

# Lifting Education Outcomes in Tasmania

Tim Doe 25 August 2024

The adoption of good education policies will help Tasmania achieve higher and more equitable education outcomes. Providing more money for education does not, of itself, lead to better education outcomes as evidenced by past additional funding for education which has not lifted outcomes. Good leaders and excellent teachers will dramatically lift outcomes.

There are four questions that should be asked in order to predict whether or not a proposed action will lift education outcomes:

## **Will the implementation of this proposal;**

- 1. raise the quality of current and/or future teachers?**
- 2. raise the quality of current and/or future school leaders (especially principals) ?**
- 3. encourage students and/or parents to value learning more highly?**
- 4. help children in Tasmania realise their personal educational potential?**

If a proposal will not do any of the above things then it is unlikely that implementing it will result in better education outcomes. Australia ranks as spending the fifth-highest amount on education in the OECD and has increased funding to education by about 14% in real terms over the last decade but over this period student performance has declined. Australia's performance in the PISA tests, held every three years, has shown a steady decline from 2000 when the tests were first held to 2015 when the most recent tests were held. Over this period our mean score in science has dropped from 527 to 510, in maths from 524 to 494 and in reading from 528 to 503 and Australian students' performance in the NAPLAN tests have only improved marginally since their introduction in 2008.

Better school buildings, new gymnasiums, sports grounds and libraries, more computers, smaller class sizes, much of the in-service professional development, a lot of the university teacher training that is currently being provided as well as most changes to schools' curricula are unlikely to lift student outcomes.

Some actions that may help Australians, including Tasmanians, achieve higher and more equitable education outcomes are provided below.

## **Will the introduction of this policy raise the quality of current and/or future teachers?**

1. Most teachers in our schools are good and many are excellent but the single most important thing that can be done to lift education outcomes in Australia is to further improve the quality of our teachers.
2. Increasing the salaries of current teachers will not, of itself, result in improved student outcomes. However, encouraging bright and enthusiastic young school leavers to train to be teachers will certainly lead to higher student outcomes down the track.
3. It is important to understand that a high ATAR score does not guarantee that a school leaver will become a great teacher. Enthusiasm, liking and respecting young people and having high expectations for them are equally important attributes.

4. **Introduce a probationary period for beginning teachers** and discontinue the employment of those who are not succeeding or provide them with additional training. This would be of benefit to hundreds of students as well as being of service to the underperforming teachers themselves. There are few vocations that are more rewarding than teaching but also few vocations that are more challenging for those individuals who are not suited to the profession.

5. **Introduce “student teacher” scholarships.** That is to say, signing up some of our best school leavers as probationary teachers and giving them an apprentice wage as they complete their university studies. Classroom teaching experience can then be provided during their university holidays. Bonding these students to teach is unnecessary as there are built in incentive for these students to remain as teachers. For example, before they begin full time teaching they will have already accrued four years of long service leave and superannuation.

6. Currently about 30,000 students enrol in teaching courses in Australia each year and of these about 18,000 graduate. Of these graduates about 11,000 find work as teachers. Perhaps we should offer 11,000 “student teacher” scholarships to school leavers each year and award these scholarships to the applicants with the potential to become excellent teachers in the disciplines forecast to be needed. If we paid these “student teachers” an apprentice wage of double the youth allowance (say \$22,000 per annum) it would cost less than \$1billion each year and result in a tremendous lift in student outcomes. Singapore and Finland only **train the number and type of teachers forecast to be needed** and following their lead in Australia would save much more than \$1billion.

7. **Provide more school based pre-service experience for aspiring teachers** and rather than paying our current teachers extra to supervise these pre-service teachers this should be included in the teaching award as part of their job.

8. **Scholarships should be established to allow some exemplary teachers and school leaders in their early to mid-career to visit and learn from overseas education systems that are achieving the best education outcomes.**

9. Outstanding teachers can be recruited if we **interview graduating university students who aspire to be teachers and offer the best of them guaranteed employment on an advanced rung of the teacher salary scale.**

10. **Ensure University education faculties use experienced teachers to provide their students with the skills required to manage students.**

11. **Provide pre-service and in-service training for teachers in explicit instruction focusing on the basic learning areas.**

12. **Raise the status of teachers in the community** and this will encourage more of our best school leavers to aspire to be teachers. This is demonstrated in Finland where secondary teachers have higher degrees and teachers are paid salaries that are competitive with other professions.

### **Will the introduction of this policy raise the quality of current and/or future school leaders (especially principals)?**

1. **Give principals in government schools more autonomy and require that they take responsibility for the education outcomes of their schools’ students.** Inadequate funding should not be used by a principal as an excuse for their school’s poor education outcomes. Principals who consistently underperform should be replaced.

2. **Allowing principals/School Boards to hire and fire their teachers** (with appropriate industrial safeguards) is a powerful way to ensure that good teachers are employed and that unsatisfactory teachers do not continue to hold back student achievement.
3. Excellent principals demand teachers use the most effective pedagogy based on evidence based research. The most effective pedagogy is commonly clearly articulated teaching focusing on the basic learning areas. This is particularly important in the primary sector.
4. A principal who visits classrooms to focus teachers on maximising student learning time has been shown to lift the education outcomes in the school.  
Good school leaders try to increase the time that students are actually learning. The time spent in school each year and the number of years spent at school are not necessarily closely related to the time spent learning. Streaming students into learning groups with similar abilities is one way to increase effective learning time, **Stream primary students across grades for the learning of basic skills such as literacy** as this can be very effective.
5. The transfer of principals initially appointed to non-preferred regional schools to preferred city schools without merit selection can result in a proliferation of mediocre principals. This is less likely to occur if quality applicants are attracted to the principalship of non-preferred schools by higher remuneration.
6. Promotion to principalship should be based on the applicants success in previous roles and this success should be supported by confidential statements gathered from the applicants colleagues.
7. The high number of male principals relative to the proportion of male teachers (particularly in the primary sector) is an indication that many women are not applying for leadership positions in schools. Policies to address this imbalance are required in order to lift the quality of our principals.

### **Will the introduction of this policy encourage students and/or parents to value learning more highly?**

1. Most students and parents in some countries (South Korea is a good example) believe that a good education is the key to prosperity and happiness. School systems in these countries achieve good education outcomes.
2. **Improvement in the educational outcomes achieved by individual students and schools needs to be celebrated.** Improvement year by year is a much better way to judge teacher and school success than looking at students' results at one point in time.
3. The media should be encouraged to celebrate high achievers in education as they do high achievers in sport.
4. **In order to increase the value placed on education we should use advertising to promote it.** The advertising campaign targeting drink driving had a powerful and lasting effect on young Australians and a similar campaign advertising the value of education could be equally effective. Just because we have compulsory education does not mean we don't need to sell its benefits.

### **Will the introduction of this policy help children in Australia realise their personal educational potential?**

1. Needs based funding for schools is absolutely necessary to help disadvantaged students achieve their personal educational potential. Extra attention needs to be given to children who have not had, or who are not having, satisfactory help with learning at home. This can be done before they begin formal schooling as well as once they have started school.

2. As soon as children start school their literacy and numeracy should be assessed by their teacher. Additional needs based funding to each school should be based on these assessments rather than on the SES of the school's nearby suburbs.

3. Most children who receive good nurturing from their family will probably be able to read before they start school. The children who are not able to read when they start school must receive the highest priority for funding as this skill along with verbal and written communication is the key to their future learning.

4. Teacher focused learning has been shown to be more effective in raising student outcomes than student focused learning. The preferred pedagogy and curriculum should be supported by teaching resources provided for teachers.

## **Addendum**

I was a teacher, principal and senior education administrator for 49 years and I am now retired. I worked closely with both Labor and Liberal ministers and also worked on committees across Australia along side senior educators including Dr Ken Boston. I have included in the attached paper my views on what I believe could be done to lift the mediocre education outcomes that Australian students in general and Tasmanian students in particular, are currently achieving, in spite of the very significant extra funding that has been provided.

Some of the recommendations that I have proposed in my paper I implemented or attempted to implement during my tenure as Deputy Secretary of Education in Tasmania.

Many of the suggestions in my paper are Federal rather than State responsibilities but I hope that some could be used to target extra State funds into areas that will actually make a difference.

I personally attended government schools in Tasmania and at the age of 17 was employed as a "student teacher" by the Tasmanian Education Department and studied at the University of Tasmania. I gained a Bachelor of Science and a Diploma of Education and later a Master of Education Studies. I subsequently taught in high schools and colleges across Tasmania and briefly in an independent preparatory school in Sussex and then in a very challenging comprehensive high school in London before returning to teach in Tasmania. Later, after a year as a college principal, I was promoted into education administration. I retired as Deputy Secretary of Schools and Colleges. Following my retirement from full time work I chaired the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority for nine years.

My wife Margaret (also a teacher) and I brought up three adopted children. Each of our children attended the same or similar Tasmanian state schools. They mostly had good or very good teachers. As they grew up they received identical encouragement and nurturing however they finished their formal education with dramatically different levels of academic achievement but hopefully they all reached their personal educational potential.

Tim Doe