

Structuring the Tasmanian education system for demographic change and associated implications

SUBMISSION TO THE INDEPENDENT TASMANIAN EDUCATION REVIEW

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Executive summary

Projected continued decline in the number of school-age children in Tasmania - for all but six of the 29 Local Government Areas (LGAs) - will see declining enrolments in most schools across the State over the next 15 years¹. Combined with an ageing schooling sector workforce and a national teacher workforce crisis, Tasmania is likely to experience an increase in the exodus of educators from the sector's workforce. Given the future-focused priority of the Independent Education Review, these compounding issues provide an opportunity for the Tasmanian Government to re-envisage the structure² of the Tasmanian school education system so that it effectively delivers on the purpose of school education – excellence and equity - into the future³.

While the Australian and Tasmanian Governments have recently signed an agreement to 'fully fund' all public Tasmanian schools to the School Resourcing Standard (SRS) by no later than 2029⁴, the number of school-age students – those aged 5 to 18 years - living in Tasmania between now and 2029 is projected to decline by 1,884⁵, meaning that actual funding will likely decline while the cost of maintaining public education infrastructure will remain. Additionally, if the trend of enrolments shifting from government to non-government schools (including home-schooling and alternative schools such as the Indie Schools) continues then public education funding will be further stretched.

If the Tasmanian Government is to achieve its Strong Plan 2030 aspiration that Tasmania is the best place to live, work and raise a family⁶, to attract and retain working families in the State, particularly in regional areas, it will need to provide a quality education system, including the provision of excellent and equitable schooling throughout the whole state.

Given the objectives set out in the Terms of Reference for the Independent Education Review it is critical that the structure of the education system is prioritised as part of the review process. If not, the good intent of the Independent Education Review will be compromised. These objectives are that the Tasmanian Liberal Government wants a Tasmanian School System that⁷:

- Implements evidence-based whole of school practices and pedagogy that leads to improved student educational outcomes and behaviour
- Delivers high quality teaching that is evidence based and meets the needs of students at all levels
- Effectively utilises resources to improve student outcomes and attract and retain a high-quality workforce
- Contributes to the State's productivity by supporting a highly skilled local workforce to assist local businesses and industry to grow and compete
- Is accountable for improved student outcomes, including in remote and rural areas.

¹ All references to population projections throughout this submission are based on the medium series of the Tasmanian Department of Treasury and Finance Population Projections, 2024.

² Whereby 'structure of the education system' refers to the arrangement and relations between the multiple parts of the system such as government and non-government schools; primary, high, college and district schools, their number and distribution; as well as the regulatory bodies, policies and practices that govern the system.

³ As per the Ministers for Education National Agreement - the 2019 Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration

⁴ See <https://www.premier.tas.gov.au/latest-news/2024/september/australian-and-tasmanian-governments-agree-to-fully-fund-all-tasmanian-public-schools>

⁵ Tasmanian Department of Treasury and Finance, Population Projections, medium series, 2024

⁶ See <https://www.premier.tas.gov.au/budget-2024/budget-releases/delivering-the-2030-strong-plan-for-tasmanias-future>; https://www.stategrowth.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/526331/ACTIVE_-_Tasmanias_Population_Policy_2_July.pdf

⁷ Terms of Reference, Independent Education Review, Tasmania www.ier.tas.gov.au

In terms of defining educational success, all young Tasmanians should complete their schooling in year 12 as literate, numerate, knowledgeable and well-rounded individuals who are prepared for, and confident about, the next stage of their lives whether that be to pursue further education and/or training or to enter the workforce. This includes digital, health and financial literacy. The measure of success is how well the education system achieves its purpose. At an individual level, success is how well prepared – literate, numerate and knowledgeable - and confident a young Tasmanian feels about life after school.

There are two options. First, to do nothing. As enrolments continue to decline and composite classes increase creating further workload pressures on classroom teachers, the quality of education will likely be compromised due to the inability to attract and retain qualified and experienced teachers, education support staff and other professionals to a school, which will also mean limited capacity to support and mentor early career educators. Doing nothing would facilitate the slow demise of a school until there is no other option but to close. Doing nothing would be costly and detrimental to all involved – the students, the families, the educators, the community and the region. Doing nothing would fail in delivering, and achieving, the purpose of education – equity and excellence. It would also compromise the effective implementation – and outcomes – of the nation-leading system-wide policy for structured literacy and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) in the primary school sector to achieve the aspiration for 100% literacy in the state.

The second option is to proactively re-envisage the delivery of, and access to, schooling and the system's structure, particularly in areas where the number of children of school age is projected to decline considerably, to ensure that the purpose of education – equity and excellence – can be achieved and maintained. This will require developing a framework to inform the structure of the system and the 'right-sizing' of schools⁸ – the criteria and/or principles to ensure that the purpose of education – excellence and equity - can be achieved successfully in each school so that young Tasmanians complete their schooling in year 12 as literate, numerate, knowledgeable and well-rounded individuals who are prepared for, and confident about, the next stage of their lives and that educators, support staff and professionals can be attracted to, recruited and retained in schools, and in the profession.

In addition to the projected decline of school-age children and an anticipated increasing exodus within the education sector workforce, there are several other compounding issues which should be considered alongside the Independent Education Review. These include Tasmania's ageing workforce and the need to replace around 100,000 retiring workers over the next 15 to 20 years, persistent and ongoing skill and labour shortages across most industry sectors and projections by Jobs and Skills Australia⁹ and the University Accord¹⁰ that most jobs of the future will require further education and/or training following successful secondary school completion.

By 2050, 80% of all jobs in Australia will require a tertiary qualification (Higher Education or VET). To meet this need, 90% of young people finishing school need to go to TAFE (or another VET provider) or University. The Accord report sets a target that by 2050 55% of Australians aged 25 to 34 years will have a university qualification to meet these workforce needs¹¹.

⁸ This could also include the co-location of a range of other services such as child and family learning centres, childcare, libraries, allied health services. For more information see Denny, Lisa; Pisanu, Nyree (2020). Strategic policy responses to population decline: A synthesis of regional approaches and outcomes with policy recommendations for consideration from a Tasmanian context. University of Tasmania. Report. <https://hdl.handle.net/102.100.100/503006>

⁹ <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/employment-projections>

¹⁰ <https://www.education.gov.au/newsroom/articles/australian-universities-accord-final-report-released>

¹¹ Universities Accord

If the vision of the Tasmanian Government’s recently released Youth Jobs Strategy for 2024 to 2030¹² is one that “All young Tasmanians feel empowered and are supported to access meaningful training or employment opportunities” because all “young Tasmanians deserve a smooth pathway from school into the world of work”¹³ then the vision for Tasmania’s school education system must be that all young Tasmanians complete their schooling in year 12 as literate, numerate, knowledgeable and well-rounded individuals who are prepared for, and confident about, the next stage of their lives.”

Defining educational success

The purpose of the education system, as agreed by all Australian jurisdiction Education Ministers and set out in the 2019 Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration is twofold - to achieve excellence and equity, and, that all young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.

Given this, in terms of defining educational success in Tasmania, all young Tasmanians should complete their schooling in year 12 as literate, numerate, knowledgeable and well-rounded individuals who are prepared for, and confident about, the next stage of their lives whether that be to pursue further education and/or training or to enter the workforce. This includes digital, health and financial literacy. The measure of success is how well the education system achieves its purpose. At an individual level, success is how well prepared – literate, numerate and knowledgeable - and confident a young Tasmanian feels about life after school.

To achieved educational success, the progress of young Tasmanian students should be tracked, and intervention provided where and when required, so that they achieve the expected level for their age and grade, throughout each year of their schooling all the way to year 12. This approach will ensure that all young Tasmanians are able to successfully complete their schooling as literate, numerate and well-rounded knowledgeable young people so they can make choices about their future and ‘write their own story’.

School-age children in Tasmania - projections

The number of students enrolled in Tasmanian schools (all sectors) has been declining since ACARA first started reporting enrolments in 2006¹⁴.

In 2006, there were 84,245 students enrolled in a Tasmanian school, almost three quarters (73.3%) were enrolled in a government school, 16.2% in a catholic School and 10.4% in an independent school. By 2023, the number of students enrolled in a Tasmanian school had declined to 81,057 – 67.0% in a government school, 19.3% in a catholic school and 13.7% in an independent school.

In 2006, 90.1% of all 5- to 18-year-olds in Tasmania were enrolled in school. In 2023, the proportion of 5- to 18-year-olds enrolled in school had declined to 88.3%.

According to the Tasmanian Department of Treasury and Finance 2024 Population Projections¹⁵, between 2023 and 2038, the number of school age children in Tasmania is projected to continue to

¹² <https://www.youthjobsstrategy.tas.gov.au/>

¹³ Premier of Tasmania, Jeremy Rockliff, State of the State Address, February 2023

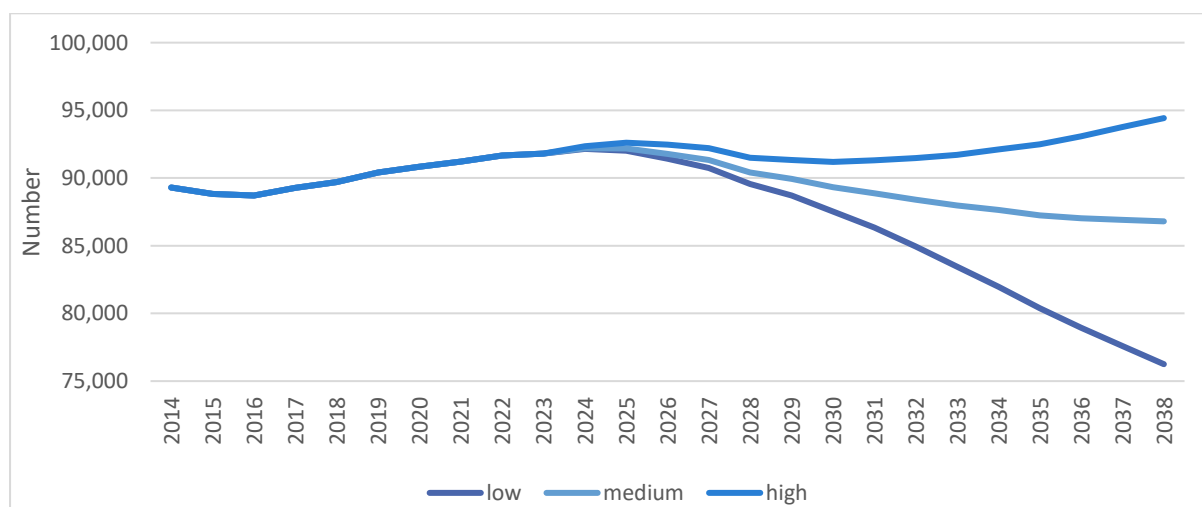
¹⁴ ACARA National Report on Schooling in Australia, 2023

¹⁵ See <https://www.treasury.tas.gov.au/economy/population-projections>

decline by 5.5% (5,016 children) under the medium series and by 16.95% (15,566 children) under the low series projections. Under the high series, the number of school age children will continue to decline initially and then start to increase by 2.8% (2, 609 children). However, this increase is based on an unlikely assumption that the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) will increase considerably. See Figure 1.

Tasmania’s total fertility rate (TFR) is already below the assumed rates for the Tasmanian Department of Treasury and Finance’s medium series population projections and is unlikely to increase to the assumed levels over the 15-year projection period. However, it is unlikely that the TFR will decline to the level assumed in the low series¹⁶. For these reasons, the number of school age children in Tasmania over the next 15 years will likely fall between the medium and low series, but closer to the medium series, of the 2024 Tasmanian Treasury Population Projections.

Figure 1 Number of school age students, 5 – 18 years old, actual and projected, Tasmania



Source: Tasmanian Department of Treasury and Finance Population Projections, author calculations

While acknowledging that students do not necessarily enrol at a school in their Local Government Area and that intake areas may overlap LGA boundaries as well as the options for e-school and home schooling, LGA population projections can provide an indication of demand for future schooling.

Of the 29 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Tasmania six are projected to increase the number of children aged 5 to 14¹⁷ in their council area by between 0.2% and 5.3% under the medium series, while the other 23 LGAs are projected to decline by between 44.3% and 2.1% over the 15-year period.

Table 1 details the number of school aged children in each LGA for 2023 and the projected number for 2038 as well as the change in number and by percent. It also includes the number of schools (total for all sectors) for each LGA in 2023 and the geo-location classification for each school in the respective LGA.

¹⁶ For more detailed discussion about Tasmania’s ultra-low fertility rate see <https://lisadenny.substack.com/p/oped-problems-grow-as-our-birthrate> and <https://lisadenny.substack.com/p/baby-boom-or-bust-the-tasmanian-perspective>

¹⁷ The Tasmanian Department of Treasury and Finance population projections for Local Government Areas are in 5 year age groups rather than single year of age. For the purposes of this submission ‘school age children’ at an LGA level are those aged 5 to 14 years.

Table 1 Projected change in school age children aged 5 to 14, by Local Government Area, number and percentage, number of schools and geolocation classification, Tasmania

	2023	2038	change	% change	No. schools	Geo-location
Break O'Day	630	495	-135	-21.4	2	Outer Regional
Brighton	3,027	3,163	136	4.5	7	Inner Regional
Burnie	2,540	2,134	-406	-16.0	15	Outer Regional
Central Coast	2,578	2,191	-387	-15.0	11	Outer Regional
Central Highlands	243	225	-18	-7.4	2	Outer Regional
Circular Head	1,056	878	-178	-16.9	8	7 Outer Regional, 1 Remote
Clarence	7,397	7,430	33	0.4	30	Inner Regional
Derwent Valley	1,380	1,289	-91	-6.6	6	5 Inner Regional, 1 Outer Regional
Devonport	3,116	2,668	-448	-14.4	14	Outer Regional
Dorset	778	591	-187	-24.0	6	Outer Regional
Flinders	79	44	-35	-44.3	2	Very Remote
George Town	797	577	-220	-27.6	3	Outer Regional
Glamorgan/Spring Bay	341	309	-32	-9.4	4	2 Outer Regional, 2 Remote
Glenorchy	5,549	5,843	294	5.3	20	Inner Regional
Hobart	5,288	5,297	9	0.2	27	Inner Regional
Huon Valley	2,258	2,210	-48	-2.1	10	Outer Regional
Kentish	714	684	-30	-4.2	2	Outer Regional
King Island	189	148	-41	-21.7	1	Very Remote
Kingborough	5,073	4,961	-112	-2.2	18	17 Inner Regional, 1 Outer Regional
Latrobe	1,372	1,385	13	0.9	7	Outer Regional
Launceston	8,267	7,534	-733	-8.9	36	Inner Regional
Meander Valley	2,512	2,181	-331	-13.2	9	Outer Regional
Northern Midlands	1,599	1,471	-128	-8.0	5	3 Inner Regional, 2 Outer Regional
Sorell	2,027	2,095	68	3.4	4	3 Inner Regional, 1 Outer Regional
Southern Midlands	789	767	-22	-2.8	4	Outer Regional
Tasman	190	175	-15	-7.9	1	Outer Regional
Waratah-Wynyard	1,737	1,464	-273	-15.7	5	Outer Regional
West Coast	449	355	-94	-20.9	6	Remote
West Tamar	3,038	2,882	-156	-5.1	8	4 Inner Regional, 3 Outer Regional
Tasmania	67,036	63,484	3,552	-5.3	273	

Source: Tasmanian Treasury Population Projections 2024, medium series; ACARA Australian Schools List.

Educational outcomes

Ultimately the call for an Independent Inquiry into the Tasmanian Education System¹⁸ was instigated on the back of deteriorating education outcomes in Tasmania following the Productivity Commission's most recent Report on Government Services in February 2024. The PC Report showed that the gap between Tasmanian educational outcomes and those in other jurisdictions is large and widening - just 53% of young Tasmanians left school in 2022 with a Year 12 or equivalent qualification, compared to 76% nationally¹⁹. This is despite the data also showing that the Tasmanian Government spends more money per student than all other jurisdictions, bar the Northern Territory, and having higher ratios of staff to students.

From a Tasmanian only perspective, the report showed that Tasmania's successful educational attainment – the TCE which includes VET (vocational education and training) courses²⁰ – has been deteriorating and that there are stark differences in attainment by socio-economic status (SES). In 2022, there was a 21.2 percentage point difference between Tasmanians from a high socio-economic background successfully completing their schooling (66.5%) with those from low socio-economic backgrounds (45.3%).

Educational outcomes are not excellent nor equitable for Tasmanian students.

In 2023, 54.3%²¹ of the potential year 12 population successfully achieved their Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE), compared with 58.0% in 2019. The TCE recognises the achievement of Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualifications based on their assumed level of complexity and size rather than separate to the TCE as an 'or equivalent' qualification²². Of those students who were enrolled in year 12 in 2023, 79.3% successfully completed their TCE, compared with 81.2% in 2019.

Given that 80% of the future workforce will require either university degree qualifications or trade and technical vocational education and training certificates²³, Tasmania must restructure its education system so that it is future-focussed and can effectively deliver accessible excellence and equity throughout the state's schools.

While the Tasmanian Government has committed to implementing an evidence-informed, system-wide structured literacy approach to teaching and learning reading and writing in primary schools by 2026²⁴, this is only the first step to implementing "evidence-based whole of school practices and pedagogy that leads to improved student educational outcomes and behaviour"²⁵. The reality is that the outcomes of this much-welcomed policy and practices direction will not start to become evident in NAPLAN results until at least 2029. This is when the first full cohort of young Tasmanians will sit their year 3 NAPLAN test having been taught to read and write using structured literacy practices and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) consistently through Preparatory (Prep) to grade 2. This

¹⁸ See the Open Letter calling for an Independent Inquiry into Tasmania's education system <https://openletter.earth/call-for-an-inquiry-into-the-tasmanian-education-system-45369f23>

¹⁹ Note that ACARA advises against comparison with other jurisdictions due to inconsistencies with measuring 'successful attainment' between jurisdictions.

²⁰ <https://www.tasc.tas.gov.au/students/qualifications/tasmanian-certificate-of-education-tce/>

²¹ <https://www.tasc.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/TCE-Attainment-2019-2023-for-web-publication.pdf>

²² See here for details on how VET is recognised in the TCE. <https://www.tasc.tas.gov.au/students/qualifications/vet/>

²³ <https://www.education.gov.au/newsroom/articles/australian-universities-accord-final-report-released>

²⁴ Disclosure: I am a member of the Premier's Lifting Literacy Outcomes Monitoring Group

²⁵ Terms of Reference, Independent Education Review, August 2024

cohort will not reach year 7 until 2032, grade 9 in 2034 and then successfully complete school in 2037. That is 13 years away.

Furthermore, successful implementation of the Minimum Schooling Guarantee as part of the Lifting Literacy Framework²⁶ may be at risk due to the projected decline in school-age children throughout the state combined with exiting or retiring educators and the subsequent increased use of composite classes which will likely have implications for whole-class instruction, multi-tiered systems of support and explicit teaching practices²⁷.

In the meantime, there is a significant proportion of the older cohort of school-aged Tasmanians who are not succeeding in school and are at immediate risk of not engaging in further education and training or employment.

Furthermore, evidence has shown for decades that years 8 and 9 are high risk for disengagement with many schools, predominantly non-government and alternative schools, restructuring and re-designing these critical years to mitigate the risk of disengagement. This includes the restructuring of primary and high schools into junior (grades 3 to 5), middle (grades 6 to 8) and senior (grades 9 to 12) and the inclusion of specialised programs to support personal development, maintain engagement and achieve progress²⁸.

Until such time that the desired outcomes of effectively implementing structured literacy and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) are evident in students' tracked progress, the Independent Education Review must consider how best to structure secondary schooling to nurture continued engagement in education over the long term while recommending an evidence-based approach for catching up and engaging students for the immediate to medium term (5- 10 years) and an associated de-implementation plan.

2024 NAPLAN analysis²⁹

Analysis of the 2024 NAPLAN writing test results provides further evidence that there is no excellence or equity in Tasmania's schooling system.

Year 9 NAPLAN test results are strong predictors of year 11 and 12 performance³⁰, that is, whether or not young Tasmanians continue on to year 11 and 12 and successfully complete their schooling. While over half (53.7%) of the 2024 year 9 students who participated in NAPLAN were above the expected proficiency level in writing – the domain which is the best predictor of successful school completion – the data also reveals alarming differences in proficiency by socio-demographic and spatial factors.

While much of the reporting of NAPLAN results focusses on the overall levels of proficiency for each of the domains – reading, spelling, punctuation and grammar, writing and numeracy – for each year group – 3, 5, 7 and 9 -, analysis by the various socio-economic variables reveals concerning differences within each - gender, remoteness, indigeneity, language background and parental

²⁶ https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/330044/Lifting-Literacy-3-year-Implementation-Plan.pdf

²⁷ Disclosure: Dr Lisa Denny is a member of the Lifting Literacy Outcomes Monitoring Group

²⁸ For more see [Year 9 is often seen as the 'lost year'. Here's what schools are trying to keep kids engaged - Federation University Australia](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-09-16/education-special-programs-help-year-9-students/104353370?utm_source=abc_news_app&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_campaign=abc_news_app&utm_content=link); https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-09-16/education-special-programs-help-year-9-students/104353370?utm_source=abc_news_app&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_campaign=abc_news_app&utm_content=link; [Year 9 is often seen as the 'lost year'. Here's what schools are trying to keep kids engaged - Federation University Australia](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-09-16/education-special-programs-help-year-9-students/104353370?utm_source=abc_news_app&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_campaign=abc_news_app&utm_content=link)

²⁹ See <https://lisadenny.substack.com/p/naplan-results-explain-tasmanias>

³⁰ [Year 9 NAPLAN writing results the best predictor of HSC success: study, media article reporting on a NSW Centre for Statistics and Evaluation \(CESE\) report](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-09-16/education-special-programs-help-year-9-students/104353370?utm_source=abc_news_app&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_campaign=abc_news_app&utm_content=link)

education and occupation - as well as for those students who did not participate in the NAPLAN writing test.

2024 NAPLAN Writing Results

Writing proficiency is the accumulation of the other literacy domains – reading, spelling, and punctuation and grammar – which should be taught and learnt sequentially over the schooling years. By year 9, a young person should be a proficient reader, speller and grammatically correct writer, well prepared to continue engaging in a wider school curriculum to year 12.

While the overall 2024 NAPLAN year 9 writing results indicate an improvement since 2023, direct comparison with previous NAPLAN results is not possible due to new proficiency measures introduced in 2023³¹. Under the old measure, the proportion of year 9 Tasmanian students not meeting the expected level in writing had been deteriorating over time while participation had also been declining. This contributes to the understanding of why Tasmania’s retention rates and successful school completion rates have not been improving.

For some reason, ACARA (the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority) includes students who have been formally exempt from testing as having participated in the NAPLAN test – ACARA’s definition of participation is the number of those assessed, non-attempt and exempt students. Therefore, the sum of the four proficiency levels does not equate to 100%. Students who were absent or withdrawn from the tests are not included as participating students. Research shows that students who do not participate, are exempt or do not attempt the test, are likely to be struggling and/or disengaged learners, and/or have a disability or learning disorder and are unlikely to meet the expected proficiency level if they attempt the test. As such, a variable which includes exempt, non-attempt, withdrawn and absent students for analysis purposes (but may include small rounding or duplication errors) was created for this analysis.

For those who participated in the NAPLAN writing test, while over half 53.7% of the year 9 students were above the expected proficiency level (38.1% strong, 15.6% exceeding), 43.7% did not meet the proficiency level expected. A further 12.5% of the enrolled cohort did not participate in NAPLAN – they were either exempt, withdrew, were absent or did not attempt the tests.

This means that of the 6,677 enrolled year 9 students in Tasmania in 2024 around 3,240 students were above the expected proficiency level in writing, 2,630 were below and 840 did not participate in the NAPLAN test. This also means that of the whole year 9 cohort in 2024, just over half (52.1%) were not assessed as meeting the expected level in writing at the time of the NAPLAN test. Given that it is the year 9 writing test that strongly predicts year 11 and 12 performance, it is unlikely that half of the 2024 year 9 cohort will continue on to year 10 to 11 and then 12 (retention) and complete their schooling, successfully (attainment).

When considered by gender, remoteness, background, and parental education and occupation, and participation, the NAPLAN results also suggest that the structure of the Tasmanian school education system is not meeting the needs of the students to support them achieve in education.

If a young, year 9 Tasmanian is either male, indigenous, lives in the outer regional or remote areas, has a parent with a certificate level qualification or lower or hasn’t finished school, or works in a unskilled job or not at all for the last 12 months, that young Tasmanian is unlikely to meet the expected proficiency standards in writing (if they participated in the test) and, as a result, is less likely to successfully complete school. More than half of those students with these socio-economic

³¹ see [here](#) for details from a Tasmanian perspective

variables did not meet the expected proficiency level ranging from 50.4% of those students in outer-regional areas to 65.8% for those students whose parents had completed year 11 only.

Those young, year 9 Tasmanians who were more likely to be above the expected proficiency level were female (63.1% proficient), non-indigenous (56.5%), live in inner regional areas (56.9%), have a language background other than English (64.4%) or have a parent with a bachelor degree or higher qualification (72.5%) or diploma (56.2%) or worked in senior management and professional roles (70.4%) or other management and professional roles (56.8%).

Those young, year 9 Tasmanian students who did not participate in the NAPLAN writing test – the exempt, absent, withdrawn or attended but did not attempt the test – 12.5% (834 students) of all enrolled year 9 students - were more likely to be from backgrounds where their parents had not been in paid work for 12 months (35.6% of all students whose parents had not been in paid work for 12 months did not participate in the NAPLAN writing test), or whose highest level of educational attainment was year 11 (28.9%), or when the occupation was not state or unknown (28.9%).

In terms of reading, the foundational skill for literacy development, 2 in 5 (40.3%) year 9 students did not meet the expected proficiency levels and 13.3% of the enrolled cohort did not participate in the test and so were not assessed. Two thirds (66.1%) of those students who participated in the test whose parents' highest level of education attainment was year 11 did not meet the proficiency expectations yet 29.6% of that cohort also did not participate in the NAPLAN. The situation is similar for those students whose parents were not in paid work or worked in unskilled or unknown roles or indigenous students.

In terms of numeracy - the foundational skill for pursuing further education and/or training in STEM related futures - more than 2 in 5 (42.8%) of the year 9 students who participated in the NAPLAN test did not meet the expected proficiency level. 14.6% of the enrolled year 9 cohort did not participate in the test at all.

Education sector workforce

It is well documented that there is a national education sector workforce crisis which has resulted in a National Teacher Workforce Action Plan³². In Tasmania these workforce challenges are compounded by the ageing workforce, the regionally dispersed nature of the Tasmanian population and the large number of small schools spread throughout the State as well as the fact that Tasmania has a Labour Market Entrants to Exits (LMEE) Ratio³³ of less than one³⁴. Given the highly competitive labour market and increasing demand for workers across industries, attracting young people and new workforce entrants to the education and schooling sector will be critical to delivering on the purpose of school education in Tasmania.

Attracting and retaining educators in the Tasmanian schooling system will be dependent on the effective structure of the system and how educators are supported in their schools.

³² See <https://www.education.gov.au/national-teacher-workforce-action-plan>

³³ The Labour Market Entrants to Exits ratio (LMEE) calculates the ratio of the number of potential workforce entrants aged 15 to 24 years (typical age of school leavers and higher education graduates) to the number of potential workforce exits aged 55 to 64 years (typical retirement age). A ratio of more than 1 indicates more potential labour market entrants to exits. A ratio of less than 1 indicates more potential labour market exits than entrants. Since 2011, the LMEE ratio for Tasmania has been less than 1. That means, more Tasmanian workers have been exiting the labour market than young Tasmanians have been entering it for the past 13 years.

³⁴ See here for a more detailed explanation <https://lisadenny.substack.com/p/explainer-why-tasmania-has-a-workforce>

Career intentions

Since 2020, there has been a considerable increase in the proportion of the Tasmanian teaching workforce reporting that they intend to leave the workforce prior to retirement; 32.4% in 2022 compared with 24.1% in 2020³⁵. This increase has seen a corresponding decline in the proportion intending to stay in the workforce until retirement, 43.2% in 2020 to 31.1% in 2022. The proportion of the workforce which is unsure about its intentions has remained stable at around 36% for Tasmania as well as nationally.

For the Tasmanian teaching workforce, the workload and ability to cope is the factor that the majority of the workforce nominate for their reason to leave the profession – 93% listed this factor in 2022, followed by classroom factors (70%), recognition and reward (68%), the administrative workload (66%) and the professional regulation (50%).

The reasons the workforce intends to stay is because they enjoy teaching (73%) and that it is a rewarding profession (68%).

The latest available data from the Department for Education, Children and Young People – for the year ended March 2024 – reveals that of the total number of workforce ‘separations’, 19.4% were teachers with 5 or less years of service (61 resignations for the year)³⁶. This is a substantial number given that retirements are also included in the total number of separations, of which there were only nine. This reinforces that educators are leaving the [public] sector prior to retirement³⁷.

Ageing workforce

Tasmanians are intending to retire from the workforce at a younger age than any other state in Australia at an average intended retirement age of 64.7 years³⁸.

As a State, around 42% of all employed Tasmanians are aged 45 or older meaning that around 120,000 Tasmanian workers will likely exit the workforce over the next 20 years. Not only will their exit from the workforce create further skill and labour shortages due to the demand for replacement labour, but it will add to the challenges to fill new job creation opportunities as well.

The situation is even more dire for the Tasmanian schooling workforce.

Of the total schooling sector workforce in Tasmania, 53.1% were aged 45 or older at the time of the 2021 ABS Census of Population and Housing. Of the 15,948 Tasmanians working in the schooling sector, around 8,466 will exit the workforce over the next 20 years due to retirement, if not beforehand.

Around three quarters (74.3%) of the schooling working force were female, with 54.3% of them aged 45 years or older. For men, 49.7% were aged 45 years or older.

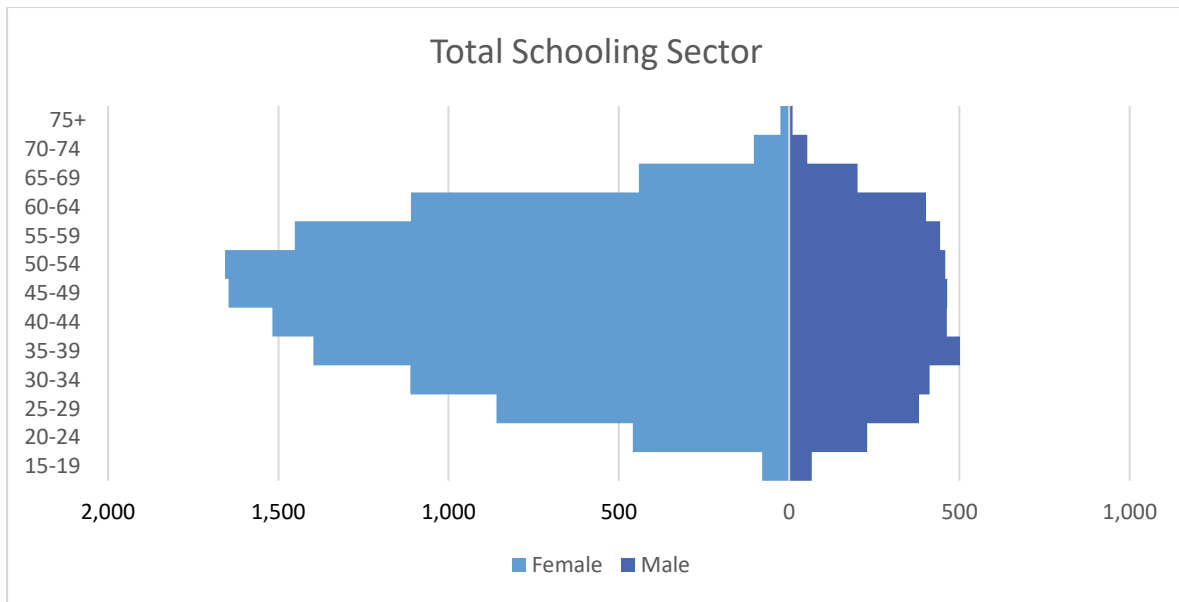
³⁵ Australian Teacher Workforce Survey

³⁶ Similar data is not available for the non-government school sectors.

³⁷ Anecdotal evidence suggests there is considerable movement from the public schooling sector to the non-government schooling sector.

³⁸ See <https://lisadenny.substack.com/p/tasmanians-intend-to-retire-earlier>

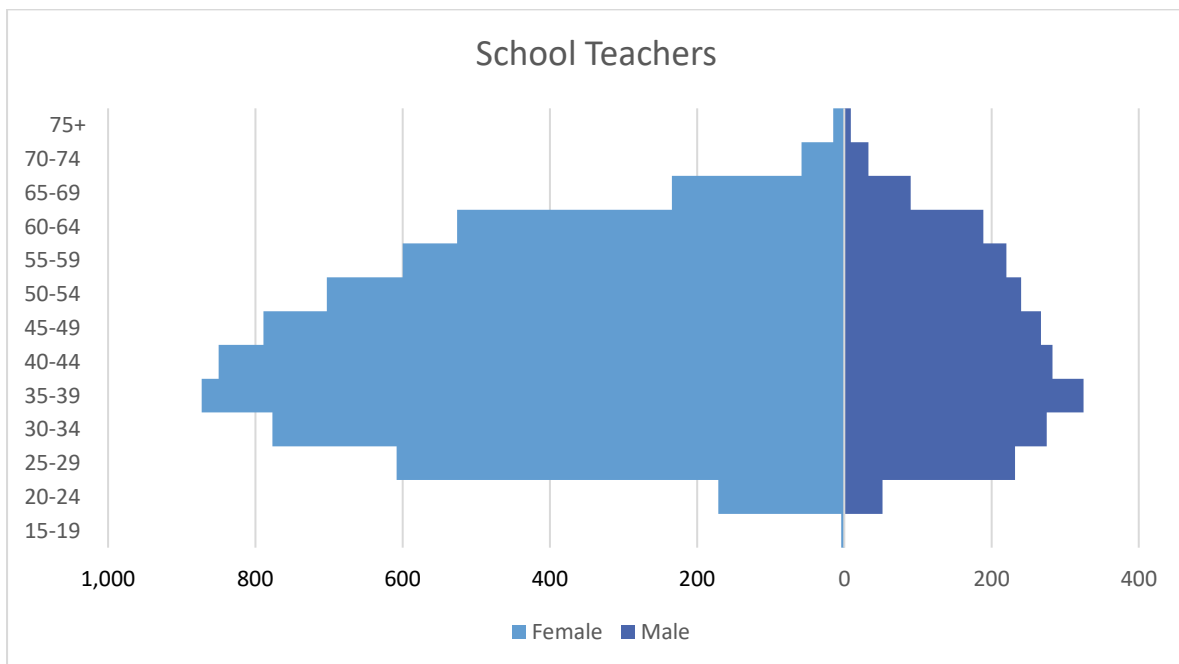
Figure 2 Schooling workforce by five year age group and sex, Tasmania



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

For the 8,424 Tasmanian school teachers – 73.7% of whom were female – 47.1% were aged 45 years or older meaning that over the next 20 years around 3,966 school teachers will exit the workforce due to retirement, if not beforehand.

Figure 3 School teacher workforce by five-year age group and sex, Tasmania

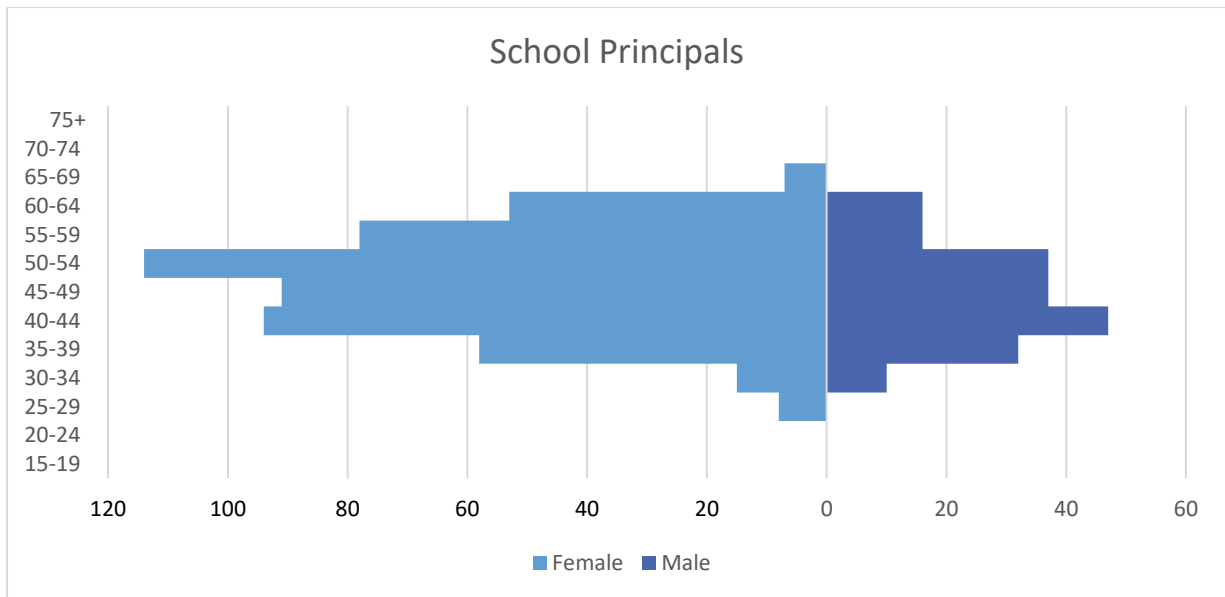


Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

For the 521³⁹ school principals – 63.3% of whom are female - 65.8% are aged 45 years or older meaning that around 343 school principals will exit the workforce within the next 20 years, if not beforehand.

³⁹ While this may appear a large number given the total number of schools in Tasmania is 273, it is likely that the Census captures people who are the Principal of a campus, or a primary, middle or senior school within a larger school.

Figure 4 School Principal workforce by five-year age group and sex, Tasmania



Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

Teaching experience

Given the decline in the proportion of Tasmanian educators intending to stay in the workforce until retirement and that the workload and ability to cope is the factor that most of the workforce nominate for their reason to leave the profession, it is clear that Tasmania educators are not being well supported, particularly those with five or less years of service.

While educators suggest that the reason they stay in the profession is because they enjoy teaching and that it is rewarding, analysis of the Tasmanian Teaching Workforce from the ATWD Teacher Survey data finds that Tasmanian teachers spend less time than their Australian counterparts marking and undertaking professional learning⁴⁰.

Given the need to track student progress to ensure they are meeting the expected level for their age and grade throughout their schooling, that teachers do not spend as much time marking suggests perhaps that Tasmanian teachers do not spend enough time assessing their students to ensure they are on track, or that perhaps they are not using the best assessment tools to track progress? While the progressive shift to whole-class Tier 1 explicit structured literacy instruction should eventually reduce variance in classrooms and improve behaviour in the longer term – provided the classes are not ‘composite classes’ – ensuring students are tracking to expected levels or providing intervention when required in the short to medium term will reduce the need for differentiation and additional planning, contributing a welcome downward pressure on workload.

Given that Tasmanian teachers also appear to spend less time undertaking professional learning perhaps they are not being supported to keep pace with the evidence of what is best practice for teaching and learning, assessment and so forth?

These findings are reinforced in a 2023 survey⁴¹ that found only 5% of teachers report moderating with other schools and that 50% of primary teachers and 25% of secondary teachers don’t believe their leaders have expertise and knowledge of curriculum and assessment. Further, 84% of teachers

⁴⁰ <https://lisadenny.substack.com/p/insights-into-the-tasmanian-teaching>

⁴¹ Australian Curriculum Implementation Project, 2023 Survey Data, Learning First

report creating their own lesson plans, contributing to considerable workload pressures. Teachers also articulated the difficulty of having composite classes to plan for, with one teacher suggesting that they had to teach double the curriculum in one year. Given the projected decline in school-age children in Tasmania and ageing workforce retiring, the risk of increased composite classes is high under the current structure.

STEM teachers

It is well documented that there is a nationwide shortage of STEM – science, technology, engineering and mathematics – educators⁴² to the point that a high proportion of teachers in these disciplines do not actually hold a specialised qualification in STEM.

The same is true in Tasmania. The decline in enrolments in STEM subjects in years 11 and 12 suggests that young Tasmanians are not inspired during their high school years to pursue STEM related courses in their senior secondary school years. This is further reflected in the decline in tertiary education choices by Tasmanian students in STEM related university degrees⁴³.

It is widely argued that pursuing STEM related disciplines and careers will drive innovation and productivity improvements in Australia during and beyond the technological revolution of Industry 4.0. Strong STEM knowledge and skills are also critical for medicine and health related disciplines and careers, of which there are already wide-spread skill shortages in Tasmania⁴⁴. Of all future new job projections to 2033⁴⁵, 27.0% will be in the Health Care and Social Services industry, 11.8% in the Professional, Scientific and Technical Services sector, 7.9% in Education and Training, 7.3% in Manufacturing and 6.2% in Construction meaning that around three in five (60.3%) of all projected new jobs in Australia are likely to require STEM knowledge and skills⁴⁶.

If the Tasmanian education system is to successfully inspire and encourage young Tasmanians pursue STEM related career pathways, they need to be inspired, engaged and achieving in STEM subjects in high school well before they choose their senior secondary subjects and a post-school education and training pathway.

If the STEM educators with specialised qualifications are concentrated in Tasmania's eight urban-located colleges and STEM teachers in non-urban high, district or extension schools do not have specialised STEM qualifications, experience and know-how, then how can Tasmania's education system inspire, engage and support young Tasmanians firstly to achieve in STEM subjects and then pursue STEM into the future through their TCE or VET subject selections and post-school further education and training or work? How can the education system be more effectively structured to enable equitable access to STEM qualified educators throughout the state and our regional areas?

⁴² A google search for 'STEM Teacher shortage Australia' reveals numerous news articles and research studies

⁴³ "The pipeline of students aiming to join our STEM workforce is at crisis point", presentation by the University of Tasmania Vice-Chancellor, Rufus Black, at the Committee for Greater Hobart Future of STEM in Tasmania forum.

⁴⁴ Skills Priority List data, Tasmania Shortage Rating, Jobs and Skills Australia, 2024

⁴⁵ Victoria University Employment Projections, Jobs and Skills Australia, 2024

⁴⁶ Jobs and Skills Australia no longer produces employment projections at a state level.

Future workforce

Jobs and Skills Australia⁴⁷ and the Universities Accord⁴⁸ predict that most jobs of the future will require further education and/or training following successful secondary school completion.

By 2050, 80% of all jobs in Australia will require a tertiary qualification (Higher Education or VET). To meet this need, 90% of young people finishing school will need to pursue further education and/or training with TAFE (or another VET provider) or at a university. The Universities Accord report sets a target that by 2050 55% of Australians aged 25 to 34 years will have a university qualification to meet these workforce needs⁴⁹.

Combined with the compounding challenges of an ageing workforce and projected decline in the number of school aged Tasmanians over the next 15 to 30 years - and therefore new workforce entrants - continued poor educational outcomes will have an exacerbated impact on Tasmania's economic and social fabric into the future and will struggle to meet projected workforce demand.

If the Tasmanian schooling system is to 'contributes to the State's productivity by supporting a highly skilled local workforce to assist local businesses and industry to grow and compete' in addition to improving educational outcomes, the education system will need to provide a robust, the evidence-based career education program from at least upper primary school and throughout the secondary school years.

To plan for Tasmania's future labour demand and mitigate against future skill shortages, young people need to be aware of, and knowledgeable about, the opportunities available to them so they can make informed choices to pursue education and career pathways for jobs of the future.

Unfortunately, over the past decade, career education and development policy in Tasmania has shifted from being student-centred and proactively embedded in the curriculum as per the national career education strategy launched in the early 2010s, to one aligned to largely private sector industry priorities which focusses on vocational education and training rather than aligning career aspirations with future labour force demand.

Furthermore, there is little direct support or guidance to schools on how to provide high-quality career education, development and transition advice and support to young Tasmanian school students⁵⁰.

Critical to the supply of skilled workers for the future workforce will be inspiring young Tasmanians to aspire to achieve and pursue education and training or employment following their schooling. This will mean ensuring that young Tasmanians are aware of the occupational and sectoral opportunities into the future and that effective career education during their schooling years, starting in primary school, provides them with a sound understanding of the associated education and training requirements for respective career pathways.

⁴⁷ <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/employment-projections>

⁴⁸ <https://www.education.gov.au/newsroom/articles/australian-universities-accord-final-report-released>

⁴⁹ Universities Accord

⁵⁰ Woodroffe, J., Kilpatrick, S., Williams, B., and Jago, M., (2017), Preparing rural and regional students for the future world of work: Developing authentic career focussed curriculum through a collaborative partnership model, Australian and International Journal of Rural Education, Vol 27 (3), pp 158 – 173.

The critical need for effective career education

Around one in four Tasmanian children are growing up in a family in which no adult works⁵¹. For many young Tasmanians in our schooling system, the purpose of education and the concept of work are unknown, through no fault of their own.

The Tasmanian schooling system should be structured so that it enables all young Tasmanians to aspire to pursue further education, training and/or employment following their schooling and to 'write their own story'. To do this, effective career education is critical from an early age, at a minimum, from upper primary school.

However, while the recently released Youth Jobs Strategy confirms that 'it starts at school' and that "schools provide the foundations for cultivating young people's aspirations and ensure they are equipped with the knowledge and tools they need to make informed decisions about education, training and employment pathways"⁵² the strategy also limits its actions to a 'comprehensive, coordinated and coherent approach to careers guidance that delivers best-practice activity' to the secondary and post-secondary education, training and employment ecosystem, predominantly in vocational learning⁵³, despite a plethora of evidence which demonstrates that nurturing career aspirations and providing career education should start as early as primary school.

Career aspirations

Several Australian studies⁵⁴ using Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY) and the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) data conclude that young people do not have a full appreciation of the types of jobs available to them, resulting in their career aspirations falling within a narrow set of occupations, not all of which are realistic, and which have been narrowing further over time.

A key indicator of a young person's capacity to understand and progress in the labour market is the extent to which their educational and occupational aspirations are aligned. However, these studies have also found that there is considerable confusion relating to educational pathways and their alignment with occupations.

From an international perspective, a joint OECD and the Education and Employers UK charity research report⁵⁵, took the findings of previous studies further by concluding that the skills mismatch observed in the labour market has its roots in primary school. The report recommended that the key to widening their view of the world of work is by giving all children, regardless of gender and social background, the same chance to engage with workers in a variety of fields.

Studies⁵⁶ out of the UK and New Zealand conclude that teenagers' career aspirations are shaped at very young ages, between 7 and 11 years. These studies further link labour market skill mismatches to the career aspirations of primary school children and further conclude that there is 'nothing in common' between young people's career aspirations and the reality of the labour market.

⁵¹ ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

⁵² Page 16

⁵³ Vision for Vocational Learning and VET in Tasmanian schools to 2030

⁵⁴ NCVET (2018), Generation Z at school, NCVET; Baxter, J. (2017), The career aspirations of young adolescent boys and girls, Chapter 2, LSAC Annual Statistical Report 2016 chapter— August 2017, The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children; Department of Employment, Education and Skills (2020), Career Aspirations and Outcomes, Australian Government

⁵⁵ Envisioning the Future of Education and Jobs: Trends, Data and Drawings.

⁵⁶ TEC (2020), Drawing the Future: exploring the careers aspirations of New Zealand children; Nothing in Common: The Career Aspirations of Young Britons Mapped Against Projected Labour Market Demand 2010-2020

The OECD Dream Jobs? Teenagers Career Aspirations and the Future of Work study highlights the extent to which the career aspirations of young people reflect actual and anticipated labour market demand. The report finds that labour market signals are failing to reach young people during the years of making education choices informed by occupational aspirations.

This is also evident in another UK Education and Employers research project⁵⁷; which involved a study of 11,000 17-18 year-olds to map their career aspirations against jobs in different economic sectors. The study found that there was statistically ‘nothing in common’ with adolescents’ career aspirations and projected labour market demand.

All these findings matter because aspirations can predict, and limit, study and career choices later on and thus, the supply of critical workers into the future.

Career education in Tasmania

In Tasmania, over the past 12 to 15 years the provision of career education in Tasmania has shifted from a program delivered to predominantly secondary school students which was adjunct to education provision within a school community, to one integrated and embedded within the curriculum at a whole-school level for a whole-of-life, student-centred approach from kindergarten to grade 12 aligned to the national career education policies, and then to one that has repositioned career development as vocational learning in secondary education, aligned to industry needs and priority industry sectors identified by the Government⁵⁸.

By 2022, following a plethora of changes to career education provision since the early 2000s, career education, development and transition policy in Tasmania appears to be informed primarily by the Years 9 to 12 Project and the recommendations from the Premier’s Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council, with a focus on vocational education, training and learning.

The recently released Tasmanian Youth Jobs Strategy 2024 to 2030 is grounded in the vision that “All young Tasmanians feel empowered and are supported to access meaningful training or employment opportunities”. Within its priority action areas, the strategy will “develop and implement a new Careers Guidance Framework and Practice Guide that ensures that all Tasmanians aged 15 to 25 years can access meaningful, relevant and actionable career guidance”⁵⁹.

Given the level of disengagement in Tasmanian public schools – 77.4% average daily attendance in year 9⁶⁰ - starting career education in year 9 is too late. Nurturing and developing career aspirations in primary school will provide a greater understanding of the purpose of education, introduce the concept of work and prepare young people for the next stage of life after schooling.

Sources of career information for Tasmanian students

A recent research project⁶¹ undertook to identify the views of young Tasmanians relating to their experience with career education and development in the schooling system and their preparedness to transition successfully from education to employment. Some clear trends were identified. While

⁵⁷ Nothing in Common: The Career Aspirations of Young Britons Mapped Against Projected Labour Market Demand 2010-2020

⁵⁸ Denny, L (2022), Career education, development and transition to employment: A review of policy positions and investment in Tasmania since 2010, A report for Beacon Foundation

⁵⁹ Page 53

⁶⁰ <https://www.decyp.tas.gov.au/about-us/policies-legislation-data/data-and-statistics/student-engagement-participation-data/>

⁶¹ Denny, L (2022), The views of young Tasmanians: career development, support, preparedness and transitioning to the world of work, A report for Beacon Foundation

the understanding of the types of post-school options available to young people is consistent, there has been a shift in the primary sources of information to inform this understanding.

In 2016, most young Tasmanians reported being somewhat well prepared to make decisions about their future study or work plans. However, since 2016 there have been substantial changes to the delivery of career education in the Tasmanian schooling system. In a 2020 survey, for young people who were choosing to get a job immediately following their schooling or take a gap year, two-thirds reported that they were choosing that option as they 'can use it as an opportunity to work out what I really want to do'. This suggests that the career education and development experience during the schooling years has not been successful for all students.

Overall, the findings suggested that traditional perceptions about post-school options and career pathways are being perpetuated within the family, community and school sector. That is, pursuing a higher education (university) pathway is preferable for the stronger academic performers seeking prestige and to expand their knowledge and networks and that vocational pathways are preferable for less academically successful students who seek an employment pathway. This perception about vocational education is consistent with the findings of the 2012 Simmons Review⁶² which identified a widely held perception at the time that the status and reputation of VET had a diffused identity and a damaged image with students, parents, industry and employers following a period of ongoing reform and restructure within the vocational education and learning sector.

However, the report also found that there has been a shift away from family and the community as the primary sources of information about post-school options for young people, to online sources of information and the school sector. Young people now predominantly report that their family and friends generally just want them to be happy and are less likely to directly influence their post-school choices.

This shift is consistent with the embedding of career education in the curriculum nationally and in Tasmania through My Education from Kindergarten to Year 12, including online resources such as ME Online⁶³, myfuture and careerify as well as and the prevalence of technology and social media in everyday life.

The reliance on the internet as a source of information for career education and development could also suggest that young people are not getting the information they need from other sources. Given that career education is now embedded in the curriculum, teachers now play a substantial role in supporting young people to make choices about their future. However, teachers' own knowledge and understanding of available careers and education pathways may be limited⁶⁴.

Teachers are often time poor, and, in what is a packed curriculum already, educators can struggle to stay up to date with changes in the world of work, including jobs that are available within and outside communities, the skills that are needed and valued, and the educational pathways to career

⁶² Simmons, V. (2012). The review of the role and function of Tasmania's public sector Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers. Hobart: Department of Education, Tasmania.

⁶³ Now decommissioned in Tasmania

⁶⁴ Groves O, Austin K, O'Shea S, et al. (2021) 'One student might get one opportunity and then the next student won't get anything like that': Inequities in Australian career education and recommendations for a fairer future. *The Australian Educational Researcher*: 1-18.

pathways that will allow people to transition successfully between the many jobs that today's school students will have in their lifetimes⁶⁵.

The report also found that Tasmanian educators often lacked confidence and up-to-date knowledge on what was available to their students locally with respect to further education, training and career opportunities and that professional development in this area was welcomed⁶⁶. The need for career planning to be better situated within the curriculum and included in ongoing professional development was clearly articulated by educators in both interviews and surveys. However, it was also acknowledged that this professional development took teachers' time and required ongoing support from school leaders. New teachers also spoke of the need for universities to consider career education as part of their training of graduate teachers as many were unable to speak about disciplines in which they were not trained themselves.

Overall, the findings suggested that Tasmanian secondary school students were participating in career education and proactively considering post-school education and career pathways but that the consideration is often undertaken with a short-term lens, with a view to what would meet with their current interests and what would make them happy⁶⁷. These considerations were limited to the advice they were receiving within the schooling system and from networks. This advice was further limited by the knowledge of educators and networks of individual students.

Summary

If the vision of the Tasmanian Government's recently released Youth Jobs Strategy for 2024 to 2030⁶⁸ is one that "All young Tasmanians feel empowered and are supported to access meaningful training or employment opportunities" because all "young Tasmanians deserve a smooth pathway from school into the world of work"⁶⁹ then the vision for Tasmania's school education system must be that all young Tasmanians complete their schooling in year 12 as literate, numerate, knowledgeable and well-rounded individuals who are prepared for, and confident about, the next stage of their lives."

The Independent Education Review should review the Tasmanian school system's career education policy and practices to ensure that young Tasmanian students are active and engaged in understanding the wide range of career opportunities available to them and the educational pathways required to achieve their aspirations. This wide range of career opportunities needs to reflect labour market demand now and into the future for all jobs and professions, beyond just those in vocational education streams or priority industry sectors which tend to be politicised, particularly given the projected growth in the services sectors and that a majority of future jobs will require a tertiary education and training qualification.

⁶⁵ Woodroffe, J., Kilpatrick, S., Williams, B., and Jago, M., (2017), Preparing rural and regional students for the future world of work: Developing authentic career focussed curriculum through a collaborative partnership model, Australian and International Journal of Rural Education, Vol 27 (3), pp 158 – 173.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ See Commissioner for Children and Young People Tasmania (2021) We call it happy.. CCYP Wellbeing consultations with 0 to 18 year old Tasmanians

⁶⁸ <https://www.youthjobsstrategy.tas.gov.au/>

⁶⁹ Premier of Tasmania, Jeremy Rockliff, State of the State Address, February 2023

Discussion and conclusion

Given the projected decline in the number of school-age Tasmanians throughout the state over the next 15 to 30 years and the likely increase in the exodus of retirement-age educators, combined with the lack of excellence or equity in educational outcomes for the state, the Tasmanian Government needs to rethink how, and where, it provides excellent and equitable schooling in Tasmania. An effectively structured and functioning schooling system will enable young Tasmanians to achieve educational success and be confident and prepared for life after school, be that further education and/or training or meaningful employment.

The schooling system needs to be re-envisaged so that it can be restructured to provide strong support and engagement with learners throughout all stages of their education, support for the school sector workforce so they are attracted to, and retained in, the profession – so that ‘hard-to-fill-jobs’ does not have to be a line item in the Tasmanian Budget – and that the system is accountable for improved outcomes, including in our regional and remote areas.

The most recent and historical educational outcomes data clearly demonstrate that there is no equity or excellence in Tasmania’s schooling system and that outcomes have been deteriorating over the past decade.

For the relatively high proportion of Tasmanian children from low socio-economic backgrounds who are not likely to benefit from a strong and stable home environment, the education system and associated resources are their primary opportunity to develop the necessary language, literacy and numeracy knowledge and skills to successfully complete school, pursue further education and training and work and ultimately overcome previously entrenched socio-economic disadvantage.

Internal migration analysis shows that many young families living in regional or remote areas relocate to other areas within Tasmania when their children reach school age, whether that be for primary or secondary schooling – some go to public schools, others non-government schools in the LGA they move to. This is predominantly because the areas they leave do not have a reputation for providing quality education and some families have the economic and social mobility to be able to relocate for the purposes of achieving greater quality education for their children. This has implications for the regions they leave in terms of loss of working age families and exacerbates skill and labour shortages in those areas, further contributing to the rate of population ageing. It is also a deterrent for business investment if they are unable to attract and retain workers and their families in the area. It also has a compounding effect in the ability to attract and retain educators to work in these areas too (hard to fill jobs), which then further impacts the quality of education offering in the area, a snowball effect.

There are two options. First, to do nothing. As enrolments continue to decline and composite classes increase creating further workload pressures on classroom teachers, the quality of education will likely be compromised due to the inability to attract and retain qualified and experienced teachers, education support staff and other professionals to a school, which will also mean limited capacity to support and mentor early career educators. Doing nothing would facilitate the slow demise of a school until there is no other option but to close. Doing nothing would be costly and detrimental to all involved – the students, the families, the educators, the community and the region. Doing nothing would fail in delivering, and achieving, the purpose of education – equity and excellence. It would also compromise the effective implementation – and outcomes – of the nation-leading system-wide policy for structured literacy and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) in the primary school sector to achieve the aspiration for 100% literacy in the state.

The second option is to proactively re-envisage the delivery of, and access to, schooling and its structure, particularly in areas where the number of children of school age is projected to decline considerably, to ensure that the purpose of education – equity and excellence – can be achieved and maintained. This will require developing a framework to inform the structure of the system and the ‘right-sizing’ of schools⁷⁰ – the criteria and/or principles to ensure that the purpose of education – excellence and equity - can be achieved successfully in each school so that young Tasmanians complete their schooling in year 12 as literate, numerate, knowledgeable and well-rounded individuals who are prepared for, and confident about, the next stage of their lives and that educators, support staff and professionals can be attracted to, recruited and retained in schools, and in the profession.

If Tasmania is to improve its educational outcomes and ‘deliver high quality teaching that is evidence based and meets the needs of students at all levels’, and ‘effectively utilises resources to improve student outcomes and attract and retain a high quality workforce’ it needs to ensure that the education schooling system is structured and functioning effectively to support the ‘essential’ classroom teachers on the ‘front line’ as well as those on ‘backline’ who support the front line. It is our educated, trained and skilled classroom teachers and support staff such as allied health professionals and education assistants who will have the greatest direct impact on inspiring our future generations, raising aspirations, improving engagement and making progress for young Tasmanians on a day-to-day basis.

Without a valued, engaged, supported and effectively trained and retained education workforce, it will be difficult to improve educational outcomes in Tasmania and meet future workforce needs.

The Independent Education Review must consider the structure of Tasmania’s schooling system to ensure accessible, excellent and equitable education provision, and outcomes for all, including the education sector workforce. The implications of not achieving the necessary structural reform will be far-reaching and is likely further entrench disadvantage in the State.

⁷⁰ This could also include the co-location of a range of other services such as child and family learning centres, childcare, libraries, allied health services. For more information see Denny, Lisa; Pisanu, Nyree (2020). Strategic policy responses to population decline: A synthesis of regional approaches and outcomes with policy recommendations for consideration from a Tasmanian context. University of Tasmania. Report. <https://hdl.handle.net/102.100.100/503006>

Appendix A – Brief overview of the purpose of education and the Education Declaration

This Appendix provides a brief history of the background to the latest Education Declaration.

Schooling and education serve multiple purposes. A simple explanation of the purpose of education would be to acquire knowledge and skills to use effectively at an individual, societal and economic level.

This overarching purpose of education can be further explained by three intentions⁷¹;

- 1) Democratic equality
- 2) Social efficiency
- 3) Social mobility

Social efficiency refers to the economic purposes of education to achieve competent and productive workers while *social mobility* refers to the private purposes which provides individual advantage through credentialism in a competitive environment such as the labour market and social standings. *Democratic equality* refers to the public good of education and the desire to produce active and competent citizens in an equitable environment.

The purpose of schooling at a point in time can be determined by the funding, structure, organisation and curriculum of an education system⁷². It is argued that policy positions and associated funding decisions over many decades have shifted to prioritise the economic and individual purposes of education at the expense of equality, equity, citizenship and social justice – the public good of education⁷³.

With the commencement of the decentralisation process of the education system in Australia in the 1970s so that education would be a “central implement for making society more equitable and promoting social change and reform” and the associated significant Commonwealth redistributive funding to schools, it was legislated that “the primary obligation of governments was to maintain government school systems at the highest standards, open to all, without fees or religious tests.”⁷⁴ Initially, the decentralisation process was intended to increase access and equity by providing autonomy to principals and their schools to better meet the needs of their students and the community, as recommended in the 1973 Karmel Report⁷⁵. However, over time, the purpose of

⁷¹ Labaree, D. F. (1997), “Public goods, private goods: The American Struggle over Educational Goals”, American Educational Research Journal, Vol. 34 No. 1, pp. 39-81

⁷² Cranston, N., Kimber, M., Mulford, B., Reid, A., and Keating, J. (2010), Politics and school education in Australia: a case of shifting purposes. Journal of Educational Administration, 48(2), pp. 182-195

⁷³ Cranston, N., Kimber, M., Mulford, B., Reid, A., and Keating, J. (2010), Politics and school education in Australia: a case of shifting purposes. Journal of Educational Administration, 48(2), pp. 182-195; Wilkinson, J., & Brooks, J. S. (2018), Educational Leadership in Australia, Asia Pacific Education: Leadership, Governance and Administration, 31; MacDonald, K., Keddie, A., Blackmore, J., Mahoney, C., Wilkinson, J., Gobby, B., Niesche, R. and Eacott, S., 2021. School autonomy reform and social justice: a policy overview of Australian public education (1970s to present), The Australian Educational Researcher, pp.1-21.

⁷⁴ Cited in Connors, L., & McMorrow, J. (2010). New directions in schools funding: A proposed model. Sydney: University of Sydney, Faculty of Education and Social Work.

⁷⁵ Karmel, P., Blackburn, J., Hancock, G., Jackson, E. T., Jones, A. W., Martin, F. M., Tannock, P., Thomas, M. E., Whitley, A., & White, W. A. (1973). Schools in Australia: Report of the interim committee for the Australian Schools Commission, May 1973. Australian Schools Commission.

schooling has shifted to being central to the national economic growth agenda rather than to achieving equity.

By 2011, the legislated requirement of public schooling had been downgraded so that the level of education to be acquired in government schools was “the safety net and guarantor of a reasonable quality education in this country.”⁷⁶ Education became the economic tool for Australia’s future prosperity and subsequent education policy positions, language and associated funding, reflected this shift. Australia now has an education system which consists of governance at multiple levels – Federal, State or Territory and at the school level – with considerable difference between the states in terms of curricula, assessment, funding and system structures.⁷⁷

The decentralisation, restructuring and then some re-centralising of the education system has resulted in federalism shaping the policy and practices underpinning the role and purpose of schooling in Australia. While the curriculum and standards framework for teachers and school leaders are now set centrally and the Australian Constitution allocates the administrative responsibility for schooling to the States and Territories, it is the principals themselves and their school associations which have autonomy over the details of curriculum, texts and teaching practices, particularly at primary and lower secondary level⁷⁸. However, the reality of the increase in managerial tasks associated with higher levels of autonomy is that principals have less time to devote to leading learning in their schools, including the support and development of teachers.⁷⁹ This is despite principals also being expected to be the instructional leaders in schools.

Initiated in 2007, the National Education Agreement between the states and territories and the Federal Government set out objectives and outcomes for schooling, roles and responsibilities of each level of government and established strong accountability frameworks such as performance indicators and benchmarks, reporting mechanisms and policy and reform directions. This national reform agenda initiated the development of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in 2008, the Australian Curriculum in 2010 and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) in 2010 as well as the National Assessment Program, participating in international standardised assessment benchmarking programs (e.g. PISA) and the Australian Education Act 2013 which contained a range of targets to ensure that Australia “provides a high quality and highly equitable system for all students” and setting a specific goal that “Australia to be placed, by 2025, in the top 5 highest performing countries based on the performance of school students in reading, mathematics and science”.⁸⁰

Even so, the decentralisation and subsequent increasing involvement from the Federal Government combined with different ideological perspectives across the nation over the five decades, has led to

⁷⁶ Cited in Armitage, C. (2007, May 16). Vouchers not an option in the new market model. *The Australian*, p. 21.

⁷⁷ Wilkinson, J., & Brooks, J. S. (2018), *Educational Leadership in Australia*, *Asia Pacific Education: Leadership, Governance and Administration*, 31

⁷⁸ Thomson, S. (2021), *Australia: PISA Australia—Excellence and Equity*, in N. Crato (ed.), *Improving a Country’s Education, PISA 2018 Results in 10 Countries*, Chapter 2, Springer

⁷⁹ Heffernan, A. (2018). Power and the ‘autonomous’ principal: Autonomy, teacher development, and school leaders’ work. *Journal of educational administration and history*, 50(4), 379-396.

⁸⁰ Cited in Thomson, S. (2021), *Australia: PISA Australia—Excellence and Equity*, in N. Crato (ed.), *Improving a Country’s Education, PISA 2018 Results in 10 Countries*, Chapter 2, Springer

considerable tension, inevitability impacting on the purpose of education and subsequent outcomes.⁸¹

Given the structural and systemic changes to the education system in Australia, federal and state education ministers agreed to develop national goals for schooling education in a joint declaration approximately every 10 years. The first Declaration in 1989 is referred to as the Hobart Declaration. In 1999, the Adelaide Declaration included a goal based on equity; “Schooling should be socially just, so that: students’ outcomes from schooling are free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability; and of differences arising from students’ socio-economic background or geographic location.”⁸² The Melbourne Declaration in 2008 extended the notion of equity to include excellence as its primary goal. It also explicitly stated that socio-economic disadvantage should cease to be a significant determinant of educational outcomes.⁸³ In 2019, the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration⁸⁴ repeated the previous primary goal for excellence and equity and stated that governments and the education community must improve outcomes for educationally disadvantaged young Australians, such as those from low socio-economic backgrounds, indigenous students, and those from regional, rural and remote areas.⁸⁵

The current Mparntwe Declaration has two aspirational goals; that the Australian education system promotes excellence and equity; and, that all young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community – suggesting the purpose of education is democratic equality.

It is important to note that the 2019 to 2023 National School Reform Agreement has been extended by 12 months to end 31 December 2024. In recent years, education policy development has shifted towards centralisation and evidence-aligned policy and practices, particularly in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and initial teacher education (ITE). It is likely that this shift will continue with the new National School Reform Agreement.

⁸¹ Cranston, N., Kimber, M., Mulford, B., Reid, A., and Keating, J. (2010), Politics and school education in Australia: a case of shifting purposes. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 48(2), pp. 182-195.

⁸² Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century, Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA)

⁸³ Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), (2008), Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians

⁸⁴ Council of Australian Governments (2019), Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration. Canberra, Australian Capital Territory: Education Council.

⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 17