

## Submission National School Reform Agreement Interim Report

“For children and young people, their experiences and relationships at school are often major influences on their wellbeing. For example, at school they have opportunities to develop skills (such as resilience, emotional awareness, ability to resolve conflicts) and social networks that support their wellbeing. Conversely, students may have experiences at school that adversely affect their wellbeing (such as bullying or social or classroom exclusion)” (p. 104)

Another experience that can adversely affect wellbeing is the experience of continually failing, of never being good enough, of not winning, which is experienced by many who are the youngest in their class, or who have a disability, particularly those with an undiagnosed disability.

The emphasis needs to move away from “Are you at this level?” to “How much can you learn?”. Many students are capable of learning much more than they currently do at school, but teachers are not encouraged to extend students beyond their year level as young students don't cope with the stress of year 12 exams very well. If we can extend those students and do it in a non-stressful way, we should. Why can't they learn all of the knowledge involved in a year 12 subject but not formally enrol in it until they are ready and old enough to cope with the stress of year 12 exams? Are the exams not about what they end up knowing? Or are they, rather, about how much a student can cram in a single year?

The online formative assessment tool along with the learning progressions is supposed to allow teachers to report on student learning in terms of years of progress. [“Your son, Charles, has learnt 1.4 years worth of maths this year, but is still to show that he is at year 6 standard. He has worked hard to fill the gaps in his education caused by the multiple hospital admissions he had to contend with last year.”] But the progressions themselves do not contain any idea of pacing. The progressions need to have, within them, an idea of how long an average student would spend on this level in the progression, with perhaps an outside number, where, if a child spends longer than this in the level, it is an indication that intervention is called for.

If the progressions are to be used to report student progression up to the end of year 10, then they need to extend well beyond the level that average year 10 students attain. If, say a student is capable of learning 1.3 years of schoolwork in a year, by the end of year 8 they would have learnt  $9 \times 1.3 = 11.7$  years worth of schooling and would be working at the level of a student who had finished year 10 and is in the second half of year 11. For the progressions to work and allow students who find school work easy to show over a year's growth each year the numeracy progression, for example, would need to be extended past year 12 level to something like 2nd year university level or

perhaps the numeracy progression would need to transition to a mathematics progression that extended that far.

At the moment teachers are not expected to extend students past their current year level. Students who finish early because the work is too easy for them get to play (read, write or draw) quietly while the other students catch up. Some of these students hit a wall in about year 10 or 11 when they end up in differentiated classes which have higher expectations. I have personally met students who in a year 9 mixed maths class could sustain 'B' results by paying attention for about 5 minutes in a 45 minute lesson, and who then take the advanced maths class in year 10 to prepare for maths methods in year 11, and are extremely surprised at the work that they are expected to do and have a lot of trouble adapting to the learning style that they need for senior schoolwork.

### Mastery

The learning progressions seem to come with an expectation of mastery learning, where a student needs to master previous levels in a progression in order to progress to a new level. But schools do not seem to be set up in a way where all students can attain mastery without some students being held back from their potential to learn. When a whole class is required to master a concept before moving on, the students who master it earlier and easier have to wait, and their time is wasted. I'm not sure if this can be fixed unless the whole of schooling moves onto some sort of individualised system, something like Maths Pathway does, for the basic progression learning but, then, with group projects involving students at similar levels on progressions where students apply their learning. So, maybe for English, students would work at their own level on sentence, grammar, paragraphing and spelling skills, but work with students of similar ability to produce a piece of persuasive text?