service professional learning required for the introduction of new curriculum and policies;
- seek increased financial support and recognition for relevant courses undertaken by teachers.

AATE believes that the critical factor in improving student learning in Australian schools is providing teachers with access to a range of quality professional learning opportunities and resources. High quality English teaching requires the provision of continuing opportunities for professional development in the subject discipline of English, together with best practice in English instruction and pedagogies. Teachers need:

- access to new research and knowledge in the teaching of literacy, language development and an integrated curriculum;
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What should educational success for Australian students and schools look like?

What capabilities, skills and knowledge should students learn at school to prepare them for the future?

How should school quality and educational success be measured?

To prepare students for the future, schools need to provide opportunities to develop the following capabilities, skills and knowledge:

- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Creativity, curiosity and divergent thinking
- Having a growth mindset
- Global understandings
- Understanding cultural sensitivities and cultural awareness
- Information literacy, research and selecting information
- Capacity to deal with ambiguity and contradictions and to be flexible (being responsive and resilient)
- Understanding what it means to be a life-long learner
- Capabilities to be proactive and engaged in work and community.

The more English specific capabilities, skills and knowledge that need to be developed:

- Conceptual knowledge for English
- Read, understand, respond and create a wide range of texts for multiple purposes
- Reading inference and nuance
- Writing shaped by purpose and audience.

Measuring of school quality and educational success

School quality and educational success should be measured on the basis of priorities set within the context of an individual school.

A range of measures should be used to assess school quality and educational success. The measures should be contextually relevant. There is a need to focus on learning growth for both students and teachers.

The measurement of student learning against their individual and personal goals would provide students, teachers and parents more meaningful feedback that can

direct future learning. Success to each student can be different and such an approach provides students with the opportunity to be active in the direction of their learning. The different starting points allow students to stretch themselves against meaningful goals.

Success needs to be measured in a much broader manner to take in student and teacher well-being, social education, problem solving, global and cultural understanding and engagement with parents and caregivers.

Measures assessing students need to be more relevant to them, for instance the ability to solve real world problems can measure social skills, ethical skills, agency, social responsibility, literacy, numeracy, citizenship and intercultural understanding. A variety of relevant assessments can provide more useful measures e.g. projects, problem solving, volunteering.

School quality should not be a comparative measure between schools. Schools should be encouraged to collaborate with each other and to continuously grow by learning from each other.

What can we do to improve and how can we support ongoing improvement over time?

How could schools funding be used more effectively and efficiently (at the classroom, school or system level) to have a significant impact on learning outcomes for all students including disadvantaged and vulnerable students and academically advanced students?

- What actions can be taken to improve practice and outcomes? What evidence is there to support taking these actions?
- What works best for whom and in what circumstances?

School funding could be more effectively and efficiently used by providing evidence and research for effective practices for student and teacher learning. This evidence needs to be evaluated by an independent group and teaching associations should be involved in the steering/governing body of such a group.

Funding for students, schools and teachers should be determined on a needs basis. There is a need to work the extra cost required to educate students with specific needs.

There is a need for funding to support teacher professional learning. Schools need to encourage active connection and collaboration of teachers with their professional associations. These connections provide teachers with the opportunity to collaborate, provide advice and learn from each other.

Inquiry based approaches for individual teachers and groups of teachers are particularly useful when focused on a challenge. Action research is critical for the

development of individual teachers and teams of teachers. Personal and professional goals of teachers need to be taken into account for real growth.

Team-teaching approaches allow a various specialists and support strategies to be applied. This allows for teachers to learn from one another applying new approaches, experimenting with new ideas to assist their students to learn. In these instances, the conditions for such learning approaches require schools to flexibly work with staffing allocations and school structures.

There is a need for investment in leadership within schools, particularly for those in middle leadership positions. Funding needs to be directed towards the development of subject leaders such as English Coordinators who can lead teams of English teachers from those who are early career teachers, through to more experienced teachers. High quality leaders who are teachers of English need to lead English faculties ensuring that teachers continue to develop their knowledge and skills in the subject discipline of English, together with best practice in English instruction and pedagogies.

Quality teaching is directly related to the development of a strong, well-informed and well-supported professional body to respond to community and educational concerns and to influence opinion. Access to professional development is crucial in enabling teachers to:

- improve learning outcomes for students;
- take a more active role in curriculum planning, including building on and refining existing practices;
- constantly develop excellent teaching practices;
- actively participate in the evaluation of teaching practices and programs; and,
- actively participate in the implementation of local, state and national curriculum initiatives.

The development of this approach requires formal co-operation between jurisdictions and professional teaching associations at the national and state level.

What institutional or governance arrangements could be put in place to ensure ongoing identification, sharing and implementation of evidence-based good practice to grow and sustain improved student outcomes over time?

Every teacher and school should value professional development with an emphasis on good practice. To ensure that every teacher is able to access and consider evidence-based studies, or create and implement such projects in their own context, there must be a time investment for this within institutions across the nation. While professional development is often allocated time, projects based on evidence-based

research is often dismissed or not allowed to be developed for more “top-down” instruction about practice.

The current national educational divisions (state and sector differences) produce a particular environment of separation in educational decision making and communication processes. Within each of these jurisdictions different institutional factors influence the governance of ‘good practice’, and restrict the communication of developing models in other states or jurisdictions. External communication platform, and a repository for research publications and resources, would be extremely beneficial to educators around the nation. A network, potentially an online platform, that could provide a searchable collection of professional development resources, research projects and findings, as well as communication channels, that could connect teachers and institutions for various jurisdictions.

Many educational jurisdictions are influenced by external timeframes on measurement, such as election cycles and short contract time frames. Research projects and measurement process are often long term considerations and the effectiveness of programs, education approaches and changed theoretical perspectives, often require a longer timeframe than government terms or management contracts. It is imperative that long range measurement models be allowed to develop, rather than short and often unhelpful measurement models.

It is critical to highlight external bodies that are in the position to oversee measurement and maintain communication methods that are less susceptible to divisible politics and shortened timeframes. AATE is one such body, and along with other professional associations, this national organisation has the ability to oversee long term research questions and measurement methods. Such bodies also have the potential to communicate directly to teachers about their specific teaching context, and are experienced at establishing and providing professional development directions. Consulting with such groups, through reference groups or as partnerships, would ensure ongoing identification, sharing and implementation of evidence-based good practice.

How can system enablers such as targets and standards, qualifications and accreditation, regulation and registration, quality assurance measures and transparency and accountability provisions be improved to help drive educational achievement and success and support effective monitoring, reporting and application of investment?

This question repeats the conjunction “and” eight times. The listing of these regulatory frameworks and their being linked in a chain, points to the fact that there is an over-regulation of teachers and schools in Australia. The level of regulation needs to be streamlined and cut back so that they are more reasonable and do not create a burden on teachers. Most time is spent on measuring rather than focusing

on learning. Teachers need more autonomy in the workplace to make the best decisions in the interest of their students' learning. A focus on the needs of students and teachers will better align strategy.

While the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers provide a guide for initial teacher education courses and the development of teachers from across career stages, they do not include the full set of capabilities that make a successful teacher such as strong interpersonal skills, teacher wellbeing and resilience.

An investment in research is needed. There needs to be an independent group that monitors the impact of educational investment across states and territories.

Are there any new or emerging areas for action which could lead to large gains in student improvement that need further development or testing?

- What are they and how could they be further developed?

There is a need to increase the value placed within the Australian community of the important role of teachers. How to increase the respect for the profession within the community and for the role of the teaching profession within Australia requires focus.

It is imperative to address the conditions necessary to effectively support student and staff wellbeing. There are a growing number of pressures on young people experiencing trauma, anxiety and depression. Educators are requesting greater understanding of dealing with student trauma and a growing number of resources are being placed into this area. Are these pressures effectively being addressed? Are we preparing our new graduates for these challenges? Is the support and wellbeing of educators being measured and the increased number of stresses being acknowledged? Is there enough flexibility within and between schools for alternative learning opportunities and programs, particularly when addressing mental health issues and the impact on student behaviour and learning?

The amount of 'administrivia' placed on educators is ever growing with written accountability and acquittal processes, particularly when measures of improvement are not targeted, manageable and prioritised but too often general and centralised with limited time frames.

How we use and monitor the impact on student learning of new and emerging technologies is an area also in need of more focus. How do we effectively equip young people for an ever changing and highly networked society? In doing so how do we ensure the equity of access?

Are there barriers to implementing these improvements?

If yes, what are they and how could these be overcome?

The barriers to implementing improvements are:

The sense of teachers chasing the policy tail and not having the chance for full implementation. Negative messages from conflicting, inconsistent and ever-changing sets of priorities. The recycling of “new” initiatives also creates a barrier and resistance from teachers and the community.

There is currently no consistent method of communicating within the teaching professional beyond sectors or between states. With a national population, and workforce, with such diversity and distance, an accessible and reliable online platform for communication, to act as a resource repository and to deliver online instruction, would be invaluable.