

## **OPENING STATEMENT**

**Stephen Gniel, ACARA Chief Executive Officer**

**12 February 2026**

Thank you Chair.

It's a pleasure to be back before the Committee and to have the opportunity to discuss some of ACARA's work.

With the start of the new school year now underway across the country, I wish all our students, teachers, principals and wider school staff, and families a positive and successful start to the year ahead.

As a father of three teenagers and as a former classroom teacher, I know the beginning of the school year is an important moment to set expectations, build relationships and re-establish routines that support learning and wellbeing.

I know the work our amazing teachers and wider school teams do at this time of year, in partnership with families, lays the foundations for everything that follows.

At ACARA, we'll continue to support our schools and sectors through the Australian Curriculum, national assessments and reporting, and trusted information that helps inform teaching and learning.

To that effect, I would like to update the Committee on a few key developments since we last met in December.

### *F-2 Mathematics iterative review*

In December, I updated the Committee that education ministers have commissioned ACARA to work with jurisdictions, sectors and stakeholders to look at an iterative review of Foundation to Year 2 Mathematics in the Australian Curriculum.

This is in light of latest NAPLAN results and the national focus on numeracy improvement, and ahead of the Year 1 Numeracy Checks coming into effect this year.

The Committee will recall from my last appearance that Ministers can direct ACARA to conduct iterative reviews of the Australian Curriculum during its implementation and use in schools to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant and current.

The inclusion of an iterative review of the Australian Curriculum balances the need for stability of curriculum – including impact on teacher workload – with the ability to respond rapidly when required.

For this specific review, ACARA has consulted with key stakeholders – including teachers – to further understand the challenges of implementing Mathematics in these foundational years and identify where action might need to be taken.

We are now in the process of finalising our advice, including the scope, for Ministers to consider later this month at the Education Ministers Meeting on 20 February.

### *Focused review into antisemitism content in the Australian Curriculum*

Another review ACARA has been asked to lead is following the horrific incident we witnessed on 14 December 2025 – the Bondi Beach terrorist attack.

The incident targeted the Jewish community marking first day of Hanukkah - the festival of light - which should have been a night of peace and joy.

Threats against any part of our society are a challenge for us all. Together we are stronger and can ensure that no one falls victim to these hateful influences.

I would like to express my deepest sympathies with the Jewish community and all those affected by this event.

At ACARA we know the Australian Curriculum has a role to play in ensuring our young people are developing the knowledge, skills and understanding to reject antisemitism and hate crimes in all its form.

The Prime Minister's Antisemitism Education Taskforce, which ACARA is represented on, has endorsed the approach to a Focused Review of the Australian Curriculum and agreed to seek formal approval from Education Ministers at the next Education Ministers Meeting.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Taskforce on this important work.

### *NAPLAN 2026*

Finally, ACARA's Assessment team has been preparing for NAPLAN 2026.

Starting on 11 March, around 1.4 million students across Australia in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 will undertake assessments to see whether they are developing the fundamental literacy and numeracy skills they need for success throughout their lives.

ACARA experts in curriculum, content, measurement, assessment development and psychometrics who oversee the National Assessment Program have again worked to ensure that the assessments are of the highest standard.

Working with our partners, including Education Services Australia who provide the testing platform and our test administration authorities in each state and territory, we are completing the scheduled activities in the lead-up to the NAPLAN 2026 test window.

To our students taking part in NAPLAN this year, I'd like to reiterate that there's no need to study for the assessment. The best preparation is engaging in your everyday classroom learning and to just do your best.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that ACARA remains steadfast in its commitment to ensuring we inspire improvement in the learning of all young Australians through world-class curriculum, assessment and reporting.

Thank you.

**[ENDS]**