

Briefings

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From the Executive Director

2016: It's an Election Year

The Federal Opposition has set the scene for the 2016 Federal election with the early release of its schools' policy. The Opposition Leader, Bill Shorten and Shadow Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Kate Ellis, launched *Your Child. Our Future.* in Melbourne on Thursday 28 January 2016¹. The 22 page policy document sets out the commitments of the ALP in terms of Federal funding for schools should they win the election expected to be held later this year.

As widely expected, the Opposition has committed to years five and six of the "Gonski" funding model at an additional cost of \$4.5 billion for 2018 and 2019. Mr Shorten said "the Gonski funding and reforms will be delivered on-time and in-full". The ALP also committed \$37.3 billion for its schools package over the decade 2015/16 to 2025/26.

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The funding commitments are lined up against the Coalition's current policy to fund the "Gonski" package only to the end of 2017, with CPI based indexation applying thereafter which was confirmed by Federal Minister for Education and Training, the Hon Simon Birmingham in an interview with the Fairfax media on 29 December 2015².

Whilst welcomed by the schooling sectors, the ALP policy has been widely questioned by commentators and the Government on the grounds of whether it is fiscally responsible and how the package will be funded.

The long-term commitment of funding to 2025/2026 is dubious given there will be four Federal elections before that date is reached and the forward estimates for Government spending only ever extend to three years beyond the current budget.

In fact, it was the longer-term funding commitment of the previous ALP Government in 2013 which has left us with the contestable issue as to whether or not schools funding is being cut post-2017 by the current Government. The argument about \$30 billion in cuts to schools funding will be heard a lot this year, but it is highly debatable.

Data produced by the Parliamentary Budget Office shows Federal schools funding continuing to increase during the period 2015/16 to 2018/19 from around \$14 billion to \$19 billion and even with CPI increases post 2018/19, the funding would continue to increase. It is difficult to find a "cut" in what has been a long term increase in Federal funding for schools.

¹ Available at <http://www.laborsplanforeducation.com.au/>

² The Sydney Morning Herald also reported on 3rd February 2016 that the Government is willing to "ditch" its plan to link school funding increases to inflation.

2016: It's an Election Year

It is true that schools funding will not reach the levels that were proposed by the ALP Government in 2013 (the gap between the ALP's proposed funding and the Coalition's current policy setting being \$30 billion over a 10 year period).

Whilst most attention will be paid to the funding promised in the ALP policy, there are other aspects worth examining.

In particular, the large number of targets, reforms and initiatives contained in *Your Child. Our Future*.

There are 44 items listed "to drive reform" and to foster the development of "a dynamic education system where students learn to embrace uncertainty, encourage collaboration, harness global perspectives and make time and space for creativity."

Most of the long list is very familiar and covers all of the recent policy issues in schooling – STEM, coding, school engagement with Asia, improving literacy and numeracy, early intervention, higher teaching standards, professional support for teachers, school leadership and "real" engagement with parents.

The community would expect the Federal Government to set high level directions for schooling, but must there be such prescriptive measures across such a wide range of areas? Particularly when so many cover initiatives that States/Territories have already targeted for reform.

National policy targets and directions should be realistic and achievable. Take for example the *Your Child. Our Future* target that by 2020 all STEM teachers in secondary schools will have a relevant tertiary qualification. Apparently only 40% of existing STEM teachers are so qualified. The logistics of having the other 60% achieve a tertiary qualification by 2020 just don't seem to add up.

Education is littered with targets, benchmarks and goals. Every major policy initiative seems to contain many of them.

Labor's plan includes investing in schools to improve literacy and numeracy, which will deliver amongst other things, more subject choices and more extra-curricular activities. It is not clear what this would actually mean for a school and doesn't seem to take into consideration the recognised issue that there is already an overcrowded curriculum.

No evidence or argument is presented as to how more subject choices and more extra-curricular activities would contribute to improved student outcomes.

Education is littered with targets, benchmarks and goals. Every major policy initiative seems to contain many of them. Aspirations are great and useful in driving improvements but there doesn't appear to be much debate about how they will contribute to educational improvements, nor proper accountability if the targets aren't achieved.

The Federal Government setting targets and reforms is problematic in itself as the Commonwealth doesn't actually own or operate any schools. It doesn't have the necessary levers to implement initiatives in its own right but must rely upon the States/Territories and the non-government sectors.

Easily solved; just make Federal funding conditional. Shadow Minister Kate Ellis in an interview said "it was the current Liberal Government who said that they believed in no strings attached funding to our schools. That will not continue under Labor" and "we are providing substantial funds ... but that does not come with no strings attached³."

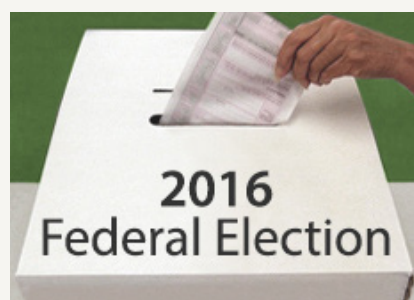
The ALP's proposed "Gonski" package and the current Government's position on schools funding have already been featured heavily in the media and in Federal Parliament. Expect a focus on these issues in the lead-up to the Federal election.

Unfortunately, some of the debate and commentary has been less than rigorous and unnecessarily divisive. Politicians need to be mindful of the uncertainty for schools, students and their families which is generated by emotive debate. In just one example, the ALP claim that the Coalition's policy "is the same as cutting one in every seven teachers in our classrooms"⁴ has alarmed schools unnecessarily. It is not factual. Instead, the ALP could have promoted its own funding proposal positively by highlighting it would allow schools on average to employ one additional teacher for each current six teachers.

Such is politics! Be prepared for a long and divisive debate on schools funding during 2016.



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Visit The Independent Schools Queensland 2016 Federal Election webpage at <http://www.isq.qld.edu.au/federal-election> for more information on the election including electorate maps and profiles of each Queensland federal electorate, Members of Parliament contact details and data showing students attending independent schools based on the most recent ABS National Census. The details of each federal electorate include the location of independent schools in that electorate. Education policies of the major parties will be uploaded on this site as they are released plus other relevant links and information.

⁴ Shadow Minister for Education, Kate Ellis, in education funding debate, Federal Parliament 2 February 2016

Performance and development for school improvement

A strategic approach to the performance and development of teachers at all career stages is now understood to be fundamental to maximising student gains and ensuring that a school's continuous improvement cycle achieves its desired impact.

Teachers account for the vast majority of expenditure in school education and have the greatest impact on student learning, 'far outweighing the impact of any other education program or policy' (Jensen 2010 p. 5).

The National Education Reform Agreement (COAG 2013) and the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA 2008) state that improving teacher quality is considered an essential part of Australia's efforts to improve student attainment and ensure it has a world-class system of education.

In 2010 Jensen reviewed an OECD survey of lower secondary teachers that showed that, 'in Australia, current systems of teacher evaluation are largely seen as bureaucratic exercises, not linked to teacher development or improved classroom teaching' (Jensen 2010).

This briefing establishes the importance of performance and development for school improvement and highlights the activities that are emerging as the most effective in supporting quality teaching.

A continuous growth and learning culture

The Australian Performance and Development Framework (2012) states:

'Research is unambiguous in showing that a successful approach to effective performance and development relies on creating a strong and supportive culture in a school. Formal performance and development procedures are important, but excessive attention to process is a common feature of less successful approaches. It is therefore important to focus on the factors that need to be in place for a performance and development culture to flourish. (p3)

Schools establishing performance and development activities (e.g. peer observation, feedback, appraisal/review mentoring, coaching, etc.) need to base their choices and approaches on data about current cultural perceptions of the existing growth and development culture and the needs of students. Performance and development directions that either rely on staff's own perceptions of need or purely on school priorities results in ineffective or non-sustainable change (Pedder & Opfer 2010). In 2013 the Gates report

Feedback for Better Teaching: Nine Principles for Using Measures of Effective Teaching (MET Project) demonstrated that data should be used not just by teachers as measure of effective teaching, but also by schools to determine and support teachers' improvement needs.

Arnold and Flumerfelt (2012) in The Essential Guide to Professional Learning: Leading Culture (AITSL 2012) states that sustained improvements in teacher and student learning are more likely to result if professionals actively learn with and from each other, in a constructive and rigorous way, framed by a shared educational philosophy and strategic plan for the school.

National policy that guides principles for the effective professional learning and development of teachers highlights aspects of school culture that need to be actively considered. The Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders (the Charter) (AITSL 2012) states that a high quality professional learning culture will be characterised by:

- a high degree of leadership support for ongoing adult learning and risk taking
- collective responsibility for improving practice
- disciplined collaboration aimed at specific and relevant goals that relate to the learning needs of students

- high levels of trust, interaction and inter-dependence
- support for professional learning through school structures, explicit planning and the allocation of time
- a focus on the professional learning that is most likely to be effective in improving professional practice and student outcomes. (p3)

If a school is seeking to establish a high quality learning culture, the Charter emphasises the need to embed genuine collaboration and quality professional interactions between teachers and school leadership. The characteristics from the Charter also highlight the importance of aligning improvement goals with student need; aligning teacher professional learning and feedback cycles and engaging teachers as leaders of learning.

Aligning performance, development and professional learning

Across the globe educational researchers, schools and systems are striving to understand what approaches to teacher performance and development will most effectively lift student outcomes. Recent research is clear that aligning teacher development and feedback processes with whole school improvement works. Strategic school leaders are beginning to recognise how important alignment between agreed high standards and goals are to ensuring that professional

development is most effective (Pedder & Opfer 2010, Dinham 2007).

A 2016 report from National Centre on Education and the Economy (NCEE) illustrates how four high performing systems – British Columbia (Canada), Hong Kong, Shanghai (China) and Singapore aligned their professional learning processes in order to achieve their desired outcomes which was marked gains in student achievement.

The reports states that a strategic approach required all professional learning to be developed around an improvement cycle always tied to student learning (Jensen, Sonnemann, Roberts-Hull, Hunter). A high performing system or school ‘transform the improvement cycle into a culture of continuous professional learning that in time turns schools into true learning organisations.’ (p4)

The outcomes of the research conclude that continuous professional learning cultures are achieved at school level through a focus on the following ‘key components’:

1. School improvement is organised around effective professional learning (that reflects the principles of adult learning).
2. Distinct roles are created to lead professional learning in schools and throughout the system
3. Schools and systems recognise the development of teacher expertise.

4. Teachers and school leaders share responsibility not only for their own professional learning but also the learning of other teachers.

5. Collaborative professional learning is built into the daily lives of teachers’. (Jensen et al., 2016, p4)

Genuine school improvement begins once there are defined and explicit goals for student gain. These goals for improved student achievement, wellbeing and engagement become the drivers for teacher professional learning.

Schools in these high performing systems develop a learning culture by using ‘expert teachers as well as external expertise’ to support activities that improve instruction. These activities include:

- Classroom observation and lesson analysis (focused on students as well as teachers)
- Cooperative teaching and analysis of outcomes of changes in instruction
- Collaborative curriculum and assessment development

All high performing systems align accountability activities with the desired strategic improvement goals. The effective accountability processes in these systems include development and review of professional learning plans, review or appraisal processes based on evidence of implementation of teaching and learning priorities and evidence of their impact on students.

Performance and development for school improvement

Finally the NCEE review emphasises that high performing systems include accountability processes that value 'teaching as a collaborative profession rather than exclusively focussing school or student performance measures'. (p18)

Moving from routine to adaptive expertise

In 2008 the Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) found that professional development activities focussing on improving outcomes for students, and providing teachers with opportunities to discuss new practices with their colleagues were more likely lead to school improvement (Timperley & Alton-Lee, 2008).

If schools prioritise growth in teachers' practice, they need performance and development opportunities that assist them to become, or value them as adaptive experts.

Professor Helen Timperley states,

Adaptive experts are deeply knowledgeable about both the content of what is taught and how to teach it. They are aware of their assumptions underpinning their practice and know when they are helpful and when to question them and, if necessary, to let them go.... Adaptive experts have the capability to work out when known routines do not work for students and sufficient knowledge to work out innovative approaches when needed. Part of being an

adaptive expert is to know when and from where to seek help. Engaging in ongoing inquiry and knowledge-building cycles is at the core of their professionalism (Timperley, 2011, p6).

Adaptive experts:

- focus on the moral imperative of improving a range of valued outcomes for students
- take agency for the continued development of their knowledge and skills through self- and co-regulated learning as new evidence comes to light or new students present new challenges; and
- create self-awareness in terms of existing assumptions and when they might be helpful or unhelpful, and in this way becoming highly metacognitive. (AITSL 2015)

Teachers with adaptive expertise are more likely to lead learning communities where continuous improvement is valued. Strategic performance and development can support the development of more adaptive expertise however there are conditions that enable teachers to operate with adaptive expertise and barriers to the development of this expertise.

The Professional Conversations Literature Review (AITSL 2015) synthesises the barriers and enablers to the development of adaptive expertise. The review identifies that while professional learning processes should be designed to contribute to positive relationships, and reflect high expectations of improvement from leaders; a significant barrier to developing

adaptive expertise at all levels in schools are 'unsupported and untrained' conversations. These conversations do not rely on evidence to determine if teaching and leadership practices are improving the outcomes for students (AITSL 2105).

A structured approach to the conversation

Powerful professional learning occurs through collaborative practice embedded in real situations and daily practice (Crow 2008, Fulton, Britton & NCTA 2011). Communities of practice, or professional learning communities, can be sites for effective professional conversations that improve practice. In these communities professionals can interrogate their own learning and development with regards impact on the students they teach.

Professional communities can enable teachers and school leaders to integrate collaboration, reflection and inquiry (Hanson & Hoyos 2015). Inquiry values reflective thinking about what is effective and meaningful in the classroom. It builds a community of practitioners with a common interest in developing quality practice (Hanson & Hoyos 2015, Crow 2008).

Kaser and Halbert observed in the NCEE report that 'we have found that as much as the time that is made available, if there isn't a framework (e.g. Spiral

of Inquiry) for collaboration and inquiry then that time will be wasted' (p37). It is clear that effective professional conversations and communities need structure and purpose in order to support school improvement. The NCEE report states that:

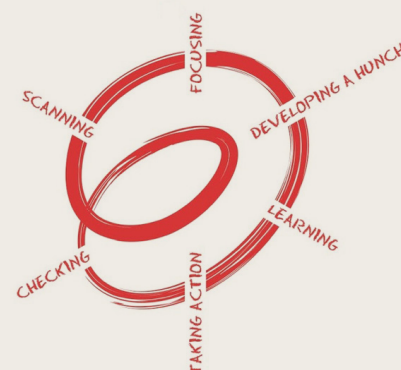
'the Spiral of Inquiry (Figure 1) can be used by teachers as to collect evidence on student learning, pinpoint a specific improvement area, research and implement a new teaching practice. During the process teachers constantly collect data on student learning to gauge where instructional changes are working and where they are not. Teachers give each other feedback through lesson observation or teaching while implementing new practices.' (Jenson et. al 2016 p36)

Timperley, Kaser and Halbert explain that 'the key to the making the spiral of inquiry work is for everyone to approach the framework with a mindset of curiosity and genuine inquiry into what is going on for learners and move forward from there'. The spiral focuses everyone's learning on common challenges. The two key questions for teachers having inquiry conversations are:

- What is happening for our learners?
- How do we know? (2014, P7)

Figure 1

The six parts of the spiral of inquiry:



Scanning

What's going on for learners? More emphasis is placed on teacher observations of students, in all circumstances. There are some difficult questions to ask, such as: Is it all right for some learners to experience challenging and engaging learning in one classroom while in the room next door the students are not? Scanning is not done overnight, can last two months, and may turn up surprises.

Focusing

Where will concentrating our energies make the most difference? Focusing well will lead to informed actions, and usually means selecting no more than one or two areas so that the inquiry is "focused and deep". The authors point out that a common focus generates the momentum to transform schools.

Developing a hunch

How are we contributing to the situation? "Hunch" is an important word – hunches may not be totally accurate, but it is essential to get them all on the table because they guide the focusing. Sometimes they might be well-established routines of the school or the classroom, and be relevant to your own school. Hunches need testing.

New learning

How and where will we learn more about what we do? Teacher learning must be connected to identified learner needs. External expertise is important here and the school must make clear to externals what makes a difference to learners. We all need to know why new ways of doing things are better than what we did before.

Taking action

What can we do differently to make enough of a difference? "Genuine inquiry needs space to take risks, make mistakes, and try again – and again". Changing things can also feel risky for some learners who then resist change, and in turn bring concerned parents. We need to build understanding for all, right from the outset.

Checking

Have we made enough of a difference? Checking doesn't have to be formal, or at a set time. It can go on throughout the spiral. The importance of trust should be a recurring theme throughout the cycle, and it certainly is true of checking.

The quest for lifelong learning

Teachers and their mentors and coaches need dedicated time for inquiry conversations. Teaching teams need clear accountability targets to ensure conversations remain focused on a school's strategic goals for student gain. Whilst professional teachers will commit to each conversation, senior and middle school leaders are responsible for:

- working with teachers to set improvement goals
- establishing the cultural expectations for professional conversations; and
- creating the time, space and structures to support ongoing inquiry.

The importance of leadership

School leaders can be enablers or barriers to performance and development that leads to improved student learning. Hattie (2015) stated that effective 'instructional' leadership is about leaders actively observing how teachers teach, creating ongoing dialogues, and supporting

and initiating professional development that maximises impact for all students. Robinson and Timperley (2007) outlined five leadership dimensions key to fostering teacher and student learning;

- providing educational direction
- ensuring strategic alignment
- creating a community that learns how to improve student success
- engaging in constructive

problem talk; and

- selecting and developing smart tools to assist in this process.

The NCEE report (2016) is also explicit about the ways leaders in high performing schools develop continuous, embedded collaboration focused on improving instruction. The report outlines aspects of leadership critical to the success of high performing systems. These include selecting and supporting effective *professional learning leaders* (other expert teachers, middle leaders, mentors and coaches) and school principals developing school improvement plans around professional learning. (p13)

The report notes that *professional learning leaders* in schools ensure that 'professional learning plans reflect school objectives' and that 'professional learning cannot be effective in bringing about a learning culture if it is not firmly embedded in school strategic planning'. (p14)

It was also noted that in high performing environments, school leaders enable teachers to be responsible for determining what professional learning will extend their own practice. They dedicate time to enable teachers to engage in these activities and establish suitable accountability processes.

OECD in their report 'Teachers for the 21st Century: Using Evaluation to Improve Teaching' (2013) showed that a teacher's

self-efficacy beliefs are tied to instructional practices as they influence student achievement and wellbeing. Therefore, designing a coherent evaluation and accountability framework with the student at the centre will enable leaders and teachers not just to value their professional learning but also be more likely to embed it in lasting ways.

Developing and embedding reflective professional development and growth programs in a school can necessitate some changes of culture that need to be carefully managed. Educators, generally, are deeply connected to their practice on a personal level. Day (1999 p. 97) contends that 'if we accept that the practitioner's own sense of self is deeply embedded in their teaching, it should not be surprising to us that they find real change difficult to contemplate and accomplish'.

Managing change

Teachers are generally committed to their work because it is part of their professional and personal identity (Billet & Somerville 2004). It is important for individual teachers be able to personally relate to a school's strategic vision of learning (Short & Harris 2010, p.379). The degree to which individuals engage with learning and development depends on their personal and cognitive experience. Performance and development potentially threaten a teacher's 'sense of

professional self’ and needs developing through a carefully planned process that values the needs of the individual and assists them to challenge their thinking in ways that does not threaten their personal connection to their work.

Change that is mandated or demanded is unlikely to be successfully embedded long term. Dinham (2007) asserts that even if change occurs under these conditions, there is a risk of plateau or falling back. He states that authoritarian approaches do not engender realisation of individual or organisational potential. Embedded change occurs when it is anchored in culture and becomes ‘part of the way we do things’ (Kotter 2007). Change that has become embedded in social norms and shared values is change that is less likely to degrade over time.

Dickerson reflects on the challenges school leaders may face when leading a culture towards more collaborative approaches and learning orientation. He states that ‘transforming the culture of a school involves more than the introduction of a new program or structure. It requires the educators who work there to adopt new values, perspectives and assumptions (Schein, 2004).’

He quotes Fullan (2001) who observed, ‘re-culturing is a contact sport that involves hard, labour-intensive work. It takes time and it never ends’(p. 44). He emphasises that school leaders ‘seeking to

shape school culture must first have a firm grasp of the current culture and its core values, including an understanding of the environmental context and its stage of development. They must provide the resources and structures necessary to support the desired culture, as well as ‘fashion a positive context’ for change (Hargreaves, 1994; Peterson & Deal, 1998). However, while skilled leadership is critical to modifying cultures (Fullan, 2001), leaders alone cannot mandate or implement a change in culture.

The key elements for successful, sustained changes to culture include; commitment of leadership, broad ownership of the approach, open communication, sufficient time for design and implementation, and thoughtfully designed formative and summative evaluation (Galea, Fried, Walker, Rudenstine, Glover & Begg 2015).

Conclusion

It is clear that the current imperative for education centres on the need for each student to have access to quality teaching from quality teachers in schools where these teachers develop and learn professionally, in mutually respectful community contexts, supported by effective leadership (Dinham 2011).

A high performing system or school must have a strong commitment to supporting quality teaching in every classroom as the foundation for improved student learning.

Performance and development fulfils this role by supporting effective teaching and providing a clear link between what teachers know and do and what happens in the classroom to support student learning.

In summary effective performance and development contributes to the development of a high quality professional culture. It actively engages teachers in conversations about their practice and its impact on student engagement, wellbeing and achievement. It is enabled by school principals who support the learning of teachers and identify ‘learning leaders’ who walk alongside teachers in their classrooms. Leadership provides clear accountability steps that align expectations of collaborative professional teachers and leaders with the goals for student gain. Leaders plan and implement change so that performance and development values teachers and their professionalism. Finally for performance and development to lead to lasting school improvement it will have the ‘relationship of the teacher and the student in the presence of content at the centre of all efforts to improve’ (Elmore 2008).



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