



Submission by the Foundation for Young Australians on the NSW Department of Education and Community's Great Teaching, Inspired Learning Discussion Paper

November 2012





Contents

Introduction.....	3
<i>Key recommendations and outline of this paper</i>	3
The Policy Context of Great Teaching, Inspired Learning.....	4
Section A: Measuring What Matters	5
<i>Addressing equity and educational disadvantage using disaggregated data</i>	5
<i>Embedding 21st century learning outcomes into educational goals and policy</i>	6
Section B: Professional Collaboration through a Feedback Culture	7
<i>Orienting Performance and Development systems: feedback over compliance</i>	7
<i>Employing multiple performance measures and the role of student feedback</i>	8
References	11



Introduction

The Foundation for Young Australian's (FYA) Centre for New Public Education (CNPE) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Department of Education and Communities' (DEC) Great Teaching, Inspired Learning Paper (NSW DEC 2012b).

FYA is a national, independent, non-profit organisation dedicated solely to young people. It provides a national platform of respect and opportunity for the best ideas and actions that young Australians have to offer. FYA believes that all young people have the courage, imagination and will to shape their education and create social change. Our vision is for a generation of connected, confident and optimistic young people with a deep sense of purpose and belonging. Our mission is to empower young Australians to be successful learners and creative, active and valued citizens through research, initiatives and partnerships and by harnessing the passion of young people.

The Centre for New Public Education is an initiative of FYA focused on mobilisation and policy research. CNPE believes that education reform must be driven by increased public will, informed by what educators and experts know works, and sustained due to increased pressure from public monitoring of educational performance. CNPE works to engage and empower young people, shape and monitor policy and accelerate alliances to achieve change.

FYA has a proven track record in the delivery and development of education programs, research and community engagement over the past 30 years. Its many education initiatives aid young people in developing the skills and knowledge required in the 21st century. Our research documents and promotes young people's capacity for active participation across all areas of public life. This includes the annual How Young People are Faring (HYPAF) report, which provides a regular snapshot of the education and employment situation for young people across Australia.

For over ten years, FYA's research team has been seeking to understand learner centred environments and the broader institutional, technological, social and economic implications for public education in Australia in the 21st century. The team has been commissioned to provide advice about this research to Cisco Systems, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and the Flexible Learning Framework and National Curriculum Board (now ACARA).

Key recommendations and outline of this paper

CNPE is responding to the Great Teaching, Inspired Learning (Great Teaching) discussion paper on behalf of FYA. We commend the DEC for opening discussion on this important component of education policy. While broadly supporting the DEC's focus on teaching quality to deliver learning outcomes, this submission highlights the importance of aligning each level of the educational system around improved educational outcomes for all students in the 21st century. Section A of this paper (Measuring what matters) will show how the DEC's current approach may overlook important elements of 21st century skills and educational equity, and recommends the use of disaggregated data to identify problems that are hidden at the whole of system level. Section B (Professional Collaboration through a Feedback Culture) explores the issues involved in improving teaching practice on the ground.



The Policy Context of Great Teaching, Inspired Learning

Great Teaching sets out the importance of building and maintaining a teacher profession that is prepared for the 'challenges of effective learning in the 21st century' (NSW DEC 2012b, p.2). The document identifies teaching as the single most important in-school factor that impacts student learning, which is consistent with the evidence in Australia and internationally (McCaffrey et al. 2003; Rivkin et al. 2005; Rockoff 2004).

However, teacher quality can often be regarded by political leaders and policy makers as a silver bullet for education reform. Keating argues that 'teacher quality is seductive for policymakers as it simplifies the highly complex sociology of schooling' (Keating 2009, p.13). A relentless focus on teacher quality can result in teachers being cast as the saviour or the villain, with corresponding policies that can reduce the complexity of teacher effectiveness to single issue actions such as performance pay or a focus on teacher standards at the point of entry to the profession.

While teacher quality is a critical lever in improving student outcome, teachers are just one part of a learning ecosystem. To have impact, teacher workforce reforms must dovetail with other reforms that address whole school and system factors, such as school funding to address disadvantage, a 21st century curriculum, and school and community partnerships.

Teacher quality issues in NSW cannot be analysed without considering the larger policy enablers and accountability frameworks in play. The Great Teaching paper sits within the context of the DEC's 5 Year Strategic Plan 2012-2017 (NSW DEC 2012a), which sets out the priorities and targets for the NSW education system. It is important that the DEC achieves whole-of-system alignment to deliver on key policy objectives which include educating students for the 21st century and closing equity gaps. Any teacher quality reforms in NSW and the Great Teaching discussion paper need to account for the specific context of NSW as it transitions from a centralised system to a more autonomous system. As such, the Local Schools, Local Decisions (LSLD) plan (NSW DEC 2011) passes greater responsibility to schools for staffing, teacher performance management, and resourcing (NSW DEC 2012c). The planned implementation of LSLD and this movement towards greater school autonomy will need an 'appropriate accountability framework that reflects the authority and resources available to decision makers'(NSW DEC 2011, p.5) to work effectively. This approach has specific implementation challenges when it comes to teacher performance and evaluation as greater devolution can lead to higher levels of variability across a system. For example, teacher performance evaluation can become anchored to school level expectations of teacher quality if the system is not calibrated to ensure inter-rater reliability between supervising teachers or principals who are evaluating performance.

Within this context of increasing autonomy, the challenge is for the DEC to provide the appropriate incentives, support and oversight so that school based innovation and professional practice will be aligned towards improved student learning outcomes.



Section A: Measuring What Matters

Addressing equity and educational disadvantage using disaggregated data

The DEC sets out a commitment to 'closing gaps in achievement in areas of disadvantage' alongside its commitment to achieve 'quality teaching and leadership' as priorities in its 5 year strategic plan (NSW DEC 2012a, p.4) . However, despite top-level commitment to equity in the strategic plan, there is not a clear indication of targeted actions that will successfully close gaps in achievement in the Great Teaching discussion paper.

The DEC's commitment to educational equity is reflected in its targets that address disadvantage, such as to:

- Improve the achievement and inclusion of under-performing and under-represented groups
- Close the gap between Aboriginal Australians and other Australians
- Implement the Supporting Students Action Plan
- Increase the number of students completing tertiary education (NSW DEC 2012a, p.7)

These system-wide commitments to deliver educational equity are also reflected in the measurable targets set by the DEC, which aim to increase the proportion of students achieving at or above the national minimum standards as well as in the top two performance bands for literacy and numeracy.

These targets are effective indicators of the NSW system's progress as they are based off clearly understood growth measures. However, system level goals, while important, can aggregate value-added data in a way that masks the underlying issues. Value-added measures need to examine improvement across the distribution of students in order to ensure that performance measures do not hide groups of students left behind in a broader context of rising achievement. The use of disaggregated data accompanied by targets focussed on sub-group performance is essential to reveal where disadvantage exists. This level of information helps teachers, schools and the system to intentionally deploy resources to where they are needed most and works to close equity gaps.

In an era of increasing public accountability and transparency with regard to school performance, it is important that the system is held accountable for what really matters. A potential model for comparison with NSW is the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, where the school and district accountability framework aims to halve proficiency gaps for all schools, and sub-groups over the next five years. The Massachusetts state system classifies schools and districts on a five-level scale, with corresponding accountability and support interventions. The indicators used to determine the performance of a school include achievement and growth data on state wide tests, cohort graduation rate and annual drop-out rate. This information is reported in aggregate for all students in each school and also for high need subgroups such as students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education 2012). The point of difference with NSW is the targeted focus on sub-group performance. This helps teachers, schools and the system to deploy resources to where they are needed most and works to close equity gaps. School level disaggregated data has also helped identify schools that may have



previously been regarded as high performing due to their student body, but failed to effectively serve certain groups (Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education 2012, p.6).

Currently, the DEC has only set one identifiable sub-group target (to halve the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in reading and numeracy by 2018 (NSW DEC 2012a, p.10)) that sets clear expectations of how student disadvantage will be addressed. These type of targets should be developed for all areas of disadvantage, such as disability, remote schools, non-English speaking background, and low SES (Gonski et al. 2011). Where data is not yet available on the educational outcomes of disadvantaged groups, the DEC should consider incorporating measurement of these outcomes in any future accountability framework implemented in schools. It is important that the DEC translates its ambitious system level targets to the school and teacher level to ensure all students in NSW have the chance to succeed.

Embedding 21st century learning outcomes into educational goals and policy

The DEC's Great Teaching, Inspired Learning (Great Teaching) paper identifies the need for NSW's schools to develop the skills needed for students to thrive in the 21st century, such as creativity, critical thinking, ICT literacies, problem solving and collaboration. This reflects the commitments of the Melbourne Declaration and aligns with the Australian Curriculum (ACARA 2012) which is being implemented in NSW (Board of Studies NSW 2012).

However, this top level commitment to 21st Century learning needs to be translated into the goals and targets set by the DEC, and embedded in each part of the system from curriculum to teacher evaluation. In order to deliver the desirable outcomes, the system needs to measure what matters. It is of concern that 21st century skills and learning outcomes appear to be absent in the targets set by the DEC in its 2012-17 Strategic Plan (NSW DEC 2012a). The DEC lists its targets in terms of attainment at the Year 12, Certificate II/III and University level, as well as performance bands in literacy and numeracy (via the NAPLAN framework). While these are important goals, high performing systems like NSW should aim to deliver comprehensive learning outcomes for all students, beyond attainment.

Attainment, literacy and numeracy outcomes tend to dominate education policy discussions largely because they are the easiest outcomes to measure. However, there is increased international momentum towards incorporating 21st century skills in measurement and assessment. The OECD's highly influential Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) will incorporate collaborative problem solving in its 2015 testing round (Pearson 2011). With education systems around the world increasing their focus on 21st century skills, the international competitiveness of the NSW economy will require an education system aligned to these learning outcomes. The DEC needs to incorporate these skills into its assessment framework, to ensure that NSW schools are aligned towards 21st century educational outcomes.

The Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills (ATC21S) project has made significant progress in building the toolkit to allow 21st century skills to be identified, measured and developed. The ATC21S has drawn on international educational expertise to develop an assessment framework that is designed to be implemented at scale via cloud-based software, while allowing for fast feedback that



is more useful for improvement in teaching practice. The ATC21S framework should be explored as a potential way to incorporate these valuable skills into the DEC's accountability framework in the near future. This will enable the monitoring of progression in achieving 21st century learning outcomes.

Moreover, at the classroom level, it is important that 21st century skills are incorporated in 'assessment for learning', and data from assessments is used to inform teaching practice. This is the key to improving student learning outcomes. In this environment, assessment of 21st century skills needs to emphasise the opportunities for feedback for improving teaching, identifying areas for targeted intervention, and tracking student progress.

Section B: Professional Collaboration through a Feedback Culture

Regardless of the system level goals, successful teaching reform in an increasingly decentralised system will require the development of a feedback culture within the teaching profession that is aligned towards collaboration to improve learning outcomes.

Orienting Performance and Development systems: feedback over compliance

Professional collaboration works to improve the 'collective capacity' (Fullan 2011, p.2) of the profession, shifting the 'drive for change away from the centre to the front lines of schools' (Mourshed et al. 2010, p.22) and making reform efforts self-sustaining. The challenge then arises in aligning the whole system to support, demand, promote and reward effective professional collaboration that is oriented around increasing student learning. This alignment also requires a fundamental shift in professional culture, as teaching is currently a highly atomised profession with teachers inherently spending the majority of their professional life alone in classroom with their students. According to Jensen and Reichl, 'the culture within most schools, and schools systems, is a long way from one of openness and sharing, continuous learning and high performance' (Jensen & Reichl 2012, p.1).

Performance management systems can be used as a professional development tool to improve instructional practice and as a measurement tool to assess performance (Papay 2012, pp.125–6). The NSW system, like most across Australia, has prioritised improvement purposes over accountability (Marshall et al. 2012, p.7). This can have significant system impact if there is rigour in the evidence used to assess standards not only for individual teachers, but across classrooms and schools (Marshall et al. 2012, p.6).

AITSL has identified several strengths to NSW's performance and development framework that should be maintained when it implements the Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework (NSW DEC 2012b, p.11). These include mandatory alignment with the Professional Teaching Standards set by the New South Wales Institute of Teachers (NSWIT) and the mandatory use of classroom observation in teacher performance reviews (Marshall et al. 2012, sec.Appendix).



As the DEC shifts to a more autonomous school system, there are several measures required to support and sustain the implementation of a performance development and management system:

- Promoting stronger accountability by requiring the use of certain types of evidence and data (Marshall et al. 2012, p.6)
- Stronger monitoring of the implementation of performance management practices across the system (Marshall et al. 2012, p.6)
- Building the capacity of school principals to give effective feedback on teaching practices (Marshall et al. 2012, p.6)
- Providing independent monitoring of classroom observations to ensure system level reliability (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation 2012a, p.4)
- Providing targeted capacity building, requiring principals to demonstrate ongoing accuracy in the use of classroom observation instruments to reduce issues with inter-rater reliability (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation 2012a, p.3)
- Provide teachers with multiple forms of feedback evidence including student outcomes, classroom observations and survey instruments to improve professional practice (Marshall et al. 2012, p.6)

The DEC should ensure that any feedback system developed for NSW is focussed on developing an ongoing feedback culture in schools by embedding it in professional practice. As AITSL has identified, government compliance requirements in NSW that link salary increments to performance reviews combined with centralised monitoring of the process ensures that performance and development processes are adopted across the system (Marshall et al. 2012, p.5). Nonetheless, compliance in itself does not guarantee improvements in such processes (Marshall et al. 2012, p.5). The focus of feedback should be on improvement purposes so the feedback is not interpreted as a punitive measure. Ultimately it requires the buy-in of school leadership and teachers to drive change and build a culture of shared practice. A feedback system is best served when it is focussed on improving practice (Marshall et al. 2012, p.6). As DEC noted in Great Teaching, teachers value collaboration, professional learning and feedback from other teachers but in many instances don't receive regular opportunities to participate in these activities. Half of those that do participate view the process as an administrative exercise (NSW DEC 2012b, p.10). Funding release time for teachers to engage in these collaborative activities has been shown to be a key enabler in producing a feedback culture (Black 2007, p.37).

Employing multiple performance measures and the role of student feedback

In order to develop a feedback culture within teacher practice, the DEC needs to incorporate regular and meaningful feedback into the everyday practice of teaching. Classroom observation is one practice that teachers have identified as useful (NSW DEC 2012b, p.10). Classroom observation is a useful measure of teacher performance, and especially powerful as a diagnostic tool for targeting areas of strength and development in teaching practice (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation 2012b, pp.14–15). The Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project, which involved 3,000 teacher volunteers drawn from across six school districts in the United States (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation 2010, p.4), has also shown that the use of multiple measures of teacher effectiveness (student surveys, classroom observation and value-added assessment) creates a more reliable



measure and are a greater predictor of student achievement gains than any of the measures separately (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation 2012b, p.14).

CNPE believes student feedback is an additional untapped source of meaningful feedback to improve teacher practice in NSW. The use of student feedback is understandably complicated by the perception that student responses could be based on subjective feelings towards their teacher, or other subjective criteria. However, the MET project has shown that appropriately designed student surveys are a more reliable measure of a teacher's student achievement gains than classroom observation (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation 2012b, p.52). The TRIPOD student survey used in MET has been designed specifically to avoid teacher popularity contests which are evident in well-known teacher rating sites such as the 'Rate my Teachers' website. The surveys ask students to agree or disagree with statements directed at specific aspects of the classroom environment such as "my teacher wants us to use our thinking skills, not just memorise things" or "our class stays busy and doesn't waste time" (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation 2010, p.12).

Overall, the development of a feedback culture needs multiple measures of teacher effectiveness in order to provide meaningful feedback to improve performance. It has been shown that student surveys provide useful feedback for the improvement of teacher practice and they are also a low cost option to implement across a whole system (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation 2010, pp.7 & 10).

Conclusion

The CNPE commends the DEC for opening discussion into the important topic of teacher quality and effective teaching practice. There are no silver bullets in education reform, but teacher quality is an important lever for improving NSW educational outcomes. This submission has outlined the importance of setting the right objectives by measuring the educational outcomes that matter, including 21st century learning and educational equity. This submission has also highlighted the importance of developing professional collaboration through teacher feedback and professional development.



Acknowledgements

This submission was developed by Ricky Campbell-Allen, Ghazi Ahamat and Calum Lindsay-Field from the Centre for New Public Education, an initiative of FYA. The submission was supported by Robert Jansen.

The Foundation for Young Australian's Centre for New Public Education would be pleased to speak to this submission or elaborate on our research to assist the Department of Education and Communities in its important work.

For further information about this submission or FYA's research and initiatives,

please contact: Jan Owen

Chief Executive Officer

The Foundation for Young Australians

21-27 Somerset Place Melbourne Victoria 3000

jan.owen@fya.org.au



References

- ACARA, 2012. The Australian Curriculum: overview. ACARA. Available at: <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Curriculum/Overview> [Accessed October 18, 2012].
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012a. *Gathering feedback for teaching: policy and practice summary*, Available at: http://www.metproject.org/downloads/MET_Gathering_Feedback_for_Teaching_Summary.pdf.
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012b. *Gathering feedback for teaching: research paper*. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Available at: http://www.metproject.org/downloads/MET_Gathering_Feedback_Research_Paper.pdf [Accessed October 2, 2012].
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010. *Learning about teaching: initial findings from the measures of effective teaching project*, Available at: <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/college-ready-education/Documents/preliminary-findings-research-paper.pdf>.
- Black, R., 2007. *Crossing the Bridge overcoming: Entrenched disadvantage through student-centred learning*, Melbourne. Available at: <http://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/black2007crossingthebridge.pdf>.
- Board of Studies NSW, 2012. The Australian curriculum in New South Wales. *Board of Studies NSW*. Available at: <http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/australian-curriculum/> [Accessed October 18, 2012].
- Fullan, M., 2011. *Learning is the work*, Available at: <http://www.michaelfullan.ca/media/13396087260.pdf>.
- Gonski, D. et al., 2011. *Review of Funding for Schooling - Final Report*, Canberra. Available at: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/ReviewofFunding/Documents/Review-of-Funding-for-Schooling-Final-Report-Dec-2011.pdf>.
- Jensen, B. & Reichl, J., 2012. *Implementing a performance and development framework*, Melbourne. Available at: http://www.aitsl.edu.au/verve/_resources/Implementing_a_performance_and_development_framework_-_Grattan_-_Feb_2012.pdf.
- Keating, J., 2009. *A new federalism in Australian education: a proposal for a national reform agenda*, Available at: http://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/fya_newfederalism_fullreport2.pdf.
- Marshall, G., Cole, P. & Zbar, V., 2012. *Teacher performance and development in Australia: a mapping and analysis of current practise*, Available at: http://www.aitsl.edu.au/verve/_resources/Teacher_Perf__Dev_Aus_AITSL.pdf.



- Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education, 2012. *School Leader's Guide to the 2012 Accountability Determinations*, Available at:
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/apa/ayp/2012/SchoolLeadersGuide.pdf>.
- McCaffrey, D.F. et al., 2003. *Evaluating Value-Added Models for Teacher Accountability*, Santa Monica. Available at:
http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2004/RAND_MG158.pdf.
- Mourshed, M., Chijioke, C. & Barber, M., 2010. *How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better*, Available at:
http://mckinseyonsociety.com/downloads/reports/Education/How-the-Worlds-Most-Improved-School-Systems-Keep-Getting-Better_Download-version_Final.pdf.
- NSW DEC, 2012a. *5 Year Strategic Plan: 2012-2017*, Sydney. Available at:
<https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/about-us/how-we-operate/strategies-and-plans/corporate-plans/fiveyrs-strategic-plan.pdf>.
- NSW DEC, 2012b. *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning Discussion Paper*, Available at:
<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/news/greatteaching/gtil.pdf>.
- NSW DEC, 2011. *Local Schools, Local Decisions*,
- NSW DEC, 2012c. *Managing Resources*, Sydney. Available at:
<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/news/lsld/managing-resources.pdf>.
- Papay, J., 2012. Refocussing the debate: assessing the purposes and tolls of teacher evaluation. *Harvard Educational Review*, 82(1), pp.123–141. Available at:
<http://her.hepg.org/content/v40p0833345w6384/?p=a76b57a57e1a45c5ba90dbc60169c0a4&pi=6>.
- Pearson, 2011. Pearson to develop frameworks for OECD's PISA student assessment for 2015. *Pearson*. Available at: <http://www.pearson.com/news/2011/october/pearson-to-develop-frameworks-for-oecd-s-pisa-student-assessment-f.html?article=true>.
- Rivkin, S.G., Hanushek, E.A. & Kain, J.F., 2005. Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement. *Econometrica*, 73(2), pp.417–458. Available at:
http://fourpercentgrowthproject.com/downloads/theInstitute/educationReform/AREL/AREL_Framework-Bibliography/Rivkin-Hanushek-and-Kain--Teachers-Schools-and-Academic-Achievement.pdf.
- Rockoff, J., 2004. The impact of individual teachers on student achievement: evidence from panel data. *The American Economic Review*, 94(2), pp.247–252. Available at:
<http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/3592891?uid=3737536&uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&sid=21101155051103>.