



# Thinking ahead

Preparing WA's education  
system for future workforces



Chamber of Commerce  
and Industry WA

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>An overview of WA's education system.....</b>	<b>5</b>
The structure of education in WA .....	6
The role of the Federal Government .....	7
<b>Educational excellence: how are we performing? .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Building blocks: Key themes from around the world .....	10
<b>Pedagogy .....</b>	<b>11</b>
Using pedagogy to improve student outcomes .....	13
<b>Curriculum .....</b>	<b>16</b>
Benefits of getting curriculum right.....	19
<b>Supporting Schools .....</b>	<b>21</b>
A leading role for Government – risk and reward.....	23
<b>Student equity .....</b>	<b>26</b>
Levelling up equity.....	28
<b>Connecting schools to community.....</b>	<b>30</b>
The power of collaboration .....	31
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Summary of recommendations .....</b>	<b>34</b>

## Introduction

High-quality education systems have broad societal benefit, underpinning economic growth, productivity and higher living standards. Society flourishes when the next generation is actively encouraged to learn and generate ideas, extending on the knowledge of generations before them to improve our economy and society.

Australia's education system is built on this foundation. In late 2019, all States and Territories agreed to the *Alice Springs (Mpartnwe) Declaration*, which states that education should enable students to become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.

As defined in CCIWA's constitution, we are proud champions of a well-rounded education system which seeks to promote and develop high standards in both education and training. We believe that education should be contemporary, drive curiosity, creativity and critical thinking, and empower the next generations to succeed. We also believe that education systems should adopt modes of teaching that preference the genuine acquisition of knowledge, whether that relates to numeracy, literacy or other subject matter.

Our advocacy in this space has spanned many years, most notably with our 2009 report "Building a Better Tomorrow: Education Reform in WA". However, Western Australia's education system has made little progress since this time, with many of the recommendations from that report remaining relevant.

To our detriment, educational attainment levels in our State and nation have dropped. Unsurprisingly, businesses, large and small, across industry, have expressed concern at the ill-prepared nature of high school graduates for life outside of school.

This is backed up by evidence and data.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has found that for mathematics and reading, students in Australia scored more than 25 points below students of the same age who sat the exact same test in the early 2000s.

In other words, 15-year-olds students in 2022 scored at a level that would have been expected of 14-year-olds, some 20 years earlier.<sup>1,2</sup> The latest NAPLAN results for WA also reinforce these findings. This decline must be reversed if we want to improve our state's economy and, more importantly, help children become accomplished individuals.

In preparing this report, we engaged with industry, private and public-school teachers, education and school leaders, training providers and universities to understand where the education system was failing. We also held a roundtable discussion with industry

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<sup>1</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. [PISA 2022 Results \(Vol 1 & 2\) - Country Notes: Australia](#). December 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Note: PISA assessments are usually taken from a sample of schools and a sample again of students within schools. This may skew results. PISA also publishes sub-regional data, but does not detail data for Australian States and Territories.

and gained further insight through surveys. These stakeholders were unified in their view that the primary purpose of our education system is to deliver students who are workforce ready. And based on this metric, WA's education system is not meeting expectations.

There are many reasons put forward as to what might be causing system issues, including, but not limited to, the pedagogies being used, red tape, risk aversion, an oversized curriculum disconnected from industry needs, failure to address student inequity, and the heaviness of bureaucracy.

Our findings align with existing research and advocacy from other education stakeholders, such as the Fogarty Foundation, the Grattan Institute, and the Centre for Independent Studies.

In responding to these findings, we have developed a suite of recommendations. However, as a point of difference, our recommendations have been crafted with a Western Australia focus and consideration of broader economic factors.

We took this approach as the economy is intrinsically linked to a strong education sector. Some economists estimate that, on average, productivity increases up to eight percent for every extra year of education attained.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, if education is not also viewed through an economic lens, there is a significant risk to WA's and the nation's future economic prosperity. We need the education system to deliver a fine balance between the skills and knowledge needed today, and the needs of the future. Given this, generations Alpha and Beta will, inherently, need to be more educated than any generation that has existed before.

With this context, this report seeks to respond to two fundamental questions:

1. What are the drivers leading to the current gap in skills and knowledge development in the education system today?
2. How can the education system be improved to deliver the skill needs of the future?

During this 12-month inquiry, we have sought to answer these questions, consulting closely with industry, government, parents and teachers. We welcome the series of announcements recently by the Minister, which reflect some of the recommendations in this report. However, there are other areas of reform that we would also welcome.

In what follows, we outline WA's public education system and how it is structured. We then explore how these failures can be addressed, outlining how the State Government and other education stakeholders can improve the system and ensure future workers have the skills they need to succeed in the labour markets of the future.

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<sup>3</sup> Agenda: A Journal of Policy Analysis and Reform Volume 11, Day C.& Dowrick S. [Ageing economics: human capital, productivity and fertility](#). January 2004.



## An overview of WA's education system

In Australia each State and Territory is responsible for delivering local education. However, there is a Federal Department of Education which provides funding and national strategic direction. Education is delivered through public, private, and independent schools, with single gender and co-educational options.

Formal education in Western Australia comprises of:

- **Pre-School for ages 3-5:** Most schools offer Kindergarten (age 4) and Pre-Primary (age 5). Some schools also offer Pre-Kindergarten (age 3); however, this is mainly limited to private schools. Uniquely, compared to other States, in Western Australia most preschools are co-located with Primary Schools.
- **Primary School for ages 6-11:** Primary school starts with Year 1 and concludes with Year 6. The curriculum is taught to year-only cohorts or mixed year cohorts (stylised as Year 4 or Year 3/4). Teachers are trained as generalists. Specialist teachers exist for music, languages other than English (LOTE), physical education, and visual arts. High-achieving pupils can access Primary Extension and Challenge (PEAC) programs or similar types of extension classes.
- **Secondary or High School for ages 12-18:** High school consists of Years 7-12, usually further split into Middle School (7-9) and Senior School (10-12). The curriculum changes over time, with course offerings becoming more specific in Senior school. Schools offer Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) courses, General courses, school-based traineeships, and Vocational Education and Training (VET). Teachers are often specialists in a chosen field.
- **Tertiary education** is used interchangeably with the term Post-Secondary Education. It includes University study, TAFE, apprenticeships, and VET studies.

Western Australia's vast size and relatively low population can mean rationalisation of schooling in some regional communities, and limited access to in-person tertiary education outside of the Perth metropolitan region. It is not uncommon for towns to accommodate District High Schools (Years 1-10 only) or Senior Colleges (Years 11-12).

There are also specialty schools and programs, such as those offered through the Agricultural College network and approved specialist schools. There are over 100 specialist programs offered at 56 schools, such as the fine arts and music-focused John Curtin College of the Arts.

Tutoring services also exist, whether provided by schools, private tutor providers, or by individuals, however tutoring is entirely optional.

In Western Australia, schools offer four terms (9-11 weeks each) over the course of a year, with a long Christmas break (6-8 weeks), and two week breaks between terms in April, July, and September. This structure means that students are in classrooms around 41 weeks every year. Preschool hours vary depending on the school, with most Kindergartens offering 2 or 3 part-days per week.

## The structure of education in WA

In the last decade, Western Australia has seen immense population growth, particularly across the Perth, Great Southern, and South West regions. This has led to a 50 per cent increase in the number of schools since 2015, mostly in Perth. Today, approximately 1,146 schools across public and private school systems deliver education to some 494,000 students.<sup>4,5</sup>

As a result, the public education system is the second biggest cost to the State Government and has the second biggest staff headcount within the public sector. However, this is arguably underestimated, as the education budget is split across different departments:

- The **Department of Education** is the main entity responsible for education.
- The **School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA)** is responsible for developing the curriculum and is supported by the Department of Education.
- The **Department of Training and Workforce Development (DTWD)** is responsible for oversight of the TAFE network, delivering targeted apprenticeship grant programs, and for tracking workforce development data.
- The **Department of Communities** provides management and oversight of early childhood education and care, out of school care, and partially funds services at public childcare development centres. It also authorises Working with Children checks and registration of early childhood centres.
- The **Department of Health** provides management of public health service provision in schools and partially funds public childcare development centres.
- The **Department of Energy and Economic Diversification (DEED)**, formerly the Department of Jobs, Tourism, Science and Innovation (JTSI). DEED provides strategic planning for international education and tracks jobs data, and helps facilitate international trade and advocacy for WA's universities.
- The **Department of Justice (DoJ)** plays a small role in supporting youth justice reinvestment, including education, training, and healthcare services.
- The **Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC)** was recently funded \$4.9 million to conduct a review into early childhood policy settings and hosts the Office of Early Childhood.<sup>6</sup>

In 2008, Western Australia undertook substantial reform of its education system, with the introduction of the Independent Public School (IPS) framework. IPS is designed to provide schools with more autonomy, which was broadly welcomed by education stakeholders as it delegated significant authority to Principals and School Boards.

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<sup>4</sup> WA Office of the Auditor General. [Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools](#). August 2015.

<sup>5</sup> WA Department of Education. [Annual Report 2023-24](#). May 2024.

<sup>6</sup> WA Treasury. 2024-25 Mid-Year Review. December 2024.

As of 2025, almost 75 per cent of schools in Western Australia are now IPS. Independent reviews in 2013 and 2015 found that IPS has had an overall positive impact.<sup>7</sup> These reviews concluded that school leaders and teachers felt more confident in being able to meet business plans, engage with parents, and assist students who require additional support.

However, some unions remain opposed to IPS, arguing it created performance measures within staff contracts and did not deliver improved student equity.<sup>8,9</sup> Yet by using school budgets more efficiently and effectively, schools have been able to improve equity by providing an increased focus on students with learning difficulties, hiring subject specialists, and offering pre-kindergarten classes or onsite childcare.<sup>10</sup>

Overall, the feedback continues to be overwhelmingly positive. IPS is highly valued and well supported by a broad cross-section of the community, by providing a degree of autonomy to schools, leading to rapid decision-making at the local level.

## **The role of the Federal Government**

As outlined earlier, the Federal Department of Education also has a role to play in delivering education. During the 2010s, a series of national reforms and funding agreements led to the creation of two coordination agencies: the Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).

ACECQA develops and monitors the Early Learning Years learning framework.<sup>11</sup> This framework applies to non-formal curriculum settings, such as daycare and childcare. The framework does not apply to pre-kindergarten, and ACECQA plays no role in monitoring pre-kindergarten settings. Instead, it is up to State and Territory jurisdictions to manage learning content for early years education. However, investing in early childcare is a cost shared by both State and Federal Governments.

This contrasts to other countries, such as Estonia and Taiwan, where formal education starts from as early as the age of two. Various reports, including the Gonski report, concluded that early childhood investment and early childhood engagement improves overall student outcomes.<sup>12,13</sup>

ACARA has two key responsibilities, firstly, in developing the National Curriculum, the model curriculum for State and Territory Governments to adopt, and secondly, in delivering the National Assessment Program for literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN).

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<sup>7</sup> University of Melbourne. [Evaluation of the Independent Public Schools Initiative](#). May 2013.

<sup>8</sup> State School Teacher Union of WA. [Submission to Inquiry into the Department of Education's IPS Initiative](#). April 2016.

<sup>9</sup> State School Teacher Union of WA. [Facing the Facts report](#). September 2024.

<sup>10</sup> University of Melbourne. [Evaluation of the Independent Public Schools Initiative](#). May 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority. [National Quality Framework](#). Accessed January 2025.

<sup>12</sup> Australian Government Department of Education. [The Gonski Report of Funding for Schooling](#). December 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Educational Psychology Review, Ritosa A et al. [Measuring Children's Engagement in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings: A Scoping Literature Review](#). September 2023.

## National Curriculum

The National Curriculum includes nine topics, with three cross-cutting themes [Figure 1]. These are detailed across Foundations through to Year 10.<sup>14</sup> ACARA does not prescribe the pedagogy, that is, how each topic and theme should be taught. State and Territory curriculum authorities either adapt or adopt the National Curriculum, which may create discrepancies in how the national curriculum is ultimately taught.

**Figure 1: National Curriculum topics and themes**

National Curriculum Topics			Cross-cut themes
 English	 Mathematics	 Technologies	 Sustainability
 Humanities and Social Sciences	 Sciences	 Health and Physical Education	 First Nation Histories and Cultures
 Languages	 The Arts	 Work Studies (Year 10 only)	 Australia and Asia

While the National Curriculum was initially welcomed, it has faced criticism in recent years due to a perceived lack of agility and relevance to industry; being too cluttered; and that it focuses on delivering cross-cutting themes at the expense of core topics.

Criticism also extends to specific cohort years and topics. The Year 7 curriculum, for example, is seen to be particularly problematic for not providing a clear baseline of required skills and knowledge for senior schooling.<sup>15, 16, 17</sup> The science curriculum has also been criticised for lacking depth and breadth, with sequencing and clarity issues.<sup>18</sup>

## NAPLAN Testing

Introduced in 2008, NAPLAN is Australia's standardised national skills test. The test is only conducted for English and mathematics across Years 3, 5, 7, and 9. While NAPLAN was introduced to deliver a nationally consistent measure to assess student performance, the way academic outcomes have been measured has changed over time

<sup>14</sup> The term Foundations was chosen, as each jurisdiction has a different name for the year of study before Year 1.

<sup>15</sup> The Conversation Australia, Hickey C. [A 'crowded curriculum'? Sure, it may be complex, but so is the world kids must engage with](#). June 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Fogarty Foundation. [Review to Achieve Education Excellence in Australian Schools – Submission](#). December 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Learning First. [Fixing the hole in Australian Education: The Australian Curriculum benchmarked against the best](#). November 2023.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



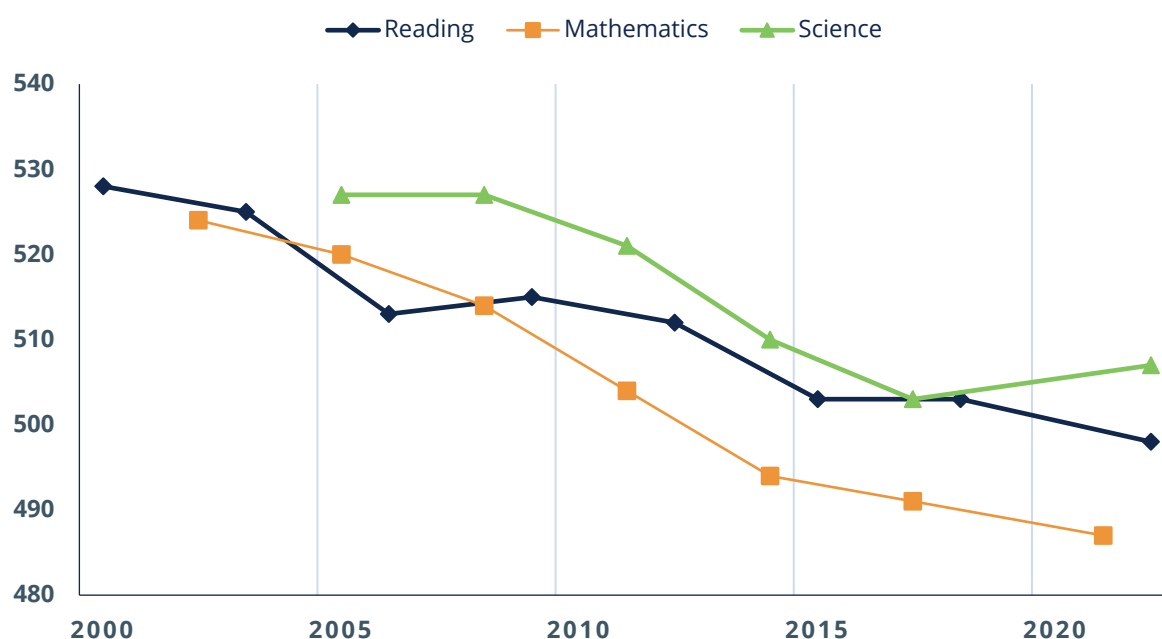
by Federal Education Ministers to mitigate bad results. Nevertheless, NAPLAN is still the main measure in Australia to assess student performance.

## Educational excellence: how are we performing?

Australia's NAPLAN results have attracted increased interest in recent years, as student performance has, unfortunately, trended worse. WA appearing to pull down the national average. Based on NAPLAN data from August 2023, a significant proportion of WA students were below the NAPLAN average, with 30 to 40 per cent of students in WA needing 'additional support' or deemed 'developing'.<sup>19</sup>

PISA, the OECD's international testing scheme, has also highlighted Australia's lacklustre performance **[Figure 2]**. In fact, in 2019, the Australian Centre for Education Research (ACER), issued a public statement raising concerns about Australia's under-performance in core knowledge bases.<sup>20</sup>

**Figure 2: Trends in Australia's national PISA results, from 2000 to 2022<sup>21</sup>**



As a result, both the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Business Council of Australia have made calls for policy action to improve Australia's education standards.<sup>22</sup> The need for policy action is also consistent with the findings from our engagement with industry in Western Australia.

For example, during our consultations, a trades training business noted:

<sup>19</sup> CCIWA analysis of [NAPLAN National Report 2022](#) data.

<sup>20</sup> Australian Council for Educational Research. [PISA 2018: Australian student performance in long-term decline](#). December 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. [PISA 2022 results – Australia](#). Accessed December 2024.

<sup>22</sup> Business Council of Australia. [BCA calls for policy action to improve sliding education standards](#). January 2025.

Literacy and numeracy are particularly bad, especially in trade... apprentices are often let go because they need to re-learn basic knowledge they should have learnt in school settings.

And a representative from the health and community services sector said:

Basic digital skills remain lacking in graduates... simple things such as writing emails and being comfortable communicating over the phone.

In response to falling academic outcomes, the Federal Government commissioned an independent report into the education system, which was released publicly in December 2023.

The *Improving Outcomes for All* report found that school attendance has declined since 2015, with less than half of students attending school 90 per cent of the time in 2022. It also found that disadvantaged students are three-times more likely to fall behind and more than one in three students are not meeting NAPLAN literacy and numeracy proficiency standards.<sup>23</sup>

This has a flow on effect for students, who often end up effectively paying twice for education if they pursue tertiary education or post-secondary education through a registered training organisation.

To this, a lead academic from the university sector stated:

Students in bridging courses perceived these courses as better value learning compared to their experiences in high school. While these courses have their value, in an ideal world, they should not be required.

If WA is to deliver a world-leading education system, as intended by the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration*, then it appears reform is needed to address these concerns.

## Building blocks: Key themes from around the world

Some academics argue that our outcomes are not falling, but other countries are improving at a much faster rate compared to Australia.<sup>24,25</sup> With this in mind, we undertook desktop research into several top performing countries to find similarities in their education systems. Countries investigated included Singapore, South Korea, Japan, China, Estonia, and Finland, and the following themes emerged:

<sup>23</sup> Australian Government Department of Education. [Improving Outcomes for All: Australian Government Summary Report of the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System](#). December 2023.

<sup>24</sup> The Guardian, Cassidy C. [Nearly 80% of Australian students say they 'didn't fully try' in latest PISA tests](#). January 2024.

<sup>25</sup> Australian Council for Education Research. [Media release: PISA 2022: Australian student performance stabilizes while OECD average falls](#). December 2023.

- **Pedagogy:** While main pedagogies may differ, all systems focused on deep learning for English (or the relevant primary national language) and mathematics. Assistance is flexible and targeted to students who need help.
- **Curriculum:** Students focus studies on English, mathematics, and science. Creative and extracurricular topics are encouraged but are not necessarily core to education outcomes. Hobbies and sports take place after school, allowing students a set time to develop 'soft' skills. All countries provide investment and support in early childhood education, with formal learning from as young as two. Teaching time for early childhood often exceeds 30 hours per week.
- **Teacher and school autonomy:** Schools are often decision-makers, and they support teachers through access to innovation funds, and access to industry. Teachers often have access to national schemes to undertake short-term placements with industry. Curriculum authorities are well connected to industry.
- **Connecting schools and community:** Regardless of vocational or classroom-based learning, systems which excel at education outcomes all have strong industry engagement. Career counselling and internships are also well embedded into senior schools. Most countries also only have a single department or ministry of education, which also tracks workforce data.
- **Parents are engaged:** Parents engage strongly with their child's education journey. Often this is cultural, with parents seen as supplementing learning at school, particularly for earlier years. Parents are also seen to engage with children to visibly support and show interest in learning.
- **Student equity:** As outlined above, students are supported if they need help in these countries. We also found that school holidays were shorter and supplemented by camps and learning programs. This allows parents who work, particularly shift workers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, to experience less disruption to work-life balance, while also maximising student learning.

If other countries are improving their standards, then Australia should be competitive and learn from their success. In what follows, we seek to better understand how these themes play out in a Western Australian context, identifying key issues and recommendations to address them.

## Pedagogy

The way curriculum is taught, known as pedagogy, is crucial to student learning and for students to develop a passion for learning. There are several types of pedagogies, with the primary types identified as follows:

- **Explicit instruction** is teacher-led, with students taught information directly. It is based around the practice of 'deep learning', of constant review and reinforcement, scaffolding information. Students generally do not progress until they show that they have developed mastery of a topic.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Australian Education Research Organisation. [Explicit Instruction](#). February 2024.

- **Project learning** sees students learn via projects, not class topics, with varying levels of teacher engagement. It is often used to supplement core pedagogies.<sup>27</sup>
- **Student-led inquiry** directs students to information or information sources, and tasks students to help each other learn the course content.<sup>28</sup> Teachers act as a guide for discussion.
- **Play-based learning** is when students are left to learn through play. Play-based learning is commonly applied in early years education and less so after preschool.<sup>29</sup>

While both explicit instruction and student-led learning have a place in our education system, explicit instruction is gaining increased attention, particularly in the early years, to underpin the development of core knowledge.

Ironically, explicit instruction was once the widespread pedagogy, however over the years this has been replaced with student-led inquiry. Some unions have consistently pushed for student-led inquiry, arguing that explicit instruction is akin to factory work and that structured lesson plans ignore the individual circumstances of students.<sup>30,31</sup> As a result, there has been a notable decline in the importance placed on understanding and deep learning within public systems across Australia.

Recently there has been a marked shift in thinking to restore explicit teaching in Australia. Leading policy institutions, such as the Grattan Institute and Centre for Independent Studies, show strong support for explicit instruction, particularly for reading and phonics.<sup>32</sup>

In Western Australia, the Teaching for Impact and the Quality Teaching Strategy were released in 2022, having been in development since 2020.<sup>33,34</sup> Similar frameworks have been introduced in other jurisdictions, arguably with more fanfare and supporting materials for teachers and school leaders to support their implementation. Examples of these include Victoria's *Teaching and Learning Model*; Queensland's *Age-appropriate Pedagogies* (AAPs) framework; and the New South Wales *Quality Teaching Framework*.

Some Western Australian schools are applying explicit instruction to profound effect. For example, Campbell Primary School in Canning Vale, requires teachers to test children before they start teaching a concept to determine what they know and what to focus on, and then test them again after they have taught the curriculum content.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Australian Council for Education Research, Sharma P & Kapoor A. [Project-based learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom](#). August 2024.

<sup>28</sup> Australian Government Department of Education. [Inquiry-based learning](#).

<sup>29</sup> WA Government Department of Education. [Play-based learning](#).

<sup>30</sup> Australian Education Union, Stroud G. [Opinion: A new standard](#). December 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Australian Education Union. [Submission to the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System](#). August 2023.

<sup>32</sup> Grattan Institute, Haywood A. [Australia's schools have too many instructional casualties](#). February 2024.

<sup>33</sup> WA Department of Education. [Teaching for impact](#). October 2022.

<sup>34</sup> The West (Australian), Hiatt B. [Strategy aims to improve teaching and boost results in WA schools](#). October 2022.

<sup>35</sup> The West, Hiatt B. [The 25 WA schools that made list of high-performers based on NAPLAN results](#). December 2024.

These models/frameworks are underpinned by an explicit learning approach (for example, with phonics-based learning in early years), and were driven by the need to address declining education outcomes.<sup>36,37</sup> This ensures that students understand key concepts before moving onto other, more advanced, concepts.

Yet despite the existence of the Teaching for Impact and the Quality Teaching Strategy, we found that some teachers felt like they need more support and guidance on when to apply the right pedagogy and how to do so. This lack of knowledge and understanding has been compounded by a lack of emphasis placed on the importance of these pedagogies, particularly explicit, within tertiary studies. A shift is occurring, however, with Edith Cowan University recently reintroducing explicit teaching as a core topic.<sup>38</sup>

This shift to greater levels of explicit instruction must continue, albeit the newest cohort of undergraduate teachers were likely never introduced to this pedagogy during their own schooling. As such, we should not underestimate the challenge ahead.

## Using pedagogy to improve student outcomes

To ensure the widespread adoption of explicit instruction across WA schools, a multi-faceted approach is needed, with buy-in from the teaching community, unions, school leaders, the State Government as well as universities and training providers.

As mentioned previously, Edith Cowan University has reintroduced explicit education training into their Master of Education degree. This is an important development. La Trobe University, in Victoria, is leading reform with their SOME and SOLAR Lab programs teaching explicit education methods for mathematics, literacy, and reading skills.<sup>39,40</sup> The State and Federal Governments must work with the university sector to ensure education degree programs across Australia, include content relating to pedagogies and learning by explicit instruction.

Pedagogy can be used to great effect, when applied appropriately. This requires providing teachers and school leaders with the right tools and to be empowered to deliver different pedagogies. An example is Warriapendi Primary School **[Case Study 1]** which has been highlighted anecdotally and in the media as a very successful school for improving education outcomes of their students. To this end, the State Government should continue to deliver explicit teaching, and provide greater assistance to teachers in relation to explicit and deep learning instruction.

To support teachers in delivering pedagogies effectively, classroom management also warrants further investigation. The State Government should provide funding for Independent Public Schools to trial some of these classroom management approaches,

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<sup>36</sup> Victorian Government. [Media Release: Making Best Practice Common Practice in the Education State](#). June 2024.

<sup>37</sup> NSW Government. [Media Release: Landmark new school curriculum to drive better education outcomes](#). July 2024.

<sup>38</sup> Edith Cowan University. [Master of Education: Course Overview](#). Accessed February 2025.

<sup>39</sup> Australian Financial review, Hare J. [This school may have the answer to improving kids' math](#). March 2025.

<sup>40</sup> Australian Financial review, Hare J. [A lot of pseudo-science: The problem with schools](#). February 2023.



specifically teacher looping and timetabling. These have long been a part of education pedagogy overseas in high-performing OECD countries.

### **Teacher Looping**

Teacher looping is common across high performing education systems. It generally involves teachers remaining with a student cohort over several years. In Finland and Japan, for example, one teacher remains with a class for Years 1-2, and then another for Years 3-6.

Estonia, on the other hand, employs a slightly different model, with two teachers assigned to one class, with one teacher focused on mathematics and science subjects and the other for languages and social studies.<sup>41</sup>

Teacher looping not only allows for greater connection with students, but it also ensures teacher accountability, for example, in highlighting when teachers may need to undertake professional development due to underperformance.

### **Timetabling**

Timetabling is also a key consideration that has marked impact on student learning and classroom management. Findings from child development studies suggests that a typical child in a primary school can only maintain attention on cognitive tasks for between 10 minutes to 30 minutes.<sup>42</sup>

Developing good habits with attention span is also important to embed in earlier years, as students with shorter attention spans often struggle with information retention and developing a sense of understanding.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to having relatively flexible timetables, schools in the UK and Japan, also operate on trimesters. This allows students to maximise class time and retain information. Trimesters are broken up by a one-week break, halfway through.

In addition to supporting the broader application of deep learning and explicit teaching for core skills and knowledge, the Department should support different timetabling arrangements, with the aim to improve academic outcomes through maximising learning retention.

Some private sector school systems in Western Australia have already trialled timetabling to improve student information retention and engagement. The Department of Education could learn from this existing work.

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<sup>41</sup> US National Center on Education and the Economy, Kraemer J. [Looping Students with Teachers: Providing Continuity and Support](#). March 2021.

<sup>42</sup> Sahlberg P. [Three simple strategies to transform our schools](#). November 2024.

<sup>43</sup> Oaten J. [Combating the attention span crisis in our students](#). April 2024.

## CASE STUDY 1

### Warriapendi Primary School, Balga

Warriapendi Primary School is an Independent Public School in Balga. It has a diverse student cohort, and, as a result, has focused on explicit teaching and a bespoke curriculum to deliver student excellence.

Teachers are empowered to work collaboratively to deliver high-impact lessons using explicit teaching approaches. The school also operates a Child and Parent Centre onsite.



*Image credit: Department of Education WA*

### Recommendations:



#### **1. Greater support for teachers to apply explicit instruction**

The State Government should ensure the supporting material for explicit instruction is fit-for-purpose, ensuring teachers understand the importance of pedagogies, and how to apply different pedagogies in different contexts.



#### **2. Teacher training in explicit instruction**

The State Government must support and encourage teachers to engage in professional development that supports the advancement of explicit instruction.



#### **3. Fund to pilot different teaching systems**

The State Government should provide funding for schools to trial teacher looping in primary school settings. The fund should also allow schools to trial different timetabling methods to see if this improves student retention and reduces teacher burnout. To aid the pilot, the State Government should engage with the private education sector to identify classroom management practices that work for different school systems in WA.



## Curriculum

In engaging with the business community, a common complaint highlighted was that graduates are not 'job ready'. This is despite the inclusion of 'general capabilities' within the WA curriculum, and the setting of minimum education standards.<sup>44</sup>

In Western Australia, the curriculum has expanded rapidly in recent years. While the National Curriculum outlines nine subject areas, these are not the only subjects available to students. Secondary education provides a multitude of additional topics for students to pursue. In May 2024, the former Minister of Education announced a review into the WA Certificate of Education (WACE) and the WA Statement of Student Achievement (WASSA).<sup>45</sup> This intends to identify gaps in communicating a graduates' skillset to potential employers.

What individual businesses expect can vary, but, primarily, they want to see graduates who are able to communicate effectively, verbally and in writing, can apply mathematics in real-world scenarios, and can think critically about their workplace. These skills are fundamental to further engagement in the workplace. However, rather than refocus on these critical skills in the curriculum, the Department of Education and SCSA instead preference specialist subjects for both ATAR and general course pathways.

In addition, new subjects are continually added into the Western Australian curriculum, depending on perceived gaps in education. Often these new subjects crowd out existing, multimodal courses, which offer the same skills and knowledge development. For a variety of reasons, not all schools can offer the substantive curriculum across all year levels, which can also create inequality across the education system.<sup>46</sup>

As one business noted:

Students are just so overwhelmed with a smorgasbord of topics... [WA has] the most crowded curriculum ever but the least resilient kids.

Another representative from the science sector noted that despite the focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), science is often an afterthought in primary school settings. As a result, students can fail to see value in studying science subjects in high school:

[The Government] keeps pushing STEM, but 64 per cent primary students choose not to do science in high school because of no or minimal focus on science in primary school aged settings.

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<sup>44</sup> SCSA advises that there are seven general capabilities for students which are intended to align with the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration: Literacy, Numeracy, Information and communication technology (ICT) capability, Critical and creative thinking, Personal and social capability, Ethical understanding, Intercultural understanding.

<sup>45</sup> Media Statement. [Cook Government released blueprint for senior secondary pathways](#). May 2024.

<sup>46</sup> Learning First, Jensen B. & Ross M. [Four reforms could close the education inequality gap](#). September 2022.

The issues arise as SCSA can either adapt or adopt the national curriculum to local contexts. SCSA must work closer with industry to identify the basic skills and knowledge needed. Further, while SCSA does provide 'curriculum guidelines' for Kindergarten, there is no single national curriculum or guidance on early years education such as Kindergarten. This creates a critical gap in child learning and development, as each child starts at a different level of knowledge across the country.

There is a lack of national consistency for terms used and hours taught in early education [Figure 3]. Notably, pre-kindergarten is not mandated by the Federal Government, resulting in a lack of consistency across jurisdictions. As mentioned earlier, in Western Australia pre-kindergarten is offered by private schools but is broadly not well catered for within the public system.

**Figure 3: Comparison of formal Early Childhood Education offerings by jurisdiction**

Age 3		
SA	3 year old preschool	12 hours per week, eligible children only
VIC	3 year old Kinder	5 hours per week, increasing to 15 hours per week
ACT	3 year old preschool	15 hours per week, not yet universal
Age 4		
NSW	Preschool	15 hours per week, over 2-3 days
QLD	Kindergarten	15 hours per week, over 14 days
SA	Preschool	15 hours per week, over 2-3 days
TAS	Kindergarten	15 hours per week, over 3 days
VIC	4 Year old Kinder / Pre-Prep	15 hours per week, increasing to 30 hours per week
WA	Kindergarten	15 hours per week, over 2-3 days <sup>47</sup>
ACT	Preschool	15 hours per week, over 5 days
NT	Preschool	15 hours per week, over 5 days
Age 5		
NSW	Kindergarten	25 hours per week, over 5 days
QLD	Preparatory	25 hours per week, over 5 days
SA	Reception	25 hours per week, over 5 days
TAS	Prep	25 hours per week, over 5 days
VIC	Preparatory	25 hours per week, over 5 days
WA	Pre-Primary	25 hours and 50 minutes per week, over 5 days
ACT	Kindergarten	25 hours per week, over 5 days
NT	Transition	25 hours per week, over 5 days

In comparison, both Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), will have 'pre-kindy' programs commencing in public schools from this year and rolling out broadly over the next several years. Both programs intend to formalise universal 3-year-old preschool or Kindergarten from 2025-26. By 2029, schools in Victoria and the ACT will be resourced to offer 15 hours per week of formal education for 3-year-olds. As mentioned earlier, there is no national standard curriculum for these programs.

<sup>47</sup> In February 2025, WA Labor committed to a trial of five day kindergarten at select schools, starting in 2027.

Our engagement with industry also found that digital literacy requires further curriculum development. While students today may be labelled as 'digital natives', we heard consistently that students are not developing the right skills to succeed in the workplace, particularly in the general day-to-day use and etiquette of digital skills.

For example, a disability advocacy group noted that graduates struggled with basic digital skills:

Generation Z embrace technology, but basic digital skills are missing... email writing in particular is an issue.

This was also reinforced by a private registered training organisation, who noted that digital literacy is often a skill set that requires further development with their students, whether mature aged or straight out of school.

Part of the problem relates to teachers not having up-to-date knowledge and adequate skills for teaching digital literacy. Some stakeholders pointed to the lack of guidance from the Department of Education on how and when digital literacy should be taught, and what systems or applications to teach with. For example, on the use of artificial intelligence, one teacher noted:

Artificial intelligence is being encouraged for all sorts of things, without teachers and school leaders being provided best practice or ethical guidance...

One of the key challenges identified is that teachers and staff skilled in multi-modal learning have, over the years, been replaced by teachers focused on specific tasks. For example, teacher-librarians used to be commonplace across both public and private systems. They were skilled in teaching research, digital skills, and could be deployed across the school to supplement English teaching, particularly for students who learn English as a second language or who may have a learning disability. It is now rare to find public schools with true teacher-librarians.

Without skilled and informed teachers to help students navigate the best practice of digital technology, students are failing to understand its application in workforces. Given these trends, there is an evident need for the role of technology in education to be better defined and supported by policy and funding.

This should also extend to a review of preferred devices, noting that the dominant device in a corporate workspace is a laptop. The policy settings must also acknowledge that some students, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds and regional and remote communities, have limited access to digital technology.



## Benefits of getting curriculum right

A right knowledge, right time approach to learning requires applying best practice pedagogies to teach fundamentals first, with a secondary focus on two future skills – resilience and digital skills.

SCSA should adopt a clear approach to core skills and knowledge, primarily mathematics, English, science, history, and geography. Where appropriate, this should be balanced with unstructured and structured lesson time, both inside and outside the classroom, as this type of engagement is of immense benefit to child development.<sup>48</sup>

Schools should adopt a deep learning approach, which assists students to fully comprehend a topic before moving on to more advanced concepts. For secondary school settings, this requires a significant rationalisation of classes offered. SCSA must work with industry to identify core knowledge and skills which can then be adopted across subjects. General and ATAR branded courses should be collapsed back into a single course offering.

Secondary school should offer more subjects compared to primary school, allowing students to follow specialisations. Where possible, however, these should be multimodal in content, helping students to develop several skills as part of the subject. For example, outdoor education teaches geography, mathematics, resilience and comprehension skills and knowledge.

Sitting alongside this simpler approach should be a digital skills matrix and a resilience strategy. This would help school leaders and teachers incorporate both resilience and digital skills into lesson planning and learning. Wesley College **[Case Study 2]** is an example of a school which has successfully incorporated both resilience and digital skills into their curriculum.

The resilience strategy should focus on a mix of extracurricular activities and tests. SCSA should generate a series of PISA-aligned tests to track child and cohort development. The tests should be voluntary and inclusive, allowing students who may have neurodiversity or disability to undertake assessments.

While the National Curriculum does include an overview of technologies, a more focused and targeted curriculum for digital skills is required to help students understand how technology is used in the workplace. Digital skills training and learning will require a two-pronged approach, firstly with teachers being upskilled in line with industry expectations, and secondly, students must develop skills and knowledge.

Rather than create an entire curriculum for digital skills, the Department of Education should develop a digital matrix for schools. This matrix would assist school leaders and teachers to identify capabilities, content, equipment needs and staff training needs.

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<sup>48</sup> Nature Play WA. [Outdoor Learning, Outdoor Play and the School Environment Literature Review](#). June 2023.

## CASE STUDY 2

### Wesley College, South Perth

Wesley College is a private school, founded in 1923. Over the century, it has developed a highly flexible curriculum, focused on developing core skills and knowledge.

Wesley's curriculum also places a focus on wellbeing, academic excellence, future-readiness and workplace learning, as well as innovation and digital skills – the school is developing its own digital matrix.

This will inform a new digital skills curriculum, for teachers and students across Pre-Kindergarten to Year 12.



**WESLEY COLLEGE**

By daring & by doing

*Image credit: Wesley College*

### Recommendations:



#### 4. Simpler Curriculum

The State Government, through SCSA, should develop a curriculum which embeds foundational skills and knowledge early, and often. The State Government should adopt streamlined secondary school offerings, removing the 'general' option for learning and committing to ATAR and VET as the minimum learning threshold.



#### 5. Push the Federal Government on early years curriculum

Through National Cabinet, the State Government should push for a national approach to early years curriculum which ensures both mathematics and English skills and knowledge are effectively taught.



#### 6. Building resilience

The State Government should develop a resilience strategy to sit alongside the curriculum. As part of the strategy, SCSA should also develop PISA style tests, which help to track resilience development.



#### 7. Digital literacy matrix

The State Government should work with industry, school leaders, and teachers to develop a digital skills matrix. This matrix should ensure that students graduate with an acceptable level of digital skills, and that students can understand how these skills are applied. It should also undertake a thorough review of existing device policy guidance.



## Supporting Schools

In our engagement, three governance themes emerged: the need to support school autonomy, a lack of a singular governing department which tracks education holistically, and the twin issues of risk and red tape.

The IPS model is critical to WA's public education system, as it provides school leaders and communities with the autonomy they need to make local decisions. While broadly welcomed, IPS is yet to be fully applied to all schools in WA.

Under the model, school leaders directly negotiate with teachers regarding workload and responsibilities. The State School Teachers Union of WA (SSTUWA) has consistently opposed this devolution of decision-making.<sup>49,50</sup> The SSTUWA has openly declared that it is focused on "protecting and improving our industrial and professional rights and promoting quality public education for all". It needs to be recognised that this can come at the expense of education delivery.<sup>51</sup>

These focuses can conflict with delivering the best student outcomes, as the primary purpose of unions is to represent educators, not students and their learning outcomes. This was evident during the recent enterprise bargaining negotiations with the WA State Government, where teachers walked off the job and disrupted student learning.<sup>52</sup>

There has also been criticism about a lack of guidance and support. For example, the committee chair of a 2016 State Government inquiry into the IPS framework stated:

*in any devolved system, and particularly in education, local decision makers need to be supported by central office guidance and be subject to appropriate levels of accountability. Support and accountability must balance autonomy so it does not become abandonment.*<sup>53</sup>

The lack of guidance and support for IPS leaders and teachers was common feedback among stakeholders. Examples included the need for assistance with teaching and learning frameworks, helping principals to budget appropriately, and providing guidance on risk management.

It also appears the Department's view of support also differs greatly from school leaders and teachers, which creates a gap in responsibilities. This has resulted in poor workforce planning, with school leaders reporting that their time is increasingly taken up with staff recruitment.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> State School Teacher Union of WA. [Submission to Inquiry into the Department of Education's IPS Initiative](#). April 2016.

<sup>50</sup> State School Teacher Union of WA. [Facing the Facts report](#). September 2024.

<sup>51</sup> State School Teacher Union WA. [About](#). Accessed January 2025.

<sup>52</sup> The West. [SSTUWA threatens to disrupt schools in fight for higher salaries](#). January 2024.

<sup>53</sup> Parliament of Western Australia, Education and Health Standing Committee. [Report 8: The Report of the Inquiry into the Independent Public Schools initiative](#). August 2016.

<sup>54</sup> Robinson V & Hamilton P. [Understanding and Reducing the Workload of Teachers and Leaders in Western Australian Public Schools](#). November 2023.

School leaders partially blamed the machinery of government changes, which saw corporate knowledge split across the new Department of Education and DTWD. This has led to a fracturing of responsibilities, with no single point of contact to track a child's education journey. There were two examples raised in our engagement with industry, including school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SBATs) and support for early childhood development.

SBATs allow students to undertake normal studies while undertaking an apprenticeship or traineeship. While the Department of Education provides oversight of schools and curriculum, SBATs fall under the remit of the DTWD. However, it is up to schools to determine the duty of care provisions for apprentices. This has resulted in concern and confusion among educators, particularly regarding who is responsible for the Duty of Care of students undertaking SBATs on school grounds. Despite their importance, this lack of clarity discourages their support and promotion within schools.

Similarly, the Department of Education and Department of Communities both provide oversight for the early childhood sector, with two existing offices within each department. Stakeholders we interviewed stated that this leads to confusion around which department must pay for development and wellbeing, and confusion over leadership for new initiatives. In some circumstances, such as Child and Parent Centres, the Department of Health also provides funding for service delivery.

While WA Labor has committed to an overhauled Office of Early Childhood, sitting within the Department of Premier and Cabinet. At this stage, it remains unclear if this newer version of the office will include management of development services and wellbeing or perform an administrative-only function.

Risk adversity was also raised as a concern. Where school leaders, teachers, or the Department of Education felt the risk was too high, they would simply decline a request. For example, one school lamented that outdoor education provided significant opportunities for multi-modal learning of people skills, geography, and mathematics. However, red tape was also getting in the way of learning delivery, for example, with schools cancelling courses or activities due to risk aversion.

Furthermore, the Grattan Institute recently noted that, nationally, a 'typical' teacher spends approximately six hours a week on creating or sourcing lesson materials, and a quarter of teachers' report spending 10 hours or more on this task.<sup>55</sup> Teachers we engaged with noted that 'duties other than teaching' (DOTT) have increased significantly. In other states, this has been accompanied with an increase in pupil free days.<sup>56,57</sup>

However, pupil free days can have a disproportionate impact on families from low socio-economic communities. These families often do not have the flexibility to work

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<sup>55</sup> Grattan Institute, Haywood A & Jongbloed L. [Australia's Catch-22 curriculum challenge](#). May 2024.

<sup>56</sup> The Age, Smith B. [Parents face juggling act with potential increase in pupil-free days](#). November 2024.

<sup>57</sup> ABC News, Lewis A. [Pay deal for NSW teachers includes more pupil-free days](#). October 2024.

from home, due to their occupation, or may struggle to find last-minute childminding services.

While the Department of Education has sought to reduce the paperwork and red tape, many educators felt that this was misplaced. In one example, the Department is trialling artificial intelligence for report writing and student comments to reduce workload.<sup>58</sup>

In 2023, the State Government commissioned the Robinson-Hamilton review to understand and reduce the workloads of teachers and school leaders.<sup>59</sup> The extensive review found that the drivers of workload and work intensification go well beyond administrative red tape, but red tape has proliferated due to the increased expansion and complexity of work teachers must now undertake.

The Robinson-Hamilton review also noted that:

The guiding principle for resolving the problem [of red tape] must be the relentless pursuit of the proper purposes of schools, by enabling teachers and leaders to focus on the core work that they are uniquely trained to do.

The review concluded that the job of teaching as currently performed and organised is not doable and sustainable, with several recommendations designed to address red tape and risk aversion. The recent announcements of a new Chair for the Workload Intensification Taskforce and funding in the 2025-26 State Budget to help reduce teacher workload are positive steps to publicly addressing some of the issues identified.

## **A leading role for Government – risk and reward**

Supporting school autonomy, government leadership, and risk management can be significantly addressed through clear leadership with an emboldened Department of Education, which has one purpose – to support and track a child’s education journey. We also urge the State Government and the Department to better plan for workforce needs, respond to the Robinson-Hamilton review, and complete the roll out of the Independent Public School system.

Despite IPS launching in 2010, not all public schools have moved across to this model. We understand that approximately 25 per cent of schools in WA are not under the IPS model. Given that IPS has now been in place for a generation of students, the Department should immediately prioritise transferring the remaining schools to IPS, with a clear timeline for this to be completed by the end of 2026.

The benefits of IPS should not be understated, with clear examples of schools succeeding academically due to their local decision-making capacity. Campbell Primary

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<sup>58</sup> The West. [Public school teachers directed to cut comments on report cards under red tape crackdown](#). September 2024.

<sup>59</sup> Robinson V & Hamilton P. [Understanding and Reducing the Workload of Teachers and Leaders in Western Australian Public Schools](#). November 2023.



School is a key example of how being an IPS can deliver dividends to students and the community broadly [**Case Study 3**].

Noting the substantial number of State departments involved in education, without a clear single source of authority, we suggest an Education and Training Coordination Committee of Cabinet (ETCCC) is needed to support the delivery and implementation of the Government's priorities, policies and reforms related to Western Australia's education and training systems.

At a minimum, the ETCCC should include the Ministers for Education and Early Childhood; Disability Services, Volunteering and Youth; Tertiary and International Education; Skills and TAFE. Similar portfolios should be members of the ETCCC if these roles are changed in future State Government cabinets.

As a priority, the ETCCC should:

- develop a holistic workforce plan for education systems to ensure the right mix of appropriately skilled education staff;
- respond to the Robinson-Hamilton review and track implementation of the recommendations it supports; and
- work with WA's tertiary institutions to ensure tertiary education courses include content related to pedagogies and explicit instruction, and support upskilling for existing teachers.



## CASE STUDY 3

### Campbell Primary School, Canning Vale

Campbell Primary School is an independent public school under the IPS framework. The school has a very active and supportive School Board and P&C.

This has enabled the school to focus on student behaviour – with a very strong pastoral care policy – and to adopt research-based pedagogies and learning programs. In combination, this school has recorded strong NAPLAN results.



*Image credit: Department of Education*

### Recommendations:



#### **8. Continue to support and roll out the IPS framework**

The State Government should provide a timeline to transition all schools to the IPS framework by the end of 2026, with improved support from the Department for existing IPS.



#### **9. Create an Education and Training Coordination Committee of Cabinet**

The State Government should establish an Education and Training Coordination Committee of Cabinet (ETCCC), similar to the Health Coordination Committee of Cabinet, to pursue long-term coordination of education and training systems.

As a priority, the ETCCC should:

- develop a holistic workforce plan for education systems to ensure the right mix of appropriately skilled education staff;
- respond to the Robinson-Hamilton review and track implementation of the recommendations it supports; and
- work with WA's tertiary institutions to ensure tertiary education courses include content related to pedagogies and explicit instruction, and support upskilling for existing teachers.

## Student equity

Inequalities and inequities remain in society today, despite best efforts to level up communities. Education is a crucial lever in helping to break children out of a cycle of disadvantage, yet student self-learning also faces equity challenges.

According to the *Improving Outcomes for All* report, the national gap in student inequity has broadened.<sup>60</sup> NAPLAN data also shows that the learning gap for students of low socio-educational status compared to their higher socio-educational status peers has risen from 1.4 years in 2008 to 2.3 years in 2022 for Year 3 reading. By the time students reach Year 9, the gap broadens to 5.1 years.<sup>61,62</sup>

Recently released data from the Australian Early Development Census found that over 24% of children in Western Australia in 2024 were considered DV1 – developmentally vulnerable in either physical, social, emotional, language, or communication skills.<sup>63</sup> At least 12.6% had two skills vulnerabilities (DV2). Both DV1 and DV2 rankings were above the national average.

Attendance of Aboriginal students in WA public schools recorded the second-lowest attendance levels in the nation last year, with 26.7 per cent turning up regularly, down from 38.3 per cent in 2015.<sup>64,65</sup> BHP's Pilbara Partnership **[Case Study 4]** has sought to help address this, through targeted equity measures from early years onwards.

For a representative of the local government sector, equity was a key issue within their school community, which captures high- and low-income suburbs:

Equity should be highlighted more as a focus of the system...  
At the moment, it is a postcode lottery.

Based on this, addressing inequity must be a key consideration of government. There are three considerations here: the role of government in levelling up communities, students with disability, and a focus on early childhood and wellbeing.

Schools are often the only arm of government where there is regular parent engagement, and schools can face funding limitations in addressing inequity. For example, the WA School Canteen Association estimates that around 17 per cent of children in WA face food insecurity, which has led to calls for free or low-cost lunch programs.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Australian Government Department of Education. [Improving Outcomes for All: Australian Government Summary Report of the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System](#). December 2023.

<sup>61</sup> Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority. [NAPLAN reporting data](#). Accessed January 2025.

<sup>62</sup> Jensen B. [Submission to Australian Government Summary Report of the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System](#). August 2023.

<sup>63</sup> Australian Early Development Census. [Community Data Explorer](#). June 2025.

<sup>64</sup> Productivity Commission. [Report on Government Services 2025: Section B4](#). February 2025.

<sup>65</sup> The West, Hiatt B. [Education report reveals kids skipping school more frequently than a decade ago](#). February 2025.

<sup>66</sup> WA School Canteen Association Inc. [School lunch programs presentation](#). October 2023.

Unfortunately, the true number is unknown, as the Department of Education did not support an inquiry into quantifying the number of schools using their own funds to provide free food programs for students.<sup>67</sup>

In an increasingly digital world, access to contemporary technology and access to internet are two other equity factors. If teachers are focused on or are required to take a digital first approach to learning, then students will be at a disadvantage. Australia's Digital Inclusion Index shows that students from low-SES backgrounds and those in regional areas, experience lower levels of digital access, and First Nations peoples experience even lower levels of digital inclusion.<sup>68</sup> The WA Local Government Association (WALGA) noted that library services have seen an increase in visits, particularly for early childhood programs.<sup>69</sup>

Similarly, there are equity issues relating to students with disability. Recent changes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme will have a significant and direct impact on some students.<sup>70</sup>

For example, students will lose access to a range of important provisions including out of school hours care; assistance for learning support regardless of VET, general or ATAR streams; reasonable infrastructure and personal equipment; transport to and from school events; support for work experience; as well as tutors. These changes create barriers to students with disability, particularly for students who want to engage in the workforce.

We also note that, anecdotally, it is harder for students with disability or from low socioeconomic backgrounds to secure work integrated learning opportunities.

Over one in five students receive an educational adjustment in Australian schools, and nearly nine in ten students with a disability attend a mainstream school.<sup>71</sup> Yet schools often struggle to provide the required support to all students who need it, and funding levels are simply not adequate.

Students often only receive support when they are identified as being below the expected level (below C grade). These supports are abruptly pulled once students cross the threshold or when funding is no longer available.

Early childhood is often the first opportunity to identify and address inequity, with the Federal Government noting that the first five years of a child's life are a critical development window.<sup>72</sup> WA Labor's free and full-time kindergarten trial proposed for

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<sup>67</sup> WA Government. [Government response to Hungry for Change: Addressing Food insecurity for children and young people affected by poverty](#). October 2023.

<sup>68</sup> Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, Thomas J & McCosker A et al. [Measuring Australia's digital divide: Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2023](#). January 2023.

<sup>69</sup> WA Local Government Association. [Advocacy efforts continue for WA Libraries](#). January 2025.

<sup>70</sup> National Disability Insurance Scheme. [What does the NDIS fund?](#) Accessed February 2025.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. and data from Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

<sup>72</sup> Australian Government, Department of Education. [Early Years Strategy to provide Australia's children with the best start possible](#). May 2024.

2027 is a welcomed announcement, as this will help address inequity issues early in a child's development.

We also note and welcome the recent State Government announcements of short-term funding for a Group Tuition Initiative and the hiring of 64 full time equivalent complex behaviour support coordinators.<sup>73</sup>

## Levelling up equity

Inequity is not a problem with a simple fix, however, it does require Ministers and Departments to work together, to cut across government and deliver the right outcomes. It is our view that the proposed ETCCC would outline and deliver this intent.

The Department of Education should also work with the Department of Communities to identify appropriate supports for students with disability, considering the changes to NDIS. Supports could be provided through targeted funding programs or through other support mechanisms.

For example, in our recent submission into the State Government's review of post-secondary education pathways, a clear gap in addressing inequity is the lack of inclusive alternative WACE program or pathway to recognise student abilities and achievements.<sup>74</sup> Such a program would provide holistic representation of student capabilities and bridge the gap in recognition and certification.

While the recent funding announcements may go some way to addressing this issue, the reality is that funding will need to be longer term (as in, more than two years) and be flexible enough to address student needs.

Noting that the State Government has recently committed \$38 million to expand the free school breakfast program to five days a week at 650 schools, we urge the Department of Education to also investigate the actual cost of free breakfast and lunch programs provided by schools.<sup>75</sup> Without knowing the scale of the problem, the funding commitment may be significantly under or over budgeted.

Schools should not be left to bear the brunt of costs associated with levelling up communities. The current system effectively abandons schools and school leaders, who must devise and fund local solutions. This is not a feasible long-term, and there should be better coordination across government services, and with the private sector, to help address student equity matters.

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<sup>73</sup> Media Statement. [Taskforce Chair appointed to reduce teacher workloads as a priority](#). June 2025.

<sup>74</sup> CCIWA. [Submission to Pathways to Post-School Success review](#). December 2023.

<sup>75</sup> WA Labor. [Roger Cook and WA Labor to step up to cost of living relief for WA families](#). February 2025.



## CASE STUDY 4

### BHP Pilbara Education Partnership

BHP's Pilbara Education Partnership, established in 2005, has delivered significant educational and health outcomes to Pilbara students and families.

The program operates across 15 schools and was recently extended until 2028. It provides substantial improvements to student outcomes through early childhood funding, activities to support further study, and pathways to employment such as career taster events.

The partnership has delivered improved results and attendance, across all regions of operation.<sup>76</sup>



**Pilbara  
Education  
Partnership**

*Image credit: BHP Pilbara Education Partnership*

### Recommendations:



#### **10. Investigate best-practice settings for early years education**

The State Government should advocate to the Federal Government to review and develop a National Standard for pre-kindergarten, and a curriculum for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten.



#### **11. Support students with disabilities and their families**

The State Government should identify opportunities to support students with disability to engage with education, training, and enter the workforce. Support funding should be flexible.



#### **12. Quantify the number and cost of free food programs**

The State Government should identify the actual cost and number of existing free food programs, and whether a different method of service delivery may be more cost effective.

<sup>76</sup> WA Government. [Multi-million dollar boost to extend BHP education partnership in the Pilbara](#). February 2025.

## Connecting schools to community

Throughout the development of this policy work, the lack of engagement between schools and community has been a consistent theme to emerge. Industry, community and education have become siloed, with different stakeholders having different expectations about what the education sector, must at an absolute minimum, deliver.

Some parents, some businesses, and even some schools see the education system as a 'catch all' system to society. This worldview sees schools as entirely responsible for teaching life skills, such as toileting, at the expense of a true education built on foundational work-related skills and knowledge.

Parents have a very significant role to play in their child's education, yet from our research it was quickly made apparent that parents are not aware of the significance of this responsibility. This contrasts to other countries, where parents are strongly encouraged, culturally, to engage in their child's learning, particularly in early years.<sup>77,78,79</sup>

We also found that businesses were expecting high school graduates to be proficient in letter writing, be able to use basic accounting software and to have well-developed people skills. One business suggested that students should be able to write sufficiently to compose parts of tender documents.

Under the IPS framework, school boards exist to provide advice to school leaders on industry trends, and act as an interface between the school and community. There may be a broader role for school boards in delivering this outcome.

Despite this, several stakeholders pointed to college models, such as the State Agricultural colleges and SEDA College **[Case Study 5]**, as a model of best practice. They are seen to communicate roles well and connect students to industry, thereby preparing students for emerging workplace trends. This is a policy issue the chamber movement has long advocated for – the creation of meaningful transitions from education to work through better career development programs aligned with workforce needs.<sup>80</sup>

It is not just students who should develop an understanding of workforce needs, teachers too must be cognisant of how industry works. Other jurisdictions recognise the importance of this, for example, the European Union's Erasmus+ program connects teachers within the European Union with industry and permits up to 365 days of training. The most common training or job placement was two months.<sup>81</sup> Australia differs in this regard.

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<sup>77</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development. [Early Learning and Child Well-being](#). March 2020.

<sup>78</sup> Japanese Government Ministry of Education. [Basic Act on Education](#). December 2006.

<sup>79</sup> Educating the Young Child Journal, Chen W-W et al. [Father Involvement in Taiwan](#). December 2012.

<sup>80</sup> Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, [Employment and Skills](#)

<sup>81</sup> European Commission. [Erasmus+ School Education \(staff training\)](#). Accessed January 2025.

For example, in 2019, the Teachers in Industry Placement Settings (TIPS) program was trialled in WA. This allowed science teachers to understand practical applications of their work. However, this was time limited and is not currently offered to teachers.<sup>82</sup> The State Government recently announced a similar program targeted at TAFE lecturers.<sup>83</sup> This approach contrasts to other states, such as Queensland, where tradespeople are offered scholarships to become teachers and a job upon graduating.<sup>84</sup>

## The power of collaboration

Connecting schools to industry, and community, ensures that students are better prepared for life after school. To this end, the Department of Education should look at all the levers within its remit to take advantage of the power of collaboration.

Stakeholders advised that businesses find it easier to engage with private or specialty schools, rather than the public school system. This is due to a lack of facilitation in connecting schools to industry, and a lack of clear responsibilities. Specific examples of work programs highlighted included BHP's Pilbara Education Partnership, SEDA College, and St Mary's i3 program.

To this end, we recommend that the Department of Education be tasked with creating a Charter of Responsibilities. This document should be an evolution of the existing Statement of Expectations, involving more stakeholders and providing clearer guidance for those stakeholders. It should be developed in consultation with the community, industry, and school leaders.

Career counsellors and school boards are key to providing connection points between industry and schools. The Department should consider how to best employ both resources to benefit student engagement with industry.

We also propose a significant shift in the way SCSA and the Department approach Years 11 and 12. These years should become linking years, helping students to understand the nuances of work through regular volunteering or work placements.

While students can undertake work placements in Years 9 and 10, this is often short term. This limits the understanding of business and fails to build a real sense of appreciation or community with volunteering groups.

Teachers have an important role to play in building and reinforcing these connections as well. There is merit in increasing a renewed TIPS program for a longer period of time, and consider expanding entry to career counsellors. A greater investment in career counsellors would help provide more opportunities for schools to engage with industry.

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<sup>82</sup> Chamber of Minerals and Energy. [Media release: Pilbara science teachers to swap school for mine sites](#). August 2019.

<sup>83</sup> WA Government. [Media release: TAFE college lecturers well placed to meet industry skills needs](#). February 2024.

<sup>84</sup> Queensland Government. [Trade to Teach Internship Program](#). February 2025.

## CASE STUDY 5

### SEDA College WA, Perth and Bunbury

SEDA College WA is a registered independent school in Western Australia which engages students in learning via their interests and passions, contextualising curriculum to sport and recreation, and construction and trade industries.

SEDA College WA partners with elite organisations in both industries to create an education where students have a deep connection to their learning which is taught in a multimodal way.

Students at SEDA College WA combine classroom-based learning (typically 3 days per week), with applied and hands on application via workplace learning and community clinics (typically 2 days per week).



*Image credit: SEDA group*

### Recommendations:



#### 13. Helping students to become workforce ready

The State Government should require students in Years 11 and 12 to undertake weekly work placement or volunteering opportunities, equivalent to 6 hours.



#### 14. Helping teachers connect with industry

The State Government should consider reintroducing and promoting the Teachers in Industry Placement Settings (TIPS) program.



#### 15. The role of School Boards

The State Government should require School boards to undertake better engagement with their local business community, with primary purposes to create better links between education outcomes, employment and learning opportunities, and to help the school community build expertise in understanding industry.



#### 16. Develop a Charter of Responsibilities

The State Government should develop a publicly available Charter of Responsibilities, which clearly outlines core roles and responsibilities for all participants (students, parents, industry, educators, government, etc.) in a child's education journey.



## Conclusion

Education is fundamental to our future economic development and prosperity, and high standards of living. It is, therefore, critical that WA's education system is fit-for-purpose, preparing students for the rapidly evolving needs of the WA economy, today and tomorrow.

The system should take children on an education journey that creates innovative individuals, with a strong understanding of the world around them. These students will be citizens who, by their nature, are constructive and active members of society and deeply connected to the labour market.

As the Western Australian Auditor-General noted in 2015:

A good education is powerful. It gives children skills, opens up opportunities and is often a key part of overcoming disadvantage.<sup>85</sup>

Yet, as the Robinson-Hamilton review noted, the core purpose of education is being compromised. Schools are stuck with red tape and a big curriculum, which does not deliver the core skills and knowledge for jobs now and in the future.

Industry, along with other education stakeholders, are concerned that WA's economy and productivity will be heavily impacted if the State Government does not consider solutions to address these issues.

So, how do we improve the education system to deliver the skill needs of the future? It starts with empowering schools to provide the right pedagogy, for the right curriculum. For decades, we have experimented with the pedagogy by which we teach our children.

It has been a deeply flawed decision that has led to an unequivocal decline in the education of our young people. The experiment needs to end. We instead need to hard-wire our children with knowledge, thereby providing them with the building blocks to think critically and creatively. Investment in early years should continue, targeted to provide a durable foundation for learning. Student equity should be a key focus, so all students can be their best selves.

A strong independent public school system, with local decision-making, supported by a central department, and strong links to industry and the community, will also help to achieve this goal. Industry and community can, and should, be engaged in education.

With only the best intentions, the recommendations in this paper provide a roadmap for reform to ensure that WA's future workforces are adequately skilled and knowledgeable for whatever the future holds for our great State.

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<sup>85</sup> WA Office of the Auditor General. [Managing Student Attendance in Western Australian Public Schools](#). August 2015.

## Summary of recommendations

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### **1. Greater support for teachers to apply explicit instruction**

The State Government should ensure the supporting material for explicit instruction is fit-for-purpose, ensuring teachers understand the importance of pedagogies, and how to apply different pedagogies in different contexts.

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### **2. Teacher training in explicit instruction**

The State Government must support and encourage teachers to engage in professional development that supports the advancement of explicit instruction.

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### **3. Fund to pilot different teaching systems**

The State Government should provide funding for schools to trial teacher looping in primary school settings. The fund should also allow schools to trial different timetabling methods to see if this improves student retention and reduces teacher burnout. To aid the pilot, the State Government should engage with the private education sector to identify classroom management practices that work for different school systems in WA.

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### **4. Simpler Curriculum**

The State Government, through SCSA, should develop a curriculum which embeds foundational skills and knowledge early, and often. The State Government should adopt streamlined secondary school offerings, removing the 'general' option for learning and committing to ATAR and VET as the minimum learning threshold.

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### **5. Push the Federal Government on early years curriculum**

Through National Cabinet, the State Government should push for a national approach to early years curriculum which ensures both mathematics and English skills and knowledge are effectively taught.

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### **6. Building resilience**

The State Government should develop a resilience strategy to sit alongside the curriculum. As part of the strategy, SCSA should also develop PISA style tests, which help to track resilience development.

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### **7. Digital literacy matrix**

The State Government should work with industry, school leaders, and teachers to develop a digital skills matrix. This matrix should ensure that students graduate with an acceptable level of digital skills, and that students can understand how these skills are applied. It should also undertake a thorough review of existing device policy guidance.

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### **8. Continue to support and roll out the IPS framework**

The State Government should provide a timeline to transition all schools to the IPS framework by the end of 2026, with improved support from the Department for existing IPS.

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### **9. Create an Education and Training Coordination Committee of Cabinet**

The State Government should establish an Education and Training Coordination Committee of Cabinet (ETCCC), similar to the Health Coordination Committee of Cabinet, to pursue long-term coordination of education and training systems.

As a priority, the ETCCC should:

- develop a holistic workforce plan for education systems to ensure the right mix of appropriately skilled education staff;
  - respond to the Robinson-Hamilton review and track implementation of the recommendations it supports; and
  - work with WA's tertiary institutions to ensure tertiary education courses include content related to pedagogies and explicit instruction, and support upskilling for existing teachers.
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### **10. Investigate best-practice settings for early years education**

The State Government should advocate to the Federal Government to review and develop a National Standard for pre-kindergarten, and a curriculum for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten.

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### **11. Support students with disabilities and their families**

The State Government should identify opportunities to support students with disability to engage with education, training, and enter the workforce. Support funding should be flexible.

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### **12. Quantify the number and cost of free food programs**

The State Government should identify the actual cost and number of existing free food programs, and whether a different method of service delivery may be more cost effective.

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### **13. Helping students to become workforce ready**

The State Government should require students in Years 11 and 12 to undertake weekly work placement or volunteering opportunities, equivalent to 6 hours.

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### **14. Helping teachers connect with industry**

The State Government should consider reintroducing and promoting the Teachers in Industry Placement Settings (TIPS) program.

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### **15. The role of School Boards**

The State Government should require School boards to undertake better engagement with their local business community, with primary purposes to create better links between education outcomes, employment and learning opportunities, and to help the school community build expertise in understanding industry.

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### **16. Develop a Charter of Responsibilities**

The State Government should develop a publicly available Charter of Responsibilities, which clearly outlines core roles and responsibilities for all participants (students, parents, industry, educators, government, etc.) in a child's education journey.

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**CCIWA seeks to understand the views of all its members, and ultimately, in keeping with its Constitution, forms policy positions consistent with the long term interests of the overall economy, for the benefit of communities in WA.**

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