



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

Submitter: Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals  
Submitting as a: Peak body  
State: Vic.

### Summary

The Commonwealth should provide the national aspirations and direction for education, but the States should set state wide goals and targets relevant to their contexts.

Individuals with practical experience leading and managing schools must have input into all decisions about matters pertaining to schools.

Principal certification, if it is to be introduced, should not be mandated and should only be managed by groups led and respected by the profession.

Services for students should, wherever possible, be provided by staff within schools.

Online assessment tools should be developed in all curriculum areas to ensure that teachers can access timely feedback on student progress. National benchmarks would allow schools to monitor the growth of their students against 'like' Australian schools.

Valid and reliable teacher, principal, parent and student surveys should be developed and normed nationally.

Universities should be encouraged to introduce or extend teacher training courses in the area of special education.

Research into school effectiveness and improvement should be conducted to produce a national evidence base for Australia.

Innovation within schools must be explicitly encouraged and supported.

### Main submission

The Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, VASSP, is an incorporated body under the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012. The Association represents the majority of government secondary school principals and assistant principals across the state. VASSP is a key education stakeholder in Victoria. The Mission and Purposes of the Association are as follows:

1. The Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals (VASSP) is a professional association established to support, develop and strengthen educational leadership capabilities in secondary schools. The mission of the Association is to shape the future of state education through influential and progressive leadership, ensuring all students receive the highest quality education.
2. The purpose of the Association is to improve educational outcomes for government school students through:
  - a) enhancing the capacity of school leaders (principal, assistant principals and aspirants) to deliver quality education
  - b) providing high quality professional services and support to school leaders
  - c) providing high quality and relevant professional learning for school leaders
  - d) advocating for education on behalf of government school leaders at state, federal and international levels
  - e) persuading and influencing key stakeholders in the pursuit of educational excellence.

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

The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008) provides school systems, schools and school leaders with a national shared point of reference. Almost ten years on these goals remain aspirational.

Goal 1 Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence.

Goal 2 All young Australians become:

- successful learners
- confident and creative individuals
- active and informed citizens.

It is hoped that the Commonwealth, States and Territories through the Education Council will review this Declaration. The Commitments to Action identified in the 2008 Declaration should be reviewed and evaluated with a view to developing the 2018 Declaration.

It is appropriate for the Commonwealth through the Education Council to set the national goals and articulate a set of national aspirations. It is appropriate for the States to determine specific state-wide goals and targets.

What can we do to improve and how can we support ongoing improvement over time?

## School Funding

- The introduction of the national Student Resource Standard is welcomed, as is the proposal for greater transparency across systems. All schools and school systems that are provided with public funds must be held to the same levels of accountability and transparency.
- Government secondary school principals would generally prefer to receive funding to locate services within their schools. For example: principals would prefer to employ social workers and counsellors at the school level to respond to the rise in mental health issues experienced by young people. A 'casework referral' system to access services is not appropriate for the needs of adolescents who frequently require an 'immediate' service. The regional location of these types of 'supports' for schools requires extra levels of regional funding and administration. These funds would be better directed to schools.
- It is apparent that there are some anomalies in Victoria with respect to the collection of 'nationally consistent data' relating to student need. There must be improved monitoring and oversight of this data to ensure that school funding is genuinely needs based.
- The decision making related to infrastructure funding should be managed as close to the school level as possible. There are past instances where money has been wasted when the expenditure has been directed by the Commonwealth; examples include Rudd government initiatives such as Computers in Schools and Building the Education Revolution.

## School Performance Data

- The Australian Curriculum and the Victorian Curriculum provide comprehensive frameworks for schools to develop 'context relevant' curriculum for their students, along with standards and assessment. Further research into effective teaching strategies should be conducted within Australia.
- The NAPLAN testing regime allows systems and schools to monitor performance and progress. These measures of academic achievement, along with senior school indicators, are published by ACARA on the MySchool website. This information is useful in benchmarking performance and many families value the independent 'snapshot' of student achievement provided by NAPLAN.
- As a respected national body, ACARA would be well placed to develop tools that would enable teachers to monitor student progress in real time. The development of national high quality online assessment tools could have a

significant impact on student learning. They would provide instant feedback for teachers and facilitate real time monitoring of student growth.

- A significant measure of secondary school success is student retention. This data is not published on the MySchool website. Student retention in education or training is an important measure of success. ACARA should collect and publish this data.
- A secure pathway in education, training or employment beyond school is also an important measure of success. Immediate post school destinations are collected and published. Tracking student destinations post-secondary school over a longer period would provide evidence of secure pathways.
- Victorian government schools currently administer an annual student opinion survey, staff opinion survey and parent opinion survey. A group such as ACER would have the expertise to develop national opinion surveys with a high degree of reliability and validity. This would enable a broader evaluation of performance and benchmarking of 'like' school performance.
- The development of a highly reliable and validated instrument to measure student resilience and wellbeing that is based on Australian norms and Australian research would be of value to schools and school systems.
- The development of a national survey to gauge principal opinion would value the role of school leaders and honour their expertise. The data from such a survey could be used to inform Commonwealth and state policy development and implementation. There are different surveys undertaken that monitor principal health, wellbeing and workload. What is missing is the opinions of principals on matters relating to school effectiveness and improvement.

#### Teacher Education

- A specific Australian normed instrument to assess non-academic capabilities for entry into teacher education courses should be developed to ensure national consistency across teacher education providers.
- There is evidence from Finland that direct employment by schools of special education teachers, who are trained to intervene when students fall behind in their learning, has a significant impact on student outcomes. Special education has a relatively narrow focus in Australia and anecdotal evidence suggests that recruiting high quality special education teachers is almost impossible in Victoria. There is an opportunity for the Commonwealth to promote a broader definition of special education. This could be achieved through teacher training scholarships and incentives for tertiary institutions to develop courses to train special education teachers.

- Principals report a high degree of satisfaction with graduate teachers who have had experience in another career. The pre-requisites for teacher education courses for mid-career professionals should be broadened to include industry experience and prior knowledge. Appropriate assessment, including proficiency testing, could be developed to support the selection process.

#### Principal Certification

- Any principal certification process should be state based and must be managed by a government authorised body. In Victoria, this would be the Bastow Institute for Educational Leadership. Principal certification must not be mandated.
- A national body could accredit state based principal certification programs. This body must be highly credible with the profession and accountable to government, such as Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership.

#### National Research

- There are many examples of international research about the best performing schools and school systems. There are many examples in Australia of high performing schools and also of schools that have been 'turned around' in challenging circumstances. The Commonwealth Government should commission research that is specifically Australian based. What works in this country and in what context? This 'evidence' of Australian best practice could then be used by schools and school systems to drive improvement at scale.

#### Innovation and Excellence

- The national aspiration for education can be summed simply – 'to raise the bar and close the gap'. To achieve this there must be a deliberate focus on both 'closing the gap' and 'raising the bar'. Innovation and excellence must be priority. The Commonwealth Government could provide incentives and support for schools to develop innovative projects that are rigorously evaluated. Areas for innovation could include: STEM, STEAM, digital tools, global competencies and entrepreneurial learning. The Leading Schools Fund, introduced as part of the Blueprint for Government Schools in 2003, is an example from Victoria. This program explicitly funded innovative projects that were rigorously evaluated and promoted across the system.

Are there barriers to implementing these improvements?

The inequitable distribution of funding – needs based funding must be a priority.

The politicisation of education is demoralising for principals and their school communities.

The increasing number of groups wanting to influence education to further their own agendas is a distraction for schools.

The increasing expectation that schools can 'fix' complex social issues.