



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

Submitter: AITSL  
Submitting as a: Government agency  
State: Vic.

### Summary

The Review offers an opportunity for us to collectively consider how school funding can be targeted to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) welcomes the opportunity to lend our voice, expertise and national perspective to this conversation of national importance.

Our recommendations clearly and unambiguously place student learning ‘front and centre’, guided by the belief and substantial evidence base that a high quality education sets up our children for success. Our approach is focussed on what can be done at a national, system and sector level to improve quality teaching (the biggest in-school influence on student learning) and school leadership (the second biggest in-school influence on student learning). We support investment that ‘unleashes’ teaching expertise, so that it is properly understood and shared across systems, sectors and geographic divides. We believe that the best results will be achieved by continuing to invest in what is working well and reducing the clutter and distractions that impede the primary role of educators – to improve student learning.

AITSL proposes better and more structured career pathways for both teachers and school leaders. We recommend continued national efforts to drive teaching and leadership quality. We support strategies that empower teachers with the right tools and data insights to accurately identify individual student needs and act on those day-to-day learning moments in the classroom. We recommend building the public reputation of the profession so that the societal contribution of educators is valued and understood. A stronger profession will ensure that teaching continues to attract committed and high-calibre candidates, with the skills and personal attributes to make a difference to the lives and learning of their students.

## Main submission

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools.

Education reform requires a commitment to shift student outcomes so that all children and young people progress and achieve success. We already have some great practice and outcomes within our system and a highly committed profession of teachers and school leaders. Further improvement requires an investment of teacher and school leader time in the practices that have the greatest impact on student outcomes, reducing the clutter and distractions that impede a teacher fulfilling their primary role; teaching. Real and significant change can be made by focussing efforts on reorganising and supporting how we share and use expertise, within and across classrooms and schools, and always with the goal of improving student progress and achievement. We know great teaching and leadership are the key to student outcomes – our investment must reflect this.

**Recommendation 1: Use existing national agreements to drive teaching and leadership quality**

AITSL has collaborated across the nation with systems, sectors, experts and the profession to establish eight (8) evidence-based policy frameworks to improve the quality of teaching and school leadership in Australia and maximise our impact on student outcomes. However, these frameworks have been unevenly adopted and potential benefits unrealised. Strengthened implementation, including improvements to the efficiency, consistency and quality of application, will form a key anchor for further reform. Some of these policies require judgements to be made against standards. Improvements can be made to ensure that these judgements are valid and reliable through strengthened national quality assurance processes. Examples of how this could be done include nationally consistent use of standard setting methods and transparent reporting of results.

AITSL recommends the following improvements to national policy implementation:

1. Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

Recommended improvements: Embed in career pathways policies and structures across all jurisdictions

2. Australian Professional Standard for Principals

Recommended improvements: Embed use in preparing, recruiting and developing principals across all jurisdictions

3. Certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers in Australia

4. Nationally consistent registration of teachers in Australia

5. Accreditation of initial teacher education programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures

Recommended improvements: Seek efficiency in implementation and ensure national consistency and rigour of decision making

6. Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders
7. Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework
8. Graduate to Proficient: Australian guidelines for teacher induction into the profession

Recommended improvements: Commitment from jurisdictions and schools to implement the essential elements and high-impact strategies detailed in these policies

Recommendation 2: Create structured career pathways for teachers

Implementing structured career pathways for Australian teachers will further professionalise the workforce, leading to improvements in self-efficacy, confidence, work satisfaction and the status of the profession. As teachers progress through their careers, our collective expectation must be that they increase their expertise and impact, and are recognised for doing so. This recognition should be done at both the school and jurisdiction level, with clearly defined roles and development streams, allowing for accelerated development and more effective management of the workforce. A structured approach to workforce management should also be underpinned by remunerating more teachers based on their expertise and impact on learning, rather than tenure.

An example of this type of structure is seen in Singapore, with three tracks available to teachers: teaching, leadership and senior specialist (with a focus on research and policy in a specialised area). This structure seeks to build a close relationship between professional status and performance. Teachers must meet specific criteria to advance to the next stage of their chosen track, allowing for a pattern of continuous professional learning and reward. Evidence shows that these types of professionalisation practices promote high quality teaching and retention of the teaching workforce.

In Australia, national teacher certification offers a standards-based measure of increased teaching expertise and leadership against the higher career stages of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. Certified Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers (HALTs), or their equivalent, should be given appropriate responsibilities and support to lead colleagues and change within and across schools. Examples include leading curriculum areas or teaching teams, teacher-coach positions, mentoring pre-service and graduate teachers, and instructional leadership

roles. Drawing on the expertise of these certified HALTs will enable sharing of examples of best practice pedagogy across subject areas, stages of education and care, and across a range of challenges and contexts such as teaching diverse student populations.

### Recommendation 3: Invest in leadership development and define levels of principal expertise

After teaching, leadership has the greatest impact among all school related factors on student learning; an effect which is magnified in schools facing greater challenges of educational disadvantage. Great principals and leaders enable a culture of learning, not just in one classroom, but across whole schools, by focussing effort on the quality of teaching and learning. Investing in the development of school leadership is a highly cost-effective approach to improving Australian schools' performance and student outcomes, and ensuring a supply of well-prepared leaders. With the average time taken to become a principal in Australia currently at 27 years, and the OECD average at 21 years, efforts need to include a focus on developing the leadership of teachers from early on in their careers. Evidence suggests there is an autonomy premium available to schools that are provided with a higher level of autonomy. This premium can deliver better student progress and achievement if schools have the capacity to take up the autonomy available to them, and if this autonomy is accompanied by professionally appropriate forms of accountability.

Autonomous actions that are most effective at improving individual school performance and student outcomes focus on the selection and development of staff, fostering collective efficacy, resourcing strategically and implementing effective school improvement processes. A nationally consistent standards-based professional learning experience for all aspiring and experienced leaders will be secured by:

1. Endorsing and implementing a set of national leadership development guidelines
2. Implementing voluntary pre-principal certification as an assessment of principal preparedness.

The guidelines will build on the significant work of systems and sectors in this area, and assist them to affirm, evaluate and refine their approaches to developing future school leaders. This, in turn, will raise the quality of Australian school leadership and accelerate the process of development by identifying and nurturing potential leaders.

To complement this work, the Australian Professional Standard for Principals should be reviewed and revised to determine well-defined levels of expertise so it can be better used to drive improvements in leadership. Current uses in recruitment, performance and development processes would be strengthened. As with teachers, effective gradation of the Standard and assessment against the levels will allow

school leaders to be remunerated based on expertise and impact rather than simply tenure or school demographics.

**Recommendation 4: Develop a robust formative student evaluation tool for teachers**

Australia must embed in policies and practice, a focus on progress as well as achievement. This shift needs us to think about the learning trajectory of each student, in every class, in every school and have high expectations of improvement for all.

To help with this, teachers need timely data on each individual student's progress to make informed decisions about how to most effectively teach students. This is true regardless of whether the student is a high achiever, is struggling, or is performing in the middle. Critically, teachers need to know what to do next with student assessment information, and make immediate changes to their teaching practices. Timely formative assessment data will enhance teachers' ability to have a stronger impact on student learning.

These practices will enable teachers to better target their teaching to individual students, taking into account their contexts, strengths, and areas for further growth. When teachers have access to information about individual students' progress they can be more targeted in what and how they teach. They can identify gaps early, including areas where a student may have missed core concepts in learning. This is important, as concepts or skills that are missed early in a student's learning can block the take up of new skills down the track.

We have the technology available and expertise in Australia to develop a solution that would help teachers do this. The expertise is found in the profession, across systems and sectors, and in organisations such as AITSL, ACARA and ESA. Key to the success of such a solution is teacher capacity to select and build appropriate assessments, as well as their capacity to use the advice and support provided to tailor their teaching. An accompanying suite of professional learning would help schools and teachers to effectively maximise the return on the proposed investment in formative assessment.

**Recommendation 5: Elevate the profession with emphasis on public recognition**

In Australia, we know we have great teachers that make a positive contribution to the lives and opportunities of young Australians and this should be recognised within and outside the education community. We also know that there is still a need to stem attrition, improve retention and to recruit the best and brightest to the teaching profession. To achieve this we need to elevate the profile and promote the value of teaching. We must support, recognise and esteem our teachers.

Introducing a national and education-specific honours and awards function or division, similar to that run by the Department of Defence, would allow for

recognition of current and former members of the profession as well as provide advice to Government on honours and awards issues. In addition, AITSL recommends that more educators sit on established honours panels, including those that determine Australia Day and Queens Birthday honours.

#### A continuously improving profession

Australia has reason to be confident that the basis for improvement already exists within our system. The challenge is to ensure that the practice of our best teachers and school leaders becomes the norm. There are different factors that come together to impact on a student's learning journey – what students learn and how they learn are critical, however AITSL's submission focusses on areas of our particular areas of expertise – teaching, leadership, success measures and scaling of good practice. Teaching and leadership, like any skill, can be learnt and improved over time. Once we accept this, our job is to enable those with greater expertise to impact on those with less expertise and create a shared responsibility for the learning of all students. A continuously improving profession. That's the future of education.