CPSU SUBMISSION
INDEPENDENT EDUCATION
REVIEW

Proud
to be
public.

Introduction

Public education in Tasmania is at a critical juncture. The pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges and introduced new ones, including lost learning time, increasing student mental health challenges, digital transformation, workforce shortages, long wait times for diagnoses of learning disorders and disabilities, intergenerational disadvantage and rising living costs for many families.

These issues cannot be resolved solely within the classroom; they require a holistic multi-disciplinary approach involving the broader school system, community, and government policy settings.

The CPSU

The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), represents over 120,000 members nationally, including School Support Staff and Professional Support Staff who are integral to the educational system and play a crucial role in supporting both students to access learning and teachers.

CPSU members include, but are not limited to the following roles:

- School Administration Support & School Business Managers
- Teachers Assistants & Educational Support Specialists
- Allied Health Professionals: Speech Pathologists and School Social Workers
- Aboriginal Education Officers, Library Officers, Youth Workers and Network Support Officers
- Learning Services and broader Agency employees

This submission is based on consultations with our members across the state and includes their feedback on the review's discussion questions. We have sought to amplify the experiences and voices of our members in the hope of providing insights from a cohort of employees with a unique perspective.

Key Theme 1: Defining educational success

We need to ensure that our education system has clearly agreed objectives that are transparently reported. What does success look like after the formal years of schooling in the Tasmanian context and how do we better encourage our young people to aspire to achieve?

Key Feedback:

- Success should mean that students leave school with the literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, and social skills necessary for further study or employment and that their location, health, disability, or socio-economic status is not barrier to achieving success.

- More focus is needed on the barriers many learners face in accessing education; such as caring responsibilities, poverty, abuse and learning disabilities, making it difficult for them to aspire to academic success.

- We need to broaden what we define as success, beyond achieving an ATAR score and provide more individual support for learners to identify their strengths and career pathways.

- Improved educational outcomes should be a shared priority across all agencies, like the approach taken around Family Violence, as recommended by the *State Service Review* for difficult issues that require a whole of government response.

CPSU Member Feedback

'I feel this [success] is always the goal in our educational settings. However, have any of the initiatives changed any of the outcomes? Are we making inroads here? Or are we just creating more work than what is actually needed.'

'We need to broaden what we define as success. We take it away from ATAR; so much pressure is on young people to have a high ATAR, it takes away from the enjoyment of learning, adding unnecessary pressure.'

'For some young people, success is getting to school.'

'Some children are caring for their parents, living in absolute poverty, neglect, and abuse—with very little being done about it. Parents can opt into support and opt out, it's difficult to aspire to achieve when you are surviving.'

'Many students in Tasmania will be the first in their family to finish year 12 or go to university. We need to make this more possible for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and rural and remote areas. We need role models and mentors who are not parents or teachers but work in the field of interest to support and encourage—be a cheerleader for a student attempting something that seems impossible.'

"Success looks like a young person who has a positive outlook on their future, who has the literacy and numeracy skills to function in society to their potential."

'There are societal challenges that are not within the scope of DECYP. Accepting what we can do and not do is also important.'

'Kids need to be known. Adults need to be curious about them and what makes them tick rather than trying to get them to fit into a box. We need to see things from the kid's perspective more and resist the urge to judge or dismiss the voice of students. Kids need to know 'what's in it for me' and adults need to be able to spark the motivation in them to do great things. Ask the kids what success looks like—it's most often not the same as the adults.'

Proposals for Consideration: The government should leverage its position as Tasmania's largest employer to create pathways for young Tasmanians to explore and pursue careers in the State Service and GBEs. This can be achieved through structured work experience, traineeships, apprenticeships, and supported by formal quotas and financial incentives to boost engagement across agencies and GBEs.

Proud to be Public
Proud to be Union
CPSU

Key Theme 2: Strengthening supports and engagement for all learners at all stages of their education

How can we collectively support Tasmanian learners to get the most out of their entire education experience and ensure all students reach their potential?

The first step would be to reframe our ideas about who is involved in the education of children and recognise and value the role that all school-based employees play in the engagement and support for learners. Professional Support Staff have a critical role to play in leading evidence-based practice for supporting learners with Specific Leaning Disorders, such as dyslexia, disabilities and trauma and teacher assistants play a critical role in the delivery of targeted support.

Key Feedback

- A multi-disciplined approach is needed to improve educational outcomes. To do this we need to improve the involvement of Professional Support Staff in policy development and decision-making processes within DECYP.
- Growing cohort of students with suspected but un-diagnosed disabilities, or whose disabilities do not attract additional or sufficient funding
- Waiting times for diagnosis is a significant issue that impedes early intervention ad effective support, with significant wait times for School Psychologists and many paediatricians in Tasmania closing their books to new patients. Must meet the diagnosis back log and increase funding to provide more targeted support to vulnerable learners
- There is a critical need to grow the number of qualified Social Workers and Speech and Language Pathologists
- All classes should be assigned a teacher assistant to support teachers and the individual needs of students

Reduce the Diagnosis Backlog & Meet Rising Demand for Support Services

There is a significant backlog in diagnosing learning disorders and disabilities, creating delays in accessing suitable accommodations and funding. This delay in diagnosis has the effect of entrenching disadvantage and advantaging more privileged cohorts of learners who have access to private referral pathways.

Professional support staff such as speech pathologists report higher rates of language disorders, with delays in assessments leading to delays in providing evidence-based multi-disciplinary intervention and support. School Social Workers report rising demand that has seen the focus shift from wellbeing support to crisis management with available resources almost exclusively spent supporting students at risk of self-harm, suicide, neglect or sexual and physical abuse.

Schools can and are paying for additional professional support through their School Resource Package, however workforce shortages of Speech and Language Pathologists and School Social Workers, mean this demand is unable to be met.

This anecdotal evidence is supported by recent wait times released in the 2024/25 Budget Estimates.

Proud to be Public
Proud to be Union
CPSU

'We under-service, we do our absolute best to see as many kids as we can, but to do that it means we often are not able to support kids for as long as we need to.'

'Right now, I really only have time to support kids who are at risk of suicide or experiencing neglect at home, unless we see an increase in resourcing we will see an increase in the burnout of School Social Workers.'

This is a multi-faceted issue with insufficient funded positions to meet growing demand and difficulties recruiting and retaining staff, as salaries and conditions are not competitive compared to the not-for-profit sector. This coupled with reduced access to workplace flexibility and not having access to additional leave like teachers and psychologists mean that DECYP is increasingly not seen as an employer of choice.

Proposals for Consideration:

1. Additional resourcing for school-based allied health staff to meet the growing needs of students with disabilities and mental health challenges, including the employment of Occupational Therapists across the State.
2. Funding is required to achieve a minimum ratio of one full-time equivalent school social worker for every 500 students.
3. Industrial and workforce incentives must be considered or expanded; including offering permanent employment as part of university degrees, extension of the scholarship program, paid placements, implementation of a market allowance to recruit and retain professional support staff.

Lift the Voice and Influence of Professional Support Staff in Decision Making

Professional Support Staff face significant challenges in having their voices recognised within DECYP. Policies and programs, such as dual reporting, are often implemented without consultation, risking strained relationships with service providers and potential disengagement of vulnerable children. New roles, like the Child Safeguarding and Youth Worker positions, are introduced without input from Professional Support Staff, leading to staff working unsupervised in the school environment, often increasing the workload for School Social Workers through a blurring of professional lines around scope of practice.

Professional Support Staff are frequently excluded from management and promotional opportunities due to the requirement for many senior roles to have a teaching qualification, even when their expertise is more suited to the role. This exclusion exacerbates the teacher shortage and disregards the skills and qualifications of professional support staff, particularly in positions that involve managing their own teams. This failure is also not leveraging the professional expertise of Professional Support Staff to support the implementation of evidence based practice for literacy and behaviour management.

'Often programs and policies are implemented without any consultation, the most recent example being to dual report. While it might mitigate risks to DECYP there is a real risk that reporting can damage the relationship with service providers and increases likelihood of disengagement/isolation of a child'.

Proud to be Public
CPSU
Proud to be Union

'Professional Support Staff need to have much more involvement in policy and decisions at a higher level'.

Proposals for Consideration:

1. Enhance the involvement of Professional Support Staff in policy development and decision-making processes within DECYP to ensure their expertise and insights are integrated into program implementation, thereby improving evidence-based practice and outcomes for children.
2. Review qualification requirements for management positions to allow qualified Professional Support Staff to apply, promoting a more inclusive leadership structure.

Improve Accommodation for Professional Support Staff and School Support Staff

There has been a rise in school-based services from professionals such as psychologists, speech pathologists, social workers, nurses, and NDIS-funded providers. However, DECYP's lack of planning for multidisciplinary education has led to inadequate accommodation. It is common for staff to work out of unsuitable spaces like staffrooms, print rooms, and storage areas impacting service delivery, student privacy and in some cases limiting the expansion of services.

'I have a number of schools that I am responsible for providing IT support to and visit regularly, it is not unusual for me to have to work out of a cupboard, while sitting on a kids chair.'

'Having dedicated office space for Social Workers in every school would go a long way to helping students and teachers understand that professional support is available.'

Proposal for Consideration: DECYP should expand office and clinical spaces in schools to support allied health and visiting staff, ensuring effective service delivery. Input from professional and support staff must be considered during the design phase of school redevelopments.

Improve In-Class Support

To support all students in reaching their potential, a teacher assistant in every classroom should be the norm, specialised in essential areas like literacy, numeracy, behaviour management and inclusive education.

Teacher assistants play a vital role in meeting diverse learning needs by offering individualised support, reinforcing core skills, and assisting students with disabilities and additional needs. Working alongside teachers to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, enhancing student engagement and minimising disruptions.

By ensuring each classroom has dedicated support, we can create equitable learning opportunities, enabling all students to thrive throughout their educational journey.

Proposals for Consideration:

1. Increase funding to secure teacher assistants in every classroom to strengthen educational support and engagement for all students, ensuring consistency and equity across all schools and the expansion of Education Support Specialists roles across schools.

2. Consider the development of a new classification structure for teacher assistants that incentivises and rewards specialisation in literacy, numeracy, IT, science, food tech, disability and behaviour management. Complemented by subsidised TAFE fees to encourage upskilling.

Key Theme 3: Outcomes at the conclusion of the formal years of schooling

Noting the specific challenges that emerge as young people progress through schooling; how can we improve attendance, retention, attainment and student outcomes to better support choice of learning and career pathways?

Key Feedback:

- A more consistent approach to non- attendance is needed across schools and colleges
- Extension of transport, food and after school programmes to assist with attendance, retention and attainment should be considered
- Increased investment in administration, professional support staff and teacher assistants is needed to ensure vulnerable and disadvantaged learners are not locked out of the learning before they even enter the classroom
- Adequate resourcing is a must for all new policy initiatives so that they can be implemented effectively

CPSU Member Feedback

'Centrelink incentives for low socio-economic families.'

'Give me a bus and a Bus Driver and I would improve attendance in a Term, transport is a major challenge for our students [in the regions]'.

'More intervention, earlier, I can tell you the child in Year 3 that will disengage and struggle with attendance in Year 10.'

'More flexible options around suspension as it just punishes children without providing support for the underlying behaviour.'

'Supporting learners who have different needs and approaching their support with a neuro-affirming lens. Continuing to work towards true inclusion for all students.'

Increased Administration Support to Lift Attendance

Daily follow-up of attendance is a significant investment of time for administration teams, yet the contributions of administrative staff in these activities are often undervalued by DECYP. School Business Managers frequently struggle to secure additional resources through the School Resource Package for administration activities limiting their ability to relieve teachers and principals of administration tasks.

To address this issue, CPSU School Administration members have previously proposed the engagement of full-time attendance officers in larger schools to support these efforts.

Proud to be Public
Proud to be Union
CPSU

CPSU Member Feedback

'The nonattendance process of school sending letters is optional to principals - so there are schools not sending letters to parents; on top of that they are not ringing or having meetings with the parents and kids as to how can we support a return to school - there is no accountability for many parents around not sending to school and additionally around the school not doing anything to contact parents and engaging their child to school.'

'Some schools do great follow up, some schools do little and the message of not sending letters or ringing is read by families often that the school does not care.'

'Stronger attendance procedures that principals are required to follow rather than they can opt to do.'

'ccc process is a joke in our system - some families ccc's are reconvened 6-7 times with still no orders to attend - some referrals for cccs are not even being picked up and proceeded on.'

Proposal for Consideration: Provide funding for full-time attendance officers, as part of the administration team, in larger schools to enhance attendance monitoring and support initiatives.

Extension of Breakfast and Lunch Programs

School food programs improve attendance, focus, health, and social outcomes while alleviating stress and financial pressures for working families. International studies indicate that these programs can increase school attendance by 1.8 days annually and reduce chronic absenteeism by 5.4%. Currently, access to breakfast clubs is inconsistent, and lunch programs are available only in a limited number of schools.

"More consistent expansion of food and gardening programs in school"

Recommendation: Expand breakfast and lunch programs to all schools, ensuring adequate administrative support, staffing, and necessary infrastructure investment.

Development of After School Clubs

After School Clubs (Study Hubs) offer substantial benefits to students by providing guided activities, supervised homework, and learning time that foster positive study habits and social skills. These programs also help reduce crime by diverting at-risk students from youth justice and supporting those in unsafe home environments.

To ensure equal access, it is crucial that these programs are structured and provided within the government school system, allowing all students to benefit, regardless of their parents' working arrangements or financial means. Well-designed programs could also provide Teacher Assistants with additional work hours, create employment opportunities in the local community, and help establish a pipeline to careers in education to assist with the deepening skills crisis.

Proposal for Consideration: Implement structured After School Clubs across all government schools to ensure equitable access for all students while also potentially providing employment opportunities for Teacher Assistants.

Key Theme 4: Support for our teaching workforce

How do we attract, support and develop teachers and school leaders to be effective and successful practitioners who can confidently deliver high quality, evidence-based teaching that meets the needs of students at all levels?

Key Feedback

1. The increasing demands on teachers, including data collection and behaviour management, are overwhelming and beyond what one profession or person can deliver; trust in their professionalism is essential as well as additional support.
2. Leadership changes are necessary at the director level to modernise educational approaches, ensuring that strategies genuinely improve educational outcomes.
3. More professional support for teachers and teaching assistants is required. Targeted support for teachers should begin before they enter the classroom, with initial teacher education emphasising the science of learning, reading, trauma, emotional regulation, disability, and inclusion.
4. Technology will continue to change how learning is structured and delivered; however, support is required for it to not become an additional burden added to the ever-growing tasks required of teachers.

'Package permanent employment as part of the uni teaching degree and include scholarships.'

'Better pay and more support/resourcing for children with additional needs that can't be met by just one class teacher.'

'Teachers are very stressed and feel that there is more and more being put onto their plates - the pressure is often too great'.

'We need to stick with the one approach and allow teachers to become comfortable and well-practised in doing things similarly each year. There needs to be a stable base to grow from.'

'We need to have targeted support for teachers that begins before they walk into the classroom. We need to change initial teacher education so that teachers leave university understanding the science of learning and the science of reading - we are not having to 'retrain' them when they begin working.'

'Initial teacher education needs to focus less on theories and more on science and practical knowledge of trauma, emotional regulation, disability and inclusion.'

'Consistent implementation of inclusive practice strategies. Clearly defined classroom routines and expectations that are communicated to students in a way that they understand. Inclusive classroom practices are not an extra or 'more work' - just good teaching.'

'I think we need to get our school teachers back into classrooms. We have a teacher shortage and have more out of school positions than ever. Also, we need to stop schools purchasing teachers out of their SRP, that will then free up quality teachers for those hard to staff schools.'

'Valuing our teachers and all other DECYP staff who work with our children and young people.'

'The demands on teachers these days is ridiculous. I don't know how they manage to keep everything happening. Data collection, differentiation, inclusivity, curriculum, behaviour management. We need

to trust that majority of our workforce do a good job. I feel we need to go back to basics and trust our teachers.'

Reduce Teacher Admin Workload Through Improved Support

The increasing complexity of school operations, particularly following decentralisation, introduction of the NDIS and the recent *Commission of Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in Government Institutions*, means that the administrative and governance requirements on schools, teachers and leader has never been higher.

These changes have not seen a corresponding lift in administration resources or a review of the classifications and roles in school administration to ensure that they are sufficient to deliver required outcomes.

The NDIS is a welcome funding model for people with disabilities but has not been adequately supported in the school workplace. One student may have a range of services provided by private providers and each new professional requires hours of additional work for the school. The assessment of and re-assessment of students with high needs and paperwork associated with accessing state-based disability funding is also a further burden on the school system, with teachers reliant on support from school administration, and leadership to undertake the extensive paperwork to access and maintain funding.

Outside the NDIS, new programs, policy initiatives and governance requirements often demand administrative support without providing any corresponding funding. The culture in some schools mean that school business managers often struggle to secure approval for funding through the School Resource Package, even when funds are available for teachers, professional support staff and teacher assistants. The challenges around administration funding are especially pronounced in small regional schools where some School Business Managers are still employed on 40-44 weeks and large primary schools and colleges where funding for enrolment numbers caps out.

These changes necessitate a higher base funding for School Administration, lifting base funding for school administration would assist principals and teachers as it would allow them to be relieved of or supported with administration tasks.

Proposals for Consideration:

1. Increase base funding to the School Administration Staffing Formula and consider the implementation of additional funding for the employment of executive officers for principals in large schools and colleges. Consider the introduction of administration-focused roles to assist teachers with modern demands, potentially mirroring the NSW School Administration Improvement Program, which added 600 administrative positions to alleviate teacher workload.
2. Establish a new broad banded classification structure for school administration officers to allow greater flexibility in how their skills can be utilised to meet school needs. Allowing the devolution of higher-level administration tasks from Principals.
3. Recognise and standardise the role of school business managers within the senior leadership team.

Proud to be Public
Proud to be Union
CPSU

4. Centralise tasks such as facility management and relief into a network model, where services are delivered across a network of schools by dedicated staff, freeing up administration resources for more school-based support.

5. Employment of school support staff (school administration officers and teacher assistants) for 52 weeks to provide increased administration and student support time, more time to support teachers before term commencement and at the beginning and end of the day.

Leveraging Technology to Support Learning & Reduce Workloads

IT support is critical as digital technology becomes integral to teaching and school administration, with laptops, smart boards, online programs and information systems increasingly in use. However, digital literacy and access varies amongst staff, students, and parents.

'Most communication with parents happens online, but some parents struggle with accessing it due to limited digital skills, entrenching disadvantage.'

'We have students with dyslexia whose individual learning plan require access to tech, but we don't have enough devices.'

Information Technology (IT) is and will continue to be an essential function of modern schooling and can be a powerful tool to reduce workloads but only if technology is integrated across platforms, supported by on-going professional development and sufficient IT support.

Proposals for Consideration:

1. Greater funding for the use of digital technology and laptops to engage learners and support learners with disabilities.

2. Establish IT apprenticeships to provide ongoing technical support, addressing the growing demand for digital infrastructure in education.

Key Theme 5: Accountability for improved outcomes

How do we ensure that policy initiatives are implemented, and resources are used to improve learning outcomes? This review will take into account relevant past and current reviews and policy initiatives.

Key Feedback:

1. To improve student outcomes and support teachers, it is crucial that policy development involves consultation with key stakeholders. Often, employees find out about change through media announcements or after change is well progressed.

2. Need for improved tracking of the utilisation of NCCD funding to ensure adjustments are effectively implemented and funding not diverted for other uses.

3. There is a perception that initiatives have not significantly been evaluated or measured to ascertain whether they have changed outcomes and some concern they may add unnecessary work.

4. Need to ensure adequate funding for staff, resources, and infrastructure upgrades to successfully implement policy initiatives. Resistance to change may be misinterpreted as a

Proud to be Public
CPSU
Proud to be Union

cultural issue when it stems from frustration over being asked to do more without sufficient support.

CPSU Member Feedback:

'Firstly, we ensure that the policy has been developed based on consultation with the key stakeholders.'

'It starts from the top. Are our current directors etc fit for the role? - they seem to have very old ideas on education and I don't think we will every move forward without a change at the top.'

'The primary reading pledge needs to be reported on annually. How many of our year 7 students are entering high school reading at or below the minimum standard? Schools need the practical resources (e.g. funds for decodable books) to be able to make transformational change.'

'We need to stick with the one approach and allow teachers to become comfortable and well practised in doing things similarly each year. There needs to be a stable base to grow from.'

'We need less ministerial interference in schools. The minister does not need to be visiting schools and definably does not need to attend Principal forums.'

'Track how the NCCD money is being spent - are the adjustments used as evidence actually happening in schools?'

Proposal for Consideration: All recommendations accepted for implementation, from all reviews and inquiries, to be made available on a public website and for progress against those recommendations to be reported.

CONCLUSION

supporting Tasmanian students and educational staff effectively, demands targeted investment in staffing, professional development, and resources to help every learner achieve their full potential. This submission emphasises a multi-disciplinary approach that values and leverages the critical roles of Professional and School Support Staff, advocating for enhanced support, recognition, and investment in these positions.
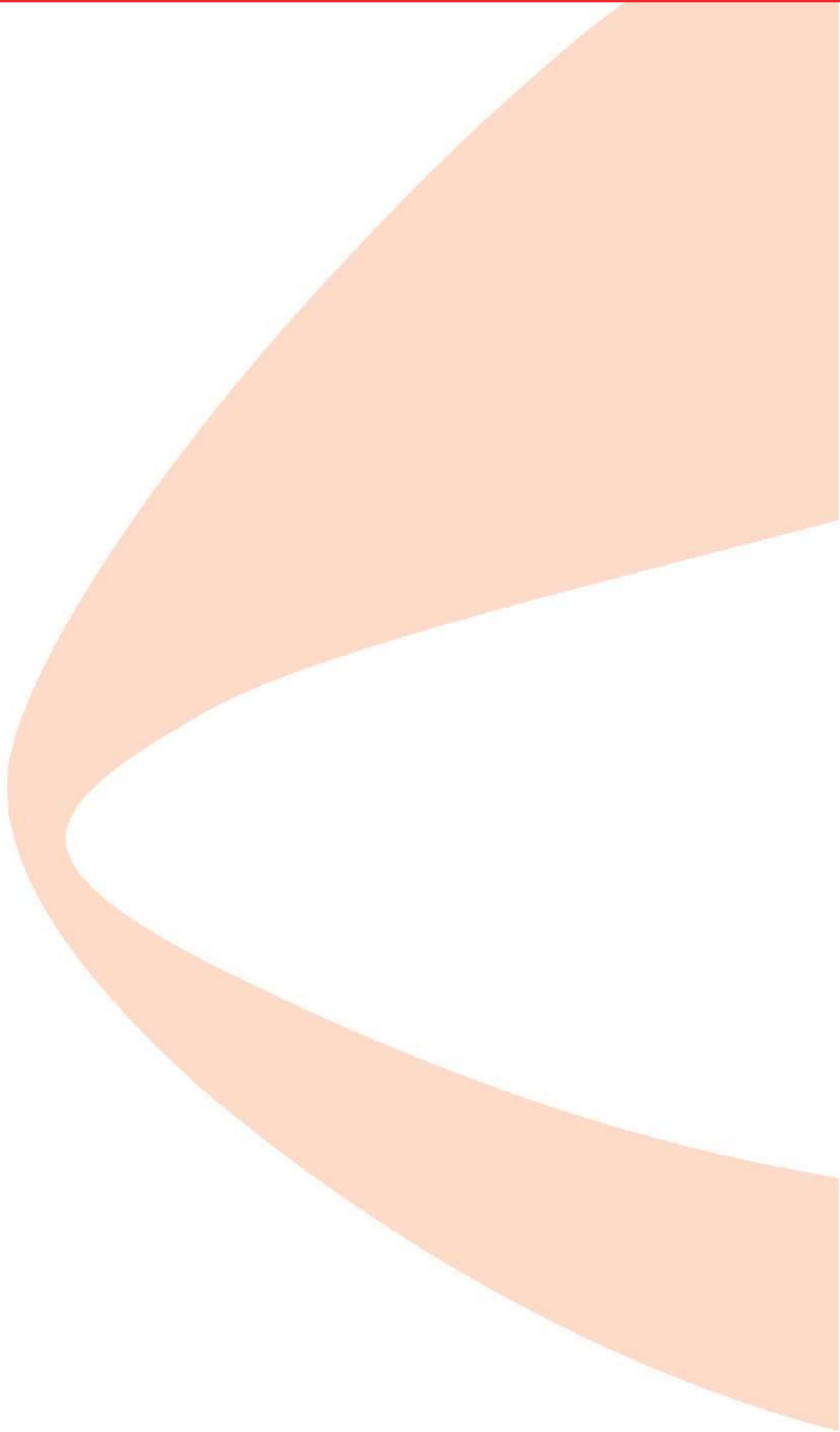
The expectation that teachers alone can meet the growing demands of modern education is unsustainable. DECYP must shift its culture to embrace the contributions of all educational professionals who work tirelessly each day to support teachers, principals, and students. By implementing these recommendations, Tasmania can establish a more equitable, effective, and enriching educational experience for every student across the state.