

## Recipient Details

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## Responses

### Curriculum and assessment

We need to get literacy right. It is the foundation for the entire curriculum. Poor literacy is associated with lower education, earnings and health outcomes, and high rates of unemployment, welfare dependence and teenage parenting. A 2011 ABS study shows that 44% of Australians, aged 15-74 have literacy levels below level 3. Level 3 is considered as the minimum level to meet the complex demands of life and work in the 21st century (ABS 2012). We are failing every young person who exits the school system with low literacy skills.

NAPLAN and standardised testing are not valued by many in the teaching profession. In our area, data from NAPLAN reports has been extensively used to identify schools where students are not achieving as highly as they should be. I believe it has had a positive impact on changing the curriculum and teaching. Schools are held accountable for their results. This national testing enables the identification of schools that need assistance and support. An old business maxim states that 'if you can't measure it, you can't manage it'. We need to ensure that all children are proficient in numeracy and literacy.

Many families and young people have low aspirations regarding education and low awareness of diverse career pathways. We need to deliver a meaningful career curriculum in the primary school years, so that children are motivated and aspire to achieve.

Rating: 7

### Teachers and teaching

Secondary school teachers are generally not trained how to teach children to read. They are not well equipped to teach children transitioning from primary school with Grade 2-3 (or below) literacy. There are some excellent literacy intervention programs available, but they are often expensive, resource intensive and schools do not know which program to use. It is time our Education Departments, distilled the best practice key elements of these programs and developed a literacy program for schools to use, at no cost. The program could be part of teacher training to ensure consistent effective delivery of the program to all students who need it. At the moment schools have to choose between a lot of different programs including QuickSmart, MultiLit, Reading Recovery, Intensive reading, CAFÉ reading, Spalding program, Bridging the Gap, Corrective Reading, Making a Difference, THRASS, PEEL, Fountas and Pinnell, etc.

The current situation ensures that we have a lack of common assessment and language, inconsistent delivery and effectiveness ensuring variable teaching and results within, and across schools. No commercial business would survive by approaching a critical problem in such an ad-hoc manner. Educating our kids is the most important business of all.

Rating: 7

## Leaders and leadership

It is time for politicians and governments to lead. Whilst we continue to have a centralised government system in Canberra and our capital cities, how can governments expect businesses to set up, or move to, regional areas? Population decline is the most important issue for rural communities. The three key elements to reversing rural decline and poor education outcomes are investment, jobs and greater education support for rural students and families (early years, primary, secondary and post secondary). Professional families are reticent to move to rural areas if they do not provide high level education options. If we keep doing what we have been doing, we will get the same results, the trend will continue and our rural communities will continue to wither and die.

Country communities regularly lose their best and brightest young people as they move to metropolitan and major regional centres for tertiary education. Once they have gained their qualifications there are no job opportunities in their profession in their home town.

Unless governments get fair dinkum and significantly decentralise the public sector, this situation will continue and ensure that rural communities continue to decline. Federal and State governments are the biggest businesses in Australia and could deliver significant investment and jobs in rural areas. With connectivity and technology, people can perform office work from anywhere in the world, including rural communities. This would stimulate local economies and private sector investment, creating more jobs. Once population decline is reversed, the outlook for rural youth and rural towns would be much brighter. Why are most of our government departments situated in the CBDs of our capital cities? Melbourne is growing at nearly 100,000 people per year, and this growth is clearly undesirable and unsustainable.

Rating: 7

## School and Community

We know that too many children are turning up to school, not ready to learn. Nearly one quarter (22.5%) of Wimmera children are developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains (AEDC 2015). In most cases, the reason is that their parents lack the knowledge, skills and/or motivation to support their children's development before they get to kinder and school.

We know that children who start school behind their peers, often do not catch up. They struggle through primary school and ultimately disengage from secondary school in the middle years with low literacy and poor skills. Many are destined to a lifetime of welfare dependence. Regional and rural students (15 y.o) are on average one-two years of schooling behind metropolitan students in reading and scientific literacy (PISA 2012).

If we really want to improve rural education outcomes, we need to focus on the early and primary years. "By the time a child is three years old, 90% of their brain has been developed – the quality of relationships and learning environments for babies and toddlers is critically important. The impact of early experience has a greater influence on development than heredity" (Winter- MCEECDYA 2010). We need to educate and support parents to read, speak, sing and count with their kids on a daily basis. This can only happen with a sustained public education campaign on a multi-media platform, with consistent messaging on electronic and social media. A national roll out of the Let's Read and Let's Count programs would be a key element of this strategy. We also need to engage with vulnerable families and connect them with schools and the wider community.

Rating: 7

## Information and Communication Technology

Technology, robotics and data have significantly changed the world of work. The rate of change will continue to increase and there will be less entry-level jobs for people with low skills. We owe it to all young people, that they have strong ICT, numeracy and literacy skills when they exit school.

Without these basic skills, our most vulnerable young people will not be equipped to participate in the 21st century economy and will be locked out of the labour market.

Young people who have a good education will have the ability to use technology to become job creators, rather than job seekers. We need to strongly focus on the 20% of most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, so that they have a chance of succeeding in the modern world.

The Grampians Virtual School is an excellent example of using technology to improve access to VCE studies. The cluster of Wimmera Southern Mallee schools work together to deliver a broad range of Year 11-12 subjects through video conferencing technology. This is particularly important for our small rural schools who may only have ten Year 12 students, have a limited teaching staff and are unable to deliver all subjects that the students may want to undertake. This innovative program ensures that all students across the Wimmera have access to a wide variety of subjects to select from, even if that subject is not delivered in their own school. Students can undertake their courses through video conferencing and participating in subject classes at another school.

Rating: 6

## Entrepreneurship and schools

Rating: 6

### Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding

The Wimmera Southern Mallee schools cluster work to deliver 15 Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) courses as part of the school curriculum. Students come to Horsham (central location) every Wednesday from an area covering in excess of 30,000 km<sup>2</sup> to undertake their chosen VETiS course.

The Wimmera schools also combine to support an extensive VCAL cluster and Careers Association. The Wimmera and Southern Mallee Careers Association deliver the biggest Careers Expo in Victoria, outside of Melbourne. More than 2000 students attend this one day event. The 2017 Expo featured over 100 exhibitors, 35 'try a trade' demonstrations, tertiary education information sessions and 50 careers and education seminars. More than 20 universities and training providers were represented at the Expo.

Rating for enrolments: 6

Rating for clusters: 7

Rating for distance education: 7

Rating for boarding: 4

## Diversity

Rating: 0

## Transitioning beyond school

If we equip all young people with strong educational skills, the probability of successful transition into further study or employment will be enhanced. Australia is a big country, full of opportunities

for those with the skills to achieve and succeed in the 21st century. Our young people are our future, and our rural youth deserve the same opportunity to a great education as their metropolitan cousins.

Our challenge is to ensure that our children and families get the support and skills to ensure that all rural youth succeed in their education and become productive members of our communities. If we are to reverse rural decline, we must ensure that all rural youth achieve a Year 12 qualification, as a minimum. Our future prosperity is dependent on having a skilled and literate workforce.

Rating: 6

#### Additional Comments

Schools cannot teach children if they do not attend. Governments need to use a carrot or stick approach to student attendance. Families should be either penalised if their children do not achieve a 90% attendance rate (a reduction in payments, if they receive government benefits), or rewarded with a monetary bonus at the end of each year if their children attend school 90%+ of the time. It is our experience that the young people who miss the most school are the children who most need to be there and are, often, from our most vulnerable families. Unfortunately, many low SES families do not value education and don't care if their children attend. The results of this are clear to see. Students (15 years old) from the lowest SES quartile are, on average, 2 ½ years of schooling behind students from the highest SES quartile (PISA 2012).

At present, there are no consequences for families if their children do not attend school. We are failing these children (and sabotaging their futures), by allowing this to continue.

We need to make sure that all young people have strong language, literacy and numeracy skills. The Industry Skills Council 2011 paper, 'No More Excuses', highlights the critical need for improvements in language, literacy and numeracy skills and noted the following key points:

- Language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) are the essential underpinning skills that enable people to be productive in their work, to continue to learn and develop, and to participate fully in society.
- Literally millions of Australians have insufficient LLN skills to benefit fully from training or to participate effectively at work
- The situation looks as if it could be getting worse, not better: the LLN performance of Australian students has, over the past decade, worsened in comparison to other OECD countries.