

National School Reform Agreement

Secondary state school teacher comment

Melbourne (Northern region)

Nineteen years of full-time teaching experience in low socio-economic schools

On page. 127 of the 'Review of the National School Reform Agreement Interim report, Recommendations and Findings 5: Supporting teachers.

Teacher effectiveness is the most important in-school factor driving student outcomes

Student outcomes are driven by a range of factors both inside and outside the school, with teachers representing the most important in-school factor (AERO, sub. 6, pp. 4–5; AITSL, sub. 27, p. 6; Victorian Government, sub. 31, p. 6).

Studies that measure teacher effectiveness examine the additional learning gains that students achieve from having a certain teacher (appendix D). Evidence suggests that teachers account for between 30-40 per cent of the variation in student learning gain (Hattie 2003, p. 2; Ingvarson and Rowe 2008, p. 8) — **no other in-school factor has a greater effect on student achievement** (Hanushek 2011, p. 467).¹

Teacher effectiveness is driven by a range of factors

The factors that drive teacher effectiveness vary and can affect either 'quality teaching' and or 'teacher quality' (figure 5.2).

Understanding the different drivers is important for policy development. For example, the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) (sub. 6, p. 5) noted that high-performing school systems such as Singapore, South Korea and Finland target both teacher quality and quality teaching in their recruitment and system strategies. Evidence on which driver has the greatest effect on teacher effectiveness is contested. Measurable teacher characteristics such as experience, qualifications and test scores can sometimes explain little of the variation in student achievement (Burgess 2016, pp. 31–33; Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain 2005, p. 420). For example, there is wide variation in the quality of professional development and its effect on teacher effectiveness (Didion, Toste and Filderman 2019, p. 55). And evidence suggests early career classroom performance may be a better indicator of teacher effectiveness (Fahey 2022, pp. 31–32).

The factors that affect teacher effectiveness can be split into professional development, the school environment and government policy (Naylor and Sayed 2014, pp. 9–20).

- Professional development captures effective pre-service education and ongoing development that improves teacher effectiveness.
- The school environment captures school-level factors that can affect teacher classroom practices.
- Government policy captures how teacher effectiveness can be influenced by policy levers.

¹ These studies can be subject to selection bias from two important factors (Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain 2005, p. 424).

Footnote:

First, families will generally choose the neighbourhood and schools their children attend. Second, principals and administrators will allocate students to classrooms. Therefore, without accurate information about how these decisions are made, estimations of student achievement could be biased. Even so, the breadth of evidence about teacher effectiveness is large and robust; and these factors do not change the underlying point that teachers are the most important in-school factor affecting student outcomes

Based on almost twenty years of full-time teaching experience in Melbourne schools, so many variables exist that impact on student outcomes that aren't measured and are intangible. These include:

- Student mindset, intrinsic student motivation, self-confidence, self-perception of academic abilities
- Parental influence, affluence, literacy levels, parenting skills
- Classroom personality dynamics
- Maturity of students (Year 8-10 boys)
- Poor self-regulation
- Low resilience
- Student moods
- Tiredness> attending excessive hours of paid work after school, bedtime of students

- Emotional issues
- Student absences, interruptions to teaching and learning sequences
- Student aspirations
- Teacher time to work with students 'one-on-one' during a lesson
- Student attitude towards school> measured, bias in self-reporting versus actuality
- Student personal organisational skills
- Impact of two years of sequential Melbourne lockdowns and remote learning on student motivation levels
- Increased rates of non-completion of homework
- Excessive screen time
- Informal language usage, truncated language due to technology usage, electronic spell checks, habits of short messaging style
- Reduced hard copy book reading
- Dictionaries not being used in classrooms
- Degree of student appreciation and respect for education

Suggesting that teacher quality and teacher effectiveness is the sole determinant of student academic achievement, demonstrates a profound lack of understanding and appreciation for how state classrooms function. This perspective also relegates teachers as the scapegoats for poor student performance. Teaching is a mutual partnership between teacher and hopefully, co-operative students. It is about building their capacity and their learning independence. I worked in a Melbourne high school that for many years had one of the highest intakes of TFA teachers (Teach for Australia) in Victoria. This scheme made highly trained and highly skilled 'lay teachers' feel like we were second rate and not good enough. Often these TFA teachers were fast tracked through leadership positions without learning the nuances of classroom teaching. The recruitment of these TFA teachers did not make one iota of difference to the school's overall VCE academic results. Why? Because we worked with inherently difficult students, day in and day out and to be labelled as lacking 'quality' is a hurtful and disgraceful insult. Walk a mile in our shoes. Unless you have been a teacher in front of twenty-five darling cherubs, you really have no understanding of the daily challenges and unnecessary system stressors in teaching public students.

As teacher shortages are chronic, may I suggest that you collectively change your narrative and approach. Build up your teachers as we also need positive praise. Teacher time needs to be respected and we do not need superfluous busy work like 'inquiry cycles' and excessive meetings that defers our core teacher work and adds to our burgeoning workload. A few of my colleagues have decided to take gap time from teaching next year. It is time for this political roundtable gathering to seriously and radically reform your practice, if we have any hope in rebuilding and stabilising our honourable profession.

Ms Christine Usher

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