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18th July 202

Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM (Chair)
Expert panel
Quality Initial Teacher Training Review
ITEReview@dese.gov.au

Dear Ms Paul and the Expert Panel,

The Teaching Schools Alliance Sydney (TSAS) wishes to provide a response to the Quality Initial Teacher Training Review Discussion Paper.

The TSAS is one of a number of Teaching Schools established in partnership with Alphacrucis College through their Hub model as an alternate approach to initial teacher education. This submission details our experience establishing and operating this Teaching School, while also addressing a number of the specific questions identified in the Discussion Paper.

We would welcome any opportunity to speak further to the panel regarding the TSAS and our partnership with Alphacrucis College.

Warm regards,



Dr Caitlin Munday
Director

Teaching Schools Alliance Sydney (TSAS) ITE Review Submission

Prepared Dr Caitlin Munday, Director Teaching Schools Alliance Sydney

Background

This submission is made on behalf of the Teaching Schools Alliance Sydney (TSAS). The TSAS is one of a number of Teaching Schools (St Philip's Teaching School and St Thomas Aquinas Teaching Schools Institute) developed in partnership with Alphacrucis College (AC) through their Hub model. The Hub model draws on clinical teaching models from around the world to offer an alternate approach to Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

The TSAS was formed by five independent schools in late 2019: St Andrew's Cathedral School; Blue Mountains Grammar School; The Scots College; William Clarke College; and Inaburra School. It was formed as a response to systemic social concerns about teacher efficacy and retention, as well as more specific threats to the independent sector, which included:

- High attrition rates in the profession
- The quality and classroom readiness of ITE graduates
- A lack of supply of ethos-aligned teachers, and
- The disengagement of schools in ITE

These concerns mirror the challenges raised by the Quality ITE Review Discussion Paper.

The TSAS seeks to provide an immersive, contextually responsive, and deeply integrated pathway into the classroom by delivering undergraduate (BEd) and postgraduate (MTeach) teacher education degrees in partnership with Alphacrucis College, embedded in schools and underpinned by a Christian worldview. The experience of a Teacher Trainee with the TSAS is built around four elements:

- **Tertiary study** (Undergraduate or Postgraduate ITE) - delivered by Alphacrucis College in a variety of modes for the TSAS cohort.
- **School Experience** - employment as a Teacher's Assistant 1-2 days a week in an Alliance school supported by an experienced Mentor Teacher, commencing with a minimum of 6 months in a primary school classroom.
- **Bespoke Sessions** - special weekly training for the TSAS cohort, shaped by the specific needs of the Trainees, about learning to be a teacher in an Alliance school. These sessions are designed and facilitated in partnership with Alliance schools who share the hosting of these sessions each term. In this way experienced teachers and school leaders are actively involved in skills-based training for ITE students. Topics include: vocational formation and teaching philosophy; to assessment approaches and design, behaviour management and parent engagement.

- **Visiting Fellow Lectures** - Annual lectures delivered to the cohort and members of Alliance schools by leading educators and thinkers nationally and internationally.

As of 2021 the TSAS has 13 Trainees, across two cohorts, placed in Alliance schools, 7 of whom are Postgraduate students (MTeach) and 6 of whom are Undergraduate students (BEd).

The content of this submission draws predominantly on our experience forming and operating a Teaching School. While this submission does address a number of questions raised by the Discussion Paper specifically, it supports the AC Hub model and the formation of Teaching Schools, like the TSAS, as an integrated approach that might address the various challenges faced by ITE more holistically.

PART A - Attracting and selecting high-quality candidates into the teaching profession

2. What changes to admissions and degree requirements, including recognition of prior experience, would better attract and support suitable mid- and late-career professionals from other fields transition into the profession and become quality teachers?

Our experience suggests that attracting high-quality candidates to the teaching profession, including those transitioning from other fields, is best encouraged by the provision of a high-quality ITE programs that value professionalism and integrated practice.

Of the 13 ITE students (Trainees) in the TSAS, 9 are either career changers or postgraduate students. They identify several factors as drawing them to the TSAS program as an alternate model of ITE offered through AC, as opposed to more traditional ITE programs:

- *Experiential pedagogy that addresses the theory/practice divide* - The AC/TSAS partnership enables a greater integration between teaching practice and educational theory. Extensive school experience from Day 1, enables ITE students to make connections between what they observe and experience in practice and what they learn in theory. Further, such a model enables those delivering tertiary courses to draw on and integrate ITE student experience in the school and classroom into their assessment models and course content meaningfully and on an ongoing basis. This is a significant departure from traditional models of ITE where professional experiences occur in the latter half of a degree and are generally limited to 4-6 week blocks.
- *Extensive school experience and employment* – ITE students have employment from Day 1, and the possibility of employment at the conclusion of their degree. As raised by the Discussion Paper (2021, p.7) for those counting the financial and professional cost of a career change, this provides some security and incentive.
- *Professional mentoring* - The provision of a mentor for the duration of a student's ITE by an experienced industry professional implies a commitment to and investment in an individual Trainee's progress and growth

This suggests that to attract career changers into the profession of teaching more ought to be done to offer ITE that values experiential education and integrates theory and practice; that provides greater opportunities for engagement with, and employment within schools;

and that supports the professional growth of a student in meaningful ways. The TSAS, and the AC Hub model, provide such an offering.

3. How can we increase ITE completion rates so that quality ITE students graduate and pursue careers as quality teachers?

The TSAS has found the application of a rigorous interview process in the identification of Trainees, with a particular emphasis on non-academic characteristics, has been effective in identifying suitable candidates for a career in teaching. This process includes an informal interview prior to application, the submission of a formal application, followed by a panel interview with stakeholders representing TSAS, AC and the schools. Following this, the applicant is required to facilitate a short lesson or activity to a group of students. They are observed and then offered feedback by a panel member and are provided with the opportunity to re-teach the same lesson to a different group of students. Should they be successful at this phase of the application process, they are invited to a final interview with an Alliance school principal.

Our experience suggests that the rigor of this selection process has had a beneficial impact on the admission, progress, completion, and retention of ITE students for several reasons:

- *It values the agency of schools by re-engaging them in ITE and the shape of their future workforce.* As expert communities of practice, schools are best placed to identify suitable candidates for ITE.
- *It promotes an integrated pathway for a student/Trainee from ITE into employment.* Successful candidates receive employment within an Alliance school as a Teacher's Aid from the commencement of their tertiary study, as well as the receipt of 50% tuition scholarship. This substantial investment by a school increases the likelihood of future employment for the ITE student.
- *It raises the profile of the teaching profession, and dissuades the application of those who are not committed to it.* A competitive application, interview and selection process raises the profile of the profession, while also supporting the early identification of those unsuitable for a career in teaching.
- *Through the teaching experience, and the interview process, multiple opportunities are provided for candidates to demonstrate non-academic characteristics,* including: EQ and interpersonal awareness (with young people and adults); responsiveness to feedback; agility and flexibility; as well as commitment to, and personal investment in the teaching profession.

4. What more can be done to address issues with workforce supply in some subject areas (particularly maths) and schools?

As identified in the opening statement of this submission, two of the factors underpinning the formation of the TSAS for Alliance member schools, were the lack of supply of ethos-aligned teachers, and the disengagement of schools from ITE programs. The schools within the Alliance are faith-based schools within the Independent sector. Through AC and the TSAS something has already been done to meet the demands of this sector. The Hub model

developed by Alphacrucis College, with whom the TSAS partners, re-embeds initial teacher training back into a formative environment (the school). Through a commitment to an 'ecology of learning', learning that is experiential and deeply responsive to context, this model specifically links the formation of future teachers to the ethos of schools.

In this way, the Hub model flips the conventional model of teacher training by bringing higher education onsite to local school clusters. This strategic approach to ITE allows the schools to sponsor annual cohorts of quality pre-service teachers and provide clinical training from day one. It enables a communal approach to teacher training embedded in local knowledge and the unique ethos of the schools.

For a more extensive overview of the Alphacrucis Hub Model please see its submission to the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review.

7. What more can ITE providers and employers do to ensure ITE students are getting the practical experience they need before they start their teaching careers?

9. How can leading teachers, principals and schools play a greater role in supporting the development of ITE students?

The experience of the TSAS suggests that ITE providers and employers can do much more to ensure that ITE students receive the practical experience they need prior to commencing their teaching career. Most significantly, we suggest that beyond practicum experiences or professional placements, ITE students ought to have:

- Greater access to schools:
 - from the commencement of their ITE program and for its duration
 - with the opportunity to develop a relationship at depth, such that they come to understand the distinct attributes of a community of practice, while also being;
 - exposed to a range of different schools and school types
- Greater breadth of school-based experiences
 - Both within and beyond the classroom (ie. Induction through to parent-teacher interviews)
- Ongoing support of an experienced Mentor Teacher
- Skills-based training from experience teachers and school leaders

Such access would enable an ITE student to better understand and navigate the complex ecosystem within schools, the differences (and similarities) between schools, as well as the rhythms of the school year. It would also provide them with a more robust picture of a teacher's work, more extensive opportunity to experience and engage in such work, and the relational structure and support to grow through it.

Through the TSAS, a Trainee (ITE student), is provided with access, experience and support. The employment of a Trainee from day one in a school as a Teacher's Aide, with a dedicated Mentor supports their integration into a school community. As an employee of the school they are invited into wider school life (for example, Induction, Professional Learning Days and

School Communications), are a member of a team, and are held to the standards of professional conduct.

Apart from a brilliant mentor teacher, it has been wonderful how welcoming and helpful other staff are. I have spent time with a number of secondary staff to interview for assignments, and they were so willing and positive to share their time and expertise. Also the primary staff in helping me feel included and part of the team. Such a privilege. (Deb, TSAS Teacher Trainee, 2021)

The Mentor Teacher acts as a model of 'good' teaching practice, while also guiding the Trainee through their teaching experience. They work together to devise an individualized program of goal-setting, planning, action, reflection and feedback to support the growth of the Trainee. This relationship benefits both the Trainee and Mentor Teacher:

Sam is a fantastic student teacher. She is committed and wants to learn and be challenged. Working with her has been the highlight. It's also been a truly valuable experience for my own professional development having someone in my room - it makes you as the mentor reflect deeply and critically about your own teaching (Jack, TSAS Mentor Teacher, 2020).

Further, the nature of the 'Alliance' ensures that Trainees are exposed to a range of different schools at depth. The Bespoke Sessions provide a dedicated opportunity for skills-based training from experienced teachers and leaders at point of need for Trainees. As one Trainee commented:

I loved how interactive and student-focused Bespoke sessions were this term. In particular, learning walks were the highlight of Bespoke sessions at XXXX. I gained a great insight into how XXXX connect both their vision for curriculum, and their values to in-class practices. It was so valuable to be able to hear from the students themselves, to see inside their classrooms, and to speak to different teachers. (Jess, TSAS Trainee 2021).

Enriching the practical experience of ITE students in such a way requires both the vision and investment of school leaders. Vision for strategic people management and succession planning, and substantial investment of financial and human resources. Further, it indicates the need for the establishment of partnerships-at-depth between ITE providers and schools. The opportunities offered to Trainees through the TSAS program are afforded because of the unique relationship between the TSAS, AC as the tertiary provider, and the schools within the Alliance.

In summary, the Teaching Schools Alliance Sydney, exists as one example of the Alphacrucis College Hub model in action. While still in its infancy, early evidence suggests that as an alternate approach to initial teacher education, it attends to a number of systemic challenges raised by the Review.

With thanks for your consideration.

Dr Caitlin Munday
Director, Teaching Schools Alliance Sydney