

Recipient Details

Name of organisation or individual: [I] Jenkinson, Charles

Reference Type: Chairman of an Independent Public School

State or territory: WA

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Responses

Curriculum and assessment

Echoing the message from WA Chief Scientist, Peter Klinken: The biggest problem with assessment is that it tests memory not problem-solving ability.

You don't need to remember something you can look up in 15 seconds, but you do need to know how knowledge integrates. Students need to be fully engaged in finding/researching information not regurgitating information that has been fed to them. Let us create a nation of problem solvers and innovators.

Interestingly, Edward De Bono experimented with teaching 'problem solving' as a subject and found a significant statistical jump in learning outcomes from previously struggling students.

Overall, it matters not whether a school student is in the city or bush. The key is the provision of equal opportunity to go further.

Rating: 5

Teachers and teaching

Student engagement with the curriculum is entirely due to teaching skills and the ability of individuals to motivate and encourage.

We have all experienced great teachers who are pure gold and those who should not be given the responsibility of shaping young minds because they either have their own issues or cannot even spell properly.

The questions have a significant focus on attracting top teachers and what incentives should be given. Looking at it from another direction, how do we remove bad teachers from the system? And, how do we get good teachers to go to bad schools?

Rating: 7

Leaders and leadership

It is exceptionally rare to find a 'born leader'. It is a learned skill which can be picked up by anyone willing to acquire it.

My question would be that given that strong leadership is based on respect, vision, authenticity and an ability to deal with others then why are we discussing this as a matter for principals? It should be a part of teacher training and a part of the curriculum so students can also benefit.

Rating: 6

School and Community

The culture in any given school has great influence. The power of the peer group can hold a student back or raise them to realise full potential.

The whole learning environment must be one that respects the quality of teaching, continual improvement and a desire for all students to be the best they can be.

The Discussion Paper talks about parent engagement and it is agreed that where parents engage with their child then that individual's prospects are boosted, however, the Discussion Paper's references to school-parent partnerships raises new issues. It has proved very difficult to interact with parents at the Year 11-12 school at which I am Chairman. Our school is a 'school of choice' and I believe the parents care a great deal about their children, but they care a great deal less about interacting with the school.

That said, we have had great success with student placements in workplaces and our school is fully engaged with TAFE and the nearby university which offers a few courses in the country. The message may be that parents see the education of their children as a matter for the school.

From the student's perspective, there is a considerable workload and pressure for ATAR. Many young people also work to save up for university and many play sports, additional community engagement is almost impossible for those people unless they are prepared to ease back on study, work and/or sports. These students are already motivated and know what they want to achieve.

Rating: 7

Information and Communication Technology

There is little doubt that the NBN network in non-metro areas is currently of a lesser standard, although that will doubtless improve with newer technologies.

There had been some local discussion around connecting high schools to deliver more marginal courses (ie marginal in the sense that offering a particular subject was becoming a marginal issue for funding a teacher). The problem was that when a course attracted insufficient student numbers it would be dropped. The consequence is that students either can't study their chosen subject or leave the school and their absence then pushes other courses to the brink and so we have a domino effect of children leaving a school to travel an hour to another school.

The local proposition was that if we could align classes and connect three or four schools by real-time internet, then students could not only take their chosen courses by collectively having the numbers, we could even offer courses that would never ordinarily attract sufficient students to make it viable (eg accountancy). The stumbling block is cost of the system and quality of the internet links. There are also co-ordination issues. Schools must know their numbers and courses in respect of State funding. Synchronising courses, numbers, teaching resources and funding at one school is difficult enough without having to work with others.

Flexible resourcing would resolve the issues but the internet issues remain.

Rating: 4

Entrepreneurship and schools

There is no doubt that where students have been exposed to entrepreneurship training, they are more likely to establish their own businesses and become self-reliant. These studies can be

combined with other subjects and cover more areas of education and do not necessarily need new programmes.

Rating: 6

Improving access – enrolments, clusters, distance education and boarding

Boarding education should be paid by the government as a duty to all young citizens regardless of their parents or family finances.

It is our duty to furnish students with as much opportunity as possible if the nation is to benefit. There is a clear link between educational achievement and wages/productivity so why would we not support learning on the basis that the more people go on to earn then the more taxes they will pay. It is an investment in the future.

Rating for enrolments: 7

Rating for clusters: 1

Rating for distance education: 5

Rating for boarding: 7

Diversity

I do not have sufficient experience of this area to comment.

Rating: 0

Transitioning beyond school

Equality in opportunity is a basic right of all young people.

While there will always be those with more money than others, young adults do not control incomes and should not be judged by the worth of their parents.

While this will be treated as anecdotal evidence, I have personally witnessed bright students who could not go to university because their parents cannot afford the accommodation fees. I have also seen students fail because they were held back as they tried to work unskilled low paid jobs to save enough to pay for accommodation in the city. The gap for some is a bridge that grows too wide to overcome.

Regional and rural students are badly disadvantaged by a system that favours live-at-home metropolitan students over regional students who have to find \$18,000-22,000pa for accommodation. This issue must be addressed - whether through government-sponsored accommodation or tax breaks for parents who pay for their children. You cannot means test parents in this regard because not all put the interests of their children first, and it should be noted that I have personally witnessed girls not being funded by parents who live in the past and think marriage is a better option for their daughter than a university education.

Bluntly: the system is grossly unfair and there is not much point in getting all the other steps right if a barrier exists on the last step. We must treat young adults as individuals.

Rating: 7

Additional Comments