16 June 2022
Productivity Commission
Review of the National School Reform Agreement

To Whom It May Concern

Thank you for accepting this submission to the Productivity Commission's (PC) Review of the National School Reform Agreement.

Pivot Professional Learning's submission comprises four sections:
1. About Pivot
2. Measuring and improving teaching quality using student feedback
3. Measuring and improving student wellbeing and readiness to learn
4. Attachments:
   A. Research summary on using student feedback to measure teaching effectiveness [**NOTE: COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE**]
   B. Pivot's published research, conducted with the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers, using student feedback to determine characteristics of effective maths teachers "Learning from the best: what makes an excellent teacher of mathematics"
   C. Research summary on Pivot's wellbeing for learning tool [**NOTE: COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE**]
   D. Pivot's published research on our Wellbeing for Learning survey tool

I would be happy to discuss any aspect of our submission with you should you have any questions.

Best wishes
Belinda

Belinda Harries
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1. About Pivot

Pivot Professional Learning is a Melbourne-based education technology company, established in 2014 and now working with over 700 schools around Australia and New Zealand. We were founded to help educators to transform their teaching practice. Our three founders brought their skills together to build a compelling, evidence-based, practical solution for schools:
- Belinda Harries had worked in the Commonwealth and State governments on education policy and understood the system requirements;
- Cleo Westhorpe, a teacher and school Department head, understood the needs of individual educators and schools; and
- Caitlin Macleod had a background in good governance, data analytics and policy making.

From both top-down and bottom-up perspectives we could see that debates around "teaching quality" were superficial and unhelpful. We recognised that the data collected by teachers, schools and education systems focussed on output measures that might reliably report against a range of environment, structural, personal and systemic factors; however, these measures were not necessarily attributable to different teaching practices.

For example, we could see that NAPLAN results were not improving – but this provided little insight into what an individual teachers could do to turn things around for their students. Likewise, NAPLAN provides policy makers a lag indicator that is arguably too blunt to guide public investment or reliably inform the application of other policy levers.

Meanwhile, in 2013 the Gates Foundation released the Measures of Effective Teaching study which found that students – when asked the right questions and in the right way – could reliably and consistently distinguish between effective and less- effective teachers. Moreover, student feedback was also more consistently reliable, and easier to implement, than classroom observations at scale. A summary of research around student perception surveys is at Attachment A.

2. Measuring and improving teaching quality or effectiveness

The Pivot Student Perception Survey on Teaching Effectiveness launched in 2014, designed specifically to meet the needs of teachers, school leaders and systems. We saw it as crucial to provide a 'line of sight' or 'through line' on teaching practice from classroom to system. Students from K-Year 12 respond anonymously to age-appropriate questions aligned with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. Critically, the Pivot approach provides each teacher with their own results, broken down by each class they teach – and these results are confidential to them. The confidential nature of results, and our reporting approach, helps ensure that student feedback can be used in a supportive, non-judgemental and strengths-based way.

Our studies have found that three out of four teachers make a change to their practice after they view their Pivot reports – guided by our recommended evidence-based resources that help them to take action the very next day.

A schools' results are aggregated, providing immediate results to inform management or operational decisions around supporting targeted, evidence-based professional learning for groups of educators:
- Middle Leaders, such as heads of department, reflecting the strengths and areas for development across their department, and as compared to the school's average
- School Leaders, enabling a detailed understanding of the teaching performance across a school – broken down by year level, department, or other grouping
- Regional Managers, enabling clusters of schools (such as regional networks, like schools (e.g. selective entry) or any other grouping) to consider shared strengths and development areas, and invest in collaborative expertise across schools (e.g. pairing departments with differing/complementary results to share professional learnings).

Our internal studies have found that 9 in 10 school leaders use Pivot data to support school planning and evaluation. Many of our schools embed their Pivot data and goals around specific items in their school improvement plan.

And of course, our data can be aggregated at the system level, enabling evidence-based insights and targeted professional learning that can be drawn from a 'through line' from each classroom to system goals. We have worked with most State and Territory jurisdictions as well as peak bodies and not-for-profit organisations in Australia to share our insights, helping collect granular feedback to support programs as diverse as Maths Teaching, Student Voice and Agency, Professional Learning Communities and Graduate Teacher and Alternative Teacher Pathway programs.

We find significant variation in results within a school – as much as variation between schools. Likewise, the granularity of results presented to a teacher – helping them to see how their teaching approach needs to be tailored for each class they teach, depending on the student cohort, subject, year level etc – will also help educators to understand the 'so what' for them.

At a system level we can see variation in student feedback results within specific disciplines, helping to guide state-wide professional learning initiatives and facilitate collaborative expertise (teachers learning from each other). For example, the research we conducted with the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers in 2019 (Attachment B), found that the unifying characteristic of top mathematics teachers was the ability to form strong connections

with students; and that subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and content pedagogical knowledge was critical.

Our view is that student feedback provides a critical and reliable way to gather actionable data on teaching. We should note that the Pivot experience is very different from other 'student voice' measures that are in place, such as the *Tell Them From Me* survey in NSW or the *Attitudes to Schools Survey* in Victoria: these single annual surveys that ask students to aggregate their teaching and learning experiences across a school into single responses are meaningless when it comes to understanding the wide variation in teaching quality within a school. By their nature, the results are virtually impossible to act upon at the school level and certainly at the teacher level, with the further implication that students feel their feedback has been ignored – the opposite intention of a student voice initiative. At a system level the inability to meaningfully disaggregate data points further obscures any real picture of difference.

Recommendations on measuring and improving teaching quality

In summary, the Pivot experience of student feedback on teaching practice is that this method:
- is a valid and reliable way to understanding different teaching practices from classroom through to system,
- is most useful when it is very granular, capturing feedback at the individual classroom level, and
- is most actionable when results are provided directly to a teacher, ideally anonymously, so this can be treated as a supportive, strengths based reflective professional learning experience.

We would strongly support the PC recommending the new National Schools Agreement consider a more structured, granular approach to collecting student feedback on teaching quality or effectiveness. Moreover, the PC should ensure that this data is reported back to individual teachers and schools in a way that is supportive, strengths-based and actionable (in the way we have described) rather than existing only as an oversighting/reporting mechanism. That is, the collection of data should be considered through a lens of not just accountability but also demonstrated and applied usefulness: each school touchpoint has a real cost and should be justifiable.

3. Measuring and improving students' wellbeing and readiness to learn

In 2021 in response to the COVID19 pandemic, prolonged school shutdowns and awareness of the growing importance of student wellbeing we developed a Wellbeing for Learning survey tool and approach.

Many Australian organisations have undertaken national surveys of wellbeing and safety, issuing comprehensive reports that collectively illustrate urgent need for action.[1] There is ample research evidence demonstrating the critical importance of addressing student wellbeing in the areas of safety, belonging, and resilience – well pre-dating the more recent COVID years. For example:

- Between 2010 and 2014, the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) showed that about a quarter of school-aged young people reported regular bullying and social exclusion.[2] Approximately 20% reported experiencing online bullying.[3]
- In 2015, Australian students had lower levels of school belonging than their peers in 35 OECD countries. School belonging has been declining in Australia since 2003.[4]
- The Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing found 14% of school-aged Australian children experienced a mental disorder in 2013-2014.[5] Further, rates of psychological distress and death by suicide among Australian youth increased between 2007 and 2016.[6]

Now, more than ever, Australian students need support with their wellbeing. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the urgency of understanding and addressing student wellbeing in Australia, particularly that of children and youth living in communities facing disadvantage.

The Wellbeing for Learning framework was designed to leverage our understanding of the school environment, along with our expertise in designing and administering evidence-based surveys that generate high student response rates, and providing insights and resources for individual teachers and leaders that lead to immediate action. As a wellbeing tool our survey approach is not a mental health intervention and does not seek to identify or record clinical diagnoses. Instead, it looks to help schools to monitor and support the wellbeing of students. It

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[1] Education Services Australia. (2020). *The Australian Student Wellbeing Framework*. Commonwealth of Australia. https://studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/educators/framework/; Davidson, P., Saunders, P., Bradbury, B., & Wong, M. (2020). *Poverty in Australia 2020: Part 1, Overview. ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 3*. Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS). http://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Poverty-in-Australia-2020_Part-1_Overview.pdf

[2] Sollis, 2019

[3] Baay, A. (2015). A review of literature (2010-2014) on student bullying by Australia's Safe and Supporting School Communities Working Group.

[4] De Bortoli, L. (2018). *PISA Australia in focus number 1: Sense of belonging at school.* Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). https://research.acer.edu.au/ozpisa/30

[5] Lawrence, D., Hafekost, J., Johnson, S. E., Saw, S., Buckingham, W. J., Sawyer, M. G., ... & Zubrick, S. R. (2016). Key findings from the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 50*(9), 876-886.

[6] Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). (2018). *Report Card 2018: The wellbeing of young Australians*. Author. https://www.aracy.org.au/publications

captures information across three domains of wellbeing that impact a student's readiness to learn in school: their resilience, their sense of belonging and their sense of safety (both in person and online). The tool also captures information on contextual factors that schools and educators need to understand to support a student's readiness to engage in learning (what we call 'protective factors') such as their sleep, family relationships and health. Research has demonstrated all these to be malleable factors that respond to school-based instruction and interventions. Our research literature review has been included at Attachment C to this submission.

There are two key aspects of our Wellbeing for Learning survey approach: first is a 15-item baseline survey instrument that measures wellbeing in three domains of safety, belonging, and resilience. This survey is based on international evidence, has been tested with numerous groups of students and teachers at different levels to ensure consistency of interpretation, and has been statistically validated.

After the baseline survey, cycles of shorter check-ins (usually fortnightly) help to gather a full picture of wellbeing across a school, over time – including understanding students' general wellbeing, and how students feel about their 'protective factors' including friends, hobbies, families and sleep. Students are also able to reach out to an adult they trust through our survey tool if they are struggling, as well as access external supports from organisations like Kids Helpline and Headspace. We find that 5% of all students actively seek help during this check-in process; anecdotally we understand that half of these students were previously unknown to be struggling by the school. The personalised, online and non-judgemental method that we employ through our survey tool provides a critical 'safe' way for students to ask for help when they need it. See Figure 1 below on the Pivot methodology and philosophy on student engagement with our survey tool.

The timing of the check-ins is also critical. We know that student wellbeing fluctuates over time: around 10% of students ask for help or are at risk of struggling at each check-in – but critically, students in this 10% are not always the same. Equally it is important to avoid survey fatigue (boredom) on the part of students. We find that fortnightly check-ins – that is, one 5 week check-in cycle per term – is generally well accepted by students and teachers.

After each check-in, the Wellbeing for Learning platform provides school staff with clear visualisations of real-time survey results and a list of students needing support. Comprehensive evidence-based resources for supporting student wellbeing are integrated into the platform and have been designed to support school leaders and teachers plan interventions that support students with different aspects of their wellbeing. At the end of each five-week cycle, school leaders receive a cumulative trends and insights report, as well as the opportunity of a coaching call with one of Pivot's data experts to help understand and act on the data.

Our granular data may also be used at the system level to generate an understanding of wellbeing differences within and between schools, and therefore as a way to better support system-level professional learning priorities. We have a regular program of research and insights into our datasets, and publicly released a very well received research paper earlier in 2022. It is at Attachment D and also available on the Research section of the Pivot website (www.pivotpl.com)

Pivot's implementation approach involves supporting school leaders, teachers, and students on properly situating the survey and its purpose, key stages, reporting, and resources within the school context. The fidelity of our implementation approach is key. We support our schools to

ensure that Pivot's Wellbeing for Learning tool is connected clearly to the school's annual strategic plan and reporting requirements, but also within its day-to-day operations. Our schools will often hold a 'Wellbeing Wednesday' as a way for all members of the school community understand that the survey approach is not a one-off accountability or tick-the-box mechanism but both a diagnostic tool and an intervention in its own right. Our experience over this year of offering our Wellbeing for Learning approach is that a full wellbeing curriculum or professional learning event is not necessary to generate change and impact for individual students: a small, consistent action like ensuring every student feels they can ask for help can make a big difference.

We know that the Pivot approach is successful because of our high student response rates, generating a dataset of very high integrity – core to ensuring that we can support educators to support student wellbeing. As with our Teaching Quality survey approach, we know students will properly and honestly engage with our process when they understand that the tool is for them, their feedback will be acted upon, and they therefore should answer the questions honestly. We further recognise that the way to help students know this is by properly supporting and empowering school leaders, and ensuring the buy-in of their <u>teachers</u>. The Pivot approach has been designed with individual teachers in mind, so that they:
- understand that the data and insights from student feedback
- have the necessary support and guidance to act quickly in way that supports their individual students, and without significant difficulty or burden, and
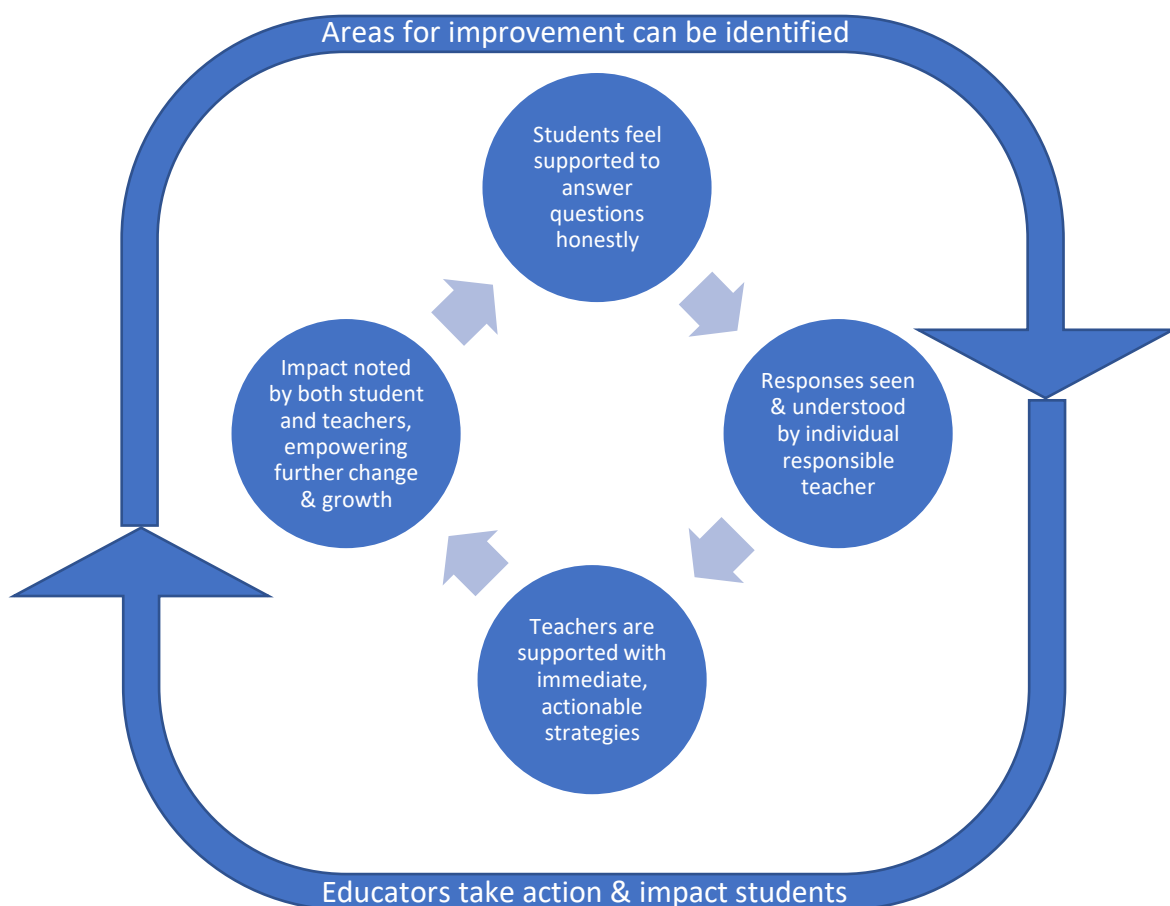- can then see and measure the outcome or impact of their actions.

Figure 1: Pivot's survey approach methodology and philosophy on student engagement and educator empowerment

Recommendations on measuring and improving student wellbeing

We recommend the PC advocate for fit for purpose student wellbeing indicators as part of the new National School Reform Agreement. Domains of student resilience, school belonging and relationships and school safety have been demonstrated in research as key factors impacting students' wellbeing and their readiness to engage in learning. These are also all factors that are malleable and within the control of schools to positively affect: an important threshold point in incentivising new National Schools Reform priorities.

Pivot's experience with our Wellbeing for Learning survey is that, much like our experience with the question of measuring Teaching Quality, strong student engagement with the survey tool itself will be generated only where students know and understand that their feedback will be acted upon. Our experience is that this action will occur but only where school leaders and teachers are properly empowered to see the data relevant to them, and are supported to act up on it.

4. Attachments

We have attached four documents to our submission. Two of these are commercial-in-confidence given they go to a summary of our research around our proprietary survey tool and methodology and as such should not be placed on the public website of submissions.

The four attachments are:

A. Research summary on using student feedback to measure teaching effectiveness [**NOTE: COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE**]
B. Pivot's published research, conducted with the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers, using student feedback to determine characteristics of effective maths teachers "Learning from the best: what makes an excellent teacher of mathematics"
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