



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

Submitter: Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA)  
Submitting as a: Peak body  
State: NSW

### Summary

ACTA's submission focuses on the role of language in educational achievement; evidence on the difference that EAL/D pedagogy makes in classrooms when supported by schools and systems; the importance of a systemic approach including leadership development, specialist teacher standards, teacher education and professional learning; the unfinished business of defining and measuring EAL/D students' educational success; the deterioration of EAL/D programs in schools under state and territory school autonomy and flexible resource management policies and restructures; and promising projects and tools of national significance that drive good EAL/D practice and continuous improvement. Each issue is addressed by specific recommendations.

### Main submission

As the peak professional body for TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) educators in school and adult settings, the Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) welcomes the opportunity to provide advice to the Review on ways in which English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) learners can be supported to achieve their educational potential in Australian schools.

There are currently over an estimated 300,000 EAL/D learners in schools throughout Australia. These students include newly arrived students entering Australian schooling at any year from Kindergarten to Year 12 and Australian born students in all years of schooling functioning at varying levels of English language proficiency. They include humanitarian entrants and asylum seekers with little or no previous formal schooling and migrant and international students, as well as Indigenous students who have little or no exposure to Standard Australian English.

High order literacy and learning in schools requires all students to master the specialised academic language and disciplinary registers of the curriculum. For students learning English as their second or other language, specific risk of

educational disadvantage arises from insufficient levels of English needed to access, participate and succeed in the English-medium school curriculum.

Successive large scale international studies have highlighted the pervasive academic underachievement experienced by many English language learners in the course of their schooling. A common trajectory is that, after acquiring a basic conversational proficiency, these students reach a language plateau or literacy ceiling and fail to master the academic literacy necessary for school success. Students with disrupted education and little or no literacy in their first language are particularly at risk.

In the coming decade, immigration will constitute a major proportion of Australia's population growth, while international humanitarian crises will continue to put pressure on Australia's refugee intakes. To meet this challenge, building national capacity and responsiveness through a strong national system of EAL/D provision is an essential government investment in high quality schooling in a multilingual society.

Australia's ongoing immigration program and its growing linguistically diverse and Indigenous population means that EAL/D learners will continue to make up a significant proportion of the school student population. Effective English language provision in schools will remain a vital educational access and equity strategy giving these learners opportunities to achieve their educational potential.

The difference EAL/D Pedagogy makes

EAL/D teaching and learning is more than 'just good teaching'. It is a specialist teaching practice that makes a difference for students' learning through language-based instruction, assessment and curriculum, resource development, program and task design and evaluation, and professional development support and advocacy.

EAL/D teaching and learning is informed by a growing evidence base of generalisable good practice models of 'what works' in achieving educational excellence for English language learners at classroom, school and system levels. Details of Australian and international research on the nature and impact of EAL/D-focused pedagogy, school programs and system support on English language learner outcomes can be found on pages 3-6 in the full submission at: <http://www.tesol.org.au/Advocacy/Media-Room>

Despite its evident value for the development of high impact EAL/D programs in Australian schools, there has been little or no real take up of such research in mainstream system policy and planning. A key reason for this is that Australia has no national research agenda or coordinating mechanism dedicated to investigating and disseminating best models of EAL/D practice in classrooms, schools and systems.

Recommendation 1

That a nationally funded research strategy be established to plan, co-ordinate and contract EAL/D research by university and other research agencies with a particular focus on investigating and promoting best models of EAL/D practice in classrooms, schools and systems.

The importance of a systemic approach

A national targeted program policy framework is vital for direction and coordination of effort in EAL/D education. It provides an essential cohering focus for the development of specialised pedagogical practice, expertise, curriculum, research and leadership and the basis for supply of qualified teachers, professional development and the creation of an appropriate evidence base.

Research has highlighted the key role played by school leadership in building inclusive whole school systems of support that meet the language learning needs of EAL/D students. Echoing findings of research on whole school approaches to EAL/D provision, such leadership is typically distributed across the school with an instructional focus that involves:

- promoting effective, differentiated pedagogy and collective staff responsibility for progress towards shared goals
- ongoing collection and formative use of data to monitor student engagement and achievement for instructional improvement and whole school planning
- developing strong professional development support programs for all staff, including administrators, with opportunities for peer and expert coaching, and collegial sharing
- assisting parent and family participation, building school-community relationships.

As outlined in the next two sections, such best practices are not being realised under school autonomy and flexible resource management policies promoted by state and territory education systems.

The quality of EAL/D teaching crucially depends on an interrelated system of EAL/D teaching standards, accreditation, initial teacher education and ongoing professional learning operating in each state or territory. These in turn are entirely dependent on the values, priorities and directions established by an overarching EAL/D policy framework. With the disappearance of this policy framework at the national level, these vital professional supports are largely stagnating or unravelling in state and territory jurisdictions. A coherent, national EAL/D professional development strategy that supports state and territory actions to address these issues is urgently required. Details are on pages 7-9 in the full submission

at: <http://www.tesol.org.au/Advocacy/Media-Room>

## Recommendation 2

That a national EAL/D professional development strategy be developed in partnership with States and Territories that supports:

- i. development by AITSL of Australian professional standards for specialist EAL/D teaching at different career stages, drawing on ACTA's *EAL/D Standards Elaborations*
- ii. strengthening of State and Territory standards, qualifications and accreditation requirements for EAL/D as a teaching specialisation
- iii. requirements for pre-service teachers to undertake mandatory units which specifically address the language learning needs of EAL/D students and for universities to include these in their pre-service teacher education courses.
- iv. recognition in all State and Territories of school-based EAL/D professional learning programs as pathways to full specialist EAL/D accreditation
- v. development and provision of a program of specialised EAL/D professional development for school principals and leaders.

Unfinished business: Defining and measuring EAL/D students' educational success

Currently there is no nationally agreed mechanism for identifying the EAL/D learner target group or for national reporting on their English learning needs or outcomes. This affects NAPLAN and other national reporting as well as Commonwealth schools funding allocations. As a result, we really do not know anything about the literacy performance of the EAL/D student cohort nationally, while the target group itself has disappeared from national policy discourse, planning and provision. The inability to identify the EAL/D student target group in terms of their English language proficiency constitutes a major, systemic gap in the nation's education evidence base.

Use of appropriate assessment tools is essential to accurate monitoring of EAL/D learners' English language development and to effective instructional support. Assessment tools such as early learning screening instruments, literacy continua and progressions used to identify student achievement and progress reflect monolingual native speaker norms of development and have the potential to create new forms of educational disadvantage for EAL/D students through misdiagnosis of their language learning need and inappropriate or ineffective 'remedial' interventions.

The ACARA EAL/D Learning Progression, developed in 2011 as part of the Australian Curriculum to support non-specialist teachers to understand the broad phases of English language learning, monitor EAL/D students' English development, and inform teaching and learning, provides a sound basis for national identification of the EAL/D learner target group and measurement of their English learning progress. Its application would enable meaningful analysis and reporting

of EAL/D learners' performance in NAPLAN and other data collections and support effective planning and intervention at school, system and jurisdiction levels.

National collaborative work around mapping the instrument throughout 2014 and 2015 resulted in a National Framework for Assessing English Language Proficiency endorsed by the Education Council in 2016. However, further progress appears to have stalled. A nationally consistent approach to identifying and assessing EAL/D students' English language proficiency in Australia's multilingual schools is long overdue. It represents the last, unfinished business in the nation's education reform agenda towards student outcomes.

Further information and evidence on this issue is detailed in ACTA's submission to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry on the National Education Evidence Base at: [http://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/208903/subdr120-education-evidence.pdf](http://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/208903/subdr120-education-evidence.pdf)

### Recommendation 3

That a nationally consistent approach to identifying, assessing, resourcing and reporting on EAL/D students in the school sector be endorsed through the following actions:

- i. completing work undertaken under the auspices of the Education Council on the National Framework for Assessing English Language Proficiency, including its validation and trialling
- ii. gaining COAG agreement that the framework is the nationally accepted means of identifying English language proficiency in the school sector.
- iii. using this agreed measure for national collection and reporting of data on English language needs and outcomes.
- iv. discontinuing other inaccurate identifiers used for these purposes, notably Language Background Other Than English, LBOTE, and Disadvantaged LBOTE
- v. using the National Framework for Assessing English Language Proficiency to inform the allocation of Commonwealth targeted funding for students with English language learning needs to State and Territory education systems during the 2018-2021 schools funding quadrennium.

### Going Backwards: targeted provision for EAL/D students

Over the last few years, major organisational restructures in State/Territory education systems have had direct, adverse impacts on EAL/D programs and provision in schools. Inspired by school-based management and school autonomy policies, these restructures have resulted in:

- devolution of responsibility for EAL/D provision away from central offices to schools
- weakened system level EAL/D program policy, planning and oversight
- cuts in/disbanding of State/Territory and regional office EAL/D consultancy teams and their functions
- dismantling of specific-purpose EAL/D resource allocation mechanisms
- effective untying of EAL/D funding through 'one line' budget allocations to schools and school based flexible resource management
- reduced EAL/D professional development support for teachers.

These impacts have been accompanied by a loss of transparency in system-to-school allocative funding mechanisms for EAL/D learners and a commensurate lack of public accountability reporting for how these funds are used. The impacts have been reported occurring in nearly all state and territory jurisdiction, including those that signed up to the 'Gonski' funding process. Further information on these impacts in individual state and territory systems is detailed in Table 5 (p.58-60) of ACTA's submission to Inquiry on Migration Settlement Outcomes at:

[file:///C:/Users/TOSHIBA/Downloads/Sub108%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/TOSHIBA/Downloads/Sub108%20(1).pdf).

At the school level, school autonomy and flexible resource management policies have resulted in widespread deterioration of EAL/D programs and redirection of available Commonwealth needs-based funding away from those students it is intended to assist. EAL/D programs are increasingly subject to the variable knowledge and commitment of principals, the dilemmas of conflicting school funding priorities and the vicissitudes of staff micro-politics. All areas underpinning effective EAL/D program delivery are being eroded including: EAL/D management and leadership, specialist funding and staffing, within-school resource allocation and accountability, recognition of specialist expertise and professional development support. Principals' in-school staffing decisions are leading to diversion of EAL/D funding, fractionalisation and casualisation of EAL/D teaching positions and the employment of teachers without EAL/D qualifications. Detailed evidence of teacher comments about these impacts collected from ACTA's State of EAL/D in Australia Survey can be found on page 60-71 of ACTA's submission to Inquiry on Migration Settlement Outcomes.

The national policy framework that supported national effort in maintaining and improving English language provision for EAL/D learners has long since broken down. In its absence, EAL/D provision can only continue to be localised, residualised, fragmented and eroded. A commitment to protect, maintain and continuously improve the EAL/D program as a systemic provision needs to be reaffirmed as a

national priority by Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments through accountability requirements in Commonwealth school funding agreements.

#### Recommendation 4

That a national policy framework for EAL/D in the school sector be established through:

- i. A national review of EAL/D provision in the school sector be conducted with reference the impact of devolution policies, effective system planning, and employment of qualified teachers with a view to setting policy directions for the program
- ii. Specific EAL/D accountability requirements that ensure targeted funding and quality provision and outcomes, and annual public reporting be included in Commonwealth school funding agreements with State and Territory Governments.

Moving forwards: Identifying, sharing and driving good EAL/D practice and continuous improvement

A number of EAL/D projects targeting key practice areas of EAL/D pedagogy, assessment and whole school improvement show promise as research-informed, innovative, best practice models of national significance promoting higher educational outcomes for EAL/D students. Details of some of these projects can be found on pages 15-16 in the full submission

at: <http://www.tesol.org.au/Advocacy/Media-Room>

To ensure productivity benefits for education systems, such projects require sustained system support, leveraging and investment in project up-scaling, new practice dissemination, and knowledge utilisation and embedding in teacher training and professional learning programs. For this, Australia requires an appropriate national structure for research collaboration, planning, coordination, sharing and utilisation across state boundaries.

#### Recommendation 5

That a national system for identifying, sharing and driving good EAL/D practice and continuous improvement be created through:

- i. establishing a nationally funded EAL/D research network tasked with investigating and identifying best practice, high performance models of whole school and classroom EAL/D program delivery
- ii. endorsing the standards described in 4.2.1 of ACTA's submission as national best practice EAL/D standards for education systems, schools and classrooms and incorporating them as systemic outcomes and indicators for

EAL/D education as part of the National Outcomes Standards for the education and training priority area of the National Settlement Framework

- iii. establishing, through the Education Council, a national digital space and clearing house within Education Services Australia for the recognition, dissemination and further development of evidence based, best practice resources and tools for EAL/D education.

#### Conclusion

EAL/D education in Australia is presently at a critical crossroad. The teaching of English to speakers of other languages in Australian schools has a proud history of excellence and innovation but under current policy conditions, its future is now at risk. A commitment to protect, maintain and continuously improve this provision needs to be reaffirmed as a national priority by Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments. Without this, EAL/D provision in schools will continue to wither, and along with it, Australia's capacity to achieve educational excellence for its EAL/D learners.

The full submission with detailed evidence base can be accessed on the ACTA website at:

<http://www.tesol.org.au/Advocacy/Media-Room>