



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

Submitter: Catholic Education Western Australia
Submitting as a: Peak body
State: WA

Summary

CEWA is strongly committed to system approaches to school improvement, particularly in the area of improving teacher quality. This results in an effective use of resources. Other important benefits include the ability to engage experts to assist with professional learning; cross subsidising and support for special needs schools; and the development of system approaches to school improvement and accountability. CEWA supports policies which build on this systemness while recognising the need to allow local decision making to reflect schools' circumstances. CEWA proposes a number of priorities around the area of quality teaching. These include a strong focus on and support for, early years' learning; continuing support for quality professional learning for teachers, especially in areas such as coaching and mentoring; greater recognition for the needs of some schools, including but not limited to remote and sole provider schools, schools with higher Aboriginal cohorts, CARE schools and those with higher refugee cohorts; and ongoing reforms in the area of preservice education. In the case of the later, suggested priorities are - a focus on the practicum, the extent to which classroom management and engagement strategies are developed, and partnership opportunities to develop processes by which early career teachers can be better supported.

Main submission

WHAT SHOULD EDUCATION SUCCESS LOOK LIKE FOR SCHOOLS/STUDENTS

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

A critical focus of learning for students is on the early years. Schools and school systems need to be supported to implement high quality early learning programs that provide the necessary building blocks for continued schooling. In Western Australia, early years learning (cross sectorally), is considered 0 – 8 years, which is an added need for teachers from pre-kindergarten to Year2 to have a significant

understanding of early years learning needs. This requires the provision of high quality professional learning for staff (including pre-service education). AITSL should be encouraged to play a larger support role in early years learning. Government policies and funding should identify early learning as a national priority.

A greater emphasis on STEM in all years of schooling is also required. This refers to ongoing resource production such as through ESA, as well as professional learning support for teachers including higher level pre-service education. This is particularly important in ensuring an adequate supply of highly proficient STEM teachers in senior secondary courses.

VET, especially trade-related and higher level qualifications, remains a priority for many students. Australian government support in terms of funding and assisting with regulatory arrangements remains a priority. The Australian Curriculum General Capabilities also remain as a priority for focus in schools, not only for general learning but also for transition beyond schooling. It needs to be recognised that delivery of VET, especially in areas where schools do not possess staff expertise, is considerably more expensive than mainstream education.

Competence in ICT should remain as a high priority in schools. CEWA notes the importance of a range of online resources being developed to support the Australian Curriculum. An issue which needs to be addressed is the inequality which exists in the ICT area in terms of socio-economic levels and geographical location.

How should school quality and education success be measured

Testing such as NAPLAN and other international measures should play a small role; an overemphasis on NAPLAN has the capacity to divert effort accordingly at the expense of quality instruction. NAPLAN online does however have the capacity to deliver faster feedback, will increase in its diagnostic value and will enable more timely education support to be provided to students that year. ACARA should be fully supported in the roll out of online assessment as well as supporting processes for schools and teachers in diagnostics, data interpretation and planning.

Teachers need to be supported in reading, interpreting and planning with data. This includes ongoing support in developing quality assessments that provide collective and individual feedback about students. The ongoing work by ESA and ACARA in developing learning progressions and quality assessments related to the Australian Curriculum is important.

CEWA is committed to developing processes which raise quality in schools in terms of learning outcomes. These include a Quality Catholic Schooling framework; climate surveys; School Cyclical Reviews; school audit processes and a range of strategic and curriculum planning processes. These frameworks and processes are seen to be highly successful ways of developing and measuring success in schooling. Frameworks developed by AITSL should continue to be supported in helping to

develop teacher and leadership quality. System approaches allow processes such as those mentioned above, to be implemented. Government policy needs to support system approaches.

Successful transition to post-school destinations is a further measure of education success for senior secondary students. Ongoing research such as the ACER Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) provides a rich source of data which enables systems and schools to more appropriately link school processes and offerings to post-school aspirations and outcomes. This research needs to be supported.

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 outcome for all students including disadvantaged and vulnerable students and academically advanced students

Ongoing support for teacher development, as a priority, is the biggest single factor in raising educational outcomes (outside socio-economic status). National initiatives through AITSL need to continue. Improvements in pre-service education are required especially in areas of classroom management, differentiated learning and in higher level skills in STEM, particularly mathematics. Government and education systems need to continue to invest in teacher quality. Attracting graduates who are currently in the workforce will become more difficult with the introduction of a two year post graduate education qualification. Incentives or expansion of programs such as TFA could be considered.

System approaches to funding and education reform are important and should be factored into funding models. Such models are able to cross subsidise schools which serve specific high need communities but which may not be financially viable. Examples include high Aboriginal cohort schools, remote and sole provider schools and special needs schools such as Curriculum and Re-engagement Education (CARE) schools. System wide approaches also allow for resource sharing, collaboration, accountability and highly leveraged professional learning opportunities.

Funding also needs to continue in areas such as students with disability and Curriculum and Re-engagement Education (CARE) schools. In the case of CARE schools (or equivalent) an increasing number of disengaged students require such alternatives to mainstream education. Demand far exceeds supply of places for these students.

Support for gifted and talented students is important. This can best be achieved through improvements in teacher expertise and investment in ICT and learning

technologies. Support for teachers in data driven learning and planning is also important.

What actions can be taken to improve practice and outcomes. What evidence is there to support taking these actions

There is an unequivocal research evidence base (internationally and nationally) to support practices which raise teacher proficiency. An eclectic approach needs to be taken, commencing with pre-service education. Selection processes need to ensure that quality teachers are recruited. Pre-service education should reflect the recommendations of the TEMAG, particularly in terms of a focus on classroom management and quality practicum experiences. Support also needs to be provided to early career teachers once appointed, either through education systems or preservice providers, or a partnership of both. Greater emphasis on core discipline material, especially in STEM, is also required in preservice education. Many early career teachers are often appointed to non-metropolitan locations where there may be a limited support base.

Research also shows that teacher mentors or coaches can be highly effective in improving teacher quality. CEWA has invested in a teacher mentor model in partnership with Prof. John Hattie and the University of Melbourne. The focus on instructional excellence and mentoring has developed a core of teacher mentors to work in their schools and provide support to other teachers, particularly those less experienced.

A special focus is also required for teachers in non metropolitan areas. In many situations, these may be early career teachers with limited mentoring support available. These teachers are often required to teach out of field in secondary schools. Attracting and retaining quality teachers to remote schools is also an issue and this needs to be reflected in funding loadings. The evidence shows that levels of achievement of students in non-metropolitan schools is lower than for similar schools in metropolitan areas. This disparity is greater for remote area schools and those with higher Aboriginal cohorts. These inequities need to continue to attract support from government.

The role of ICT will play a key role in improving educational outcomes, especially in country schools where resources and curriculum breadth may be more limited. CEWA is investing in an expansive ICT initiative – LEADing Lights - which will connect all schools and offices. Education policy needs to continue to support companies such as ESA and AITSL to provide online resources.

There is also a strong evidence base in assisting teachers in areas of data driven planning and delivery. This involves mentoring and professional learning for teachers in developing effective assessments and planning learning to meet student needs.

NAPLAN online remains as a priority in this respect with tests becoming more extensive in terms of bands covered and with more timely results produced.

What works best for whom and in what circumstances • See above

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 Key government organisations and companies such as ACARA, AITSL and ESA continue to play a key role in conducting research and in producing processes and resources to support schools and systems. The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers produce a sound organisational and improvement framework. Resources produced by ESA draw on international best practice and assist jurisdictions in the implementation of their respective curriculums. The focus needs to be on practical assessments and exemplars of standards etc.

CEWA has in place a number of accountability and quality assurance measures for schools which might be considered by other schools and systems. All schools are required to produce a strategic plan which includes, among other things, strategies to improve teaching and learning. Additionally schools are also required to produce an Annual School Improvement Plan with a specific focus on improving student outcomes. Teacher development is an important aspect of the plan. This plan becomes a focus for staff as well as audit and similar visits outlined below. School Cyclical Reviews also occur at least every five years. These involve a panel of experienced educators and have a strong focus on leadership and school improvement. It is a collaborative and reflective process. More formal school audits also occur. These help satisfy the System Agreement involving school registration. Satisfactory learning outcomes is a key element of the audit.

CEWA also developed the quality Catholic Schooling (QCS) framework which covers all aspects of school improvement including learning and teaching and improvement in student outcomes. This has provided a focus for conversations and planning in schools.

As discussed previously, CEWA enjoys numerous benefits by being governed as a system, especially with the capacity to share best practice and assist schools in collective initiatives to achieve school improvement and better outcomes for students. A system approach also helps to assure higher level of accountability. Funding models and accountability arrangements implemented by the Australian Government need to reflect this systemness.

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 As stated above, standardised testing should play a role, but is not the definitive measure. Over-emphasis on NAPLAN data has the potential to divert effort away from quality learning and teaching.

As a system, several enablers exist to maximise outcomes through strategic direction of funding and resources. This includes centralised and targeted support for teachers, development of quality professional learning, support for early career teachers and specialised support for schools with special needs.

CEWA cautions regarding implementing unnecessary regulatory frameworks regarding teachers, standards etc. State teacher registration bodies manage this efficiently.

Are there any new or emerging area for action which could lead to large gains in student improvement that need further development or testing One area which is becoming a priority, albeit recognised by educational research for some time, is the focus on improving teacher quality. While frameworks for teacher improvement such as the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers are useful, more practical professional learning is required. Classroom and student engagement and management, data informed planning and higher subject discipline expertise are key areas. The focus on student engagement is important for all schools but particularly important for lower SES cohorts and for schools with higher Aboriginal proportions of students. The role of CARE schools and the model they are based on should be expanded across Australia.

Teacher mentoring and coaching is a further research and evidence-based approach. The work of Professor John Hattie and others has demonstrated the importance of in situ professional learning and support. Schools who use their teachers or others as mentors and coaches demonstrate improvement in student learning and whole school improvement.

As discussed previously, research also points to the critical role of early learning years programs. Schools need to be supported to expand learning for three and four year olds. This includes both Commonwealth and State government funding support as well as quality professional learning opportunities and resources. Pre-service providers should also place a greater focus in this area, in partnership with schools and education systems.

What are they and how could they be further developed • See above

ARE THERE BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING THESE IMPROVEMENTS

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

Servicing and supporting certain categories of schools remains an issue. For example remote area and sole provider schools are extremely expensive to support as well as recruiting and retaining quality staff and leaders. Providing professional learning

opportunities and servicing these schools with additional online support is also difficult. Such schools invariably require additional wrap around support such as medical, psychological and social work. Funding and loadings need to accommodate remote schools.

Similarly, CARE schools or their equivalent are expensive to run as the student cohort is typically very small, often less than 60 students. Staff numbers – teachers and other support staff – tend to be high. CARE schools play an important role in accommodating the needs of disengaged students for whom mainstream schooling is not always appropriate.

Continued support for these schools is critical, recognising their cost structures.

An issue with implementing effective early learning programs is the additional cost burden and employing high quality staff. Early years learning needs to remain as an educational priority and funded accordingly.

While accountability and compliance by schools and education systems is important, CEWA counsels against the introduction of unnecessary regulatory frameworks that divert effort away from quality teaching and learning.

Pre-service education, despite the recommendations from the TEMAG, may not be capitalising on opportunities to better meet the needs of schools. Broad areas of opportunity exist in the structure and duration of the practicum, the need to focus on classroom management and engagement practices, school information management program and processes and ongoing support, in partnership with schools, for early career teachers.