



Independent Review into the Tasmanian Education System

In response to the Independent Review of Education in Tasmania, Launceston Grammar School senior teachers provided feedback to the themes identified in the Terms of Reference.

Theme 1 - Defining educational success

Defining educational success is a complex and ever-changing concept, with many challenges. One of the biggest challenges is that the very notion of what constitutes success in education is highly debated. Questions arise, such as: What are the markers of success? Who gets to decide these markers? Should the government be the main authority in determining what success looks like? Additionally, there's the broader question of the purpose of education. Is it to align with the Australian curriculum's goal of creating functional, contributing members of society? Is it to inspire aspirations and open up opportunities? Or is it simply about being able to read and write? This is a fundamentally difficult question.

In the context of Tasmania, one clear challenge is literacy. Most people agree that being able to functionally read, write, and do mathematics is a basic measure of success. But why has this been such a challenge, even with many ongoing interventions? Are the methods we use to measure success, like NAPLAN, truly the best? Perhaps not. And beyond that, there's significant pedagogical work showing that there are no consistent answers for how to achieve educational outcomes across different contexts.

This ties into another issue: the intergenerational barriers that exist in Tasmania, which limit the development of an aspirational mindset for the future. For some, simply finishing grade 12 can be a huge challenge. For others, even attending high school presents difficulties.

It's also important to acknowledge that while Tasmania is a state, it is made up of small rural centers and minor rural communities. This means that infrastructure plays a critical role in the success or failure of educational outcomes, yet the resources available in Tasmania are not always comparable to those in other states.

A third point to consider is that many people involved in education recognise one of the most important aspects of success—something nearly impossible to measure—is helping to create individuals who have a clear worldview, an ethical framework, and the ability to make empathic, well-reasoned decisions that benefit both themselves and their community. How can a government measure or define this?

This is one reason why there is a distinction between government schools, independent schools, Catholic schools, and others. Each sets its own vision for what a successful person looks like. Ultimately, the outcomes are shaped by the vision of the school, the vision of the teachers, and how they model excellence according to their own definitions.



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

Theme 2 focuses on enhancing support and engagement for learners at every stage of their education. The first question we considered is: what do families do well to support children and young people in their learning? One key factor that gives children a significant advantage is early reading. When families read with their children from birth, they help develop essential literacy skills before formal schooling begins, giving them a strong head start.

This foundational literacy is crucial, and families should be supported in achieving it. One way to do this is by providing access to resources such as libraries, where families can borrow physical books, as these offer valuable opportunities for shared learning experiences. Ensuring that children have access to a wide variety of books is a key marker of success. Additionally, we recognised the importance of quality daycare, which plays a significant role in children's social and emotional development.

Daycare settings teach children how to interact with their peers, learn manners, collaborate, and compromise. These social skills are essential for their overall development, and access to such environments at a young age is beneficial. Programs like *Launch into Learning*, offer valuable support by helping families engage in early reading and educational activities, setting children up for success.

Another important question is how to better support students who are struggling or at risk of falling behind. One crucial factor that emerged is the need to help parents manage their children's access to technology. Research has shown that excessive or inappropriate technology use can hinder children's learning and development. For example, a recent presentation highlighted the negative impact smartphones can have on cognitive development. As a result, we may need to explore options such as providing "dumb phones" and educating parents on how to control screen time more effectively.

Parenting education and support networks, like group classes on parenting skills, are vital in ensuring that families can foster healthy, functional environments. These resources contribute to children's development, and functional families are more likely to raise well-rounded, successful children. As a society, it is important that we continue to find ways to support all families, ensuring that children grow up in stable, nurturing environments that promote learning.

To address the diverse futures of children, we also need to provide various pathways to success. Not all children will thrive in traditional classrooms, so offering alternative ways for teenagers to gain an education through hands-on, productive experiences can be valuable. It's essential that these alternative pathways still provide access to the educational skills children need, ensuring they are equipped for the future.

The current TCE model is driven by assessment, and this assessment burden poses significant challenges to success for our students. With the increase in mental health concerns, over-assessing our students comes at a significant cost to mental wellness. It also means students fail to gain depth with their learning due to the outcomes-based approach. Could Tasmania work with another state



to share the load of development of contemporary curriculum and best practice to ensure that we are best supporting our students for their future? Should Tasmania adopt practices in other systems, for example the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme or Victorian Certificate of Education, that is a two year program, thus focusing on skills and understandings as opposed to content regurgitation?

Finally, we discussed the importance of teaching children to self-educate. Many successful individuals who didn't have the best start in life were able to achieve success through self-education, as long as they had basic skills in reading, writing, and numeracy. In many disadvantaged areas around the world, access to smartphones has enabled individuals to educate themselves, leading to significant improvements in their quality of life. Encouraging a positive relationship with technology, alongside teaching children how to self-learn, can open doors to better futures.

Theme 3 - Outcomes at the conclusion of the formal years of schooling

What are the most effective ways to support students to successfully complete Year 12 and achieve optimal outcomes? Emphasis is placed on the importance of providing students with a broad range of educational choices and ensuring they are well-informed about these options. Significant debate exists surrounding the expansion of high school education to include Years 9 through 12, which necessitates a higher level of specialised expertise, particularly in Years 11 and 12. However, current practice often reveals gaps in this area, with some schools feeling compelled to offer senior subjects without the necessary expertise and resources.

Raising awareness among students about alternative educational pathways, such as TAFE, apprenticeships, and traineeships, is also crucial. Unfortunately, the stigma associated with level 2 subjects persists, leading students to feel as though they are underachieving when compared to peers in level 3 subjects. Yet, level 2 subjects serve as a crucial and appropriate pathway for some students, especially those at risk of disengagement. Addressing these perceptions is key to ensuring that all students recognise the value of these educational options.

Another critical area is the need for enhanced literacy and numeracy support. Despite the numerous initiatives aimed at improving these foundational skills, many students still require additional assistance to achieve proficiency. Furthermore, attention is drawn to the role of teacher literacy, highlighting the need for improved teacher training, as teachers with lower levels of literacy may struggle to provide effective support to their students.

To further support interests and pathways, students may benefit from micro-credentialling or semesterised subjects. Could the current two-year model be extended to three, that is not driven by the ATAR?

Students in Years 11 and 12 often experience a sense of uncertainty, as they are frequently informed that they will change careers multiple times throughout their lives. This creates challenges in decision-making regarding educational pathways and can lead to disengagement from specific



academic trajectories. If students perceive that their future career paths are uncertain, they may feel less inclined to commit to a clear academic plan, believing that change is inevitable.

In conclusion, providing students with a variety of pathways, reducing the stigma surrounding certain educational options, strengthening literacy support, and improving teacher training are essential measures in enhancing student outcomes at the conclusion of formal schooling.

Theme 4 - Support for our teaching workforce

Theme 4 addresses the support needed for the teaching workforce, focusing on two primary aspects: attracting new teachers and retaining them in the profession. Academic research consistently highlights the concerning short retention period for new teachers, with many leaving the profession within five years. Various factors contribute to improving retention rates, including the implementation of well-structured mentoring programs in schools. However, while some schools offer mentoring, these programs are often inadequately structured.

Mentoring is crucial for new teachers, yet it requires significant support for the mentors themselves. Effective mentoring can only occur if mentors are given reduced teaching loads to ensure they have the necessary time to dedicate to their mentees. Without this adjustment, mentors must divert time from their own classroom preparation, which can affect the quality of their teaching. Although educational standards recommend that experienced teachers mentor new staff, schools must implement structural changes to accommodate this, as the benefits for both mentors and mentees are well-documented in academic literature.

Additionally, it is not enough to simply assign a mentor; the mentor must be an expert in the subject area of the mentee. For example, when a new teacher with minimal experience was assigned to teach a high-level physics class, the school lacked the internal resources to provide sufficient support. Consequently, an external mentor with significant expertise in physics was brought in, offering valuable guidance and co-teaching opportunities, which significantly contributed to the new teacher's professional growth.

Research from Western Australia further underscores the importance of integrating new teachers into the local community, particularly in rural or provincial areas. Schools play a vital role in fostering these connections, as new teachers often face challenges in adapting to their new environment. Encouraging participation in local activities, such as sporting clubs, cultural groups, or other community organisations, helps new teachers build a sense of belonging outside the school environment.

New teachers, particularly those transitioning from university into their first full-time job, often struggle with the demands of teaching. Managing a classroom of 25 students, along with the expectations placed on them, can lead to burnout. These teachers often isolate themselves, working excessively during evenings and weekends, which further exacerbates the issue. Schools must prioritise the establishment of professional networks and support systems to prevent new teachers from feeling overwhelmed and to ensure they receive adequate guidance.

To address teacher shortages and attract new talent, schools with the capacity to do so should actively recruit graduates from universities. Offering incentives such as cadetships, financial



bonuses, and professional development opportunities can help attract and retain high-quality candidates. Creating a supportive and nurturing work environment also increases the likelihood that teachers will remain in the profession.

Another key strategy for supporting new teachers is reducing their workload. Currently, new recruits may be given a lighter teaching load, but it may be worth considering further reductions to allow more time for lesson preparation. Additionally, effective leadership involves minimising administrative burdens on teaching staff, allowing them to focus on their core responsibilities.

Providing time off for mentors to support new teachers has also been shown to prevent early retirement among experienced staff. Mentoring can reinvigorate senior teachers, providing them with renewed purpose and engagement in their profession. Finally, teacher salaries in Tasmania, which are lower than those on the mainland, must be addressed. The cost of living in Tasmania has risen, and the previous justification for lower salaries is no longer valid. Governments need to recognise this and take appropriate action.

Theme 5 - Accountability for improved outcomes

A key point of focus for Theme 5 is the importance of ensuring that individuals within the education system are equipped to deliver high-quality training and facilitate the successful implementation of reforms. The current approach appears to be overly ambitious, with a push to implement all five identified outcomes at once. This approach not only risks overwhelming the system but also undermines the potential for achieving any one of the outcomes effectively. Research suggests that sustained, focused effort on a single outcome, over an extended period—such as one to one and a half years—can lead to deeper, more meaningful change (Hattie, 2009). This phased approach allows for sufficient time to refine processes, adapt to feedback, and ensure that the changes are embedded within the educational framework.

A critical factor in this process is the appointment of dedicated personnel who are responsible for overseeing the implementation of changes. This role is essential for maintaining accountability and ensuring that the reform efforts are aligned with the overarching goals. Moreover, the framework for these changes must be clear, specific, and realistic. A focus on achievable outcomes, rather than lofty goals with no tangible roadmap, ensures that progress is measurable and sustainable. In line with Fullan's (2006) theory of educational change, which emphasises the need for clarity, coherence, and sustained effort in implementing reforms, a structured, staged approach would be far more effective in bringing about long-term improvements.

Furthermore, it is important that the reform efforts engage all key stakeholders—students, teachers, administrators, and policymakers—ensuring that their voices are heard and their needs are considered. Although current efforts appear to involve stakeholders to some degree, there is a growing concern that the process has become politicised. When educational reforms are influenced by political agendas, there is a risk that decisions may prioritise short-term political gains over long-term educational benefits. This is a concern that has been widely discussed in academic literature, where it is argued that reforms driven by political motivations often fail to address the core issues in



education (Apple, 2004). A more balanced approach, where stakeholder input is genuinely considered without undue political influence, is essential for the success of these reforms.

A related issue that emerged during our discussion was the distinction between quality and quantity in education reform. There appears to be a prevailing focus on the latter, with multiple initiatives being pursued simultaneously, rather than concentrating efforts on a single reform and executing it with excellence. This mirrors findings in the literature, where it is often observed that education systems under pressure to meet numerous targets at once tend to suffer from superficial implementations (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2011). A more focused approach—emphasising depth over breadth—would likely yield more significant, long-lasting improvements in student outcomes.

Lastly, an important question raised was the incentives provided for individuals studying, living, and working in Tasmania. Attracting and retaining talent in the education sector, particularly in more remote or rural regions, is critical to the success of any reform initiative. Research from similar contexts suggests that incentives such as housing subsidies, professional development opportunities, and competitive salaries are key factors in encouraging skilled professionals to remain in these areas (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2011). To foster long-term improvements in the Tasmanian education system, it will be essential to offer robust incentives that make the region an attractive option for both educators and students.