



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

Submitter: Catholic School Parents Victoria
Submitting as a: Peak body
State: Vic.

Summary

Main submission

In response to the 'Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools Issues Paper' members of Catholic School Parents Victoria have reflected on and expressed the experiences of parents with regards to the following themes:

1. What students learn and how they learn
2. Teachers and school leadership
3. Parent and community engagement

WHAT STUDENTS LEARN AND HOW THEY LEARN

In the Australian education context, parents typically have little to do with determining what children learn. The content, curriculum and pedagogy used in schools is determined by Government, systems and educators themselves in how they implement the curriculum as set by the law of the land.

Parents expect the curriculum and standards set by Government, systems and educators will prepare their children for further education and future employment.

Schools expect parents to provide support for learning by engaging with the school as well as nurturing their child's social and emotional and life skills to prepare them for human interactions and other life challenges.

There is strong evidence over the past forty years that clearly indicates that to achieve all skills and attributes necessary for future employment and life opportunities, both schools and families need to work together in the formation of children, in what they learn and how they learn to provide the grounding needed to navigate a broad range of experiences across their lifetime.

“In schools.....families have a most important place and role. Catholic schools appreciate their value, and promote participation in the school, where they can assume various forms of co-responsibility.”¹

Each child is different and how they learn is unique to them. Therefore, how curriculum is taught to cater for a spectrum of learners with varied abilities and learning styles is an area for significant focus and improvement.

Understanding how to develop effective learning strategies, provide effective feedback for improvement, build strong, collaborative relationships, navigate personalities, understand a child’s background and learning capabilities, psychology of learning and how the brain works are areas education leaders and teachers must focus on to improve the education and life opportunities for all children.

The 2017 Commonwealth government, National Innovation and Science Agenda suggests that ‘We need to embrace new ideas in innovation and science, and harness new sources of growth to deliver the next age of economic prosperity in Australia.’²

If we are to encourage the ‘innovators of the future’, the skills required for children to be able to create and manage in the future workplace include but are not limited to the following:

- High standard of literacy and numeracy skills
- High standard of humanities skills, problem solving, analytical skills, adaptability and versatility
- Ability to work across global environments with understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures and people
- Ability to develop relationships and communicate verbally and in written form
- Non-cognitive skills
- Financial and digital literacy
- Entrepreneurial, business and creative skills fostered through the arts

How these skills are taught and the people responsible for guiding children are school educators, parents and members of the community – the whole village.

Therefore, schools, families and community must work in partnership to develop children to effectively and successfully function in their future workplace and living environments.

To achieve this, a cultural shift is necessary in education and in society as a whole. A change in attitudes and perceptions across all educational institutions must take place in order to embrace the concept of raising and educating children together.

How children learn:

- Modelling – children learn from example and modelling of behaviour, attitudes and actions of those around them – leadership has powerful influence on how people behave and the culture of learning environments. Leadership in schools that is inclusive of parents as leaders in the home and in school communities, is essential for effective growth and development of children in both cognitive and

non-cognitive strengths.

- Environmental considerations – learning in the classroom is different to learning through incidental play and learning by doing – therefore learning environments that enhance how children learn must be considered.
- Understanding the Brain – how the brain and mind works is critical for teachers and parents in understanding a child’s behaviour, knowing how to engage students in learning and how to teach them social and emotional skills. The impact of understanding neurological pathways has the potential to have the biggest impact on every individual learners’ progress and growth.

TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

“If we want to be able to (get these) complex systems to work better, we need to abandon our reliance on the leader-as-hero and invite in the leader-as-host. We need to support these leaders who know that problems are complex, who know that in order to understand the full complexity of any issue, all parts of the system need to be invited to participate and contribute.”³

As the world rapidly changes around us, it is critical to have leaders who are willing to work in collaboration with others. To continue to build capacity of people to move into Principal leadership roles, we must explore the role itself and the skills required for leaders in education and in managing the increasing demands of the role.

Support for education leaders must be provided by government, the system, teachers, parents, students, the media, local communities and society in general. Principals take on huge responsibility and sacrifices both personally and professionally, yet many work in conditions that would be unacceptable in a business environment.

Recommendations for support mechanisms for Principals and school leaders may include:

- External mentoring and coaching (professional and wellbeing)
- Business management training
- Business managers located in schools to free up principals to lead learning teams

- Personal Assistants
- HR Skills to hire and induct effective teaching staff
- Ongoing support around new technologies for more efficient teaching mechanisms – eg. Cloud based learning environments – (LMS) Learning Management Systems, Visible Learning strategies etc. that have been proven to improve student learning outcomes
- Building Principal skills in developing relationships with staff and parents
- Improving value and perception of the profession

Supporting great teaching requires an understanding of the role of a teacher:

In order to develop effective teachers, focus must be on two categories:

- Pre-service teachers
- Current teachers.

Support for teachers who fall into these categories require quite different approaches.

Personal attributes required by teachers:

- Social and emotional skills, resilience, perseverance, growth mindset
- Versatility in adapting to and responding to various situations and perspectives
- Accepting of diversity in students' both culturally and in learning capabilities
- Awareness of the brain for learning and children's stages of development
- Willingness to develop relationships to work in partnership with leadership, teachers, students and parents
- Seeing a need and doing something about it – conscientiousness, awareness and taking purposeful action
- Awareness of the responsibilities of teaching the role and expectations of teachers
- Awareness of future global opportunities and new, effective methods of teaching.

Teachers and school leaders are the enablers of parent engagement. To enable a partnership approach in education, a whole school culture must embrace the opportunity to work together. This can only be enabled by leadership, teachers and parents who are the key drivers of change in education.

Leadership in education to encourage family, school and community partnership requires a multi-level approach and adaptation of a dual capacity framework to build the capacity of schools and parents to cohesively work together for improvement: 4

- Principals as leaders and enablers – Principals are the key drivers of culture and change in school communities. They must believe in the partnership and model it for others to enable engagement.
- Teachers as leaders – teachers are enablers of cultural change and parent engagement. Their strength is in communication of learning and progress of the child and how parents can support learning at home.
- Parents as leaders – parents are enablers of cultural change and parent engagement only if they are provided the opportunity by an outward facing school to lead by example and work in collaboration with Principals and teachers to instigate cultural change and build capacity of other parents to engage in learning.
- Students as leaders – students are enablers of cultural change in education and student voice is important in determining the needs and challenges of being a student in this era of rapid change.

BUILDING CAPACITY OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

The profession of teaching is becoming increasingly challenging. Preparing pre-service teachers to more effectively manage once they are in the workplace, will mean improved teacher quality and increased teacher retention.

Recommendations to enhance teacher training for pre-service teachers

Following the research and interviews of various case study schools, a number of recommendations were made to Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and the Department of Education and Training in Victoria. Following the Smarter Schools funding, many new initiatives were introduced to enhance school capacity to engage with parents in school communities. Research into the effectiveness of family school partnerships methods and implementation of support networks in low SES schools resulted in various recommendations for teacher education:

Preparing teachers for future demands in classrooms and society

- Teachers are not experts in every subject area. To provide school students with opportunities to learn from experts in the field, external collaboration or engagement of specialists in a specific field is recommended. Developing teacher induction courses for qualified professionals with industry experience in specific areas of expertise (eg coding, IT, science/maths/design professional backgrounds) to enter the teaching profession.

- Placement of student teachers' in low SES schools and remote areas to ease the gap for the disadvantaged – students who wouldn't otherwise apply for graduate jobs in these schools come to understand communities, reducing bias and increasing possibilities for quality teachers in these areas.⁵
- Introduce pre-service teachers to project based learning, critical and creative (design) thinking techniques and development of entrepreneurial mindset and business skills for students in a global market – build strong awareness of teacher responsibility for developing student capacity through reciprocal teaching and learning, developing custom, personal and efficient learning pathways for each individual student. Awareness of efficient workflow systems that enable timely assessment and monitoring of student progress – eg cloud-based platforms enabling effective personalised and collaborative learning, efficient and up to date record keeping and improved time management for teachers.⁶
- Provide opportunities for increased collaboration with schools whilst studying – with access to quality mentors currently in the profession.
- Include psychology, neuroscience, Neuro linguistic programming, human behaviour knowledge and relationship building skills – with students, peers and parents.
- Include SEL (social and emotional learning) as a core subject as well as restorative practice techniques (behaviour management in the classroom and playground and having restorative practice conversations with peers and parents).

PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Recommendations to enhance parent engagement in learning:

Reintroduction and distribution of National Partnerships funding to support and promote the work of family school and community partnerships (FSCP) across all school sectors has the capacity to:

- Ensure FSCP system-led reform be extended and sustained due to its effectiveness and worth in enhancing family/community engagement and the link to learning outcomes.
- Expand and align focus on FSCP with other areas including literacy, numeracy and school improvement to develop a strong and integrated approach to system-wide reform.
- Enable consideration of the successful model of appointing school focused staff in relation to future staff appointments in area of FSCP – Family

Engagement Leaders and Parent Leadership in building the capacity of FSCP (particularly in low SES and ESL/new refugee immigrant communities).

- Enable support and expansion of professional learning for pre-service teachers, principals, teachers and parents regarding learnings and successful practices of FSCP reform.
- Develop funding structure to enable community hubs, playgroups and parent groups in schools to introduce parent engagement and enhance school readiness.
- Enable funding for parent engagement practitioners to deliver professional learning for pre-service teachers, parent formation, school staff and system personnel.
- Enable each system to employ a diverse range of professionals, including those with backgrounds outside education, to maximize the impact of FSCP training and staff appointments.
- Enable schools to work in partnership with university faculties of education to ensure that in both pre-service and graduate teacher education programs proper attention is given to learning the value and strategies for effective FSCP for student learning outcomes - integrated as compulsory learning in teacher education programs.
- Recommend that FSCP be included as compulsory in leadership training, principal induction and mentoring programs.⁷

Recommendations of system-wide initiatives to enhance parent engagement at scale

- A non-government National Coalition of Parent Engagement in Education be formed to help promote a 'community of practice', provide a co-ordinated national voice and drive national conversation and best practice in parent engagement.
- The Commonwealth develop a nation-wide program to support the full-time employment of

school-based parent engagement specialists.

- Universities develop a Centre for Parent and Family Engagement and as a matter of urgency develop pre-service and higher learning courses around parent engagement for all teacher training courses.
- Provide schools with resources to support cultural change needed in building dual capacity of teachers and parents as partners in education.
- Enhance development of parent leadership and formation in schools to build capacity of parents to engage with their children

- Resource schools in providing professional learning and other material to enhance parent engagement in learning (reading resources and basic foundation literacy and numeracy skills for children)
- Provide mechanisms for schools at a national, state and local level to develop:
 - Research
 - Technical assistance
 - Leadership development
 - Expanded funding and support for PIRCs – Parental Information and Resource Centres.
 - Create flexibility in funding streams to enable states and local communities to develop systemic approaches that incorporate parent engagement in learning strategies.⁸

BUILDING CAPACITY OF PARENTS TO ENGAGE WITH SCHOOLS AND THEIR CHILD'S LEARNING

Whilst building the capacity of teachers and leaders in schools is a priority, so too is building the capacity of parents to engage in their children's learning.

The following research into strategies introduced into the UK demonstrates how parents have been supported in building their capacity for parenting and for parent engagement in learning:

- Every Parent Matters – creating conditions for parents to engage with their children in learning – examples of this in Australia may be playgroups who support parents with young children.
- Family Pathfinder – aim to improve outcomes for families caught in a cycle of low achievement, supporting families by responding to the needs of the whole family – linking family, school and community organisations to support the family unit.
- Respect Parenting Practitioner – delivery of evidence based, structured parenting programs for parents of families at risk.
- Parent Know How – a program designed to increase provision of support and advice to all parents, including parents of children with special needs, disability and parents of teenage children
- Parent Support Advisors – School based programs focusing on working with parents of children with mental health and wellbeing challenges.
- Home-school agreements – a statutory requirement and a powerful tool in making an agreement between parent and teacher what they can expect

from their child's school and what responsibilities the school expects of families.

- The Children's Plan – providing a voice for parents around parenting – a national parents panel advising the national government on strategies for engagement of parents in parenting strategies that enhance children's opportunities. 9

Leading research from John Hopkin's University, USA into the effectiveness of parent engagement and family school partnerships recommends that along with clear policies and multi-level leadership support, an Action Team for Partnerships in each school is essential. The ATP must consist of school leaders, teachers and parents. Their role is to set a one year plan and have a continuing role to build the capacity of the community to sustain the implementation of strategies long term.¹⁰

BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING THESE IMPROVEMENTS

- School culture that is inward, not outward facing
- Lack of communication or consistency in schools to enable adequate engagement with parents
- Lack of training of teachers in strategies for engagement and impactful teaching
- Lack of knowledge of effective strategies in 'how' to engage students and parents in learning
- Lack of awareness of parent role in education – by both parents and schools alike
- Lack of resources and key drivers of change in school culture
- Attitudes of parents towards education
- Attitudes and perceptions of schools towards parents
- Resistance and reluctance to support parents in parenting and education
- An attitude of 'more work' for teachers and schools in engaging parents in learning
- Lack of resources that link learning at school (curriculum and strategies) with learning at home
- Lack of funding for schools to implement new learning platforms and further parent engagement strategies
- Time – teachers and Principals too busy to develop appropriate resources and measurement tools. Parents too busy to engage with school and with children at home.

ENDS

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