



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

Submitter: NSW Department of Education  
Submitting as a: Government agency  
State: NSW

### Summary

#### Main submission

##### Introduction

The purpose of this review is to identify how funding can be used most effectively and efficiently to improve student and school performance.

These are outcomes that New South Wales (NSW) is well-placed to inform.

As the first signatory to the original National Education Reform Agreement, we are in the midst of implementing a system-wide reform program that is transforming the way we deliver education.

The scale of our reform agenda is broad. When taken together, our evidence-based reforms constitute the most comprehensive reforms to education in NSW in a century.

We have implemented major structural reforms to lift education performance across all schools – government and non-government – as well as sector-specific reforms and targeted reforms that address persistent problem areas.

We are driving high quality learning at all stages of the education journey – from early childhood education, through school, and into vocational training and higher education.

And we've made evidence central to our reform agenda. We've invested in data and analytics so we can determine what's working, what to continue and what to improve.

All our reforms are united by a single aim: to improve outcomes and opportunities for every student. Critical to their success has been the implementation of needs-based funding for all schools, and an increase in investment.

This is in the face of significant challenges for NSW and Australian schools.

Right now, NSW is responding to pressures on the education system which vary by location as well as student cohort.

We are facing extraordinary student growth in some metropolitan areas. At the same time, we are also responding to challenges of resource availability, connectivity and access in regional areas.

Our changing economy will demand new, more complex skills so that our young people can compete internationally. They will need to think creatively, solve problems and adapt quickly to the changing nature of work.

While research shows that large-scale reform can take six years to achieve measurable change, our reforms are beginning to show results.

Our 2017 NAPLAN results, for example, show marked improvement across priority areas.

NSW is now in the top three jurisdictions for all test domains across all year levels.

We met our Premier's Priority target – to increase the proportion of NSW students in the top two NAPLAN bands by 8% by 2019 – two years' early, in 2017. We will be focused on sustaining and building on this positive result until the target end date in 2019 and beyond.

And we have made other important gains, notably, reducing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students at the Year 9 level.

We expect our performance will continue to improve as our reforms gain momentum.

However, complementary action nationally and by the Commonwealth will be critical to sustain these improvements and ensure our reform program delivers its full potential.

The Commonwealth can better support NSW through a range of measures in areas where it has more direct responsibility. This includes through reforms to initial teacher education to improve the quality of new teachers.

Sustained Commonwealth support for early childhood education, school capital and technology needs will also be critical. These are important underpinning supports for educational outcomes and should therefore be considered.

Likewise, while the review will not consider funding, it should be noted that adequate and ongoing Commonwealth funding will be necessary to provide NSW with the certainty we need to continue to make the necessary investments in education.

The NSW Government's submission to the Review into Regional Rural and Remote Education speaks to a complementary set of actions and recommendations on our students in regional, rural and remote areas. We urge the Panel to also consider the NSW submission to this Review.

The NSW reform journey

Australia's changing economy means young people will need to develop higher-level skills in order to compete internationally. They will need to be highly competent in critical and creative thinking and problem solving. They will need to be adaptable to the changing nature of work.

In the face of these opportunities and challenges, the NSW Government has moved to lift the performance of our education system and ensure it can meet these challenges and opportunities into the future.

Each reform we have implemented is based on the best available evidence, recognising that strengthening the teaching profession is a key element of any improvement strategy.

Since 2011, the NSW Government has:

- implemented the [NSW Literacy and Numeracy Strategy](#) to focus on the core skills for all students
- committed to [literacy and numeracy standards for students](#)
- developed new measures to measure and support student wellbeing
- implemented [needs-based funding to support all students](#)
- committed to a record investment in school infrastructure
- provided new support for different career pathways, and to help students transition to higher education, vocational education and work
- provided funding and support for early childhood education to improve transition to school
- required Higher School Certificate (HSC) students (since 2016) intending to enter initial teacher education to have a Band 5 or higher in three HSC subjects including English or have met a comparable standard through an approved alternative pathway
- implemented [Great Teaching, Inspired Learning](#), which is a range of reforms that span the whole career cycle of a teacher from initial teacher training and induction for beginning teachers, through to recognising and valuing experienced teachers and supporting potential school leaders

- implemented [Local Schools, Local Decisions](#), a reform that recognises all schools are not the same, and gives schools the authority to implement the programs best suited to their students
- put in place the [School Leadership Strategy](#), a reform to provide additional support to school leaders so that they can focus on leading teaching and learning in their schools
- adopted the [School Excellence Policy](#), an accountability policy for schools that requires they consult with their local communities on their strategic directions
- adopted the [Regional and Remote Blueprint](#), a detailed plan to improve student learning in regional, rural and remote schools across NSW
- implemented [Connected Communities](#), an innovative strategy to address the educational and social aspirations of Aboriginal Students and all students
- implemented the [School Excellence Framework](#) to support all NSW government schools to monitor their progress against their strategic school plan and drive further improvement
- adopted the Best Start assessment for Kindergarten students to help teachers identify their students' literacy and numeracy knowledge
- adopted the SMART tool to better leverage NAPLAN data
- undertaken a multifaceted approach to improve teacher practice, including through our Great Teaching, Inspired Learning reforms
- established the Leadership Development Initiative to build school leadership capacity
- provided new self-assessment tools to schools through the [School Excellence Policy](#)
- established [CESE](#) to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of education in NSW
- established the [NSW Education Standards Authority](#) (NESA), to set and monitor quality teaching, learning, assessment and school standards.

Our reforms are underpinned by the [seven themes identified by CESE](#) that improve educational outcomes: high expectations, explicit teaching, effective feedback, use of data to inform practice, classroom management, wellbeing and collaboration.

It should also be noted that our reforms are at different stages of maturity. Given their scope and ambition, our major reforms like the Resource Allocation Model (RAM) require multiple years to implement. Others, like Connected Communities, are being scaled up at the school level. Others still, like the Literacy and Numeracy

Strategy, have entered a second stage that builds on the first, following [extensive evaluation](#).

In short, our reform program is not static, but a process. In this context, it is important that NSW has a period of stability to let our reforms take effect.

Likewise, it should be recognised that in the national context, all states and territories are at different stages on the reform pathway. This diversity should be recognised by the Panel in the development of its recommendations.

### **Improved outcomes**

NSW's reforms are already showing results in the form of improved student outcomes.

The NSW Government Premier's Priority on education, set in 2015, targets an increase in the proportion of NSW students in the top two NAPLAN bands by 8% by 2019.

Preliminary 2017 NAPLAN results show we have met this target two years early, with an average of 35.4% of students achieving the top two NAPLAN bands in reading and/or numeracy (from a baseline of 32.7%). This is 8,300 additional students compared to 2016, and more than 167,700 students in total.

We will focus on sustaining and building on this positive result until the target end-date in 2019 and beyond.

The 2017 results also show:

- that NSW is in the top three jurisdictions for all test domains across all year levels
- that for the first time ever, NSW is first in Year 9 Numeracy and second for Year 9 Reading
- that NSW has achieved its highest ever mean scores for Year 3 in Reading and Numeracy
- a clear increase in Years 5 through 9 Spelling results, with NSW remaining first in the country in Spelling at all year levels
- a sharp increase in the mean numeracy score for all year levels from 2016, meaning NSW has regained second place for Year 7 Numeracy
- an 8% increase in the proportion of students in the top two NAPLAN bands (compared to the 2014 baseline). This equates to 13,679 additional students achieving the top two bands since baseline
- continued improvement in the Year 3 Grammar and Punctuation mean score

- that, among Year 9 students, there has also been an improvement of 2.3 percentage points for reading and 4.4 percentage points for numeracy in the top two bands (from 2016 to 2017)
- that the increase in the proportion of NSW students in the top two bands from 2016 to 2017 is almost double that of other jurisdictions.

NSW has achieved these improvements in NAPLAN at the same time as it has seen an improvement in its participation rate, up from 92.8% in 2016 to 94.7% in 2017.

Efforts targeted at particular cohorts are also delivering results. The 2017 NAPLAN results for NSW Government schools show:

- In Year 9 Numeracy, the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the proportion of students at or above the minimum standard has substantially decreased. The gap in 2017 was 5 percentage points, compared to a gap of 8.5 percentage points in 2016 (a 42% decrease), and a gap of 12.4 percentage points in 2012 (a 60% decrease).
- Connected Communities primary schools demonstrated a marked improvement in Reading and Writing results.
- Schools participating in the Bump It Up program as a group achieved greater improvements in results for students in the top two bands for Reading and Numeracy than other schools.
- Primary Bump It Up schools improved by 4.3 percentage points compared to 1.2 percentage points in non-Bump It Up schools. Secondary Bump It Up schools improved by 2.1 percentage points compared to 0.2 percentage points in non-Bump It Up schools.
- Early Action for Success schools have improved their average results in reading and numeracy. These schools have fewer students in the bottom two bands and more in the top two bands over time. This has contributed to NSW schools' highest ever reading and numeracy results in 2017.

And while NAPLAN is a valid indicator, it does not measure all aspects of successful student outcomes. Doing so requires we take into account factors like student wellbeing and engagement, school completion levels and how students transition from early childhood education to primary school or from primary school to high school. School leavers' preparedness for work, further study or skills training could also be considered.

Indicators that speak to these broader factors are also showing positive signs. For example, NSW retention from Year 7 to Year 12 continues to improve. For NSW government schools the 2016 rate for fulltime students of 74.3% is the highest on record and is around 4 percentage points higher than five years prior (70.5% in 2011)

and 9 percentage points higher than ten years prior (65.1% in 2006). Among other things, this speaks to increased student engagement in senior high school.

Research demonstrates that large scale reforms can take up to six years to demonstrate results. While the results listed above are encouraging, sustainable and stable funding is required to further embed these reforms.

#### Recommendations

The NSW Government has made significant investment in targeted, evidence-based reforms in early childhood, school education and vocational education and training (VET).

These reforms are driving high quality learning and teaching at all stages of education – from early childhood, through schools and into vocational and higher education.

In developing and implementing a reform agenda, NSW as a state, our school systems and individual schools have looked to the increasingly rich international and Australian [evidence base](#). Successfully implementing reform requires stable, predictable and well-targeted funding, consistent application of evidence based reforms that support and enhance strong professional practice in each classroom.

Embedding local decision-making into the school system has been a critical component of NSW reforms and our success to date, as we have provided schools with the resources, flexibility and autonomy to choose the programs which best suit their students' needs. Retaining states and territories' autonomy as system managers and recognising their expertise is essential to continue improving student outcomes and encouraging innovation, and the imposition of any additional national policy settings should therefore be limited.

Success for individual students, schools and systems will best be achieved when all elements of the education system are aligned to the same core principles and strategies. NSW recommends that the Panel consider national and Commonwealth actions that can accelerate and deepen reform efforts in the state.

A consistent theme of the research is that greatest results are achieved when solutions are tailored to local needs. States are best placed to determine which reforms should be implemented, including how they should be implemented, given the unique circumstances of each state and each school. NSW highlights that any national requirements on state-based reforms should be limited.

It is also worth noting that it has been agreed that any new reforms will be agreed through the Education Council.

As such, the Review should consider how its final advice should be incorporated into the school funding and reform agreements to be considered in 2018.

## What students learn and how they learn

National curriculum and approaches to assessment have an important role in the setting of standards, and the expectations of what students should experience and achieve before they leave school.

NSW recommends that the Panel:

- consider how ACARA's future charter for the Australian Curriculum can be leveraged (in collaboration with state-based curriculum and assessment authorities) to better prepare students for a rapidly changing and uncertain world, such as in a phase two curriculum exercise that allows greater depth of instruction, allows more scope to apply learning and provides more emphasis on the acquisition of students' non-cognitive skills, such as a growth mindset
- consider the best national approach to assess minimum literacy and numeracy standards for all Australian students to complete Year 12, given that the Commonwealth has committed to require national minimum standards in their Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes package
- consider ways in which students in senior secondary years can undertake a greater depth of study while reducing the pressure of a single final ATAR number.

Commonwealth policy outside of schooling has a direct impact on the outcomes for students (potentially to a greater degree than more direct mechanisms).

NSW suggests that the Panel:

- recommend that reliable and sustained Commonwealth and state funding and strategies for early childhood be required to provide Australia with a sound platform for schooling
- request the Commonwealth consider the alignment of funding, regulation and support mechanisms to develop a seamless national tertiary education system which provides students with more flexibility and greater choice.

NSW is experiencing an unprecedented era of student growth, and accordingly, has committed to a record education infrastructure program. To help meet the demands of this growth, NSW recommends that the Panel consider ways the Commonwealth can support the capital and digital needs of government and non-government schools brought on by a growing student population.

### Teachers and school leadership

While NSW has taken a number of steps to improve the quality of teachers and school leaders, there are many areas where the state's actions would be strengthened by additional national and Commonwealth actions.

NSW recommends that the Panel:

- note that the Commonwealth funds initial teacher education courses on a demand basis without regard to the needs of employers (government and non-government schools). This leads to students graduating in areas with low demand (and poor prospects of employment) and schools undertaking significant efforts to provide practicum places for these students
- request that the Commonwealth leverage its funding and regulation of universities to address asymmetries between an oversupply of primary teachers and unmet demand for secondary teachers, particularly in the disciplines of mathematics, science and languages
- recommend additional steps to strengthen the quality of initial teacher education candidates, including through the introduction of national minimum entry standards
- consider ways to continue to improve the quality of initial teacher education programs (and help strengthen the expertise of the teaching profession) by requiring initial teacher education courses to include mandatory content on building knowledge of quality assessment practices and the use of technology for teaching and learning
- consider how ACARA's future charter can be leveraged (in collaboration with state-based curriculum and assessment authorities) to better support teachers with clear guidance on explicit teaching and the use of quality online diagnostic assessments – to help them identify and target learning to meet student needs.

Defining and measuring success in education

The purpose of defining and measuring success in education is to provide teachers, students, schools and the community with clear and objective standards for driving student progress and ensuring students can be prepared as well-equipped citizens.

International and national standardised tests are useful systemic measures but quality classroom assessments are the real drivers for student improvement. Greater emphasis should be given to ensuring that all assessments provide the insight that teachers need to lift outcomes, and that teachers are well equipped to utilise assessment data.

NSW recommends that the Panel:

- consider how the current development of the Literacy and Numeracy Learning Progressions could be advanced with online assessments linked to the Progressions for use by teachers. This could also be used as a model for

developing learning progressions to support other areas of the curriculum linked to online assessments broader than literacy and numeracy

- recommend that ACARA, in collaboration with state-based curriculum and assessment authorities, have clear responsibilities for developing: quality assessments and teacher expertise in using them; measures for ensuring consistency of teacher judgements; and nimble systems for capturing data that can inform teaching
- consider ways to grow the depth and expertise of the teaching profession in relation to assessment by introducing and supporting mandatory professional learning in assessment for teachers, and building knowledge of quality assessment practices into initial teacher education courses.

Identifying, sharing and driving good practice

NSW has strengthened all parts of our education system to have a much greater evidence-based orientation.

NSW recommends that the Panel:

- consider existing state and territory efforts to identify and drive good practice, and look at ways these efforts can be shared nationally
- identify ways to support school inspection and regulatory authorities develop quality schooling frameworks to assess and report on how schools and school systems are supporting teachers to implement quality pedagogy and formative assessment.