



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

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Submitting as a: Other (teacher, principal and senior education administrator
(retired))
State: Tas.

Summary

I was a teacher, principal and senior education administrator for 49 years and I am now retired.

I worked closely with both Labor and Liberal ministers and also worked on committees across Australia along side senior educators including Dr Ken Boston. I have included in the attached paper my views on what I believe could be done to lift the mediocre education outcomes that Australian students are currently achieving, in spite of the very significant extra funding that has already been provided.

Some of the recommendations that I have proposed in my paper I implemented or attempted to implement during my tenure as Deputy Secretary in Tasmania.

Many of the suggestions in my paper are State rather than Federal responsibilities but I hope that some may be useful in targeting the extra federal funds into areas that will actually make a difference.

Main submission

Education Outcomes in Australia

Tim Doe 26 October 2017

The adoption of good education policies will help Australia achieve higher and more equitable education outcomes. Providing more money for education does not, of itself, lead to better education outcomes as evidenced by past additional funding for education which has not lifted outcomes. Good leaders and excellent teachers will dramatically lift outcomes.

There are four questions that should be asked in order to predict whether or not a proposed action will lift education outcomes:

Will the implementation of this proposal;

1. raise the quality of current and/or future teachers?
2. raise the quality of current and/or future school leaders (especially principals) ?
3. encourage students and/or parents to value learning more highly?
4. increase the number of children born in Australia who have above average educational potential and/or help all children in Australia to realize their personal educational potential ?

If a proposal will not do any of the above things then it is unlikely that implementing it will result in better education outcomes. Australia ranks as spending the fifth-highest amount on education in the OECD and has increased funding to education by about 14% in real terms over the last decade but over this period student performance has declined. Australia's performance in the PISA tests, held every three years, has shown a steady decline from 2000 when the tests were first held to 2015 when the most recent tests were held. Over this period our mean score in science has dropped from 527 to 510, in maths from 524 to 494 and in reading from 528 to 503 and Australian students' performance in the NAPLAN tests have only improved marginally since their introduction in 2008.

Better school buildings, new gymnasiums, sports grounds and libraries, more computers, smaller class sizes, much of the in-service professional development and a lot of the university teacher training that is currently being provided as well as most changes to schools' curricula are unlikely to lift student outcomes.

Some actions that may help Australians achieve higher and more equitable education outcomes are provided below.

Will the introduction of this policy raise the quality of current and/or future teachers?

1. Most teachers in our schools are good and many are excellent but the single most important thing that can be done to lift education outcomes in Australia is to further improve the quality of our teachers.
2. Increasing the salaries of current teachers will not, of itself, result in improved student outcomes. However, encouraging bright and enthusiastic young school leavers to train to be teachers will certainly lead to higher student outcomes down the track.
3. It is important to understand that a high ATAR score does not guarantee that a school leaver will become a great teacher. Enthusiasm, liking and respecting young people and having high expectations of them are equally important attributes.

4. The pre-appointment assessment of all aspiring teachers' ability to teach could result in graduates who are not ready to teach being required to undertake more classroom focused training or deciding to choose another profession.
5. A probationary period for beginning teachers that actually discontinues the employment of those who are not going to succeed would be of future benefit to many hundreds of students as well as being of service to the underperforming teachers themselves. There are few vocations that can be more rewarding than teaching but also few that can be more challenging and less satisfying.
6. The re-introduction of probationary "student teacher" scholarships should be considered. That is to say, signing up some of our best school leavers as probationary teachers and giving them an apprentice wage as they complete their university studies. Classroom teaching experience can then be provided during university holidays. Bonding these students to teach is unnecessary as there are built in incentive for these students to remain as teachers. For example, before they begin full time teaching they will already have accrued four years of long service leave and superannuation.
7. In order to save the money required to fund a student teacher program Australia could follow the lead of Singapore and Finland and only train the number and type of teachers needed each year. Currently about 30,000 students enroll in teaching courses in Australia each year and of these about 18,000 graduate. Of these graduates about 11,000 find work as teachers. Perhaps we could offer 11,000 "student teacher" scholarships to school leavers each year and award these scholarships to the applicants with the potential to become excellent teachers in the disciplines needed. If we paid each of them an apprentice wage of double the youth allowance (say \$22,000) it would cost less than \$1billion each year and result in a tremendous lift in student outcomes
8. Provide more school based pre-service experience for aspiring teachers and rather than paying current teachers extra to supervise these pre-service teachers this should be one the responsibilities within the teaching award.
9. Traveling scholarships should be provided to exemplary teachers and potential leaders in their early to mid-career so they can visit the international education systems that are achieving the best education outcomes.
10. Another way to recruit excellent teachers is to interview university students (who aspire to be teachers) in their final year and offer the best applicants guaranteed employment on an advanced rung of the teacher salary scale.
11. In education faculties there should be more emphasis on providing techniques for the management of students and classrooms and this should be delivered by experienced teachers. Pre-service training should encourage more explicit instruction focusing on the basic learning areas.

12. Raising the status of teachers in the community will encourage more of our best school leavers to aspire to be teachers. This is demonstrated in Finland where secondary teachers have higher degrees and teachers are paid salaries that are competitive with other professions.

Will the introduction of this policy raise the quality of current and/or future school leaders (especially principals)?

1. Principals in government schools must be given more autonomy and take more responsibility for the education outcomes of their school. Inadequate funding should not be used by a principal as an excuse for their school's poor education outcomes.
2. Allowing principals/School Boards to hire and fire their school's teachers (with appropriate industrial safeguards) is a powerful way to ensure that good teachers are employed and that unsatisfactory teachers do not continue to hold back student achievement.
3. Excellent principals will demand teachers use the most effective pedagogy based on evidence based research. The preferred pedagogy often should be clearly articulated teaching focusing on the basic learning areas. This is particularly important in the primary sector.
4. A principal who visits classrooms and focuses teachers on maximizing student learning time lifts the education outcomes in the school.

Good school leaders try to increase the time that students are actually learning. The time spent in school each year and the number of years spent at school are not necessarily closely related to the time spent learning. Streaming students into learning groups with similar abilities is one way to increase effective learning time but there can also be benefits in teaching classes of mixed ability students. Streaming primary students across grades for the learning of basic skills such as literacy can be very effective.

5. The transfer of principals from non-preferred state schools to preferred schools without merit selection can result in a proliferation of mediocre principals. This can occur unless quality applicants are attracted to the principalship of non-preferred schools by higher remuneration.
6. Promotion to principalship should be based on the applicants success in previous roles which should be supported by confidential statements gathered from the applicants colleagues.
7. The high number of male principals relative to the proportion of male teachers (particularly in the primary sector) is an indication that many women are not applying for leadership positions in schools. Policies to address this imbalance are required in order to lift the quality of our principals.

Will the introduction of this policy encourage students and/or parents to value learning more highly?

1. Most students and parents in some countries (South Korea is a good example) believe that a good education is the key to prosperity and happiness. Students in these countries achieve high education outcomes.
2. Improvement in educational outcomes achieved by individual students and by schools needs to be celebrated. Student improvement year by year is a much better way to judge teacher and school success than comparing students' results at any one point in time.
3. The media should be encouraged to celebrate high achievers in education not just in sport.
4. In order to increase the value placed on education we should use advertising to promote it. The advertising campaign targeting drink driving had a powerful and lasting effect on young Australians and a similar campaign advertising the value of education could be equally effective. Just because we have compulsory education does not mean we don't need to sell its benefits.

Will the introduction of this policy increase the number of children born in Australia who have above average educational potential and/or help more children realize their personal potential ?

1. This is a contentious policy question and perhaps the one that is least recognized as influencing our national education outcomes. Many children born with an educational potential that is below average will achieve excellent education outcomes and conversely many children with high education potential will not realize their full potential but research, including the study of identical twins, concludes that more than 50% of the education potential of a child is inherited.
2. As we are not all born with the same education potential achieving equitable education outcomes does not mean that everyone will achieve equal education outcomes. Education outcomes are equitable when everyone fully realizes their personal education potential.
3. Needs based funding for schools is absolutely necessary to help disadvantaged students achieve their personal educational potential. Extra attention needs to be given to children who have not had, or who are not having, satisfactory help with learning at home. This can be done before they begin formal schooling as well as once they have started school. As soon as children start school their literacy and numeracy should be assessed by their teacher. Additional needs based funding to each school should be based on these assessments rather than on the SES of the nearby suburbs. Most children who receive good nurturing from their family will probably be able to read before they start school. The

children who are not able to read when they start school must receive the highest priority for funding as this skill along with verbal and written communication is the key to their future learning.

Tim Doe

I attended government schools in Tasmania and at the age of 17 was employed as a “student teacher” by the Tasmanian Education Department to study at the University. I gained a Bachelor of Science and a Diploma of Education and later a Master of Education Studies. I subsequently taught in high schools and colleges across Tasmania and briefly in an independent preparatory school in Sussex and in a very challenging comprehensive high school in London before returning to Tasmania. After a year as a college principal in Tasmania I was promoted into education administration. I retired as Deputy Secretary of Schools and Colleges. Following my retirement from full time work I chaired the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority for nine years.

My wife Margaret (also a teacher) and I bought up three children who we adopted at birth. Each of these children attended the same or similar Tasmanian state schools. They mostly had good or very good teachers and received absolutely identical encouragement and nurturing from us. In spite of this they achieved dramatically different levels of academic achievement.