

Independent Review of Education in Tasmania

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



DECEMBER 2024



Executive Summary

Introduction

If Tasmania only has the capacity to do one thing well over the next decade, then it should stay the course on its Lifting Literacy initiative. Literacy is a key foundation for students to be able to engage successfully in learning and access the curriculum throughout their years of schooling and chosen pathways. Being relentless in equipping teachers with the knowledge, skills and resources to use evidence-based teaching approaches will have the greatest influence on student progress and achievement.

Improvement at large scale requires a laser like focus on what matters and takes time to become evident. The early success stories are emerging for individual students and in some schools. With multi-partisan commitment to unwaveringly support the implementation and monitoring of the Lifting Literacy initiative, there is every reason to expect sustained growth for Tasmania's children and young people in literacy.

As a small jurisdiction, Tasmania's Education System will need to follow the evidence and choose where to invest energy, effort and resources to make the greatest gains. The approach taken with the Lifting Literacy initiative could act as an exemplar for how any other priorities are pursued over the next decade. Evidence-based, explicit and systemic teaching practice should underpin all teaching.

About the Review

The scope of the Review included the government and non-government school sectors with a focus on Kindergarten to Year 12.

The Terms of Reference (ToR) asked the Review to focus on five themes:

- 1 Defining educational success**
- 2 Strengthening engagement and supports for all learners at all stages of their education**
- 3 Outcomes at the conclusion of the formal years of schooling**
- 4 Support for our teaching workforce**
- 5 Accountability for improved outcomes**

The Review was conducted over 18 weeks and the full Report is not intended to represent a comprehensive, deep dive into each of the themes outlined in the ToR. The Report outlines a summary of key themes and provides findings and recommendations for Government and the Tasmanian Education System to consider. The Review used publicly accessible and comparable data across the three educational sectors.

Demographic change over the next decade

Tasmania faces challenges and opportunities over the next decade due to its changing population, including for the provision of education. Population projections modelled by the Tasmanian Department of Treasury and Finance project fewer students over the coming decade.

While there are no similar projections for teachers or the educator workforce more generally, the age profile of teachers together with the general ageing population suggests that it is likely that Tasmania will have fewer teachers by 2035 than it has today.

Redefining educational success: pathways, outcomes, and measures

Education leads to better economic and social opportunities for individuals and provides broader societal and economic benefits for communities. No matter what career and life choices young people want to have, they will not be able to pursue them without being literate and numerate to a standard that enables them to participate fully.

The absence of a definition of educational success in Tasmania has meant that the primary focus of success has remained on the traditional concepts of 'formal attainment' in schools. Reporting of Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE) attainment does not include attainment achieved outside of schools in other forms of education and training, such as Vocational Education and Training (VET) with a Registered Training Organisation. By only including enrolled students, this reporting excludes a cohort of young people who are legitimately engaged in another option allowed for under Tasmanian legislation but who are not enrolled in a Tasmanian school.

As a result, many students cannot see themselves represented in the current narrative of success surrounding education and training. A well-rounded education system recognises diverse student pathways. For students to make informed choices, it's important that all pathways are presented and valued equally.

The Review heard young people generally describe success as a range of achievements and attributes that they hoped to have, including functional life and social skills, having choice for future pathways, personal development, achieving personal goals, and being contributing members of society.

Currently attaining a TCE or VET qualification enables young people to demonstrate they have the skills to participate in employment and further education and training. The Review consistently heard that there is a need for a way to capture and certify broader student capabilities. Examples of such approaches are emerging across Australia.

Engagement and support for students and families

Engagement is the extent to which students identify with and value schooling outcomes and participate in academic and non-academic school activities. Student engagement thrives when students are empowered as active partners in their learning. The Review saw Tasmanian schools that were amplifying the views and voices of their students by encouraging collaborative decision-making in school planning. It is important to note that these schools used evidence-based approaches to teaching and were clear about lesson design and the sequence of the curriculum content.

Nationally, data such as lower attendance rates, indicate that disengagement often starts in the later years of primary school. This is most evident from the high school

years. Effective wrap-around supports during transitions can significantly impact students' confidence, motivation, and overall success. The high school years are when most students begin to consider their future careers, education pathways, and life goals. The Review consistently heard from students the need for more and earlier career education and career counselling. This helps contextualise their learning to keep students engaged and motivated to achieve.

There is a natural change in the intensity of direct family involvement in school as students age and gain a level of independence over their learning. This means there is no one-size-fits-all approach to good family engagement, but sustaining an appropriate level of family engagement throughout all stages of education is important for maintaining support for students.

The Review saw examples of schools focusing on creating inclusive environments, supporting families to feel safe, welcomed, and be valued partners in their children's education. These schools pointed to positive parent satisfaction that indicated strong family engagement and a sense of belonging to the school community for students and their families. This can be amplified by knowing and valuing the capabilities and experiences of families that can contribute to and enrich the school community.

Supporting educators

The greatest in-school influence on student progress and achievement is quality teaching. The Review heard amazing stories about educators who change young people's lives and go above and beyond every day. The Review heard from many Tasmanian educators how highly rewarding teaching is. Elevating the value of teaching remains vital.

Educators and school leaders overwhelmingly told the Review about the value of professional development that is focussed on teaching practice. The Review noted that professional associations and research organisations offer and facilitate professional learning.

There are national initiatives to create faster and employment-based pathways for mid-career professionals wanting to become teachers, which have the potential to be scaled in Tasmania. There are opportunities for Tasmania's education sector and the University of Tasmania to work more closely together to ensure that undergraduate teacher training best prepares tomorrow's teachers.

Improving attraction and retention of teachers can be aided by creating career pathways and recognising middle leaders and expert teachers.

Just as student wellbeing is critical to learner outcomes, so too is the wellbeing of educators. The Review heard that the impact of trauma on educator wellbeing is an issue that requires differentiated support, particularly in schools that have large cohorts of students with trauma experience.

Teacher workload remains a key issue and is a national focus already being subject to scrutiny and review. This requires systems to minimise their administrative requirements on schools and ensure that the right role within the school is responsible for completing non-teaching tasks. Explicit requirements to limit and/or offset workload on school leaders and educators should be explored.

The current growth in Edtech and AI has the opportunity to assist teachers and learners. Careful consideration and curation of technology solutions will be essential to mitigate risks in relation to security, accuracy and appropriateness of context.

Rethinking service delivery

Tasmania is a small state with finite resources. There will need to be different, place-based approaches to ensuring that quality teaching can be sustained for all Tasmanian students and the communities in which they live.

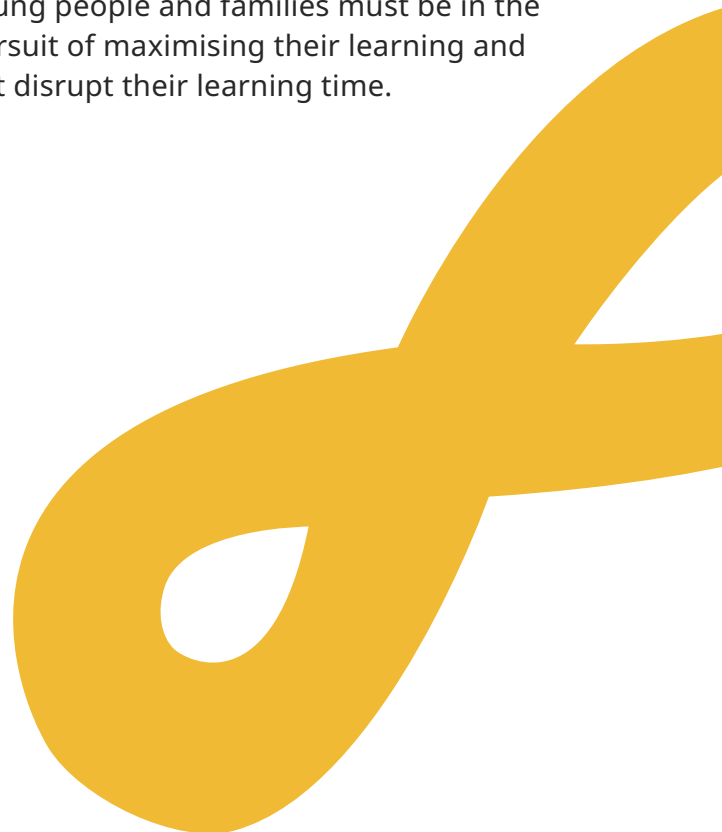
The Review heard that Tasmania could further leverage resources from other jurisdictions, systems, and non-government organisations. Not only would such action mitigate a quality and sustainability risk, but it would free up system resources that could be redirected to tasks that directly support schools, to deepen their capacity.

Across Tasmania, the Review saw various partnership models that support schools in their immediate and broader community. Some schools told the Review that they would be collectively stronger and better able to meet student learning needs if they were to formally operate as one school across several campuses. 'Multi-School Organisations' (MSOs) are defined as strong 'families' of schools, bound together through a united executive leadership that is accountable for students' results.

A one-size-fits-all model or state-wide mandate is unlikely to be the solution on how best to resource and provide learning opportunities to students. Any new models trialled in Tasmania should be done in partnership with the local communities.

Leveraging the capabilities and expertise of the local community and other external partners can further strengthen the support for schools. These relationships provide industry insights and resources, support curriculum enhancement and instructional methods.

The Review was impressed by the Child and Family Learning Centre (CFLC) model that places children and families at the centre. CFLCs provide access to a range of integrated services and wrap around supports for children and families. In this model, Centre Coordinators lead the coordinated delivery of programs and services. To reduce the administrative burden on schools and educators, the Review considers applying a role similar to the CFLC Coordinator in the school context. Coordination of services required to support young people and families must be in the pursuit of maximising their learning and not disrupt their learning time.



Implementation, monitoring and evaluation

Effective implementation and monitoring of new initiatives and programs in schools are critical to maximising educational outcomes for all students. There must be a clear cadence of change from the boardroom to the classroom. Factors such as demographics, staffing, school readiness and resourcing influence how schools adopt new practices. Systems can support schools to assess the fit and feasibility of changes, including timelines and priorities, to ensure credibility, buy-in and, ultimately, success.

The Review saw impactful examples of structured change management supporting implementation of initiatives. Key to these examples was partnering with organisations and individuals that brought expert knowledge, skills and capability; de-implementation of work not aligned with priorities; and monitoring and evaluation.

Stay the course on literacy

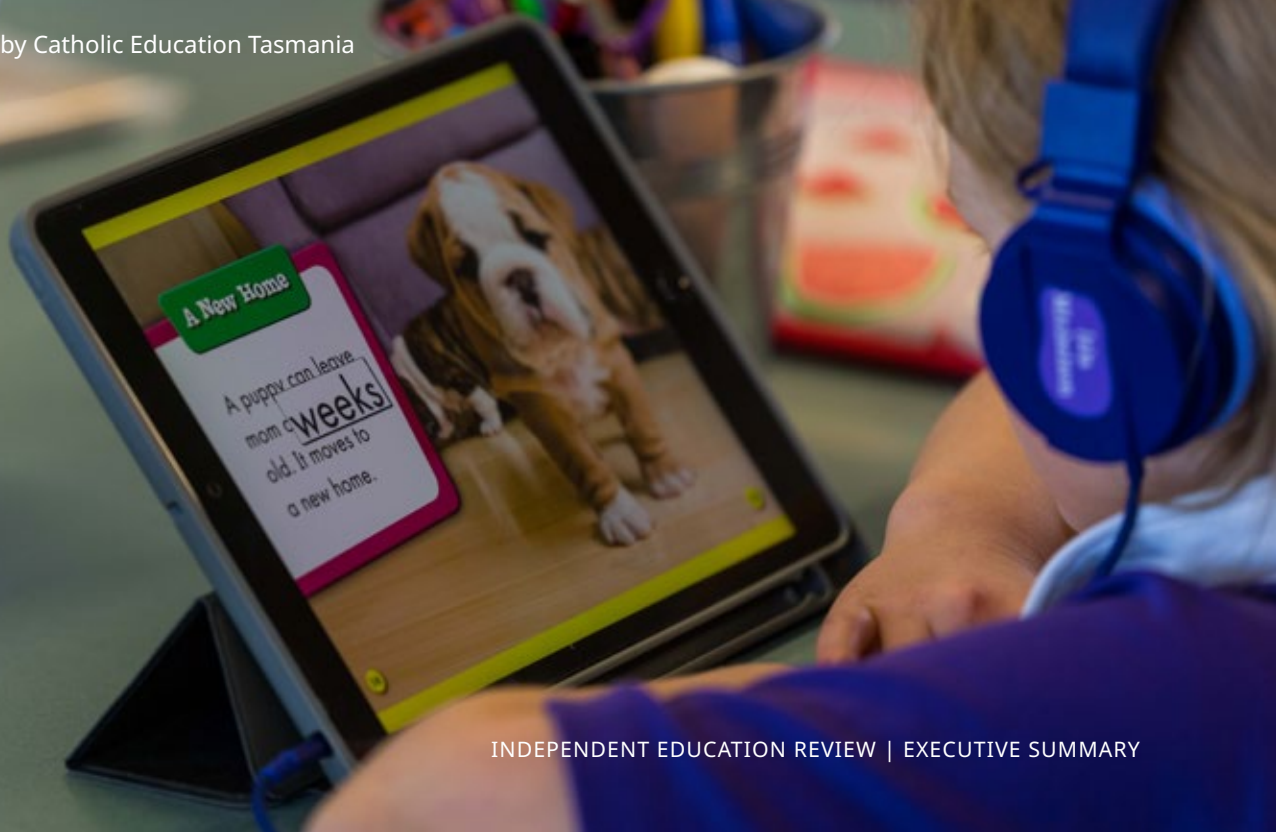
There is substantial work underway to improve literacy in Tasmania. Literacy is foundational to all other learning. Research highlights that evidence-based teaching practices, grounded in the cognitive science behind how students learn benefits all students.

The Review visited a number of schools which have been implementing structured literacy instruction for some time, and acknowledges that across the systems, schools were at different stages of their implementation journey.

The Review noted that common diagnostic tools are being adopted by schools and systems across Tasmania, with schools reporting that they were already seeing growth in student-level reading and spelling data.

There are lessons to be learnt from the implementation of past reforms and initiatives. Sustaining focus, implementation support and resources over the longer term on Lifting Literacy is important to the lives of individuals and Tasmania's overall future.

Photo supplied by Catholic Education Tasmania



Summary of Recommendations and Findings

Redefining educational success: pathways, outcomes, and measures

RECOMMENDATION

- R1** More work needs to be done to improve the narrative and reporting underpinning success to increase student and family understanding around the value proposition of education.

FINDINGS

- F1** There is an opportunity to strengthen Tasmanians' understanding of the importance of participating in the formal years of education and training.
- F2** The Tasmanian Advisory Council for Education should consider the work of other states and territories, when progressing the conversations and stakeholder input on defining educational success for Tasmanians.
- F3** Tasmania's reporting of outcomes needs to mature and focus on young people's achievements regardless of their learning setting.
- F4** Tasmanians' idea of success is broad and varied. Recognising achievements, including academic, social, or vocational skills builds student pride and encourages continued effort and engagement. This ongoing celebration of diverse forms of success reinforces the idea that education is not a one-size-fits-all journey but a personalised pathway to a fulfilling future.
- F5** Once a clear definition of success has been agreed in the Tasmanian context, it is crucial that the measures and certifications align and strengthen this message.
- F6** Personal pathways should be valued and should deliver a high quality, inclusive and comprehensive education with a universal level of literacy and numeracy.
- F7** As an education sector, to strengthen the public narrative of success, Tasmania should:
- ▶ be unrelentingly focussed on its improvement journey;
 - ▶ have clear indicators/measures that provide evidence of whether initiatives being implemented have impact; and
 - ▶ have contemporary, comparable and comprehensive certification that captures the multiple pathways available.
- F8** The Tasmanian Certificate of Education is a recognised certificate and metric, however, on its own is insufficient and incomplete recognition of the range of attainment.

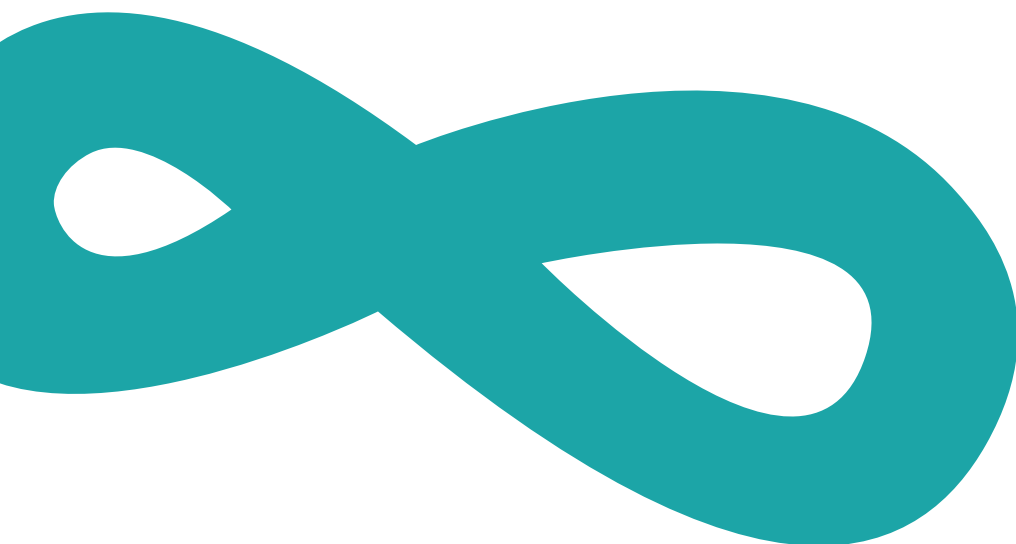
Engagement and support for students and families

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R2** Strengthen students as partners in their learning for school improvement.
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- R3** Harness the power of family and community knowledge through engagement to improve student outcomes.
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FINDINGS

- F9** Schools that have robust models that amplify students as partners in their learning have increased engagement.
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- F10** The Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework offers an approach that ensures all students receive effective, evidence-based teaching, and some students can gain differentiated, targeted instruction according to their needs.
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- F11** Continuity of curriculum and consistent teaching practices are crucial to support student engagement across key transition points.
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- F12** More and earlier information should be offered about pathways, courses, career, and learning options that support students' diverse goals and interests.
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- F13** School culture is a critical foundation for learning success. Schools that focus on actions that make school a place where students have their growth and achievements regularly celebrated, make for a more positive learning environment.
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- F14** Schools that create inclusive environments where families feel welcomed, valued and engaged build the collective capacity to support students' learning.
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Supporting educators

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R4** Consider funding Professional Associations to enable them to deliver discipline-specific professional learning.
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- R5** Strengthen University of Tasmania and sectors collaboration to ensure Initial Teacher Education is preparing teachers for all aspects of the role.
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- R6** Consider broadening support, modelled on programs available to front line staff in other industries (e.g. Emergency Services, Health), for educators working in complex settings, to maintain and maximise education staff health and wellbeing.
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- R7** Consider partnering with other organisations and education jurisdictions to inform Tasmania’s position on expanding the safe and effective use of digital teaching and learning tools, especially to improve outcomes for disadvantaged and special needs students, through:
- ▶ professional learning opportunities and preservice teacher education; and
 - ▶ research into what works best in using education technology learning applications, including working with disadvantaged schools to test and showcase effective integration.
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FINDINGS

- F15** Explicit mentoring and peer observation opportunities that are structured and resourced, including time to participate, can aid in ensuring that professional learning and mentoring is not foregone due to other workload pressures.
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- F16** The Tasmanian Education System could leverage the expertise of professional associations to support professional development for discipline-specific learning.
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- F17** The Tasmanian Education System could strengthen how it works with tertiary providers, particularly the University of Tasmania, to ensure that early career teachers have the knowledge, skills and capabilities so they are well prepared for all aspects of the classroom.
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- F18** The Tasmanian Education System can better leverage national and international work, to strengthen the support for and retention of Tasmania’s education workforce, as well as improve attraction.
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- F19** Schools, particularly those that deal with significant trauma, should have access to wellbeing and support services beyond Employee Assistance Programs and more akin to those available to frontline emergency services staff.
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- F20** Explicit requirements to limit and/or offset workload on school leaders and educators should be explored.
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- F21** The use of education technology and Artificial Intelligence has the potential to significantly support educators, including reducing their workload, but there are also risks that require careful consideration when adopting and using these tools.
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Rethinking service delivery

RECOMMENDATION

- R8** Trial a limited number of models where access to resources and services can be maximised to better support learning and the work of schools.

FINDINGS

- F22** The Tasmanian Education System has the opportunity to maximise its use of resources by better leveraging the expertise of other jurisdictions and external organisations.
- F23** There is merit in trialling Multi-School Organisations in schools and communities that are interested in, and will be supported with, this approach.
- F24** Accountability for student outcomes is a collective responsibility, and roles should be clearly defined. The sharing of relevant data and information across schools to inform the improvement agenda needs to be strengthened.
- F25** The Tasmanian Education System could explore further models that assist schools to better leverage external partners to support student needs, maximise opportunities and experiences to improve engagement and learning.
- F26** The role of service coordinator in schools could be explored to ensure educators can focus on teaching and learning as a priority.

Implementation, monitoring and evaluation

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R9** The Tasmanian Education System should create a clear cadence for change and build clear lines of accountability through a focus on what matters most: what is being taught and how it is being taught.
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- R10** As a small jurisdiction and in the context of existing workforce capacity, Tasmania should intentionally and systematically source the most appropriate evidence-based support and resources to enhance implementation and de-implementation.
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- R11** Adequately planned and resourced implementation, along with monitoring of progress and evaluation of impact, is required to drive, refine, sustain and embed practice.
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FINDINGS

- F27** Implementation frameworks should allow for differentiation in implementation that enables schools to tailor to their context.
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- F28** To be highly effective, the Tasmanian Education System should focus and resource fewer, evidence-based, strategically aligned priorities.
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- F29** A structured change management approach should underpin all initiatives to ensure successful outcomes.
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- F30** The Tasmanian Education System should continue to partner with subject matter experts to support the development, delivery and capability building underpinning new initiatives.
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Stay the course on Lifting Literacy

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R12** Stay the course on the Lifting Literacy initiative as the Review witnessed several indicators of early impact.
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- R13** Over the next 10 years, ensure that the existing and future workforce is equipped with the knowledge, skills and resources to ensure the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy are taught across all phases of learning and subject disciplines.
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- R14** The advice from the Lifting Literacy Outcomes Monitoring Group, along with system and school monitoring, needs to inform the pace of implementation of other major state-wide initiatives to ensure there is a sound evidence-base guiding the direction, resourcing, and implementation.
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FINDINGS

- F31** A laser like focus on what matters most helps teachers and students focus on where to direct their energy.
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- F32** Embracing the evidence on the best ways to teach and the best ways to learn at a class, school, and system level is the first crucial step. The real challenge lies in implementation and monitoring.
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- F33** Early school-based feedback indicates evidence-based structured (systematic and explicit) literacy teaching is supporting students' growth and progress.
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- F34** The full impact of a large-scale system-wide approach to the teaching of literacy on student learning outcomes will take time to see.
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- F35** Starting points vary between schools and implementation needs to account for these differences. Schools and educators need wrap-around systemic support, that is tailored to their context so they can effectively deliver literacy instruction.
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- F36** Before policy makers consider undertaking a systemic approach for numeracy, the Lifting Literacy initiative should become truly embedded with sustained improved outcomes evident over time. That said, there is no reason why smaller scale evidence-based initiatives at the school-level cannot be supported for those schools that are ready.
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