



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

Submitter: South Australian Secondary Principals' Association
Submitting as a: Peak body
State: SA

Summary

The Prime Minister wants Australia to become “more productive, more innovative, more technologically sophisticated and more imaginative”. This has contributed to a growing understanding that, for our nation to transform to a more enterprising, innovative economy, our schools must focus on the application of the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities.

The two measurements of student performance valued by secondary education leaders are: the awarding of a Senior Secondary certificate, and the inclusion in this certification of a verifiable level of satisfactory development and application of the Capabilities. SASPA advocates the use of key milestones and transition points leading up to senior schooling (i.e., junior primary to middle primary; middle primary to upper primary; upper primary to junior secondary; junior secondary to senior secondary) as touchstones to either acknowledge satisfactory development of disciplinary knowledge and Capability development or as alerts for targeted interventions. By taking such an approach the Capabilities would provide an important “through-line” from early childhood, through the primary and secondary years and into adult life.

Placing increased weight on educational success expressed in these terms will challenge our schooling systems. There is an existing model of validating teacher judgement of student achievement – moderation - that stands-up well in the high stakes environment of senior secondary, and which could easily be adapted and applied to key milestones or transition points.

Equity is about giving educators what they need to enable all young people to be successful. This means doing four things: improving the quality of teaching in our schools; increasing school leaders’ capacity to undertake the teacher improvement work; allocating resources to those students with the greatest learning needs, and improving the distribution of our most capable teachers and leaders to the schools and communities where they will have the greatest impact.

Main submission

The Prime Minister has made a compelling case for Australians to be transformed to become “more productive, more innovative, more technologically sophisticated and more imaginative”. This has contributed to a growing understanding that, for our nation to transform to a more enterprising, innovative economy, our schools must focus on the application of knowledge through the attitudes and values, and skills and processes, represented by the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities.

Such a view is consistent with the OECD 2030 Framework which sees 21st century learning as a braiding of attitudes and values, skills and knowledge.

Whilst curriculum content still holds some importance, it will be the development and application of the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities through disciplinary and inter-disciplinary knowledge contexts that will prepare our school graduates to act, and interact, as effective global citizens and to contribute to an enterprising and innovative economy.

To achieve this re-purposing of teaching and learning, and assessment and reporting, we need the Commonwealth Government to work with the States and Territories (and the various sectors) to create the enabling conditions in their jurisdictions for such work to occur in all schools (and systems).

Recommendation 1:

That the States and Territories be required to work together with the Commonwealth to develop a nationally consistent approach to the explicit teaching, assessing and reporting on each learner’s development of, and progress with, the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities.

Recommendation 2:

That the Commonwealth work with ACARA to reduce the disciplinary content demands of the Australian Curriculum by approximately 33%. By doing so, the necessary time can be created for the amplification of the teaching and learning, and assessment and reporting, of the General Capabilities.

We must measure what we value. The two measurements of value for leaders of secondary education are:

- the awarding of a Senior Secondary certificate, and
- the inclusion in this certification of a verifiable level of satisfactory development of each of the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities.

If this is what we value for graduates of 13 years of schooling, we must use the key milestones and transition points leading up to senior schooling (i.e., junior primary to middle primary; middle primary to upper primary; upper primary to junior secondary; junior secondary to senior secondary) as touchstones to either

acknowledge satisfactory development of disciplinary knowledge and General Capability development or as alerts for targeted interventions.

The need for every young Australian to successfully complete 13 years of schooling has never been more important. Given the economy and the society these graduates will participate in, and help to shape, they need to exit secondary education as “expert learners”. By this we mean that all students have demonstrated competence in the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities and have the confidence to transition their application of them to the various life and work challenges of the 21st century.

Placing increased weight on educational success expressed in these terms will be a challenge for our schooling systems. However, there is an existing model of validating teacher judgement of student achievement – moderation - that has stood-up well in the high stakes environment of the senior secondary years. Internal and external moderation processes could easily be adapted to other levels of schooling (and be strengthened to include increased emphasis on a student’s demonstration of the General Capabilities), The practice of moderation affirms that it is the teacher who is best placed to make a valid assessment of a student’s performance against the achievement standards, but that the profession must ensure that a teacher’s judgement is accurate or within accepted tolerance levels. Such moderation exercises combine assessment rigour with on-going professional learning and could be scaled-up to focus on blended student performance (i.e. subject achievement and general capability progression) across the junior primary, upper primary and junior secondary years.

Recommendation 3:

That the States and Territories be required to work together with the Commonwealth to develop a nationally consistent approach to the moderation of blended student performance (i.e. subject achievement and general capability progression) applied to the key transition points (i.e., junior primary to middle primary; middle primary to upper primary; upper primary to junior secondary; junior secondary to senior secondary). By doing this, we make the General Capabilities the “through-line” from early child hood, through primary and secondary education and into adult life (on the understanding that one’s progress with, and development of, is a life-long pursuit).

Recommendation 4:

That the States and Territories be required to support the development of expert teachers in learning and assessment design.

Recommendation 5:

That the States and Territories create the time to have teacher moderation of student performance undertaken twice per year (i.e. internal moderation once per year and external moderation once per year).

On his October 2017 tour of Australia, Pasi Sahlberg stipulated that any investment in equity had to be about “giving educators what they need to enable all young people to be successful”. In Australia this means doing four things:

- improving the quality of teaching in our schools;
- increasing school leaders’ capacity to undertake the teacher improvement work;
- allocating resources to those students with the greatest learning needs, and
- improving the distribution of our most capable teachers and leaders to the schools and communities where they will have the greatest impact.

Since the research of Crevola and Hill (1992) we have known that there is more variance in quality between a school’s classrooms (i.e. 33 – 55% variance) than there is between schools (i.e. 7 – 18% variance). Therefore, the real impact the Commonwealth Government must seek is to develop the capacity of every teacher to produce expert learners (regardless of the learner’s geographic, social or personal circumstances).

We need teachers to be more expert in learning and assessment design. We need them to acknowledge and understand each learner’s stage of development. We need them to apply a blend of challenge and support that will “stretch” student’s achievement in keeping with the ambition of “at least one year’s achievement growth for one year’s engagement with learning”. As per Finding #2 from the McKinsey Research paper, “How to Improve Educational Outcomes: New Insights from Data Analytics”, we need our teachers to get the balance right between direct instruction and inquiry-based learning to achieve the best outcomes from students. Lastly, we need our teachers to balance the focus on capability development and disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary knowledge acquisition (i.e. skill development and deep knowledge). To do this, they will need to design learning and assessment through the lens of the General Capabilities using the knowledge contexts of the subject-based curriculum.

There are already pockets of highly effective practice that can be leveraged to achieve improvements to pedagogy on a larger scale. In South Australia, the SACE Board’s Institute for Educational Assessors is a good example of a systemic approach to improving learning and assessment design, and to validate teacher judgement of student performance in an achievement or standards-based curriculum.

The transformation of how teachers approach the design of learning and assessment is a massive piece of work. It follows, therefore, that we need school leaders to be

better equipped to challenge and support their teachers through this major reform. The challenge is to make sure that every school leader has the necessary skills and abilities and can use them effectively in the context of the school (and community) they lead. This will mean an investment in “the profession leading the profession” to increase leadership capabilities. However, even the best leaders, in the best of circumstances may not be able to transform the practice of some teachers ill-suited to the profession. In such situations, school leaders need systemic and/or sector support to expedite unsatisfactory performers from the profession.

Recommendation 6:

That the Commonwealth work with the States and Territories to ensure that each jurisdiction has fair, effective and efficient policies and procedures that expedite unsatisfactory performers from the profession. Appropriate levels of support must be provided to school principals undertaking this important quality control process.

“Social inequalities arise in education because the demands made by the curriculum outstrip the cultural resources of the schools their children attend... The aim of the public high school is to provide every child with opportunity to acquire the higher forms of knowledge on which our economic and social organization is based.”

Professor Richard Teese, For the Common Weal, 2014

To have every young Australian successfully complete 13 years of schooling we must continue to distribute education resources to address the social inequalities that exist in our society. But we must make sure that these resources are targeted to improving educational leadership and teaching practice in schools. This is because it will be their work that will create the “achievement stretch” necessary for the national average of “at least one year’s achievement growth for one year’s engagement with learning” to be exceeded by those students with the greatest educational need. We can narrow the performance gap, but not without this investment in increasing the professional capacity of our educational leaders and teachers (and ensuring that the communities with the greatest need have the best educational workforce possible).

Recommendation 7:

That the States and Territories be required to work together with the Commonwealth to develop centres of excellence in the development of educational leaders, “by the profession, for the profession”. This work must focus on principal preparation and on-going development of principals through-out their careers; i.e. an “end-to-end” approach.

Recommendation 8:

That the States and Territories have processes for principal development, principal selection and principal attraction and retention that are geared to achieving a “right person, right place, right time” outcome for every school community.

Recommendation 9:

That the States and Territories be required to work together with the Commonwealth to develop incentivised approaches to the attraction and retention of our most capable teachers and leaders to the schools and communities where they will have the greatest impact.

Recommendation 10:

That the Commonwealth work with the States and Territories to develop improved conditions for school principals. These conditions should include appropriate levels of executive support (including an executive assistant, an appropriately trained business manager and adequate numbers of deputy and/or assistant principals commensurate to the size of the educational service being provided) and attractive remuneration packages (i.e. recognising the value that principal has to their local community and to the sector they serve). Such a step would be a strategic response to the current a low supply / high demand educational executive leadership situation.

Recommendation 11:

That the Commonwealth directs targeted funding to the States and Territories for the reduction to the amount of face-to-face time teachers have in classrooms. The effect of this reform will be an increase in the time teachers have to undertake collaborative professional capacity building in their schools undertaken with the challenge and support of their principal.

Our contention is that we do not need more governance, we simply need better governance. Essentially, we need a governance model that focuses on what really matters (student development of the General Capabilities, teacher capacity building and leadership development) so that long term planning and strategic actions can be realised. Such a governance model should balance its interest in the processes for improvement, as well as the impact these processes have on the objects for improvement (i.e. improvements to student, teacher and leadership performance).

Recommendation 35 in “The Review of Funding for Schooling” (Gonski 2011) refers to a national Schools Resourcing Body which would require support and funding to conduct: “Ongoing research, analysis and data improvement to ensure continuous improvement within schooling sectors”. We contend that if this national body is established, it needs to place as much emphasis on each sector’s strategy for improvement (particularly how social and educational inequalities are to be

addressed) as they do on the improvement impact derived from those strategies. The focus must be a balance between intention and impact.

All schools undertake annual review processes that provide the basis for communicating to their community (which may also include an educational authority) the extent to which their stated plans for improving student performance have been effective.

In some jurisdictions, this annual review process is validated through an external school review undertaken at regular intervals of either 3, 4 or 5 years. These school reviews identify effective strategies for building and sustaining improvement. Currently such understandings of highly effective practice are not systematically harvested. There is an opportunity for the Commonwealth to seek a nationally consistent approach to school reviews where one of the strategic intentions would be the collection of effective school practices for adoption, adaptation or sharing.

Recommendation 12:

That the Commonwealth establish a representative educational advisory group to provide advice to the national Schools Resourcing Body on highly effective practices and high impact interventions in schools (harvested from annual and periodic school review processes). That advice should also be extended to include recommended responses to under-performing schools.

It is crucial that this educational advisory group operates under strong and transparent guidelines with a diverse and capable membership. The advisory body must ensure that it is credible and truly representative in that, at the least, it contains school leaders from different sectors, and is culturally appropriate and inclusive.

Elsewhere in this submission the practice of professional networks for the moderation of learning tasks and assessment standards has been discussed. The propagation of such an approach serves at least three purposes: affirmation of teacher judgement (or evidence for grade-band change); identification of highly effective learning and assessment design, and networked professional learning.

Recommendation 13:

That the Commonwealth work with the States and Territories to have a nationally consistent approach to the institutionalising of moderation processes and networks. Such a step would assist in identifying exemplary practice (including high impact interventions) and enable its sharing within local networks and, with sector support, provide the basis for large-scale sharing (i.e. meta-network or system-wide sharing).

The concept of “expert learners” has been discussed elsewhere in this submission, and the teaching, assessment and reporting of the General Capabilities was advocated as the key step towards producing this disposition in all students. SASPA’s

view is that this is the gift we should aim to give all young people after the completion of 13 years of schooling. If this became our agreed challenge nationally, what strategies would we advocate to meet such a challenge? How could we best achieve alignment between these strategies?

Our answer lies in the creation of a national agreement (beyond 2008 Melbourne Declaration) where there is a strong congruence between teaching quality, school leadership and how schools (and/or systems) meet their responsibilities in developing “expert learners” which includes the teaching, assessment and reporting of the General Capabilities.

On the understanding that significant Commonwealth investment will be made to increase teacher effectiveness and improve the capacity of school leaders to improve teachers’ practice, it follows that we would need some nationally consistent measure to check the extent to which these school and/or system responsibilities have been successful. Quality assurance measures, therefore, will need to go beyond measures of student achievement (i.e. annual growth in each of the learning areas of the Australian Curriculum and commensurate development of the General Capabilities) to include peer review of teacher and leader performance. Such a practice is consistent with what occurs in other professions.

Recommendation 14:

That the investment the Commonwealth makes in the development of teachers and school leaders includes a system for peer review that affirms the quality of individuals within the profession (and, where necessary, provides specific programs for those who need accelerated growth or mentoring support).

One of the significant impacts of the NDIS will be more young people with disabilities being supported to live, work and socialise in our communities. These young people do and can make positive contributions to our rich cultural mix in Australia. Explicit teaching and focus on General Capabilities provide the opportunity for this group of vulnerable children and students to further develop core skills to enable them to make important contributions to their communities, the economy and higher levels of understanding and tolerance.

Learner dispositions is something that we believe needs more attention at the national level. Schools are responsible for educating the whole child, and we are seeing significant change to the nature and variety of learner dispositions apparent in our classrooms. There are more and more students presenting with various forms of mental illness and these can be inhibitors to learning growth. The rise of non-verified disabilities amongst the student population and the implications this has for teachers trying to meet the needs of all learners is something we cannot continue to ignore nationally.

Mindfulness and wellbeing for learning are as important in the education sectors as the challenge and rigour of the academic learning program.

There are a plethora of interventions, programs and strategies currently being adopted by schools, systems and sectors. Programs that address the family issues alongside the school-based issues are more likely to achieve the type of traction we seek for a wellbeing for learning outcome.

Recommendation 15:

That the Commonwealth work with the States and Territories to ascertain the best high impact well-being for learning programs. These would be the programs where families and schools experience improved capacity to work with the child.

Change is resource hungry. In education, time for collaborative professional growth is one of the most valued and impactful resources. The more agendas for educational change, the less capacity we have as a profession to satisfy those agendas.

We are a nation of 24.7 million people of which 3.8 million are enrolled in schools. Despite being a small nation by population standards we have 6 States, 2 Territories and the Commonwealth all having a stake in what happens in education. In whatever 2018 agreement follows the Melbourne Declaration (2008) we must take a “less is more” approach – one that seeks a strong alignment between the strategies we advocate to meet an agreed and clearly articulated national challenge.