

## Stimulus questions

Education as an endeavour, especially within schooling, is a highly political and often contentious policy area. Each of these cartoons has something different to say about education.

1. What is the topic of each of the cartoons?
2. What perspective is being portrayed?
3. What would a counter perspective be of the issue the cartoonist has sought to highlight?
4. Have a go! What is a topic of schooling, or something in the education system more broadly, that you have an opinion about? Draw a cartoon of how you would represent the issue.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Focus on the APST graduate teacher level Standards 6 and 7 by providing an introduction to the education profession through its various systems.
- Develop an understanding of the professional development standard requirements of your profession.
- Learn about the legislative, administrative and organisational requirements of teaching through being introduced to various policies.
- Connect Australian school-based teaching with United Nations' reports, PISA assessment and global education systems impacting on teaching in Australia.
- Understand how key stakeholders and the wider community see schooling and teachers.

## INTRODUCTION

With the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2020) showing that in 2019 there were 9477 schools, 288 583 teachers (full-time equivalent) and 3 893 834 students Australia-wide, the sheer scale of early childhood, primary and secondary schooling means that systems need to be in place to manage schooling. Students as individuals do not usually see themselves as part of a huge apparatus; rather, they see their peers, the teacher in front of them, their school principal and their school in its physical, social and cultural structures as being their world of schooling and what schooling *is*. Even years after they have graduated, students can often position the school they attended and their own experience of schooling as being the definitive, archetypal experience, and can essentialise this to be applicable to others' experiences, too. In the Australian context, there are similarities among schools and between the states and territories that manage the schooling system, with each having its own separate jurisdiction via a government department of education. It can be seen as necessary to have similarities across and within jurisdictions for ease of managing such a large number of people and separate sites.

There are many **stakeholders** in schooling systems in Australia, beyond the student-parent-teacher-community relationships that are frequently raised in discussing matters of schooling. In this complex system, with multiple school system options across multiple states and territories and with various layers of government, the influence on schooling by multiple stakeholders is very real. This can be seen, for example, in the 2019 review of the 2008 *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Melbourne Declaration; Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2008), which received 159 submissions from organisations as diverse as teacher professional associations, parent groups, the Australian Human Rights Commission, non-government organisations, and business groups such as the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry; as well as individual submissions from academics, teachers and members of the general public. According to the Education Council, the government organisation that coordinated the initial review, 25 per cent of submissions came from individuals and 75 per cent

**Stakeholders:** typically a group, organisation, government or individual with an interest in or concern for a particular area. For education and schooling, in particular, this often includes politicians, parents and other family members, students, community members, media commentators, education-focused businesses, and those working within schools such as teachers.



Web activity:  
Review of the  
Melbourne  
Declaration

**Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration:** (pronounced M-ban tua);

an agreement signed in December 2019 by all Commonwealth, state and territory Ministers of Education. It has two overarching goals: Goal 1: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence; and Goal 2: All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

from organisations, with contributions received from every Australian state and territory (Education Council, 2019b). The review was completed and the outcome included the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration*, released by the Australian Government Chair, Ministerial Council on Education and Minister for Education Dan Tehan and his state and territory counterparts in December 2019 (Education Council, 2019a). It is the latest declaration following on from the Melbourne Declaration, the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century* (MCEETYA, 1999) and the *Hobart Declaration on Schooling* (MCEETYA, 1989) that signals national cooperation between the states, territories and the Commonwealth to establish and maintain national, broad objectives for the schooling of young people.

## SCHOOLING IN AUSTRALIA: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The modern, colonial period of Australian history began in 1788 with the colonisation of the area in and around what is now modern-day Sydney by (British) Royal Navy officer, Admiral Arthur Phillip, who also became the first Governor of New South Wales when Great Britain founded the penal colony. Prior to this arrival, and despite colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continued their robust systems of education to acculturate and teach their young (see, for example, Pascoe's (2014) explanation of Indigenous knowledges in traditional environs). During the initial period of colonisation, when multiple fleets of ships sailed from England to Australia (at that time a series of colonies, not a nation state), little thought was given to education and schooling for people who were considered to have a criminal mindset. Burkhardt (2015, p. 1) describes the bleak situation and outlook for any children on board the First Fleet, either as convicts or so-named *free settlers*:

No official provision was made for the inclusion of a school teacher among the government personnel in the First Fleet, regardless of the fact that 34 children under 14 years old sailed with it ... By 1800 there were 958 children in the colony and it was obvious to the governors of New South Wales from as early as 1788 that provision needed to be made for the schooling of the children of transported convicts, military personnel and government officials and their employees. Although a strong case existed for the establishment of schools in the colony, the absence among the comparatively few free settlers of literate and well educated people available to act as teachers led to a consideration of the use of well educated convicts to fill this urgent need.

By 1830, figures show that from 1788 there had been 68 people acting as teachers in the colony (Burkhardt, 2015). In the mid to late 1800s, there was an increasing push by the population for free, secular and compulsory education to be provided to all children, and in all the colonies this started to be legislated, with departments of education, or public instruction as they were commonly called, also established to administer, oversee and provide centralisation of government legislation and control. Departments of education replaced any previous board or council from 1872 (Victoria) through to 1893 (Western Australia; for more detail, see Campbell, 2014).

### New South Wales

New South Wales established the Public Instruction Department in 1880 with the *Public Instruction Act 1880* and it became compulsory for children aged seven to 14 to attend school. The introduction of compulsory, secular and free education resulted in the withdrawal of funding to denominational schools in 1883. The *free* part of schooling was enacted in 1906, although throughout the twentieth century it was not always in place for high school students.

## Queensland

Mass, state-funded education in Queensland was formally instituted with the passing and enactment of the *State Education Act of 1875 and Regulations of the Department of Public Instruction in Queensland (State Education Act of 1875; Education Act)*. The compulsory age of schooling clause was fully enacted in 1900, making school in Queensland free, compulsory and secular. Initially, the compulsory age of schooling was for 'every child of not less than six or more than twelve years of age' (State Education Act, Part 3, s. 28).

## South Australia

The *Education Act 1851* established a Board of Education and only those schools that provided non-denominational funding were funded and supported by the government. With the *Education Act 1875*, the Education Department was established, as was compulsory schooling for children aged seven to 13.

## Tasmania

Tasmania holds the honour of being the first Australian colony to enact compulsory education, in 1868, and it provided schooling for children aged seven to 12, later increasing to 14 years. The Department of Education was established with the *Education Act 1885*, and it abolished school fees for compulsory education in 1908.

## Victoria

For Victoria, the *Education Act 1872* signalled the beginning of government-supported education, with the Department of Public Instruction also being established. The compulsory age of schooling was children aged six to 15 years and education was free.

## Western Australia

The *Elementary Education Act 1871 Amendment Act 1893* established the state's department of education. Its 'first education authority, the General Board of Education (WAA 24), was established in 1847 to oversee the development of the Colony's schools. It established secular girls' and boys' schools in Perth, opened government-assisted schools in rural districts, and subsidised Roman Catholic schools' (Tout-Smith, 2004, para. 1).

## Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory

The two Australian territories, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the Northern Territory (NT) were established in the twentieth century and, being carved from existing states, had entrenched public education systems already in place.

## School funding

Funding for schools in Australia can be complicated to understand. While constitutionally the Commonwealth, or federal, government has no jurisdiction over the states and territories for school funding and decision making, the reality is not as straightforward. When Australia federated on 1 January 1901 the **Australian Constitution** did not refer specifically to education, which has meant it is a state (and territory) responsibility. However, section 96 of the Constitution allows the Commonwealth government to make 'conditional grants of money to the States for any purpose. This power to impose conditions on how the money is spent by the States allows the Commonwealth to influence the way things are done in areas over which it has no direct power to pass

**Australian Constitution:** sets out the legal framework for the country. It was established in 1901 formally as the *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act*. Unlike other laws, it cannot be changed by a Parliament vote; any alteration needs to be put to the Australian voters via a referendum. Of the 44 referendums held since 1901, only eight have passed.

laws' (Parliamentary Education Office, 2010, p. vii). With the Commonwealth government allocating funding to each state and territory, conditions can be placed on schooling matters, such as participation in NAPLAN testing; otherwise, funding can be withheld – funds that state and territory governments need in order to govern and function effectively.

In Australia, each state and territory has its own Department of Education and is responsible for schools, teacher registration and employment, the curriculum and syllabus of each subject, and all other matters associated with the strategic planning and day-to-day running of schools. State and territory governments provide the majority of funding to government schools and the federal government provides the majority of funding to non-government schools (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019). The legislation that covers the federal government's spending and areas of responsibility is currently the *Australian Education Act 2013* (the Act). Statistics from 2014–15 released by the Productivity Commission (2017) show that across the nation, \$14.9 billion of recurrent school expenditure was provided by the Commonwealth and \$38.1 billion came from state and territory funding.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS ► ► ► ►



Link: EduResearch Matters blog  
Guided responses in eBook

Jason McGrath and John Fischetti pose a provocative question: *What if compulsory schooling was a 21st century invention?* In their article, they 'examine a) the role of the teacher and of the learner and b) assessment practice' (McGrath & Fischetti, 2019, p. 212).

The full, publicly accessible blog can be read here: <https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=4137>.

Can you imagine that compulsory schooling was a twenty-first-century invention? Knowing what you do about society, technology, how people learn and what engages people's interests, answer the following questions.

1. What would the role of the teacher look like in the twenty-first century? Identify two priority points for a teacher.
2. From your perspective, what does a current student look like? If schools adopt your response to the first question, how might a student look and act differently in this new vision of education?
3. What would assessment look like?

## SCHOOLING IN AUSTRALIA AND AROUND THE WORLD: A CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE

Despite existing problems (e.g. to do with funding, issues of equitable access and assessment regimes), Australia has a successful education system from early childhood through to tertiary education. Internationally, the Australian school education system is well regarded. The Queensland Department of Education, for example, has within it Education Queensland International (EQI), which works to place international students in Queensland schools, with high school students usually living in a homestay arrangement with Australian families (Queensland Government, 2018). EQI offers places in over 110 high schools across the state, indicating its broad take-up by international students. The Department also offers what it terms an Offshore Projects Unit, providing the Queensland curriculum to schools in the United Arab Emirates, Papua New Guinea, China, Nauru and Taiwan.

**Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA):**  
an independent, statutory authority set up and funded by the Commonwealth government, to be involved 'in the learning of all young Australians through world-class curriculum, assessment and reporting' (ACARA, 2016, para. 1).

Depending on which study is consulted and the testing used, Australia's adult literacy rate is at 99 per cent. The Year 12 certification rate for all students in Australia is reported by the **Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)** to be 79 per cent in 2017, a steady increase from 64 per cent in 2009. The percentage of

Australians aged 20 to 64 with a Bachelor degree or above has risen from 24.4 per cent in 2008 to 31.4 per cent in 2018 (ACARA, 2019b). These numbers indicate a positive outlook for education systems in Australia. By legislation, Australian education is free (however problematic and exclusive the term ‘free’ is), but does not include other costs related to schooling such as excursions and materials.

Regardless of socio-economic status and geographical location, schooling is provided for all children, with variable outcomes. Education departments around the nation, in considering the diverse needs of students in accessing public education, offer a range of options such as stand-alone primary and high schools, selective high schools, schools for students with disability, School of the Air/School of Distance Education, Queensland School for Travelling Show Children (for those students whose families work on the agricultural show circuit), high school options in **TAFE**, and supported options for home schooling.

**TAFE:** Technical and Further Education, is a government-run, vocational education facility, usually for post-high school qualifications.

As a signatory to the United Nations’ (UN) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, ratified on 17 December 1990, Australia has an obligation to ensure that all children receive a free education. Article 28 (simplified version) reads in part: ‘Children have the right to an education. Discipline in schools should respect children’s human dignity. Primary education should be free’ (United Nations, 1989). There are various networks and alliances to ensure that governments are held to account and that schools provide inclusive education to all students – for example, the Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education.

There are three schooling systems within Australia. This is quite unique, as most countries have either one (publicly funded, as in Finland) or two (a public and a private/independent sector) systems. According to the ABS, student enrolments in public schools make up 65.6 per cent of the school population; Catholic schools make up 19.7 per cent; and independent schools make up 14.7 per cent (ABS, 2020).

The three systems are:

- *public or government schools:* this is schooling provided to all children and young people from Kindergarten (also called Reception, Prep or Foundation) to Year 12 and is funded by the respective state and territory governments. The majority of students attend public schools. Education is free and secular, although there may be charges for additional activities, materials and excursions.
- *Catholic schools:* schooling run by the Catholic Church and is the second-largest schooling system in Australia. Catholic schools are run by the Catholic Education Office and are not part of the government system. Generally, students enrolled in Catholic schools will either be of the Catholic faith or agree to abide by Catholic faith principles while in attendance. Attendance at a Catholic school is on a fee-basis and is generally less expensive than at an independent school.
- *independent schools:* schools in this system vary significantly, from large metropolitan elite schools to local Christian church-run schools and alternative schooling options. There are approximately 1140 independent schools across Australia. They are privately funded – usually via a user-pay system whereby parents or carers pay for their child to attend the school.



[Link: Types of school](#)



[Web activity: UN Rights of the Child](#)

## Quality teachers and ongoing development

A further strength of the Australian school system is the quality and professionalism of school teachers. All school teachers in Australia are required to have either a four-year Bachelor of Education, or a three-year Bachelor degree in a non-education discipline (e.g. a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science) and the equivalent of a Graduate Diploma or Master of Teaching qualification in order to be eligible for teacher registration. Professional registration in a specific state or territory is also required. As part of the increasing push towards making schooling nationwide and breaking down state and territory jurisdiction borders, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has developed the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST), which were introduced in Chapter 1. These standards, categorised as graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead, are set up to follow teachers throughout their career from graduation through to leaving the profession. The standards are

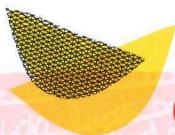
mapped, and professional development opportunities are pitched to match certain standards so that teachers can demonstrate their professional currency (AITSL, 2011).

## Accountability issues in relationship to the Commonwealth government, state governments and teachers

As discussed in Chapter 1, accountability occurs in all professions, and teaching is no exception. How accountability is measured for teachers is a subject open to much discussion in the field of education and is often a topic of interest in politics and the media. Former Minister for Education and Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, styled herself as the ‘education prime minister’ and often spoke about school reform. In a speech in 2010, where she delivered her ideas for a so-called ‘education revolution’, she discussed teacher autonomy as a barrier to accountability, saying:

For too long we have let children down ... Let them down by allowing the quality debate to be stymied by the orthodoxy that what teachers did in the classroom was largely up to them and that external scrutiny of schooling and accountability for student outcomes was somehow not appropriate. (Gillard, 2010, n.p.)

A year earlier, Gillard (2008, para. 5) had issued a press release notifying the public of the creation of ACARA, stating ‘It is internationally recognised that achieving world class education standards requires the close alignment of curriculum, assessment and accountability systems’. Crawford (2011, p. 170) has pointed out that linking accountability to assessment and curriculum is not as clear-cut as may be presented by key stakeholders with vested interests, writing ‘while teacher accountability is clearly an important issue and while the teaching profession ought to be held to high standards, there is little tangible evidence that the “close alignment of curriculum, assessment and accountability systems” provides a valid context within which to judge the quality of teaching or learning’.



## CONNECTIONS



Links:  
Accreditation  
authorities

### ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Accountability in the Australian education system is monitored through the APST. Each state and territory has its own professional development and registration requirements that are aligned to the APST. For more information about your state or territory, access the relevant accreditation authority.

#### AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY: ACT TEACHER QUALITY INSTITUTE

The ACT Teacher Quality Institute requires teachers to undergo 20 hours of accredited professional development each year and is connected directly with the APST.

#### NEW SOUTH WALES: EDUCATION STANDARDS AUTHORITY (NESA)

The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) sets and maintains accreditation and professional development requirements for school teachers.

#### NORTHERN TERRITORY: TEACHER REGISTRATION BOARD

The Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory offers the five-stage Certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers (HALT) as per the agreement between the Commonwealth government and each state and territory.

#### QUEENSLAND: QUEENSLAND COLLEGE OF TEACHERS

The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) requires yearly professional development of all teachers working in the state as part of its Continuing Professional Development Framework.

### SOUTH AUSTRALIA: TEACHERS REGISTRATION BOARD

The Teachers Registration Board (TRB) of South Australia administers the 60 hours across three years of professional requirements for all teachers in the state.

### TASMANIA: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING INSTITUTE

The Professional Learning Institute (PLI) of Tasmania manages the professional standards, including offering online modules for teacher professional development.

### VICTORIA: VICTORIAN INSTITUTE OF TEACHING

The Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) ties professional development to teacher registration and renewal, and links its professional learning framework to the APST as well as to its state-based codes of conduct and ethics.

### WESTERN AUSTRALIA: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Leadership Institute provides a range of professional development opportunities for the very geographically diverse locations of its teachers. Its courses range from one day to online to postgraduate qualifications.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS



From what you have read in this textbook (including Chapter 1), your own background knowledge, the state or territory organisation responsible for your professional development and accreditation, and other education topics you have learnt about at university, consider:

1. What are the reasons for accountability?
2. How does accountability in the form of ongoing professional development support teachers and, ultimately, students?



Guided responses  
in eBook

## AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Despite the successes of the Australian education system in general, it is by no means perfect and without fault. Like any large government department or organisation, it is susceptible to complaint and criticism; and the criticisms are not always misplaced.

Although there is legislation passed by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, and policies put in place to ensure young people have access to education, there are systemic challenges to ensuring equitable access to education opportunities for people from birth to 18 years old and beyond. These systemic schooling challenges are often connected to poverty and health outcomes. The *Educate Australia Fair? Education inequality in Australia* report points out a few sobering statistics: 'An Indigenous child is 40% less likely to finish high school and 60% less likely to go to university compared with a non-Indigenous child. A child born in remote Australia is only a third as likely to go to university as a child born in a major city' (Cassells et al., 2017, p. vii). The report explains the drivers of educational inequality:

The most disadvantaged areas in Australia are characterised by low educational participation, high rates of developmental vulnerability and risk, lower achievement in national literacy and numeracy testing, poor high school retention rates and lower pre-school and school attendance rates ... Average NAPLAN scores are typically between 150 and 190 points lower among children attending schools in the most educationally disadvantaged areas, compared with the least disadvantaged. (Cassells et al., 2017, p. xiv)

Other reports and research (see, for example, Peake & Sacks, 2014; UNICEF Office of Research, 2018) also consistently outline issues of where students live (remote, regional, urban), the educational

experiences and outcomes of their parents (whether they finished high school, graduated from university), socio-economic status (often determined by postcode, and the term *closing the gap* is frequently heard), early childhood education (whether or not a child attended preschool or other setting), whether students are Indigenous or non-Indigenous as factors contributing to educational success (especially for those students living in the Northern Territory or remote areas of Australia) and teacher effectiveness. The report, *Good But Must Do Better*, identifies that ‘while many aspects of the System are strong, some measures do not consistently indicate optimum performance’, and it calls for reform to occur on a broader basis, rather than being ‘pursued on a siloed basis’ (Peake & Sacks, 2014, p. 5).

Some reports and organisations are also concerned about the mental health and social wellbeing of students, and outline how the education system can make changes to processes to support young people (see, for example, Youth Action, 2019). There is a range of reports that look at systemic failures in the education system as hindering student learning, not preparing students for life beyond the classroom, and increasing education inequality (Goss, 2017). The **United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF)**: set up in 1946 to, among other things, support the rights of children, advocate for their education and healthcare, and protect them.

The **United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF)** released a report in 2018 that claimed Australia ranked as the 30th worst country (out of 41) for inequality across the three stages of education; and for the three indicators of equality in education, Australia ranked bottom third alongside New Zealand and Slovakia (UNICEF Office of Research, 2018). The data showed that the segregated (funding) schooling system of Australia contributed to this result. Location, socio-economic and funding issues were included as factors contributing to the results published in the report.

While it may be easy to fall into a spiral of negativity when looking at this research, it is important to note that even where there are bleak educational outcomes, there is an upward trend of positive education attainment, as pointed out in *Educate Australia Fair?*, which reported an increase in the number of 15 year olds participating in schooling (from 94.5% in 2006 to 99.7% in 2015); and improved retention of Year 12 students (Cassells et al., 2017). Overall, the Australian education system is regulated and professional.



Suggested  
response in eBook

### PAUSE AND THINK

Do an internet search using the search term, ‘Australian education system’, within the news search option. Look at the top 10 results. How many were positive, negative and balanced? Write 100 words on why you think you got the results you did.

## Funding education

One of the common criticisms made by reports on Australian schooling is to do with the funding arrangements. Often pointed out is the complicated funding arrangements between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments, the multiple education sectors, and the inequity that occurs as a result (see, for example, UNICEF Office of Research, 2018). Given the amount of funding governments spend on education, there is an expectation, influenced by factors such as the marketisation of education, that accountability occurs. What this accountability looks like is cause for much debate, and often involves discussions around student results, teacher qualifications, teacher literacy and numeracy levels, and curriculum and assessment content. Crawford (2011, p. 213) explains:

Governments, who annually spend millions of dollars on education, are naturally enough very interested in finding out whether this investment provides value for money and, importantly, how the performance of Australian schools and pupils compares with educational outcomes in other nations. That is, of course, a much easier task if education systems are held accountable, and if school and teacher ‘outputs’ are measured.

The task of gathering data about value for money and efficiency is significantly easier if there exists a centrally controlled, managed and monitored national curriculum and allied testing and assessment regimes.



Compared with many other countries around the world with mature education systems, Australia has an unusual funding model, whereby independent and religious (the Catholic Church being the largest religious education provider) schools, alongside public schools, are all funded with public money. While the majority of funding comes from states and territories, and from this public schools on the whole receive more funding than independent and religious schools, Commonwealth government funding continues to increase and provides more funding to the independent and religious sectors than to the public sector. Table 3.1 shows that Commonwealth funding for the 2019–20 financial year included 2.5 per cent to non-government schools and 1.7 per cent to government schools, a not insignificant difference.

**Table 3.1** Education expenses as a proportion of total Australian Government expenses (%)

	2018–19 (est.)	2019–20 (est.)	2020–21 (est.)	2021–22 (proj.)	2022–23 (proj.)
Higher education	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.9	1.9
Vocational and other education	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Schools	4.0	4.2	4.4	4.5	4.5
<i>Non-government schools</i>	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.7
<i>Government schools</i>	1.6	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.9
School education – specific funding	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0
Student assistance	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
General administration	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>7.3</b>

Source: Parliament of Australia, 2019.

## Schooling systems for diverse students

A strength of the Australian education system is the diversity it offers students. The number of students enrolled in Australian schools is substantial. Latest figures released by the ABS show that in 2018 there were almost four million students attending a government (public), Catholic or independent school (ABS, 2020; see Table 3.2). For some students, however, attending a mainstream education facility such as a preschool, a Foundation/Kindergarten/Prep to Year 6 primary school, or a Year 7 to Year 12 high school is not possible, or not the best option for them. This can be due to a range of reasons such as, but not excluding, geographic isolation, being a student with disability, having had poor experiences in a mainstream school, or parents opting to not send their child to a mainstream school. While curriculum-wise, education jurisdictions in Australia can be quite prescriptive, the mode of delivery is open to flexibility. For example, students can attend their local school in a face-to-face option, which the vast majority of students do; for remote students, School of the Air/School of Distance Education is offered, which enables the student to remain living at home while completing their education up to Year 12; and homeschooling, whereby the parent or other carer prepares the curriculum and lessons and delivers them in the home environment.

**Table 3.2** Student enrolments by school affiliation, Australia, 2014–18

	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014
<b>Government</b>	2 558 169	2 524 865	2 483 802	2 445 130	2 406 495
<b>Catholic</b>	765 735	766 870	767 050	765 539	757 749
<b>Independent</b>	569 930	557 490	547 374	540 304	529 857
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3 893 834</b>	<b>3 849 225</b>	<b>3 798 226</b>	<b>3 750 973</b>	<b>3 694 101</b>

Source: ABS, 2020.

A growing alternative schooling option is homeschooling. Homeschooling is where students undertake their formal education in their own home, usually being taught by one or both parents and sometimes by a hired registered teacher or student learning support officer. Currently, it is reported that there are approximately 20 000 students home-schooled in Australia. Statistics released by Accelerate Homeschooling (Chapman, 2018) show that nationwide in 2011 there were 10 441 registered home-schooled students, which jumped to 13 312 in 2014 and to 19 004 in 2017. According to Chapman, this represents 0.45 per cent of the total student population in Australia.

Due to legislation across Australia requiring students to attend a school until they are at least 15 years old, registering to home-school is a requirement for parents. There are usually state- and territory-specific regulations to meet and often these are put in place to ensure that children being homeschooled are receiving an education at a minimum comparable to what is delivered in mainstream schools. Some reasons to home-school include: dissatisfaction with the schooling system; philosophical reasons related to either religious or secular thinking; itinerant working or travelling; or a child having special needs. A parent choosing to home-school their child will usually put together a curriculum that they will follow, connect it to the curriculum requirements of their education jurisdiction, and submit it to the relevant Department of Education for approval. Periodic inspections take place to ensure the curriculum is being followed. Other options include buying in a home-school education package, which can be popular with religious families. Once approved, the home-school experience can begin.

Another education option is alternative schools. These have been around for decades, but have recently gained greater momentum following an increase in student enrolments, more support from state and territory governments, and more effective incorporation into partner mainstream high schools. For example, Big Picture Education Australia went from 34 partner schools in 2010 (White, 2010) to

40 in 2018 (Ryan, 2018). Previously, alternative schools have often been stand-alone schools, physically removed from mainstream schools, and usually focused towards students excluded or at risk of exclusion from mainstream schools. Big Picture Education Australia is developing the way alternative schooling is delivered and changing the cohort so that it is more diverse (Ryan, 2018; White, 2010). This organisation aims to offer schooling in a radically different format to the traditional high school format. Commencing in 2006, Big Picture sees its focus as working with the individual interests and passions of students, often through project-based learning, to meet curriculum outcomes. It is aimed at teaching students to be independent learners and this is done with the intensive support of advisory teachers, with a very low teacher to student ratio that cannot be matched in mainstream high schools. Part of its personalised learning approach includes working with the student to develop post-school pathways and, as such, it has started negotiating alternative entry pathways to university study – for example, with the University of Newcastle.

For students who are geographically isolated, School of the Air, or as often now called, School of Distance Education, provides an alternative schooling option from preschool to Year 12. Originally set up as correspondence schools, School of the Air began with radio lessons delivered to students from their teachers at a base (e.g. in Charleville, Queensland, the base was the veranda of the Royal Flying Doctors Service office, established in 1966). In more recent years, the radio waves were replaced by telephones and now many undertake lessons using either telephone or some form of internet video conferencing. Students are typically sent packs of teaching and learning materials fortnightly (whether by postal service or electronically) and, with the help of a parent or home tutor, work through the materials during class time, calling in for a lesson when timetabled and sending their work to their teacher for marking and progress checking. Students meet each other and their teachers during face-to-face sessions held several times a year, such as sports and swimming carnivals, or 'musters', which provide opportunities for class time, peer interaction and assessment to be undertaken. These schools are typically for students who live on large farming properties and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students living in remote locations. Additionally, students who are unable to attend their local high school in a small country town, students with parents who are itinerant workers, or students who are travelling also use the services of a School of the Air. *Australian Geographic* poetically described the Alice Springs School of the Air as, 'it must be the biggest school in the world – its classrooms are spread over 1.3 million square kilometres, yet it only has 120 students and 14 teachers' (Hanson, 2010, para. 1).

### PAUSE AND THINK

Consider an alternative schooling option presented here, or another one that you may know of, such as unschooling. Locate information about this schooling option through your library, the school's website or other sources.

Identify:

- the name of the school or schooling option
- the main purpose of the school
- who are the school's typical student cohort
- three interesting points that differentiate it from mainstream preschools, primary schools or high schools.

Now write 50 to 100 words on how it fits within the broader school system.



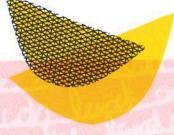
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### Assessment systems

The **Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)** has attracted a lot of debate about its value and usefulness as a measure of student ability. There have been claims that a reliance on its scores, along with the much discussed National Assessment

**Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA):** an international study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) designed to evaluate education systems by measuring student performance in mathematics, science and reading.

Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing, has resulted in a narrowing of the curriculum to an overemphasis on literacy and numeracy. Some educators, especially in the primary school context, have claimed that preparing students for high-stakes testing such as NAPLAN has meant the curriculum has been significantly narrowed (see Parliament of Australia, n.d.). Other research points to negative impacts on student wellbeing and learning (Wyn, Turnbull & Grimshaw, 2014). Comparisons are routinely made between the data of Australia and other education jurisdictions such as Shanghai, China, and Finland. The comparisons can lead to some false assumptions, as they do not always take into consideration the diversity of the Australian context, the educational pressures and the monocultural mix of students in other jurisdictions. Finland, for example, has one education system, which is a well-funded public schooling system. Alarmingly, Wilson, Dalton and Baumann (2015, para. 8) identified that education results from 'analysis of PISA and NAPLAN suggest that stagnation and decline are occurring among performing students as well as low performers'. The authors also point out that declining participation in Science and Mathematics, the monolingual education students receive, issues of teaching quality and low participation in early childhood learning have all contributed to a decline in student outcomes.



## CONNECTIONS

### WHAT IS PISA?

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), run through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), began in 2000 and represents over 80 economies, including member countries, partner countries and partner economies, such as an economic area within a country's border (e.g. Macau in China).

According to its website, 'PISA measures 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges (PISA, 2018, n.p.). Since 2018, financial literacy has started to be included in assessment too. A snapshot of PISA in 2018 shows that 600 000 students, representing the 32 million 15 year olds in schools in participating countries and economies, sat the two-hour test. You can see sample test questions on the PISA website: [www.oecd.org/pisa/test](http://www.oecd.org/pisa/test).

The NAPLAN testing is carried out annually in the second full week of May and covers Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. Students are assessed on their literacy (reading, writing, and language conventions of spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy skills. The testing is undertaken across the nation and reported via the National Assessment Program (NAP) website organised through ACARA. Results are provided three to four months post-testing.

NAPLAN results (and PISA reports) receive intense media scrutiny when they are released. In the main, the scrutiny is based on criticisms when testing scores and results are not at an expected level or when they appear to have dropped. Regular criticisms lodged include: a harking back to an unidentifiable bygone era when schools were supposedly concerned with the 'basics' of education, commonly referred to as back-to-basics; teacher quality has slumped; students being too concerned with technology and not enough with literacy and numeracy; the school curriculum not focusing sufficiently on phonics; demands for political intervention; and a range of other factors. Criticisms from educators are largely based on a number of key issues, as Rogers (2018, n.p.) points out:

- NAPLAN causes a major distortion of the curriculum in schools in a bad way.
- NAPLAN causes serious distress for students and teachers.

- NAPLAN results posted on the My School website are inappropriate and are an inaccurate way to judge schools.
- NAPLAN results are not used to help children learn and grow.
- NAPLAN results for individual children are associated with a degree of measurement error that makes them difficult to interpret.

In a demonstration of the variety of perspectives educators have on the value of NAPLAN testing, Rogers (2018, n.p.) outlines the value of NAPLAN, which includes: it could be a ‘useful tool for teachers, parents, schools, researchers and governments (for tracking students, reporting on progress, providing extra support, researching on assessment, literacy and numeracy issues and allocating resources)’. Other educators disagree, referring to: the lack of individual support for students; the time it takes out of other key learning areas (KLAs) such as the creative arts and Human Science and Its Environment (HSIE) in favour of preparing students to take tests; and the reliance on NAPLAN data for decision making by Department of Education officials and by parents in selecting schools, among other factors (see, for example, Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013). Bahr and Pendergast (2018, n.p.) write that NAPLAN has not improved literacy and numeracy, despite its promise to do so, but rather ‘it has been somewhat of a distraction for teachers, students and communities’. They write that the student data gathered from the testing is outdated by the time stakeholders receive it, the testing regime assumes that teachers are not effectively using diagnostic assessment tools to ascertain the literacy and numeracy skills of their students, and it has a negative impact on learning cultures. Rogers (2018, n.p.) does believe that NAPLAN should be used as ‘only a single piece of evidence’ rather than as a judgement tool for an entire school, and that while some schools over-prepare students, causing stress and distress, this is not the case across the board.

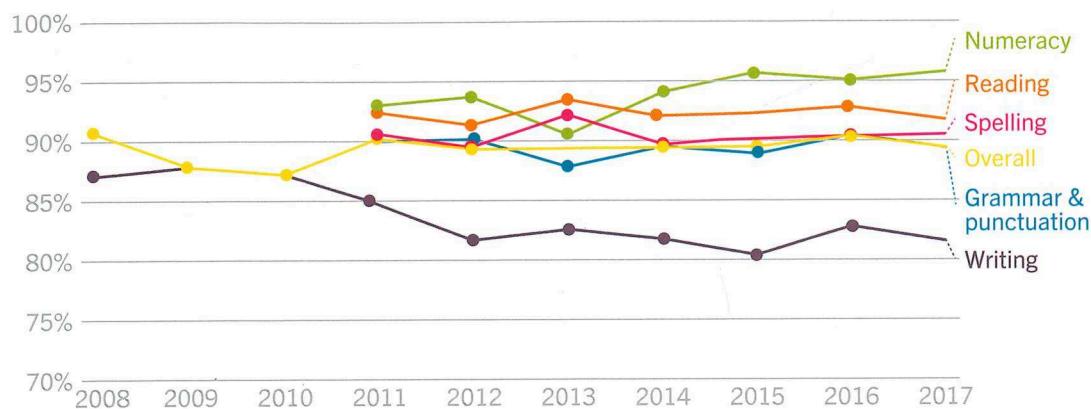
## NAPLAN TESTING

EXTRACT

Professors Nan Bahr and Donna Pendergast have called for NAPLAN testing to stop. They write: ‘Since it’s clear NAPLAN hasn’t been an outrageous success, we suggest we ought to rest the program and adopt more continuous teacher-led evaluation methods that enable teachers to respond directly to students’ (Bahr & Pendergast, 2018, para. 4). They then outline seven problems which, in full, are:

1. the tests provide information about student performance in narrow aspects of literacy and numeracy
2. it’s well outdated by the time teachers, parents and students receive it, as it can take up to four months for teachers to receive results from the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), who designed and administer the tests. The tests are in May and according to the official NAPLAN site, are released to schools and parents somewhere between mid-August and mid-September
3. it assumes teachers are not using appropriate, in-time formative and diagnostic approaches as part of their repertoire of teaching
4. it often results in a change in school and classroom culture, with an emphasis on teaching to the test instead of more appropriate teaching methods
5. it reinforces a culture of sameness and lockstep achievement
6. it has led to gaming, where participation in the test is influenced in order to achieve certain outcomes. For example, students whose teachers expect them to struggle with the tests can withdraw them from the test, effectively removing them from the school’s performance profile for that year
7. it has created a generation of learners who have had the opportunity to fine tune a range of negative responses to the high stakes regime, including anxiety and physical illness.

Professors Bahr and Pendergast then refer to a graph that shows the tracking of Year 9 student results from 2008 to 2017 to illustrate their point (Figure 3.1).



**Figure 3.1** Percentage of students performing at or above the national minimum standard in Year 9, 2008–17  
Source: ACARA, 2019a.

## Education reforms in Australia and overseas

An ongoing factor in any discussion of reform in education and in garnering political and public support for reform outside of education institutions directly, is that in Australia, at least, nearly everyone has been to school (see, for example, Tait, 2016). Attendance has been usually for more than 10 years, people know others who have gone to school, and they may have ongoing connections with schools through, for example, children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews and neighbours. Due to this *familiarity* with schooling, general members of the public can confuse this to mean they possess *expertise* in all things to do with schools, especially what teachers do (or, as is often the case, what teachers are perceived as *not* doing). Therefore, discussion in the media is often framed around anecdotes of personal experiences, regardless of the accuracy of people's recall or the reality of schools today. Similarly, when reports are released detailing potential education reform, in many ways people have already made up their minds about what they think should be in the report, and this can frame media discussion, rather than an analysis of the facts and the findings of the research presented in education reform reports.

Recently, there has been debate in New South Wales with the release of the *NSW Curriculum Review Interim Report* led by Professor Geoff Masters (NSW Education Standards Authority [NESA], 2019). The report attracted significant media and public interest, not least because it was released on the eve of Year 12 students sitting their final, high-stakes assessment, the Higher School Certificate (HSC). One example of public attitudes towards schooling came in the form of talkback callers to a local ABC radio station. Following an interview with Professor John Fischetti, where he explicitly spoke about teaching children skills for the twenty-first century, listeners phoned in to express their views, yet none of the callers referred to Professor Fischetti's interview (whether to agree or disagree with what he said) nor to engage in anything written in the report advocating for educational reform. Rather, callers took the opportunity to espouse their mostly unqualified views of education, which invariably seemed to fall within two camps of thought: first, that teaching in schools should return to the basics of maths, reading and writing and computers should be moved out of the classroom; and, second, that schools should teach life skills such as how to write a résumé and how to manage a household budget. These two perspectives both see schooling as narrow, and ignore the complexities of the education system and the realities of society now and into the future. As voters for governments that determine education policy and spending, it is important that public awareness is raised regarding what schools do and their purpose.

## What about Finland (and other overseas education systems)?

For many years, Finland has been a source of interest and intrigue for educators around the world (see, for example, Chung, Atkin & Moore, 2011). On international rankings such as the OECD's PISA,

Finnish schools score highly on multiple measures, and even though some of the rankings have slipped in recent years, it remains a highly scored education system. What is it about Finland that has caused the success that so many other educational jurisdictions want to emulate? One significant difference between Finland and Anglophone countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, which have adopted many neo-liberal positions in key areas like education and health, is that Finland enables its teachers to be more autonomous, its education system is decentralised, play-based learning is privileged, especially in the early years, cooperative learning takes place regularly in the classroom, the curriculum is not prescriptive, and Finland focuses all its education resources within one, publicly funded system rather than, as in Australia, public, Catholic and independent school systems. From the successes seen in Finland, other countries have attempted to 'policy borrow' in order to improve their own results (Chung, Atkin & Moore, 2011). The contexts of various education systems and broader societies are vastly different, so care needs to be taken when adopting the policy of another country; and attempting to transplant an education system into another jurisdiction, lock, stock and barrel, is unlikely to be effective. Wallace-Richards (2017), in examining the Finnish context, identified four points that make education systems successful: 1) collaboration; 2) personalisation; 3) trust-based responsibility; and 4) teacher and leader professionalism. On the contrary, those education systems that do not do as well are based on: 1) competition and choice; 2) standardisation; 3) test-based accountability; and 4) fast-track teacher preparation.

Various factors are attributed to Finnish success in the PISA, including, for example:

- *equity in student achievement*: 'The Finnish strategy for building up high quality has been based on the principle of equity and on an effort to minimise low achievement ... [I]n Finland the gap between high and low performers is relatively narrow' (Välijärvi et al., 2003, p. 31)
- *equal opportunities to learn*: 'Finland has sought to provide all students irrespective of their place of residence with equal opportunities for high quality education. An extensive network of schools and the recruitment of highly qualified teachers in all schools have been important means in ensuring high educational quality and equality in all Finland. The results are most encouraging, which can be seen in that in PISA the differences found among schools between the different regions as well as the urban and rural areas of Finland proved relatively unimportant. In Finland it is thus of little consequence where students live and which school they go to. The opportunities to learn are virtually the same all over the country' (Välijärvi et al., 2003, pp. 34–5)
- *equality related to family background*: 'Students come to school from widely differing family backgrounds both in Finland and in the other PISA countries. Family background, as shown by the results of PISA, still has an impact on student performance. In Finland, however, this influence is less marked than on average across OECD countries' (Välijärvi et al., 2003, p. 35).

## DISCOURSE OF CHOICE

Finnish teacher and academic, Professor Pasi Sahlberg, now residing in Australia, discusses differences between Finland and Australia and the discourse of choice, which is connected to the commercialisation of schooling.

PASI SAHLBERG (2019), 'AUSTRALIA MUST FIX SCHOOL INEQUITY TO CREATE A TOP EDUCATION SYSTEM', ABC NEWS, 14 AUGUST.

Around the discourse of choice, Sahlberg (2019, n.p.) writes:

In its [OECD] 2012 publication titled Quality and Equity in Education: Supporting disadvantaged students and schools, it stated:

## EXTRACT



Guided response  
in eBook

School choice advocates often argue that the introduction of market mechanisms in education allows equal access to high-quality schooling for all. Expanding school choice opportunities, it is said, would allow all students – including disadvantaged ones and the ones attending low performing schools – to opt for higher quality schools, as the introduction of choice in education can foster efficiency, spur innovation and raise quality overall. However, evidence does not support these perceptions, as choice and associated market mechanisms can enhance segregation. (p64)

Instead of increasing school choice, the OECD suggests that governments should invest more systematically in equity in education.

...  
The OECD suggests that school choice should be managed to balance parental choice while limiting its negative impact on equity.

Competition between schools delivers bad outcomes.

In this subject Australia has not been a very good pupil in the class of OECD countries.

...  
Parental choice is an idea that became commonly known as a consequence of Milton Friedman's economic theories in the 1950s. Friedman stated that parents must be given the freedom to choose their children's education and encourage competition among schools to better serve families' diverse needs.

Friedman's school choice theory has been tested in large- and small-scale settings around the world since then.

School voucher systems in Chile and Sweden, charter schools in the US, and academies in England, are examples of mechanisms to advance parental choice and private schools.

Results over the past half a century have not been what Friedman expected.

In 2013 the Grattan Institute in Australia concluded:

By increasing competition, government policies have increased the effectiveness of many sectors of the economy. But school education is not one of them. (p35)

Instead of asking schools to race against one another for better outcomes, state and federal strategies should introduce incentives that would encourage collaboration between schools and guarantee that all schools have sufficient resources to cope with inequalities that children bring with them to school every day.



## QUESTIONS

1. What are the main differences between Australian and Finnish schooling that Professor Sahlberg identifies in the article?
2. What is the *discourses of choice* that he explores in the article?

## Teachers working within a system

This section addresses the topic of *what* constitutes the official knowledge in school curriculums and *how* this official knowledge is generally determined. It is important to recognise that there are many contentious issues and arguments associated with 'the school' as an institution and that the socially constructed economic and political values it reinforces for students is not a 'neutral enterprise' (Apple, 2004, p. 7). The concept of *official knowledge* theorises the way dominant values are communicated to students as a type of non-overt means of inculcating students to view the world in particular ways – for example, this can be through anything from curriculum, to stated school rules, to unspoken expectations of behaviour (see further discussion of this in Chapter 6). It is argued that dominant values are those usually viewed in society as being 'normal', 'just' or 'right' and broadly accepted to be 'true'. In a sense, they have been repeated so many times that they have become naturalised as a way of understanding

the way the world is, becoming part of the hegemonic practice of schooling students (see, for example, Luke's (1995–96) understanding of hegemony). Hall (1988, p. 44) explains how this concept is practised:

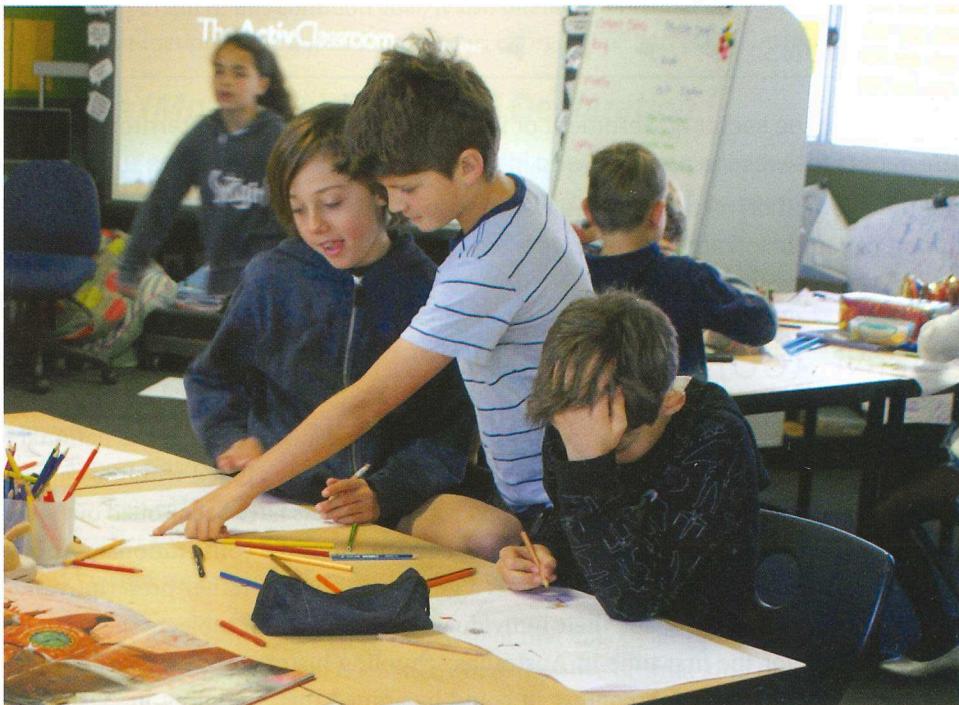
The social distribution of knowledge *is* skewed. And since the social institutions most directly implicated in its formation and transmission – the family/school/media triplet – are grounded in and structured by the class relations that surround them ... the circle of dominant ideas *does* accumulate the symbolic power to map or classify the world for others ... It becomes the horizon of the taken for-granted: what the world is and how it works, for all practical purposes.

Furthermore, rather than culture and ideology as naturally occurring or evolving forms or processes, Apple (2000, p. 15) asserts the explicit operation of ideologies, writing, 'the conventional approach ... assumes by and large that ideology is "inscribed in" people'. Here, it also encompasses what and whose knowledge is determined to be of most worth for students to learn (Apple, 2004). There are various factors, such as economic and political, which determine what is included as official knowledge. For example, those who have access to the political systems are better placed to influence the content of what is included in official knowledge. In debunking myths about education, Tait (2016, pp. 225–6) discusses the effect of globalisation on high-stakes assessment, writing:

**Myth #2 We have an Australian education system here, not any kind of 'globalised' one.**

*If we're now living in a globalised world, this news hasn't filtered down to our education system yet. Our schools and universities are still very much Australian.*

In fact, the evidence suggests that we have become educationally globalised in ways that we probably don't even recognise. For example, our apparent obsession with standardised testing, such as NAPLAN, is something we've picked up from the global educational community. Likewise, our devolved schooling system is part of a broader international neoliberal agenda, with its emphasis on economic rationalism, deregulation, competition and individual responsibility.



## Teacher unions

There are multiple support mechanisms available for teachers to access through their employers, and these vary between states and territories. Teachers can also join a union. Most unions have a pre-service teacher arrangement that is free or low cost while you are studying. Visit the website of the teacher union in your state or territory for information.



Links: Teacher unions

**EXTRACT**

Link: The Conversation

Guided responses in eBook

**SIX WAYS AUSTRALIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM IS FAILING OUR KIDS**

Access the article 'Six ways Australia's education system is failing our kids' by Wilson, Dalton and Baumann (2015).

One of the six points the authors make is that 'International and migrant students are actually raising standards, not lowering them'. The UNICEF report, *An Unfair Start*, also discusses the achievements of immigrant children, pointing out the differences in Canada and Australia compared with other nations:

In 21 of the 25 countries with substantial levels of immigration, children who are first-generation immigrants tend to do less well at school at age 15 than non-migrant children. In 15 countries, second generation immigrant children also do less well than non-migrant children. However, in Australia and Canada, second-generation immigrant children do better than non-migrant children. These differences reflect varying patterns of migration to different countries. (UNICEF Office of Research, 2018, p. 4)

**QUESTIONS**

1. The high achievements of children of migrants may be contrary to some people's assumptions about this group of students. Read what the authors have to say about this point. Why do you think this might be the case? Write down a couple of points.
2. What research can you do to see if these assumptions are correct? Write down the first three places/reports/documents you would go to or access to find out more information.

**REVIEW QUESTIONS** ► ► ► ► ►

Guided responses in eBook

1. Select a union for the sector (government or independent) and the state/territory you are likely to teach in, access the website provided, and identify three key ways it provides support to teachers.
2. Reading the information on the selected website, note three reasons why you may need to call on the support of your union across your career.

**SCHOOLING (CURRICULUM) IN THE NATIONAL CONTEXT**

Arguably one of the most significant changes that has occurred for schooling at the national level was the introduction of the Australian Curriculum in 2011. It was initially piloted with the core subjects of English, Mathematics, Science and History, and other school subjects have been rolled out systematically for adoption by the states and territories. As school curriculum is the constitutional responsibility of states and territories, the Australian Curriculum is a guiding (although rather prescriptive) document for states and territories to use to shape their individual syllabus for each subject. The establishment of a national curriculum, for the first time in Australia's schooling history, can be seen in the context of the broader socio-politico education context. It could be argued that schooling in Australia has been dominated for at least the past decade by a conservative approach from governments. This is despite successive government claims to the contrary, in particular, the Rudd–Gillard–Rudd governments' (2007–13) claim of leading an educational 'revolution' (see Reid, 2009, for a critique of the so-called revolution). Successive federal governments (e.g. the Liberal/National Howard government; the Labor Rudd–Gillard–Rudd governments; and the Liberal/National Abbott–Turnbull–Morrison governments) have increased their policy interest in the way state-based education is organised and funded (see, for

example, Harris-Hart, 2010). Harris-Hart (2010, p. 295) critiques this as an example of 'coercive federalism' rather than being a cooperative approach to education policy development between states and the federal government. The conservative approaches adopted, which transcend traditional bipartisan boundaries, can be seen in the rise of external-based assessment (e.g. NAPLAN) and the significance placed on this as an indicator of student learning and quality of teaching (as seen, for example, on the My School website and subsequent media reporting of this data). It is also evident in other areas of schooling, such as the 'Values for Australian Schooling' poster produced in 2005 (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2005), direct funding to schools by the federal government, and the implementation and expansion of the My School website. The Australian Curriculum can be seen as the result of successive attempts to standardise education across the various Australian states and territories. While there had been previous attempts to instigate a national curriculum since Federation, in 2011 it was able to happen due to bipartisan political support (for an overview, see Seddon, 2001).

ACARA is responsible for administering the Australian Curriculum and describes its purpose as:

The rationale for the introduction of the Australian Curriculum centres on improving the quality, equity and transparency of Australia's education system.

- Quality – an Australian Curriculum will contribute to the provision of a world-class education in Australia by setting out the knowledge, understanding and skills needed for life and work in the 21st century and by setting high standards of achievement across the country.
- Equity – an Australian Curriculum will provide a clear, shared understanding of what young people should be taught and the quality of learning expected of them, regardless of their circumstances, the type of school that they attend or the location of their school.

The commitment to develop a national curriculum reflects a willingness to work together, across geographical and school-sector boundaries, to provide a world-class education for all young Australians. Working nationally makes it possible to harness collective expertise and effort in the pursuit of this common goal. It also offers the potential of economies of scale and a substantial reduction in the duplication of time, effort and resources. (ACARA, 2016, paras 3, 4)

### **Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration**

Another example of the increasing federalisation of the schooling system in Australia is the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Education Council, 2019a) and its previous iterations, the 2008 Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008), the 1999 Adelaide Declaration (MCEETYA, 1999) and the 1989 Hobart Declaration (MCEETYA, 1989), as discussed earlier in the chapter. All of these declarations aimed for an agreed statement that would bring together the education systems of the various states and territories in a way that would demonstrate consistency across the jurisdictions. The purpose of MCEETYA, the intergovernmental agency that created the Declarations, is, in part, to ensure that policy consistency and similarity can occur between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments when appropriate.

The *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* sits as an overarching document to guide education policy, rather than as a direct link to school action. In its Preamble, the Declaration sets out the context of and vision for schooling in Australia. It reads:

Our vision is for a world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face.

This begins with making sure that every young child has the opportunity to benefit from structured play-based learning before they start school, because this helps build the social, emotional and cognitive skills they need to succeed in the years to come.

To achieve excellence, and for our system to be equitable, every student must develop strong literacy and numeracy skills in their earliest years of schooling, and go on to develop broad and deep knowledge across a range of curriculum areas.

However, our education system must do more than this – it must also prepare young people to thrive in a time of rapid social and technological change, and complex environmental, social and economic challenges. Education plays a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion. They need to deal with information abundance, and navigate questions of trust and authenticity. They need flexibility, resilience, creativity, and the ability and drive to keep on learning throughout their lives. (Education Council, 2019a, p. 2)

*The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* has two goals that come out of its global statements on the purpose of education. These goals are: 'Goal 1: Australian schooling promotes excellence and equity. Goal 2: All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community' (Education Council, 2019a, p. 4). From these goals, a wide range of policies are being developed by the various levels of governments, by NGOs (non-governmental organisations) interested in education, other organisations or for-profit companies. There have been a number of criticisms levelled at the Declaration – for example, that it is caught up in the language of a market economy and not sufficiently focused on the needs of learners (see, for example, Carter, 2019).

## REVIEW QUESTIONS ► ► ► ►



Guided responses  
in eBook

1. What is the federal government's view on education in the twenty-first century and what impact will this view have on teachers' jobs? In considering this question, answer the following three sub-questions:
  - a. What are the main ideas in the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration*?
  - b. What do these ideas mean for learners in the twenty-first century?
  - c. What do these ideas mean for teachers in the twenty-first century?

## CONCLUSION

One of the perennial questions around education is: *What will it look like in the future?* Answers range from dystopian views of teachers being replaced by robots through to utopian views of students working collaboratively in creative and well-equipped spaces. Students often receive mixed messages about the purposes of schooling. On the one hand, young people are encouraged to be 'active and informed citizens' (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 8), yet when they seek to demonstrate their democratic rights and obligations, they can be criticised by those who see active citizenship as meaning understanding the democratic process of voting and not including activism. Negative reactions to recent strikes by high school students protesting against inaction on climate change demonstrate the narrow understanding some politicians and commentators have towards how they interpret what citizenship is about and who has the right to exercise it and when. These criticisms echo other times students have stood up for what they see as politically important topics that need addressing (for a counter perspective on students striking, see Bousfield and Tinkler, 2018). Many similar strikes took place during the twentieth century, some small in nature that addressed school-based issues, such as substandard facilities, but there were larger ones, too – for example, protests against conscription in the 1960s and against the Vietnam War more broadly in the 1970s; in the 1990s students went on strike against French Government nuclear testing on Mururoa atoll; and the 2000s saw students strike against the invasion of Iraq by Western powers. Politicians on all sides have generally been quick to condemn student action and cautious to support it. The most recent strikes drawing attention to government handling of climate change are examples of a long history of students protesting. As the world becomes even more interconnected through information technologies, school strikes are likely to continue and possibly increase.



Frequently, when the future of education is discussed, the topic of digital technologies is raised. From students bringing their own devices to schools, to collaborating with classmates and teachers through video conferencing, to replacing teachers with technology or robo-teachers, digital technologies are often seen as driving future educational change. While computers have been in classrooms for at least the past three decades, the continuing acceleration of technology in society through the use of smart devices and other portable devices that make accessing information relatively straightforward, along with online gaming, and technology innovations such as augmented and virtual reality, potentially make learning more interesting and enjoyable and will have a significant impact on classroom teaching and learning.

Other changes cited by those in the education system include teaching with a focus on skills, differentiating student work so that it is more individualised, and a focus on in-class collaboration. The types of ideas about the future knowledge society referred to in Chapter 1, drawing on the work of Hargreaves (2003) and Drucker (2011), are likely to impact on the education system, especially in relation to the changing nature of work.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

- This chapter has provided you with opportunities to learn about a number of issues related to the organisation of the education system.
- The purposes of professional development and how your Department of Education delivers this to meet the APST have been described.
- The various frameworks in place to support the Australian education system, such as the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration*, have been outlined.
- A variety of perspectives about, and completed activities to demonstrate your learning in, the areas of connecting your classroom, teaching with international contexts such as PISA assessment, and comparing schooling with other education jurisdictions nationally and internationally, have been presented.
- Through reading a variety of texts, including political cartoons, you have developed your understanding of how key stakeholders understand teachers and schooling.