

Briefings

Thought leadership for the independent schooling sector

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THE COALITION'S PLANS FOR SCHOOLING

From the Executive Director

With the return of the Morrison Federal Government, including the re-appointment of the Hon Dan Tehan as Education Minister, what can be expected over the next three years in terms of the Government's agenda for schooling?

Education did not play a significant role in the 2019 Federal election, with very few new policy announcements on schools from the Coalition during the campaign.

The Government's plans for schooling are outlined in three key documents – Quality Schools¹; the 2019/20 Federal Budget²; and the National School Reform Agreement³.

Key commitments from the Coalition as outlined in these documents can be examined in the context of Independent Schools Queensland's (ISQ) Election Statement⁴ which was based on five pillars – **stable and fair recurrent funding; regional and remote education stimulus; support for students with special needs; capital support to underpin parental**

investment in independent schools; and support for school improvement and high-quality student outcomes.

Recurrent Funding

Despite the ALP's (misleading) claim that funding has been cut by the Government, the figures show a continuing increase in funding for schools.

The 2019/20 Federal Budget provided a record \$21.4 billion for schools for the 2020 calendar year. This represented an increase in Federal funding for schools of \$8.5 billion since 2013. The government projects recurrent funding to increase by a further \$37 billion over the next decade (a 62% increase in per student funding).

Apart from overall increased recurrent funding, the significant initiative for non-government schools over the next three years will be a change in the measure to determine parents' capacity to contribute methodology through the replacement of the SES by a Direct Income Measure (DIM). The new measure is to be fully implemented from 2022 (the year of the next Federal election).

Federal Minister Tehan will need to focus on a smooth implementation of the DIM. It presents a high risk for the Government given the likelihood of winners and losers at the individual school level. The funding arrangements for non-government

schools announced in September 2018 included an additional \$4.6 billion over the next decade associated with the implementation of a DIM.

This additional funding included a \$1.2 billion Choice and Affordability Fund⁵ partly to assist schools with the transition to the Gonski 2.0 funding model by 2029. The independent sector will expect a speedy finalisation of the Guidelines and Agreements in respect of the Fund which is scheduled to commence in July 2020.

Political commentator, Professor Peter van Onselen told the recent ISQ State Forum that Federal education policies will be driven partly by fiscal discipline in the term of the new Government. This would suggest a "business as usual" approach to funding for schooling with little room to grant additional funding.



ISQ'S FEDERAL ELECTION STATEMENT

1 Available at <https://www.education.gov.au/quality-schools-frequently-asked-questions>
 2 The Department of Education's Portfolio Budget Statements are available at <https://www.education.gov.au/budget>
 3 Available at <https://www.education.gov.au/national-school-reform-agreement-0>
 4 Available at <https://www.isq.qld.edu.au/members/federal-election?sectionurl=members>
 5 See <https://www.education.gov.au/what-choice-and-affordability-fund> for further details on the Fund

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The focus on recurrent funding for schools is therefore more likely to be on efficient use of existing funding and the targeting of it to initiatives that have proven results in improving student outcomes.

Regional and Remote Schools

Whilst the Government has announced several modest initiatives to specifically support schools in regional areas, it will principally rely upon the location loading in the Gonski model to deliver an additional \$6.8 billion for regional and remote schools in the period through to 2029.

Support will be provided for several programs⁶ designed to attract and retain teachers in rural and remote schools. These types of initiatives will take on increasing importance as the teacher shortage starts to impact on regional schools.

A welcome announcement in the recent Federal budget was \$4 million in Special Circumstances Funding for non-government schools affected by the recent floods in North Queensland. Several Queensland independent schools can expect to benefit from this funding.

Given the regional nature of Queensland and the tough economic conditions across most Queensland regional areas, the independent sector will be looking for further initiatives from the Government to support schools in the regions. A good starting point would be for the new

Government to revisit the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education⁷ undertaken by Professor John Halsey in 2017.

Students with Special Needs

The Government will provide funding for students with special needs through the Student with Disability loading as part of the Gonski funding model. Funding for this loading is projected to increase from \$1.7 billion in 2018 to \$3 billion in 2029.

The implementation of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with a Disability (NCCD) which is now being used to determine funding for students with disability will need to be carefully managed by the Government. For independent schools, funding has been volatile based on year-to-year variations in NCCD data. The lack of national consistency in the NCCD and the impact this has on equitable funding arrangements for schools is of increasing concern.

The Government has commissioned the National School Resourcing Board to undertake a review of the loading for students with disability⁸. The Board is expected to report by the end of 2019. The outcomes of this review will be critical to ensuring students with special needs are properly resourced.

Capital Funding

It will be "business as usual" for capital funding for schools with the

Government to provide an estimated \$890 million in capital funding for non-government schools over the next five years. This includes a real increase in capital funding that was announced in 2018.

There are looming challenges for the independent sector in terms of providing places for the increasing number of school-aged students. In particular, there are pressures related to the costs of establishing new schools and campuses. This is an area where the Government could look to provide specific initiatives particularly for independent schools which do not have the systemic support to initiate new schools.

The Government announced a \$30 million Local School Community Fund as part of the 2019/20 Budget to fund priority projects in local school communities. The independent sector will be keen to see the guidelines for this funding which might be used for upgrades of school equipment.

School Improvement and Quality Outcomes

The recently signed National School Reform Agreement sets out the policy priorities when it comes to student outcomes and non-funding initiatives. This Agreement incorporates most of the recommendations of David Gonski's *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*⁹.

Key initiatives include; enhancing the Australian Curriculum so that teachers can identify each individual students' learning needs, creating a unique student identifier, and establishing a new national evidence institute to drive improvements in teaching and learning.

There is likely to be a continuing focus on improvement in pre-service education with initiatives such as the

6 For example, \$15 million for Teach for Australia to train high achieving teachers who will become high quality school leaders in rural, remote or disadvantaged schools

7 Available at <https://www.education.gov.au/independent-review-regional-rural-and-remote-education>

8 See <https://www.education.gov.au/review-loading-students-disability-swd> for further information

9 See <https://www.education.gov.au/review-achieve-educational-excellence-australian-schools>

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new literacy and numeracy test for trainee teachers continuing.

The Government has already commissioned a review of the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on the Goals for Schooling and it will continue to promote the voluntary Year 1 phonics health check.

There are some other key issues impacting on schools that the re-elected Government will need to deal with. Perhaps the most contentious is anti-discriminating legislation and religious freedoms. The Government has referred anti-discrimination laws to the Australian Law Reform Commission (which is due to report in April 2020). However, there is already talk of a possible early resolution of the issue with legislation expected to be introduced into Federal Parliament in the next sittings.

The Government will also need to oversee the implementation of the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. It will also oversee a new Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability during its next term. This new Commission will hopefully focus on best practice in schools.

The Morrison Government has strongly articulated that parents should be able to choose the school that best meets the needs of their child. It will have the challenge of reversing Australia's declining student outcomes compared to other countries. Expect a “steady as she goes approach” to schooling and a focus on the basics in the next three years.



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BUILDING COLLECTIVE TEACHER EFFICACY FOR GREATER IMPACT ON STUDENTS AND SCHOOL CULTURE



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Recent headlines have highlighted that many believe there is a potential crisis looming in terms of teacher supply in our country. The combination of lower numbers of graduates with teaching degrees, an ageing workforce and teacher attrition, according to some, is heralding a potential shortfall in teachers at a time when there are projected increases in school enrolments.

Dr Tania Aspland, president of the Australian Council of Deans of Education, expects a “huge shortage of teachers in three or four years. There is already a teacher shortage in some areas and large numbers of teachers teaching out-of-field, particularly in maths and science, and we’re seeing a declining interest in becoming a teacher” (Singhal, 2019). This and other headlines that bemoan the state of education with endless inquiries into education, which include league tables and international comparisons, leads to an environment where schools feel pressure to demonstrate visibly and stridently that they are lifting standards and providing outstanding educational outcomes.

This highly competitive environment has led to an intense focus on teacher performance and a rush to ensure that professional learning is geared toward best-practice and improvement. Educational providers deliver a raft of professional learning ‘quick fixes’ and ‘one size fits all’ solutions to supporting teachers to lift their performance and efficacy. Jensen, Sonnemann, Roberts-Hull and Hunter (2016) caution against this focus on only providing more and more support on ‘what works’ as the key to instructional excellence.

Five years on from the introduction of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers it is perhaps time for leaders to consider their role in moving beyond this idea of best-practice and move toward what Jensen et al. describe as a consistent focus on a deeply clear picture of what instructional excellence looks like and develop collaborative professional

learning opportunities that support teachers to achieve this. This is a movement from individual excellence to collective efficacy.

A recent study commissioned by Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ), in conjunction with the Queensland University of Technology, found that high performing teachers are enabled to achieve their potential in supportive, collegial environments that feature formative feedback and deep reflection on practice (Independent Schools Queensland, 2018). High performing school systems around the world have long recognised the power of collaborative professional learning, built into the daily lives of teachers, to lift both student impact and enhance the efficacy and wellbeing of teachers (Jensen et al., 2016). However, just offering teachers professional development has not been shown to actually improve teaching and learning and truly support teachers in their work (Jacob & McGovern, 2015); whereas collective teacher efficacy has been found to have the highest effect size in terms of building academic achievement for students (Hattie, 2019). At a time when it is imperative that schools are truly effective in improving student results and collective teacher efficacy, approaches to teacher professional learning need to be those that lift whole school performance rather than individual teacher ability. This can be achieved through the development of collective efficacy.

What is collective efficacy?

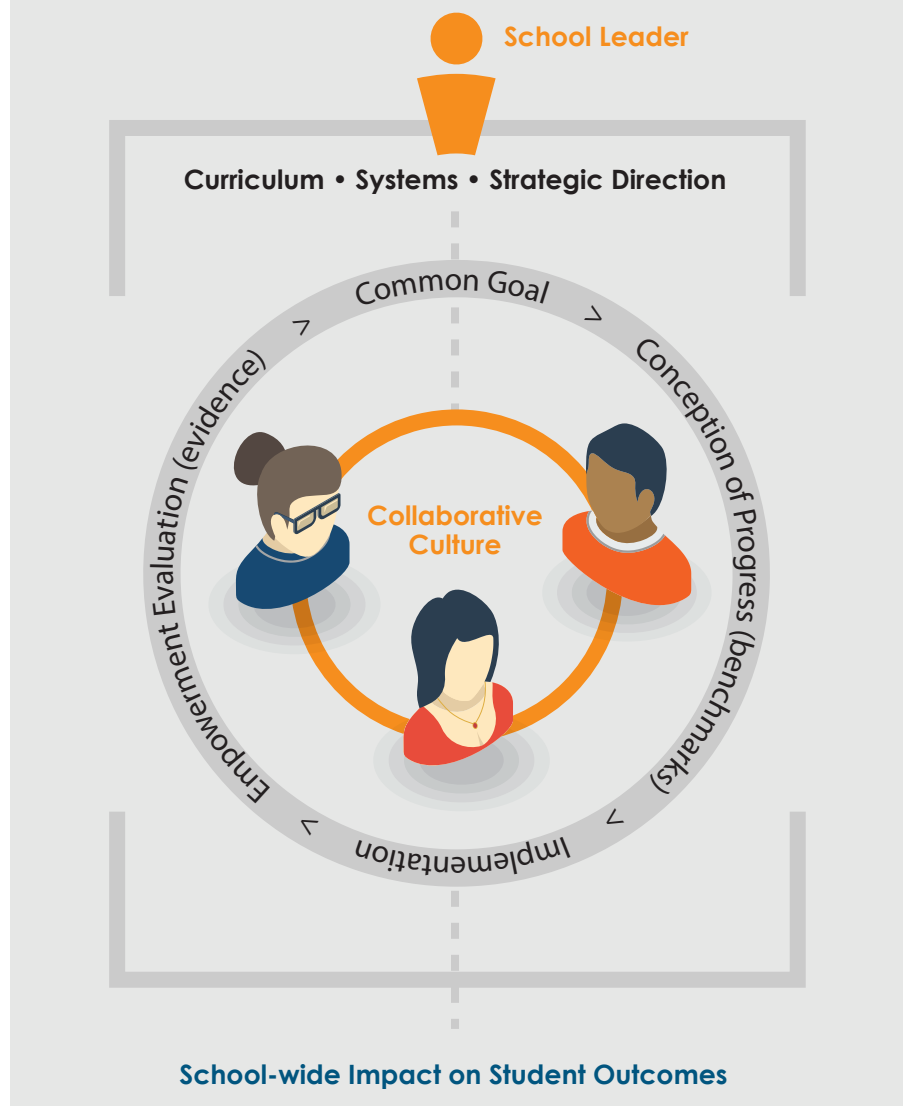
The approaches to the development of collective expertise in teacher professional learning over the years have included lesson studies, classroom observation, action research, professional learning communities, and co-teaching/planning. While all these approaches have undoubtedly benefited the teachers involved, some would argue that the true potential of these activities is not realised unless there is a focus on the performance capability of the social system as a whole, how this relates to the goals of the group, and how well members of the group work together toward those goals (Putney & Broughton, 2011). See Figure 1.

The premise of collective efficacy is that overall school performance, and therefore individual teacher satisfaction, can only be lifted when all teachers have the same impact as the best teachers (Hattie, 2015). According to Hattie;

“the greatest influence on student progression in learning is having highly expert, inspired and passionate teachers and school leaders working together to maximise the effect of their teaching on all students in their care. There is a major role for school leaders: to harness the expertise in their schools and to lead successful transformations.”

This is not a call to an unattainable high standard, but a learning environment where teachers view the learning of all students in the school as their business and are invested in the success and improvement of their colleagues. Such collective environments are those that focus on what matters – students – and prioritise deep trust, clear structures and cultures, expertise and enthusiasm, rigour, dialogue, and open and honest feedback (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018).

Figure 1. School-wide Collective Efficacy



Building collective efficacy

Bryan and Kaylor (2018) propose five essential conditions for collective efficacy:

- a culture based on trust;
- a commitment to transparency of results;
- a climate of non-blaming;
- a commitment to practices being employed; and
- specificity of evidence that will be gathered to mark success.

The landscape of education has been marred in recent years by poor public perception, higher accountabilities and negative media attention, all of which has led to many teachers feeling defensive of their profession and their own expertise. Added to this has been a long list of inquiries into education which have led to various reform agendas and a change-weary generation of teachers. Trust in a professional community has been defined as a safe learning space where all work together for a common goal (Le Fevre, Timperley & Ell, 2015). Policy environments

BUILDING COLLECTIVE TEACHER EFFICACY FOR GREATER IMPACT ON STUDENTS AND SCHOOL CULTURE CONTINUED

that explicitly or implicitly promote expectations of compliance, with reforms that others are leading and developing, contribute to the lack of impact of these reforms. Solving the complex problems of teaching and learning requires more than doing something different. It often requires questioning and challenging one's personal beliefs (Le Fevre et al., 2015). This kind of questioning can only occur in environments where teachers feel safe to question and make themselves vulnerable to reflection. Trust, and a culture where professional learning is explicitly and deliberately constructed in ways that promote teacher agency, is vital in leading reform that results in improved outcomes for students.

Once a collective environment of trust has been established it is more likely that teachers will be open to examining their current practices in relation to student results and commit to being vulnerable for the sake of their own and their students' learning. This kind of transparency can only be facilitated when the learning occurs in environments that are responsive to the needs of teachers and students.

Collaborative inquiry into practice requires that all involved are committed and feel safe to be open, honest and reflective about their work (Samaras, 2010). This shift involves moving from exchanging helpful hints to deep inquiry as those involved find compelling reasons to change what they are doing and take joint responsibility for doing it (Le Fevre et al., 2015). A commitment to a common purpose enables teachers to honestly

and openly analyse student data in relation to the practices employed in the classroom in a climate that is not focused on judgement but directed at a common improvement goal.

Day (2017) has shown that the work of teachers is closely linked to personal identity. It is important to acknowledge that to teach to one's best will require an investment of the personal as well as the professional self. This interaction of professional and personal self means that professional learning activities that focus on teacher deficiency rather than student need will result in the emotional self of teachers being stirred and the goal becomes self-preservation. A non-blaming climate is required; one which addresses a specific challenge in the environment, rather than learning to enact a generic set of standards or teaching practices that apply across contexts. It is important to set up conditions that are responsive to the ways in which individual teachers learn and is strongly shaped by the contexts and students in which the teachers practice. Research informs us of the important role played by school leaders in creating and sustaining 'can do' cultures of high expectations, care and achievement and, as a key part of these, promoting

a range of professional learning and development opportunities as a means of supporting, extending and, where appropriate, challenging the functional and attitudinal development of staff aligned to specific needs of their students (Day, 2017).

Because schools are intrinsically a social enterprise, it is important that more opportunities are provided for teachers to exchange, reflect on and integrate promising ideas and techniques into their own teaching to build collective efficacy. This will result in all students experiencing the benefits of expert teaching and successful school-wide improvement. Norms of shared responsibility among teachers, and a shared commitment to practices which create structures and opportunities for learning that promote interdependence rather than independence among teachers. School leaders play a part in this by ensuring that the team stays focused on the school, system, curriculum and strategic directions that are clearly linked to student needs (Day, 2017). Teachers work together to diagnose challenges, identify possible causal pathways and develop the most productive solutions aligned to a common goal (Le Fevre et al., 2015).

Once a shared goal has been established it is critical to have a shared understanding of what success looks like and how will it be measured. Hattie (2015) goes further to say that the development of a common conception of progress is key to accelerating progress while also ensuring that expectations

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of what constitutes progress is appropriately high. A commitment to consistently evaluate against agreed and understood benchmarks helps to cultivate a continuous culture of evidence by asking educators for evidence to support their views and interpretations and to engage in continual phases of analysis, decision-making and implementation. This approach, sometimes called empowerment evaluation, is premised on improvement, inclusion, democratic participation, social justice, capacity building, organisational learning, community knowledge, community ownership, evidence-based strategies, and accountability (Wandersman, Alia, Cook, & Ramaswamy, 2016).

Cautions

As with any approach there are pitfalls. Collective expertise is no different. For collective expertise to be effective it is important to recognise and plan for the potential barriers to success.

The kind of professional collaboration that characterises high-performing systems requires a strong teaching profession with highly developed expertise, as well as time and resources for teachers to meet with colleagues within, as well as beyond, the regular school day (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2017). This involves prioritising time for collaboration. The Australian Professional Standard for Principals (AITSL, 2014) indicate the importance of prioritising, creating and sustaining student-centred learning by:

- Establishing systematic methods for collecting and interpreting evidence to identify excellent teaching and learning.
- Share successful strategies with the school community.
- Encouraging staff to contribute to education networks, supporting the learning of others and development of pedagogy.

- Model collaborative leadership and engage with other schools and organisations to share and improve practice and encourage innovation in the education system.
- Link improvement to strategic priorities that are established through careful analysis of students need.

By strongly linking to school priorities and student need, a school leader can position collective learning as a part of the core business of the teacher, not an add-on for which extra time must be allocated.

“The reason for this failure [to improve student outcomes] is that professional learning is effective only when it becomes a normal part of daily work life in schools. Separating professional learning from daily teaching routines is counterproductive, and limits the benefits for teachers and students alike.”

(Jensen, Sonnemann, Roberts-Hull & Hunter, 2016, p. 28)

Raising the collective expertise in a school is sometimes problematic for school leaders when some teachers still want their practice to remain private, or when others are willing to share but lack the leadership expertise needed to work collaboratively to improve instruction. Sometimes school leaders lack resources to dependably identify those who are making an impact and processes to amplify their practices. The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards) provide a blueprint for what high functioning teachers look like through the identification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers (HALT). Reviewing the Standards and the higher career stages can assist leaders to identify and activate teachers who already have the capacity and desire to support and lead colleagues to improve practice.

Once identified, the priority is to facilitate collegial relationships around these teachers which will lead to professional learning communities deeply invested in analysing practice against student need. This leads to a collective environment where the collaborative capacity is raised in an environment of trust and support; an outcome with longer term positive impact on the quality of the professional environment than short term strategies to address teacher shortages.

The Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher (HALT) Certifying Service provides a high quality, nationally consistent approach to identifying and certifying teachers according to the advanced career stages of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST).

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