



Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Building Blocks for Education – Whole System Reform

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AUSTRALIAN CASE PROFILE

Prepared by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

CONTENTS

Map of Australia.....	3
List of important abbreviations	3
Glossary	3
Case summary	4
Context – setting the stage	6
Theory of action	8
Implementation.....	10
Areas of focus	14
Outcomes.....	18

MAP OF AUSTRALIA



LIST OF IMPORTANT ABBREVIATIONS

ACARA	Australian, Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
AITSL	Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership
ATSIEAP	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan
BER	Building the Education Revolution
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
ESA	Education Services Australia
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
MCEECDYA	The Ministerial Council on Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
NAP	National Assessment Program
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy
NEA	National Education Agreement
SES	Socio-economic Status

GLOSSARY

Commonwealth	The whole nation; a federation of states and territories with powers and responsibilities divided between a central government and state and territory governments.
Council of Australian Governments (COAG)	The peak intergovernmental forum in Australia, comprising the Prime Minister, State Premiers, Territory Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association.
Federation	A union of states (and territories) under a central government, distinct from the individual governments of the separate states.
Government schools	Schools run by state and territory governments (public schools)
Non-government schools	Schools not run by the government (private schools).

CASE SUMMARY

Context – setting the stage

1. Australia is a federation which includes six states, two territories and a national government (known as the Australian Government). States and territories are responsible under the Constitution for school education. During 2009, 3.48 million students (including part-time students) attended school in Australia.
2. The Australian Government plays a major role in policy setting and program development for schooling and provides supplementary funding for schooling.

Theory of action

3. While the provision of schooling is the constitutional responsibility of the states and territories delivered through the government schools system and in partnership with non-government education authorities — the Australian Government has worked with all sectors and governments to articulate a national platform that clearly outlines future directions for Australian schooling.
4. While evidence suggests that most Australian students perform well by international standards, there is still a long ‘tail’ of underperformance linked to disadvantage. That is why the Australian Government has placed educational equity at the centre of its reform agenda. Through its National Education Agreement, the Australian Government has articulated a national platform that clearly outlines future directions for Australian schooling, including the division of roles and responsibilities between the respective layers of government.
5. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has set ambitious targets for schools to achieve. These are:
 - lift the Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate to 90 per cent by 2015
 - halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade
 - at least halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2020.
6. By undertaking the reform agenda and progressing towards these targets, all Australian governments are striving to ensure that Australian children are able to reach their individual potential.

Implementation

7. Although the states and territories have primary responsibility for delivering schooling, education is a key priority for the Australian Government as improving educational outcomes for all young Australians is central to the nation’s social and economic prosperity.
8. To achieve this, the Australian Government has set a policy agenda with the following priority areas:
 - developing a national framework for schooling, including a new financial arrangement between the Australian Government and the states and territories that links Australian Government funding to state and territory outcomes for schooling
 - increasing school-level transparency and accountability in order to improve student and school performance
 - closing the gap in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students
 - developing and implementing a national curriculum across all learning areas from Kindergarten to Year 12.

Areas of focus

9. Standards and ambitious targets for school education are central to the reform agenda in Australia as shown through the following COAG schooling targets:
 - lift the Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate to 90 per cent by 2020

- halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade (2018)
 - at least halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2020.
10. To monitor progress towards meeting these targets, COAG will publish annual independent reports that review the achievements of the Australian Government, states and territories against the objectives, outcomes and targets specified in the National Education Agreement.
11. These goals are supported by reforms to strengthen the accountability and transparency of school education. Governments have agreed to the development of a national data repository to support education ministers and systems in their evaluations of system and school performance. This will assist in identifying what is working in schools across the country and help direct resources to where they are most needed. The creation of this data repository will enable education ministers and systems to make informed decisions, based not only on the performance of their own schools and systems but in comparison to other schools and systems across the country. Best practices can also be identified and shared.
12. The capabilities and capacities of teachers and school leaders are immensely important. Evidence has established that they are the two strongest school-based factors influencing student outcomes¹. At a national level, the Australian, state and territory governments have committed to a range of reforms to improve the quality of teaching and school leadership, including:
- new professional standards to underpin national reforms
 - recognition and reward for quality teaching
 - a framework to guide professional learning for principals, teachers and school leaders
 - national accreditation of pre-service teacher education courses
 - national consistency in teacher registration
 - national consistency in accreditation/certification of Accomplished and Leading Teachers
 - improved mobility of the Australian teaching workforce
 - joint engagement with higher education to provide improved pre-service teacher education; new pathways into teaching; and data collection to inform continuing reform action and workforce planning
 - improved performance management in schools for teachers and school leaders
 - enhanced school-based teacher quality reforms.

Outcomes

13. The systemic reform agenda for Australian schooling is still emerging. For example, 2010 will provide the first literacy and numeracy growth data for the cohort of students who sat the first national literacy and numeracy tests in 2008. As such, the data that currently exist are best interpreted as a sound baseline from which progress can be measured, with outcomes from the reform agenda being reported in forthcoming years.

¹ Hattie J, (2009), *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*, Rutledge.

CONTEXT – SETTING THE STAGE

14. During 2009, 3.48 million students (including part-time students) attended school in 9,529 institutions across Australia (see Table 1). Of these, 2.29 million students attended 6,802 government schools and 1.19 million students attended 2,727 non-government schools. Of the non-government schools, 1,705 were classified as Catholic schools and 1,022 as Independent.²

Table 1: Number of schools and students by school affiliation and state/territory, 2009³

STATE		Government	Non-government		Total Schools
			Independent	Catholic	
NSW	<i>Schools</i>	2,181	330	586	3,097
	<i>Students</i>	737,549	136,225	239,442	1,113,216
Victoria	<i>Schools</i>	1,575	216	488	2,279
	<i>Students</i>	540,359	119,228	188,091	847,678
Queensland	<i>Schools</i>	1,245	176	289	1,710
	<i>Students</i>	490,690	105,413	128,323	724,426
SA	<i>Schools</i>	588	97	102	787
	<i>Students</i>	169,057	44,077	47,340	260,474
WA	<i>Schools</i>	771	138	158	1,067
	<i>Students</i>	234,451	57,321	65,400	357,172
Tasmania	<i>Schools</i>	207	30	37	274
	<i>Students</i>	59,478	9,302	14,175	82,955
NT	<i>Schools</i>	152	21	15	188
	<i>Students</i>	28,718	5,361	4,739	38,818
ACT	<i>Schools</i>	83	14	30	127
	<i>Students</i>	34,336	8,255	17,327	59,918
Australia	<i>Schools</i>	6,802	1,022	1,705	9,529
	<i>Students</i>	2,294,638	485,182	704,837	3,484,657

15. Australia is a federation which includes six states, two territories and a national government (known as the Australian Government). States and territories are responsible under the Constitution for school education.
16. Australia has both public and private schools which are usually referred to as ‘government’ and ‘non-government’ schools. Government schools operate under the direct responsibility of the relevant state or territory minister, while non-government schools are established and operate under conditions determined by government and state or territory registration authorities. Non-government schools can be part of a system of schools (systemic) or completely independent. Many non-government schools have some religious affiliation, most with the Catholic Church, and as such the non-government sector in Australia is often split into ‘Catholic’ and ‘Independent’ for reporting purposes.
17. States and territories have primary responsibility for funding government schools and provide supplementary assistance to non-government schools. The Australian Government is the primary source of public funding for non-government schools while also providing supplementary assistance to government schools.
18. The Australian Government plays a major role in policy setting and program development for schooling, which is facilitated through national consultative arrangements such as the Ministerial

² ABS Schools Australia 2009 – Preliminary Release: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4220.0>

³ Source: ABS, Schools, Australia 2009 Cat # 4221.0,

<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4221.02009?OpenDocument>

Council on Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA), and through funding provided to schools which is usually attached to certain outcomes that need to be met.

19. Up until recently, states and territories have been responsible for setting the curriculum and achievement standards for their state or territory, through Boards of Studies or relevant authorities. In 2008, all Australian education ministers agreed to the development of a national curriculum, which will be implemented from 2011 for Kindergarten to Year 10 in English, mathematics, science and history. The senior secondary curriculum and the Australian curriculum for languages, geography and the arts are also under development for implementation at a later stage.
20. School management in government schools varies across the states and territories, from very centralized to decentralized. For example, in government schools in the state of New South Wales (NSW), school principals lead the design and implementation of school curriculum, assessment, and teaching and learning programs within agreed curriculum frameworks, while key budget items are managed centrally to reflect the benefits of service-wide contractual arrangements and policies. On the other hand, in government schools in the state of Victoria, school principals lead and manage the planning, delivery, evaluation and improvement of the education of all students in the school community through the deployment of financial and other resources provided by the department, school council and school community. For independent schools, school management responsibilities are entirely that of the Board of the school and principal.

Structure of schooling across Australia

21. The structure of school education varies across the states and territories. Formal school education in Australia comprises of primary education and secondary education. Depending on the state or territory, primary school education consists of six to eight years followed by five to six years of secondary school education. There are two basic patterns in current formal schooling in Australia. These are:
 - in New South Wales (NSW), Victoria, Tasmania, the Northern Territory (NT) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), primary education comprises seven years, starting with pre-Year 1 — variously known as Kindergarten (NSW and ACT), Preparatory (Victoria and Tasmania) or Transition (NT) — followed by Years 1 to 6. Secondary education comprises Years 7 to 12 (except in Tasmania, where secondary education comprises Years 7 to 10 followed by post-compulsory years 11 and 12).
 - in Queensland, South Australia (SA) and Western Australia (WA), primary education comprises eight years, spanning pre-Year 1 to Year 7. In Queensland, the year of schooling before Year 1 is called Preparatory, in SA it is called Reception, and in WA it is called Pre-Primary. Secondary education comprises Years 8 to 12.
22. Currently there is no national consistency in school starting age, with four different minimum school starting ages across Australia ranging from four years and five months to five years of age at the beginning of the pre-Year 1 school year. The minimum school starting age in Queensland, NT and WA is four years and six months; the minimum starting age for NSW is four years and five months while in Victoria and the ACT the starting age is four years and eight months; the minimum school starting age in SA and Tasmania is five years of age.
23. Up until December 2009, states and territories specified the compulsory age up to which students must stay at school and the age differed in different jurisdictions. In April 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to implement the requirement that, from January 2010, all young people must participate in school (or an approved equivalent) to Year 10 and then participate full-time (at least 25 hours per week) in education, training or employment, or a combination, until age 17.⁴

⁴ Further information can be found in the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) meeting communiqué of 30 April 2009 available on the web here: http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-04-30/docs/20090430_communique.pdf

Infrastructure to support reform

24. To assist in delivering national reforms, significant changes have been made to the national education architecture including the establishment of three new agencies, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) which commenced operations in May 2009, the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) which commenced operation in January 2010, and Education Services Australia (ESA) which commenced operations in February 2010.

THEORY OF ACTION

25. Schooling is essential to helping Australian children to reach their individual potential and is a critical part of supporting future productivity. Literacy and numeracy are key foundation skills that every child in Australia must develop to participate fully in society and work. These skills provide the basis for further learning and are the platform upon which a culture of aspiration and life satisfaction are built. Engagement and attainment at school are positively linked to higher levels of employment and labour force participation, higher wages and higher levels of productivity. While evidence suggests that most Australian students perform well by international standards, there is still a long 'tail' of underperformance linked to disadvantage. This means that educational outcomes continue to be heavily affected by factors such as location and socio-economic status.
26. While the provision of schooling is the constitutional responsibility of the states and territories — delivered through the government schools system and in partnership with non-government education authorities, — the Australian Government has worked with all sectors and governments to articulate a national platform that clearly outlines future directions for Australian schooling. This includes a National Education Agreement (NEA) and the division of roles and responsibilities of the respective layers of government.
27. The NEA outlines a reform agenda that places students and teachers at the centre of schooling, focusing on a range of factors that have a direct impact on future success. This includes three clearly identified targets to:
- lift the Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate to 90 per cent by 2015
 - halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade (2018)
 - at least halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2020.
28. All Education ministers agreed in late 2008 to the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* which outlined new national goals for schooling. This declaration identifies key strategies and initiatives Australian governments will undertake in the following eight interrelated areas in order to support the achievement of the educational goals:
- developing stronger partnerships
 - supporting quality teaching and school leadership
 - strengthening early childhood education
 - enhancing middle years development
 - supporting senior years of schooling and youth transitions
 - promoting world-class curriculum and assessment
 - improving educational outcomes for Indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds
 - strengthening accountability and transparency.
29. COAG has also set out a number of specific goals in the National Productivity Agenda.⁵ For the first time, all Australian governments agreed on a common framework for reform of education with COAG's endorsement of a comprehensive set of aspirations, outcomes, progress measures and

⁵ <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Ministers/Gillard/Media/Releases/Documents/COAGForumPaper.pdf>

future policy directions in the key areas of early childhood, schooling, and skills and workforce development that will guide education systems across the nation. Those related to schooling are articulated through the National Education Agreement and are outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Council of Australian Governments’ national productivity agenda - schools

PARTICIPATION AND PRODUCTIVITY

<p>That all Australian school students acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society and employment in a globalized economy.</p>						ASPIRATIONS
All children are engaged in and benefiting from schooling	Young people are meeting basic literacy and numeracy standards, and overall levels of literacy and numeracy achievement are improving	Australian students excel by international standards	Schooling promotes the social inclusion and reduces the educational disadvantage of children, especially Indigenous children	Young people make a successful transition from school to work and further study		OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Proportion of children enrolled in and attending school – Literacy and numeracy achievement of Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 students in national testing – Proportion of students in top and bottom levels of performance in international testing (e.g. PISA, TIMSS) – Proportion of the 19 year old population having attained at least a Year 12 or equivalent or AQF Certificate II – Proportion of young people participating in post-school education or training six months after school – Proportion of 18-24 year olds engaged in full-time employment, education or training at or above Certificate level III 						INDICATIVE PROGRESS MEASURES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Lift the Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate to 90 per cent by 2020 – Halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade – At least halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2020 						COAG TARGETS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – All Year 9-12 students have access to a computer and teachers are trained appropriately – All secondary schools have access to Trades Training Centres delivering high quality industry-recognized training at Certificate III level – National Curriculum supports world-class teaching in all Australian schools from Kindergarten to Year 12, including literacy and numeracy standards – Asian Languages — Increase the number of qualified language teachers and develop national curriculum for advanced students 						COMMONWEALTH ELECTION COMMITMENTS
Improving teacher and school leader quality	High standards and expectations	Greater accountability and better directed resources	Modern, world class teaching and learning environments including ICT	Integrated strategies for low SES school communities	Boosting parental engagement	POLICY DIRECTIONS

IMPLEMENTATION

30. Although the states and territories have primary responsibility for delivering schooling, education is also a key priority for the Australian Government. Improving educational outcomes for all young Australians is central to the nation's social and economic prosperity. Through a range of reforms introduced since November 2007, a policy agenda has been developed that will ensure young Australians acquire the knowledge and skills they need to enable them to reach their full potential.
31. Four areas of reform have received particular priority:
 - developing a national framework for schooling, including a new financial arrangement between the Australian Government and the states and territories that links Australian Government funding to state and territory outcomes for schooling
 - increasing school-level transparency and accountability in order to improve student and school performance
 - closing the gap in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students
 - developing and implementing a national curriculum across all learning areas from Kindergarten to Year 12.

A national framework for schooling

32. In 2008, COAG negotiated the delivery of schooling through the development of a new framework for both investment and reform in Australian schools. The proposed reforms are predicated on greater collaboration across all levels of government in order to lead to improved outcomes as students move through school. The reforms involve collaboration across the government and non-government sectors of schooling and a partnership involving parents, children, students, employers and all levels of government.⁶
33. The result of this collaboration was the National Education Agreement,⁷ agreed by COAG in December 2008, which provides the vehicle through which the Australian Government provides funding to states and territories for government schools.
34. Central to the reform framework is the removal of input controls on how state and territory governments spend Australian Government funding. Instead, the NEA focuses on outcomes, with state and territory governments responsible for developing the policies, delivering the services, and regulating, monitoring and reviewing the performance of individual schools as they work to achieve national objectives and outcomes compatible with local circumstances and priorities.
35. In order to support key reform priorities, the Australian Government has invested in a broad range of additional initiatives designed to transform schools and schooling for teachers, students and the community over and above funds appropriated for the general recurrent and capital costs of operating schools. These National Partnerships (NPs) represent a new approach to funding and working collaboratively across all school systems and aim to:
 - address disadvantage in low Socio-Economic Status (SES) school communities
 - provide a greater focus on literacy and numeracy, including building the evidence base of what works to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes
 - improve teacher quality, including leading work on national teacher workforce reform in relation to pre-service education, teacher registration, professional standards for school leaders and performance management
 - improve, through the Building the Education Revolution program, school facilities with approximately 24,000 individual capital investment projects managed through partnership arrangements with states and territories and non-government education authorities

⁶ The Policy document, *Quality Education: The case for an Education Revolution in our Schools*, can be accessed here: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/Resources/Documents/Publications/QualityEducationEducationRevolutionWEB.pdf>

⁷ The NEA can be accessed in full here: www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/index.cfm

- support, through the Digital Education Revolution program, 21st century learning through Integrating information and communications technologies in teaching and learning
- support students to attain Year 12 qualifications or equivalent, such as:
 - the Trade Training Centres in Schools program to deliver enhanced vocational education and training on school sites, and
 - the Youth Attainment and Transitions National Partnership that is designed to improve the transition of young people to further education and employment.

Transparency and accountability

36. To facilitate comprehensive public debate on the performance of Australia's education system, Australian governments have committed to making accurate, clear information widely and publicly available. To deliver this information, the *My School* website has been developed and published by ACARA on behalf of the Australian Government and state and territory governments.
37. *My School* provides the most comprehensive school information that Australia has ever had. It includes data on individual school performance and, importantly, relevant contextual information about the school. For each school in Australia, it provides a national profile that contains a range of information about the school, including details about the type of school, student and staff numbers, student attendance rate, socio-economic background of the student body, teaching resources, results from national literacy and numeracy tests and, where relevant, Year 12 attainment and post-school destinations.
38. A key feature of school-level reporting is the ability of a user to compare the performance of a school with other 'statistically similar schools' across Australia – that is, schools with similar student populations based on socio-economic statistics. The site uses a specially created index formed using Australian Bureau of Statistics census data to group schools with similar student backgrounds. This then allows the comparison of school results in national literacy and numeracy testing with similarly advantaged or disadvantaged schools. The index is known as the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage, or ICSEA. It places schools on a numerical scale by reference to their relative socio-educational advantage.
39. The ICSEA takes into account 16 socio-economic and other factors (such as remoteness of the school and the percentage of Indigenous students at the school) which analysis has shown to have a strong correlation with student performance in the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). The ICSEA is thus 'tailor-made' for the purpose of identifying schools serving similar student populations.
40. Since its launch on 28 January 2010, the *My School* website has seen a substantial volume of traffic, indicating a significant interest by the community in the type of information it provides, and sparking considerable and robust public debate. The community can now participate in the public debate about the future of education with the benefit of relevant comparable information on schools.
41. To further the website's utility, it has been agreed that it will include additional indicators about each school. The income available to each school by funding source will be published by the end of 2010 once data comparability issues have been resolved. ACARA is also working with education authorities to find a way that broader aspects of schooling can be reported at the school level. Ministers have already agreed to investigate the development of a nationally comparable satisfaction survey of parents, teachers and students.

Closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage

42. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the most economically and socially disadvantaged group within Australian society. Numerous reports and research studies describe the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians on various measures of economic and social wellbeing. COAG committed to work together with Indigenous Australians and the broader community to achieve ambitious targets across six key areas—life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, numeracy and literacy, educational attainment and economic participation.
43. A new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (ATSIEAP) outlines how governments will work together to achieve the closing the gap targets (outcomes of Indigenous students compared with other Australian students) outlined in the COAG Productivity Agenda and the NEA. Non-government education providers have agreed to join with governments to achieve these targets and progress actions outlined in the plan. The plan builds on the commitments through COAG to introduce substantial structural reforms in early childhood education and schooling. These reforms are designed to improve outcomes for all Australian students by increasing access to quality early childhood education, lifting attendance, improving literacy and numeracy achievement, addressing disadvantage in low socio-economic status school communities, improving teacher quality and increasing the number of young people attaining a Year 12 or equivalent qualification.
44. Agreed national reforms will complement a range of other actions that will help achieve these targets between 2010 and 2014. The plan identifies national, jurisdictional and local actions in six priority domains that evidence shows will contribute to improved outcomes in Indigenous education. These priorities will guide efforts over the next five years. Priority domains are:
 - readiness for school
 - engagement and connections
 - attendance
 - literacy and numeracy
 - leadership, quality teaching and workforce development
 - pathways to real post-school options.
45. The ATSIEAP is currently being finalized by MCEECDYA, Education ministers and is expected to be provided to COAG during the course of 2010.

A national curriculum

46. Under the NEA, states and territories agreed to develop and implement a new National Curriculum for Kindergarten to Year 12.
47. The new Australian Curriculum will equip young Australians with the skills, knowledge and capabilities that will enable them to effectively engage with and prosper in society, compete in a globalized world and thrive in the information-rich workplaces of the future.
48. The Australian Curriculum will provide two key elements:
 - an agreement on the content that all Australian students should be taught, and
 - explicit advice on the achievement standards that all Australian students should be meeting, regardless of their circumstances, the type of school that they attend or the location of their school.
49. The curriculum content will specify what teachers are expected to teach and what students need to learn. It will involve an outline of knowledge, skills and understandings for each learning area at each year level.

50. Achievement standards will describe the quality of learning – depth of understanding, extent of knowledge and sophistication of skill – expected of students at each year level from Kindergarten to Year 10.
51. To support the implementation of the agreed reform agenda, the education architecture for the schools sector has been renewed. This renewed architecture includes ACARA, AITSL and ESA.
52. In October 2008, COAG agreed to establish ACARA to oversee the development of the Australian Curriculum beginning with the learning areas of English, mathematics, science and history. Phase two will involve development of national curriculum in geography, languages and the arts.
53. In 2009 ACARA released a foundational paper, *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum*⁸, as well as shaping papers for each of the phase one learning areas. These papers were the product of an extensive national consultation process, and incorporated the feedback that was received from key education stakeholders and the wider education community, including parents, teachers, principals, professional associations, academics, and representatives from the business and industry sector. The papers also helped to guide the teams that were established to draft the Australian Curriculum.
54. From 1 March to 23 May 2010, ACARA made available on its website⁹ the draft Australian Curriculum documents from Kindergarten to Year 10 in the first four learning areas for public consultation. ACARA's forward consultation strategy will also involve online surveys, state and territory consultation activities, national consultation meetings, and intensive school-based engagement and trialling activities.
55. Consultation on the draft Australian Curriculum for the senior years in English, mathematics, science and history occurred between April and July 2010.
56. The Australian curriculum from Kindergarten to Year 10 in English, mathematics, science and history will be implemented by the states and territories from 2011.
57. The timing is likely to vary by learning areas and by states and territories depending on the extent of difference between the new Australian Curriculum and existing state and territory curricula, and therefore how much support and preparation is required prior to implementation. ACARA is working with state and territory education authorities to map the extent of change to assist them to develop their implementation plans.
58. While there will be a window within which to accommodate the specific issues to be addressed in each jurisdiction, all states and territories have committed to work towards implementation by 2013.
59. Timelines for the implementation of the senior secondary years' curriculum will be determined later this year.

⁸ http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/resources/Shape_of_the_Australian_Curriculum.pdf

⁹ www.australiancurriculum.edu.au

AREAS OF FOCUS

Standards and targets

60. Central to the current reforms has been the agreement of COAG to three targets for all states and territories to meet:
 - lift the Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate to 90 per cent by 2020
 - halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade (2018)
 - at least halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2020.
61. To monitor progress towards meeting these targets, COAG requires the COAG Reform Council (CRC), a body independent of individual governments, to report directly to it on achievements made by the states and territories. Its current role relating to education includes:
 - monitoring, assessing and publicly reporting annually on the performance of the Australian Government and state and territory governments against the objectives, outcomes and targets specified in the National Education Agreement
 - reporting to COAG on the performance of governments under the National Partnerships, assessing whether predetermined milestones or performance benchmarks have been met before incentive payments to reward nationally significant reforms are made.
62. Copies of recent reports submitted to COAG are publicly available online.¹⁰ The CRC provides COAG with an annual report on the progress of the National Reform Agenda.
63. MCEECDYA has also established a reporting framework with the aim of driving school improvement and enhanced outcomes for students. Ministers responsible for school education have agreed to report on progress towards achievement in the following priority areas, comparable by state and territory, and using key performance measures as the basis for reporting:
 - literacy
 - numeracy
 - science
 - civics and citizenship education
 - information and communication technologies
 - vocational education and training in schools
 - participation and attainment.
64. The core of the framework is a schedule setting out key performance measures and an agreed assessment and reporting cycle for the period for 2006-2014.
65. The framework includes national proficiency standards that have been agreed by education ministers and used for reporting. Australia's performance against the *Measurement Framework for National Key Performance Measures* is reported annually in the *National Report on Schooling in Australia (ANR)*.¹¹
66. The suite of key performance measures is reviewed annually in the context of MCEECDYA's expectation that measures will be few in number, strategic in orientation and adequately cover the priority areas outlined in the educational goals or required under the relevant legislation. From 2010, this review will be carried out by ACARA.
67. The National Assessment Program (NAP), agreed by MCEECDYA in 2008, monitors progress towards the Educational Goals for Young Australians and supports ongoing evaluation of the national

¹⁰ <http://www.coag.gov.au/crc/reports.cfm>

¹¹ The ANR is available online here: <http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/anr/>

education system. It encompasses all tests endorsed by MCEECDYA, including national full cohort literacy and numeracy tests (NAPLAN) and three-yearly sample assessments in science literacy, civics and citizenship and ICT literacy.

68. Australia's participation in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) are also part of the NAP. Australia will also participate in Progress in International Reading Literacy Study for the first time in 2010-11.

Assessments and use of data to underpin accountability and transparency

69. COAG has ensured that within the reform agenda, there is a strong basis of accountability and transparency, using data to establish baseline positions and to evaluate and measure progress.
70. The results from the NAP provide the means by which the achievement and progress of Australian students, schools and systems can be measured and reported using nationally comparable data against national standards. The results are not used towards students' grades or entry into programs or courses but they provide valuable information which is used for policy analysis and to set policy directions.
71. Additional student assessment is conducted in each state and territory and is designed to test the student's application of knowledge based on their curriculum, in order to evaluate what they have learned from the curriculum. Student assessment, based on goals and standards set in state/territory curricula, is often developed at the school level. It includes a wide range of tools, both informal and formal summative evaluation, as well as formative assessments.
72. The progress of students is assessed against specific curriculum standards for each state and territory, which define what students should know, understand and be able to do. Students in some states and territories participate in forms of testing at Year 10, which recognizes the achievement of the end of compulsory schooling. All states and territories have senior secondary completion assessment which is a gateway qualification to further study or employment.
73. Using data for school-level assessment, evaluation and improvement practices are well established within Australia's schools. In general, all schools participate in annual self-evaluation practices, utilising standard guides, templates and set frameworks which are usually developed by the relevant state or territory government or system authority. The performance of a school is usually evaluated using student assessment data, and other sources such as surveys of communities and teachers. The current approach to school assessment achieves improvement and accountability through the continuous cycles of evaluation and intervention for those schools needing assistance. Assessment practices are in place in schools across Australia in order to identify best practice or high performing schools, alongside identifying those schools that require additional assistance in order to make improvements. All government schools across Australia take part in some form of school-level assessment and evaluation process annually as well as a long-term strategic review.
74. School assessment results are usually published in the form of an annual report, which is made available to all stakeholders. School assessment results published in system annual reports and strategic plans are used by systems as important elements in their own evaluation process. Some states and territories also publish performance information at the school level for their schools. This information is made publicly available, although the format varies considerably between jurisdictions.
75. In 2008, MCEECDYA agreed to create a national data collection on individual schools to support school evaluation, accountability and resource allocation. Data are held in a national data repository, housed in ACARA. Data for each school was made publicly available through a national website on 28 January 2010.
76. The national data repository will support education ministers and systems in regard to their evaluations of system and school performance, ensuring schools are accountable to government and

assisting in identifying what is working in schools across the country and directing resources to where they are most needed. The creation of this data repository will enable education ministers and systems to make informed decisions, based not only on the performance of their own schools and systems but in comparison to other schools and systems across the country. Best practices can also be identified and shared.

77. Through the *My School* website, profiles of every Australian school are published containing information relating to the following categories:
- contextual - a school's student intake (population), that is, factors that contextualize student outcomes e.g. proportion of low socio-economic students, proportion of Indigenous students
 - capacity - a school's capability e.g. school income, teacher workforce, and
 - outcomes - a school's outcomes e.g. literacy and numeracy test results, Year 12 attainment.

Capacity building and the development of the teaching profession

78. The most important school-based factor in improving outcomes for students is the quality of their teachers. At a national level, governments are committed to improving the quality of teaching performance and rewarding quality teaching. COAG has agreed an Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership that will provide nationally significant and sustainable reforms to attract, train, place, develop and retain quality teachers and school leaders in schools. The parties to the national partnership have committed to:
- new professional standards to underpin national reforms
 - recognition and reward for quality teaching
 - a framework to guide professional learning for principals, teachers and school leaders
 - national accreditation of pre-service teacher education courses
 - national consistency in teacher registration
 - national consistency in accreditation/certification of Accomplished and Leading Teachers
 - improved mobility of the Australian teaching workforce
 - joint engagement with higher education to provide improved pre-service teacher education; new pathways into teaching; and data collection to inform continuing reform action and workforce planning
 - improved performance management in schools for teachers and school leaders
 - enhanced school-based teacher quality reforms.
79. The new draft professional standards have been informed by an analysis and review of the standards currently in use by teacher registration authorities, employers and professional associations. The development process has drawn on national agreements, extensive research and expert knowledge as well as an examination of the use of standards to inform professional development and provide an objective basis for assessing professional practice.
80. The draft standards¹² describe what is required of teachers at four levels of professional expertise – Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher – across three domains: professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement. They make explicit, for those within and outside the profession, the knowledge, skills and dispositions required of teachers at each level.
81. The standards are designed to provide a continuum of capabilities and expectations and a nationally consistent basis for valid, fair and reliable identification and recognition of those who meet the standards. These standards will also form the basis for accreditation of pre-service teacher education courses, initial teacher registration, and performance appraisal and professional accreditation of teachers at higher levels of professional expertise.

¹² http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/_resources/NPST-DRAFT_National_Professional_Standards_for_Teachers.pdf

Leadership development

82. Governments have made substantial investments in school leaders in acknowledgement of their role as not only administrative and managerial leaders, but also as instructional or educational leaders. Included in this is the emerging role of principals as mentors and facilitators of teachers' professional learning.
83. While qualifications in leadership may assist aspiring principals to secure school leadership positions, a four-year teaching qualification and registration as a teacher are the only formal requirements for school leaders.
84. The 2008 OECD *Improving School Leadership Activity: Australia Country Background Report*¹³ notes that there is an expanding range of leadership learning activities that demonstrate the growing investment in school leadership in Australia, including in target groups such as Indigenous school leaders and women who are underrepresented among Australian school leaders.
85. All states and territories have acknowledged the need for specific professional development and ongoing support for principals and aspiring principals. To support this, the Australian Government has established Australian, Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (AITSL) and provided it with a remit to:
 - promote excellence in school leadership
 - develop rigorous national professional standards
 - foster and drive high-quality professional learning for school leaders, including development of national standards for professional learning programs and the delivery of accredited flagship, national and affiliated programs
 - deliver the *Leading Australia's Schools* program — a challenging national leadership program for principals from across Australia that affirm, challenge and inspire principals to build their professional knowledge and leadership skills.
86. The Teacher Quality National Partnership contains a commitment to fund initiatives at a national level to support reforms in professional development for school leaders, including for the *Stronger Smarter Institute* to deliver high-quality leadership programs to teachers and principals to enhance the teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, annual national principals' forums for 2010-2013, and biannual seminars with national principals' associations for 2010-2013.

Sustainability

87. Australian governments are committed to ensuring that the reform processes underway are sustainable into the future. To do this, one focus of the reform agenda has been to develop, where possible, national solutions and interventions. As part of this, education ministers have:
 - established new education architecture that harnesses experts from across the country to drive much of the reform. New agencies such as ACARA and AITSL and ESA are coalescing expertise in specific areas so that reforms gain broad stakeholder input and approval prior to their implementation
 - invested in 21st century education facilities, particularly through the Australian Government's Building the Education Revolution which is delivering the biggest single investment in physical capital in the country's history, and the Digital Education Revolution which is transforming ICT capabilities in schools
 - developed innovative and tailored responses to teacher shortages in areas of need, including through the *Teach for Australia* program to attract the highest performing non-education graduates to the teaching profession, and the new *Teach Next* proposal to attract experienced non-teaching professional to a career in teaching

¹³ http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/79C36708-3F33-43F0-9A19-1933AFDE842D/23721/OECD_ISLA_revised_Aug07_FINALV2.pdf

- implemented reforms to attract, train, place and retain high-quality teachers, including national appraisal and reward programs that will offer additional payments for those with advanced skills to offer an extended career path as a classroom teacher as an alternative to becoming a principal.

OUTCOMES

88. The systemic reform agenda for Australian schooling is still emerging. For example, 2010 will provide the first literacy and numeracy growth data for the first cohort of students who sat the first national literacy and numeracy tests in 2010. As such, the data that currently exist on the influence of the reform agenda is better interpreted as a sound baseline from which progress can be measured.
89. In September 2009, the CRC issued its report *National Education Agreement – Baseline Performance Report for 2008*¹⁴. This is the first of the CRC's annual reports on the progress being made to achieve COAG outcomes and targets.
90. In respect to the COAG outcomes, the CRC reported the following:
- *All children are engaged in and benefiting from schooling* - across all states and territories there are very high enrolment rates for children aged 6 to 15, reflecting the compulsory nature of schooling for this age group. The rates, however, for Indigenous children are lower, particularly in the Northern Territory. At a national level, the enrolment rate for non-Indigenous children is 98.8 per cent compared with 93.3 per cent for Indigenous children, and 87.2 per cent for Indigenous children in the Northern Territory. Compared with school enrolment rates, attendance rates for students are lower. Student attendance rates in government schools are relatively constant through the primary school years, but begin to decline from Year 7. Attendance rates at non-government schools remain relatively constant up to Year 10. By Year 10, the attendance rate in government schools for all students is less than 90 per cent in all states and territories except Victoria.
 - *Young people are meeting basic literacy and numeracy standards, and overall levels of literacy and numeracy are improving* - in 2008, under NAPLAN, all states and territories perform at high levels against the benchmark of the national minimum standard, with the exception of the Northern Territory. Consistently, 90 per cent or more of students in NSW, Victoria and the ACT achieve the national minimum standard in all year levels in the three learning domains. In six out of 12 tests the performance is at or above 95 per cent. Tasmania also has high results, with generally 90 per cent or above of students achieving the national minimum standard, and in three out of 12 tests the performance is at or above 95 per cent. Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia have greater variation in performance across the years and domains, but generally 90 per cent of students achieve at or above the national minimum standard. Queensland performs least well in this group overall with performance below 90 per cent in five out of the 12 tests. The Northern Territory differs markedly from other states and territories, with between 62.5 per cent and 77.0 per cent of students achieving the national minimum standard in all years and all domains. Northern Territory results particularly reflect the high proportion of Indigenous students (40.7 per cent). Results for non-Indigenous students in the Northern Territory are similar to other jurisdictions.
 - *Australian students excel by international standards* - Australian students perform very well in international testing. Australia's results are significantly above the OECD average in scientific, reading and mathematical literacy in the 2006 PISA. For the 2007 TIMSS, Australia's results are significantly above the average in Year 4 mathematics and science, and similar to the average in Year 8. Australia also performs well against the indicator of the proportion of students achieving at or above the nationally agreed proficiency levels in PISA—significantly above the OECD average for all literacy types in all states and territories, except Tasmania and the Northern Territory.

¹⁴ http://www.coag.gov.au/crc/docs/nat_edu_agree_perf_2008.pdf

However, for the proportions of students in the top levels in both PISA and TIMSS, Australia scores significantly below the top performing countries. There is evidence, however, that Australia's performance is not improving over time relative to other countries. In particular, there has been a significant decline in Australia's mean scores in reading literacy between PISA 2000 and PISA 2006. Scores decreased in all states and territories, with statistically significant declines in the Northern Territory, South Australia, NSW and the ACT. Importantly, the decline in reading literacy has occurred mainly at the upper end of the reading literacy achievement scale, without any compensatory improvement at the lower end. In 2000, 18 per cent of Australian students achieved the highest level of proficiency in reading, compared with 15 per cent in 2003 and only 11 per cent in 2006.

- *Young people make a successful transition from school to work and further study* - in 2008, 84.2 per cent of young people in Australia had completed Year 12 or equivalent. This proportion varies across states and territories from high proportions of 90.4 per cent in the ACT and 88.7 per cent in Victoria, to lower proportions of 72.0 per cent in Tasmania and 64.9 per cent in the Northern Territory. Indigenous young people have significantly lower Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates, with a national rate of 47.4 per cent (based on the 2006 Census). There is also considerable variation across the states and territories in Indigenous Year 12 attainment, with a very low proportion of 18.3 per cent in the Northern Territory. In 2008, the national average for young people (aged 18 to 24 years) participating full time in employment, education or training was 76.3 per cent. The proportion varies across jurisdictions, from high proportions of 87.4 per cent in the ACT and 79.6 per cent in Western Australia, to low proportions of 69.8 per cent in the Northern Territory and 66.9 per cent in Tasmania. Nationally, the proportion of non-Indigenous young people engaged in full-time employment, education or training (73.4 per cent) is almost twice the proportion for Indigenous young people (37.3 per cent) (based on 2006 Census data). In the Northern Territory, only 19.2 per cent of Indigenous young people were participating in post-school education, training or employment.
- *Schooling promotes social inclusion of and reduces the educational disadvantage of children, especially Indigenous children* - across the agreement, the educational outcomes for Indigenous students are significantly below those for other students—from school attendance through to literacy and numeracy achievement, and transition from school to work or further study. In primary school, in most jurisdictions school attendance rates for Indigenous students in government schools are below 90 per cent—in the Northern Territory they are between 71 per cent and 75 per cent. Low school attendance rates are reflected in low Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates, which are reflected in Indigenous young people's low post-school engagement in employment, education or training. The outcomes for Indigenous children and young people vary across states and territories, generally reflecting the numbers and proportions of Indigenous people in the population and the impact of remoteness. Generally, for those states and territories with relatively large numbers of Indigenous people—NSW, Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory—results for Indigenous students are below those for jurisdictions with small numbers. The lowest results are in Western Australian and the Northern Territory where there are large proportions of the population in remote areas. Students living in remote and very remote areas of Australia face considerable educational disadvantage. Results for these students in national literacy and numeracy testing are below those from metropolitan and provincial areas.

91. In respect to the COAG targets, the CRC reported the following:

- *Lift Year 12 attainment to 90 per cent by 2015* - in 2008, 84.2 per cent of young people in Australia had completed Year 12 or equivalent, 5.8 percentage points below the target of 90 per cent. COAG has agreed the achievement of the national target will be met by differential target rates across jurisdictions. Jurisdictions with low proportions of young people having completed Year 12 or equivalent will require substantial improvements to meet the agreed COAG target by 2015.
- *Halve the gap in Indigenous literacy and numeracy* - the size of the gap differs across the learning domains of reading, writing and numeracy, and across year levels. For example, at the national level, the gap between the proportion of non-Indigenous students (94 per cent) and Indigenous students (68 per cent) achieving the national minimum standard in Year 3 reading is about 25 percentage points. Individual targets and trajectories for each state and territory are being developed for reporting against in future years.
- *Halve the gap in Indigenous Year 12 attainment* - based on the 2006 Census, the national Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate for Indigenous young people is 47.4 per cent. There is a gap of about 36 percentage points between the rate for Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people, with gaps above 30 percentage points in NSW, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory. The council will report on attainment towards individual targets for jurisdictions, which are currently being agreed.