

Department of Education, Training and Employment Submission October 2012 to the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' Inquiry into teaching and learning – maximising Australia's investment in schools

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

To support schools in their improvement journey, the Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) has introduced a raft of innovative strategies to make a difference to student learning outcomes across a large and diverse state.

One of these strategies is the Teaching and Learning Audit which allows schools to look beyond student performance and explore their strategies, programs and practices against world-class standards in curriculum, assessment teaching and learning.

The audit is conducted in schools by high-performing, highly-trained and independent Queensland principals who gather data from a range of areas. This data is collected using several techniques to review school planning documents, school and classroom practices and individual student work.

Judgments are made about school practices against defined criteria that are categorised as eight dimensions. Schools are given a detailed report that clearly outlines commendations, recommendations and affirmations which are used to inform their planning processes. The results are also used by DETE to inform whole-of-State strategic planning processes.

Already schools have shown significant improvement in teaching and learning processes, with the vast majority showing positive change from one year to the next. Principals are reporting high levels of satisfaction with this intensive process of collaborative self-reflection with satisfaction ratings consistently exceeding 90%.

The audits are supporting schools to review teaching and learning practices that drive improvement through clear expectations, focused resourcing and consistent and common language. The audits extend beyond student performance data and drives deep into practices, from the office to the classroom and into student work.

The system is also benefiting from having a better understanding of how best to support school leaders in their work. The audit instrument also provides a particularly promising framework for leadership development. It potentially focuses school leaders on the very practices that improve teaching and learning.

Queensland is pleased to note the consistent improvements in the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy results for our students since the inception of the test. In addition, the most recent Programme for International Student Assessment results show improvements in the performance of 15 year old students in the areas of Reading and Scientific Literacy.

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

On 18 September 2012 the Queensland Government announced 26 schools which have been accepted into Round 1 of the *Independent Public Schools* initiative and will become *Independent Public Schools* from 2013.

It is expected that a total of 120 *Independent Public Schools* will be involved in the initiative—around 30 each year from 2013 to 2016.

The purpose of this initiative is to lift education standards for students by allowing schools and their communities more control over their decision making, cutting red tape and removing layers of management.

This commitment is enabled through the key features of the *Independent Public Schools* initiative which include enhanced local governance, opportunities for innovation, a locally tailored workforce, and increased financial flexibility.

Independent Public Schools will work within governance and accountability requirements, such as the establishment of a school council ensuring accountability to the community.

School councils will enable greater involvement of the school community and other stakeholders, such as industry, in setting the strategic direction for the school. The councils will approve and monitor the school's strategic direction, further strengthening collaborative local decision making.

As well as the range of existing autonomies afforded to state schools, *Independent Public Schools* will have additional autonomies over governance and administration. These include the principal having a performance agreement with the Director-General and an independent review of the school's progress on a four-year cycle.

Independent Public Schools will continue to be able to benefit from the strengths of the state schooling system, through access to existing liability insurance, legal and media advice, financial and procurement advice, industrial relations advice and support, Curriculum into the Classroom, OneSchool, MyHR, WorkCover support, and central and regional office support as required.

The implementation of the *Independent Public Schools* initiative will be closely monitored. An evaluation will be conducted to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the initiative and to ensure that any opportunities for improvement are identified.

Schools selected to participate in the initiative will be those in the best position to use increased autonomy to improve student outcomes and represent the diverse range of Queensland state schools.

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

My Department strongly supports that basic tenant that all children have the right to a quality education. Parents and families' engagement with their children's education is supported and encouraged.

There is a wide body of research which supports the powerful impact parent and community engagement with schools can have on student achievement. The research shows that when schools, families and community groups work together to support learning, children enjoy school more, have greater success and stay in school longer. Significantly, research has indicated that the positive influence of parental engagement is evident across families of all economic, racial and educational backgrounds and for students of all ages.

With this clear evidence in mind, my Department is currently developing a *Parent and Community Engagement Framework*. This framework will reflect current and best practice and will provide practical support for schools, parents and families, and communities to strengthen effective engagement to ultimately improve student outcomes.

Parents and Citizens' Associations (P&Cs) play an important role in education services with approximately 1,252 individual P&Cs working closely with Queensland state schools. Partnerships with P&Cs are vital for building successful school communities. P&Cs engage parents and the community in shaping their school and its environment.

P&Cs Queensland (formerly the Queensland Council of Parents & Citizens' Associations) and DETE work together to support state school P&C groups. This partnership is governed by partnership protocols.

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

My Department is committed to providing world class education for all students. Our investment in tools for teachers to create and maintain an optimal learning environment is driven by our commitment to the core learning priorities of reading, writing (including spelling, grammar and punctuation), numeracy, science, retention, attainment and transition of students, and closing the gap between the attendance and outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

This focus on improvement is through the consistent implementation of these core learning priorities and strategies within an agreed statewide framework, *United in our pursuit of excellence*, which outlines our shared expectations about school and community partnerships, school curriculum planning and implementation, teaching practice, principal leadership and school capability.

The Department supports teachers to create and maintain optimal learning environments through the *Curriculum into the Classroom* (C2C) initiative which provides planning resources and independent student learning materials to help teachers implement the Australian Curriculum in Queensland state schools.

The C2C includes whole school, year level and classroom planning, units, assessment items and lesson plans for English, mathematics and science. History materials are in development and will be released to schools in 2012 for implementation in 2013. C2C also provides materials to support teachers in multi-level classrooms and offers samples to support differentiation.

The C2C is delivered through my Department's comprehensive *Smart Classrooms* strategy which ensures teachers and students have the digital tools, spaces, services and resources they need to create and maintain optimal virtual learning environments.

Through *Smart Classrooms*, Queensland state schools are provided with:

- an Enterprise Platform of ICT infrastructure and services;
- *OneSchool* - a common eBusiness environment for all state schools including curriculum planning, assessment and reporting;
- *The Learning Place* – Education Queensland's comprehensive eLearning environment for teaching, learning, collaborating and professional learning;
- digital learning materials including C2C and resources from the National Digital Learning Resources Network (NDLRN); and
- development of teachers' capacity to utilise digital tools as an integral part of effective classroom practice.

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

In April 2012 the Productivity Commission released a report on the schools workforce that had been commissioned by the Australian Government. While my Department supports many of the findings and recommendations contained within the report, and agrees that there are some consistent issues relating to the teaching workforce across all Australian jurisdictions, there are also differences between jurisdictions that impact on teacher supply and demand, and hence across the areas of interest to this inquiry.

For Queensland, in particular, unique contextual features include:

- the geographical size of the state and the challenges this presents in delivering educational services across widely-dispersed communities; and
- the impact of a strong resources sector on the labour market.

For the teaching workforce, these most particularly result in increasing challenges to ensure communities in rural, remote and regional areas and those experiencing significant socioeconomic disadvantage have access to a high quality teaching workforce, as well as broader challenges in ensuring those entering the profession are well-selected and prepared for working in contemporary classrooms.

Queensland also identifies continuing imbalances between the supply mix of teaching graduates and employer demand, raising the risk of future teacher shortages especially in high demand teaching areas—particularly given new university funding arrangements that commenced in 2012 which have given universities greater scope to increase the number of preservice teachers enrolled in initial teacher education programs.

Queensland has actively participated in the National Partnership Agreement on *Improving Teacher Quality*, which included a range of reforms to boost teaching quality in every classroom, including:

- National Professional Standards for Teachers;
- nationally-consistent processes for teacher registration; and
- nationally-consistent processes for the accreditation of initial teacher education programs.

These reforms have generally been embraced by the profession and have laid the foundation for ensuring all schools have access to quality teachers to support student learning and development. However, numerous challenges remain for the profession and for teacher employers, not limited to:

- concerns that filters for entry into initial teacher education programs are not adequate, and that academic measures of successful applicants are declining, leading to widely varying quality of teaching graduates, with the Productivity Commission noting evidence to suggest that the average literacy and numeracy skills of those entering teacher training courses have declined;
- ensuring graduates have sufficient understanding of the content they are required to teach and the skills to engage effectively with the diversity of students with whom they will teach;
- the limited practical in-school experiences available as core to initial teacher education programs;
- a range of issues relating to professional experiences (practicum and internships), including but not limited to:
 - the need for pre-service teachers to undertake repeated quality professional experiences that link clearly with theoretical constructs;

- concerns regarding the level and application of Commonwealth funding for professional experiences;
- the lack of real incentives for teachers to supervise preservice teachers during professional experiences;
- lack of clarity regarding expectations of supervising teachers during professional experiences, especially a lack of consistency in assessment of preservice teacher performance;
- reports from schools of differential support and monitoring provided by universities during professional experiences; and
- meeting the demand for professional experience placements.

Queensland is currently developing its strategy to implement recommendations from its recent *Review of initial teacher education and induction* which seek to strengthen program entry filters, content and professional experiences. Among the range of proposed actions, Queensland is considering:

- development of new and flexible pathways into the teaching profession;
- formalising partnerships between schooling sectors and universities to clearly outline mutual expectations;
- ensuring students entering initial teacher education programs possess requisite levels of personal competence in literacy and numeracy;
- ensuring that preservice teachers are prepared to address the individual learning needs of the students they teach;
- ensuring that preservice teachers develop effective classroom management skills that equip them to positively support and manage the range of student behaviours and school cultures in contemporary school environments;
- establishment of additional processes to facilitate the provision of independent and evidence-based feedback to universities regarding the quality of programs; and
- additional filters at various points in the graduate teacher lifecycle, including entry to programs and pre-registration testing for graduates.

Other Australian jurisdictions have identified similar concerns and have agreed to establish a working group, led by Queensland, which is to provide a report to the Standing Council for School Education and Early Childhood in December 2012. This report is to outline proposed further national reforms to boost teacher quality.

(f) Other related matters

The Queensland Government is also focussing on delivering programs and services that better prepare and support Queensland students throughout their education. In June 2011, the Government released *A Flying Start for Queensland Children* White Paper which outlined a number of educational reforms.

From 2015 Year 7 will become part of high school in all state and non-state schools across Queensland. The move of Year 7 into high school will bring Queensland in line with most other Australian jurisdictions.

To ensure a smooth transition, DETE is implementing a range of measures including piloting the move of Year 7 into high school in 20 state schools from this year and introducing a new phase of education, Junior Secondary, into all state high schools from 2013.