

Senate Estimates – 7 November 2024

Opening statement – Dr Jenny Donovan, CEO, AERO

At my three previous appearances before this committee, I have delivered some comments about: the importance of evidence-based practice and decision-making in education; a description of explicit teaching and the cognitive science that underpins it; and an explanation about how the evidence-based approach of multi-tiered systems of support can ensure that students receive any additional support they need quickly. I have noted the accelerated shift towards introducing and embedding explicit teaching and structured literacy approaches across Australia, in the three years that AERO has been at work.

There is a great deal more that I look forward to drawing to the Committee's attention at future appearances. For example, our creation of a longitudinal dataset that gives researchers the ability to track students' performance and growth throughout their schooling and assess the effectiveness of learning interventions, creating significant potential for using empirical evidence to support Australian education policy and practice. Our analysis of the learning outcomes for students who have low NAPLAN results in Year 3 (showing they do not tend to catch up – and if they do, they don't stay caught up); our analysis of who is not participating in NAPLAN and why it matters; and so much more.

When the education ministers decided to create AERO, they made a brave, unanimous, bi-partisan decision. They wanted this agency to operate with independence so that its research and work would have credibility and integrity. They were willing to hear what needed to be fixed and looked forward to learning about the evidence for solutions.

AERO's research has shone a spotlight on areas in education that can be improved. But our work has not stopped there. It goes to the evidence-based solutions. By carefully evaluating rigorous research, we have identified the best bets – the most evidence-based approaches that can address the national education challenges we share. The high standard of evidence we apply means that the practices and approaches we advocate can be trusted.

AERO is nearing the end of its first three year strategic plan. We are about to take our plan for the next three years to Ministers. Along with our continued research, evaluation, and resources development, the new plan has an increased emphasis on the implementation of evidence-based practice. After three years, we know what works – the next mountain to climb is getting what works into widespread practice. Over the next three years we look forward to working with teachers, service and school leaders, the jurisdictions and other stakeholders to see that happen, and to see the outcomes for students and equity of our system improve.