



Senate Inquiry and Report Teaching and Learning - Maximising Our Investment in Australian Schools

(a) the effectiveness of current classroom practices in assisting children to realise their potential in Australian schools;

The majority of schools and teachers are using a range of reflective practices to ensure pedagogy best meets student needs and potential.

In the Primary sector the sharing and reflection of classroom practice to enable real improvement is hampered by a lack of support such as Heads of Curriculum and Coaches as well as the absence of the latest equipment and access to high speed internet. The lack of middle management and curriculum leadership in Primary schools requires a change to the funding model so that they are at least as well-resourced as Secondary schools. It is vital that children are confident and competent in their literacy and numeracy skills by at least the end of Year 3.

For students to realise their potential, quality teachers are vital. Currently the quality of teachers is inconsistent and the prolonged and time-consuming processes involved in dealing with under-performing teachers results in these poor quality teachers remaining in the system.

Quality professional development for teachers is sometimes inaccessible or too costly, particularly in our rural and remote areas of Queensland.

Primary schools require the support of increased early and sustained intervention and sufficient support for special needs students.

(b) the structure and governance of school administration local and central and its impact on teaching and learning;

Accountability for public funds forms the cornerstone of many structural and governance processes. Funds which would be best used to deliver front line services in schools are used to maintain administrative responsibilities within central, regional and local school governance areas. Maximum funding should be directed to the school and red-tape should be minimised.

Risk management is no longer left to good old 'common sense'. The litigious age in particular has schools and supervisors ensuring an ever growing percentage of Education budgets are spent meeting accountabilities and reporting requirements to both state and federal overseers. Primary school leaders find themselves involved daily in WH&S issues rather than focusing on teaching and learning as schools do not currently have a full-time officer.

This erosion of resources and impact of practices on the daily process of effective instruction is thus a major impasse for school effectiveness.

Increased resourcing in Primary school Administration and Middle Management will have a positive impact on teaching and learning outcomes.

Funding models from both state and federal governments need to be transparent with a clear focus on schools and children rather than bureaucracy. The Gonski proposals aim to rectify this, to some extent, but equity in base funding, regardless of sector (primary versus secondary) needs to be reviewed.

Principals have limited opportunities to select staff and do not have adequate processes for the removal of underperforming staff. Transfer systems in jurisdictions such as Queensland, however, must be retained.

(c) the influence of family members in supporting the rights of children to receive a quality education;

Most parents would like to support their children in their education but some lack the skills to do so, resulting in children being unprepared for formal schooling.

Early effective intervention including at least health screening from birth to school age, and teaching of parenting skills to new parents is a way of helping our children be prepared adequately for education. Positive experiences for parents of young children can also encourage them to be positively involved in their schooling.

Investing in this early intervention and ensuring that parents support the literacy and numeracy development of their children before the age of 10, will result in significant savings later.

All children should rightly have an expectation of being provided with a quality education. Unfortunately schools are faced with a daily challenge of meeting student rights within a framework where some students and their parents ignore fundamental responsibilities.

To this end the impact of misbehaving and disruptive children on the effectiveness of instruction is a massive factor impacting teacher effectiveness. School administrators spend untold hours attempting to deliver a balance between ensuring engagement and participation of every child, including the most disruptive child while not at the expense of the well behaved and compliant student.

The quality of education can be directly linked to the amount of disruption by a handful of students. A general theory of 80/20 is well quoted in schools. 20% of students attract 80% of teacher time due to their disruption. This means 80% of the students are supported in authentic learning 20% of the time.

Education needs more support to ensure this hijacking of the school day by the misbehaving students is heavily reduced; then a right to quality education for all can be delivered effectively.

Education should not happen in a vacuum and there should be consultation, collaboration, communication and a partnership between families and the school.

(d) the adequacy of tools available for teachers to create and maintain an optimal learning environment;

Over the decades the fundamental designs of facilities and educational environments have not changed to match contemporary demands.

There are many wonderful tools available to assist teachers to create optimal learning environments. Unfortunately all these tools are not within the budgets of most of our schools and students at home are very often using the latest technology.

Teachers need to have the latest resources to hold and maintain the interest of the child. To create an optimal learning environment, the classroom needs to be vibrant and appealing, as well as having access to high speed internet, hardware and programmes. Teachers need to maintain a skill level commensurate with that of the equipment available to them.

Fundamental to the availability of any tool or resource in schools is adequate recurrent resourcing. Presently Australian schools are at least 11% behind where their resourcing should be. This is highlighted in the poorly acted upon Gonski Report on Education. This report recounts a national underfunding of education in Australia annually of over 5 billion dollars.

(e) factors influencing the selection, training, professional development, career progression and retention of teachers in the Australian education system; and

Primary Education in Queensland has a very limited career path as there is an abundance of teachers and very few Heads of Curriculum, Coaches, Deputy Principals and Learning Support positions. An increase in these will not only provide equity with the secondary sector but would provide other options for teachers, greater opportunities for professional growth and improved career paths.

The lack of value that our society places on education is an impediment in the attraction of quality teachers to our profession. The cultural paradigm in which teaching sits within Australian society is the greatest factor influencing all elements of teacher recruitment, selection and training. Drawing on the model of Finland, Australia undervalues both financially and socially the role of school teachers.

The profession needs to be well remunerated to attract quality applicants. Comparatively, education as a profession rates well below medicine, law and engineering in Australia. At a fundamental level this societal value must be addressed for the long-term sustainability of any improvement in the Australian Education system.