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Productivity Inquiry
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

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Productivity Inquiry

The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Productivity Commission's Productivity Inquiry.

In this submission, AHISA focuses on national initiatives to support and accelerate the professional development of teachers and school leaders. We also respond to the Commission's expressed interest in promoting 'diffusion'.

The Commission's Interim Paper No 3 on Innovation notes: "The education system is almost all about diffusion — spreading contemporary knowledge among people and giving them the skills to learn new ones" (page 19). Accelerating the uptake of better, best or next practice in school education — that is, diffusion of knowledge among educators — is an issue AHISA has touched on in several submissions since 2015, including in its recent submission to the Productivity Commission's Review of the National School Reform Agreement. In this submission we outline how profession-led 'diffusion' supports the professional learning of educators. We also propose national mentoring schemes for both early career teachers and first-time principals to accelerate growth of their expertise, and an expansion of opportunities for teachers to undertake graduate certificate and diploma courses to strengthen the middle tiers of leadership in Australian schools.

Should you require further detail or clarification of material presented in this submission, please contact me at telephone (02) 6247 7300, or via email at ceo@ahisa.edu.au.

Yours faithfully,

(Ms) Beth Blackwood

AHISA Chief Executive Officer

About AHISA

AHISA Ltd is a national professional association for Heads of independent schools, with six state/territory Branches.

The primary object of AHISA is to optimise the opportunity for the education and welfare of Australia's young people through the maintenance of collegiality and high standards of professional practice and conduct amongst its members.

AHISA's 450 members lead schools that collectively account for over 450,000 students, representing 70 per cent of total independent sector enrolments and over 11 per cent of total Australian school enrolments. Some 20 per cent of Australia's Year 12 students attend AHISA members' schools.

AHISA's members lead a collective workforce of over 45,000 teaching staff and some 28,700 support staff.

The socio-economic profile of AHISA members' schools is diverse. Over 20 per cent of our members lead schools serving low- to very low-SES communities.

AHISA believes that a high-quality schooling system in Australia depends on:

- Parents having the freedom to exercise their rights and responsibilities in regard to the education of their children
- Students and their families having the freedom to choose among diverse schooling options
- Schools having the autonomy to exercise educational leadership as they respond to the emerging needs of their communities in a rapidly changing society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

Establish a national teacher-mentor training scheme to: support skills acquisition by pre-service teachers on practicum placements or training under internship arrangements; accelerate the acquisition and refinement of pedagogical and behaviour management expertise by early career teachers; and support the ongoing development of experienced teachers.

RECOMMENDATION 2

To provide support for early career principals, the Australian Government could task AISTL with developing a program to train current or former principals as mentors/advisers for early career principals and initiate a trial of a national principal mentoring/advisory program through principals' associations.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Australian Government should task AITSL to undertake a rapid literature review of effective professional learning for middle and upper school leaders and to scope current professional learning options.

RECOMMENDATION 4

To encourage the development of accredited post-graduate certificate and diploma courses for middle leadership roles – and to support the acquisition of graduate qualifications by school leaders at all levels – the Australian Government could increase the number of Commonwealth Assisted Places available for all graduate courses in education.

RECOMMENDATION 5

To support all school leaders to maintain their professional reading, the Australian Government could reactivate a Leadership Clearinghouse, under the auspices of AITSL, AERO or an Australian university, as a repository of research on school leadership.

1. Introduction: A system that is performing while transforming

AHISA has been concerned for some time by the narratives of Australian school education emerging from governments and their agencies, the business and industry sectors and policy-preneurs. Too often, these narratives reflect deficit-model thinking about schools, that is, that schools (and teachers and students) are ‘failing’ and are in urgent need of repair or radical reform. As a professional association of principals, we see instead a system where school leaders embrace continuous school improvement as they navigate what Anthony Salcito, Vice President of Microsoft Education Worldwide has called ‘the challenge of performing while transforming’.

While NAPLAN data show that many students fail to meet minimum national standards and that overall student achievement has apparently flatlined, the reasons for this are still a matter of conjecture. Lack of evidence as to the ‘why’ of students’ NAPLAN achievement and therefore the most appropriate ‘how’ to raise achievement has not proven a barrier to policy proposals or government interventions.

Typically, national attempts to get NAPLAN trajectories moving upward – along with Australia’s ranking in international tests results – have been heavily focused on improving initial teacher education (ITE) and eligibility for enrolment in ITE courses, partly because the federal government wields greater regulatory authority in the university sector. There is no shortage of other proposals to improve schooling outcomes, including the long-standing ideological argument to remove government funding from non-government schools and, most recently, to introduce greater specificity in the Australian Curriculum, supported by ready-made lesson plans.

Media headlines would have us believe that every aspect of Australian schooling is in need of an urgent overhaul and that stringent, top-down mandates on what is taught, how it is taught and when it is taught are the appropriate ‘fix’. The inference is that schools and those who work in them are neither interested in improvement nor capable of initiating it. Yet, countering this vision has been the performance of schools and teachers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools, their leaders and teachers demonstrated a remarkable capacity to adapt and innovate at high speed, with NAPLAN trend lines showing far less disruption to student achievement than feared. Similarly, the impact of globalisation and rapid social and technological change on schools over the last two decades has been profound, yet so smoothly accommodated by educators as to pass largely unremarked.

For some time AHISA has argued that, instead of defaulting to deficit-model thinking about schools, governments should adopt a strengths-based approach to reviewing Australia’s school education system. Coupled with a serious research effort to explore the ‘why’ of our school system’s failure to meet government targets, we believe a strengths-based approach will lead to the development of policies that better support the recalibration of Australia’s school education system as schools continue to transform, while also recognising the capacities of our educators.

This is not to suggest that Australia’s results in national or international testing regimes are not of concern or that Australia’s education system does not require improvement. As a professional association of principals, we are well aware that one of the most important tasks of a principal is to establish and lead his or her school in a continuous cycle of review and improvement so that all students are able to achieve the best possible outcomes. We would hope, however, that governments will begin with an evidence-based scoping of perceived problems before attempting policy development.

2. Strengthening the teaching profession through mentoring

RECOMMENDATION 1

Establish a national teacher-mentor training scheme to: support skills acquisition by pre-service teachers on practicum placements or training under internship arrangements; accelerate the acquisition and refinement of pedagogical and behaviour management expertise by early career teachers; and support the ongoing development of experienced teachers.

The Australian Government makes significant investment in Australian educators – through subsidising the cost of initial teacher education courses and through recurrent grants to state and territory governments and non-government schools which typically help defray the cost of teacher salaries, as well as through National Education Architecture organisations which all produce a range of teaching resources and professional development tools.

AHISA recommends that introduction of a national teacher-mentor scheme, although entailing additional expenditure, would enhance the return to the nation from existing federal investment.

As described in our submission to the Productivity Commission's National School Reform Agreement Review, AHISA has been advocating the value of a national teacher-mentor training scheme for several years, including preparing a paper on mentoring, one of several developed by national principals' associations and commissioned by AITSL as an outcome of a review conducted by the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG). Key points reiterated since 2015 include:

- In interviews conducted in preparation for the TEMAG project paper, AHISA members reported that mentoring and/or observation and feedback are considered successful models for professional development of teachers at all stages in their careers.
- Among AHISA's members' schools there is increasing adoption of peer-to-peer models of teacher professional learning such as learning circles, action research projects and peer observation models, including pedagogical rounds and learning walks. Peer-to-peer models promote collaborative professional learning, which can accelerate the adoption of and help embed new and/or improved practices far more readily than attendance at external professional development courses. Trained teacher-mentors are seen as enriching this process.
- A system of trained teacher-mentors in schools has the potential to support alternative pathways into teaching, for example for career-change professionals, including practitioners in the visual and performing arts or from VET-related industries, and for those in targeted areas of teacher shortage, including native speakers of languages other than English, or with a background in physics and chemistry or higher-level mathematics.
- The introduction of Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA) arrangements for ITE students suggests a further benefit of teacher-mentors: to assist ITE students on practicum placements develop and demonstrate the attributes and skills to be assessed.
- School-based mentors are the most appropriate model for maximising the effectiveness of school-based practical experience for a range of programs (such as clinical teacher education programs and internships) and for particular stages of ITE students' development, as well as to support the ongoing professional learning of graduates and experienced teachers.

A national approach to teacher-mentor training recognises that mentors need to be outstanding adult educators, not just outstanding child and adolescent educators, and that a formalised approach to the training and support of mentors is warranted:

- Given its role in the accreditation of ITE courses, the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) is well placed to develop a framework for teacher-mentor training and accreditation of courses. Accreditation of teacher-mentor training courses gives assurance to those undertaking the courses as well as their future mentees.
- Accreditation of courses and certification of teacher-mentors recognises the importance of the contribution of teacher-mentors to the profession.
- Course accreditation supports consistency in mentoring approaches, which then supports Teacher Performance Assessments. It also assists the recognition of teacher-mentor training courses as professional development counting toward teachers' re-registration requirements, a significant attraction for teachers.

Initial teacher-mentor training need not entail a major time impost on teachers. For example, the Victorian Department of Education and Training's Effective Mentoring Program encompasses a two-day mentoring course as well as online modules and is supported by a [Mentoring Capability Framework](#). Queensland University of Technology offers an online certificate course, [Mentoring Beginning Teachers](#), rated for 13 hours of certified professional development.

While there are existing models for the development of course frameworks for delivery and accreditation, AHISA recommends that a review of teacher-mentor training and certification already offered in Australia, and their supporting standards or frameworks and tools/resources, be undertaken as a first step toward a national scheme. A review of international teacher-mentor training and certification programs and/or related standards, tools or resources and any evidence of their impact is also warranted. (It is worth noting that the [Teacher Registration Board of South Australia](#) commissioned such a review in 2016-17.)

Further actions should include:

1. Development of draft standards for Australian teacher-mentors for consultation among ITE providers and the profession.
2. Identification of resources or tools for teacher-mentors that could be developed nationally and which, along with existing resources or tools (such as [AITSL's mentoring guide](#) and range of [tools and resources designed for use between peers and mentors](#) to improve teaching practice), could be linked via a dedicated page on AITSL's website.
3. To promote both 'diffusion' and development of teacher-mentor expertise, AITSL could also host an online professional support group for teacher-mentors.

A teacher-mentor scheme may be a first step for experienced teachers toward undertaking Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher (HALT) certification. Given the role HALTs are expected to play in developing their teaching colleagues, consideration could be given to making teacher-mentor certification a pre-requisite for HALT certification.

The cost of time release for teacher-mentors to work with pre-service and graduate teachers or more experienced teachers (for example through class observation) is a significant impost on schools. To initiate a national scheme with the breadth and depth to have immediate and long-term impact on retention of ITE students and graduates and their professional learning, the Australian Government might consider matching grant schemes:

- In a recent article canvassing [options to break the ongoing cycle of teacher shortages experienced in the United States](#), influential education academic Linda Darling-Hammond, President and CEO of the Learning Policy Institute and Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education Emeritus at Stanford University, proposes provision of high-quality mentoring for all beginning teachers to “sharply reduce attrition and increase competence”. According to Darling-Hammond, “A federal matching grant to states and districts that create high-quality mentoring and induction programs for beginning teachers – who most often teach in high-need schools – would reduce churn, heighten teaching quality, and heighten student achievement”. The Australian Government could make available to state and territory governments a grants pool to pay schools in all sectors which make application for a set amount to support time release of certified teacher-mentors. Such grants might be limited to mentoring of pre-service teachers, interns and ITE graduates in their first two years of teaching.
- Given that Australia is also experiencing a critical teacher shortage, with indicators of attrition from the profession by teachers at all stages in their career, Australian governments might consider a limited-life project to offer experienced teachers considering leaving the profession the opportunity to first train and then work as teacher-mentors on a time-limited contract. The project could be delivered by state and territory departments of education on a cost-share basis, with the teacher-mentor available to a group of schools in one area, across all sectors. As well as facilitating the sharing of expertise, such a project might also have the added benefit of persuading experienced teachers to remain within the profession at the end of their mentoring contract.

3. In time support for early career principals

RECOMMENDATION 2

To provide support for early career principals, the Australian Government could task AISTL with developing a program to train current or former principals as mentors/advisers for early career principals and initiate a trial of a national principal mentoring/advisory program through principals' associations.

Principal professional associations are a key channel for the identification and promotion of leadership and management skills required by principals, and primary agents to accelerate the adoption of these skills.

As a professional association, AHISA's primary role is to create the collegiality and programs that support peer exchange. We offer national seminars, webinars and conferences, as well as Branch-based networking, professional development and exchange. Our online network, HeadNet, offers members access to sharing of resources and in-time support on specific issues. As a contribution to the wider profession, we publish online and free-to-view our biannual journal, [*Independence*](#), which features articles by our members or their staff on leadership issues or showcasing new programs or research outcomes.

AHISA's annual New Members Conference has not only proven to be a highly successful venue for exchange between experienced and new principals but is a means of establishing professional friendships across jurisdictional boundaries, avoiding any potential confidentiality conflicts.

For first-time Heads, we also have an adviser program, in which recently retired and experienced Heads are available to companion Heads in the critical first years of principalship. While Heads of independent schools typically come into the principalship with long experience across a range of senior school leadership positions and with post-graduate qualifications in education – including educational leadership – the full force of the responsibilities and challenges of principalship is difficult to prepare for in advance. In-time support and coaching assists new principals to quickly establish confidence in and grow their leadership capacity and capabilities.

In his OECD commissioned paper, [*School leaders: Challenging roles and impact on teacher and school effectiveness*](#), University of Tasmania Professor Emeritus Bill Mulford describes the benefits of mentoring of principals as including:

- Exposure to new ideas and creativity
- Protection from damaging situations
- Opportunities for challenging and risk-taking activities
- Increased confidence and competence
- Improved reflection.

Given the existing interest and effort of principals' professional associations in mentorship, and their access to recently retired and experienced members, the Australian Government could trial a national mentoring program for first-time principals through principals' associations, under the auspices of AITSL. AITSL could be tasked with developing a mentor-training program and also with defining those elements of a mentoring program that participating associations would be required to meet. The involvement of principals' associations would ensure variance in leadership contexts are adequately addressed.

4. Strengthening middle leadership in schools

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Australian Government should task AITSL to undertake a rapid literature review of effective professional learning for middle and upper school leaders and to scope current professional learning options.

RECOMMENDATION 4

To encourage the development of accredited post-graduate certificate and diploma courses for middle leadership roles – and to support the acquisition of graduate qualifications by school leaders at all levels – the Australian Government could expand the number of Commonwealth Assisted Places available for all graduate courses in education.

RECOMMENDATION 5

To support all school leaders to maintain their professional reading, the Australian Government could reactivate a Leadership Clearinghouse, under the auspices of AITSL, AERO or an Australian university, as a repository of research on school leadership.

The disruption of schooling in 2020 and 2021 revealed the importance of school leadership structures in facilitating the fast ‘pivots’ to online delivery and in ensuring the ongoing health and wellbeing of both staff and students. In particular, the role of the middle management tier of school leadership in implementing and embedding change came into sharp focus. Cultural change within schools is also more difficult and can become a lengthy process unless there is alignment of middle management with the goals of senior leaders.

In the independent sector, senior leadership roles have also undergone significant change as schooling has transformed. Over the last decade it has become increasingly common to see roles such as Director of Teaching and Learning, Director of Learning Analytics and Director of Wellbeing, or variants on these titles, appearing on the delegate list for our Leading, Learning & Caring conference (which serves Heads and their senior staff) and in the biographies of contributors to AHISA’s journal, *Independence*.

We propose that, appropriately conceived and implemented, a national policy focus on what is generally referred to as ‘middle leadership’ in schools could have a tangible and progressive impact on the quality of leadership in Australian schools. Such a focus would inevitably strengthen the leadership pipeline and offers a means for governments to have a substantive impact on school leadership with immediate and long-term benefits.

As middle leadership roles typically reflect the size of schools and their priorities in meeting the educational priorities of their communities, it is important that any government support does not undermine the autonomy of schools in their staffing arrangements. As first steps, AHISA recommends:

- The Australian Government should task AITSL to undertake a rapid literature review of effective professional learning for middle and upper school leaders and to scope current professional learning options.
- These projects could support extension of the Australian Professional Teaching Standards and Australian Professional Standard for Principals to create a map of excellence in school

leadership to support leadership progression, and would also inform the creation of resources, short courses and post-graduate qualifications to support that progression.

The development of post-graduate certificates and diplomas for beginning stages of leadership and for middle leaders could support teachers' confidence in taking on year-level coordinator roles, for example, and progressively broader roles such as subject coordinator or department or faculty leadership roles as well as roles in emerging areas of school leadership.

Currently, the number of Commonwealth Assisted Places (CAPs) for a Graduate Certificate in Educational Leadership, for example, is limited. To encourage the development and uptake of accredited post-graduate certificate and diploma courses for middle leadership roles – and to support the acquisition of graduate qualifications by school leaders at all levels – the Australian Government could expand the number of CAPs available for graduate courses in education.

AHISA acknowledges the Australian Government's existing support for teachers and school leaders through funding of AITSL. AITSL's work and resources are highly regarded by the profession and the organisation has succeeded in establishing the reputation and networks to ensure the widest possible 'diffusion' of knowledge throughout the profession.

To further support all school leaders, we suggest AISTL, AERO or a university could be tasked with reactivating the Leadership Clearinghouse to support time-poor school leaders to keep up with their professional reading. At a time of educational transformation, such an initiative could be a source of information on changing leadership demands as well as tools for personal professional reflection. Its value could be amplified with the option for users to register for weekly or fortnightly email alerts on new additions to the Clearinghouse. The Clearinghouse could also be promoted by principals' associations to accelerate adoption and use. ■