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

Submitter: Australian Secondary Principals' Association
Submitting as a: Peak body
State: WA

Summary

Good (effective) leadership – real autonomy (over what matters) – good teaching and learning - measure what is important (progress) – PL that has an impact – parent engagement - national consistency (develop nationally; implement locally) = better outcomes

Main submission

Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

The Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA) is a professional body that represents the interests of principals, deputy principals and assistant principals from government secondary schools across Australia. ASPA works with the profession to shape a paradigm of leadership and learning to create a better, preferred future for all students in Australia's government secondary schools. We are committed to ensuring that high quality government secondary education is provided to young people no matter what their geographic, social or personal circumstances.

'Our education needs some overhaul, some new ways, some good ideas, some creativity... creativity is hard work, the person in our schools who must do the hard work is the principal'

(Alf Rehn; International Confederation of Principals Conference; August 2015)

Universal access to education does not currently translate to a nationally consistent minimum standard of education provision for all students. This is a significant change that will take time – this is a "marathon, not a sprint".

In considering the most effective teaching and learning strategies and initiatives to be deployed the panel must also consider the possible "negative effects" of any initiative. (What works may hurt: Side effects in education; Yong Zhao; Journal of Educational Change, online 4th February 2017).

Recommendation 1:

Policies and practices must not be advocated and implemented without adequately studying and reporting their risks. Without this there may be more damages than benefits.

Recommendation 2:

This cannot be a "one size fits all" solution. The professionals (school leaders / teachers etc.) should be provided with evidence of possible interventions, including the positive and negative effects. What is implemented will need to vary depending upon the student needs and the context of the school and community.

Recommendation 3:

Systems and sectors must "trust in the profession" to make appropriate interventions.

The essential role of the school leader:

Research has shown that principals have the second biggest in-school impact on student outcomes after classroom teaching (Centre for Education Statistics & Evaluation, 2015, 'Effective Leadership', Learning Curve, Issue 10). Good leadership is essential to get the best from our teachers so that we get the best from our students.

"The core of preparing schools systems for a changing world is based on the idea that effective principals are a prerequisite for effective schools". Ontario Principals Council; Lessons from around the world Summit –2013

Strongly supported school leadership is crucial to driving sustained improvement in educational outcomes and innovation for the future.

Increased funding and greater autonomy will only make a sustainable difference if leaders have the skills and capabilities to use both effectively. Business and industry are continually asserting that students leaving our schools don't have the basic skills required for the future, yet we still (in most cases) select our school leaders based on the skill set and processes that we have used for decades.

The nature of education, teaching and school leadership has changed significantly, but is not reflected in our current practices. If we want to remain relevant, then leadership status quo is not an option.

All schools are different and represent their own unique ecosystem – a system, or a group of interconnected elements, formed by the interaction of a community with their environment. Healthy ecosystems change in response to their context and situation and what is learnt forms the basis for improvement.

Recommendation 4:

Our profession urgently needs a targeted conversation between major stakeholders (governments, associations, university sector etc.) to develop a sustainable, long term plan for the future. The basis of the conversation should be recognition that the role of the school leader has changed, recognition that skills and abilities required for school leadership have changed, recognition that current selection practices must change and recognition that ongoing support for school leaders is essential.

Recommendation 5:

Every school MUST have a quality school leader and whilst leadership is not an exact science, ASPA (2012) contends that all schools need edu-preneurial leaders that are creative, analytical, adaptive, imaginative, inspirational, innovative, outward looking problem solvers who create a culture of improvement / excellence in their school.

Recommendation 5(a):

We need to look at alternative practices to inform principal selection including psychometric testing against 'The Australian Professional Standard for Principals' to help identify strengths and weaknesses in aspirants. This will better facilitate targeted professional learning, mentorship, coaching, etc.

Our challenge is to make sure that every school leader has the necessary skills and abilities and can use them effectively in the context of the school (and community) they lead.

School Autonomy:

"The bottom line: Autonomy and accountability go together: greater autonomy in decisions relating to curricula, assessments and resource allocation tend to be associated with better student performance, particularly when schools operate within a culture of accountability" PISA IN FOCUS 2011/9 (October) – © OECD 2011

Principal autonomy by itself will not guarantee improved student outcomes. Autonomy is a powerful tool in the hands of the highly effective principal who has a focus on improved student outcomes and the resources to implement an ongoing cycle of collaboratively developed evidence based planning and review.

We must cultivate a proactive, intelligent and responsive educational eco-system with new leadership - in and of autonomous schools to drive improvement in educational outcomes for Australian students. Without school leaders with the necessary skills and capabilities to identify and implement appropriate initiatives the impact of additional funding will be diminished.

Principal autonomy will only result in improved student outcomes if principals have the capabilities, mindset, focus and resources to use it effectively. Current and

aspiring school leaders, federal and state policy makers, and education stakeholders must understand how policy, research and practice come together to transform schools and school systems. Principals need to know what works and why it works; practice and policy must be informed by high quality contemporary research.

School improvement efforts rely heavily on quality leadership. Good leaders develop a culture of improvement – good leaders develop good teachers who improve outcomes for their students.

Recommendation 6:

Give school leaders "real autonomy" – autonomy over the things that matter, so that they can make a real difference. This includes decisions relating to curricula, assessments and resource allocation (including human resources).

Capabilities, skills and knowledge students should learn at school to prepare them for the future …….

There is considerable discussion about the changing nature of work, the skills required by business and industry into the future and the capacity of our schools to deliver students with these 21st century skills

The Prime Minister has made a compelling case for Australians to be transformed to become "more productive, more innovative, more technologically sophisticated and more imaginative" but for the schooling sector to play its part in such a transformation, it needs the Commonwealth Government to drive the national agenda away from what has been (that is an attempt to create a better version of 1960s schools), to what it needs to be, which is a new learning paradigm where learning to learn and inquiry is every bit as important as what is learnt. The Australian Curriculum recognises this by incorporating a key set of lifelong learning skills and processes, the General Capabilities, which are undertaken through a subject-based curriculum and are the very essence of the intended spirit of the Australian Curriculum.

Just as our nation needs to transform from a traditional economy to one that is innovative and progressive, our education system needs the enabling conditions to transform from the traditional subject based orientation to an explicit focus on the teaching, assessing and reporting of the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities.

Recommendation 7:

Whilst curriculum content is important, the curriculum should be delivered through the General Capabilities. Our education system needs the enabling conditions to transform from the traditional subject based orientation to an explicit focus on teaching, assessing and reporting of the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities.

Recommendation 8:

The quantum of content in the Australian Curriculum is problematic - guidance must be given on how all the curriculum fits into what teachers are required to teach. We need "core curriculum" which takes up 60% of the time and allows flexibility over the remaining 40% to contextualize the learning to meet the needs of students and communities.

Recommendation 9:

NAPLAN testing should be linked to the curriculum so that it does not interrupt teaching and learning and when NAPLAN is online students and schools should be able to schedule the test when appropriate. This would address the issue of "league tables".

Measuring school quality and educational success ……

Whilst we acknowledge the political imperative of improved NAPLAN and PISA scores the review must focus on value add / student gain / progression. Public schools do a fantastic job at improving student outcomes; often under very difficult circumstances. Students enter public secondary schools at various levels of development. In many cases, because of disadvantage, disengagement or disability they enter significantly behind where they should be based on age. For these students, achievement against NAPLAN and PISA will always be problematic but that does not mean that schools do not significantly improve outcomes for those students.

We must focus on progress as well as achievement. Public schools do the heavy lifting on the lower end; it is important the "selective schools" demonstrate improved outcomes at the "top end" as well.

The problem with reporting national testing data as a score is that it encourages teachers, parents and students just to improve a number - and this is where teaching to the test comes in. Teaching to the test is a temporary measure that may improve students' scores and give an illusion of better results but, it is just teaching better test-taking skills.

Personalised Learning:

The OECD contends that children and young people need to engage with a contemporary education that privileges the growth of personal assets, dispositions and skills that will empower them as competitive participants in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world. Facing unprecedented challenges and opportunities, this generation requires new capacities. They will need to be critical and creative to make sensitive judgements in situations where people's perspectives and beliefs are at odds.

Our industrial model of education constrains the true development of such capacities as our curriculum, our pedagogies and our assessments are standardised. To honor the talents of every learner and to honestly monitor and celebrate one year of educational growth for one year of learning, our systems of schooling must be constructed upon a foundation that every child and young person, let alone teacher and school leader, are individuals and they will each track their own course of learning. They must be able to be co-creators of the curriculum; negotiators of the learning experience; and inventors of the assessment or sharing of their learning.

Each school will face different challenges. Addressing challenges such as school attendance will need to be the priority in many schools before any improvement will be realized.

Recommendation 10:

Remove A – E reporting and develop measures of individualised student progress.

Recommendation - Measure "value add / student gain / progress"

Whilst we acknowledge the political imperative of improved NAPLAN and PISA scores the review must focus on "value add / student gain / progress". Public schools do a fantastic job at improving student outcomes; often under very difficult circumstances. Students enter public secondary schools at various levels of development. In many cases, because of disadvantage, disengagement or disability they enter significantly behind where they should be based on age. For these students, achievement against NAPLAN and PISA will always be problematic but that does not mean that schools do not significantly improve outcomes for those students.

Supporting ongoing improvement over time?

Recommendation 11:

Early intervention in literacy and numeracy is important but we can't lose sight of the 13 years of students (who are currently in our schools) for whom early intervention strategies were not in place.

Using schools funding more effectively and efficiently (at the classroom, school or system level) to have a significant impact on learning outcomes for all students ……

Teaching and Learning

This cannot be "one size fits all"; teaching and learning interventions are a byproduct of good leadership and good teaching and learning and dependent upon the context of the school.

The Recommendations from the Targeted teaching: How better use of data can improve student learning Report (The Grattan Institute; 2015) must be considered in the context of value add / student gain. We need to develop a system where

teachers can measure individual student progress and use that data to inform and improve their practice.

Recommendation 12:

Provide teachers with additional support - Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers should be identified and recruited to work in schools to support / mentor inexperienced teachers.

Recommendation 13:

Provide additional staffing in schools to allow more time for "preparation for teaching" as opposed to "face to face teaching" – a characteristic of many Asian and high performing countries is that teachers have less "face to face" teaching time and greater time for preparation / class observation / mentoring etc.

Recommendation 14:

Use experienced leaders in schools to mentor / support school leaders.

Professional Learning:

There are no national accreditation standards for professional development providers so the quality and impact of PL delivered varies greatly. If we are going to improve then …….

- PL must be assessed in terms of "impact" on student outcomes

- PL must reflect the changing role of school leaders and the skills required for the role

- PL targeted at current leaders to help them identify the potential leaders of the future is essential

- PL linked to The Australian Professional Standard for Principals must be established that:

   o Develops essential 21stC leadership skills

   o Links to university courses that reflect contemporary school leadership

   o Involves action research

   o Involves 'leadership practicum' – aspirant leaders in real situations and

   o Enables aspirants to demonstrate their capacity as a school leader.

Recommendation 15:

Provide School leaders and aspiring leaders with appropriate and timely professional development to ensure that we have the right person (who has demonstrated the

appropriate skills and capabilities) in the right place at the right time to lead an autonomous school community in a specific context.

Australian teachers already attend professional development activities relatively often, but the practices they learn are not necessarily evidence-based or have an impact on teacher practice or student outcomes.

Recommendation 16:

Put in place mechanisms to ensure that all PL is quality assured and has a demonstrated positive impact on teacher practice and student outcomes.

Recommendation 17– provision of quality Physical Education:

According to the QUALITY PHYSICAL EDUCATION (QPE) - GUIDELINES FOR POLICY-MAKERS 2015 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO), emerging research also notes the connection between physically active youth and academic achievement. Academic performance is influenced by other factors, but, nevertheless, the evidence supports the presupposition that if young people achieve at least the recommended daily amount of physical activity there are potentially broad social and academic gains".

These findings have been supported by the Professor Richard Telford led LOOK study; a randomised controlled trial testing the effectiveness of a sustained four-year program of PE as reported in the ASIA-PACIFIC JOURNAL OF HEALTH, SPORT AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION.

This "controlled trial included nationally conducted literacy and numeracy assessments (NAPLAN) at grades 3 and 5 and these data proved more conclusive. The one clearly statistically significant intervention effect was for numeracy. With the average improvement of scores in all children over the two years being in the order of 70 points, boys and girls in the PE program improved their numeracy scores 15 and 14 points more than their control group counterparts (Telford, Cunningham, Fitzgerald, et al., 2012)".

To improve practice and outcomes .....

Recommendation 18:

AITSL, in partnership with ACARA and ESA develop a formative evaluation tool for teachers that will enable every teacher to collect timely data on each individual student's progress.

Recommendation 19:

To ensure teachers have the capacity to select and build appropriate assessments and make informed decisions about how to most effectively teach students. Targeted professional learning for teachers on the use of a formative assessment tool is essential.

What works best ......

Good leaders are essential to develop learning ecosystems that encourage teachers to seek appropriate interventions, from a range of possible interventions, to meet the needs of individual students. There is no "silver bullet" and context is important.

Recommendation 20:

Develop a network where examples of good practice can be shared. Teachers can then choose appropriate interventions that can be adapted then adopted to meet the context in which the learning is taking place.

Governance arrangements to ensure ongoing identification, sharing and implementation of evidence-based good practice to grow and sustain improved student outcomes ......

The question really is: Do we need more governance or better governance? Australia as a nation needs to de-politicise education so the goal posts don't keep shifting and long term planning can be realised. Improvement will be only be seen with sustained interventions which are well resourced and not subject to political will and resourcing fluctuations.

The Review of Funding for Schooling (Gonski 2011) recommendation 35, refers to a national Schools Resourcing Body which would require support and funding to conduct: 'Ongoing research, analysis and data improvement to ensure continuous improvement within schooling sectors'

Recommendation 21:

The National Schools Resourcing body must be guided by a representative advisory group to provide advice to the body on schooling matters. It is crucial that the governance body operates under strong and transparent guidelines with a diverse and capable membership. The advisory body must ensure that it is credible and truly representative in that at the least it contains school leaders from different sectors, is culturally appropriate and inclusive

In summary ....

Good (effective) leadership – real autonomy (over what matters) – good teaching and learning - measure what is important (progress) – PL that has an impact – parent engagement - national consistency (develop nationally; implement locally) = better outcomes