

IEUA  
Independent Education Union of Australia

**Submission to the Review to Achieve Educational  
Excellence in Australian Schools**

November 2017



## **Introduction**

1. The Independent Education Union of Australia (IEUA) is pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools.
2. The IEUA is the federally registered union that represents workers in Catholic, other faith-based and community independent schools across all states and territories of Australia. While the majority of our 75,000 members are teachers, our membership also includes workers engaged as teacher aides, administrative staff, gardeners, cleaners and caterers.
3. Membership of the IEUA is also diverse in respect to the types of workplaces included in its coverage. These range from very large urban schools with significant resources to extremely small rural schools with very limited resources and include a wide variety of faith based and non-denominational schools.
4. The Union appreciated the opportunity to meet with Mr David Gonski AC and Mr Terrey Arcus AM, both members of the Review panel, prior to this submission being prepared.

## **Background**

5. Over recent decades, a multitude of major reviews and inquiries into school education have been conducted by federal and state governments.
6. For instance, in December 1990, the Schools Council published its seminal report, "Australia's teachers: An Agenda for the Next Decade", which set out a long-term agenda for action, based on ideas about how effective teaching could be recognised, supported and rewarded through developing more

varied and defined career paths that combine incentives and opportunities for improving classroom performance.

7. In the intervening decades, repeated government inquiries and reviews have re-examined the same issues and questions over and over again.
8. IEUA believes that the panel should undertake a comprehensive audit of reports and recommendations from previous parliamentary inquiries, reviews and commissioned research which have terms of reference relevant to this Review.
9. Such an audit would give insight into whether well-founded recommendations have been implemented and whether they have made a difference to teaching and learning outcomes. This would be a valuable service to the education and broader community and would provide a thoughtful and cautionary foundation for any recommendations the panel might make.
10. IEUA believes that it is not a lack of research, knowledge or understanding which is the impediment to achieving educational excellence but a lack of will on the part of governments (federal and state), systems and school authorities to give reality to their rhetoric.
11. The IEUA submission following will concentrate on a small number of themes consistent with the findings and outcomes of the wealth of inquiry findings of recent decades.

### **National and International assessment**

12. The IEUA believes that the current focus on national and international assessments has impacted negatively on the teaching profession and outcomes for students in classrooms.

13. First, there is considerable recognition that comparison of Australian student results with those from city-states or nations that choose to only assess urban populations is unhelpful and misleading. Second, there remain serious reservations about the quality and efficacy of the assessment items between differing cultural and linguistic groups.
14. If the international ranking benchmark is what education administrators and ministers desire, Australia's 'relative performance' against other nations could be improved immediately by restricting the cohorts assessed,.
15. The IEUA continues to oppose NAPLAN, and related MySchool reporting, but given the likelihood that governments will continue to persist with these, the IEUA urgently calls for clarification by government regarding the actual purpose of NAPLAN.
16. The IEUA notes that there remain contradictory positions adopted in relation to NAPLAN's purpose, from being a diagnostic tool to an insight opportunity for school communities to look at 'success' and how it is achieved in other communities. Between these poles there are also alleged accountability and parental information attributes.
17. The one-off snapshot cannot simultaneously undertake all these roles and therefore, an urgent review of NAPLAN structure, focus and processes, in consultation with the entire school community, must be immediately undertaken.
18. THE IEUA believes that the narrow focus on national and international assessments does not serve our schools and students well. As noted in the 2011 Review of School Funding report, it is the breadth and consideration of the goals for schooling agreed by all governments in 2008 (through the Melbourne Declaration) that should drive educational excellence in our schools.

## **Transparency and Accountability Measures**

19. IEUA has significant concerns about the volume of student performance data that is currently collected, in particular the implications for teacher workload, time taken away from teaching and learning and narrowing of the curriculum.
20. The IEUA is also concerned about the lack of evidence base supporting the imposition of the increasing array of assessment and reporting tasks required by governments, school systems, system authorities and individual school leaders.
21. The recent Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM 2017, released October 24) highlights the international trend in this regard and notes that current and emerging 'accountability systems' increase teachers' workloads, complicate their tasks and necessitate additional skills. "Teachers believed that these reporting pressures also reflected low confidence in their professionalism" (GEM Report 2017 citing MacBeath 2012).
22. The GEM 2017 report notes that policy-makers must pursue two approaches in relation to this trend: first, critically examine current practice to minimise teacher and principal workload; and second, provide support to mitigate added workload and stress.
23. In addition, the assessment and reporting requirements must be evidence-based and fit for purpose to ensure that teaching and learning are correctly supported.

### **The Curriculum**

24. Despite a concluded, and reviewed, Australian Curriculum being introduced into schools the same unreasonable pressures continue to crowd teachers in their capacity to undertake their core work.

25. Media from 2017 alone reveals the continued push by vested interests to crowd the curriculum. There have been calls (some renewed) this year alone for gun safety education, antenatal education, financial literacy education, social skills education, 'lessons in life' education and mandatory water safety education..
26. In 1997 noted educationalist, Professor Andy Hargreaves, speaking at an Australian national conference on the Status of Teaching argued: "There's been a huge rhetorical move and ambition for the status and standing of teachers. Alongside all that, and quite separately, we have probably never lived in an age where there has been a more systematic, unyielding and pervasive de-professionalisation in the objective conditions of how teachers do their work... de-professionalisation in terms of things that are dumped unpredictably, in contradictory ways and in huge weights on teachers from a great height in terms of national or statewide directives."
27. Included among these huge weights continue to be the co-curricula expectations such as those mentioned above, that build on the historic pool of items such as bike education; manners education; pet care; grooming; safety on the farm; bushfire awareness; sport promotional activities; entrepreneurship; heritage in schools; science week; tree week; recycling; stranger danger; resilience education; sex education; safe schools... A list that just goes on and on.
28. In addition to well-intentioned curricula themes there are also calls for schools to be more responsive to ever-changing employer expectations. For example: capacity in critical thinking; planning and organization; initiative and enterprise; and team-work; and preparation for skills and jobs that 'do not yet exist'.
29. Teachers are navigating these demands alongside an already full curriculum while authorities seek to overlay further expectations.

30. The panel is urged to review the findings of earlier studies on the explicit and hidden curricula and make: 1) a strong statement for ongoing support of the Melbourne Declaration and; 2) a recommendation to governments to stop over-crowding the curriculum and allow teachers to teach.

### **Evidence based action**

31. Inquiries and reports have consistently pointed to the capacity and skill of the classroom teacher as the key 'in class' factor affecting student outcomes, yet successive governments have failed to action recommendations and evidence.

32. In commenting on recent OECD work, Andreas Schleicher, head of the OECD's PISA program, unequivocally states that: "[Teachers in high-performing education systems – according to PISA data] spend less time in the classroom than Australian teachers but they have much more time and opportunities actually to engage in the profession" (29 September 2017).

33. In a recent article by Centre for Independent Studies contributor Blaise Joseph the case was put to "give teachers fewer classes and more time outside the classroom" (19 October 2017).

34. The evidence base for the support of Australia's teachers is clear and has been argued ad infinitum since at least the 1996 Australian government senate inquiry "A Class Act". Again, the IEUA urges a review of the recommendations and the evidence base to support the teaching profession.

### **VET and School Transition**

35. There are a number of challenges facing VET in schools and the transition from school to work for many students, that require urgent support and resourcing.

36. In addition to the workload, assessment, reporting and preparation requirements of the Australian Curriculum and the formal year 12 certification requirements of different jurisdictions, VET teachers are required to undertake constant upgrading of programs, assessments and capabilities to keep up with industry standards. The IEUA believes that there should be a single administrative body in each jurisdiction to control and oversee VET requirements.
37. Data collection and storage of student work, in addition to the year 12 certification requirements, should be supported with additional time to either scan or keep hard copies of student competencies for ASQA audits.
38. Administration requirements to meet the oversight of multiple authorities means that additional support is required to cope with the everyday and increasing paperwork requirements.
39. Constantly changing frameworks create unnecessary workload issues and there needs to be a halt on the ever-changing content of units of competencies offered in the various framework courses.
40. Work placement visits of students should be resourced to occur during school time or teachers offered 'time in lieu'.
41. Teachers must be resourced and supported in meeting expectations and requirements to upgrade skills through time out of school and introduction of online learning, so that less teaching-time is spent away from class attending TAFE or equivalent courses.
42. The current funding for VET is insufficient to cater for the increasing number of students undertaking VET and the requirements of facilities to meet industry standards to deliver courses.
43. VET courses in schools need to be better supported publicly and locally, including through the provision of the necessary resources to: recognize the

increased numbers of students staying on to year 12 and their learning needs; have VET seen as a pathway for disengaged students; attract new graduate teachers into VET; make VET subjects attractive to students and recognized as an additional pathway other than university.

### **Student Data Collection**

44. Teacher preparation time and lesson time is being impacted by system mandated data collection. The following highlights an example from one typical Year Three classroom in one jurisdiction.
- a. 'Running Records' –: teachers required to prepare these for every student, every term. Each instance of testing equates to 20 min. Possibly more than one instance required for a child due to varying levels. Averaged to 30min per child -  $30\text{min} \times 30\text{ children} = 900\text{min} = 15\text{hrs}$  or 15hrs per term of time that the teacher is not instructing or directly supervising the class.
  - b. 'Progressive Achievement Testing' (PAT- by ACER) Comprehension, Grammar and Punctuation, Numeracy, Spelling. End of year testing. 40min per test per student
  - c. South Australian Spelling Test - up to 72 words depending on ability. 1-2 hours to administer plus marking time.
  - d. Data Walls - the concept of a Data Wall is not the problem. The teacher time taken to collect the data and then represent it on a card or sticker, is time that could be better spent by teachers on crafting their lessons and programs.
  - e. It should be remembered that these same students also participate in NAPLAN each year.
45. Accordingly the IEUA makes the following recommendations in the context of ever-increasing demands and expectations for 'accountability'.
- a. Trust teachers to test students against the curriculum.
  - b. Trust teachers to use the tools that they decide upon to monitor student progress.

- c. Free-up teachers from administering standardized tests so that they can effectively use classroom time for professionally tailored and crafted lessons.
- d. Unload teachers from the data entry and collection duties.
- e. Provide the resourcing ie a combination, or teacher-directed selection of:
  - 1. Smaller class sizes
  - 2. Increase in timetabled release-time
  - 3. F/T Teacher-assistants (1 for every 2-4 Teachers)
- f. Trust school leaders to lead their schools instead of having governments/systems continually interfering and pushing national/systemic (often political) agendas.

### **Graduate Teachers**

46. From their first day in the classroom graduate teachers are required to take full responsibility for their role. This is different to most other professional roles where graduates are able to work side by side with more experienced colleagues seeking advice when required whereas teachers need to wait until the end of the lesson or session.
47. Accordingly, The IEUA recommends:
- a. All graduate teachers participate in a well-structured and fully resourced induction and mentoring program that includes an experienced colleague as a mentor, structured lesson observations and release from face to face teaching to collaborate with colleagues, observe other teachers, attend professional learning courses and to assist in completing administrative tasks involved with lesson planning, student reporting and teacher registration requirements.
  - b. The Panel, after considering evidence of international and national best practice in the area of induction and mentoring, quantify and recommend the time required in hours per week across the number of years that will best enhance the chances of graduate teachers to build capacity and quality. Without such a recommendation many

graduate teachers will receive minimal, tokenistic support on commencing their career possibly leading to a lack of teacher quality and retention.

## **Conclusion**

48. The IEUA would welcome the opportunity to clarify or elaborate on any of the matters presented in this response.

**Chris Watt**  
**Federal Secretary**  
**Independent Education Union of Australia**  
**November 2017**