



Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA)

Inquiry into the use of generative artificial intelligence in the Australian education system

Submission

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A thriving public school system is essential to nation building. Australian Government schools cater for the majority of students including those students who experience disadvantage. At a time when the myriad of socioeconomic and related health impacts on children are being discovered, and uncovered, the Australian government has an opportunity to lead and support their communities by setting and maintaining funding levels that facilitate a thriving public education system filled with excited children at the heart of families proud to send their children to government schools.

Equity of educational outcomes

Universal access to education does not currently translate to a nationally consistent minimum standard of education provision for all students. The national goal that all students achieve their potential requires a powerful funding response that closes the gaps that exist in the universal, yet imbalanced education provision that prevails today. There is also evidence from across the nation, that the proportion of students with higher and more complex learning and social needs is growing in government secondary schools compared to other sectors.

In a country where the government has a public, moral and human rights obligation to every child, any funding model must have social justice and equity as a foundation. Our current system is high quality but low equity.

This disparity in income distribution is acknowledged internationally (OECD reports) as an indicator of student performance on any measure - that is, that students from families with higher income are more likely to achieve at higher levels than students whose families' incomes are lower. Low income is not a guarantee of low levels of achievement, but the data comparisons are compelling and deeply concerning.

As a Nation, for what purpose do we provide education for young Australians?

It is the position of the Australian Secondary Principals' Association that the Federal Government has an obligation to ensure that high quality public secondary education is provided to every young person no matter what their geographic, social or personal circumstances.

Education in our Nation is a democratic and human right. In contemporary Australia, the provision of education also comes with an expectation of a minimum standard that ranks highly when international comparisons are made. Australia has slipped in this area in recent years. For more than a decade funding models for school education have not targeted school

performance and need, but relied on a distribution of resources that did not best nurture the future prospects of the young in Australian communities - Australia's future.

The adolescent years are **high stakes years** as they are significant predictors for life success and wellbeing. It is during these years that exposure to adult and community problems have the potential to change the lives of young people. The opportunity to fund and support the needs of each adolescent is essential. The inclusive priorities of our national secondary school system should be the centerpiece of a fair and productive school-funding model. Further, there must be recognition that the core purpose of all secondary schools is education and that funding and additional resources should be targeted to ensure that all secondary schools can focus on the key work of teaching and learning.

Only government can ensure that there is a quality secondary schooling option for everyone and only government, working with the profession, can require achievement benchmarks that reflect the quality of that schooling. Transparent, consistent and equitable funding of national secondary education will be the measure by which the young people of this nation, their parents, teachers and principals will judge the commitment of governments to the education of all Australians.

Australia's challenge is to redress disadvantage through investment in government education, where the greatest challenges demonstrably lie. The review of Funding for Schooling Final Report (2011) provided more than sufficient evidence to suggest that Australian education was not meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. The Report outlines the findings by a highly credentialed independent review body. This was the most comprehensive review undertaken and it has not been fully implemented.

The Australian Secondary Principals' Association advocates for the full implementation of the needs based funding model to enable school leaders to put in place sustainable interventions and staffing to address the needs of students in their communities.

A non-political approach to Education:

It would be reasonable to assert that our educational leaders are best placed to make strategic decisions about the educational future of schools and systems but it appears unfortunately, that many decisions concerning education are made for political reasons and not necessarily sound educational reasons.

Something as important as education should not be dependent upon political funding or election cycles. It is time for agreement from all political parties around education to secure the future for our students. Education needs our political leaders and our education leaders to commit to a long term (10 year plus) plan and a structure for regular review. The further challenge then is to commit to its sustainability by ensuring adequate funding. Finland made a conscious decision in the recent past to adopt a non-political approach to education; making universal decisions about key factors that would not change with election outcomes. Australia **MUST** take this path if we are to achieve the outcomes desired by all Australians.

There is general agreement from all sides of politics on the aims for education and goals for our students. There is much common ground but we get tangled up in political cycles and trying to solve the same problems in different ways.

We have to get commitment from all parties to State initiatives and transparent long term planning and funding which will enable the systematic achievement of common goals. The education of our children is too important to let politics get in the way.

The following is ASPA's response.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming integrated into our world, and international governing bodies are rapidly developing regulatory frameworks and guiding principles for its use. Generative AI is currently being embedded into the digital platforms we use, and are likely to be commonly used on Google and Microsoft applications within 12 months. Whilst there is debate

about the extent of this integration and its impacts, it appears inevitable that there will be a profound transformation in how people live and work as a result. Schools are responsible for preparing children and young people to flourish in their future lives, and on that basis ASPA supports the principle that AI should be used in schools.

The strengths and benefits of generative AI tools for children, students, educators and systems and the ways in which they can be used to improve education outcomes;

If appropriate policy frameworks, resourcing and training for teachers and schools are in place to adapt to AI applications in education, ASPA sees great benefit for children, students, educators and systems and the ways they can be used to improve education outcomes.

If students are supported to develop the skills to use AI safely, ethically and effectively they can take advantage of opportunities afforded with potentially more equitable access to improved learning outcomes. Restricting access to AI at school may significantly disadvantage their prospects in an AI integrated society. AI has the potential to 'make knowledge easier to access' in a highly personalised way for students, providing assistance akin to having a 'tutor'.

Teachers are facing increased workload and complexity in Australian schools. AI has the potential to reduce this workload, and allow teachers more time to spend facilitating learning and helping students to develop their critical thinking, creativity, interpersonal, and metacognitive skills. There are numerous resources currently available and under development , that can support teachers to expand their repertoire of strategies and make learning more engaging and contemporary. However, it is vitally important that teachers are supported with time and appropriate professional learning to adapt their practice to the use of AI.

School administrators, principals and education systems may also benefit from reduced workload, and increased productivity through automation and more efficient operational systems that support their work through effective use of AI, and ASPA recommends more research is done in this area.

The future impact generative AI tools will have on teaching and assessment practices in all education sectors, the role of educators, and the education workforce generally;

There is potential for AI to reduce workload, increase productivity and the capacity to differentiate for student diversity for teachers. For example, AI can be used to generate and rewrite text to make it more accessible for different age groups, generate question variations, use tools that can translate content instantaneously for EALD students, build lesson plans that can integrate engaging online content, and increase efficiency of marking and feedback for students. Supporting educators with the time and resources to learn and integrate generative AI into their practice will be vital. When they are confident and proficient in their own capability they will be better able to support students.

There is debate and concern about the impact of AI on assessment practices. Integration of AI tools at school will require a positive continuation of the best-practice shift toward more formative ongoing assessment and a focus on learning as a developmental process that occurs over time rather than on more traditional summative outcomes . AI will be able to assist with summative assessment, though strategies to overcome the risk of plagiarism will need to be developed. Teachers must be supported to adjust to these developments.

It is possible that a well supported, methodical integration of AI into schools may improve working conditions for teachers, teaching support assistants and school leaders by increasing the amount of time available to support wellbeing and personalised learning for students.

The risks and challenges presented by generative AI tools, including in ensuring their safe and ethical use and in promoting ongoing academic and research integrity

There are risks associated with AI in learning. These include the potential for AI algorithms to replicate any bias or stereotyping contained in the data it absorbs; privacy concerns over the ways student data (personal information, learning behaviour, academic results) are stored and

handled; the risks of plagiarism in assessment as previously discussed; a lack of transparency in the design of AI algorithms that may make it difficult to test for bias or data accuracy.

To address these concerns teachers and their students should learn about the risks and benefits, along with digital literacy skills and the importance of ethical uses of such technology. Principles of academic and research integrity have long been taught in Australian secondary schools, and could include a focus on how they can be applied in the use of AI. Similarly systems have a responsibility to strengthen data protection and handling measures.

How cohorts of children, students and families experiencing disadvantage can access the benefits of AI

If disadvantaged students are to benefit from the opportunities and possibilities of AI they must first have access to the latest technology. There are many students across Australia that don't have such access.

With appropriate access, great potential comes with the possibility that AI can assist with differentiation for students. Targeted intervention and support for those not meeting year-level expectations could be bolstered if AI is used as an 'educational assistant', allowing teachers to manage complexity in the classroom more effectively. As previously discussed, a variety of tools can be employed to assist students from non-English speaking backgrounds and those with disabilities to access learning in real time. AI can also assist students who may not wish to 'speak-up' when uncertain, or those with anxiety and psycho-social conditions.

International and domestic practices and policies in response to the increased use of generative AI tools in education, including examples of best practice implementation, independent evaluation of outcomes, and lessons applicable to the Australian context;

There are various approaches toward integrating AI into schools around the world. The South Australian Department of Education is currently working with Microsoft to develop an education AI tool (EdChat) which will address safety, ethics and use of AI in learning environments while ensuring public school students have access.

The UK Government is consulting on how schools can "get the best' out of artificial intelligence, and one of its schooling trusts, the Harris Federation, is already training staff on how to use and integrate AI. Of particular interest is their focus on supporting staff 'with workloads so they can really concentrate on teaching and learning.'

The Education Bureau in Hong Kong has introduced an AI curriculum for secondary schools, with a focus on robotic reasoning, ethics and the impact of AI on society. They have facilitated training for more than 1000 teachers to build this capacity, and take the view that the 'new AI tools should be adopted rather than feared.'

There are models in development that Australia can learn from, and there is an opportunity for us to innovate with best-practice approaches early in this area. However it is very clear that training, time and support for teachers to adapt to and learn AI integration strategies is crucial.

Recommendations to manage the risks, seize the opportunities, and guide the potential development of generative AI tools including in the area of standards.

ASPA recommends:

- that teachers, school leaders and principals be educated about the risks and opportunities presented by AI through a nationally consistent approach.
- That any intent to implement AI in schools be accompanied by appropriate and realistic timeframes, resourcing and training. It should not be added to existing curriculum requirements, there must be explicit licensing from ACCARA to 'make room' for any new content.

- That Principals be involved in the design of national guidelines, policy and protocol related to this issue and its implementation in schools.