



## Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Submitter: Australian Federation of Modern Language Teacher  
Associations  
Submitting as a: Peak body  
State: ACT

### Summary

Capabilities, skills and knowledge that students should learn at school to prepare them to become global citizens

How educational success and school quality should be measured

How schools funding could be used more effectively and efficiently

Actions that can be taken to improve practice and outcomes

What can be put in place to ensure identification, sharing and implementation of evidence-based good practice to sustain improved student outcomes over time

System enablers for school improvement

Emerging areas for action to lead to large gains in student improvement and how they could be further developed

Barriers to implementing school improvements

### Main submission

What should educational success for Australian students and schools look like?

- What capabilities, skills and knowledge should students learn at school to prepare them for the future?

Students need to become informed global citizens with general capabilities to enable them to participate actively in society. There needs to be an interconnection between building wellbeing and resilience and academic achievement. Critical thinking, inquiry skills and flexible academic skills are vital for students as they move towards their preferred futures. They need high level language skills across the modes of communication. This should include first and additional language skills. Interpersonal and intercultural capabilities are vital for likely futures in an interconnected world.

AFMLTA believes that the framework for 21st century learning should come from a document such as the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETA, 2008) and its subsequent replacement. This should include specific recommendations about expectations for language learning and building intercultural capability for all students.

- How should school quality and educational success be measured?

Educational success of students should be measured in relation to individual trajectories rather than year level standards. School quality and educational success can't be measured by single measures, i.e. results from standardised testing. Schools contribute to the development of students more broadly than aspects of literacy and numeracy and a narrow slice of their academic achievement. School quality and educational success should be measured by students' generic cross-curriculum capabilities and their ability to engage with diverse perspectives and cope with uncertainty. Quality and success could be measured by students' ability to apply their skills and capabilities in response to problem- or inquiry-based scenarios.

What can we do to improve and how can we support ongoing improvement over time?

- How could schools funding be used more effectively and efficiently (at the classroom, school or system level) to have a significant impact on learning outcomes for all students including disadvantaged and vulnerable students and academically advanced students?

School funding needs to be targeted towards meeting student learning needs, in specific school contexts, through teacher professional learning. Teacher professional learning focused on the needs of their cohort/s of students would be more effective and efficient than directing funding to testing students and advertising the performance of schools publically based on this data, or offering generic professional learning not specifically targeted at improving teacher practice based on the needs of their students.

A review of a number of international initiatives, including endeavours such as the Academy of Singapore Teachers and others in British Columbia and Ontario provide examples of how other jurisdictions have committed to significant targeted professional learning and networking for teachers. It is prudent to note the performance of these jurisdictions in PISA testing.

- What actions can be taken to improve practice and outcomes? What evidence is there to support taking these actions?

AITSL commissioned a literature review, published in 2015, which outlines '... a systematic approach ... to identify and analyse research articles that provided a detailed analysis of professional conversations and demonstrated how they promoted the learning of the participants in ways that:

- achieved real changes in teaching practice
- improved student outcomes
- created better solutions to problems
- developed new practice.’ (p2015:4, AITSL)

This literature review provides evidence of what works to achieve improved student outcomes for all students. We recommend that this review be considered when recommending what actions can be taken to improve teacher practice and student learning outcomes. Investment of Australian Government funding should be directed towards developing teachers’ capacity to engage in cycles of inquiry around challenges of practice focused on student learning needs. Educators need to engage in professional learning communities to develop adaptive expertise and improve practice based on these identified student learning needs.

- What works best for whom and in what circumstances?

Evidence identifies that enabling contexts are those that place high expectations on participants to improve and solve problems, and systems/jurisdictions/schools providing the support to do so. The different contexts should build on, rather than interfere with, one another. Coaching, feedback and reviewing the impact of new practices on student learning outcomes will ensure school improvement.

- What institutional or governance arrangements could be put in place to ensure ongoing identification, sharing and implementation of evidence-based good practice to grow and sustain improved student outcomes over time?

Illustrations of evidence-based school improvement practices such as teachers collectively engaging in cycles of inquiry based on their students’ learning needs, across learning areas, to improve practice in a sustainable way, could be published and made available to schools through the AITSL website.

It should be noted that teacher engagement in professional learning, supported by professional teacher associations is a cost effective mechanism for providing access to high quality teacher professional learning and improving outcomes. The National Professional Development Programme was a Commonwealth funded initiative in the mid-1990s. (National Curriculum Services. 1995. Evaluation of the National Professional Development Program: A report of the evaluation of the NPDP for the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training). The evaluation of that project found that every dollar of funding provided to professional associations for professional development of teachers created between two and four times as much in terms of actual value. Hence governments (state/territory and national) and other agencies benefit from a significant ‘multiplier effect’ if they engage and fund professional associations to provide teacher professional development.

- How can system enablers such as targets and standards, qualifications and accreditation, regulation and registration, quality assurance measures and transparency and accountability provisions be improved to help drive educational achievement and success and support effective monitoring, reporting and application of investment?

System enablers, such as targets and standards, need to be focused on student improvement and growth in learning over time as opposed to year level benchmarks/national targets and standards. Schools could be made accountable for improving a targeted area of their students' learning needs based on growth in learning – from where their students were in their learning at a point in time to how far they have grown in an identified period where teachers have engaged in building adaptive expertise. This should be based on the learning needs of the students they are teaching at their school as opposed to a generic focus for improvement at a national, state/territory, jurisdiction level.

- Are there any new or emerging areas for action which could lead to large gains in student improvement that need further development or testing?

The AITSL review observed that the authors of different studies commented on the limitations of current research into conversations and improvement-focused feedback in promoting teacher professional learning. It was identified that given the importance of these in promoting teacher professional learning, and in turn, student learning outcomes, there is an urgent need to improve the quality of the research in this area.

- What are they and how could they be further developed?

The Australian Government could commission further research into new or emerging areas for action around what works in sustainable school improvement, which could lead to large gains in student improvement. Bilingual capabilities are one area for research and professional learning. Evidence-based illustrations of practice around what works could then be made available to schools to inform school improvement and student learning outcomes.

Are there barriers to implementing these improvements?

- If yes, what are they and how could these be overcome?

Better teacher preparation is needed for a fast-changing world. More universities need to provide quality pre-service teacher education, with a specialisation in learning additional languages, is needed for students training to become teachers.

AFMLTA submits that hegemonic patterns that have emerged under the influences of national curriculum development and testing (both national – NAP testing and international - PISA, TIMMS), which militates against the desired dynamism and adaptation which students require of their teachers.

The lack of a contemporary, collaboratively owned framework of learning and an appropriate 'roadmap' to the framework is a significant barrier to implementing any improvement.

This may be remediated by the development of a consistent framework for education that builds on previous, collaboratively developed frameworks. We refer to an earlier statement that the framework for 21st century learning should come from a document such as the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETA, 2008) and its subsequent replacement.