

# **Literacy and Numeracy Education Expert Panel**

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## **Consultation Paper**

**December 2023**

## **Literacy and Numeracy Education Expert Panel – Consultation Paper**

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### **Questions**

Enquiries regarding the Consultation Paper are welcome at:

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Email: [literacynumeracyinquiry@act.gov.au](mailto:literacynumeracyinquiry@act.gov.au)

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### **Acknowledgement**

The ACT Government and Expert Panel acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians of the land and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region.

The ACT Government and Expert Panel acknowledges and respects their continuing cultures and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

# Contents

How to have your say.....	4
Foreword .....	5
Terms of Reference .....	6
1: Context and Performance .....	7
2: The teaching of literacy and numeracy in ACT public schools.....	12
2.1 What is taught and how is it taught? .....	12
2.1.1 Literacy.....	14
2.1.2 Numeracy.....	16
3: The assessment of literacy and numeracy.....	18
4: Supporting all students to achieve literacy and numeracy outcomes.....	19
5: Supporting staff to deliver quality literacy and numeracy education.....	21
6: School-wide improvement of literacy and numeracy.....	22
Appendix A: Reports initially being considered by the Expert Panel.....	24
Appendix B: List of questions.....	27

# How to have your say

The Expert Panel (Panel) has provided 20 questions within this Consultation Paper for consideration and response. While all input is welcome, the Panel does not anticipate that stakeholders will necessarily respond to each question, instead focusing on areas of interest and expertise.

Additionally, the Panel is interested in receiving any reports, research or studies that should be considered, and any examples of systems or schools that provide illustrations of excellent practice that addresses equity gaps and/or consistently lifts the literacy or numeracy outcomes of all students.

The Panel values all voices in the ACT Education landscape and wants to make it easy for organisations and individuals to take part in the review. To support access and inclusion, you can:

- upload a written submission, video or audio
- send a voice mail via 02 6207 7060
- send your feedback by email or mail.

To support the Inquiry to focus on the most relevant matters, it is preferred that short, concise submissions are provided which provide direct answers to the questions outlined in this Consultation Paper. Each submission should be no more than 3000 words. The Panel would value the inclusion of, or references to, relevant supporting evidence underpinning submissions.

Submissions can be lodged electronically via: [literacynumeracyinquiry@act.gov.au](mailto:literacynumeracyinquiry@act.gov.au).

Please submit responses sent via email in a Word or RTF format. An additional PDF version may also be submitted.

Submissions can also be mailed via:

Literacy and Numeracy Inquiry  
GPO Box 158  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Your ideas will help inform the Inquiry, including the Expert Panel's development of recommendations.

If you provide permission for your consultation submission to be made public, it will be uploaded to the Literacy and Numeracy Inquiry [website](#) for other Canberrans to consider including your name/organisation name. Confidential items will still be reviewed by the Expert Panel and Secretariat but will not be published on this website. The Expert Panel will not generally respond to individual consultation submissions but will consider input received.

## Disclaimer

Please note the Literacy and Numeracy Education Expert Panel retains the right to withhold input from publication if it believes that the content is defamatory, offensive, contravenes anti-discrimination or anti-vilification law or otherwise breaches any law.

Closing date for submissions: Wednesday 14 February 2024

Email: [literacynumeracyinquiry@act.gov.au](mailto:literacynumeracyinquiry@act.gov.au)

## Enquiries

Enquiries can be made via email to: [literacynumeracyinquiry@act.gov.au](mailto:literacynumeracyinquiry@act.gov.au)

Phone 02 6207 7060 (Business hours: Monday – Friday 9:00 am – 4:30 pm)

## Foreword

ACT public education has a history of innovation and excellence with a focus on equity.

The Expert Panel recognises that the ACT public system is unique, with highly autonomous school leaders and educators. The Education Directorate provides system-wide supports, advice and frameworks, allowing ACT public school principals and educators to adopt school-based teaching approaches and curriculum, aligned with the Australian Curriculum.

The Panel accepts that while there are various sources of data that can be used to understand the ACT public system, data sets allowing national and international comparisons have particular importance to this inquiry. Such data sets include the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), the Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Various available data and reports have consistently shown that while the ACT public system performs very well overall, there is a persistent equity gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students.

The Panel acknowledges both the presence of this gap and the room for additional growth in learning gain across all students in the ACT. This is our challenge – how to ensure each child is achieving their maximum learning growth each year.

We must have a sustained focus on lifting those students who need additional support, without limiting the growth of our high performing students.

This Consultation Paper presents 20 questions to support the development of submissions. The Panel will provide additional tailored questions in seeking input from specific stakeholders in relation to their area of expertise/interest.

Due to the structure of schooling in the ACT and typical developmental phases of students, the Panel is interested in specific recommendations relating to the four key periods of learning: early years (P-2), later primary (3-6), middle years (7-10) and senior secondary (11-12) as well as transition points between these periods.

A key consideration for the Panel is what policies, supports or practices the Education Directorate needs to stop, start, change or enhance across the system and in schools.

The Panel looks forward to hearing from ACT public school communities, education experts, stakeholder groups and the broader ACT community.



**Professor Barney Dalgarno**

Chair

Literacy and Numeracy Education Expert Panel

## Terms of Reference

The Expert Panel has been established to provide the Minister with independent advice on how to address equity gaps, and achieve ongoing improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes, in and across ACT public schools.

The Expert Panel will develop targeted recommended actions that could be implemented to further existing efforts and achieve sustainable class, whole-school and system-wide approaches to literacy and numeracy achievement from preschool to year 12 in ACT public schools.

The Expert Panel will consider the best available evidence regarding:

- the relevant success factors for education systems that have effectively addressed equity issues in literacy and numeracy achievement;
- class, whole-school and system-wide approaches and supports that have been proven to improve learning outcomes for all students at each stage of learning and development, including:
  - pedagogical approaches;
  - diagnostic and assessment tools;
  - student, school and system data;
  - professional learning needs;
  - curriculum support; and
  - leadership development;
- specific approaches and supports that are relevant to the learning outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, neurodiverse learners, students with learning difficulties, students with disability and other equity cohorts;
- effective and sustainable implementation methods, considering workload implications for educators, support staff and school leaders.

### Membership

- Chair: Professor Barney Dalgarno, Executive Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Canberra.
- Professor Mary Ryan, Executive Dean, Faculty of Education and Arts, Australian Catholic University.
- Associate Professor Pauline Jones, Senior Lecturer, Language in Education at the School of Education, University of Wollongong.
- Professor Catherine Attard, Professor in Mathematics Education and Deputy Director of the Centre for Educational Research, School of Education, Western Sydney University.
- Mr Tim McCallum, Executive Director – School Performance, NSW Department of Education

# 1: Context and Performance

The ACT public school system has been frequently described as the most progressive in the country, with a commitment to excellence and equity.

While some ACT public schools have been operating for more than 100 years, the system recently celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, recognising five decades of the ACT overseeing its own public school system.

For the past five decades, the ACT's teachers, principals and system administrators have demonstrated innovative practices, pushed boundaries and worked to improve the way schools deliver education with a consistent focus on equity.

While the autonomy afforded to principals and educators since 1973 has created opportunities for reform, it has also resulted in a diverse system. There are currently 90 schools with various approaches to teaching operating under broad but flexible guidelines.

The ACT public schools now educate over 50,000 students. From 2024 there will be 91 public schools with the addition of Shirley Smith High School in Gungahlin. The 91 comprises:

- 58 primary schools (Preschool to Year 6, including five Preschool to Year 2 Early Childhood Schools);
- 11 high schools (Year 7 to Year 10);
- 9 combined Preschool to Year 10 schools;
- 1 combined Year 7 to Year 12 school;
- 8 colleges (Year 11 to Year 12); and
- 4 specialist schools.

ACT public schools have close to 4,000 teachers, and over 4,000 support staff including learning assistants, psychologists, social workers, youth workers, specialist support staff, administrative support staff, building services officers and cleaning staff.

Launched in 2018, the ACT Government's [Future of Education Strategy](#) (Strategy) sets out the ACT Government's 10-year vision for education. Its foundations are:

- **Students at the centre** – each student treads their own educational pathway and should be empowered to make informed decisions about how their learning environment operates.
- **Empowered learning professionals** – education professionals are experts, highly skilled at working with students to guide them through their learning journey.
- **Strong communities for learning** – a strong education system requires a strong community, with schools acting as hubs for education and support services.
- **Systems supporting learning** – the systems that support learning must acknowledge the importance of early intervention and promote equity of opportunity and excellence.

This Strategy sets out a progressive approach which values student voice, alongside delivering a rigorous and high-quality education that provides all students with the foundational skills and knowledge they need to be successful learners.

The ACT Education Directorate which is responsible for the delivery of public education in the ACT states in its [Strategic Plan 2022-25](#) that its vision is that *‘Every child and young person receives an excellent education, delivered and supported by highly skilled and valued professionals.’*

The Education Directorate has also shared its mission: *‘We lead and deliver excellent, inclusive and equitable education where all are safe, valued and able to flourish.’*

The Panel believes that ensuring all students in ACT public schools are supported to gain essential literacy and numeracy skills is fundamental to this vision and mission. Currently this is not the case. The Inquiry represents an opportunity to ensure that these foundational skills are delivered in the most efficient and effective way.

Figures 1-2 and 4-5 below show ACT NAPLAN data for all systems and illustrate the equity challenge across the ACT.

Figures 1 and 2 highlight that although the majority of students across ACT schools are performing very well, a sizeable group of students are not meeting proficiency expectations.

**Figure 1. NAPLAN 2023 Reading proficiency levels: ACT (all systems), years 3, 5, 7 & 9**

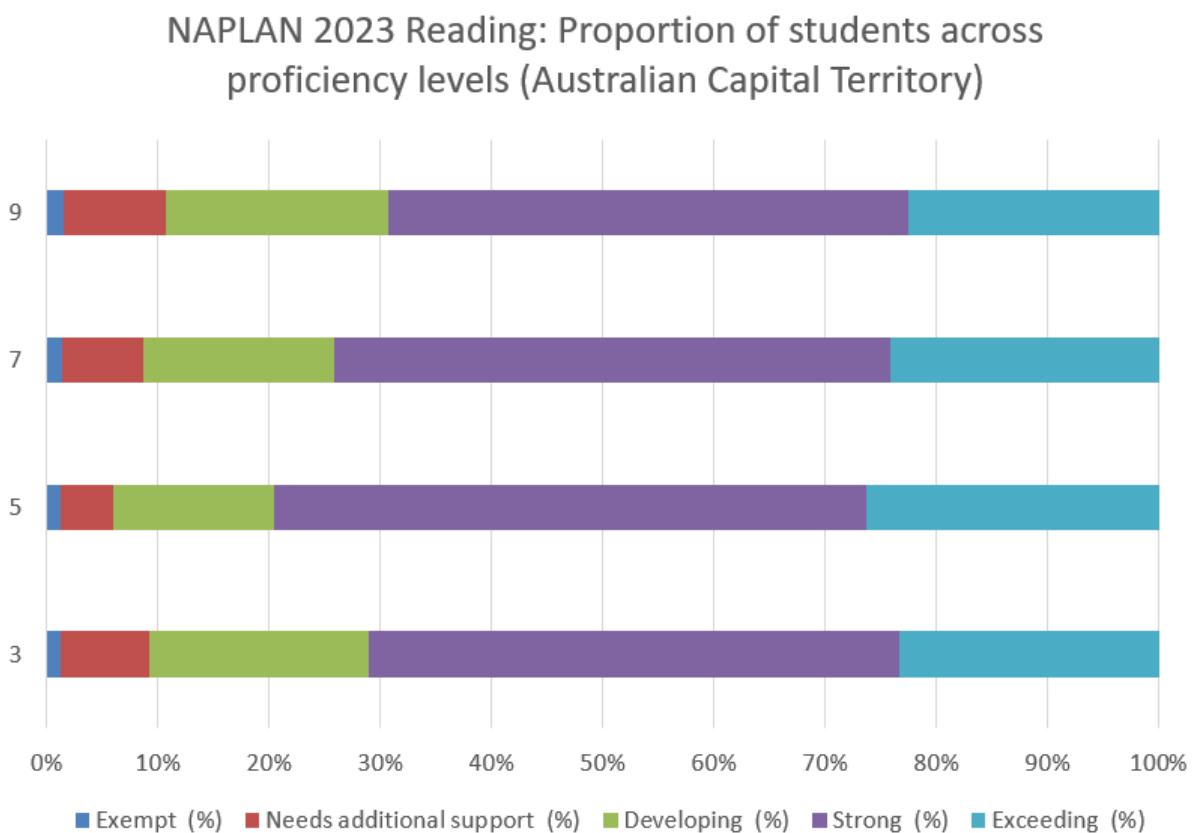
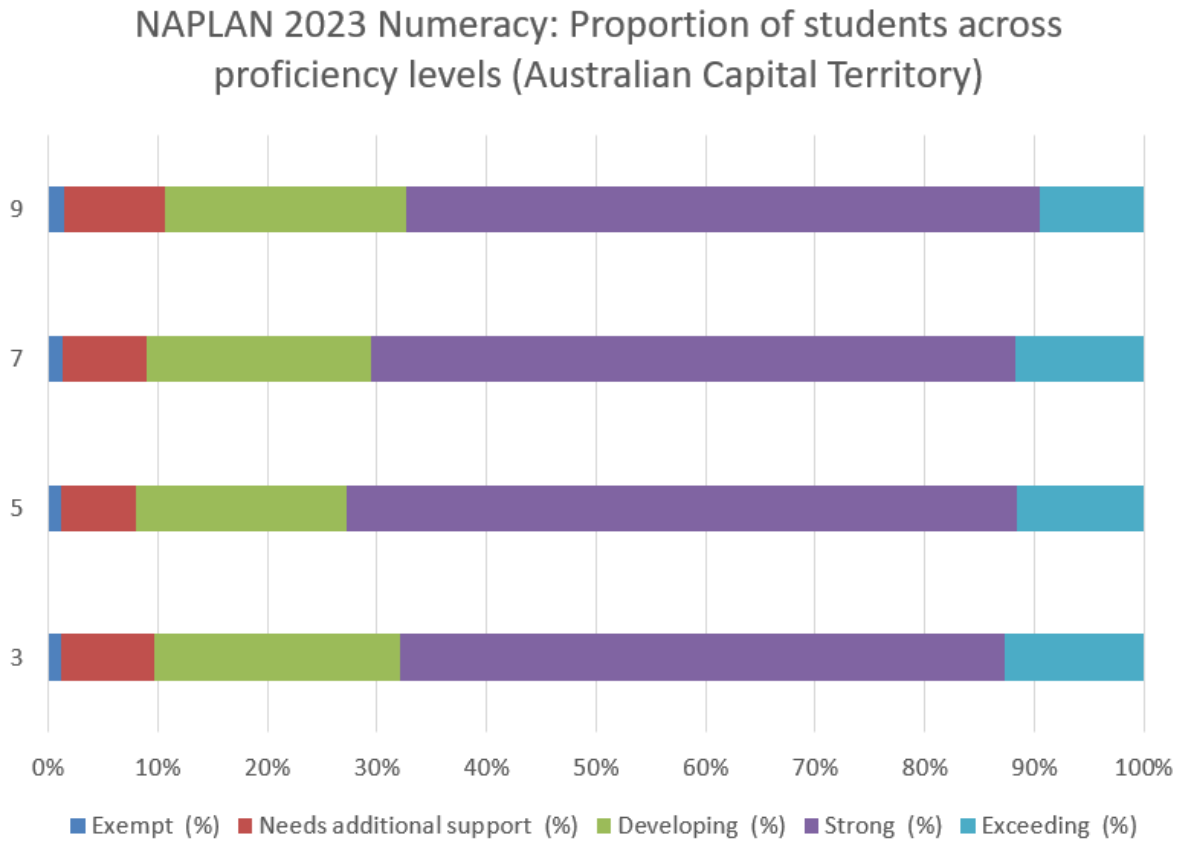


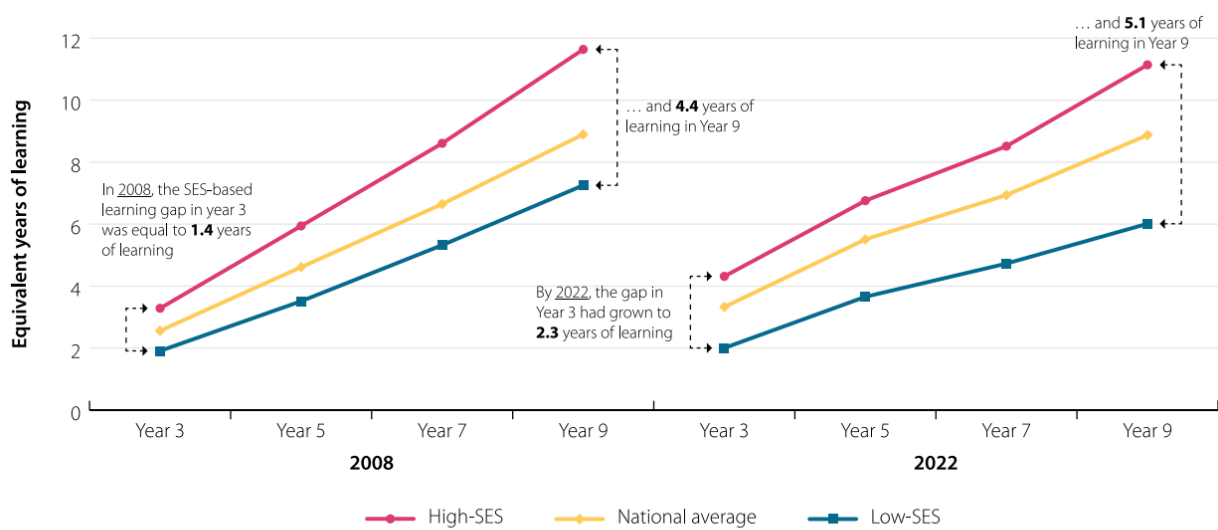


Figure 2. NAPLAN 2023 Numeracy proficiency levels: ACT (all systems) data, years 3, 5, 7 & 9



Australia has a national equity gap challenge in student achievement, as demonstrated by Figure 3 from the Australian Government, presented in the National School Reform Agreement Consultation Paper.

Figure 3. National achievement gaps between high-SES\* and low-SES students

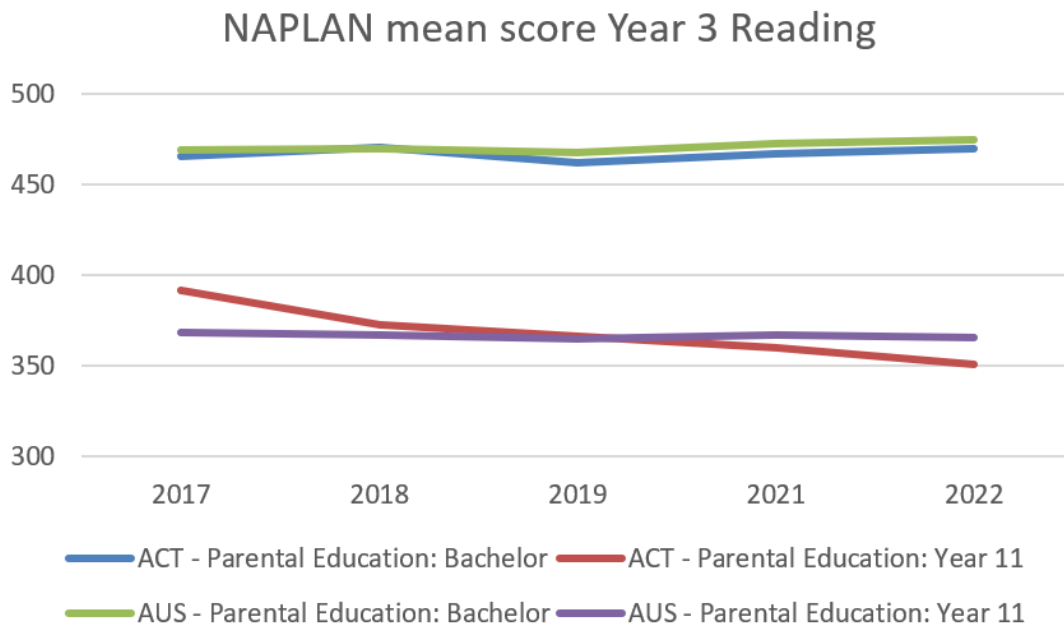


Source: Department of Education analysis of NAPLAN 2008–2022 (NAPLAN data accessible via ACARA, [National Report on Schooling Data Portal](http://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia). (www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia)<sup>21</sup>)

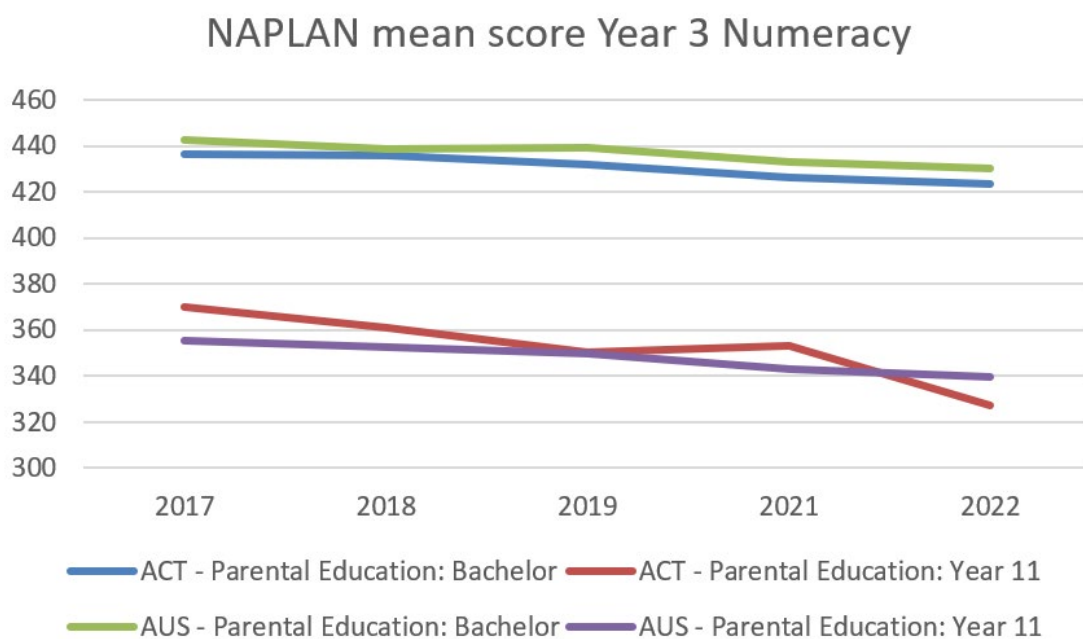
\* SES = socio-economic status

Across available reporting, the ACT has consistently performed at the top of or above other jurisdictions in most standardised testing; however, the ACT also has a sustained equity gap. The gap is demonstrated in performance data of advantaged and disadvantaged students when defined in different ways. For example, Figures 4 and 5 highlight the significant and widening gap between the performance of those students who have parents with university education, and those whose parents have finished schooling in year 11.

**Figure 4. NAPLAN Year 3 Reading results 2017-2022: ACT and Australia (all systems)**



**Figure 5. NAPLAN Year 3 Numeracy results 2017-2022: ACT and Australia (all systems)**



The Panel acknowledges that the ACT context is different from other jurisdictional contexts. There are four key differences that are important to acknowledge when considering the ACT context and the ACT public education system in particular.

### 1. Funding

The ACT is the only jurisdiction to fund its public education system to the Schooling Resource Standard. Through its Student Resource Allocation, the ACT Government has implemented a needs-based funding model that is meeting the contribution proposals of the Gonski reform agenda. The ACT Government also prioritises the funding of equity initiatives ensuring students have access to the resources they need, such as providing free laptops to students. This funding should position ACT schools well to deliver sustained improvement in learning outcomes for all students.

### 2. Size and scale

The ACT is also the only system which operates within the equivalent of a city-state, with almost no regional, rural or remote schools. With the exception of Jervis Bay School, it is feasible to drive from the furthest two schools at each end of the ACT in under an hour – most within 30 minutes. The size and scale of the ACT should enable the Education Directorate to maximise resources. It also significantly reduces the resource drain of travel, enabling the ACT to aspire towards being the most efficient and impactful system in the country in terms of using staff time to support the work of public school staff in-person.

### 3. Relative advantage

The population of the ACT is highly educated and advantaged, with elements of hidden or masked disadvantage throughout the Territory. The average or mean in the ACT does not reveal the whole picture as the ACT has dispersed pockets of disadvantage and a relatively high cost of living. The spread of social housing and the mixed demographic profile of the ACT result in many public schools with diverse student populations. Anecdotally, this diversity can create an additional workload for educators and school leaders who are required to provide tailored/adjusted education programs for a wider range of students than the more homogenous schools in cities like Sydney or Melbourne.

### 4. School autonomy

Many systems have had periods of autonomy, or policies that establish more independent public schools; however, the ACT's approach to school autonomy is different. The ACT has a long history of supporting both school principals and educators to lead education innovation and transformation at the school level. The ACT approach to school autonomy is unique and has developed a culture amongst educators of challenging the status quo and searching for new ways of teaching. While this can lead to innovation, it presents challenges in terms of how ACT public schools operate as a system. While there are frameworks and guides across teaching and learning areas, schools are still provided with significant autonomy in these areas.

While the four attributes outlined above make the ACT and Canberra unique, it does not mean ACT public schools are incomparable. It does however require a more nuanced reading of comparative educational data.

In particular, the unique characteristics of the ACT make it difficult to identify like schools in other jurisdictions for comparative purposes, and similarly to compare the ACT to other jurisdictions while controlling for Socio-Economic Advantage. Despite this, analysis of performance data and various reports have led to questions about whether the ACT's literacy and numeracy performance is as good as it could be.

While it is challenging to compare ACT student outcomes to other jurisdictions due to the unique nature of the system and demographics, some analysis has been completed. In 2017, the Education Directorate commissioned Stephen Lamb to undertake an analysis of government school performance in the ACT. The report suggested that, at that stage, the ACT was underperforming in comparison to some jurisdictions when the level of socio-economic advantage was taken into account.

Considering the evidence available, it is the view of the Panel that many students in Australia could be attaining better learning outcomes. This is, the challenges that are the focus of this inquiry are not unique to the ACT, or to public education.

The task before the Panel is to leverage the best available evidence and build upon the unique attributes of the ACT system to identify changes that will lead to sustained improvement in literacy and numeracy learning outcomes of all students.

## 2: The teaching of literacy and numeracy in ACT public schools

### 2.1 What is taught and how is it taught?

ACT public schools provide comprehensive education from preschool to year 12. ACT public school curriculum encompasses the play-based [Early Years Learning Framework](#) (birth to 5 years) in preschools, while kindergarten to year 10 follows the [Australian Curriculum](#). Kindergarten teachers may opt for a blend of the Early Years Learning Framework in conjunction with the Australian Curriculum. Additionally, year 11-12 courses adhere to the guidelines of the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies.

ACT public schools are bound by the [Curriculum and Academic Reporting Policy](#), dictating the educational standards and associated procedures. Further, year 11-12 standalone campuses, known as colleges, must comply with the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies [Policy and Procedures Manual](#), outlining curriculum development, school-based assessment, and moderation for these senior years.

ACT public schools currently implement Australian Curriculum Version 8.4. In April 2022 Australian Education Ministers endorsed Australian Curriculum Version 9.0, which will be adopted by ACT public schools by 2024.

The implementation mandates adherence to planning, teaching, assessing, and reporting guidelines outlined in the Australian Curriculum. Schools leverage this curriculum flexibility to craft teaching programs tailored to their students' educational needs, thereby determining the learning content.

The Education Directorate supports ACT public school leaders to develop and implement high impact teaching strategies that align with a system-wide framework. These six strategies are detailed below.

## Key Teaching Strategies

### Planning for student-centred Learning

- Decisions are based on deep understanding of the students, their prior knowledge, abilities, interests, culture and backgrounds.
- Agreed achievement data is used to tailor teaching and learning programs and to target school resources.
- Student agency is evident.
- Equity is demonstrated to ensure individual student needs are met.
- Frequent monitoring and assessment *for* and *as* learning, is evident.

### High expectations

- All teachers are competent facilitators of learning.
- All students are appropriately challenged and experiencing success in their learning.
- Teaching and learning embeds intellectual quality through higher order thinking and authentic contexts.
- Consistent procedures for ongoing induction, coaching and mentoring for all staff in agreed pedagogical practices across the school.

### Alignment of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment

- Pedagogy aligns with the range of curriculums and demands of the learning area, general capabilities and cross curriculum perspectives.
- A variety of assessment tasks and / or opportunities are planned and in alignment with teaching.
- Lesson design and delivery, including monitoring and data collection practices, are consistent across the school and/or learning area.
- Quality feedback is used to support and improve student learning.
- Moderation practices are used to support consistency of teacher judgement.

### Evidence-based decision making

- Teaching and learning is informed by student performance data and research that is contemporary, valid and rigorously conducted.

- Multiple sources of evidence are judiciously selected and analysed to inform teaching practice and measure impact. These sources include the capturing of formative assessment.
- Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are utilised as a forum to discuss learning data and to plan for future learning.

### **Targeted, explicit and scaffolded instruction**

- Differentiated, explicit and scaffolded teaching based on the identified needs of students is planned and delivered.
- There is a comprehensive range of agreed whole school or learning team, high impact strategies that support curriculum intent, engage students and make effective use of available technology. These agreed high impact strategies are reviewed regularly.

### **Safe, supportive, connected and inclusive learning environments**

- Consistent, whole school approaches to student well-being and agency; recognition and appreciation of difference; and student management are implemented and evident.
- Teachers build positive relationships with students and their families.
- Inclusive practice is defined, apparent and implemented across the school for all students.
- Responsible, ethical and innovative use of digital technologies is evident.

## **2.1.1 Literacy**

Literacy, extending beyond reading and writing, encompasses interpreting and employing language confidently for communication and learning. Students become proficient by engaging with diverse oral, print, visual, and digital texts, adapting language for varied purposes in different contexts. Literacy is the foundation of academic success, enabling students to participate effectively in society, communicate their ideas, and access information across subjects and disciplines.

The Panel recognises the multifaceted nature of literacy and its impact on diverse learning environments, including its role in fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Language skills develop in various contexts and have significant influence on effective communication, collaborative learning, and academic achievement.

### **Early Years and Primary School**

ACT public preschools, guided by the Early Years Learning Framework, foster literacy through purposeful play-based activities. These experiences focus on oral language development by encouraging sound and language exploration through storytelling, singing, and drawing, allowing young learners to express themselves and understand the connection between spoken and written language. Students are supported with mark-making and scribbling aids to develop pre-writing skills, laying foundations for future literacy success.

ACT public primary schools adopt a workshop model to structure reading and writing sessions, providing a balance between teacher-led instruction, targeted group work, and individual exploration. Teachers employ explicit teaching methods, offering clear models and strategies for reading and writing across oral, print, multimodal and digital, allowing opportunities for students to apply these skills independently. This approach aims to develop student reading capability and writing proficiency across genres and purposes.

The Panel will consider the effectiveness of play-based strategies in early literacy acquisition and language development. It will also look to understand the role of self-regulation and metacognition in language development among young learners.

The Panel will consider the best available evidence about early years literacy teaching; however, the Panel will also consider the broader acquisition of literacy skills across the primary years. The Panel will consider the way that ACT public schools are utilising explicit teaching approaches on diverse student populations and their literacy outcomes and consider how this aligns with evidence alongside other strategies.

The Panel is eager to hear from primary school educators and middle leaders to understand how prepared they feel for teaching and leading numeracy education and what supports are working best.

## High School

Foundational literacy capabilities are essential for the achievement of learning outcomes across all high school learning areas. While noting that the Australian Curriculum includes specific literacy outcomes within the English curriculum, it is important to note that all high school teachers share responsibility for developing student literacy capabilities with a particular focus on the literacy capabilities needed within the specific learning areas in which they teach.

High-quality literacy teaching in high schools should involve an approach, comprising direct teaching, guided practice, and independent skill application. Teachers curate activities that encompass teacher-led sessions, guided practice, and independent skill usage, fostering an environment that promotes literacy growth and engagement.

ACT public high school English classes focus on advancing students' language comprehension and analysis within increasingly complex texts. English classes form the basis of literacy development in high school; however, all high school subjects are considered important for literacy development. Engaging with a variety of text types within English, students refine their skills in textual interpretation, analysis, and synthesis. By exploring literature from different cultures and time periods, students broaden their perspectives and deepen their understanding of language nuances.

High school is a time where schools should provide a seamless integration of literacy skills with subject content. Writing becomes a tool for learning, facilitating deeper understanding and retention of subject matter. Students craft written responses, essays, and reports, synthesising their understanding of subject concepts while refining their communication skills.

ACT public high schools and colleges emphasise the teaching of literacy across different subjects and disciplines, recognising the specific literacy demands of each subject area. Students engage with subject-specific texts, learning how language functions within different disciplines. For instance, in science, students analyse scientific reports and decode specialised vocabulary, fostering a deeper understanding of disciplinary concepts.

The Panel will consider the best approach to literacy in high school and seeks views on the most effective way that English and other subjects can support all students to acquire the skills and knowledge required to be proficient in literacy. The Panel aims to understand the effectiveness of teaching discipline-specific literacy skills and their transferability across subject areas and will seek to consider how the integration of subject-specific knowledge and literacy skills is working within different disciplines.

### 2.1.2 Numeracy

Numeracy is a crucial skill that empowers students to engage effectively in academic learning and societal interactions. As outlined in the Australian Curriculum, numeracy involves not only mathematical knowledge and skills but also behaviours and dispositions essential for utilising numeracy confidently in diverse real-world situations. It encompasses recognising the role of numeracy in the world, understanding its applications, and using mathematical knowledge and skills purposefully.

Numeracy skills foster critical thinking and problem-solving abilities across various contexts and are essential for active participation in society.

#### Early Years and Primary School

ACT public school teachers in preschool to year 6 adopt targeted practices to equip students with essential numeracy knowledge and skills necessary for coping with numeracy demands across different subjects. Emphasis is placed on introducing and reinforcing mathematical vocabulary daily. Various resources are employed to strengthen students' conceptual understanding, blending regular practice of familiar concepts with the introduction of new mathematical ideas. Additionally, educators intentionally embed daily opportunities for applying mathematics within other learning areas.

Primary schools use structured numeracy teaching which incorporates whole-class, small-group, and individualised teaching to meet students' individual learning needs effectively. Teachers employ targeted small group teaching to address specific points of student difficulty, allowing for tailored teaching that supports diverse learning styles.

The Panel will consider the efficacy of current targeted practices in fostering a strong mathematical foundation in early education. It will also look to understand the impact of interdisciplinary use of numeracy skills across the primary curriculum. The Panel is eager to hear from primary school educators and middle leaders to understand how prepared they feel for teaching and leading numeracy education and what supports are working best.

The Panel is interested in exploring the variation of teaching of numeracy within ACT public primary schools, and understanding how this aligns with the evidence. In particular, the Panel will review evidence about inquiry learning, explicit and structured instruction, along with small group teaching and how this enables differentiation.



## High School

In ACT public high schools and colleges, the focus extends beyond continued numeracy development to embrace numeracy in different subject areas. Across various subjects, teachers introduce specific mathematical concepts and skills relevant to the discipline, emphasising their contextual applications. For instance, in history classes, students analyse timelines, graphs, tables, maps, scales, and statistics to explore historical issues and ideas.

High schools and colleges offer dedicated mathematics lessons focusing on advancing students' mathematical ideas, numeracy skills and problem-solving strategies, progressively increasing in complexity. Lessons are structured to enhance students' fluency, deepen their understanding, foster mathematical reasoning, and equip them with problem-solving strategies. Additionally, students leverage a range of physical and digital tools, such as calculators and digital graphing software, to augment their learning experience.

Similar to literacy, there is an interdisciplinary component to numeracy; however, anecdotally, there is less engagement with the teaching of numeracy outside the maths classroom. The Panel will be keen to test this with ACT public school educators and school leadership. There will be a focus on evaluating the effectiveness of teaching discipline-specific numeracy skills and their transferability across subject areas.

The Panel is eager to understand how mathematics can be best delivered across the public high school context, and to provide suggestions for how schools can ensure that the foundations of numeracy are provided to all students. Noting the evolution of technology in mathematics education, the Panel will consider the effectiveness of technological tools in enhancing students' numeracy achievement and engagement.

### Consultation Questions

1. What supports are required to ensure the literacy and numeracy outcomes within the Australian Curriculum are met? Are there examples of system-wide or school-based supports that have been found to be particularly effective?
2. What teaching practices have been found to consistently improve literacy and numeracy outcomes?
3. Are there curriculum and teaching practices, approaches or supports in ACT public schools that are working well or are not having the desired impact? Are there any lessons the Education Directorate can take away from what is/is not working, and what should they stop, start or expand upon to improve outcomes?
4. Does the Education Directorate's approach of suggesting but not mandating teaching approaches support improved learning outcomes or would a greater degree of evidence-based prescription be more effective?
5. Are there examples of system-wide approaches to literacy and numeracy teaching in other jurisdictions that the Panel should examine?
6. How can school leaders and the Education Directorate be confident of what is being taught and the effectiveness of how it is being taught?

### 3: The assessment of literacy and numeracy

Embedding assessment as part of an ongoing approach to teaching literacy and numeracy is essential to the success of all students. Various types of assessments, diagnostic, formative, interim, and summative, provide teachers with the knowledge they need about where students are at, and how to best support them. These can include observing the progress of students in their class, checking student work after activities, or formal testing.

Accessible, timely, and reliable qualitative and quantitative data on student performance equips educators and school leaders to effectively cater to student needs. Assessments serve as valuable tools aiding teachers in understanding student learning trajectories. Ongoing assessments help to identify areas of strength while pinpointing specific learning needs, allowing for the implementation of differentiated teaching practices tailored to individual student requirements.

In ACT public schools, educators adopt a holistic approach to assessment of students through diagnostic, formative, interim, and summative assessment. Using a wide variety of assessment practices enables educators to regularly check their understanding of student learning progress.

ACT public schools provide foundational assessments for all students in their first year of school (normally Kindergarten). These assessments are conducted through BASE, focusing on early reading, phonics, and numeracy skills. Unlike some Australian states, South Australia, New South Wales, Tasmania, and Queensland, the ACT does not mandate the use of the Year 1 Phonics Check developed by the Australian Government to gauge early literacy proficiency.

Certain ACT public schools opt to use the Progressive Achievement Testing (PAT) which uses assessment data to identify starting points for learning, target teaching and monitor learning growth. The decision to implement this assessment tool remains at the discretion of individual schools.

The Panel seeks insights into identifying the most effective diagnostic, formative, interim, and summative assessments that support educators to understand student capability and learning progress. The Panel is also interested in understanding data types that can bolster educators and school leaders in customising literacy and numeracy teaching, implementing targeted interventions, and providing necessary support systems. In gathering perspectives directly from school staff, the panel aims to comprehend firsthand experiences and explore avenues for enhancing data practices to better serve the needs of both educators and students.

Noting that schools can adopt different approaches, the Panel will also seek to understand the equity of access across all ACT public schools to evidence-based and user-friendly diagnostic and ongoing assessment tools.

### Consultation Questions

7. What approaches to assessment and screening would provide the most useful data to support educators and school leaders in understanding student progress, identifying need and ensuring consistent improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes?
8. How do educators and school leaders currently understand and use student data to improve student learning outcomes and are any additional supports needed?
9. What is the most effective way for schools to communicate student learning progress to students and their families to ensure a shared understanding of outcomes in relation to literacy and numeracy? Are there any effective approaches that are efficient and minimise impacts on teacher workload?
10. Are there any examples of effective system-wide and school-based assessment, data informed teaching, and reporting for literacy and numeracy that the Panel should examine?

## 4: Supporting all students to achieve literacy and numeracy outcomes

Despite the ACT having the lowest levels of disadvantage among Australian states and territories, the landscape presents nuances of suburban disparity and underlying disadvantage. Analysis of the ACT's socio-economic indicators and makeup of the population reveals that there are pockets of disadvantage throughout the Territory masked by the higher average level of advantage.

Students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds have a greater likelihood of challenges in mastering foundational literacy and numeracy skills. Entry into school with lower levels of proficiency in these areas typically correlates with continued academic struggle throughout their schooling journey.

Year 3 students falling below expected learning benchmarks face a heightened risk of sustained underperformance, a risk disproportionately experienced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

While the socioeconomic background of students can result in barriers to learning growth, there are other factors that can impact student learning.

ACT public schools support students with learning difficulties through tailored teaching practices and targeted interventions. Educators and schools cater to a diverse array of student needs, with schools required to make reasonable adjustments for those needing additional support to access education. Teachers are entrusted with the responsibility to adjust their teaching approaches to benefit all learners.

The term 'learning difficulties' includes challenges in reading, spelling, writing, and/or mathematics, with reading challenges particularly prevalent. Learning difficulties can stem

from neurodevelopmental conditions or environmental, social or physical factors. ACT public schools support students facing such challenges through active monitoring and a tiered approach known as Response to Intervention. This strategy encompasses whole-class instruction, targeted small-group interventions, and individualised support.

ACT public schools offer formal programs catering to students with disability based on the ACT Student Disability Criteria. These initiatives encompass various support tiers, including preschool support, inclusive education in general classrooms, specialised disability education programs offering smaller class sizes and dedicated spaces for regulation, specialist schools, and provisions for hearing and vision support.

ACT public school students and staff have access to allied health services such as the School Psychology Service, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, physiotherapists, social workers, and allied health assistants. The new Inclusive Education: A Disability Inclusion Strategy for ACT Public Schools 2024-2034, recently launched by the ACT Government, outlines a comprehensive 10-year plan to strengthen inclusive education across all public schools and the Panel will take this into account when considering evidence and developing recommendations.

The Panel seeks views in relation to how individual cohorts of students can best be provided with the supports they need to succeed with literacy and numeracy and what if any improvements could be made. In particular, the Panel will give consideration to the groups outlined in the Terms of Reference including: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, English as an additional language or dialect students, neurodiverse learners, students with learning difficulties and students with disability.

### **Consultation Questions**

11. What evidence-based supports and interventions are most effective for supporting students who have not yet reached expected proficiency in literacy and numeracy? Are there any particular supports that are more effective for students from specific equity cohorts (e.g. EALD, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students)?

12. What specific supports would be most contextually appropriate for ACT public school students who have not yet reached expected proficiency in literacy or numeracy in the following learning phases: P-2, 3-6, 7-10 and 11-12?

13. Should the Education Directorate consider targeted small group or individual tutoring to support students to improve literacy and numeracy? If so, what models should be adopted?

14. What current targeted supports and intervention policies and approaches are working well/not having the desired impact and how can the Education Directorate expand upon or leverage successful approaches to improve outcomes?

## 5: Supporting staff to deliver quality literacy and numeracy education

Educational systems often establish structured plans or frameworks for ongoing training, development, and coaching of education and support staff. A system with excellent educators will nevertheless encounter challenges in advancing literacy and numeracy outcomes without consistent, robust support and adequate time for teachers to access it.

Ensuring that experienced educators have access to new evidence and methodologies is crucial for them to teach in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

The Education Directorate emphasises that professional learning for ACT public school teaching staff is primarily overseen by school leaders through the professional development planning process. This planning is closely tied to both student needs and the educators' identified requirements.

In line with the school-based approach, a diverse range of ongoing professional learning opportunities is available to teaching staff. Throughout the year, educators have access to a calendar of professional learning events, available both online and in-person.

Additionally, a New Educator Support Program has been devised to expedite development through targeted professional learning, mentoring, coaching opportunities, and the encouragement of professional growth within the initial three years of teaching.

ACT public school staff have access to professional learning sessions designed to bolster their ability to assist students with learning difficulties. These include facilitated networks, online and in-person training, and coaching on topics such as dyslexia, speech and language needs, behaviour support, ADHD, hearing loss, and autism awareness.

The Panel will review the latest evidence on how to best provide ongoing professional development support for educators and support staff in relation to literacy and numeracy. The Panel aims to gather insights from educators and key stakeholders, including the Australian Education Union. A key focus will be on considering what supports will enable educators and support staff to effectively deliver literacy and numeracy education in the ACT public school context.

The Panel seeks input from teachers and school leaders at various career stages and with various levels of experience. For example, input is sought from new educators about their experiences in the first five years regarding literacy and numeracy teaching support and professional learning, and from middle leaders about how well prepared they are to serve as instructional leaders for literacy and numeracy across all school levels.

### Consultation Questions

15. What system-wide and school-based professional learning and coaching best support educators with literacy and numeracy instruction and improvement? Are there any that best support early career teachers as they commence, or middle leaders with literacy and numeracy instructional leadership?

16. What are the most effective ways for the Education Directorate and principals to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness/impact of professional learning and coaching support for educators and school leaders, particularly early career teachers and middle leaders?

17. What current professional learning and coaching policies and approaches are working well/not having the desired impact? How do we know? How can the Education Directorate expand upon or leverage successful approaches to improve outcomes?

## 6: School-wide improvement of literacy and numeracy

### School Improvement Strategies

Each education system employs specific methods to enhance school performance and, consequently, the academic achievements of students. This often involves planning, regular review cycles, analysing data, and collecting evidence to understand what works effectively within each school's context. Collaborative discussions between principals and school leadership further drive improvements.

A key role of school improvement strategies is to ensure that evidence-based approaches to education, including literacy and numeracy, are effectively delivered across the system, in each school. Adopting a system-wide approach to school improvement can build confidence and an understanding of what is happening in every classroom.

In response to the ACT Auditor-General's Report on Teacher Quality, the Education Directorate has developed a new approach to school improvement and review cycles. The development of the new Student-Centred Improvement Model is well-advanced and is moving to implementation through testing and piloting in 2024. The new model has been developed in partnership with education experts to embed evidence and data of student learning outcomes and progress in school improvement activities. It uses an evidence-based approach to school improvement anchored in impact on student achievement, including literacy and numeracy.

The Panel will consider how to leverage the Education Directorate's new Student-Centred Improvement Model to effectively implement evidence-based approaches to improving

whole-school literacy and numeracy outcomes. The Panel's focus will be on identifying opportunities to support practical implementation of literacy and numeracy improvement strategies across the system and in individual schools anchored in student need.

## Leadership Development and Professional Growth Planning

Effective leadership across all levels is fundamental to school enhancement. Systems investing in continuous development, succession planning, and leadership coaching cultivate resilient schools capable of ongoing improvement. Directors of School Improvement oversee principals' supervision and development, closely aligned with school improvement planning.

Leadership development often intertwines with professional growth planning, providing opportunities to align the school's improvement journey with staff members' individual development. The Education Directorate maintains an ongoing professional development process, incorporating planning and review cycles. The Panel seeks insights into evidence-based approaches to leadership development and planning, particularly in instructional leadership for literacy and numeracy, to bolster school improvement processes.

## Using Data for Informed Decision-Making

Accessible, timely, and reliable student performance data empowers school leaders to tailor their approaches to meet students' specific needs. The Education Directorate has an ongoing project aimed at strengthening schools' evaluative capabilities by enhancing system-level data dashboards for each school. Encouragement is given to school leaders to utilise their school-based data to refine their analysis and chart future directions.

The Panel is keen to understand the most effective data along with data presentation and manipulation tools that can support educators and school leaders in customising literacy and numeracy instruction, support systems, and targeted interventions. The Panel aims to explore how comprehensive data practices, spanning both individual schools and the broader system, can elevate the school improvement process with a focus on advancing literacy and numeracy outcomes.

### Consultation Questions

18. How can the ACT use evidence-based school improvement planning cycles to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes?
19. What are the best approaches to evaluation and monitoring of schools to ensure appropriate support and accountability in relation to literacy and numeracy outcomes?
20. What current school improvement policies and approaches are supporting improved literacy and numeracy outcomes and how can the Education Directorate expand upon or leverage successful approaches to improve outcomes?

## Appendix A: Reports initially being considered by the Expert Panel

### Literacy

Australian Educational Research Organisation. (2022). Writing and writing instruction: An overview of the literature.

Buckingham, J. (2017). National Year 1 Literacy and Numeracy Check Expert Advisory Panel: Advice to the Minister.

Buckingham, J. (2023). Need to know or nice to know ... What is at the heart of the Science of Reading for Teachers?, Five from Five.

Castles, A., Rastle, K. and Nation, K. (2018). Ending the Reading Wars: Reading Acquisition From Novice to Expert, *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 2018, Vol. 19(1) 5–51.

Doyle, K., Te Riele, K., Stratford, E. & Stewart, S. (2017). Teaching literacy: Review of literature. Hobart: Peter Underwood Centre.

Five from Five., Australian Federation of Specific Learning Difficulties organisations., & Learning Difficulties Australia, (2020). Primary Reading Pledge - A plan to have all students reading by the end of primary school.

Gough, P., & Tunmer, W. (1986). Decoding, reading and reading disability. *Remedial and Special Education*, 7(1), 6-10.

Hempenstall, K., & Buckingham, J. (Eds.). (2016). Read about it: Scientific evidence for effective teaching of reading.

Konza, D. (2014). Teaching reading: Why the “Fab Five” should be the “Big Six”. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(12).

Malpique, A., Valcan, D., Pino-Pasternak, D. and Ledger, S. (2023). Teaching writing in primary education (grades 1–6) in Australia: a national survey, *Reading and Writing* (2023) 36:119–145.

National Reading Panel & National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction.

NSW Department of Education. (2023). Improving reading comprehension Years 3 to 8: A guide to support conversations about evidence-based practice in reading.

NSW Department of Education Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation. (2016). Effective Reading Instruction in the Early Years of School.

New South Wales Education Standards Authority. (2018). Teaching Writing: Report of the Thematic Review of Writing.



Queensland Department of Education. (2022). Effective teaching of reading: Overview of the literature.

Rowe, K., & National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy (Australia). (2005). Teaching Reading: Report and Recommendations. Department of Education, Science and Training.

Stewart, S., Te Riele, K. & Stratford, E. (2019). Literacy teaching in Tasmania: Teaching practice and teacher learning. Hobart: University of Tasmania, Peter Underwood Centre.

Tasmanian Government. (2023). Literacy Advisory Panel - Final report to government: Lifting Literacy.

## **Numeracy**

Council of Australian Governments. (2008). National Numeracy Review Report.

National Mathematics Advisory Panel (United States). (2008). Foundations for success: The final report of the National Mathematics Advisory Panel.

Sullivan, P. (2011). Teaching mathematics: Using research-informed strategies. Australian Council for Educational Research.

## **Literacy and numeracy**

Beswick, K., MacDonald, A., Roberts, P., Anson, D.W.J., Bartos, K., Bedford, M., Brown, M., David, K., Deehan, H., Durksen, T., Fenton, A., Grover, P., Holden, R., Lee, P., Loughland, T., Martin, K., Mularczyk, L., Pino-Pasternak, D., Tyagi, S., Winslade, M., Zhou, F. (2023). Ambassador School Research Centre Final Report Stage 1. NSW Department of Education Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation.

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation. (2016). How schools can improve literacy and numeracy performance and why it (still) matters. NSW Department of Education.

de Bruin, K., Kestel, E., Frances, M., Forgasz, H., Fries, R. (2023). Supporting students significantly behind in literacy and numeracy – a review of evidence-based approaches.

Jackson, C., Wan, W.-Y., Lee, E., Marslen, T., Lu, L., Williams, L., Collier, A., Johnston, K., & Thomas, M. (2023). Which skills are important for future literacy and numeracy learning? How the Australian Early Development Census data reveal the building blocks for future reading, writing and numeracy performance. Australian Education Research Organisation.

Williams, L., Groves, O., Yin Wan, W., Lee, E., & Lu, L. (2023). Learning outcomes of students with early low NAPLAN performance. Australian Educational Research Organisation.

## **ACT specific**

### **Government commissioned research and reports**

ACT Government. (2012). Detecting Disadvantage in the ACT: Report on the comparative analysis of the SEIFI and SEIFA indexes of relative socio-economic disadvantage in the Australian Capital Territory.

ACT Education Directorate. (2013). Taskforce on students with learning difficulties.

Lamb, S. (2017). Government school performance in the ACT.

### **Legislative Assembly inquiries**

Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs. (2010). Inquiry into the educational achievement gap in the ACT.

Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs. (2019). Inquiry into standardized testing in ACT schools.

Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion. (2022). Inquiry into the ACT Auditor-General's report no.6 of 2021: Teaching quality in ACT public schools.

### **Auditor-General reports**

ACT Auditor-General. (2017). Performance information in ACT public schools.

ACT Auditor-General. (2021). Teaching quality in ACT public schools.

ACT Auditor-General. (2023). Supports for students with disabilities in ACT public schools.

### **Independent research and advocacy papers**

Del Rio, J., Noura H., Jones K., Sukkarieh, A. (2023). Raising the grade: How schools in the Australian Capital Territory can lift literacy outcomes for students and the economy. Equity Economics.

Goss, P., Sonnemann, J., and Emslie, O. (2018). Measuring student progress: A state-by-state report card. Grattan Institute.

McIntosh, A., & Wilkinson, D. (2018). Academic underperformance in ACT public schools: An analysis of ACT school performance in NAPLAN over the period 2012 to 2016.

McIntosh, A., Wilkinson, D., & Constable, A. (2020). Leading the nation? The NAPLAN performance of the ACT's high socio-economic schools. The Australia Institute.

## Appendix B: List of questions

1. What supports are required to ensure the literacy and numeracy outcomes within the Australian Curriculum are met? Are there examples of system-wide or school-based supports that have been found to be particularly effective?
2. What teaching practices have been found to consistently improve literacy and numeracy outcomes?
3. Are there curriculum and teaching practices, approaches or supports in ACT public schools that are working well or are not having the desired impact? Are there any lessons the Education Directorate can take away from what is/is not working, and what should they stop, start or expand upon to improve outcomes?
4. Does the Education Directorate's approach of suggesting but not mandating teaching approaches support improved learning outcomes or would a greater degree of evidence-based prescription be more effective?
5. Are there examples of system-wide approaches to literacy and numeracy teaching in other jurisdictions that the Panel should examine?
6. How can school leaders and the Education Directorate be confident of what is being taught and the effectiveness of how it is being taught?
7. What approaches to assessment and screening would provide the most useful data to support educators and school leaders in understanding student progress, identifying need and ensuring consistent improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes?
8. How do educators and school leaders currently understand and use student data to improve student learning outcomes and are any additional supports needed?
9. What is the most effective way for schools to communicate student learning progress to students and their families to ensure a shared understanding of outcomes in relation to literacy and numeracy? Are there any effective approaches that are efficient and minimise impacts on teacher workload?
10. Are there any examples of effective system-wide and school-based assessment, data informed teaching, and reporting for literacy and numeracy that the Panel should examine?
11. What evidence-based supports and interventions are most effective for supporting students who have not yet reached expected proficiency in literacy and numeracy? Are there any particular supports that are more effective for students from specific equity cohorts (e.g. EALD, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students)?
12. What specific supports would be most contextually appropriate for ACT public school students who have not yet reached expected proficiency in literacy or numeracy in the following learning phases: P-2, 3-6, 7-10 and 11-12?
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16. What are the most effective ways for the Education Directorate and principals to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness/impact of professional learning and coaching support for educators and school leaders, particularly early career teachers and middle leaders?
17. What current professional learning and coaching policies and approaches are working well/not having the desired impact? How do we know? How can the Education Directorate expand upon or leverage successful approaches to improve outcomes?
18. How can the ACT use evidence-based school improvement planning cycles to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes?
19. What are the best approaches to evaluation and monitoring of schools to ensure appropriate support and accountability in relation to literacy and numeracy outcomes?
20. What current school improvement policies and approaches are supporting improved literacy and numeracy outcomes and how can the Education Directorate expand upon or leverage successful approaches to improve outcomes?