

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

6.1 It is universally acknowledged that education is the key to our country's future prosperity. Australian governments, educators and families all want an education system that supports children to be successful. Practical and concrete solutions are needed to improve our education system and maximise our investment in schools. The committee intends that the recommendations in this report will contribute to this worthy goal.

6.2 The evidence outlined in Chapter 3 of this report demonstrates that the education outcomes for Indigenous students, poorer students, students with a disability and students in rural, remote and regional areas are not good enough. The committee rejects the suggestion that such students are destined to poor educational outcomes because of their demographic background. Indeed, witnesses and submitters provided strong examples where disadvantaged students achieved excellent outcomes through strategic support, parental engagement and quality teaching. Recommendations two and four look at how to help disadvantaged students; recommendation five is about ensuring incentive arrangements for hard-to-staff positions in schools are appropriate.

6.3 It is critical that all parents believe that their child will do their best at school, experience success and move onto trade training or university. Schools must work to assist parents in this important role, and government programs should be expanded to support parents to support their children (recommendations three and eight). Appropriate funding and programs should be in place to support those children with special needs to reach their full potential in a safe and appropriate environment (recommendation nine).

6.4 School autonomy was considered by some submitters and witnesses as the answer to many educational challenges faced by schools. In particular, independent schools appearing before the committee credited their success to school autonomy. The committee was particularly impressed by early indications of success in public schools that have trialled the independent model. The committee believes that there is merit in conducting a close examination of student achievement in these schools (recommendation ten).

6.5 Student behaviour in the classroom is also an important contributor to student learning outcomes. It is of paramount importance that teachers are equipped to effectively manage behaviour and are supported by parents and school administration (recommendations six and seven). Students must also take responsibility for their own behaviour and come to school with a desire to learn. Quality teaching can also impact student behaviour: teachers who are able to engage students with the subject matter will often find that students perform better.

6.6 Quality teaching graduates will result in quality teachers. Teacher selection, training and registration can be improved (recommendations 1, 11, 12 and 22). A number of recent announcements by the federal government, and state and territory governments, are directed at this area. The committee closely examined current recruitment practices and concluded that teacher selection processes should be robust and targeted to ensure that selected applicants possess the requisite academic skills and personal attributes necessary to become quality teachers (recommendation eleven). Teacher training courses can also be improved, particularly training in mathematics and literacy for primary school teachers and practical training for all pre-service teachers (recommendation 14 and 15).

6.7 The committee was surprised to hear of the number of teaching graduates who find it difficult to secure employment. To prevent an over-supply of teachers and to ensure that only the most competent teachers are registered, thought must also be given to capping registration places and introducing robust selection processes (recommendation 13). Prospective students should also be advised *prior* to enrolling in teaching training of disciplines that are in demand and disciplines where there is over supply (recommendation 16).

6.8 Effective professional learning is crucial to developing a quality teaching workforce. Teachers require ongoing professional learning and support to respond to a changing education environment, respond to student learning needs, and improve personal performance. In-school activities like mentoring, collaboration, classroom observation and feedback are relatively inexpensive forms of professional learning that require an investment of time rather than resources. While there is inevitably a cost associated with reducing teacher workloads to facilitate in-school activities, the committee believes these types of collaborative activities have significant value (recommendation 20 and 21).

6.9 Many qualified teachers leave the profession every year, particularly early career teachers and teachers who have reached the top of the salary scale. New teachers need to be better supported while experienced and highly accomplished teachers should be rewarded (recommendations 17 and 19). The committee was surprised to learn that exit interviews are not conducted with departing teachers and current data on why teachers leave the profession is scant (recommendation 18).

6.10 Large numbers of teachers in Australian high schools are teaching subjects they are not qualified to teach. This is particularly pronounced in rural, regional and remote areas. The committee commends efforts currently made to support these teachers, however the necessary long term solution is to encourage more applicants to study these subjects, and provide pathways for existing teachers to become qualified in these areas (recommendation 22). Incentive-based payments may also be useful to attract qualified teachers to work in hard to staff positions.

6.11 Many factors can promote student achievement: parental engagement, parent and teacher expectations, effective behaviour management, teacher quality, ongoing professional learning, appropriate support for students with special needs and school autonomy. The nature of education policy means that responsibility for these solutions is shared between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments and the Catholic and independent school sectors. Universities, employers, parents and students also have important roles to play. The committee urges policymakers to consider the recommendations and issues discussed in this report.

Senator Chris Back

Chair, References