
QUT's Centre for Inclusive Education (C4IE) produces research on matters that affect students in school education with the aim of improving the educational experiences and outcomes of *all*, particularly those experiencing marginalisation. One of C4IE's objectives is to address knowledge gaps and positively influence attitudes by disseminating research evidence, engaging in public debate, and providing quality professional learning opportunities. C4IE makes this submission in response to the issues raised in the [Better and Fairer Education System - Consultation Paper](#).

Chapter 2: Improving student outcomes – including for students most at risk of falling behind

What are the most important student outcomes for Australian school students that should be measured in the next NSRA? Should these go beyond academic performance (for example, attendance and engagement)?

Attendance is important, but measurement must disaggregate for gender and for priority equity groups subgroups: NCCD/disability, Indigenous, in care. This measure also needs to be distinct from the use of exclusionary discipline (take homes, suspension, exclusion, expulsion). Currently it is not clear whether attendance data counts student disciplinary absences or not. If these data are recorded separately, it becomes easier to determine what is sitting behind non-attendance. For this reason, attendance must be measured in parallel with the inclusiveness of schools, lest the response to non-attendance be punitive and aimed at students/parents when the real problem may be the culture within the school. This “big stick” approach has been adopted by various Australian state governments in the form of fines for parents, but this will not address within-school factors that may lead to school refusal (e.g., bullying, unsupportive teaching, competitive cultures). The same goes for student engagement.

Engagement is a multidimensional construct that includes cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains (Lam et al., 2012); however, more important than knowing whether students are engaged is having some indication of what may be impacting engagement. Wellbeing is also more than engagement and it is not simply ‘within’ individuals. Students’ wellbeing is affected by multiple factors outside school but also by factors within school. School systems throughout Australia administer student surveys to tap student engagement and some also assess wellbeing, e.g., NSW uses “Tell them from me” developed by a team led by J.D. Willms in Canada; however, the data are not publicly available and prospective students/parents cannot access school reports. It is also unclear how well these measures tap wellbeing, or how these data inform school improvement.

It is critical that both **student wellbeing** and **school inclusiveness** are perceived as a priority equal to literacy and numeracy, and for this to occur they must be measured, and the data made public in the same way as NAPLAN data. Recent research with 1002 Australian junior secondary students used Brown's (1997) **connectedness to school** scale and Hanson and Kim's (2007)

school support scale. The benefit of these measures is that they are quick to administer and have been used in numerous studies internationally (Allen et al., 2017). These data are important to collect because they help to orient focus on contributors to student wellbeing that are most within the power of educators to address.

Lastly, students' **social-emotional development** is of fundamental importance in its own right, in addition to being a foundation for academic achievement, classroom behaviour and overall wellbeing. This is recognised in the United States where school systems are increasingly adopting social-emotional learning to build competencies across five areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Four of these competencies are embedded in the Australian Curriculum, however, because they are not assessed they are vulnerable to not being taught (Laurens et al., 2022). All five competencies are important and should be taught through embedding in everyday teaching practice, as well as through the delivery of evidence-based programs as part of a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) approach (Close et al., 2023). Further work is needed in Australia to develop practices and evidence-based programs for implementation in diverse contexts (Laurens et al., 2022).

What are the evidence-based practices that teachers, schools, systems and sectors can put in place to improve student outcomes, particularly for those most at risk of falling behind? Are different approaches required for different at-risk cohorts?

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is a new generation model that incorporates prevention and implementation sciences to organise service delivery for optimal coverage, efficiency and effectiveness (de Bruin et al., 2023). It stands on foundations built by Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behaviour Intervention Supports (PBIS) but is superior to both because it has been developed to support all three developmental domains: academic, social-emotional, and behavioural. Unlike RTI and PBIS, which are both depicted by tiered pyramid diagrams (sometimes together), MTSS is typically depicted using a Venn diagram representing the three developmental domains with the “whole child” at the centre and/or an umbrella representing the protections enabled through service delivery. The tiers in MTSS are the same as RTI/PBIS. Tier 1 represents universal provision, Tier 2 represents additional support targeting specific skills/areas, and Tier 3 represents intensive supports. Distinguishing the tiers is the length, frequency, and intensity of supports.

MTSS is guided by **Data-Based Decision Making**, which involves the use of screening and progress measures across all three developmental domains (de Bruin et al., 2023). Students are identified for support through universal screening, and the type of support is targeted to address the skills necessary. This is why screeners like the Phonics Screening Check is valuable. They help identify when students have not yet mastered critical skills (e.g., phonemic decoding) and will prevent those children being provided with yet more of the same instruction (e.g., being read to in small groups with a teacher aide or parent) or receiving disciplinary consequences, like time out or suspension (Graham, White, Tancredi et al., 2020), when they may really need help to learn how to regulate their emotions and make responsible decisions. It is critical that schools

are provided with, and that they adopt, a range of screening measures because these data are what inform the response. Newly published research from Queensland investigating intersectionality and disproportionate risk of suspension highlights the problems that emerge from applying a one-dimensional lens (Graham et al., 2023), particularly when it comes to disability. The response when a student has a disability is different than when they do not. For example, **students in out-of-home care** will benefit from trauma-informed practice but this will not address the needs of **students with a disability**. Similarly, an Indigenous student will benefit from culturally responsive practice, but this will not address the needs of an **Indigenous student** with a hearing impairment. The provision of reasonable adjustments and support must be tailored to address the specific barriers impacting individuals and this requires consultation with students, in addition to intelligent use of data and evidence.

How can all students at risk of falling behind be identified early on to enable swift learning interventions?

In addition to the use of universal screening measures, Australian school sectors and systems could better utilise **Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)** data to inform the types of programs needed in individual schools. The AEDC provides a basis for a holistic approach by measuring not just language and cognitive skills, but also social competence, emotional maturity, physical wellbeing, and communication and general knowledge. Language and cognitive skills at school entry are strongly related with later literacy and numeracy performance on measures such as the National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), but NAPLAN performance is also associated with early developmental vulnerability on the other four domains, with the likelihood of later difficulties in attaining literacy and numeracy increasing as the number of affected domains on the AEDC increases (Brinkman et al., 2013; Laurens et al., 2020). AEDC data should be informing the focus of MTSS implementation across the nation as these data will help to (1) contextualise service delivery for the sociocultural diversities that can exist across the nation, and (2) bring social-emotional competencies into the frame of reference thereby broadening educators' perspectives as to possible sources of and solutions to "learning problems".

Should the next NSRA add additional priority equity cohorts? For example, should it add children and young people living in out-of-home care and students who speak English as an additional language or dialect? What are the risks and benefits of identifying additional cohorts?

Students who speak English as an additional language or dialect should not be identified as an additional priority equity cohort because of the diversity within this group (see Creagh, 2016). Australia needs to progress to the development of more sophisticated measures of disadvantage, such as the **Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivations**. This speaks to the three Dropping off the Edge research reports funded by Jesuit Social Services, which were published in 2007, 2015 and 2021 (see Tanton et al., 2021). Establishment of a more sophisticated index of disadvantage, one that does not assume that low income, Indigeneity, or multilingualism is synonymous with deprivation, is possible in Australia.

Greater sophistication in the determination of disadvantage is critical in relation to distinguishing children living in out-of-home care as an additional priority equity group. We welcome and support this extension but *strongly recommend the inclusion of children with substantiated reports of actual or risk of harm who were not removed into care*. We refer to recent research drawing on the NSW Child Development Study (Laurens et al., 2020) which found that all children with reports to child protection services were more likely to attain below average, and less likely to attain above average, 3rd- and 5th-grade reading and numeracy, including children with reports that did not meet the threshold to indicate any risk of significant harm (i.e., those that did not meet the threshold for further investigation by child protection workers). All levels of involvement with child protection services also increased the likelihood of children receiving an early (primary school) out-of-school suspension (Laurens et al., 2021). After controlling for many (>20) other child, family, and neighbourhood factors that are also more common in children who are reported to child protection services, children with substantiated reports of actual or risk of harm but who were not removed into care demonstrated the worst academic attainment (>50% increase in their odds of poor academic achievement relative to children not reported to child protection services), and experienced comparable risk of suspension as children in OOHC (>300% increase in the odds of their being suspended relative to children not reported to child protection services).

What should the specific targets in the next NSRA be? Should the targets be different for primary and secondary schools? If so, how? What changes are required to current measurement frameworks, and what new measures might be required?

Currently, there are three current NSRA targets:

1. by 2025, Australia considered to be a high-quality and high-equity schooling system by international standards.
2. by 2031, increase the proportion of people (aged 20-24) attaining Year 12 or equivalent qualification to 96 per cent.
3. by 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (aged 20-24) attaining year 12 or equivalent qualification to 96 per cent.

The current NSRA targets are problematic because there are ways to achieve these targets which may lead to the concentration of some groups achieving poorer value outcomes than others. Vocational and alternative education offerings, including school-based VET programs, are not always of high quality, nor do they confer much in the way of market value. The result can be school leavers with a certificate (or even a diploma) that leads nowhere, along with insufficient learning foundations to convert that “entry” certificate into further education or training (see Graham et al., 2015; Keating et al., 2013).

Lamb et al. (2015, 2020) have drawn on four **key developmental milestones** in their analysis of equity in educational opportunity in Australia:

- (1) school entry (using AEDC data),
- (2) Grade 7 (NAPLAN),
- (3) attainment of Grade 12 qualification or equivalent, and
- (4) number of 24-year-olds engaged in education, training, and employment.

The latter metric is important to keep an eye on the transactional market value of the education students receive and to determine whether there are differences between groups in further education, employment, and training outcomes. *There is no value in increasing the number of students attaining an equivalent qualification if it is not, in fact, “equivalent”.*

The next NSRA should include targets disaggregated by (i) state, (ii) schooling phase, and (ii) for priority equity groups. These targets should be explicit and measurable. It would be far better to set targets at key developmental points throughout schooling, in addition to the attainment of Year 12 or equivalent.

Early childhood education should be included in the NSRA targets as this will help to improve the quality of provision. It is reasonable to expect, given the significant level of government funding going to childcare, that all prior-to-school care providers engage in quality teaching and that children’s early social-emotional, behavioural, and academic development is appropriately supported using the desired AEDC indicators as a goal. Improving the social-emotional competencies of young children before they start school will make the work of primary schools that much more effective.

Primary school education targets should be expanded beyond literacy and numeracy attainment outcomes to include the five CASEL social-emotional competencies (Carpendale et al., 2023a, 2023b). These competencies are critical for and predictive of later academic, behavioural and wellbeing outcomes.

Secondary school education targets should also be expanded and should include a new end of junior school checkpoint which moves careers education and planning for senior subject selection into Grade 9. With the abandonment of the Year 10 Certificate, we have lost a mid-secondary checkpoint to gauge and assess student learning progress. Year 9 NAPLAN is supposed to achieve this, but many students disregard NAPLAN by this stage of schooling as it does not have any material impact for them.

Junior secondary school needs significant attention. Students in our research have expressed feel like these are “nothing years”, where they just do the same thing over and over, and they are just killing time until they are old enough to go to TAFE (Graham et al., 2015).

Interest in some occupational categories start as early as Year 5, however, for careers such as engineering and medicine, these aspirations tend to take shape in later years of high school. While socioeconomic background continues to influence aspirations towards prestigious careers, other factors such as gender, year level and school achievement are stronger predictors

of occupational interest (Gore et al., 2017). For student from low socioeconomic background, financial implications of attending university, perceptions of long-term debt associated with university education and constraints in navigating pathways into university for example, are stronger modulators of student aspirations.

Findings from the [Aspirations Longitudinal Study](#) from the University of Newcastle's Teachers and Teaching Research Centre suggest that schools do not have to 'raise' aspirations, rather they need to nurture students' aspirations and do so from an early age, so that students do not reduce their aspirations overtime. Nurturing aspirations is especially important for student with disability, who are often excluded from the discourse of aspirations and educational achievement. Sustained increase in the proportion of students "missing out" on educational opportunity across the four milestones measured by Lamb et al. (2015, 2020) indicates that **support for students who have difficulty in school and with learning is insufficient** to address existing or emergent gaps. These compound over time and become increasingly more difficult to address as children, particularly once children have moved from junior primary (K-3) into upper primary (4-6). By junior secondary (Grades 7-10), these students are almost completely excluded from the academic school curriculum.

Importantly, Lamb et al.'s (2015) study mapped a serious pattern of decline in the provision of support to the students described as missing out. Almost half of those "missing out" at the Year 7 time point (48.4%) had received specialised support at age 6/7; however, this declined to just 38% by age 8/9, *despite unimproved outcomes*. Across the four milestones, around 1 in 10 children remained behind, and did not complete Year 12 or its equivalent. The estimated cost to the taxpayer across the lifetime for each cohort of non-completers is \$12.6 billion with a social cost of \$23.2 billion (Lamb & Huo, 2017). We could be doing much better, and the solution is Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), accessible Tier 1 quality teaching with well-targeted, evidence-based supports determined through the intelligent use of data-based decision making. This will require significant investment in professional learning and an implementation science approach.

How can the targets in the next NSRA be structured to ensure evidence-based approaches underpin a nationally coherent reform agenda while allowing jurisdictions and schools the flexibility to respond to individual student circumstances and needs?

- **Commission (expert) development of a quality online resource to support MTSS implementation** that includes "how to" practice guides, rates programs according to levels of evidence (recommending only those with sufficient evidentiary support). Please don't hand this to consulting firms!
- **Provide the infrastructure to support an implementation science approach** so that programs are evaluated each time they are implemented. This should be supported by partnership models with universities such as in the *PROSPER (promoting school-community-university partnerships to enhance resilience)* Model (Nordstrum et al., 2017).

- **Fund development of technologies to help teachers** (a) correctly interpret students' presenting characteristics, (b) consult students with disability as required by the Disability Standards for Education 2005, and (c) implement relevant reasonable adjustments and/or identify the correct Tier 2 or 3 supports. Again, please don't hand this to non-experts!
- **Invest in high-quality, evidence-based professional learning on MTSS** and relevant components (e.g., data-based decision making) for middle leaders (deputies, wellbeing coordinators, support teachers, heads of inclusive education, heads of curriculum, heads of year and guidance officers/school counsellors).
- **Upskill teacher aides** so that they can administer screening and progress measures, input data and run reports to reduce the burden on classroom teachers and middle leaders. Take a good, hard look at how much is being spent on this workforce and how well they are being used, and then look at the empirical evidence to reform this critical element of school support.

How should progress towards any new targets in the next NSRA be reported on?

Annually. It would be useful to align the reporting timeframe with Closing the Gap. However, the dataset should be made publicly available to enable longitudinal analyses that can shed light on factors affecting progress. Funding to enable quality research should also be made available and it is important that there be a pool that is open-competitive, allowing for "blue sky" questions from expert researchers.

Chapter 3: Improving student mental health and wellbeing

What evidence-based wellbeing approaches currently being implemented by schools and communities should be considered as part of a national reform agenda?

A survey conducted with school leaders in 2015 in 598 NSW primary schools demonstrated marked variability in the uptake and implementation of evidence-based mental health and wellbeing programs, including of programs delivering student **social-emotional learning (SEL)** (Laurens et al., 2022). A quarter of school leaders did not report delivering any school-based mental health promotion programs, and only three-in-five reported delivering programs that included formal teaching of social-emotional competencies (i.e., SEL). Importantly, for those that were delivering SEL programs, one-third of all programs delivered had no evidence, or low-quality evidence, to support the program's effectiveness. Thus, school leaders may be unaware of where to access information on evidence-based programs or might preference other qualities (e.g., cost, ease of implementation, advertising) when selecting programs. Inconsistent uptake and implementation of evidence-based programs may reflect insufficiently clear policy and guidance for schools at the national level. Presently, Be You (<https://beyou.edu.au/>) – a major national health-promoting initiative in Australia – offers publicly accessible information regarding over 80 formally verified programs for school-based mental health promotion, but these often lack

evaluation in the Australian context. Infrastructure to support an implementation science approach so that programs that have been developed elsewhere can be evaluated as they are implemented in Australian schools is required. We endorse the value of partnership models with universities, such as in the PROSPER Model referenced earlier (Nordstrum et al., 2017), to support sustainable development, implementation, and evaluation of theoretically-informed programs for use in the Australian school context.

Should a wellbeing target be included in the next NSRA? Could this use existing data collections, or is additional data required?

The recent Productivity Commission Review of the National School Reform Agreement (2023) recommended the next inter-governmental agreement include **student wellbeing** as an outcome measure, with a requirement for annual reporting of student wellbeing. The latter review outlined one (ambitious) option of developing a new national minimum dataset (i.e., complete and nationally consistent) to enable high-quality analysis and comparisons at all levels (student, school, sector, jurisdiction, and over time). However, it was recognised that some schools/sectors/jurisdictions already have systematic collections of student wellbeing to inform their system- and school-level decision making (albeit with some measuring this via surveys/tools developed by non-government providers), making it a practical challenge to align existing survey instruments and presenting issues around potential duplication of data collection (re: burden on students, schools, and systems) for this purpose. There are also issues around divergent conceptualisations of student wellbeing, particularly when wellbeing is broadened to encompass poor mental health (i.e., psychopathology symptoms), and the degree to which the measures being used have been subject to any psychometric (reliability and validity) evaluation.

We strongly endorse the need to elevate wellbeing to an equal footing with literacy and numeracy in Australian schools, supported via the annual collection and reporting of national data from students (supplemented by parent and/or educator report, where feasible) on student mental health and wellbeing. A standardised set of measures, with published psychometric properties, should be adopted at a national level to ensure consistency of reporting across sectors and jurisdictions, with capacity to track individual trajectories of students social-emotional competencies over time.

Would there be benefit in surveying students to help understand student perceptions of safety and belonging at school, subjective state of wellbeing, school climate and classroom disruption? Would there be value in incorporating this into existing National Assessment Program surveys such as NAPLAN?

Yes. See our response to question one in relation to **connectedness to school** (Brown, 1997) and the **school support scales** (Hanson & Kim, 2007). These could easily be incorporated into NAPLAN. Measuring classroom disruption *alongside* school climate, connectedness to school, school support, and subjective wellbeing is a welcome advance in Australian education and will help to highlight the external factors contributing to behaviour, as well as where systems/sectors and schools might look in terms of school improvement reforms and the provision/location of

social services to address it. It is critical that the measurement and reporting is done well, not simplistically, as it is in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reports over the last two decades (see Graham, 2023 for a critique)

To what extent do school leaders and teachers have the skills and training to support students struggling with mental health?

We recommend the **provision of dedicated wellbeing staff in every school**, to support the planning and co-ordination of school-based wellbeing policies, practices, and programs, as part of a "wellbeing plan" to be developed and implemented in each school. These dedicated wellbeing staff should be responsible for developing and monitoring a positive wellbeing culture, and play a leading role in identifying and implementing evidence-based resources **to support universal student social-emotional learning** in a way that is contextually and culturally-appropriate to the school. They should also support local evaluation of policies and programs as they are implemented in their school. These programs should respond to local strengths and needs identified through annual assessments of student and staff wellbeing. Their role should also include responsibility for building and maintaining strong relationships with local government and non-government providers of paediatric, psychological, and allied health and social services. These wellbeing staff require dedicated training in mental health and wellbeing, either through postgraduate study following initial teacher training, or as graduates of bachelor degree behavioural science/psychology programs that incorporate training in developmental, health, psychopathology, and counselling theory and practice. In addition to these dedicated wellbeing staff, all educators should be supported to undertake additional professional development on mental health and wellbeing (i.e., paid time for participation).

What can be done to establish stronger partnerships between schools, Local Health Networks and Primary Health Networks?

For some children, schools are a place of refuge from otherwise challenging life circumstances. Schools may be the only place where students feel safe, or where they can access support services and advice that they may otherwise be unable to access. For example, students from certain religious backgrounds seeking contraceptive advice to support their own informed choices, or access to personal and support services (e.g., psychology, counselling) that they may be stigmatised if accessing from within their own communities. Making supports and services from external agencies accessible in the school environment may increase the uptake of these services and help to support students who otherwise would either not seek help or supports. **Place-based integrated infrastructure, such as through Community Hubs co-located with schools and/or locations where school-aged children frequent, are one strategy to encourage collaboration and partnerships across education-health networks and support student access to services.** For some students, accessing support within school is problematic, in part, due to the reporting thresholds required for different professionals. In some instances, matters that an employee in the Department of Education may need to report, may be different to matters that an employee in the Department of Health would need to. Students are generally aware of the

limits of confidentiality within school contexts and, particularly for those students who may be experiencing complex life circumstances, this can lead to reluctance to seek within school/school-based support despite wanting support.

What can be done to ensure schools can easily refer students to services outside the school gate that they need to support their wellbeing? How can this be done without adding to teacher and leader workload?

There are several ways that **place-based integrated infrastructure (such as through Community Hubs and education-health partnership networks) can support student access to services without adding to teacher and leader workload.** This includes student self-referral (e.g. QR codes placed around the school/neighbourhood), staff referrals (QR code push through to Hub triaging), subcontracting space within the infrastructure for students to access their external supports (e.g. if a student accesses an external psychologist or Occupational Therapist, allowing this person to conduct their session with this student in the facility so that accessing the support is more convenient for the young person), inclusion of social services and other Community supports (e.g., Centrelink drop in station, Medicare, homeless connect, Youth Workers) that are available on-site to students. Community supports (e.g., cultural support officers) and peer mentors / past students with similar experiences are another way that supports can be offered for students in ways that minimise the burden on school staff, while also supporting students to be able to access appropriate persons with which they can share their concerns, support needs, or seek advice. For example, a Transgender student while transitioning, may prefer to talk to others who have similarly experienced gender transitioning while at (that) school. School based staff (e.g., Guidance Officers, School Health Nurse etc) may also be able to be in the facility so that students have a range of options to best support their needs and preferences for different matters. A particular advantage of co-located integrated services is in their convenient location. Ensuring a variety of options are available in a **convenient and easily accessible safe 'third space'** (not school, not home, not somewhere else in the local area) aids in reducing some of the potential barriers to accessing support, while also supporting student choice and agency in support options available to them.

Chapter 4: Our current and future teachers

What change(s) would attract more students into the teaching profession?

Improving the status of teaching in Australia is critical to attract more students into the profession. **This will not be achieved by gutting university ITE as has occurred in England.** Rather than turning teaching into an apprenticeship, we need to think differently about what should be taught in universities and what student teachers should learn through professional experience. Theoretical knowledge is foundational to inclusive quality teaching. It cannot be achieved without deep grounding in human cognition and child/adolescent development (typical and atypical), and inclusive education practices, in addition to curriculum content knowledge and general pedagogical knowledge. In effect, theory is the 'know why' that informs the 'know how'. Making

the connection between theory/practice is the most challenging element of ITE and that is largely because it hasn't been well-conceptualised or well-funded by government. As we note later in this submission, **ITE students today are struggling to complete their professional experience with the requirement for block practicums impacting their ability to work.** This can lead to students working overtime during their semester to store income for when they are on professional experience. For some it can mean not choosing or completing a teaching degree. **If we really want to address the teacher shortage and improve ITE, professional experience should occur as part of a paid internship model.**

Comparing teaching to another professional degree: architecture. Students of architecture may graduate from a three- or four-year undergraduate degree but cannot be registered as architects until they have completed a master's degree and passed the registration exam. Many begin work in a practice as a 'Student Architect'. The average salary is \$50K FTE. While employed as student architects, they learn valuable skills as they prepare for registration which may take several years, depending on how much study load they take on and how much of a portfolio they can build while working in practice. Importantly, they do not get handed the same projects as qualified architects.

Currently ITE graduates are thrown into the deep end when they graduate, however, this does not occur in any other profession. In secondary schools, **graduate teachers are commonly handed the most challenging classes**, typically grades 7-10. This is the result of academic streaming and grouping students with disability to timetable teacher aide support. These students need the most experienced teachers; however, these teachers are often reserved for the senior years where they can maximise schools' ATAR results.

In addition to being handed the most challenging classes, **graduate teachers are relentlessly criticised by their colleagues, the media, and by politicians.** However, this criticism is largely unfounded as two large-scale Australian studies have found. For example, a 6-year longitudinal study using a direct measure of teaching quality with 68 teachers from seven primary schools serving disadvantaged communities in South-East QLD found **no differences between beginning and experienced teachers in the quality of teaching, including in behaviour management** (Graham, White, Cologon & Pianta., 2020). Using a different measure with 990 primary school teachers in NSW, Gore et al., (2023) also found no difference in the quality of teaching in any experience category.

Together, these two studies suggest that initial teacher education is preparing graduates to engage in similar level teaching quality as their more experienced colleagues. **Yet they are constantly being denigrated, despite teaching under the most challenging circumstances, for not only are they handed the most difficult classes, but they must teach those classes without the satisfaction of feeling like they are making a difference.** Most people going into teaching to make a difference and, even if the love of a particular subject is what first enticed them in, making a difference to students is what makes them stay. **But how can beginning teachers get satisfaction**

from their chosen profession if they are not with students long enough to develop a relationship or to make a difference?

Australian systems/sectors and schools must put an end to rampant casualisation which leaves graduates with a precarious existence as a fly-in/fly-out substitute or on contracts that may end at any time. **Casualisation results in graduate teachers doing what they feel they must to survive, including using punitive methods to control children they do not know.** Casualisation is also not conducive to *any* of the reforms needed. To be successful, a reduction in casualisation would need to be accompanied by intelligent and transparent systems to measure, reward/enhance the quality and effectiveness of teaching for all teachers, not just beginning teachers.

What change(s) would support teachers to remain in the profession?

Address the problems we have noted in our response to the previous question. See also our response to the question in relation to additional reforms needed to ensure that the schools most in need can support and retain highly effective teachers.

What change(s) would support qualified teachers to return to the profession?

Address the problems we have noted in our response to the question regarding the changes needed to attract more students into the teaching profession. See also our response to the next question.

What additional reforms are needed to ensure that the schools most in need can support and retain highly effective teachers?

To be successful, reform of casualisation would need to measure, reward/enhance the quality and effectiveness of teaching for all teachers, not just beginning teachers. This cannot be done on an ad hoc basis or opt-in/out by individuals and principals and middle leaders must be better supported to engage in performance management and to implement observation/feedback/coaching models based on standardised evidence-based criteria. *Note that we do not want an OfSted-type inspection system!* There are much better models that assist teachers to enhance the quality of their teaching; see, for example, the work taking place in the United States with respect to the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and MyTeaching Partner, as well as the Quality Teaching Rounds in NSW.

An important new development in this area comes from this Centre. C4IE Director, Professor Linda Graham, and PhD candidate, Ms Haley Tancredi, have developed Accessible Pedagogies to guide and refine the accessibility of classroom practice. It has been designed to complement existing pedagogical frameworks, and the program's effectiveness is currently being tested with secondary school teachers and Grade 10 students participating in the Accessible Assessment ARC Linkage project. **Accessible Pedagogies is informed by evidence of how students learn and focuses on reducing barriers to comprehension resulting from language and cognitive load.** This focus directly aligns with the core content in ITE outlined in the [2023 Strong Beginnings Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel](#). As leading experts in inclusive education, it is our view

that Accessible Pedagogies is the minimum standard of Tier 1 (universal) teaching quality necessary to ensure that the full range of students enrolled in everyday Australian classrooms can access the curriculum and learn.

Our current research has found that teachers not only need but **want explicit feedback** on their teaching and that the majority want specific and evidence-based criteria to guide that process. Like the CLASS, both the Accessible Pedagogies Framework and Observation Measure employ specific criteria, a standardised approach to observation, and feedback. There is opportunity to introduce Accessible Pedagogies in ITE as a rigorous means to train preservice teachers in inclusive practice informed by universal design principles, however, our current work with practising teachers suggests that ongoing professional learning and coaching will be required throughout teachers' careers.

What can be done to attract a diverse group of people into the teaching profession to ensure it looks like the broader community?

A range of initiatives can be implemented to attract diverse groups of people and improve diversity in the teaching workforce. To build a pipeline of diverse educators, the Australian government can (1) **improve the process for recognition of overseas qualifications** that is supported by bridging courses and clear pathways to obtain recognition (Irvine et al., 2016), (2) **work with communities**, cultural leaders, and community organisations to expand a diverse workforce and ensure culturally relevant programs and practices, and (3) **invest in partnerships that support culturally diverse educators** to become qualified and continue their professional learning.

However, these supports must go beyond simply attracting diverse groups into the profession. They need to continue during qualification and accreditation and extend to experience in the workplace. For example, ITE students experience considerable financial constraints associated with undertaking professional experience placements. **A National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education funded study (Grant-Smith et al., 2017) determined that while 7% of students experienced financial hardship during the semester, this increased to 56% during practicum, a statistically significant result.** The financial stress experienced because of professional experience participation does not discriminate. However, the effects on some cohorts, particularly equity cohorts, may be more pronounced. For example, in the study above, 12 times as many students struggled financially during their practicum placement compared to during the semester, which resulted in strategies such as stockpiling work and wages during the semester to be able to financially afford to cover basic essentials (food, rent, transport to/from placement) while undertaking placement. This meant they needed to make strategic choices about attending classes and how deeply they engaged in learning materials. ITE students with additional responsibilities such as caring also experienced considerable barriers (e.g., availability of childcare for temporary placements, costs associated with supporting caring responsibilities when placements were in locations not near to their home etc) that impacted their practicum experience, and whether they would continue in the degree program. Significant assistance and

attention towards the financial, relational, and academic implications of the current professional experience practices is required to both reduce the multiple and connected stresses experienced by ITE students associated with their practicum and better support equity cohorts who may otherwise leave the profession if the barriers to access become as insurmountable as they currently are.

An **inclusive workplace culture**, where diversity is appreciated, will be an essential factor to support any initiatives aimed at diversifying the teaching workforce. Discrimination and exclusion are common in the workplace (Gide et al., 2022), and more research is needed on Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) workforce, particularly in education settings. **Safe culture in schools** - which includes LGBTQI+, CALD, Indigenous, and people with disability, for example - is paramount to support a diverse workforce. However, the workforce must be **fluent in English** to ensure these strategies are effective, which can be achieved through additional support during pre-service learning.

What can be done to attract more First Nations teachers? What can be done to improve the retention of First Nations teachers?

In addition to the approaches mentioned above, the Australian Government could commission development of **bespoke programs to support First Nations teacher aides and support officers to become teachers**. They are already in schools and observing teaching practice daily. Support them to study for a teaching qualification while earning a living.

How can teacher career pathways, such as master teachers and instructional specialists, be improved to attract and retain teachers? How should this interact with the Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher (HALT) certification and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers?

Schools need more HALTs building capacity in classrooms with teacher peers, providing local, targeted expertise. Yet for more HALTs to consider certification, **teachers need to hear clearly the benefits of applying**. Excellent teachers are suspicious of policy or media stories of elite teachers getting a reward without knowing what is expected. Teachers can't see how they can do more within current workloads. HALTs need to be part of an overall strategy for school improvement, with encouragement from leadership teams, ongoing roles influencing their peers, mentoring new teachers, and engaging in local improvement projects. Roles need to be resourced with time both for HALTs and those teachers they will coach and mentor. The application process needs to be less onerous, but still support the deep professional reflexivity and renewal evident in our research that made it powerfully motivating for HALTs to continue their influence (Willis et al., 2021, Willis et al, 2022a). Twenty-two recommendations were made in a national roundtable of HALTs hosted by QUT, certifying authorities and employer bodies from each state and territory (Willis et al, 2022b). **Teachers want more support in how to argue for evidence of impact**, such as this open access resource developed by QUT <https://research.qut.edu.au/impactstory/> and networks to encourage knowledge sharing. Celebrating the HALT stories on AITSL's Illustrations of Practice website would also enable evidence to circulate widely and recognise these outstanding teachers. Benefits and impact of other

specialisation pathways need to be clear to teachers.

Are there benefits for the teaching profession in moving to a national registration system? If so, what are they?

Yes. According to AITSL, nationally consistent registration benefits teachers by:

- improving the **mobility** of teachers throughout the nation
- requiring the **same standards and consistent processes** to achieve full registration
- ensuring that **registration is part of a wider framework** for teachers' career progression and professional learning guided by the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

Chapter 5: Collecting data to inform decision-making and boost student outcomes

What data are of most value to you and how accessible are these for you?

Suspension and exclusion data currently, although it is not accessible, and it is not disaggregated for priority equity groups. We need a nationally consistent database.

The Australian Government should establish a national database like that of the Office of Special Education Programs in the United States to publish both student and incident level suspension and exclusion data (for example, through the Australian Bureau of Statistics). Those data should be **disaggregated by gender, year level, and priority equity group** (Indigenous, disability, out-of-home care, as well as those not in these groups), as well as **reasons for and duration of suspensions and exclusions**, so that overrepresentation can be identified in both single and repeat incidents, for each group, and compared across sectors.

The Australian Early Development Census provides a model of national data collection of the social competence and emotional maturity of students as students enter their first year of formal schooling (alongside their language and cognitive skills, physical health and wellbeing, and communication and general knowledge). Similar **data on emotional, social, and behavioural functioning** (mental health and wellbeing) should be collected by self-report from **middle childhood** (approximately Grade 4 onwards) through to school-leaving, using age-appropriate measures with demonstrated psychometric properties. These should include the measurement of both social-emotional competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills; the formal teaching of which is required by the Australian Curriculum), but also psychopathology (conduct, attention, peer relationship and emotional problems). There are various wellbeing measures that have been delivered successfully to large cohorts in Australia, including the South Australian Well-being and Engagement Collection (South Australian Department for Education, 2022) and the Middle Childhood Survey (Laurens et al., 2017), but research investment for further development and testing of these tools is required to evaluate validity across priority equity groups. Student surveys such as these need to become standard annual collections that publicly benchmark student wellbeing, but also provide capacity to

schools to measure how these outcomes change in concert with their delivery of evidenced school-based social-emotional learning programs. Capacity to supplement these self-report data with caregiver-report data could be explored.

Is there any data that are not currently collected and reported on that is vital to understanding education in Australia? Why is this data important?

Data on **post-school transition and implementation of transition planning programs** in all education sectors (Government, Catholic and Independent) and districts are lacking. This data could assist in understanding if schools are using evidence-based practices to support students making career choices, what are the current challenges schools are facing to provide services, support, and career information. This data needs to be disaggregated by district and different equity cohorts, which will assist in the provision of Professional Development opportunities for teachers and other school staff that are relevant to their local context.

Data on **student wellbeing** is also limited. The Australian Government need to (1) implement a national approach to age appropriate, student self-report data collection on emotional, social, and behavioural functioning (mental health and wellbeing) using age-appropriate and psychometrically appropriate tools. Data should be collected at regular junctures from middle childhood until the first-year post school-leaving. (2) Implement a national approach to public reporting on students' self-report of emotional, social, and behavioural functioning, similar to NAPLAN. (3) Research investment to support further development and testing of self-report tools that gather data about emotional, social, and behavioural functioning, particularly to evaluate validity of such tools across priority equity groups. (4) Research investment to support development of and testing to establish the validity of tools for caregiver-report data on their child/young person's emotional, social, and behavioural functioning. (5) The Australian Government should include non-cognitive measures to assess and compare student connectedness to their school and across schools on the My School website, rather than focusing only on literacy and numeracy measures, using scales like the Connectedness to Teacher Scale, the Connectedness to School Scale or the Engagement in School Scale. These data will help parents and others see and compare the connectedness, engagement, and wellbeing of school students as a litmus test. These measures could also be an indication of school inclusiveness.

Should data measurement and reporting on outcomes of students with disability be a priority under the next NSRA? If so, how can this data be most efficiently collected?

Yes. Australian state education systems are 'data-rich' and there is already considerable data collected. **The issue will be standardising those data.** For example, types of exclusionary discipline are different across states both in name and length (see SA Inquiry, Graham et al., 2020) which makes comparisons across states impossible. **Non-government schools do not even publish their data meaning that we do not know who is being suspended and excluded from those sectors and whether those students have a disability, are Indigenous, and/or in care.** A big piece of work is needed to achieve consistency in key datasets that are necessary for assessing the overall health, effectiveness, and fairness of our education systems. Nowhere is this more



critical than for students in priority equity groups who are falling through the cracks in every system. We need to be able to track where those children are and more effectively direct support to them and the schools that enrol them.

Is there a need to establish a report which tracks progress on the targets and reforms in the next NSRA? Should it report at a jurisdictional and a national level? What should be included in the report?

Yes. It should be **annual** and be **national but compare states/sectors**.

Is there data collected by schools, systems, sectors or jurisdictions that could be made more available to inform policy design and implementation? What systems would be necessary to enable these data are made available safely and efficiently?

Suspension and exclusion data should be used to revise Closing the Gap targets. New measures should include clear and ambitious suspension and exclusion reduction targets, together with the recommendation of culturally responsive pedagogies, and disciplinary alternatives (e.g., restorative practice, social-emotional learning, and in-school suspension with a focus on SEL skill building).

The Productivity Commission and Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) have identified the need for longitudinal data to identify the actual students at risk of falling behind based on their performance (and not on equity groups alone) and to monitor these students' progress over time. Should this be the key data reform for the next NSRA?

This is an interesting idea. Note that this group likely includes students with unidentified disabilities.

Should an independent body be responsible for collecting and holding data? What rules should be in place to govern the sharing of data through this body?

Yes. We recommended to the Productivity Commission that **the Australian Government should establish a national database** like curated by the Office of Special Education Programs in the United States to publish both student and incident level suspension and exclusion data (for example, through the Australian Bureau of Statistics). Those data should be disaggregated by gender, year level, and priority equity group (Indigenous, disability, out-of-home care, as well as those not in these groups), as well as reasons for and duration of suspensions and exclusions, so that overrepresentation can be identified in both single *and* repeat incidents, for each group, and compared across sectors. This Office could also monitor and address the use of segregation, restrictive practices, and partial/part-time enrolment. The data should be governed by rules to restrict the use to research purposes, and not allow for the creation of media league tables. In fact, it would be even better if this Office could include a **National Education Ombudsman** (see SA Inquiry recommendations; Graham et al., 2020).

How could the national Unique Student Identifier (USI) support improved outcomes for students?

The use of a national unique student identifier provides opportunities to track participation and

outcomes for students in multiple sectors and educational stages. Outcome data could include school attendance and achievement Year 12 completion and post-school engagement in employment, education, and training. **The unique student identifier means that these outcomes can be tracked**, regardless of whether a student moves school, including to a different jurisdiction, and could be linked to the Next Steps Survey. Critically these data could help to identify whether students in priority equity groups are being rejected from particular types of schools, leading to concentrations in others.

Chapter 6: Funding transparency and accountability

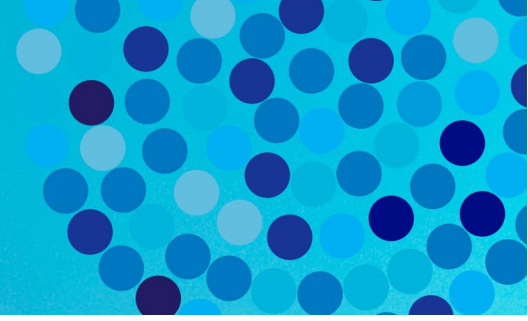
What are the priority gaps in the current funding transparency and accountability arrangements from your perspective?

Disability Funding: Transparency is essential to ensure the funding system remains flexible to support the diversity of needs in students. The lack of transparency around funding decisions and how funding has been distributed for students who require adjustments that cannot be reasonably accommodated through differentiated teaching remains unresolved. Transparency concerns can be addressed through consultation with students and families to ensure that needs are correctly assessed, and appropriate adjustments are made in school (see Tancredi, 2020 for practical information on genuine consultation). Genuine consultation with students and families can help build trust among stakeholders and support strategies to improve accountability (Smith & Benavit, 2019).

Suspensions: The Australian Government should require each education sector as a condition of Commonwealth funding to monitor suspension and exclusion data closely and to implement legislative thresholds—with effective accountability mechanisms—to trigger:

- i. review of the supports provided for individual students in the above priority equity groups (for example if a principal of a school wishes to suspend one of these students more than twice in one school year)
- ii. implementation of a performance/professional development program if a school's data indicate patterns of suspension relating to individual teachers or faculty
- iii. a whole school improvement review if data patterns indicate disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline between otherwise 'like' schools.

Analysis of suspension and exclusion data could potentially be built into the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT). However, the NSIT currently is not used nationally and has not been designed with the input of inclusive education experts and has therefore nothing to say on universal design, accessible practice, barriers preventing the access and participation of students with disability or designing and implementing appropriate reasonable adjustments. The current description of 'Differentiated Teaching and Learning' in the NSIT is informed by a formative assessment view of the world and is inadequate to the task for which it has been set. It is more about determining where students are in their learning and what they need to learn



next to progress. However, it is agnostic regarding why students may be at that point and how they might best be taught to progress. This is a subtle but critical distinction commonly affecting the reform of inclusive practice in Australia.

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