



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

Submitter: Brisbane Catholic Education
Submitting as a: Other
State: Qld

Summary

Brisbane Catholic Education appreciates the opportunity to be able to contribute to the deliberations the panel is undertaking. In submitting this response we do recognise that the issues paper is somewhat narrow in its scope, particularly as student well-being, citizenship and inclusive education are only vicariously connected to the terms of reference, the focus on educational improvement does, however provide opportunity to direct the BCE response to creating the classroom, school and system conditions that can prepare students for the future.

BCE has tried to provide a range of considerations for the panel to ponder, in so doing, it is hoped that we may provoke or stimulate innovative and creative thinking by the panel. BCE, does believe that first and foremost the issues of what constitutes educational success demands significant bipartisan reflection, discernment and debate. BCE reaffirms the seminal position the Australian Curriculum in the ongoing school improvement journey. BCE also reinforces the underpinning importance of the General Capabilities within the Australian Curriculum and identifies these capabilities as critical to the type of learning students today, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow will demand and rely on for workplace success.

BCE is also fulsome in the belief that the solution to ongoing school improvement rests primarily with the challenge of reducing in-school-variation in teaching and learning and raising the collective efficacy of the teaching profession across Australia. This will only happen with sufficient time and support. In short, to go fast here, will require some going slow and the deliberate building of confidence, support and status to the teaching profession. Allowing decision making and the associated accountabilities in relation to the allocation of resourcing to take place at the school and system level will accelerate ownership and co-responsibility for the work ahead.

Good luck with this very important work.

Main submission

Gonski 2 Panel Submission November 2nd 2017

Introduction

Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) operates a system of over 140 Catholic schools in South East Queensland, extending from Currumbin Waters in the South to Childers in the North and Kingaroy and Gatton in the west. BCE is the second largest Catholic diocesan educator in Australia providing education to 73,000 students across a broad spectrum of social and economic advantage and disadvantage. In BCE, the mission is to teach, challenge and transform the lives of the young people in its schools through service, support and leadership for Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Brisbane. In striving to achieve the mission there is a strong commitment to the beliefs that all students can learn given sufficient time and support and all teaching can improve with sufficient time and support.

As a Catholic education system, there is also a fundamental belief that students and staff are created in the image and likeness of God with an inherent right to dignity and respect within an environment that allows each person to flourish. To flourish, the young people educated in BCE schools are formed holistically, paying particular attention to spiritual, social and emotional development. While the development of foundational skills in literacy and numeracy are essential, developing young people to reach their potential requires the development and extension of scientific, problem solving, creative thinking and technological skills and competencies as outlined in the general capabilities of the Australian Curriculum.

In creating the conditions to allow all students to learn and all teaching to improve BCE is very keen to explore creative and innovative ways to effectively use all available resourcing. The intent of the Gonski 2 Review appears open to exploring new ways of thinking and supporting schools and systems in an endeavour to grow learning and foster school improvement. BCE applauds the panel for undertaking this work and writes this review within the context of ongoing improvement.

Section 1: What should educational success for Australian students and schools look like?

The issues paper perseverates on narrow measures of quantitative success, which is highly problematic and restrictive. The preoccupation on Australia's international performance on standardised testing instruments as well as an overemphasis on NAPLAN achievement creates a narrowness in what constitutes success. This is highly problematic when the growing significance of general capabilities and 21st century skills are considered in light of the future success criteria for Australian students.

It is BCE's strong position that a full picture of success cannot be captured in an exam or a standardised testing event. Quantitative data, such as NAPLAN does provide valuable evidence but does not provide a full picture of educational 'success'. It is our considered position that measures of success must be broadly considered. In particular, measures that connect with the capabilities and dispositions promoted in the General Capabilities of the Australian Curriculum, as well as student engagement measures, mind frames and attitude to learning measures and measures of student well-being need to be considered when determining what constitutes educational success for Australian students.

Consideration for the panel

BCE encourage the panel to consider the following:

- Determine what constitutes success for an Australian school.
- If the determination supports a broad definition of success and is aligned with the Australian Curriculum, consideration be given to the adoption of a 'Backward by Design' process to identify gaps in measures of success.
- Bring educational thought leaders to the table to discuss, debate and explore, with a view to potentially identifying measures of success to respond to the gap analysis.
- Fund the pilot of alternative models of success measurement in schools.
- Consider alternate models to measuring quantitatively success on core assessment instruments such as NAPLAN focusing on learning growth, whereby a year's growth for a year's schooling becomes a considered benchmark.

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

While the issues paper is considered somewhat narrow in its scope, particularly as student well-being, citizenship and inclusive education are only vicariously connected to the terms of reference, the focus on educational improvement does provide opportunity to direct the BCE response to creating the classroom, school and system conditions that can prepare students for the future.

Working closely with educational thought leaders and lead educational researchers including John Hattie, Lyn Sharratt, Michael Fullan, Jo Boaler and Di Siemon has helped refine the understanding that is shaping BCE's thinking around the capabilities, skills and knowledge young people require to flourish today, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. Of particular note are the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (Fullan and Langworthy, 2014) which recognise character education, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking (6Cs) as the fundamental building blocks for preparing young people for the future.

Concomitant with the 6Cs of the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning, educators within BCE are strongly connected to the Australian Curriculum as the national educational blueprint for improving student learning outcomes, and more specifically to the significance of the general capabilities as the focal point for consistency, shaping future professional learning and national resourcing programs. While the general capabilities are designed to “equip young Australians to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century” (Australian Curriculum, 2017) and outlines knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions, there are however, emerging capabilities that are not easily identified in the document that are considered by BCE educators as most significant for the future, of note are:

- Risk taking
- Empathy
- Resilience
- Perseverance
- Self-reflection
- Positive self-concept and efficacy
- Just in time testing and experimenting
- Ability to self-assess
- Time management skills
- Personal health and wellbeing awareness

Consideration for the panel

BCE encourage the panel to consider the following:

- Reinforcing the significance of the Australian Curriculum as the national roadmap to shape educational success in primary and secondary education and incentivise systems to develop innovations to embed and enrich the integration of general capabilities within the life of their schools.
- Linking national resourcing programs to the Australian Curriculum, with a particular focus on General Capabilities.
- Creating a cross sectoral think tank to develop strategies to strengthen the connection of general capabilities to teacher professional learning programs.
- Establishment of cross sectoral collaboration groups and joint initiatives to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate current school improvement practice.

Section 2: What can we do to improve and how can we support ongoing improvement over time?

As outlined earlier, BCE recognises time and support as essential to supporting and maintaining ongoing improvement. Built on the back of frameworks such as the National School Improvement Tool and AITSL teacher and Principal standards there is a strong view within BCE that focused and sustained resourcing is required to allow systems and schools to further develop a culture of ongoing improvement. Time for appropriate professional learning; time to understand, implement, monitor and evaluate progress; and time to create collaborative cultures are essential to maintain and sustain school improvement. Furthermore, support through targeted funding to provide time for educators to do the work; support which heralds permission to innovate and experiment, whereby schools are incentivised to develop sustainable processes to expedite improvement; and support for the leadership of school improvement can, we believe contribute to sustainable school improvement.

To create the conditions in all schools in Australia for ongoing improvement is a complex task requiring a sustained commitment to time and support through the allocation of medium to long term funding and the cultivation of collaborative cultures within schools, across schools as well as within systems and across systems.

The most significant challenge facing BCE, and I suspect all systems in respect to improving student learning outcomes is 'in-school-variation'. As Hattie outlines in *Visible Learning*, "Teachers account for about 30% of the variance. It is what teachers know, do, and care about which is very powerful in this learning equation" (Hattie, 2013). Recognising and reaffirming that there are many ways to respond to school improvement and learning growth challenges, while also being cognisant that the best person to determine the needs of students are classroom teachers remains a fundamental and underpinning belief in BCE. However, there are pedagogical practices, such as Sharratt's 14 parameters for literacy that BCE does recognise as more effective, as such, these practices are actively promoted across BCE schools. While the area of pedagogical practice may traditionally be the domain of the school, the identification of effective pedagogical practices that are strongly supported by a solid evidence base warrants further consideration for support and broad adoption.

Furthermore, the integral connection of leadership, in particular the instructional leadership of the principal must also be considered if school improvement initiatives are to be sustained. A number of questions related to Principal leadership surface when exploring ongoing improvement over time and the role of the Principal. Most notable are:

- Is the principal the leader of learning in a school?

- How is learning leadership demonstrated in the prioritisation of the work of the Principal?
- Does the Principal have time to lead learning?
- Is between-school-variation in the Principal leadership of learning improvement significant?
- Are there consistent instructional leadership practices that should be expected of Principals, for example, should Principals regularly participate in classroom learning walks?
- What can realistically be removed from the role of the Principal to allow a greater focus on school improvement and learning growth?

Consideration for the panel

BCE encourage the panel to consider the following:

- Development of a suite of case studies of successful evidence based school responses to school improvement.
- Exploration of collaborative partnerships between schools, within systems and across systems to develop a evidenced based collaborative cultures of school improvement.
- Identification of opportunities to leverage development from scale investment, for example, systems using the NSIT working more closely to share insight, resources and professional learning. To accelerate such opportunities incentive funding for cross system and sectoral collaboration could be considered.
- Commission a review of effective evidence based pedagogical practice in literacy, teaching of mathematics and science.

Section 3: Are there barriers to implementing these improvements?

Feedback from BCE leaders and classroom teachers strongly reinforce increasing workload as a significant barrier to implementing system and school improvements. Teachers regularly report having to deal with competing demands on multiple fronts, including onerous compliance reporting, time consuming administration tasks, complex student behaviour problems, extra curricula activities, supervision duties as well as the daily demands of planning, monitoring and reporting to ensure quality teaching and learning is occurring.

The reported flow on effect of content saturation within a crowded curriculum has resulted in a reduction of time being dedicated to classroom teaching and learning. This reduction in time hampers the work of teachers with the instruction, support and guidance of student learning. The challenge is further intensified when the growing expectations of content coverage within the Australian Curriculum and

associated mandated programs are considered. This increasing level of content coverage places an increasing burden on teachers to ensure content is covered or ticked off as opposed to being able to spend quality time developing meaningful (sticky learning). BCE teachers also report a growing requirement and expectation to fit more into an already crowded curriculum resulting in superficial coverage leaving limited opportunity to dedicate time to explore deeper levels of meaning and metacognition. This reality is further exacerbated in senior secondary as Queensland schools transition to a new model of senior secondary schooling driven by a greater emphasis on external assessment

The panel has a generational opportunity to influence policy and future direction to proactively respond to the work intensification situation facing the Australian teaching profession.

Consideration for the panel

BCE encourage the panel to consider the following:

- Prioritise funding to develop a 'para-support' role specifically designed to remove administrative and compliance demands impacting classroom teachers.
- Identification and endorsement of the development of enterprise software solutions to streamline compliance and administration tasks. Systems could be incentivised to develop and share solutions.
- Explore innovative models of timetabling, curriculum content coverage, alternate model of school, creative community and industry partnerships and blended learning models of curriculum delivery.
- Provide 'seed' or 'nudge' funding for systems and or schools to drive local innovation to respond to the challenge of a crowded curriculum and work intensification.
- Utilise the 'nudge' projects to form cross-sectoral and cross system communities of innovative practice.

In closing, BCE wishes the panel every success in the very important responsibility they are charged with.

Dr Doug Ashleigh

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Brisbane Catholic Education