



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

Submitter: Independent Schools Victoria
Submitting as a: Peak body
State: Vic.

Summary

1. Pedagogies that matter promote intellectual engagement, connect with students' lives, take place in socially supportive environments and value and work with difference.
2. Students generally respond better to an integrated or transdisciplinary curriculum that is organised around real-world and personally significant problems, issues and themes, rather than a curriculum driven by content.
3. Monitoring of school quality and educational success must take into consideration a broad range of school outcomes.
4. Allowing school leaders the autonomy to meet their own realistic improvement targets and overcome their school challenges will ensure continued improvement.
5. The focus of professional learning should be on impact on student learning rather than simply hours spent or capacity building with no consequent changes in practice.
6. Data literacy remains a gap in the repertoire of many school leaders and teachers.
7. Central publication and sharing of existing transformative school improvement practices should be made available and easily accessible to schools.
8. OECD research (<http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/46927511.pdf>) shows that there is a recognition across all countries that assessment and evaluation strategies and procedures are integral to building stronger and fairer school systems. Assessment and evaluation should not be seen as ends in themselves, but as tools to continual school improvement.

9. There is a role for external educational experts to work with schools in developing a productive leadership and school learning culture.
10. There are no broadly recognised principles or 'ideal' models specifically for 'School Improvement' in Australia. An Australian framework could be developed where Australian and international research on best practice is examined and articulated to schools in a practical way for implementation.

Main submission

2017 Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Response to Review Questions.

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

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

Schools are supporting students develop the skills and capacities necessary to productively engage in the world of the future. Pedagogies that matter promote intellectual engagement, connect with students' lives, take place in socially supportive environments and value and work with difference.

By challenging students intellectually, schools foster deep understanding and encourage questioning about how knowledge is constructed. While literacy and numeracy are still important skills students should take with them from school, equipping them with resilience, coping strategies, and change management techniques are also important so they are able to adapt to future requirements. The transversal skills, previously referred to as 21C skills, are paramount. Research has shown that students generally respond better to an integrated or transdisciplinary curriculum that is organised around real-world and personally significant problems, issues and themes, rather than a curriculum driven by content.

The Australian Curriculum skills and capabilities, as well as links to content areas of 'what' capabilities and skills students should learn to better prepare them for the future, are a good start. although most agree that it has far too much content specified as 'essential', meaning that learning experiences are more often a mile-wide, inch-deep. In addition, the emphasis and resources to develop the skills and capabilities are insufficient to strengthen the practice of teachers, for whom the old comfort of content is a default. Teachers are expected to teach and assess general capabilities to the extent that they are incorporated within learning area content, but there are few evidence-based best practice models of 'how' to go about this and it is often left up to the individual teacher. The need to develop relevant, authentic tasks and real learning experiences is essential to ensuring teachers are not just

aware of skills and capabilities but create the platforms to allow students to master them for the future.

How should school quality and educational success be measured?

1. Greater student retention in schools as well as student attendance are strong measures of whether there is a positive and nurturing school climate and an engaging and relevant curriculum.
 2. Measurement alone will not ensure school improvement. While curriculum and instruction will equip students with knowledge, assessment design and strategy must also meet the intended purpose. Assessment has validity if it measures what it is supposed to measure. However, teachers and schools should be analysing their results, both qualitative and quantitative, through internal and external testing to be able to identify where school improvement is needed and what is needed to do this. In particular, schools need resources (time, capacity) to work with the results, greater data literacy, and the ability to be able to communicate success with the broader community. For too long, the emphasis has been on achievement, not progress. Our 'measures' of success would be far more useful, and realistic, were they framed around progress.
 3. Monitoring of school quality and educational success must take into consideration a broad range of school outcomes.
 4. Allowing school leaders the autonomy to meet their own realistic improvement targets and overcome their school challenges will ensure continued improvement. The National Tool for School Improvement was seen as a very useful means to benchmark progress and achievement in schools but it is no longer current and would benefit from a reworking and updating.
2. 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 outcomes for all students including disadvantaged and vulnerable students and academically advanced students?

1. Professional learning for all teaching and non-teaching staff in schools is one of the most important ways that a school can have an impact on learning outcomes for all students. However, it is important that any 'new' learning gained by participating in professional learning is implemented and shared across the whole school community. The focus of professional learning should be on impact on student learning rather than simply hours spent or capacity building with no consequent changes in practice.

2. Schools require resources to better equip teachers in data handling skills and data analysis so they can better target their teaching for student learning improvement. Many good commercial products exist but are beyond the means of many schools. Data literacy remains a gap in the repertoire of many school leaders and teachers.
3. The presence of qualified and accredited learning/practitioner professionals to develop and implement targeted programs within schools, including for disadvantaged and vulnerable students, is far more effective than generic programs. For example, specifically designed and measured interventions in collaboration with teachers and speech pathologists allow not only to build the capacity of teachers to take preventative action and accommodate the different needs in their classrooms, but for accountability as well. We know that what makes a difference to changing practice is the presence of an approachable, trusted mentor or coach in the classroom working alongside the teacher.
4. Central publication and sharing of existing transformative school improvement practices should be made available and easily accessible to schools. For example, illustrations that model school improvement practices would provide guidance for school implementation or validation of one's own practice. Greater promotion and investment in initiatives such as Evidence for Learning will build an awareness of existing expertise in the system.
5. Marketed school improvement practices/programs adopted in isolation by schools without the ability to compare other practices lead to schools investing in programs with little or no impact and a subsequent waste of funds and resources. Providing schools with important platforms to compare professional learning programs/practices that work is essential. Assisting schools to mine their data to determine the root cause of their challenges is also important, as is investment in the concept of school-readiness for change.
6. Programs and training already offered by not for profit peak bodies such as Independent Schools Victoria allow for collaboration/exposure between schools to promote a system of sharing resources and good school practice.

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

OECD research (<http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/46927511.pdf>) shows that there is a recognition across all countries that assessment and evaluation strategies and procedures are integral to building stronger and fairer school systems. Assessment and evaluation should not be seen as ends in themselves, but as tools to continual school improvement.

Actions that can be taken could include:

1. Promotion and encouragement for teachers and leaders of schools to work collaboratively with like schools and community organisations to moderate assessment and integrate real life experiences and formative assessment in the evaluation and assessment framework.
2. It is time to identify and remove from the profession, in a supported way, teachers who are not willing to learn and develop their practice to be highly effective.
3. Leadership coaching and development for all staff in schools. There is no substitute for the presence of highly-skilled lead teachers whose role is to work alongside the classroom teachers in their schools as mentors and coaches, not just delivering new understandings and training in new skills but also to model, demonstrate and be present as co-learners in their classrooms.
4. Resourcing to support and create opportunities for disadvantaged and vulnerable students, as well as prioritising relationships, connections and partnerships with the school community as well as the broader community.
5. Increased opportunities and initiatives for cross-school sector sharing of good practice and continuous improvement could be developed. Resources developed by various government agencies are useful to leaders, teachers and parents in all sectors. School initiatives, such as local school hubs that are geographically clustered to establish relationships with a range of community agencies where good practice programs are shared, can work well, particularly in disadvantaged areas and ideally, involve all sectors.
6. Continued capacity building of graduate teachers during their important transition years is known to be very effective. For example, the current VIT provisional teacher registration scheme provides a platform for this to occur but a mentor without training to support and improve classroom practice does little to enable graduate teachers to better understand their learners and consolidate their skills in their initial years of teaching. Current platforms only bring very poor performance up to a sufficient level, but do little to move teacher skills from adequate to good to great.

What works best for whom and in what circumstances?

1. Funding for schools to identify and maintain well-educated, highly knowledgeable expertise on staff, an instructional coach whose role is to work in the classrooms of teachers to support their on-the-job learning.
2. There is a role for external educational experts to work with schools in developing a productive leadership and school learning culture. External consultants can be non-threatening and objective in their view of the school.

When staff undertake professional development beyond the school, the learning is often transferred into changed practice back in their school.

3. External and internal coaching and direct mentoring of school leaders and teachers to encourage program development and overall school improvement. This also prevents schools from working in isolation.
4. Recognition of schools by publishing their best practice programs and success stories is a good incentive to drive sharing of good practice and continuous improvement.

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?

1. Sound strategic planning tools and practices are needed to ensure every school has clearly identified their needs through stakeholder feedback as well as future skills awareness. Schools at an institutional level could be guided with tools of best future planning models and improvement cycle processes and procedures for implementation and reflection of student outcomes over time.
2. Ongoing development of case stories and resources by AITSL, ACARA and ESA, where school communities contribute positive success case studies, funding opportunities, ideas for collaboration on projects, support mechanisms, etc.

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?

1. An opportunity for meaningful Annual Reviews should be available for all teachers. The purpose of the Annual Review is a formative process which focuses on affirming achievement and suggesting avenues for professional development. All teaching staff should be clear about the expectations of their communities and willing to commit to their learning to become even better teachers from year to year.
2. Schools can be supported to undertake a review that shows goal setting, areas for improvement and a way that professional staff (teachers and leaders) can demonstrate targets and standards, qualification and accreditation, regulation and registration as well as transparency and accountability.

3. National quality and accountability standards will ensure that for all schools, initiatives are centred on improving teacher quality and school leadership, increasing accountability and better directing resources, implementing integrated strategies for low socioeconomic school communities, monitoring progress of student learning, ensuring all children meet literacy and numeracy standards, and improving outcomes for all students. There should also be ongoing initiatives to support student wellbeing, such as counselling and other support services, and mentoring and alternative learning programs.
4. Minimum standards are important but do not drive significant change. Autonomy in schools setting their own realistic targets based on their context and what works for them will allow for more manageable change and continued improvement.
5. There are no broadly recognised principles or 'ideal' models specifically for 'School Improvement' in Australia. An Australian framework could be developed where Australian and international research on best practice is examined and articulated to schools in a practical way for implementation. The National Tool for School Improvement was a strong attempt to develop a framework like this.
6. In addition to essential training and incentives, accountability mechanisms with embedded evaluation will ensure people throughout the system are held responsible for school improvement. Establishing a clear improvement cycle that identifies areas for improvement and recognises high impact programs is needed.

Are there any new or emerging areas for action which could lead to large gains in student improvement that need further development or testing?

What are they and how could they be further developed?

1. Programs such as student leadership programs for all students or cross-peer mentoring programs (e.g. Big Brothers, Big Sisters) should be encouraged and supported in schools. These programs already exist in some schools but a consistent approach and guidance tool for schools to help develop this in their own context would be an emerging area for action.
2. More research and implementation on learning landscapes where physical and virtual spaces can be designed to support pedagogy and the realisation of student potential.
3. An under-prepared graduate teacher's impact is a threat to continued school improvement. Evaluations of graduate teacher programs from Australia have shown that some courses are teaching obsolete or ineffective practices and

strategies (Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, 2014). There has been an increase in the number of inadequately trained graduate teachers working within low socio economic background areas. This has further exacerbated the problems of already stretched schools' resources and outcomes. Reform in teacher education training is needed.

4. The increased administrative demands of teachers and school leaders is having an impact on the quality and quantity of face to face time spent with students. Acknowledgement of this burden and research into its impact are required so that strategies and resources could be developed to support schools.
5. Leveraging the success in other areas such as <https://hundred.org/about>
6. Advocacy for the complexity of teaching – too many public commentators offer simplistic solutions to highly complex problems.