



Excellence in Teaching and Learning for All Through Resourcing, Accountability and Support

**AEU Discussion Paper
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On 27 August Prime Minister Rudd announced that the government *“will pursue a further National Policy Partnership with the States and Territories to tackle underachievement in our schools.”*

He went on to say that *“there is no ‘one size fits all’ answer to school underperformance – but we can give schools more control over their performance and more support in achieving better outcomes.*

We can provide more funding and greater discretion to principals and local school communities to address their specific local conditions.

To make a real difference, we anticipate that governments will need to commit to additional investments of around \$500,000 per year for an average sized school.

I want to see these resources beginning to be deployed in our most disadvantaged schools within the next 12 months.”

Recognising that education is the most powerful transformational agent available to provide all children with a chance to pursue the widest range of opportunities in life, the resourcing of our schools must be structured to achieve excellence and equity, constantly striving to increase expectations and standards in our endeavour to achieve an equality in learning outcomes for all students.

Whilst the details, and in particular the total number of schools to be included in such a program, remain unknown, the Australian Education Union welcomes a firm commitment to this level of investment into individual public schools.

In striving for excellence and equity in teaching and learning for all, the development of strengthened targeted programs aimed at addressing key equity areas is a priority objective for the profession.

In recent decades, politicians and media commentators have talked of the growing gap between rich and poor in Australian society. It is widely acknowledged, but rarely has any government initiated public education policy to address the resultant social dislocation, alienation and disempowerment felt by so many of our young people. Too many Australians live in circumstances where the social, economic and political obstacles to personal fulfilment and advancement loom large. This is evident in locations ranging from suburban public housing estates in capital cities to isolated rural towns.

Professional responsibility is a source of pride for teachers. Staff in our most disadvantaged schools work with great dedication and commitment in a context that denies them the means to markedly redress the manifestations of socio-economic disadvantage. Pressure, tension and stress are constant features of working life in these schools, while students are denied equal opportunity.

The circumstances and opportunities in these school communities differ markedly from those available in the relatively more advantaged communities. This inequity within public education requires greater funding

support. Put simply concentrations of disadvantage need a concentration of help.

An additional \$500 000 per year to an average sized school would certainly support the achievement of significant, 'deep impact' improvements in the quality of the teaching / learning environment. If this funding were targeted at increased staffing it could mean an additional 5 teachers to provide appropriate intervention and remedial programs for individual students. It could also allow for reduced teaching loads for beginning teachers to access a comprehensive mentoring program and / or create additional leadership positions in schools offering more experience, leadership density and therefore support for all.

The program should be targeted to schools exhibiting high support needs on indicators such as student behaviour and attendance, student learning outcomes, student turnover and retention and socio-economic disadvantage. Consideration should be given to the degree to which schooling was impacted by its location within low SES public housing estates. Experience tells us that these schools would have high numbers / percentages of beginning teachers (less than three years experience).

The successful development and construction of such a program will require the active participation and involvement of key parent and community groups. A genuine partnership of parents, community members and teachers needs to be established at each participating school.

The program needs to be underpinned by rigorous accountability measures.

The introduction of accountability processes to deliver pro-active and ongoing support and development of the schools and individual teachers is critical. Consistent with successful accountability and improvement strategies employed in Finland, processes must be driven by a shared vision of schools as learning communities where the primacy and centrality of quality teaching and learning is understood and embraced.

Processes must be underpinned by the acknowledgment that *“the irreducible core of teacher professionalism in public education is the progressive refinement, individually and collectively, of teaching knowledge and practices that serve the needs of children and young people”* and *“the continual effort (preferably collaborative) to identify and test pedagogic improvements is, in itself, a source of intellectual stimulation that fosters a culture of learning.”* Vinson p71,74.

To enhance the capacity of each school as a learning community inclusive of students, teachers and parents, all members of a school must be invited, encouraged and supported to engage in the “progressive refinement” of teaching and learning.

Support must be evident at all levels of the teaching service to ensure the ongoing development of new and experienced teachers.

In recognition of the critical importance of quality school leadership, existing and aspiring leaders need support and access to quality professional development.

The best, most rewarding support and development comes from adequately funded professional development with the allocation of time so that teachers can learn together. This support must emphasise

- *Setting up enabling and generative conditions, and providing intellectual and material resources for a focus on pedagogy,*
- *Facilitating teacher development, ownership and problem solving around issues of pedagogy,*
- *Identifying and studying which teacher and school-based solutions change student outcomes, and*
- *Consolidating and disseminating those insights and associated resources for broader use across the system. Vinson p72*

Successful schools should become 'centres of innovation', and involve independent educational experts to assist in a rigorous ongoing evaluation of the programs implemented. This will form the basis of an annual evaluation of the program in each school and should inform future policy initiatives in this area of public education.

Schools may be funded either as a group (e.g. high school and feeder primaries), or as an individual school. Where schools are funded as a group, this should occur on the proviso that the funds allocated to the targeted school or group of schools are not diluted. This aspect of the program of significant funding to schools must not be compromised.

Funding should be allocated for specific strategies to improve student literacy and numeracy outcomes, improve student behaviour and attendance, increase student retention, reduce the impacts of socio-economic disadvantage, and enhance the quality of teaching / learning and overall school effectiveness. Strategies may also be developed to enhance the transition of primary students to high school, or to optimise the effectiveness of teaching / learning practices at each particular stage or year level.

The primary focus should be on *funding personnel* to achieve program objectives. Funding should not be allocated for purchasing equipment, facilities or buildings refurbishment. These should be provided for in other budgetary allocations. (The need for additional capital investment is well documented.)

Whilst there is a clear emphasis on *the employment of additional personnel* to implement school initiatives, this should not be interpreted as an end in itself. Rather, it should be regarded as the means of facilitating programs that enhance the quality of teaching and learning and overall school effectiveness. It is expected that schools on the program will acknowledge the interconnectedness of program objectives in the development of their plans, and for this to be reflected in the evaluation of their programs. Whilst programs may provide much-needed workload support for teachers, programs should have the enhancement of teaching and learning practices as their central focus.