

Minister for Education, Children & Youth
Minister for Skills, Training & Workforce Growth
Minister for Environment and Climate Change
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

Level 9 15 Murray Street HOBART TAS 7000 Australia
GPO Box 123 HOBART TAS 7001 Australia
Ph: +61 3 6165 7670
Email: minister.jaensch@dpac.tas.gov.au



Mr Michael Brennan
National School Reform Agreement
Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2, Collins St East
MELBOURNE VIC 8003

Dear Mr Brennan

Tasmanian Government submission to the review of the National School Reform Agreement (NSRA).

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Productivity Commission's review of the of the NSRA (the Review). The Tasmanian Government notes that the scope of the Review includes:

- the effectiveness and appropriateness of the National Policy Initiatives (NPIs); and
- the appropriateness of the Measurement Framework in measuring progress towards achieving the outcomes of the NSRA.

The Commission's approach to the Review, as outlined in the Calls for Submission paper is however, far broader, noting that the Commission will *"take into account other policies affecting school education, including other national reforms and state-specific reform initiatives, as well as external factors that materially affect student outcomes."*

The Tasmanian Government notes the substantial education context that the Commission would need to consider under this approach and will therefore use this submission to highlight Tasmania's education context and experience of the NPIs and the Measurement Framework.

The Tasmanian Government is highly focused on providing high quality education services that are equitable across Tasmania's schools and school systems, but also education services that are equitable when compared with other states and territories. In this context, the NPIs contribute to both quality and equity in school delivery, however they cannot easily be considered in isolation of the financial requirements of the NSRA, which limit flexibility for state funding contributions. In some instances, Commonwealth education funding also works against equitable service provision, prior to the NPIs being a relevant consideration, such as the use of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on Students with disability as the basis of the Commonwealth's disability loading.

Education is delivered in diverse contexts across Tasmania in government and non-government schools. Our Government is the system manager, deliverer of education and majority funder of government schools. To ensure our learners have the skills and attributes they need to succeed in the modern world, the provision of education must account for the local context in which it is delivered.

Tasmania's education context includes unique challenges that impact our service delivery costs such as: geographic isolation; a highly dispersed population; and pockets of entrenched, intergenerational

disadvantage.¹ In the face of these inherent challenges, our strategic focus for education is to improve the access, participation and engagement of all young Tasmanians in education, and to improve learner outcomes.

Our Government has worked hard over the past four years with the non-government school sector to implement the improvement activities of our bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth. We have a keen interest in building on these learnings for the next NSRA so that we are able to make a real and sustained difference for all Tasmanian school students.

The NPIs require significant resources and time to implement, and the effects of nationally coordinated reform efforts take time to materialise. This is clearly evidenced through a number of ongoing NPIs. These NPIs have significant scope to improve the quality of teaching and student learning, but since 2018, they have already occupied significant resources to develop to their current state.

The potential value of the NPIs highlights why national cooperation and mutual trust between the Commonwealth, States and Territories is critical. There is significant value in the delivery of national projects through collaboration as we learn from each other and leverage national resources and skills. Jurisdictions have a mutual obligation to contribute to the delivery of national projects, but we also need to consider the cost-benefit ratio of major initiatives especially for small jurisdictions, which do not have the same resources to draw on to contribute to the national effort as larger States.

As a small jurisdiction, Tasmania supports the opportunity to develop major projects through a national approach. However, any national initiatives progressed through the next NSRA will need to continue to provide sufficient flexibility to account for local circumstances, capability, and priority. Any proposed new agreement must be based on this foundational principle.

The Department of Education's (DoE) Strategic Plan, *Learners First: Connected, Resilient, Creative and Curious Thinkers 2022-2024* acknowledges the rights of the child and articulates the Department's commitment to safeguard the rights of all children and young people to have an education, to be heard and to be kept safe from harm. This strategy is comprehensive and evidence-informed, aimed at lifting educational outcomes for all Tasmanian learners and in doing so, realising significant social and economic benefits for individuals and the Tasmanian community.

Ensuring that current and future NPIs are evidence-informed and adequately evaluated is critical to their success in improving educational outcomes.

Tasmania is supportive of developments that strengthen the national evidence base through quality data, where shared data across jurisdictions can be done securely, safely, lawfully, and ethically. Tasmania will continue to advocate that the wellbeing, safety and privacy of children and young people is at the forefront of planning and decision-making processes. The Intergovernmental Agreement on data sharing can be utilised to support future work programs to be delivered as part of the NSRA.

The *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* notes that "collection of data should be proportionate and not unduly add to the workloads of educators." Tasmania, being a small jurisdiction, is at risk of schools being over-sampled, which creates undue pressure on teachers and learners. Test fatigue can also negatively affect the monitoring of outcomes at the jurisdictional level, particularly where there is reporting overlap. Monitoring equity in data collection and reporting standards is important, however the burden on small jurisdictions of nationally consistent data collection is disproportionately greater. Future national engagement in this area should minimise the reporting burden on schools.

Tasmania, like all jurisdictions has invested in existing data collections methods. There are opportunities to leverage existing data collections and strengthen the reporting standards related to equity, especially by socio-economic factors given the unique challenges of Tasmania's education context. These methods may merit review for consolidation and consistency when applied in reporting for data sets such as student attendance.

¹ ABS 2071.0 Census of Population and Housing: Reflecting Australia – Stories from the Census 2016: November 2018.

Prioritisation for the National Measurement Framework (NMF) should consider the role that data plays for nationally consistent requirements, rather than reporting about jurisdictions or for schools. Without pre-empting what a future NSRA would look like and how it may relate to the NMF, balance is needed. Possible national surveys would benefit from analysis at a local level that is cognisant of contextual issues that may not be replicated in other jurisdictions.

A final, critical issue is the nationwide shortage of skilled workers in Australia which affects all school sectors. Addressing these challenges is a national priority to ensure that education shortages (including specialist teaching, early childhood and in regional and remote schools) and professional support staff shortages (such as speech pathologists and child psychologists) do not reach critical mass. Tasmania is keen to see the progression of national work to attract and retain staff. This work is critical if we are to address issues such as the attrition rate of our teachers and an aging workforce.

Recognising the ongoing challenges facing schools in a "living with COVID" world, we must maximise the opportunities before us and build on the successes we have already achieved to date, at all levels. We believe the best way to do this is to concentrate on foundational matters such as equity, access and participation of students and the needs of our education workforce. These fundamentals must be in place to support improved educational outcomes, and they also represent a strong cost-benefit proposition for states, territories and school sectors.

The Tasmanian Government looks forward to the release of the Productivity Commission interim report. It reflects an important step toward the continued provision of high quality and equitable education for all students in Australian schooling.

/ Yours sincerely

Hon Roger Jaensch MP
Minister for Education, Children and Youth