

Submission Re: Interim Report: 'Review of National School
Reform Agreement'

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Personal Background/Experience

Career/Experience

Classroom Teacher, in S.A. rural, regional and metropolitan settings (10 years)

Curriculum Consultant, S.A. Education Dept, (4 years)

Leadership Consultant, S.A. Centre for Leaders in Education (2 years)

Senior Project Officer, Office of Strategic Reform, S.A. Education Dept. (2 years)

School Principal, in rural, regional and metropolitan schools (20 years)

Ac.care Project Officer, working with students at risk of disengaging from schooling. (1 year)

S. A. Project Officer, KidsMatter, part of national youth mental health initiative. (4 years)

Consultant, Wellbeing In Schools Australia (2 years)

Strategic Manager, across 10 Catholic Schools, Adelaide North West (4 years)

Qualifications:

Diploma in Teaching, Primary

Bachelor of Education, Ed Administration

Preamble

I am not a researcher or an academic. I am a practitioner and my views come from things learnt in the field over many years.

All concerned with education in Australia have a common desire to see our young people thrive, flourish and succeed in the educative process.

All reform programs over the past years have had this as a common, broad focus.

The education reform agenda, in various episodic yet essentially similar iterations, has been a constant in Aust since 1980.

Broadly, the key reform themes have been:

- Standardise and sequence curriculum. Eliminate teacher judgement in the content and sequencing.
- Standardise measurement of learning against this sequence. Measurement by test and accountability for test results sits with teacher, individual school. Schools ordered according to performance.
- Focus unrelentingly on literacy and numeracy achievement only.
- Teaching based on specific, pre-determined outcomes
- Increase centralized control of most domains of the educative process
- Merit based pay systems for teachers
- Model reforms on failed reform models from other western countries such as U.S and Britain.
- The use of data-driven actions (rather than data-informed.)

Yet our student performance is not optimised. Yet our teachers are leaving the profession in significant numbers. Yet there is significant dissatisfaction with our education system.

Schooling has become about curriculum coverage not necessarily learning or the growth of the individual.

Maybe, reform needs to look different. It is in this spirit that I offer some comments.

Some Educative Principles

- The learner is responsible for their learning. A teacher cannot 'make' and individual child's brain learn anything.
- The teacher is responsible for creating the conditions in which the student sees a purpose for learning something and where their cognitive function is optimised.
- The key to successful learning is for the teacher and the student to have significant control over the rate and flow of the learning process.
- A range of ways in which the student can show what they have learnt, what they know and what they can do, should be provided for by the teacher.
- The relationship between the teacher and the learner sits at the heart of purposeful feedback. Students need to see their teacher as an advocate for them, not an adversary of them. Then feedback is seen as a positive construct, not a negative, judgemental one.

- Teachers and schools cannot be held to account for the life circumstance students may find themselves in. Teachers and schools can be held to account for how they use this understanding to inform their practice.
- There are key drivers that energise and motivate teachers. These include:
 1. The intrinsic reward of making a difference
 2. Accorded respect for professional judgement
 3. An environment where relationships assume primacy
 4. Being trusted & having trust in others
 5. Working as part of a team towards a genuine common purpose

Effective schools are driven by leadership that commits to these drivers. They understand that these are the things that enhance student learning and wellbeing.

Effective education systems also understand this.

- Student learning is optimised when their social, emotional, spiritual, physical and academic needs are met
- Individual teacher judgement sits at the heart of meeting these needs. Knowing when to push, when to back off, when to challenge and when to allow time for consolidation are all highly dependent of individual teacher judgement
- Students learn best when the teacher have credibility in their eyes. Students see highly credible teachers those who caring about them, who display great character and who know what they are doing.

School Reform: Through a Different Lens

Any attempt at school reform is doomed unless it sits in the hearts and minds of teachers.

Given that, the three points of focus for the next School Reform Agreement (improved student outcomes, increased equity of outcomes and improved student wellbeing), should sit within the broader challenge of how the practitioners can be key drivers of implementation.

The reform needs to be practitioner-centric. My thought on the 3 focus points sit in this context

I am deliberately addressing student well being first as I believe it sits at the heart of effective learning and is central to achievement of the other two focus points.

Improving Student Wellbeing

1. Reduce the curriculum to create time for teachers and students to connect as people on a regular basis. Create time for teachers to ensure students know they are cared for. Create time for teachers and students to engage in relationship development, in trivial chit-chat.
2. View primary education as critical 'up-stream' work in addressing students wellbeing. Often by adolescent years it can be too late to change the trajectory for some students
3. Secondary schools to organise themselves around middle schooling principles for years 7-9, with a focus on home group learning, fewer teachers for longer periods, flexible timetabling to facilitate relationship building. Budget allocations to schools to increase accordingly

4. Promote the view that this is not asking teachers to do more, it asking them to do less but to focus on relationship development as a trade-off.
5. Revamp traditional school staffing frameworks to ensure all schools have the ability to use creative approaches to nurturing student wellbeing. Given 1:4 students are experiencing mental health difficulties, this flexibility should amount to an extra 20-25% of total staffing budget.
6. Reduce junior primary class sizes to 1:20 and primary class sizes to 1:25
7. Remove students with special needs from the need to undertake NAPLAN testing
8. Develop culturally appropriate testing processes to test and report on indigenous student progress. Schools to collect and map indigenous learner development and embed this in overall school learner achievement data.
9. Schools to be provided with a raft of nationally consistent learner assessment options over which they have autonomous judgement as to when to test, how to test and how to report. Schools to map their data into a national data base
10. Liaise with health providers in each state with a view to a clinical presence in schools
11. Establish in school meal provision for breakfast and lunch
12. Establish genuine medium to long term, alternative learning options for students whose needs can't be met by mainstream education. Ideally this would be within the grounds of their regular school. This should not be used in a punitive sense, but rather as a genuine attempt to provide a bespoke approach to meeting student need.
13. Adopt a national approach to students not using mobile phones during the school day
14. Focus on teacher wellbeing as a key driver of student wellbeing
15. Establish multi-disciplined Student Wellbeing Teams in all schools on a per capita basis.

Improving Student Achievement

1. Reduce the volume and breadth of current National Curriculum by at least 30%
2. Articulate (revised) National Curriculum as a broad concept development road-map for teachers to use as a basis for exercising professional judgement about what students need to learn, when and how they will learn it.
3. Abolish NAPLAN and replace it with a National Learner Achievement Map (ie: against the National Curriculum). The Learner Achievement Map would articulate the required student learning in terms of concept development). Schools would then pace the sequence and rate of learning based on learner readiness, rather than by a national 'assessment date'. Schools would set the timing of their learner data-entry but it would need to be entered before the end of the school year.
4. Invest in I.T. infrastructure to support 3 (above)
5. Teaching loads reduced by 10% to facilitate 3 (above)
6. Set a goal of 70% of all govt teachers to be permanently employed within the next 5 years. This will provide time for relationship development and learner connection, will foster collaborative team approaches across schools, facilitate mentoring, coaching and professional sharing, create an environment that supports innovation and risk taking in teaching strategies.
7. Offer incentive packages for teachers close to retirement to do so. Part of the incentive package to include options to work in short-term contact positions as part of the early career teacher support program (16 below). This will enable the system to tap into the expertise of highly experienced teachers and help set up Early Career Teachers for success.
8. Ramp-up Poor Performance Processes to ensure teachers not up to scratch are either brought up to speed or exit the system.

9. Each state to establish a Professional Development Unit, which will be available to both teachers and school support officers. Professional Development Units in each state would be centralised, with outlier units in regional locations. These units would have a broad remit, but would provide professional learning opportunities for teachers, specific support for early career teachers, support staff, aspirant leaders, emergent leaders, existing leaders, programs for poorly performing teachers and subject specialists
10. Budget allocations to schools to increase by 10% to support staff professional learning.
11. Reduce the administrative burden on schools. In 1995-2000 there was a push for the notion of local school management. In some states this was titled 'Partnerships 21' Whilst the theory was sound, the implementation was not. In essence, the things that were devolved for local decision making were not core business issues (curriculum, assessment, staffing) but rather were aspects of bureaucratic function. In conjunction with this, there was a national move to standardise curriculum and assessment. The net effect of this was that schools had no control over their core business issues (yet are held to account) and found themselves busy with never-ending bureaucratic processes devolved from central offices.
12. Remove all unnecessary bureaucratic function (emerging from 11 above) from schools so that they can focus on core business.
13. Increase school leader tenure to a minimum of 10 years, subject to performance agreements.
14. Where practical, develop sharing of specialist staff across geographically close schools
15. Re: pre-service teacher training:
 - a. Current teacher training institutions to be replaced with specialised 'Teacher Training Institutes'.
 - b. Teacher Training Institutes to be staffed by both academic and practicing teachers (on secondment from schools). This would ensure practitioner voice in the teacher preparation process and will also provide a medium-term lateral career pathway for highly experienced teachers.
 - c. Each student-teacher to be appointed as a Resident Teacher in a suitable school for the duration of their course time. Resident Teachers would be regarded as 'super-numeri' in each school. This model will give student teachers a practical grounding in teaching, will allow them to develop relationships with students and colleague teachers, will allow them to try out things learnt in their study, will allow them to feel a valued part of a team, will provide them with continuous, relevant feedback and will mean they 'hit the ground running' when they graduate. They will be more 'school-ready'. It also helps reduce the adult/student ratio in schools. Which had potential to improve student learning outcomes.
16. Re 'Early Career Teachers':
 - a. Early career teachers to be allocated at least 5 Relief Days for professional development
 - b. All metropolitan (on an area basis) and regional centres to facilitate Early Career Teacher Networks in partnership with State Professional Development Unit (8 above)

- c. Early Career Teachers to be appointed to schools on a 12 month probationary basis, with permanency , somewhere in the system, upon successful probation.
 - d. In country locations, good quality, well maintained teacher housing be made available. Rental to be significantly below market rate. Each school to have grounds staff allocation increased by 10% to facilitate property maintenance up-keep etc. this is particularly important for teachers appointed on a short-term contract who may or may not have such things as tools, lawnmowers etc
 - e. Rental for teacher housing: this should be set at a maximum of 30% of market rate and should be based on a FTE of 1.0. For example, a teacher working 0.6 would only pay 0.6 of the rental figure.
17. Re starting school: that commencement at 5 years of age be optional and conditional upon the student meeting simple pre-entry requirements (largely social and emotional readiness) and that this be signed off-by both parents, pre-school and the school. Students who are deemed not yet ready for school will be offered another year in kindergarten. The compulsory age of enrolment would be 6yrs.
 18. Kindergarten enrolment procedures and funding to be modified to facilitate 17 (above)
 19. That students who commence school more than 1 term prior to actually turning 5, have all of the next year again in reception