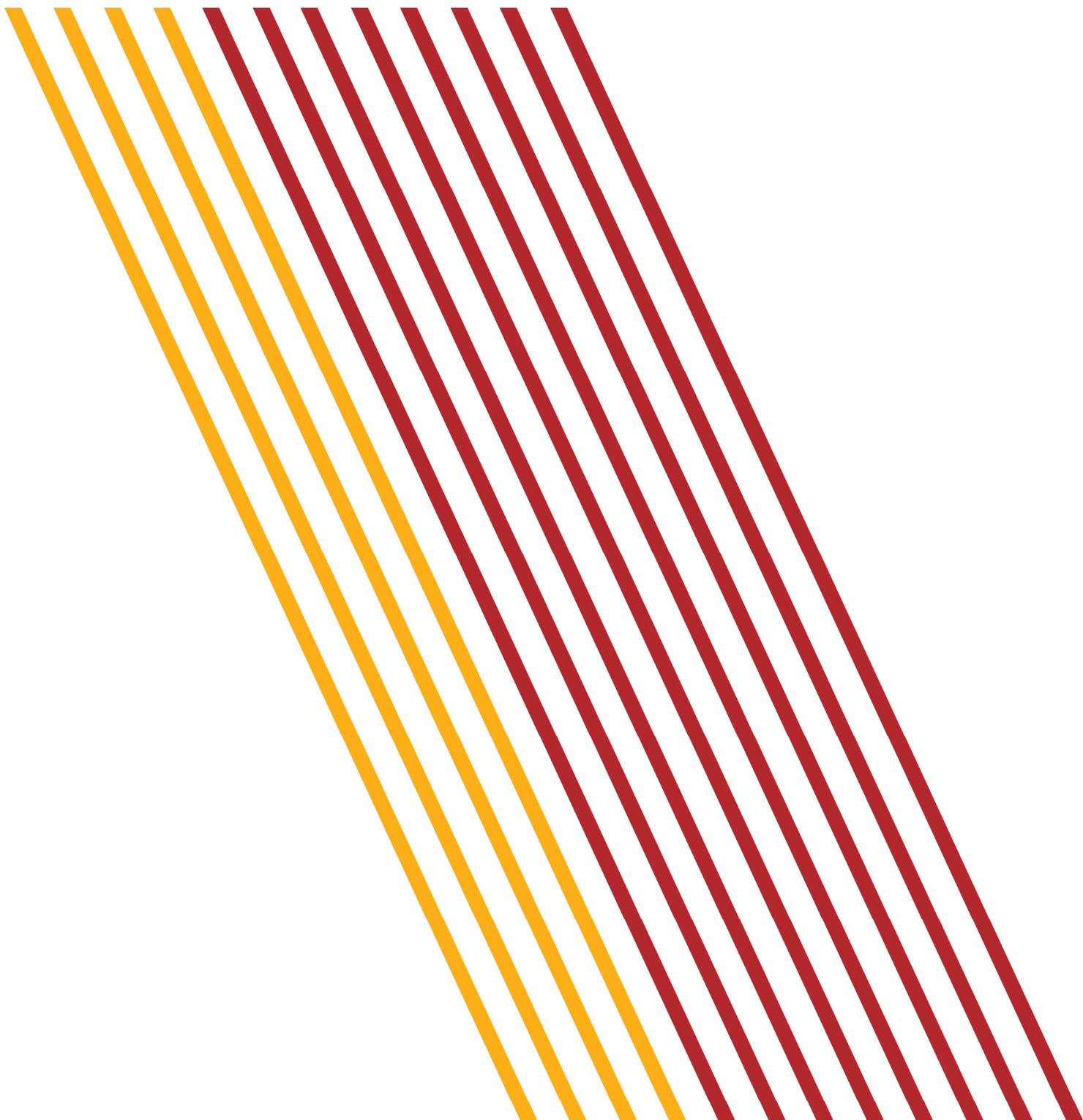


VICTORIA'S RESPONSE

REVIEW TO ACHIEVE EDUCATIONAL
EXCELLENCE IN AUSTRALIAN
SCHOOLS



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Victoria's Education Reform Agenda

VICTORIA RECOMMENDS NATIONAL EDUCATION REFORM

1. Improving access to quality early childhood education and care to achieve educational excellence
2. Providing teachers with access to quality digital classroom assessment tools
3. Building the profile and standing of the teaching profession
4. Elements for effective principal preparation
5. Forging better links between education system and industry and employers to provide more relevant and experiential approaches to learning
6. Exploring development of a national measure of student 'learning gain'
7. Strengthening the national education evidence base
8. Articulating renewed shared national education goals

This is the State of Victoria's submission to the *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* (the Review). The State of Victoria is also contributing to a submission made by the Victorian School Policy and Funding Advisory Council (SPFAC), which comprises representatives from Victoria's Department of Education and Training (DET), the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and Independent Schools Victoria.

Victoria has a comprehensive Education State reform agenda, which is a model for how funding can be used to improve school performance and student outcomes. This submission provides an overview of Victoria's reform agenda which is intended to respond to the Review questions and to inform its recommendations.

Victoria's Education State agenda is improving student achievement, engagement and wellbeing. It has:

- A set of targets that define what success looks like
- A suite of evidence-based strategies to improve practice and outcomes
- A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system to measure success and inform continuous improvement.

Victoria's submission contains recommendations for national education reform and leadership, recognising the important role of Commonwealth and national actions in supporting State and Territory reforms where improved outcomes would not be achievable at the same cost or quality from States and Territories acting individually.

VICTORIA'S EDUCATION REFORM AGENDA (EARLY CHILDHOOD THROUGH TO TERTIARY)

Victoria has commenced reform across the whole learning pathway – early childhood, school and tertiary education. The Education State Early Childhood Reform Plan recognises that investment in the early years is crucial. Victoria's early childhood education reforms will help every Victorian child and family access high-quality, equitable and inclusive services, providing additional support for those who need it.

Victoria has established an integrated system to support government school improvement and better student outcomes, which is described in detail below.

Victoria's reforms in tertiary education have improved stability in the TAFE sector and are aimed at aligning training with the needs of industry and the economy. Through the Education State Skills First reforms, Victoria has restored trust, confidence and pride in the TAFE and training sector by emphasising quality, revitalising industry engagement and restoring ongoing funding.

VICTORIA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION REFORM

Research shows that learning starts at birth. A positive start in life – through a safe and supportive home environment and participation in high-quality early childhood education – contributes to success in all the educational experiences that follow.

Economist and Nobel Laureate James Heckman has shown that early childhood investment is generally less costly than later interventions during school or early adulthood, and more effective in improving social and economic participation.

Currently, Australia invests less than 0.5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product in early childhood development, which is significantly lower than the OECD average. Recognising this, the Education State Early Childhood Reform Plan sets out the vision for a system in which all children and families, whatever their background, can access high-quality, equitable and inclusive services.

The Reform Plan contains four reform directions:

1. Supporting higher quality services and reducing disadvantage in early education
2. Providing more support for parenting
3. Making early childhood services more accessible and inclusive
4. Building a better system.

The Education State Early Childhood Reform Plan highlights the strategic and continuous efforts across both early childhood and the school system to ensure that early childhood reforms are integrated with school reform.

A strong Victorian early childhood education system is key to improving outcomes for students in school and beyond.

VICTORIA'S SCHOOL EDUCATION REFORM AGENDA

Victoria's school education reform agenda focuses on improving the performance of all students and is closely aligned with the Review's themes.

Victoria has defined success for its education system in terms of its Education State Targets – a set of ambitious yet realistic goals that apply to all Victorian schools and focus on the “whole child and young person”. Victoria has a sophisticated understanding of the challenges that its education system faces. The Targets have been developed to respond to Victoria's specific context – to deliver results by focusing on the right things and learning from existing successes.

The 10 Education State Targets are focused on the “whole child and young person” as being a life-long learner and are grouped into the following categories:

- Learning for life
- Happy, healthy and resilient kids
- Breaking the link between disadvantage and outcomes
- Building pride and confidence in our schools.

Through the achievement of these targets, all Victorian students will develop the required capabilities to thrive in life and work in our rapidly changing world.

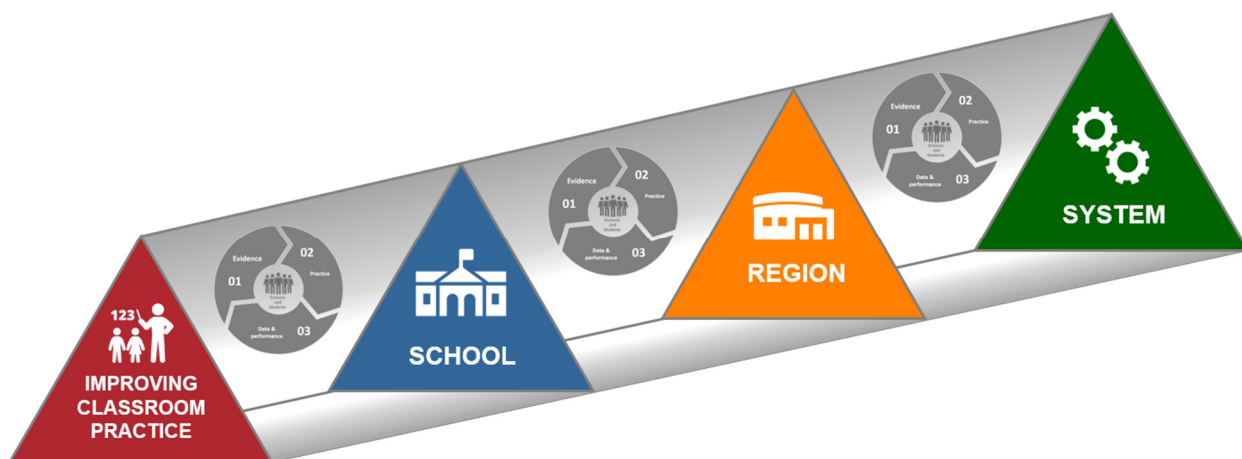
VICTORIA'S REFORM CYCLE AND INTEGRATED APPROACH

Victoria's reform efforts drive improvement at the system, regional, school and classroom level. At each level, Victoria:

- Bases its reforms on evidence of what works both nationally and internationally
- Ensures its reforms are delivered collaboratively and with fidelity
- Monitors delivery, measures progress and learns from what works
- Uses data to monitor progress and performance to learn what is working.

Victoria's Education State reform agenda adopts an integrated approach. It places improving classroom practice at the forefront of its reforms with support at the school, regional area and the system level (as seen in **Figure 1** below).

Figure 1: Victoria's integrated approach provides a line of sight between system, regional, school and classroom improvement efforts



Adapted from Gallagher, M.J. (2013) *Closing the Gap: Shared Learning and Shared Responsibility*

Supporting improvement in classroom practice

Victoria is the only state in Australia that has developed achievement standards and related mandated reporting for the four capabilities outlined in the Australian curriculum of critical and creative thinking, personal and social development, ethical understanding and intercultural understanding for all Victorian school students. The new **Victorian curriculum** recognises that students need to develop:

- Core skills (such as literacy, numeracy and science)
- 21st century skills (such as resilience, critical and creative thinking) to equip them to operate effectively in a rapidly changing world
- Holistic skills (such as arts and physical activities).

As system owners, Victoria is working to **improve the quality and status of the teaching profession** in Victoria. It is:

- Attracting and selecting the best people: for example, Victoria is raising the bar for entry into initial teacher education (ITE), which will benefit all Victorian schools
- Providing more effective and consistent early career support, such as through enabling government school graduate teachers to focus on improving and cementing strong teaching practices through reducing their scheduled duties in their first year
- Developing the capacity of experienced teachers to act as mentors through an 'Effective Mentoring Program'. Trained mentors offer individualised support for graduate teachers for up to two years
- Creating a high-performance, collaborative learning culture to support teaching excellence and inspired learners in government schools
- Building flexible career pathways across the government school workforce, such as through the new Learning Specialist role, which will be established in every school from 2018. The role will provide promotion opportunities for highly-skilled teachers and build excellence among their peers.

Victoria has drawn on international best practice to support improved teaching practice. It is focusing on the classroom to provide teachers with greater support through the provision of high quality resources.

Victoria has devised a **Literacy and Numeracy Strategy** in collaboration with experts, academics, teachers and principals. The strategy is based on what works and provides easily accessible, high quality, differentiated literacy and numeracy support. The strategy provides professional learning and tools for teachers and school leaders, including the Victorian Literacy Portal and a pedagogical model for schools.

Case study: Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in action at Officer Primary School

Officer Primary School identified a need to build consistency in teaching and learning and to strengthen staff collaboration in order to improve student outcomes. Teachers across the school were using a range of different strategies to teach literacy and numeracy, which was reflected in poor NAPLAN results for students in Year 3 and Year 5. Teachers were not consistently collecting student data and there was little to no collaboration between staff.

The school identified three key improvement areas for the leadership team to focus on:

- Developing a strong Professional Learning Team (PLT) structure and practice
- Creating a uniform approach to teaching literacy and numeracy
- Implementing a whole-school instructional model.

Teachers and staff no longer work in isolation and share the teaching and learning of all students through collaboration and collegiate discussion. PLT sessions are productive, and consistent student data is collected and analysed allowing teachers to develop meaningful teaching and learning practices. Teachers have a structure to evaluate the impact of their teaching on student results and implement more effective classroom practice.

The school's NAPLAN results are improving – the percentage of students with high growth in NAPLAN went from 21% in 2015 to 42% in 2016.

Victoria has developed **High Impact Teaching Strategies** (HITS), which provides guidance on how teachers and school leaders can implement 10 instructional practices that reliably increase student learning in their own specific school contexts. The HITS emerged from tens of thousands of studies on effective teaching practice across Australia and around the world.

Victoria has also introduced **Professional Learning Communities** (PLCs) in the government school sector to drive improvements in teacher practice through supporting collaboration amongst teachers. PLCs involve teachers working collaboratively to evaluate their teaching practice and determine how they can improve. PLCs create a culture of continuous improvement and link the learning needs of students with the professional learning and practice of teachers.

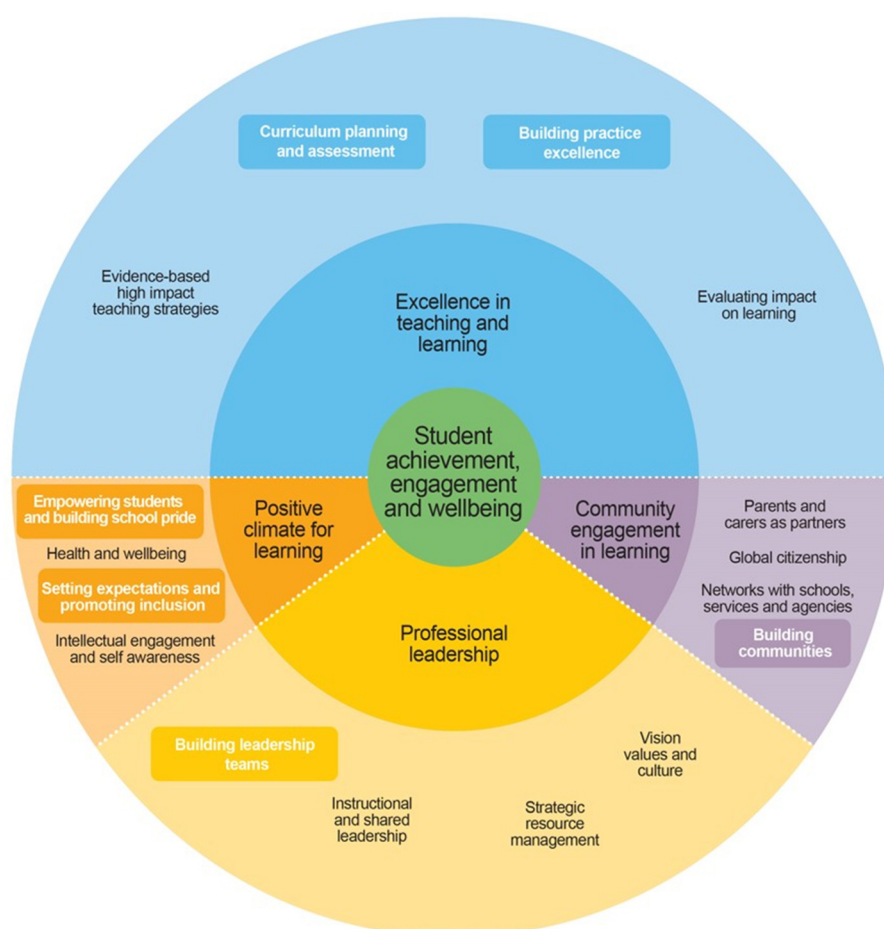
Victoria is investing in enhancing assessment of learning practice and the monitoring of student improvement over time in the government school sector. For example, the **Insight Assessment Platform** brings together several online assessment instruments and provides reporting that enables teachers to identify students' individual learning needs based on a range of assessment data and track students' growth throughout their primary and secondary schooling. Victoria sees the further development of digital assessment tools as a priority for supporting the improvement of student learning outcomes.

Driving improvement at the school level

Victoria's **Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO)** (**Figure 2** below) is its central school improvement tool and is underpinned by a strong evidence base. The FISO is designed to support schools to improve student achievement, engagement and wellbeing by providing priorities that research indicates have the greatest impact on student outcomes.

Figure 2: Victoria's Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO) is Victoria's evidence based framework to lift student outcomes and build system capacity

Improvement model



Schools select their own priority areas from the FISO based on their specific contexts and develop related school improvement plans. This includes working through:

- The [Improvement Model](#) has four state-wide improvement priorities - excellence in teaching and learning; community engagement in learning; professional leadership; and positive climate for learning – and related implementation initiatives.
- The Improvement Model is supported by the [Continua of Practice for School Improvement](#). The Continua assist principals to identify areas that require attention by articulating proficiency levels (emerging, evolving, embedding and excelling) for each of the improvement priorities.
- The [Improvement Cycle](#) supports schools to diagnose their key school improvement challenges; prioritise and set goals for improvement; develop and plan their improvement strategies; and implement and monitor their improvement.

- [Improvement Measures](#) provide schools with a reliable instrument to evaluate and monitor the effect of their self-improvement efforts on student outcomes.

To implement their school improvement priorities (based on the FISO), government schools are required to develop:

- **School Strategic Plans (SSP)** are based on a school's self-evaluation against the FISO and are underpinned by evidence and data analysis. SSP facilitate schools focusing on one or two evidence-based improvement strategies for the forthcoming four years.
- **Annual Implementation Plans** provide a detailed plan on the incremental steps school will take to implement their SSP over the next 12 months.
- **Professional Development Plans** for individual school staff are aligned with their role implementing their school's AIP and provide accountability and support for teachers in regard to their roles improving student outcomes.

Victoria recognises that data drives performance and so it has established strong data collection and analysis mechanisms at the school level. For example, its Panorama reports have detailed school level data and are used by schools to support their strategic planning and by DET to provide differentiated support to schools through its regional Learning Places model.

Regional support for schools

Victoria has developed a support and intervention model at the regional level – **Learning Places** – because international best practice highlights the need for a strong mediating layer to support school improvement. This place-based support includes the provision of:

- Regional strategic advisors – Senior Education Improvement Leaders (SEILs) – who provide critical leadership in the provision of stronger, more direct support to schools. SEILs partner with principals in a local network, coach school leaders on strategic planning and support them to implement school improvement.
- Student Support Services Officers, such as psychologists, counsellors and speech pathologists

Victoria has mechanisms to foster collaboration between government schools, such as through **Principal Communities of Practice**, which are chaired by Principal Network Chairs and bring principals together from the same geographic area to collaborate on improving teaching and learning in their schools.

The **Regional Performance Framework** and **Regional Performance Reviews** (RPR) drive improvement by providing regional level data on government school progress against the Education State Targets. The RPR provide a forum for DET leaders to discuss this data and agree actions to address any performance issues. DET leaders then implement, report on and monitor the agreed actions through a Communities of Practice approach.

System level improvement

Victoria has undertaken significant reforms at the system level to drive equity, support excellence and assess outcomes. The reforms are underpinned by evidence of what works in other high performing education systems. Victoria has:

- Used emerging research of comparable systems
- Received expert advice from international education leaders
- Established the Minister's Expert Panel to provide advice on the strengths, challenges and opportunities to improve the learning and development outcomes of students and school performance in Victoria.

Victoria has made significant investments in fostering **excellence** at the system level and **building leadership capacity** in order to improve student learning; enhance teaching; and support continuous school improvement. After teaching quality, school leadership is the most important school contributor to student learning. A growing body of international evidence points to investment in the 'middle tier' leaders, as system owners Victoria is building the leadership capacity of school leaders through:

- The **Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership**, where leaders in primary, secondary and early childhood education from both government and non-government schools can develop their leadership capacity (see below)
- Developing SEILs and Education Improvement Leaders (EILs) to build capacity of government school principals.

Case study: Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership is developing leaders

Bastow takes a strategic approach to supporting, building, and expanding the capacity and capability of leaders, as well as identifying, encouraging and inspiring leadership potential in others.

Each Bastow program focuses on a specific career stage by clearly defining what is required to thoroughly prepare leaders for their role and by providing focused, personalised and explicit support for their leadership development needs, preferences and contexts. The programs support educators to build their knowledge, skills and capacities and form networks and collaborate with others.



Victoria is fostering excellence in teaching and learning at the system level through investment in initiatives such as:

- **Tech Schools**, which use leading technology and innovation to deliver the advanced education that Victorian school students need to flourish in our rapidly changing world. They deliver programs to teachers and students in both government and non-government schools through partnerships with tertiary institutions and industry, which enable them to take technical skills back to their schools.

Case study: Monash Tech School is a high-tech learning environment with education programs that link with local industry to deliver real world learning. Students from twelve partner schools can access the Tech School throughout the year for specialised programs that enhance the programs schools provide.

To prepare students for the jobs of the future, the Monash Tech School has an education focus aligned to industries that are predicted to experience strong economic and employment growth such as pharmaceuticals, new energy, and medical technologies.

Through the Tech School students have access to state of the art technology which is used alongside design thinking to solve problems. In design thinking, students apply empathy by putting themselves in the shoes of those people they aim to help. Then they brainstorm, design and prototype — over and over.

Victoria has established the Victorian School Building Authority to lead the delivery of its ambitious infrastructure program and support modern teaching methods and 21st century education needs. This includes delivering 56 new schools, more than 1000 education infrastructure upgrades and over 30 early childhood infrastructure projects. Victoria is creating greater community engagement with education through encouraging the use of shared facilities and creating education precincts, which are transforming education by linking education providers – from early childhood through to tertiary institutions – in priority locations. Victoria's education precincts are:

- Giving students greater resources and broader curriculum choices
- Tackling education challenges and underperformance through holistic approaches
- Pooling resources of local schools, councils, industry, universities, health and social welfare providers
- Encouraging community ownership of agreed approaches to improving student outcomes.

Victoria has established a number of targeted programs and strategies to break the cycle of disadvantage. Victoria is the only jurisdiction to offer alternative pathways with two secondary qualifications – the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning and the Victorian Certificate of Education – which contributes to Victoria's strong school completion rate. Victoria is providing **equity funding** to address low educational achievement levels amongst disadvantaged students. This includes:

- Providing funding for every student from a disadvantaged background, with more funding for students in more disadvantaged schools
- **Catch Up loading** for students who were below the National Minimum Standard in NAPLAN when they entered secondary school.

Case studies: How schools are using their equity funding

Schools are using their equity funding on initiatives in the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO), for example:

- A school in western Victoria used its equity funding to establish a trauma program to conduct professional learning for staff working with students who have experienced trauma and neglect. The school has seen a significant reduction in the number of behaviour incidents in Term 1, 2017 and a significant change in teacher language around students impacted by trauma.
- A school in northern Melbourne used its equity funding to engage the Australian Research Council to deliver the Senior Science Learning Program. The funding and program has led to a 70 per cent increase in girls engaged in Senior Science including Physics and Chemistry.

Victoria has also established:

- **LOOKOUT Education Support Centres** across the state to help more than 6000 school-aged children and young people in out-of-home care complete their education
- **Navigator** – a program that supports 12 to 17 year olds who are disengaged from education or at risk of being disengaged to reconnect with their education.

At the system level Victoria has robust mechanisms to monitor, implement and assess its progress against the Education State Targets. For example, Victoria measures the progress of government schools against its reform agenda through an **Outcomes Framework** and reports publicly on its progress against the Education State Targets.

VICTORIA'S EDUCATION REFORM IS REALISING POSITIVE RESULTS

In the second year of Education State reforms, data and evidence indicates early signs of progress in government schools at the student, school and system level. At the system level:

- System coherence has improved, particularly in regard to schools' approaches to improvement through the FISO, strategic planning processes and a common language of reform
- The FISO is facilitating collaboration across schools and the overwhelming majority of principals (91 per cent) agree that there is a clear line of sight between the School Strategic Plan, the School Improvement Plan and staff's Professional Development Plans.

At the school level:

- More schools are using whole-school approaches to teaching and learning strategies
- Principals are prioritising resources for school improvement more consistently
- Teachers are more aware of the strategic direction of their school.

At the student level:

- Student voice is being recognised as an integral component of the school improvement cycle
- Disengaged students are re-engaging through the targeted Navigator program.

Victoria's challenge is to continue to implement effectively and evaluate its reform efforts, learn from its experiences and support continuous improvement in order to achieve its Education State Targets.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Victoria is developing its future reform agenda, which will build upon current work across the system to drive improvements in student achievement, engagement and wellbeing.

We know that teaching quality has the single largest impact on student outcomes so this will continue to be the focus of Victoria's reform agenda. Victoria will continue to support improved student learning, and in particular, teaching practice, at the classroom level, with supporting reforms at the school, regional and system level.

Opportunities for national education reform

In a system of 2,200 schools across the State, implementing reform requires a sustained and focused effort, with all levels of the system playing their role to achieve a shared objective.

As such, Victoria is focusing on a small number of high-impact reforms and doing these well. Victoria is currently two years into implementing its Education State reform agenda which seeks to lift student outcomes and achieve the Education State Targets.

This review provides an opportunity to identify how existing national and state education reform efforts can be complemented and built upon. Victoria seeks to work multilaterally where there is a clear rationale that national action will have the biggest impact on improving outcomes.

RATIONALE FOR STATE-BASED VERSUS FEDERAL RESPONSES

Both State and Commonwealth governments are involved in the funding and oversight of the Australian education system. But it is important national reform is consistent with the priorities of States and Territories as the majority funders of Australian schooling and operators of the largest schooling sector. The Commonwealth's role should be commensurate with its relatively modest level of investment in the system. The new Commonwealth funding arrangements introduced in 2017 cement the Commonwealth's role as a minority funder of government schools, putting an arbitrary cap of 20 per cent on its funding contribution. States and Territories, in close collaboration with parents and communities, provide over 70 per cent of all funding and are integral to the running of Australia's schools. They are therefore best placed to drive school and system improvement.

In certain circumstances there are advantages to developing national approaches to addressing a problem, as there are also situations where there are advantages to developing state-based solutions under a federalist model.

What are the advantages of states developing their own approaches?

There are a number of key advantages to having a federalist approach to reform options, where the states develop their own solutions to problems. These benefits include:

- **Allowing states the flexibility to tailor approaches to the requirements of their specific communities.** The States, in their role as system managers, best understand the key challenges faced in their school system. They also possess the expertise in supporting and implementing change within the devolved system of school delivery. In many cases, flexibility in the design and implementation of school reforms supports the delivery of effective solutions.

- **Competitive federalism allows for policy experiments to lead to innovations that can spread from one jurisdiction to another as their effectiveness is proven.** States can develop, trial and implement solutions to emerging problems and issues. There may be a role for the Commonwealth to facilitate the sharing of learnings across jurisdictions in this federalist model.

Historically Victoria has led the way on a number of important initiatives that have been adapted and adopted by other States and Territories. This includes increasing the number of decisions devolved to the school level and implementing a resource allocation approach that considers the needs of students. As outlined above, Victoria is undertaking significant reforms to improve student outcomes through the Education State agenda.

When can national approaches add value?

There are cases where there are additional benefits that can be delivered by a national approach.

Effectively designed and implemented national reforms can deliver additional benefits, especially in cases where:

- **Action is required at the Commonwealth level.** There may be legislative changes or other comparative evaluation mechanisms required at the Commonwealth level to support specific policy outcomes.
- **A coordinated national response can deliver additional benefits.** A national approach can deliver benefits through increased scale. This includes cost reductions through economies of scale, as well as increased benefits through a more comprehensive, national level evidence base that allows greater insights.

There are recent examples of initiatives that have benefited from national approaches. For example, a national approach to NAPLAN online is enabling a cost-effective software solution for all jurisdictions and all sectors to deliver the NAPLAN test in a digital form.

The rationale for any proposed national reform opportunities should identify the proposed approach to implementation (be it through action at the Commonwealth level or a coordinated national response), and how this approach will deliver additional benefits that would otherwise not be realised.

National education agencies like ACARA, AITSL and ESA can often play a key role in leading collaborative approaches to national education policy reform that draw on the expertise of all jurisdictions and sectors. It is critical that in the delivery of any national approaches that a few key governance principles are adhered to, including:

- Clear and collaborative mechanisms to set direction through clearly defined objectives
- Having the appropriate governance arrangements in place that ensure that the interests of all stakeholders are considered, and maintain the appropriate level of real and perceived independence for the delivery organisation, including consideration of the location of the entity
- The delivery organisation being properly resourced and having a degree of funding certainty.

Finally, equity is essential to ensuring long term progress towards excellence for all Australian students. This needs to be underpinned by a truly collaborative effort, with all levels of government demonstrating a commitment to equity for all students, regardless of their demographic background or the type of school they attend. The Commonwealth Government's decision to arbitrarily set fixed percentage funding shares for different school sectors represents a move away from a joint commitment to achieving equity and excellence for all Australian students.

Themes for a potential national reform agenda

Any proposed changes to the approach to this system need to consider the costs and benefits of national and federalist state-based solutions, having regard to the roles and responsibilities of all parties within this system. This includes the role of the States as system managers of the government school system. Victoria has identified the significant work it has underway across the themes identified in this review and highlighted areas where it believes there may be benefits from further federal approaches.

Victoria has identified eight reform options which are described in detail below. Commonwealth action could drive improvements to the quality of and access to early childhood education and care. Both Commonwealth action and a national responses could help improve the profile and standing of the teaching profession. National responses could be developed and implemented to provide teachers with access to quality digital classroom assessment tools, better prepare school leaders, support learning approaches that engage with industry and employers, strengthen the national education evidence base, and develop and achieve new national education goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIONAL EDUCATION REFORM

1. Improve access to quality early childhood education and care to achieve educational excellence

The most effective and efficient use of funding to improve student outcomes is to invest early.

Strengthening early childhood education will improve student outcomes in schools. Investing in high-quality, play-based learning has a strong positive impact on children's outcomes, including student outcomes in schools, especially for children experiencing disadvantage. The return on investment in the early years is high because of the developmental opportunities that exist in the first years of life.

Many foundational skills for lifelong learning develop substantially before school. For example, ages three to five are a window of opportunity for dramatic growth in executive function and self-regulation: the ability to hold onto and work with information, focus thinking, filter distractions, and switch gears. These are the essential foundations for future learning, essential to building a workforce ready for the jobs of the future.

It is critical that the Commonwealth is a partner in early childhood education, just like in school and tertiary education. The Commonwealth, in partnership with states and territories, should deliver a system that is sustainable, equitable, delivers excellence and is expanded to support children's learning from a younger age.

Any partnership with the Commonwealth must include ongoing investment from the Commonwealth towards existing national arrangements for universal access to 600 hours of preschool for all children in the year before school, and the National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care, moving away from current short-term arrangements.

The Commonwealth and States and Territories should also explore funding arrangements that more effectively address the impacts of disadvantage and support higher quality services. National funding arrangements could treat early childhood education in a similar way that we treat school education, with needs based funding including additional loadings for identified categories of educational disadvantage (similar to the Victorian newly introduced school readiness funding).

Early childhood is particularly important for children who start from a position of disadvantage. If children start behind, they often stay behind. Victorian children who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains measured in the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) are half as likely to achieve in the top two NAPLAN reading bands in Year 3 and even less likely in Year 5.

The quality of early childhood education is critical. Research has shown that the poor quality of early childhood education and care services in low socio-economic areas leads to children being 3.3 to 4.9 months behind their peers in more advantaged areas.

The Commonwealth and States and Territories need to commit to shared investment in educator quality and continuous improvement that builds on the successes of the National Quality Framework. Evidence from the University of Melbourne's Effective Early Education Experiences for Kids (E4Kids) study shows that the quality of adult-child interactions makes the most difference to children's outcomes and is still not being delivered in the vast majority of settings, and that more disadvantaged areas have the lowest quality. Continuing to build the quality and standing of the workforce that delivers early childhood education – in both pre-service training and in service professional development – is essential to improving quality and in particular the intentional teaching practices that make the most difference for children.

Finally, excellence in early childhood education recognises that children learn from birth. Expanding education to a younger age group, when children's minds are most receptive, is demonstrated to improve outcomes in schools and in life. The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) study in the United Kingdom found that at age 16, students who had attended between two and three years of kindergarten obtained higher scores in English and maths compared to their peers who had not attended kindergarten, with effect sizes equivalent to over half a year of learning.

Senior officials in all States and Territories have commissioned a *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions* to examine the effectiveness of quality early childhood interventions. The intention is that this report will complement the report for this Review and will inform discussions on the role of early childhood initiatives in improving school performance and student achievement.

Without a high quality, universal system nationally, there will be inequities in childhood development, which has implications for school, employment and health outcomes.

2. Provide teachers with access to quality digital classroom assessment tools

There is scope for new, consistent, high quality and easily deliverable formative assessment tools to help drive improvement in the outcomes of students in classrooms across Australia by providing teachers with access to real-time achievement data to inform their teaching.

The most effective intervention strategy for teachers to improve student learning is to provide accurate and timely feedback on student performance. To do this, teachers need both expertise in diagnosis, intervention and evaluation and access to analytic data. With access to appropriate data, teachers can make timely evidence based diagnoses of the learning attainment of individual students and apply the appropriate interventions and support required.

Victoria has responded to this challenge by establishing a consolidated set of existing assessment tools through a centrally managed online platform for Victorian schools. The Insight Assessment platform currently hosts a small suite of tools, targeting early years literacy and numeracy, with the intention of additional assessment tools across other domains in the future. The platform includes reporting analytics for each assessment instrument with the goal of providing longitudinal monitoring of performance across a range of domains within a singular context. Most importantly, this platform and its assessments are supported by a school engagement team, dedicated to training teachers and school administrators in the effective use of the assessment tools and data for improving learning.

While state and territory curriculum and assessment authorities provide some quality courses and curriculum and assessment products and services for teachers, these are expensive to develop and maintain, especially for smaller systems. Through pooling our resources and sharing our expertise in assessment there is an opportunity to develop a suite of high quality, reliable tools that would be otherwise too expensive for systems to afford alone. The imminent launch of Australia's first national online assessment platform also provides a baseline national infrastructure for equitable access to digital assessment.

Currently, there is uneven access to validated formative assessment tools across Australia. Instead, teachers often need to rely on a mix of locally developed (often by individual teachers) idiosyncratic tools that do not provide the most reliable measure of absolute or relative learning progress. This limits our teachers' ability to measure and monitor student achievement against key skills.

The development of new assessment instruments in common, industry standard formats will give the greatest ability for their flexible deployment by jurisdictions to most effectively and efficiently meet the needs of their schools and students. Assessments could be delivered via the emerging online national assessment platform, or implemented through established channels within jurisdictions (e.g. Insight). While there is power in having universally delivered assessments, there needs to be scope and flexibility for appropriate customisation and alignment to local curriculum and reporting requirements.

However, we know from past experience that collaboration at this scale can create its own inefficiencies and take longer to deliver than a system might be able to deliver alone. To ensure the most efficient process and to have maximum impact, any new national diagnostic tools must:

- Be developed in genuine partnership between curriculum authorities. There is scope to leverage these existing forums and relationships to expand their remit to include implementation of new classroom assessments using a collaborative approach to draw together expertise from jurisdictions across the country
- Address key gaps in the assessment offerings in schools and be aligned to the Australian Curriculum but mindful and responsive to local curriculum and assessment need
- Ensure that new assessment instruments are not imposed on schools, but rather be of a quality that draws schools to their implementation
- Have a robust regime and associated resources to support teachers to use the tool and, more importantly, the information they provide to inform high quality teaching and learning in every classroom
- Have a long-term commitment from all parties to ongoing maintenance and content development
- Be developed according to an agreed set of standards that ensure valid and reliable assessments are delivered
- Enable data analysis to inform future priorities for curriculum and assessment
- Enable evaluation at both the school and system level so that improvement can be ongoing.

A further opportunity exists to develop a national compliance process that would allow for evaluation and certification of existing commercial formative assessment tools against specific criteria. For example, alignment to Victorian (or

Australian) Curriculum; levels of difficulty; quality of items; diagnostic feedback; reporting; and alignment to other assessments. Assessment tools could be rated against key criteria and required to meet agreed national benchmarks to obtain certification.

Such a certification process could articulate a baseline level of quality combined with a detailed set of descriptors against the key criteria to provide clear signalling to educators, the market and help drive improvement in assessment tool quality.

3. Build the profile and standing of the teaching profession

Over the past few years, the Commonwealth, States and Territories have been focused on developing and implementing strategies to lift the professional standing of teachers and improve the quality of teaching. In particular, the Council of Australian Government's ministerial council for education (Education Council) has:

- Agreed to introduce a national literacy and numeracy test for initial teacher education (ITE) students to ensure all pre-service teachers are within the top 30 per cent of the population in personal literacy and numeracy (September 2015)
- Endorsed new accreditation standards and procedures for ITE programs to ensure greater rigour, transparency and consistency in the accreditation process (December 2015)
- Agreed to develop a national teacher workforce data strategy to build the evidence base about effective initial teacher education and use data to inform teacher workforce planning (April 2016)
- Released national teacher induction guidelines to ensure graduates are classroom-ready and increase retention (July 2016).

Any new action in this area must not divert our attention from the successful implementation of the existing reforms. At the same time, there is an opportunity to build on the current national momentum to improve teaching quality through Commonwealth or coordinated action to:

- Improve existing teachers' continued learning and development through access to high quality university courses in workforce priority subject areas, including part-time study opportunities
- Increase the supply of high-calibre ITE students through a national marketing campaign and removing strict prior tertiary learning requirements where students can demonstrate high levels of subject proficiency
- Improve pre-service teacher preparation through improved course quality, course content and placement experiences.

Victorian market research has indicated that there are key supply challenges because:

- ITE enrollments do not meet school workforce subject area demands (such as STEM secondary subject areas), particularly in regional and remote areas
- There are strict prior tertiary learning requirements (for major and secondary method areas) for ITE enrolments that disincentivise high quality career-changes due to onerous additional study requirements prior to ITE entry
- The expertise and skill of quality teachers is undervalued in the community, resulting in teaching being perceived as a low status profession.

To increase the supply of high-calibre ITE students the Commonwealth should:

- Raise the profile and status of teaching through a national job value campaign, pitching the benefits of the profession and progression opportunities (with associated remuneration) for high-performing early career teachers (e.g. Lead Teacher roles)
- Remove barriers to commencing teacher training for high-calibre ITE students (particularly for career changers) through a national reformed approach to ITE entry requirements (in particular, for secondary ITE programs), moving away from strict prior tertiary learning requirements (for major and secondary method areas), and toward a more flexible model of establishing relevant existing capabilities. For example, to enroll in an ITE with a mathematics specialisation, prospective students could sit a mathematics proficiency assessment to determine whether they have suitable content knowledge. The Commonwealth should move away from 'counting' prior university subject credits when determining eligibility for subject specialisation.

To improve pre-service teacher preparation the Commonwealth should:

- Address skills gaps in areas new teachers feel least prepared and have a demonstrated impact on improving student outcomes (e.g. behavioural management, student engagement and parent/community engagement)
- Improve support for schools and teaching students on placement.

4. Elements for effective principal preparation

School leadership has the second largest impact on student outcomes in the school, behind teaching quality. Great school leaders can have a significant effect on student outcomes because their leadership affects the environment and conditions in which teachers teach and students learn.

The role of the school principal is complex, evolving and situational, based strongly on the context in which they lead. Globally, school leaders are facing challenges with rising expectations for schools and schooling. In Victoria, the principal role has expanded from a managerial position to one that includes a sharper focus on learning, heightened community expectations, implementation of policy reforms and strategic resource allocation.

Given these challenges and the influence that effective leaders have on student outcomes it is imperative that system managers have a shared focus on ensuring all of our school leaders, not just principals, are thoroughly prepared for, and continually developed in their roles.

Through intergovernmental cooperation, the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments developed the Australian Professional Standard for Principals. Since 2011, the Standard has provided a national framework for what principals should know, understand and do to succeed as a principal or school leader in different or changing school contexts. This helps to guide development for aspirant principals and for principals in the role.

In May 2016 the Commonwealth proposed that all new principals should be certified through a new national certification process 'before they were eligible for permanent appointment as a principal in a government or non-government school'. Victoria notes that the Commonwealth Government has since tasked AITSL with developing 'pre-principal certification'. AITSL has confirmed it will design a national 'voluntary process for assessing if an individual is ready to step into a principal role'. Victoria supports the policy intent of the Commonwealth's proposal, that is, to ensure aspiring principals have the requisite skills and knowledge to be effective leaders. However, Victoria does not support a centralised or mandated national certification process as a precondition to principal appointment. Any consideration of formal prerequisites for employment as a principal in government schools should be considered at a local level by States and Territories as employers of principals and system managers.

Since 2004, the Victorian Government has invested heavily in developing the leadership capabilities of principals, aspirant leaders, leadership teams and teachers in government schools. More recently, the establishment of the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership (Bastow) has advanced leadership development across the state. This includes the September 2017 introduction of a Graduate Certificate of Principal Preparation to prepare teachers for their first principal position.

Furthermore, consistent with AITSL, Victoria agrees that there is an opportunity to develop a mechanism that allows aspiring principals to assess their readiness for the principal role. This is why Bastow and the Victorian Department of Education have commissioned The University of Melbourne to develop an assessment process that will:

- Enable professional recognition of aspiring principals who demonstrate an adequate level of competence
- Provide an evidential basis on which to recognise accomplished performance and readiness for the principal role
- Provide a means for aspiring principals from all pathways to evaluate their readiness for the role and identify their developmental needs
- Support Victoria to realise its Education State vision for every school to be led by highly capable, and appropriately qualified principals.

Victoria is concerned that a Commonwealth mandated national certification process risks duplicating, undermining and/or delaying State and Territory reforms and investment in developing local leadership capability. Instead, Victoria considers systems and sectors are best placed to make decisions around principal readiness, including consideration of how any national model developed by AITSL would be implemented at a local level.

5. Support a more relevant and experiential approach to learning through engagement with industry and employers

Victoria considers that there is potential for greater national collaboration in preparing students for the workforce, through greater engagement with industry and employers in the education system. Victoria has been working closely with industry bodies and employers regarding the qualifications and capabilities of students who have recently graduated and entered the workforce. These discussions highlighted that:

- It is becoming increasingly important for students to attain skills that are complementary to high-quality academic skills, such as innovative thinking, relationship management and collaboration
- Industry and employers should be closely connected to the debate about which skills are most important at the school level. Indeed, industry and employers have a strong interest to help ensure that the curriculum incorporates modern skill requirements, and also to help schools to bring real world problems into the classroom.

There is an opportunity for experiential learning to become part of mainstream education, with the approach based on evidence gained through small-scale, systematic, innovative programs with industry and community. This could include:

- Supplying industry projects from national businesses for experiential learning
- Providing input about emerging (and declining) skills needs.

Recent programs have seen industry providing experiential learning experiences for students, such as KIOSC (the Knox Innovation, Opportunity and Sustainability Centre), which aims to develop skills for the workplace such as communication and information technology.

The results from these programs have been positive. Participating students:

- Acquired a base knowledge of the skills required for future employment and are more aware of their school-to-work options
- Feel more positive about, and are more motivated by, their education
- Appreciate the relevance of skills such as teamwork and high-order thinking.

A consistent recommendation from trial projects, such as the AIG Strengthening School-Industry STEM Skills Partnerships Project, was the promotion of stronger partnerships between schools and industry through development and implementation of strategies to increase the number of partners and resources available to schools and industries. The AIG Project also called out the requirement to 'establish a national forum that will facilitate dialogue between industry and schools in STEM education, thus enabling best practice to be shared.' Victoria agrees that this would provide a consistent approach to a common goal, which can subsequently be enforced at jurisdictional levels.

Development points from the programs include:

- Difficulty in navigating insurance payments and risks involved with bringing students on site
- Lack of school capacity to physically and financially cover staff who are working with students
- Ensuring that students and entities get the most out of the program by developing industry staff to maximise student experience
- Developing teachers and school staff to carry the lessons learned from industry back into the classroom, allowing for a stronger student career advisory framework
- Increasing program relevance further by linking them to skills that are either lacking or developing on a national scale, such as new digital technologies.

Building the skills that students need to flourish in the workplace is an issue common to all states, and many companies and industry groups operate across state borders. Therefore, there may be room for the Commonwealth to establish a mechanism (e.g. a national forum) to facilitate dialogue and sharing of best practice between national employers and industry bodies, jurisdictions, and schools. This should be broader than STEM but could leverage the existing STEM forum.

This mechanism could include:

- Explaining to industry and schools the value of closer collaboration (e.g. how industry can benefit from working collectively to improve students' attainment of relevant skills)
- Developing a national approach that assists employers and industry bodies to understand and be able to engage with schools
- Assistance to facilitate collaboration between schools and industry and successful practice examples for both employers and schools
- Establishing a limited liability framework to help schools and entities overcome insurance hurdles, and/or explaining how risk of liability can be overcome.

6. Explore development of a national measure of student learning gain

Measuring student learning gain is important to understanding how much students grow their learning over time. A range of measures are currently in use to measure student learning gain but there is no clearly identified measure for assessing student growth from varying starting points over progressive years.

Two common measures of gain are absolute gain and relative gain. Both measures have strengths and limitations that warrant further consideration. For example, absolute gain measures compare school level growth in terms of the change in score from one test to another. This does not take into account student starting points and learning growth curves – students with lower absolute scores often show significant improvements in score despite poorer results overall. In contrast, relative learning gain ranks student progress compared to their peers with the same starting point. While this provides a summary of the growth profile of students within a school, it does not provide a system level picture of improvement nor does it allow for comparison of growth over time.

There is scope for the Commonwealth to work with States and Territories to test and further develop approaches to measuring student learning gain for the purpose of understanding the impact of assessment and teaching practice at the school and system level.

7. Strengthen the national education evidence base

Evidence-based practices are essential to improving student outcomes. There is an opportunity to support better use of data and research to identify areas for improvement, identify ways to improve outcomes and demonstrate the impact of policies on student performance.

There is already significant work across the wide range of bodies in Australia currently contributing to the evidence base for effective school education – including academic research in Australian universities and think tanks, program evaluations undertaken by system managers, and research and analysis undertaken across departments of education. However, there is a substantial opportunity to harness, consolidate and curate local and international evidence to improve and spread evidence-based practice across the system. This could include:

- A more planned approach to the targeting and sequencing of research undertaken
- Supporting a systemic approach to research programs by individual organisations so that research into areas of high educational returns are not inhibited by funding availability, data availability and personal interest
- Better utilizing existing sources of data, such as NAPLAN results, to uncover what works and where
- Improving formal collaboration between researchers and practitioners
- Effectively communicating and operationalising the research for practitioners in the system.

Harnessing the opportunities identified above would be supported by a national approach to:

- Determining a research agenda and administering grants to other organisations to undertake research in accordance with this agenda
- Increasing access to data sets for researchers through a data clearinghouse
- Translating research from other organisations into guidance for teachers, schools and teacher training courses
- Offering evidence-based professional development for teachers and support for school leaders
- Undertaking an in-house research program.

An effective national approach to the education evidence could deliver benefits across the education system. Teachers would benefit from having access to evidence-based teaching supports to support classroom practice. System managers will have improved visibility of the impact of different system design choices on student outcomes. Researchers will benefit from a clear and coordinated research agenda and improved access to data. Ultimately these elements should contribute to improved outcomes for students.

Victoria considers that this approach would require:

- Clear objectives being set through a collaborative forum such as Education Council
- Tasking an appropriate organisation to deliver on the identified objectives
- The organisation engaged must be structured, governed and empowered to deliver the objectives independent of influence from all levels of government and with the confidence of stakeholders
- Proper resourcing and support.

One successful model is the Education Endowment Foundation in the UK. The Foundation is an independent charity, partly funded through a grant from the UK Department of Education. The Foundation generates evidence of what works to improve teaching and learning through funding rigorous trials of promising programs and approaches. The Foundation then supports schools to implement evidence based approaches to improve learning outcomes, including through the provision of teaching resources.

Harnessing this effort would require all those interested in improvements in school education to contribute. A condition of public funding – for universities, independent researchers, schools and systems – could be participation in and contribution to the national evidence base for effective teaching and school practices.

8. Develop a shared focus and commitment to achieving national education goals

There is an opportunity to facilitate Australia's education improvement through articulating our shared aspirations, objectives and priorities in a renewed national education reform program.

National, State and Territory governments have a shared responsibility in setting the direction for national education reform and monitoring performance against our shared priorities. In addition, as part of their role as system managers state and territory governments are responsible for developing and monitoring their own local reform priorities.

Currently, national priorities are articulated across a number of different policy documents, including agreed national goals in the Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians (2008), key performance measures in the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia (2015) and agreed COAG targets in previous intergovernmental agreements for national school funding arrangements.

The Commonwealth Government's withdrawal from existing national funding agreements and the Australian Parliament's passage of amendments to the *Australian Education Act 2013* necessitate new national agreement to our shared reform priorities. These agreements should provide long-term funding certainty for systems and support a joint commitment to long-term policy reform. In the case of early childhood, the Commonwealth's short-term focus on the national quality agenda and universal access agreements has created funding uncertainty for states and undermines a strategic national focus on reform.

National goals should reflect national priorities and maintain attention and effort on issues of national interest. In contrast, State and Territory governments should set goals and targets that reflect their local priorities. States and Territories are system managers and are in a better position to choose targets given that they have more information and knowledge about what is achievable and what is aspirational. For example, Victoria's Education State Targets are ambitious and directly reflect our goal to have great schools, great teachers and to give every child the best chance in life. The targets make clear what Victoria wants to achieve from Education State investments, and give schools direction on what we are aiming to achieve for all students.

In terms of accountability for the achievement of national goals, at various times Commonwealth governments have sought to tie funding to specific benchmarks or targets and impose onerous reporting burdens on schools and system managers. For example, in May 2016 the current Commonwealth Government indicated it would impose accountability requirements to 'hold State and Territory governments to account for distributing funding according to need and demonstrating how they are applying it to best practice'. This is symbolic of this Government's increasing adoption of a coercive model of federalism and fails to recognise States as sovereign in their own sphere. With a constitutional responsibility for education, States are already publicly and politically accountable for education expenditure within their own jurisdictions, and more importantly, the quality and efficiency of the services the State delivers and outcomes achieved. Consistent with the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations 2011 and the principle of cooperative federalism, national agreements should not include financial or other input controls imposed on service delivery by States and Territories.