EDUCATION POLICY OUTLOOK IN
AUSTRALIA

OECD
BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES
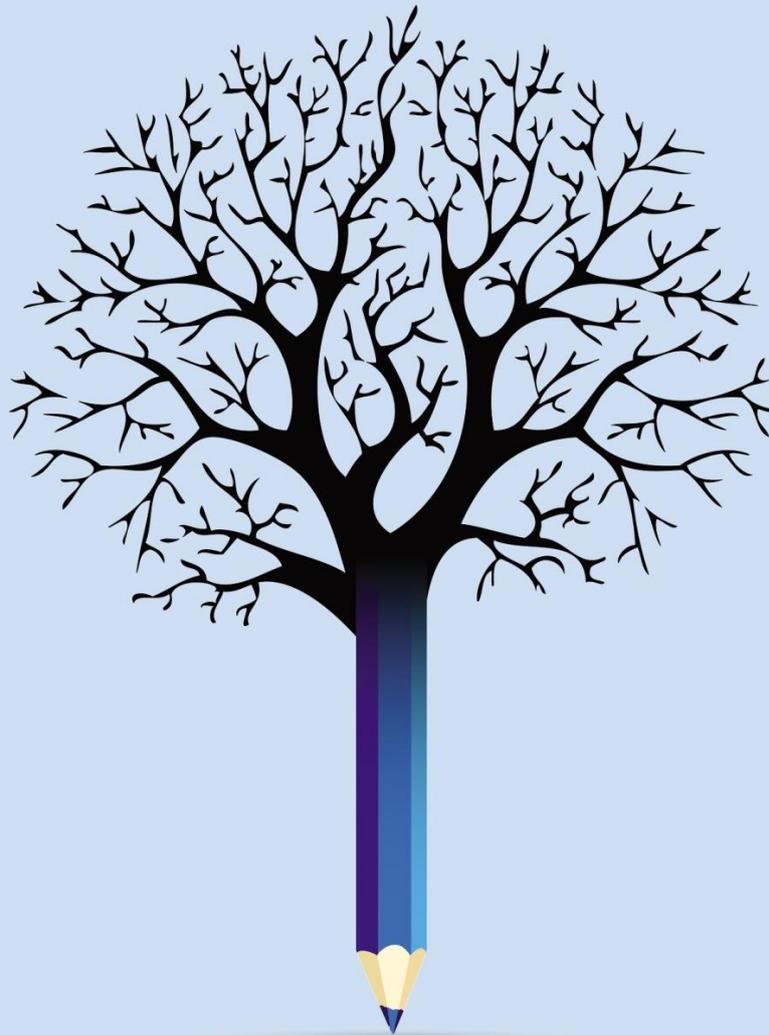
Education Policy Outlook

This policy profile on education in Australia is part of the Education Policy Outlook series, which presents comparative analysis of education policies and reforms across OECD countries. Building on the OECD's substantial comparative and sectoral policy knowledge base, the series offers a comparative outlook on education policy. This country policy profile is an update of the first policy profile of Australia and provides: analysis of the educational context, strengths, challenges and policies; analysis of international trends; insight into policies and reforms on selected topics in Australia and other education systems; and policy pointers to inform possible future action. It is an opportunity to consider developments in the education system, including areas of progress and areas for ongoing attention, viewed from the perspective of the OECD through synthetic, evidence-based and comparable analysis.

This country policy profile considers both country-level and international policies, offering analysis of current strengths, challenges and policy priorities for Australia at each level:

- **national and sub-national policies**, to analyse the evolution of ongoing and emerging related policy efforts in Australia, including education responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **international policies** that may serve as possible inspiration to national and sub-national policy makers working to build on relevant recent developments in the Australian education system.

Drawing on desk-based research of national and international evidence, as well as exploratory interviews with education policy stakeholders from across the system, this report speaks directly to Australian policy makers and implementation actors. As the analysis focuses primarily on strengths, challenges and policy initiatives at Commonwealth level, the policy pointers relate principally to the national education agenda. However, some pointers may also be relevant in informing future directions for policy efforts at the level of States and territories.

Designed for policy makers, analysts and practitioners who seek information and analysis of education policy that takes into account the importance of national context, the country policy profiles offer constructive analysis of education policy in a comparative format. Each profile reviews the current context and situation of a country's education system and examines its challenges and policy responses, according to six policy levers that support improvement:

- Students: How to raise outcomes for all in terms of 1) equity and quality and 2) preparing students for the future;
- Institutions: How to raise quality through 3) school improvement and 4) evaluation and assessment; and
- System: How the system is organised to deliver education policy in terms of 5) governance and 6) funding.

Country policy profiles also contain spotlight boxes on selected policy issues relating to the Education Policy Outlook's work on resilience and responsiveness, and which have particular relevance in the context of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. These aim to draw attention to specific policies that are promising or showing positive results, and that may be relevant for other countries.

In addition to the country-specific profiles, the Education Policy Outlook series includes a recurring publication offering comparative analysis of policy priorities, trends and evidence of progress or impact in collaboration with over 40 education systems.

Special thanks to the Commonwealth Government of Australia, in particular the Department of Education, for its active input during consultations and constructive feedback on this report, as well as other relevant actors from the Australian education system with whom the OECD Secretariat met as part of the preparation activities for this document. These meetings included representatives of education and skills departments from the governments of the Commonwealth and each of the States and territories, as well as representatives from the key national agencies and representative bodies for different stakeholder groups across education levels and sectors.

Authors: This country policy profile was prepared by Christopher Olivares, Diana Toledo Figueroa, Christa Rawkins, Jonathan James and Mustafa Saygin, as part of the work of the Policy Advice and Implementation Division, led by Paulo Santiago. Editorial support was provided by Ameline Besin, Stephen Flynn and Rachel Linden. This profile builds on the knowledge and expertise of many project teams across the OECD's Directorate for Education and Skills, to whom we are grateful.

Sources: Subject to country participation, this country policy profile draws on OECD indicators from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) and Education at a Glance, and refers to country and thematic studies. This profile also draws on information provided by Australia as part of the Education Policy Outlook's activities with countries, including during a visit from the OECD Secretariat to Australia to conduct meetings with a selection of education stakeholders.

Annex B summarises key figures quoted in the different sections of this document.

More information is available from the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills (www.oecd.org/education/) and its webpages on the Education Policy Outlook (www.oecd.org/education/policy-outlook/).

Table of contents

Figures

Spotlights

In Brief

Figure 1. Trends in key educational outcomes

Reading performance (PISA 2009-18)

Legend: ◆ OECD average ┬ Min ▲ Max ■ Australia

Y-axis: 375, 400, 425, 450, 475, 500, 525, 550
X-axis: 2009, 2012, 2015, 2018

Educational attainment among 25-34 year-olds (2005-21)

Y-axis (%): 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100
X-axis: 2005, 2010, 2015, 2021

Upper secondary

Tertiary

Australia remains a high performer in PISA, although with a trend of a gradual decline in PISA scores since its first participation in 2000. In 2019, 90.5% of 25-34 year-olds in Australia had at least upper secondary education, and 52% had a tertiary qualification, compared to OECD averages of 85% and 45%. Growth in upper secondary attainment between 2009 and 2021 exceeded OECD average growth, while growth in tertiary attainment equaled OECD average growth.

Note: "Min"/"Max" refer to OECD countries with the lowest/highest values.
Sources: OECD (2019[1]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en; OECD (2022[2]), *Education at a Glance 2022: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris https://doi.org/10.1787/3197152b-en.

Students

- Australia continues to perform at or above OECD average in PISA, although performance has been in steady decline across reading, mathematics and science since first participation in 2000. While other national and international assessments show improvements for younger students, performance of older students is more mixed. As among 15-year-olds in PISA 2018, Australia showed relatively large gaps between the most and least proficient adults in literacy and numeracy in the Survey of Adult Skills (2012).

- Participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC), particularly pre-primary, has risen considerably; participation is also high in upper secondary and tertiary. Australia has high education attainment, with 91% of 25-34 year-olds holding an upper secondary qualification in 2021 (OECD average: 86%). The share of young adults aged 18-24 years old who are not employed, or in education or training (NEETs) increased during the pandemic, from 11% in 2019 to 16% in 2020, but returned to its pre-pandemic level in 2021.

- According to PISA 2018, Australia has comparatively high levels of academic inclusiveness in schools, with socio-economic status having a less profound influence on reading performance than on average across the OECD. Nevertheless, social inclusiveness within schools is less favourable, and national evidence points to equity concerns in ECEC participation, literacy and numeracy outcomes across schooling and upper secondary completion for certain population groups and in certain geographic locations.

Institutions

- Students in Australia view their teachers positively and teachers themselves have comparatively high levels of job satisfaction. Nevertheless, learning environments are comparatively less favourable in terms of disciplinary climate, intimidation or bullying, and student truancy. National professional standards guide sub-national policy efforts to develop and support school leaders and teachers; however, approaches to and requirements for preparatory and in-service training vary across States and territories.

- Australia has a robust evaluation culture across all education levels, and the Commonwealth Government and States and territories work together to implement a national evaluation and assessment framework. In ECEC, a nationally consistent approach to quality and development evaluations has been established. Responsibility for school evaluation and teacher appraisal lies within the States and territories, although the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and participation in international assessments provide quality information on system-level performance in key skill areas at regular intervals.
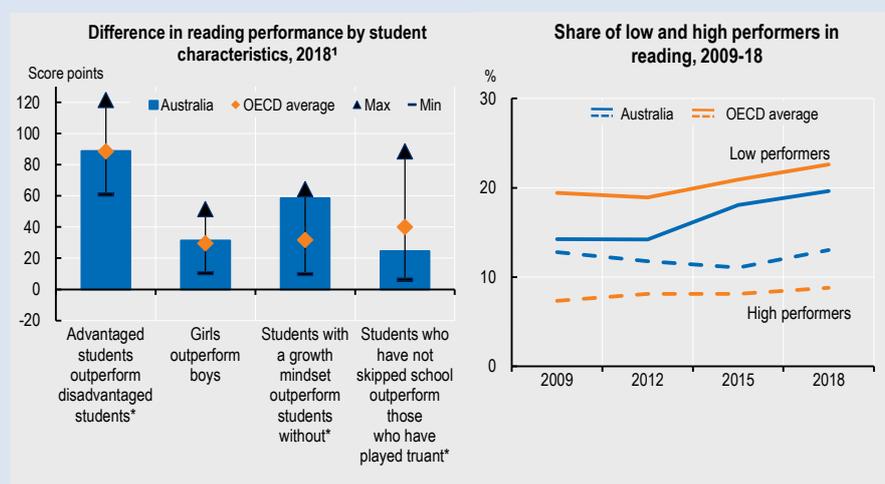
System

- In Australia, education governance is complex and varies by sector and level. States and territories have predominant responsibility for managing pre-school, schooling and vocational education; the Commonwealth Government takes a more leading role in childcare and higher education governance. Across the system, broad vision setting and the development of quality and professional standards and frameworks take place nationally through inter-governmental co-ordination. In recent years, Australia has strengthened the structures through which national and sub-national system actors collaborate. Nevertheless, given the distance between national education policy makers and local schools, ensuring that policies and knowledge impact classroom practices as intended is key.

- Australia dedicates a large share of national wealth to education and makes considerable effort, particularly in school funding, to direct funds to where they are most needed. Since 2013, Australia has been transitioning to a needs-based school funding model, which includes a basic financial contribution for each student, and six needs-based loadings.

Selected indicators and key policy issues

Key policy issues

Figure 2. Equity and quality

Difference in reading performance by student characteristics, 2018[1]

Share of low and high performers in reading, 2009-18

Arresting and reversing trends of stagnant or declining outcomes for older students while ensuring efforts to address inequities that start early and to respond to the complexity of needs. Inequities persist for those in remote learning contexts and Indigenous students, in particular. Australia must simultaneously build on improved performance for younger students and arrest declining performance for older students while ensuring that such efforts are learner-centred so as to reach all students, including those with diverse backgrounds.

Figure 3. Preparing students for the future

Transitions from education to work among 18-24-year-olds, 2019
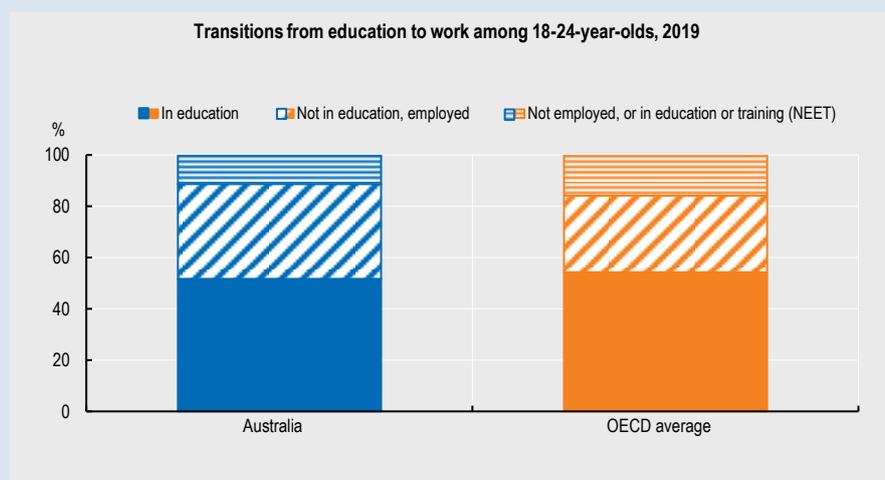
Bridging skills gaps across the population, preventing students' disengagement from education as they age, and strengthening the attractiveness, relevance and returns of educational pathways for all students. Australia has a high level of skills on average according to international assessments, yet wide gaps prevail among the population. Australia needs to make VET more attractive and relevant for all students, as well as sustaining incentives for participating in tertiary education.

Figure 4. School improvement

Students' perceptions of their learning environment, 2018 (PISA)

Share of principals reporting supports for teachers to embed ICT, 2018 (TALIS)
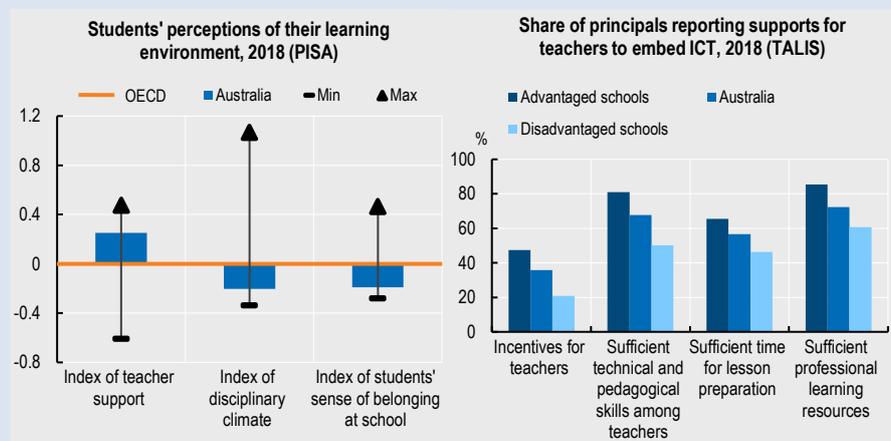
Nurturing a trusted and empowered teaching profession, while improving the learning environment for students in schools. In a context of high teacher shortage, Australia must work with the profession to better understand professional needs. Educators also need stronger support to ensure that classroom- and school-level environmental factors are conducive to student learning in all schools. Seeking more nationally consistent approaches to school leader development could support this.

Figure 5. Evaluation and assessment

Share of students whose principals reported the following uses of student assessments, 2015 (PISA)

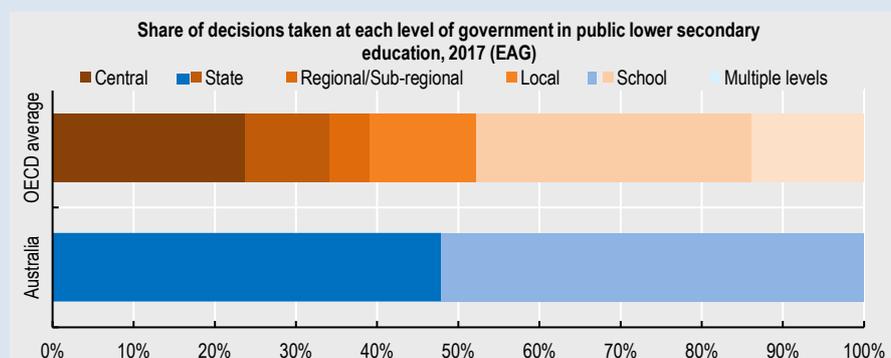Share of teachers whose principals reported the following occurs after formal appraisal, 2018 (TALIS)[2]
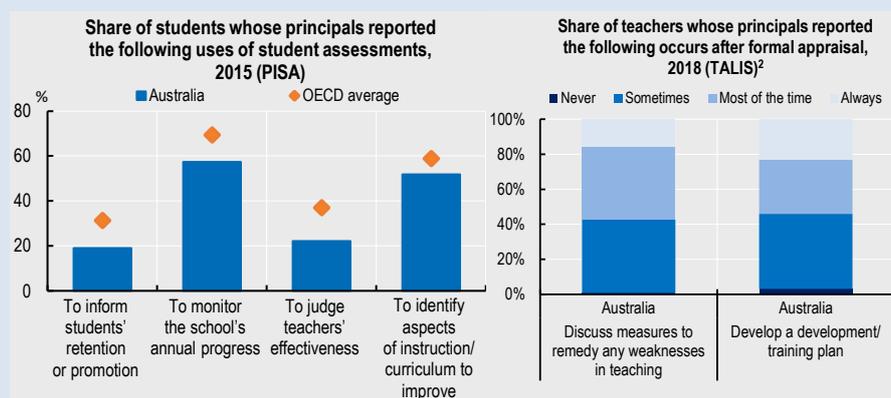
Making the most of feedback and improvement opportunities to reduce gaps. While school and teacher evaluation practices are commonly in place, diverse approaches mean processes do not consistently foster improvement as desired. At the same time, teachers' crucial role in driving student learning and closing performance gaps through classroom assessment could be better recognised and supported. Efforts to strengthen NAPLAN are important, but should remain faithful to the original aims of the assessment.

Figure 6. Governance

Share of decisions taken at each level of government in public lower secondary education, 2017 (EAG)

Working together with co-ordination and flexibility to deliver on shared goals. Although nationally agreed visions and goals exist across education levels and sectors, these do not consistently translate into policy impact at national or sub-national level. At the same time, while structures exist to facilitate inter-governmental co-ordination, more could be done to ensure that stakeholders across the system are systematically and meaningfully involved.

Figure 7. Funding

Total expenditure on educational institutions per full-time equivalent student (2019)

Expenditure in USD

■ Australia   ■ OECD average
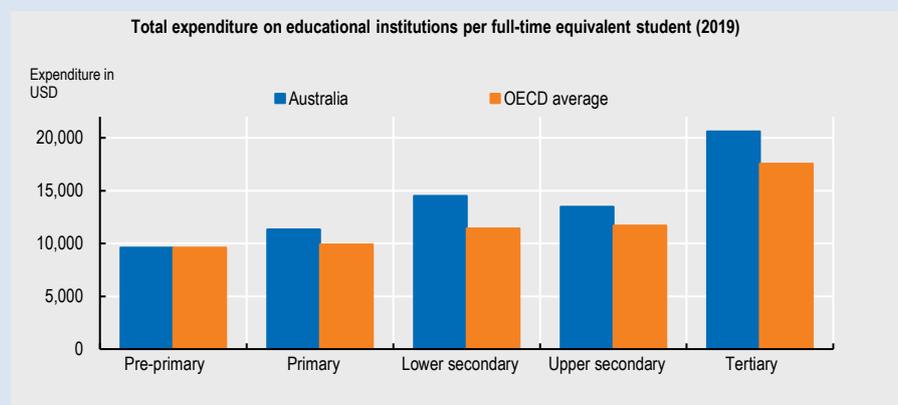
Improving funding efficiency and equity. Although Australia has significantly higher spending than the OECD average at most levels of education, ECEC and VET programmes are less well-funded than other education levels, despite being national priority areas and where returns on investment may be highest. At the same time, Australia has made considerable efforts to target equity funding according to need, but with limited impact as yet on outcomes for vulnerable students, or those in particularly challenging contexts.

Notes*:* "Min"/"Max" refer to OECD countries with the lowest/highest values. 1: Statistically significant values are shown in darker tones; 2: To be noted that the participation rate of Australia in this question of TALIS 2018 was too low to ensure comparability; [*] Score point difference after accounting for students' socio-economic status and language spoken at home.

Sources: OECD (2019[1]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en; OECD (2019[3]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume II): Where All Students Can Succeed*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/b5fd1b8f-en; OECD (2019[4]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/acd78851-en; OECD (2020[5]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume V): Effective Policies, Successful Schools*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/ca768d40-en; OECD (2022[2]), *Education at a Glance 2022: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/3197152b-en; OECD (2018[6]), *Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2018-en; OECD (2020[7]), *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume II): Teachers and School Leaders as Valued Professionals*, TALIS, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/19cf08df-en.

How the Australian education system responds to shock and disruption

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation declared the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a global pandemic. Education systems across the world felt the force of the crisis as confinement measures triggered widespread closures of education institutions. In Australia, although responses have varied according to state or municipality, schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) generally closed from March 2020. As of April 2021, some were gradually reopening; however, the nature and duration of lockdowns, as well as the measures taken by State and territory governments to address the challenges created by their unique health situation, varied greatly. In light of the work of the Education Policy Outlook in 2020 and 2021 in the context of this pandemic, below are some responses from Australia across six key areas:

Empowering learners to confidently navigate their worlds

- During the pandemic, despite the challenging context, Australia noted that remote learning also proved beneficial to some students, including those who had previously faced difficulty engaging in the classroom. In **Victoria**, an initial analysis noted that the experience of remote education gave parents previously untapped insight into current education practices, and that students and teachers had the opportunity to develop new skills and explore new classroom and teaching pedagogies. It also noted that students who face challenges in the usual school environment or routine—those who, for example, experience bullying due to learning disabilities, are easily distracted by external stimuli, or who struggle to focus earlier in the day—were well-suited to the flexibility and distance from common, school-based distractions to learning. It highlighted the need to balance potential for gains in student agency during the remote learning experience against the risk that greater personalisation and flexibility in learning could undermine equity (Learning First, 2020[8]).

Combining adaptive pedagogies for all with sustained supports for the most vulnerable

- **New South Wales** developed **Check-in Assessments** (2020) to help identify learning loss at individual and system level and inform targeted intervention responses. The assessments also helped identify students to participate in the **COVID Intensive Learning Support Program** (ILSP, 2021) which aimed to address learning loss through small group tutoring as schools re-opened in 2021, throughout 2022 and into 2023. An online delivery option enabled more schools and students to access the programme, particularly rural and remote schools and in the context of recruitment challenges. Ongoing evaluation of the ILSP indicates the programme has been well-received by schools and is seen to be having a positive impact on students' learning (NSW Department of Education, 2022[9]). NSW is considering ways in which identified lessons can inform future system-level efforts to embed small group tuition in schools.

- The **Australian Student Wellbeing Hub** (see 'School Improvement') provided a range of resources for students of all ages to aid the return to school following COVID-19 lockdown measures. This included a **Return to School for Students with Disability COVID-19 Risk Management plan** (2020), published by the Commonwealth Government, to help education staff identify and mitigate COVID-19 risks affecting students with disability, establish key staff members responsible for the well-being of the student, and assign roles to staff members for mitigating risk and taking action in the event of possible COVID-19 exposure. The Hub also provides easy access to information on addressing COVID-19 for students in vulnerable situations and their educators from relevant independent organisations (OECD, 2021[10]). The Commonwealth Government is leading a review to explore the educational experiences of students with disability during the pandemic and advise on national collaborative actions to strengthen schools' capacity to support students with disability in future emergency events, as well as their recovery from the impacts of the pandemic.

Positioning the education institution at the heart of a strategic network of actors and service

- In January 2022, the National Cabinet agreed **The National Framework for Managing COVID-19 in School and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)** to promote consistency in the policy responses of sub-national actors to the COVID-19 pandemic. The framework guides state and territory policy makers toward holistically addressing learners' needs—including social and emotional development, well-being and physical and mental health—by establishing the principle that no vulnerable children or young people should be turned away from school or ECEC. In **Victoria**, AUD 28.5 million was allocated over 2020/21 and 2021/22 to expand existing supports for the well-being and mental health of students, including the delivery of mental health training to 1 500 school staff via an online company providing mindfulness resources (Victoria State Government, 2020[11]; Victoria State Government, 2020[12]).

Empowering teachers and other education staff to lead richer learning processes across environments

- In April 2020, the Australian Health and Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) issued **advice directed at school leaders** on reducing the risk of COVID-19 transmission in schools. The publicly available advice document established principles around stopping the spread of the disease and remaining informed and supported. Released in the early days of the pandemic, it noted the need to adapt the guidance to the local context and evolution of the disease (Department of Health and Aged Care, 2020[13]).

- In addition, the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) launched the **Australian Teacher Response campaign**, **Teacher Resource Hub** and a **Facebook group** through which teachers could connect to and support one another and share best practices. The Teacher Resource Hub provides online resources with evidence from experts on teaching in different learning environments during and after COVID-19 lockdowns (AITSL, n.d.[14]).

- In **Queensland**, the government responded to a need for digital resources during remote learning by providing for 5 000 laptops and other tech necessary to study online. In **Victoria**, the Government initially loaned devices and internet dongles to government school students who faced challenges connecting during remote learning; this included 62 000 computers and 23 000 internet access devices in Term 2, along with a further 9 401 computers and 4 821 internet access devices in Term 3 (Victoria State Government, n.d.[15]). In the 2020-21 school year, the **Bridging the Digital Divide** initiative sought to protect against educational disadvantage by allowing students to retain over 57 000 devices (Parliament of Victoria, 2021[16]). The transition to online learning in the **Australian Capital Territory** (ACT) was facilitated by previous efforts since 2019 to equip every student in public secondary schools with a government-issued laptop (Australian Capital Territory Government, n.d.[17]). This initiative was expanded to Year 4, 5 and 6 students from March 2020, with provisions made for home internet based on need.

Collecting, disseminating and improving the use of information about students

- In **Victoria**, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority extended the **Consideration of Educational Disadvantage** process, by which exit-level student assessments are re-evaluated on a case-by-case basis, to all students completing examinations as part of the Victorian Certificate of Education. In this way, students' results aimed to reflect the impact of school closures, or pressures on mental and physical health experienced during the pandemic.

Fostering dynamic pathways that evolve with the learner and the times

- Through the **JobTrainer package**, the Commonwealth Government made AUD 1.5 billion available to extend a wage subsidy scheme enabling ongoing and new apprenticeships to go forward. This financial support allowed employers to continue providing work-based learning opportunities for vocational education and training (VET) apprentices and trainees during the pandemic, and helped to align the needs of employers, VET students, and local economies. Under the package, the Commonwealth Government, States and territories also provided an initial AUD 1 billion for the **JobTrainer fund**, which opened over 300 000 training places to school leavers and job seekers to pursue training in areas of greatest labour need according to State and territory context (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, n.d.[18]). For example, in the **Northern Territory**, training is available in areas such as building and construction, community services, and health and education; in the **Australian Capital Territory,** training areas include renewable energy and sustainability, digital and cyber security (White and Rittie, 2022[19]). Subsequent funding has more than doubled the initial contribution by Governments and allows Australians to pursue a qualification in shortage areas including aged care, digital skills, disability care, or childcare (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, n.d.[18]).

- The **Higher Education Relief Package** provided over AUD 4 million for the development of MicroCred Seeker (Microcredentials Marketplace) (2022), a nationally consistent online information portal that allows learners to compare available courses, credit point value, and price. The portal also provides information on the stackability of micro-credentials courses for those intending to pursue a larger qualification or skillset (Australian Department of Education, 2022[20]; OECD, 2022[21]).

Spotlight 1. Highlights of previous OECD reviews and recommendations for Australia

Main national policies and practices included in this country policy profile	**Key challenges identified and recommendations previously provided by the OECD**	**International policies of potential interest included in this country policy profile**

STUDENTS

- Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA, 2010)
- Belonging, Being & Becoming (2009)
- My Time, Our Place (2011)
- Approved Learning Frameworks Update (2021)
- Preschool Reform Funding Agreement (2021)
- The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (2019)
- The Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians (2008)
- National School Reform Agreement (NSRA, 2019)
- Education Ministers Meeting (2020)
- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA, 2011)
- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act (2011)
- Higher Education Standards Framework (2021)
- Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA, 2011)
- National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act (2011)
- National Agreement for Skills Workforce Development (NASWD, 2009)
- Try, Test and Learn (TTL) Fund (2016)
- Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP, 2010)
- Higher Education Disability Support Program (DSP, 2004)
- Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (2018)

Key challenges identified: The OECD has previously identified disparities in tertiary education access and outcomes stemming from socio-economic status or geographic location. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students also faced unique barriers to accessing higher education, in spite of policies aimed at supporting them with the costs of tertiary education. In connection, the Commonwealth Government had undertaken large-scale reform to its school education system funding model to help meet the needs of all students—including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disability, students at a socio-educational disadvantage, among others. In practice, however, the impact of the revised funding model on student outcomes has been mixed. The OECD has also noted challenges related to student well-being in the Australian lower and upper secondary classroom, with rates of bullying reported by principals three times higher than the OECD average. Finally, OECD reporting has highlighted the issue of young NEET adults, many of whom are low-skilled.

Summary of previous OECD recommendations: For ECEC, the OECD previously recommended that Australia seek to improve access in order to facilitate the work and family life balance of Australian households. In addition, the OECD underscored a need to improve the efficiency and quality of ECEC services, namely by bridging the split for pre-school teachers and staff for childcare, as well as by streamlining the ECEC staff accreditation system. At the level of higher education, the OECD recommended that the liberalisation of tuition fees be carefully monitored to ensure that choice and quality were enhanced and that access was not compromised. Finally, with regards to vocational education and training, past OECD recommendations have focused on the need to identify and provide targeted initiatives in support of post-secondary VET students at risk of low basic skills. These recommendations highlighted poor performance in basic skills among post-secondary VET students without upper secondary qualifications compared to peers with higher levels of education, as well as the over-representation of

- **Ireland:** Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS, 2017)
- **Canada:** The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework (2018)
- **Denmark:** Measurement and Improvement of Students' Well-being Initiative (*Udvikling af trivselsværktøj og -målinger*, 2014)
- **New Zealand:** Education Work Programme (2018)
- **New Zealand:** Education Work Programme (2021)
- **Germany:** National Skills Strategy (*Nationale Weiterbildungs strategie*, 2019)

• Disability Standards for Education (2005) • National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (2015) • Australia's Disability Strategy (2021) • Autism Hub • National Centre Against Bullying (2002) • National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (UANP) (2018-21) **COVID-19 responses:** • Return to School for Students with Disability COVID-19 Risk Management Plan (2020) • The National Framework for Managing COVID-19 in School and Early Childhood Education and Care (2022)	women among students with low basic numeracy and literary skills.	

INSTITUTIONS

• Australian Professional Standard for Principals (2011) • Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (2013) • Leading for Impact: Australian guidelines for School Leadership and Development (2018) • Centres for Excellence (C4E) • Respect Matters (2021) • National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2010-2022) • Consent and Respectful Relationships Education (2022) • National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children (2022-2032) • Student Wellbeing Hub (2018) • Australian Student Well-being Framework (2018) • National Quality Framework (NQF, 2012) • National Quality Standard (2012) • Shaping Our Future: A ten-year strategy to ensure a sustainable, high-quality children's education	**Key challenges identified:** Despite initiatives to improve the professionalisation of the teaching profession, there remained room to develop the pre-service training, preparation, and retention of Australian teachers. Of particular concern was the high level of teacher attrition. The OECD identified that although progress had been made in professionalising and structuring the teacher career pathways, the extent to which the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers was used as a guide in teacher formation or applied in evaluation remained uneven. Keeping quality teachers in classrooms longer would allow the Australian education system to consolidate gains from having more experienced teachers on average. Finally, as identified, layers of evaluation actors and the overlap of criteria may complicate understanding of which entity bears responsibility for what evaluation and what their standing is. At the classroom level, Australia faced challenges regarding student absenteeism and bullying. Previous OECD reporting had linked school and classroom environments with a high prevalence of bullying with lower academic performance. Developing more robust and granular data about Australian teachers was an ongoing reform initiative, although the decentralised governance of education in Australia at school age added complexity to this effort. The	• **Ireland:** Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS, 2017) • **United States of America:** The Teacher Transfer Initiative • **New Zealand:** Position Paper on Assessment (2011) • **Norway:** Assessment for Learning Programme (*Vurdering for læring*, 2010-18) • **Portugal:** The Third Education Territories of Priority Intervention Programme (*Programa Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária*, 2012) • **Portugal:** The National Programme to Promote Educational Success (*Programa Nacional de Promoção do Sucesso Escolar*, 2016) • **Portugal:** The Law of Inclusive Education (2018)

- and care workforce (2021)
- National School Reform Agreement (NSRA, 2019)
- Australian Education Research Organization (2021)
- National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN, 2008)
- Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA, 2008)
- My School (2010)
- VET Data Streamlining Program (2020)
- Australia's Disability Strategy (2021-31)
- Teacher Supply Strategy (2021-2031)
- Mathematics Strategy (2025)
- Consideration of Educational Disadvantage extension
- Turn to Teaching (TTT)
- The Teacher Resource Hub
- Rural Teacher Incentive

establishment of the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) (2020) was one important step identified towards establishing an evidence base that supports improvement in teacher practice, contributes to system improvement, and guides policy development.

Summary of previous OECD recommendations: Previous OECD reporting has highlighted the ageing labour force of Australian vocational education and training (VET) teachers. It also noted the inefficient development and implementation of training programmes. In terms of staffing at school level, the OECD had previously recommended better alignment of the Teach for Australia Programme with the government's objectives. Other recommendations had highlighted the need to align systems of data collection to allow for comparability across States and territories and guide education policy making and practice in Australian education with relevant data. Furthermore, the OECD identified the need to better employ the data and information that are available in improvement efforts and in making sure that actors at school level have the resources and training necessary to make use of the data and put observations into practice. OECD reporting on the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) highlighted the importance of linking assessment with classroom practice. Australia had made progress on this front, not only by changing the time frame for administering the assessment, but also by bringing the test online.

SYSTEM

- The Australian Curriculum (2010)
- The Shape of the Australian Curriculum (2020)
- Quality Schools Package (2017)
- Australian Education Act 2013
- National Quality Framework (NQF, 2012)
- Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA, 2010)
- National Quality Framework for ECEC (2009)
- Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA, 2011)
- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA, 2011)
- Child Care Subsidy and Child Care Safety Net (2018)
- Youth Allowance (1998)
- Austudy
- Rent Assistance

Key challenges identified: At all levels of the Australian education system, the important option of privately funded education was identified by the OECD as having an effect on the distribution of resources and delivery of service in the education system. Previous OECD reporting has focused on addressing the risks to student participation in education among low socio-economic status students at levels of education that rely significantly on private expenditure. Pressure points included pre-primary education funding, for which private sources account for almost double the OECD average proportion of private expenditure. Although most families are eligible for subsidies that offset some early childhood education development and pre-primary instruction, the OECD identified that rising prices create barriers to equitable access of quality ECEC and pre-primary education. Progress had been made in the area of funding for school-age education, with reforms in 2017 to the Australian Education Act 2013 which introduced the Schooling Resource Standard (2013), a needs-based,

- **Ireland:** First 5 (2018)
- **Korea:** Nuri Curriculum (2012)
- **Norway:** The Kindergarten Act (*Lov om barnehager*, 2006)
- **Norway:** Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017)
- **Canada:** Nunavut Northern Allowance
- **Germany:** The Good Daycare Facilities Act (*Gute-KiTa-Gesetz*, 2019)
- **England:** Pupil Premium programme (2011)
- **Finland:** Reform of VET funding (2018)

- Fare Allowances
- Relocation Scholarship
- Tertiary Access Payment
- ABSTUDY (1969)
- Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP, 2010)
- Higher Education Disability Support Program (DSP, 2004)
- Higher Education Loans Program (HELP loans) (2003)
- VET Student Loans (VSL) Program
- JobTrainer Package
- JobTrainer Fund
- Higher Education Relief Package
- National Disability Insurance Scheme (2013)
- Integration funding support (IFS)

per-student funding model aimed at improving equity. Remaining challenges identified by the OECD comprised gaps in funding between what the Commonwealth Government aimed to provide and the portion that States and territories were able to contribute to government schools. Past OECD reporting on system-level education policy also identified a lack of clear and consistent principles in funding for vocational education and training. Challenges identified also included an overlap of state and Commonwealth responsibility for the regulation and funding of VET.

Summary of previous OECD recommendations: Previous OECD recommendations to improve governance in Australia have included clarifying unclear or unbalanced division of responsibility between national and local authorities and schools. The OECD has also recommended introducing quality assurance mechanisms, although progress has been made along these lines, and the OECD has cited the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (2011) as an example of an independent national quality regulator aimed at ensuring quality in higher education. Past OECD analysis has also recommended strengthening the focus on mathematics throughout secondary education, in particular by taking into account the impact the design of the school system in Australia might indirectly have on its effectiveness in developing strong numeracy skills in young people. With regards to funding, the OECD has also recommended that Australia refine the criteria and mechanisms used to allocate funding to education institutions. This means carefully aligning financial resource policies with clear guiding objectives at system level, especially in the case of decentralised education systems. Finally, the OECD has recommended improving equity in education resource allocation as a priority for Australia. This can take the form of providing targeted support to disadvantaged population sub-groups, such as students facing geographic or socio-economic disadvantage, among others.

Note: The information on key challenges and recommendations in this Spotlight draws from a desk-based compilation from previous OECD publications (subject to country participation). The Spotlight is intended for exploratory purposes to promote policy dialogue, and should not be considered an evaluation of the country's progress on these recommendations. Causality should not be inferred either: while some actions taken by a country could correspond to previous OECD recommendations, the OECD acknowledges the value of internal and other external dynamics to promote change in education systems.

Main sources: OECD (2019[22]), *Education Policy Outlook 2019: Working Together to Help Students Achieve their Potential*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/2b8ad56e-en; OECD (2017[23]), *Building Skills for All in Australia: Policy Insights from the Survey of Adult Skills*, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264281110-en; Santiago, P., et al. (2011[24]), *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Australia 2011*, OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264116672-en, OECD (2019[4]), *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What School Life Means for Students' Lives*, PISA, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/acd78851-en; OECD (2014[25]), *OECD Economic Surveys: Australia 2014*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/eco_surveys-aus-2014-en; OECD (2017[26]), *OECD Economic Surveys: Australia 2017*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/eco_surveys-aus-2017-en.

EQUITY AND QUALITY: AUSTRALIA IS A HIGH PERFORMER, WITH MIXED OUTCOMES FOR OLDER SCHOOL STUDENTS AND EQUITY CHALLENGES

Strengthening **student performance** for all has emerged as a common policy priority across several OECD countries, with a particular focus on raising achievement among low performers (OECD, 2018[27]). In PISA 2018, Australia performed above the OECD average[1] in reading and science, and around average in mathematics. In terms of equity, socio-economic status had a lower-than-average impact on reading performance, explaining 10% of the variance (OECD average: 12%). In the same way, at seven score points, Australia had among the smallest performance gaps between immigrant and non-immigrant students in the OECD (OECD average: 24), reflecting in part the socio-demographic profile of students from immigrant backgrounds in Australia. However, Australia has experienced persistently declining student outcomes across PISA cycles in the three main subjects, with an increase in the share of low-performing students (below Level 2) for each.

Other large-scale assessments suggest some recent improvements for younger students. Results from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2019 saw gains in science for students in Years 4 and 8 since 2015, and in mathematics for students in Year 8. In the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2016, reading performance in Year 4 had improved considerably since 2011. However, there was no change in the share of students performing below the benchmark for low proficiency. In the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), performance improved for students in Years 3 and 5 in reading over the long term (2008-21), as did numeracy results in Year 5. Nevertheless, as also noted by the actors interviewed, performance remains stagnant across older groups, and the share of students not reaching minimum proficiency increases with age.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) policies can provide solid education foundations for later in life (OECD, 2018[27]). In Australia, ECEC programmes are delivered in a range of settings, including education institutions or long-day-care settings. At pre-primary level, both education-only and integrated education and care programmes exist nationally. Coverage has increased considerably under national commitments to ensure 600 hours of provision in the year before school. Across 3-5 year-olds, participation remains relatively lower: in 2020, 82% of children in Australia participated in formal ECEC or primary education, compared to an OECD average of 87%. National data and education actors with whom the OECD met indicate participation gaps for disadvantaged and Indigenous children, although these are decreasing. Australia has also worked to enhance ECEC quality: States and territories are responsible for implementing various national ECEC standards (see 'National policy efforts'). This is important, as PISA 2018 data show that children in Australia who reported having attended 2 years of ECEC performed 17 score points higher in reading than their peers who had not, even after controlling for socio-economic background (OECD average: 23). With much diversity in governance and funding structures, making quality ECEC accessible to all children across the age range is a current policy topic in Australia (see 'Governance' and 'Funding').

According to OECD evidence, some **system-level policies and practices** in place in Australia can favour equity, such as delayed tracking and lower grade repetition. Compulsory education in Australia starts at age 6 and ends at age 17, and students are first tracked into different educational pathways at 16, the most common age among OECD countries. Only 6% of 15-year-olds in Australia reported having repeated a grade in PISA 2018, compared to the OECD average of 11%. At school level, student cohorts in Australia are academically mixed: at 0.16, the isolation index for low-achieving students is below the OECD average of 0.22. However, PISA evidence suggests that 15-year-olds in Australia are more likely to be in a school where ability grouping takes place for some subjects, either between or within classrooms, than the average OECD student. PISA 2018 data also indicate some informal segregation by socio-economic status, with an isolation index of 0.20 for disadvantaged students compared to 0.17 on average. This may in part be related to the high level of school choice in Australia: according to principals' reports in PISA 2018, 87% of students were in schools in areas with two or more other schools, compared to the OECD average of 62%. This includes a large non-government sector: 37.9% of 15-year-old students were enrolled in private schools in PISA 2018 (OECD average: 16.8%). While school choice can support families to tailor decisions to their needs and foster school improvement through competition, analysis also indicates that it can lead to greater segregation if not managed carefully, reducing opportunity for positive peer effects (OECD, 2019[28]).

As shown by available data, and as expressed by the education actors interviewed by the OECD, although general equity indicators for Australia are relatively positive, national averages mask important sub-national differences across States and territories. While in some States and territories participation in pre-primary education had reached 100% in 2021, in several others it remained below 90% (Productivity Commission, 2022[29]). In NAPLAN, less than 5% of younger students nationally do not meet the national minimum standard for reading and numeracy but, in the Northern Territory, which faces complex contextual challenges, the share rises to over 20%. Some States have improved PISA performance in recent cycles, while performance has declined beyond the national rate for others. NAPLAN data also reveal challenges for Indigenous students, who, in Year 3, are around 10 times as likely not to reach national minimum standard than the total student population although, as larger shares of students nationally underperform with age, the gap diminishes. PISA 2018 results also reveal performance gaps for students in rural schools compared to urban, in public compared to private, and for non-English compared to English speakers. There are challenges too for students with disability; Australia has made this group a priority in recent years (see Spotlight 2). Future efforts to strengthen equity will need to consider intersectionality and the accumulation of inequities for certain students and in certain areas.

Where does Australia stand on education **equity and quality**?

Key strengths	Key challenges
• In PISA 2018, Australia remained a high performer in reading and science, with comparatively favourable equity indicators. Other large-scale assessments show improved outcomes for younger students. • ECEC coverage in Australia has increased for children in the year before school. • Australia has low levels of grade repetition as reported in PISA, and students are not tracked until age 16. • Australia has comparatively high levels of academic inclusiveness among schools, according to PISA evidence.	• Student performance, as measured in some large-scale assessments, has been stagnant or shown some decline for older school students. • Access to quality ECEC, particularly for the ages 3-5, could be expanded, with participation gaps for disadvantaged and Indigenous children. • Australia has less strong social diversity between schools, which translates into a difference in learning opportunities. • More positive national averages related to equity indicators mask important sub-national and sub-population differences.

Building on **national policy efforts in Australia** to move forward

The **Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration** (2019), agreed by Australian Education Ministers, sets the direction of education for the next decade. It succeeds the Melbourne Declaration (2008), carrying forward key action areas (e.g. supporting quality teaching and school leadership, enhancing middle years development, and promoting world-class curriculum and assessment) and expanding the scope of the strategic vision by further developing others (e.g. learning beyond the school years, or building foundational skills in the primary school years). The goals are intentionally broad and this supports them to remain relevant despite the unstable context that has followed their agreement. However, this also means it is difficult to quantify progress towards the goals. In part, this is addressed through the development of further bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth Government and States and territories (see 'Funding').

These bilateral agreements are part of the **National School Reform Agreement** (NSRA) (2019) established between Commonwealth Government, States and territories, which aims to build on the strategic goals of the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration by outlining key reform initiatives to 2023 through a new approach to inter-governmental collaboration. Specifically in terms of equity and quality, the NSRA aims to enhance achievement, attainment and engagement by committing to reform efforts focused on supporting students, teachers and school leaders, and improving the national education evidence base. Through it, Education Ministers set specific measurable goals through amendments, such as increasing Year 12 attainment (or equivalent qualification) to 96% amongst 20-24 year-olds by 2031 (including amongst Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people). However, an interim report (2022) concluded that, so far, the policy initiatives agreed in the NSRA that had been successfully implemented were likely to have had little impact on Australian students' academic achievement, educational attainment and skill acquisition, in part due to a need for more time, but also due to their design. The report provisionally recommended more direct efforts to raise student outcomes, equity and well-being in the future, such as going beyond system architecture to have an impact on classroom practice.

The **National Quality Framework** (NQF) for ECEC (2009) aims to raise quality and consistency in the sector through a national approach to regulation, assessment, and quality improvement. Under this, ECEC services must base their educational programme on an Approved Learning Framework. At national level, these are the **Belonging, Being & Becoming** (2009) framework—the first learning framework for 0-5 year-olds in Australia—and the **My Time, Our Place** (2011) framework for school-age children. Both adopt a holistic approach to child development, with five core outcomes around identity, belonging, well-being, learning and communication. In 2020, a review of implementation at centre level found ECEC staff generally viewed the frameworks positively, but that more support was required for deeper adoption, particularly in more remote regions. A consortium of higher education institutions is leading the **Approved Learning Frameworks Update** (2021) to reflect contemporary developments in practice and knowledge (n.d.[30]). The process included piloting draft updates in diverse contexts; this may have provided an opportunity to further explore some of the implementation challenges previously encountered in remote settings. Also within the NQF, the **National Quality Standard** establishes national benchmarks for ECEC provision across seven areas. In 2022, 93% of services met or surpassed the standard for children's health and safety, up from 75% in 2013, while 91% of services met or surpassed the standard for educational programme and practice, an increase from 67% in 2013 (ACECQA, 2022[31]).

The **Closing the Gap Agreement** (2020) is a comprehensive effort that commits Australian governments and the Coalition of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations to empower Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander populations to have similar life outcomes to those of other Australians by overcoming inequality. It is divided into Priority Reform outcome areas for which measurement instruments are under development. Progress reported on some socio-economic targets in 2022 include an almost universal enrolment of this population in pre-school in 2021 (96.7%). At the same time, only one-third (34.3%) of children were able to commence school developmentally on track. Annual Data Compilation Reports have been produced by the Productivity Commission in 2021 and 2022 to inform progress in the implementation of the agreement (Closing the Gap, n.d.[32]; Productivity Commission, n.d.[33]).

Spotlight 2. Supporting students with disability in the Australian education system

SEN is one of the many dimensions of student diversity within an education system, and it intersects with other types of student diversity to influence learners' experiences, challenges and opportunities as they progress through their education and training pathways. Although policy approaches vary largely across education systems, these have shifted over the years from placing students in special school settings to providing them with the necessary support to facilitate their participation in more mainstream education environments (Brussino, 2020[34]).

In the context of Australia, monitoring outcomes for students with disability (defined broadly to encompass physical, sensory, mental and intellectual disability) is a key policy focus for the Commonwealth Government, with challenges related to improving the sharing of good practices and data collection (e.g. on access, participation, and outcomes of students with disability) within a decentralised federal system (Productivity Commission, 2022[35]; Productivity Commission, 2023[36]). The COVID-19 pandemic added new challenges, as students with disability and their families were particularly affected by institutional closures, having to follow education online while experiencing a drastic reduction in the supports provided. In a survey conducted by Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), for example, 61% of respondents expressed that students with disability had not received adequate educational support during the pandemic (Dickinson et al., 2020[37]). To further understand these challenges, the Australian Government Department of Education is leading a review on the impact of COVID-19 on school students with disability.

At Commonwealth level, the **Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration** (2019) offers a broad, system-level vision for supporting all Australians at risk of educational disadvantage, and in particular, highlights the role targeted support can play in helping children with disability to reach their potential. The Declaration places emphasis on the need for the education system to tailor to the needs of individuals. At Commonwealth level, policy efforts provide high-level strategic vision, funding, and monitoring systems for both Australians with disability broadly, as well as targeted initiatives for students in particular. From 2013, many services and programmes for Australians with disability started being rolled into the **National Disability Insurance Scheme** (NDIS). Among the many types of supports for which the NDIS provides funding, support for transportation to school, access to early childhood interventions, and lifelong learning fall under the umbrella of education supports. Other national efforts to improve knowledge around access, participation, and outcomes for students with disability include the **Disability Standards for Education 2005**, **Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-31**, and the **Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (2018)**. Students with disability are also identified as a priority group by the **National School Reform Agreement** (see 'Equity and Quality'). Initiatives in place at state or territory level include:

- **Tasmania:** Under the **Accessible Island: Tasmania's Disability Framework for Action** (2018-21), Tasmania committed to developing inclusive and respectful education spaces across the system, and equal access and participation for all learners and staff with disability (Tasmanian Government, 2018[38]). Measures include shifting from a category-based funding model to a needs-based one. Since the introduction of the framework, the share of learning plans for school students rated as 'excellent' or 'good' in annual quality assurance processes has been rising (Tasmanian Government, 2020[39]). Since 2018, Tasmania has also invested AUD 8 million in subsidising 6 000 qualification and skill sets for its disability workforce (Tasmanian Government, 2021[40]).

- **Queensland:** The Autism Hub provides information for students with autism, their families, and education actors that support them. Key resources available in the Hub include information for students preparing for transitions into or out of the education system. For example, the Online Transition Resource Package, a document prepared by the Queensland Department of Education, the AEIOU Foundation, and Autism Queensland, covers topics such as early childhood support services, school options, and transitioning to pre-primary education for children with autism. By contrast, the Senior years resources videos series provides information for the school teams and families of students with autism on designing a successful pathway through the final years of schooling and beyond. The Hub also features a Student voice video series, where students with autism speak about their experiences, and a video series on topics aimed at building the capacity of teachers and school communities to include and engage students with autism.

- **New South Wales:** The **Integration funding support (IFS)** aims to aid schools in providing adequate adjustments for students with disability who attend mainstream classes and who have moderate to high learning and support needs. Funding can contribute to personalising learning and support for students with the help of additional teachers and school learning support officers, or enabling classroom teachers to undertake professional learning (NSW Department of Education, 2022[41]).

- **Northern Territory: Total Recreation** is a registered service provider, under the NDIS, of sports and recreational experiences for adults and young people aged 9 and above living with disability. In line with its goal of empowering members to become actively involved in their local community through sport, fitness, socialisation, art and travel, it runs School Sport, a weekly sports programme reaching over 320 students per year (NTcommunity, 2021[42]; Total Recreation, n.d.[43]).

Moving forward beyond the pandemic, Australia will need to take stock of the instruments in place to address pre-existing and emerging challenges, while assessing new directions to be taken. Beyond access to education facilities, better and more timely information on the quality of engagement and support provided by the learning environment to students with disability is key (Productivity Commission, 2023[36]).

Building on **international experiences** to move forward

Bridging performance gaps among students and regions was a persisting policy priority widely identified across several OECD education systems from 2008-17. Principles of action include developing measures to channel resources to the most disadvantaged regions and groups (OECD, 2018[27]).

- **International examples:** **Ireland** developed the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Plan 2017 to provide additional resources–such as home-school community liaisons or grants–to target education institutions catering to students between the ages of 3 to 18 in order to help families and students overcome educational disadvantage. Qualifying education institutions have a high share of students at risk of educational disadvantage and are classified according to their location and level of disadvantage. This Plan builds on an initial plan introduced in 2005. The DEIS Plan 2017 has five main objectives: applying an evaluation framework for a more efficient use of resources, developing the capacity of teachers and school leaders to facilitate this, improving students' learning experiences in DEIS schools, disseminating good practices to other schools through inter-institutional co-operation, and providing feedback to schools on their progress in terms of the plan's objectives. Although evidence shows some persisting challenges facing disadvantaged schools participating in the programme, a reduction in performance gaps between DEIS and non-DEIS schools can also be observed when comparing the evolution of performance in PISA between 2009 and 2018. As of 2022, about 1 200 schools participated in the initiative **[Read More 1, 2]**.

- **Possible relevance for Australia:** Besides providing additional resources to schools, DEIS includes a capacity building component to help education staff use resources better, and in line with their education strategy. As Australia continues exploring how to improve support for students in disadvantaged education institutions (including rural and urban schools), DEIS could provide an indication of how this support could be provided.

- **International examples:** **Portugal**'s Third Education Territories of Priority Intervention Programme (TEIP3 - 2012) targets schools in disadvantaged areas to prevent student disengagement and early school leaving, as well as to promote student success by: developing co-operation among teachers, ensuring the efficient implementation of the curriculum through interdisciplinary collaboration, and encouraging the participation of parents and society in education processes. As of 2021, the programme catered to 23 464 children in pre-primary education and over 144 000 students in primary and secondary education. TEIP3 builds on two former editions of the programme in 1996 and 2006. Three projects have been implemented to support the TEIP3: 1) The Learning Communities Project, which aims to transform school and community interactions; 2) The Digital Academy for Parents, which develops parents' digital skills to prevent student absenteeism and drop-out, and facilitates school monitoring; and 3) Mentoring for School Improvement, which organises training opportunities for school administrators to promote peer learning and support curriculum implementation **[Read More]**.

- **Possible relevance for Australia:** Portugal has considered the school environment through a holistic approach to raise student performance. As a policy effort that has been consistently evaluated since its initial implementation, the TEIP3 can provide Australia with an evidence-informed account of implementation over time. To this end, Australia can similarly increase parental awareness to prevent learning gaps and student disengagement.

Bridging performance gaps among students from different minority groups has been a persisting policy priority identified across education systems from 2008-17 (OECD, 2018[27]).

- **International examples:** **Canada** implemented the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework in 2018. The aim of this framework is to enable Indigenous people (First Nations, Inuit and the Métis Nation) to benefit from high-quality, culturally rooted early learning and childcare. The Framework was developed in 2017 through a large consultation of thousands of Indigenous people, where participants shared their vision for quality ECEC delivery, but also challenges related to implementation. Among the nine principles of quality ECEC that structure the framework are: Indigenous knowledges, languages and cultures; quality programmes and services; child and family-centred; respect, collaborations and partnerships **[Read More]**.

- **Possible relevance for Australia:** Canada implemented this framework to acknowledge distinct Indigenous cultures, and the importance for those receiving early childhood education to have their local culture form part of their development. The concept of the Framework, along with its implementation process, could serve as inspiration to Australia, in addition to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy (2021), as it strives to expand coverage in ECEC, including for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students (Government of Canada, 2022[44]).

Some policy pointers for action

As Australia strives to arrest and reverse trends of stagnant or declining outcomes for older students, while ensuring efforts to address inequities that start early and to respond to the complexity of needs, some **policy pointers for equity and quality** emerge, building on previous analysis to support Australia in moving forward:

1. **Aim for an effectively student-centred system** that provides strong foundations for all learners, keeping in mind how the many ways in which students are diverse can uniquely shape their learning experiences, and supporting their transitions throughout the education system by:

   - **Prioritising access to quality ECEC**, increasing the number of target hours and going beyond the standard year of delivery before entrance into primary education. The foundations for a good ECEC system exist in Australia, but need to be expanded so that those at greater need can benefit from it. Access to quality ECEC provides the foundation to prevent greater disadvantage as students move throughout their education pathways.

   - **Identifying and harnessing the strengths of the education system at pre-primary and primary education** to enhance outcomes as students go through the system. To this end, Australia needs to direct particular attention to strengthening transitions from primary to secondary education, and during secondary education, to prevent gaps from widening.

   - **Empowering learners to shape their own learning experiences through adequate supports,** to prevent widenining the inequities and learning gaps among them. This requires adopting a learner-centred approach through greater attention to specific needs (e.g. Indigenous, rural, with disability) to examine how children and young people, through their diversity, experience learning within and beyond education institutions, and how they can be better empowered to make those experiences their own. Local actors also need the capacity to develop strategies tailored to the needs of individual students based on their assessment of the intersectionalities of each student's needs.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE: AUSTRALIA HAS HIGH EDUCATION ATTAINMENT, WITH PERSISTING SKILLS GAPS ACROSS AGES

A country's capacity to develop **skills and labour-market perspectives** effectively can play an important role in the educational decisions of its population. In 2021, Australia had a higher share of adults attaining at least upper secondary education than on average across the OECD. This was coupled with above-average proficiency for 16-64 year-olds in literacy and problem-solving in technology-rich environments and average proficiency in numeracy in the Survey of Adult Skills (OECD, 2012[45]). Nevertheless, Australia showed relatively large gaps between the most and least proficient adults in literacy and numeracy, as was the case among 15-year-olds in PISA (OECD, 2017[23]). Like many OECD countries recovering from the lockdowns that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia is experiencing tight labour markets leading to shortages in key sectors, not least education (see 'School Improvement') and health. However, transitions into employment remain challenging for some. Australia experienced the second greatest increase in 18-24 year-old NEETs in the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing by five percentage points from 2019-20 and, although the rate had recovered to pre-pandemic levels by 2021, around one-in-ten (11.3%) young people remained out of work or education.

Upper secondary education in Australia usually takes place over two years, in general institutions, although vocational education and training (VET) options are available (see below). In 2021, 91% of 25-34 year-olds in Australia held an upper secondary qualification (OECD average: 86%). Upon completion, students receive a Senior Secondary Certificate of Education (SSCE), which is required to enter subsequent education levels. In 2021, Australia had an apparent retention rate from Years 10 to 12 of 82%, up from 78.5% in 2010 (ACARA, n.d.[46]). Nevertheless, based on the available data—with nearly one-in-five upper secondary students leaving before completion, and higher shares evident sub-nationally and among Indigenous students—and interviews with education actors, the OECD sees scope to enhance retention, both to ensure the individual returns to upper secondary attainment and the societal returns on educational investment. Moreover, as expressed by Australian actors in exchanges with the OECD, there is some indication of growing disengagement at this level following the interruptions to students' learning engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate-related shocks, as well as continued low performance for some student groups (see 'Equity and Quality'). Australia is undertaking efforts to improve school completion for all, with specific measures for students from diverse backgrounds (see 'National policy efforts').

Vocational education and training (VET) can ease entry into the labour market, yet many VET programmes across the OECD make insufficient use of workplace training. VET has been a policy focus for many education systems, with increasing attractiveness and employer engagement commonly identified as priorities (OECD, 2018[27]). In Australia, upper secondary students can pursue VET within their studies for the SSCE or pursue a parallel VET qualification via a school-based apprenticeship or VET certificate. Among 15-19 year-olds, national data indicate that, in 2018, 27% were pursuing some form of in-school VET; however, this share had decreased from 34% in 2014, and only 8% of these were in apprenticeship pathways. In PISA 2018, VET students in Australia performed less well than their peers in general or modular programmes, although, at 25 score points, this gap was less pronounced than elsewhere (OECD average: 68). The OECD (2017[23]) identified a likely selection effect whereby those with lower basic skills are more likely to enter VET pathways, calling for earlier efforts to improve numeracy skills, and to ensure that post-secondary VET programmes also lead to strong basic skills. Post-school VET is open to all learners irrespective of upper secondary pathway. In 2018, 21% of vocational students in Australia studied VET at post-secondary non-tertiary level (ISCED 4) and 24% at tertiary level, suggesting post-school VET fills a comparatively larger space in Australian vocational education than in other education systems (OECD averages: 10% and 17%) (OECD, 2020[47]). At the same time, as more vocational students reach this level, there is an opportunity to increase interaction between post-secondary vocational and general pathways (see 'International experiences').

In Australia, **tertiary education** admission for recent school leavers generally takes into account the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), which ranks students within each state or territory according to performance in eligible subjects from the SSCE. Admission criteria may also include a written statement, questionnaire, work portfolio, interview or test. Universities also offer non-ATAR or ATAR-plus pathways for eligible students, including for those at academic, residential, socio-economic or other disadvantage. Entry criteria can include prior VET or higher education studies, assessment of academic preparedness, previous work and life experience, or bridging courses. Alongside the diversity of entry routes, a high incidence of international students also contributes to Australia's relatively high enrolment rates at tertiary level. In Australia, international students make up 26% of students enrolled at tertiary level. Still, tertiary attainment is high among young adults in Australia: 54% of 25-34 year-olds held a tertiary qualification in 2021 (OECD average: 47%). Those who are tertiary-educated enjoy wage and employment advantages relative to those with lower levels of education, although the differences are less pronounced in Australia than elsewhere, given the higher baseline for lower educational attainment compared to other OECD countries. For example, while employment levels among 25-64 year-olds with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary qualifications were above OECD average in 2021–at 79% compared to 75%–those for tertiary-educated were more aligned, at 86% and 85%. Given that Australia belongs to a group of countries for which tertiary education requires high personal financial investment—offset through financial supports (see 'Funding')—it is important that the returns to tertiary education continue to motivate people to invest in order to meet societal demands for advanced skills. Similarly, ongoing policy efforts to support more equitable participation and attainment remain critical (see 'National policy efforts').

Where does Australia stand on **preparing students for the future**?

Key strengths	Key challenges
• A large and growing share of students choose to enter upper secondary pathways in Australia. • Relative to other OECD peers, 15-year-old VET students in Australia only slightly underperformed in PISA compared to their peers in general and modular programmes. • There is a high level of participation in tertiary education, and a large share of young adults have attained a tertiary qualification.	• High average skills' proficiency for both 15-year-olds and adults mask skills gaps, as shown by international surveys. • There is evidence of growing disengagement from education for older school students, in part due to recent disruptions and pre-existing challenges of cumulative learning gaps. • VET faces challenges to be an attractive option at upper secondary level, including through becoming more adapted to labour-market conditions and leading to strong basic skills. • As returns to tertiary education compare less favourably in the context of a higher baseline, sustaining incentives to participate in higher education will be important.

Building on **national policy efforts in Australia** to move forward

Improving the VET system had been a priority for Australian policy makers in recent years, and this trend was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Evaluations of the **National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development** (NASWD, 2009) called for improvements that would, for example, set more realistic targets for skills formation, enabling governments to be held to account for their commitments, and reframing the understanding of nationally recognised VET as a very important part of skills and workforce development, but not the only such contributor (Productivity Commission, 2020[48]). To respond to this challenge, in 2020, the Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform laid the ground for a new National Skills Agreement for which further negotiations will take place in 2023 (see 'Governance').

The **Try, Test, and Learn (TTL) Fund** (2016) provided funding to 52 innovative projects designed to support unemployed, at-risk adults to find work or pursue training. An evaluation of the TTL Fund highlighted strengths such as involving a broad range of stakeholders in the co-design and development of proposals and in supporting the target audience to better integrate into social and economic life. Challenges identified centred around saleability of the projects that were funded and limitations in the availability of data and survey results (Institute for Social Science Research, 2021[49]).

The Commonwealth Government provides additional resources to higher education providers to increase participation, retention and completion among students from under-represented groups. This includes the **Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program** (HEPPP, 2010) which, an evaluation in 2017 found, appeared to contribute to a greater participation and completion of higher education by disadvantaged students. From 2021, providers receive grants based on their share of domestic undergraduate students from a low socio-economic background, regional and remote areas and Indigenous students. Providers may use HEPPP funds to deliver a range of strategies and activities tailored to the needs of these students. The **Higher Education Disability Support Program** (DSP, 2004) allocates funding to providers to support students with disability to access and participate in higher education. Allocations are based on enrolment numbers (55%) and partial reimbursement for the costs of education supports and equipment through a claims system (45%). As of 2024, the **Indigenous, Regional and Low Socio-Economic Status Attainment Fund** (2021) will combine these programmes and other equity-focused higher education funding schemes, including for students from regional and remote backgrounds, under one umbrella fund to streamline efforts.

Higher education regulation is primarily the responsibility of the Australian Government. Although VET systems in most States and territories are regulated by the Commonwealth Government, Victoria and Western Australia have their own regulator. Regulation for higher education and VET at Commonwealth level is handled by separate entities that work together but are independent. The **Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency** (TEQSA, 2011) is an independent statutory agency established under Commonwealth legislation that regulates higher education providers. Under the **Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011**, TEQSA carries out its regulatory activity based on a standards-based statutory instrument, the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021, according to regulatory principles involving regulatory necessity, risk and proportionality. The **Threshold Standards** set the minimum standards that higher education providers are required to meet in order to become or remain registered to deliver higher education courses in Australia. The **Australian Skills Quality Authority** (ASQA, 2011) is an independent national quality regulator focused on vocational education and training. Brought into existence by the **National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act** (2011), ASQA applies the VET Quality Framework and Standards for VET Accredited Courses (2021) in its regulatory activity. In its **Regulatory Risk Priorities for 2021-22**, ASQA highlights changing environmental settings, market responses, policy, and regulatory settings among the factors considered in identifying its risk priorities (ASQA, 2021[50]; ASQA, n.d.[51]).

Building on **international experiences** to move forward

Raising the attractiveness of VET was a commonly identified policy priority across education systems from 2008-18 (OECD, 2018[27]; OECD, 2019[22]).

- **International example:** In **Denmark** (2015), wide-ranging reforms have aimed to increase the attractiveness of VET (including among higher-performing students), to reduce early leaving, and to ensure that all learners make progress in their skills development. Key measures include strengthening the admissions requirements for mathematics and language for students transitioning to VET from lower-secondary education, with the introduction of a course to prepare those who lack the necessary skills. Recent evidence points to an increase in students' grade averages and in the proportion of teachers who report that their students have the academic prerequisites to succeed in their course. A revised basic course allows students to try different specialisms before choosing their main pathway, with increased guidance from teaching staff. Evidence suggests this has helped students make more informed choices and may decrease their risk of drop-out. VET providers are also required to develop methods for differentiated teaching to meet the needs of students of varied ages and prior performance levels, and include these in their annual action plans. However, evaluative evidence suggests providers have made more progress implementing the structural elements of the reform than in making teaching more differentiated, varied and practice-oriented.

- **Possible relevance for Australia:** The evidence from Denmark suggests that strengthening the entry requirements for VET, while providing alternative routes for those who need more time to develop their skills, can improve learning outcomes for all. At the same time, bringing about change in teachers' practices may take more time than implementing structures and procedures [**Read More**].

Facilitating pathways to higher education levels is another key related principle of action to enhance the relevance of VET. More recently, the OECD has emphasised the importance of smoothing transitions across and within education programmes and levels to enhance system responsiveness (2022[21]).

- **International example:** In 2019, **Finland** established a working group to strengthen co-operation between VET providers and higher education institutions (HEIs). Drawing on HEIs' annual reports of their co-operation activities, and a survey of VET providers, the working group's final report provides an overview of existing co-operation models and common barriers to collaboration. Based on this analysis, the report proposes a strategic model identifying actions in six areas of collaboration: research, development, and innovation; networks (local, regional, national and international); the world of work; teaching; transitions; and structural co-operation. The model supports the consolidation of existing structures to systemise ad hoc collaborations, while establishing mechanisms for systematic dialogue and knowledge sharing between and across education levels. The report also proposes a funding model to incentivise co-operation, since this emerged as a common barrier.

- **Possible relevance for Australia:** The Finnish example provides an approach that could support Australia to find ways to strengthen the interface between higher education and VET, building on existing successful practices and identifying key barriers to co-operation. Furthermore, several of its collaborative practices address current skills priorities in Australia, such as increasing the attractiveness of VET and preparing VET students for university; increasing the labour market relevance of university education; and creating new education pathways delivered jointly by HEIs and VET providers [**Read More**].

Improving the relevance of the education offer becomes a commonly identified policy priority across education systems, as a way to strengthen the resilience of national and sub-national economies, but also to respond to learners' needs, interests and aspirations. Associated principles of action include ensuring the relevance and accessibility of VET, higher education and lifelong learning opportunities (OECD, 2018[27]). Generating and sharing information on the current and future demand for labour and skills is a key associated action.

- **International example:** Policy makers and educational institutions in **Estonia** use data from OSKA, a labour market monitoring and skills forecasting data system, to inform the provision of VET, higher education and upskilling and reskilling courses, as well as career guidance. OSKA produces annual reports on general labour market needs, thematic skills reviews, and 5-10-year forecasts for five employment sectors per year, drawing on qualitative and quantitative sources to produce granular, timely data. Findings are disseminated to key target groups through OSKA's representative management structure and to the general public through short videos and social media campaigns. Expert sectoral panels provide feedback on existing qualifications and monitor the implementation of their recommendations by different partners in the education and training system. An evaluation from 2018 recommends that these proposals be reflected in professional standards for VET and higher education, and that providers be given more practical guidance on how to implement them.

- **Possible relevance for Australia:** As Australia works to strengthen its VET and skills system following recent disruptions, the Estonian experience provides an example of how policy makers can work with key stakeholders from VET, higher education and various employment sectors to generate insights and recommendations that enhance the relevance of the educational offer, with a clear division of responsibilities in the implementation of proposals. This approach also shows how the co-ordination of HE, adult learning, and secondary and post-secondary VET provision can address current and emerging skills needs (OECD, 2021[10]) [**Read More**].

Some policy pointers for action

As Australia works to prevent students' disengagement from education as they age and strengthen the attractiveness, relevance and returns of educational pathways for all students, some **policy pointers for preparing students for the future** emerge, building on previous analysis to support Australia in moving forward:

2. **Advise and provide learners with relevant and multivalent education and training options** that effectively reflect their needs, interests and aspirations, and support them to successfully undertake them by:

   - **Elevating the quality (relevance) and status of VET** in order to be identified as a valid option by a broader spectrum of students (including by socio-demographic and age range, but also by interests and ambitions), while strengthening the foundational skills of students in VET so they can succeed as the quality bar is raised, and access further education and training options as their contexts evolve.

   - **Strengthening the connection between HE and VET** to better respond to learners' multiple needs and interests, and societal shorter- and longer-term needs by, among others, enhancing and clarifying the relevance of the different education offer, and addressing potential structural or process-oriented barriers to collaboration.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: AUSTRALIA NEEDS TO NURTURE A TRUSTED AND EMPOWERED TEACHING PROFESSION

Developing **positive learning environments** for students contributes to school leaders' and teachers' delivery of achievement gains in schools. Students in Australia view their teachers positively overall, reporting high levels of support and teacher enthusiasm, with index values of 0.25 and 0.20, respectively, compared to OECD averages of 0.01. Even so, there is a need to strengthen learning environments to become fully conducive to learning. The disciplinary climate in schools in Australia was among the least favourable in the OECD according to students' reports in PISA 2018, with an index of -0.2 (OECD average: 0.04). Furthermore, in TALIS 2018, 37% of Australian lower-secondary school principals reported that intimidation or bullying among students occurs at least weekly[2]. At the same time, a smaller share of Australian teachers than their peers across the OECD reported feeling prepared for, or capable of, managing disruptive classroom behaviour. Student truancy was also higher than the OECD average, with one-in-three 15-year-olds (33%) reporting to have skipped at least one day of school in the two weeks prior to the PISA 2018 test, compared to one-in-five (21%) on average across the OECD. Evidence shows that there is value in promoting students' sense of attachment to their school: students who have a greater subjective belonging to schooling are more likely to see value in education and aspire to a high-status occupation.

Attracting, retaining and developing high-quality **school leaders** is essential to improving the quality of learning environments and promoting effective school leadership. According to TALIS 2018 data, in Australia, the average age for principals is 51 years old, and three-in-five school leaders are male, while the inverse is true among teachers. Pathways into school leadership vary across States and territories but generally require a teaching qualification and substantial experience. Preparatory training for school leaders is optional, and TALIS 2018 data indicate that it is not widespread amongst Australian school leaders nationally, although it may be more common in certain States and territories. While, on average, half of school leaders in OECD countries and schools complete a programme or course in school administration or training for principals, only 30% of Australian school leaders do so. A similar trend exists for instructional leadership training, with only 43% of Australian principals completing such a programme prior to service entry (OECD average: 54%). The **Australian Professional Standard for Principals** (2011) outlines the expectations set by the system for the profession. Building on these, Australia has developed several efforts to support school leaders to enhance their practice (see 'National policy efforts').

A strong supply of highly qualified and engaged **teachers** is vital in every education system, but high levels of teacher attrition may hinder this. This is the case in Australia, where national evidence has projected a deficit of 4 100 secondary school teachers needed by 2025 compared to the number of new teacher graduates (Department of Education, 2022[52]). This challenge was also often mentioned during OECD exchanges with the diversity of Australian education actors interviewed. Efforts are being undertaken by States and territories to address these challenges (see Spotlight 3). According to TALIS 2018, teachers at the risk of leaving are predominantly female (62% female) and young (63%). In terms of preparation, in addition to national examinations for secondary school graduates, Australian teachers must also meet a grade point average requirement, and must hold a credential or licence in addition to an education diploma, but no competitive examination to start teaching exists as such. Graduates of education programmes must meet additional requirements before starting to teach, and new, fully qualified teachers serving in public institutions most typically hold the employment status of public sector employee. In order to become fully registered as a teacher, Australian teachers must achieve proficiency against the Australian **Professional Standards for Teachers** (2013) and the **Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework** (2013). Teaching does not seem to attract relatively high-performing students though, as evidenced by a negative score point difference in mathematics between students expecting a career in teaching and those expecting a career in other professions. Quality professional development is key to help teachers already in service catch up with the needs of the profession. Australia was the only country in TALIS where the number of days teachers spent on professional development was significantly associated with improvements in the classroom disciplinary climate. In Australia, a bachelor's degree is the highest level of educational attainment for 75% of teachers, which is above the OECD average.

Teaching conditions in Australian schools include higher-than-average net teaching hours and slightly less competitive salaries compared to other similarly educated professions, except for school principals. In 2021, teachers taught for 860 hours at primary level, 838 hours at lower-secondary level, and 839 hours at upper secondary level, compared to OECD averages of 784 in primary, 711 in lower secondary, and 684 in upper secondary. Also in 2021, lower secondary general education teachers earned 99% of the average salary of a full-time full-year worker with tertiary education, above the OECD average (90%), while principals at this level in Australia earned 185% (among the highest differences for school leaders across OECD countries with available data). Just under 4 in 5 Australian teachers reported in TALIS 2018 that they are satisfied with their non-salary contract conditions, while 2 in 3 reported that they are satisfied with their salary conditions. Furthermore, 82.8% of teachers in Australia said that if they could choose again, they would still become a teacher, among the highest of countries and economies participating in TALIS 2018, while 44.7% of teachers felt that the teaching profession was valued in society, higher than the OECD average (25.8%). Nevertheless, the importance of increasing the attractiveness of the teaching and school leadership careers was highlighted in national evidence. As was also expressed during the OECD's meetings with education actors, the diversity of contexts across States and territories implies that although teacher supply is a national issue and national efforts are taking place to make teaching more attractive, each State and territory also needs to implement their own responses accordingly.

Where does Australia stand on school improvement?

Key strengths	Key challenges
• Students in Australia view their teachers positively overall, reporting high levels of support and teacher enthusiasm. • National professional standards are in place for school leaders and teachers, and help guide professional learning opportunities open to both trainee and in-service professionals. • According to TALIS 2018, teachers in Australia have comparatively high levels of satisfaction with both salary and non-salary conditions and feel the profession is valued in society more often than elsewhere.	• High teacher turnover, teacher supply challenges, and absence of sufficiently structured career pathways despite national and sub-national efforts. Supporting teacher development in classroom management and student behaviour management to drive improvement in school disciplinary climate. • Varied approaches to school leader improvement and professional development across States and territories may contribute to inconsistencies in support and quality. • Mixed evidence on levels of satisfaction with the profession and deepening shortages suggest a more nuanced picture.

Building on national policy efforts in Australia to move forward

Recent measures to improve the learning climate of schools include the Australian Government's **National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-32** and the launch of the **Consent and Respectful Relationships Education** (2022) initiative, which aims to prevent family and domestic violence through age-appropriate, evidence-based education in schools. The initiative will be delivered in partnership with jurisdictions and non-government school systems and will be informed by expert advice. These build on previous efforts to improve student well-being and address issues around student relationships including the **Student Wellbeing Hub** (2016), which facilitated online resource collections for parents, teachers, and students, and was underpinned by the **Australian Student Wellbeing Framework** (2018). In 2022, the Productivity Commission pointed out that while student well-being is an agreed desired outcome for the system, efforts in this area could be more coherent and better provide teachers and students with access to the high-quality supports and resources needed. Related recommendations included raising student well-being to a priority area for national co-operation through integration in the National School Reform Agreement. A further recommendation is to develop a national measure of student well-being to facilitate data collection (Productivity Commission, 2023[36]). There are related efforts at sub-national level, such as Victoria's **Attitudes to School Survey** (2004) (Victoria Department of Education and Training, n.d.[53]) and NSW's **Tell Them From Me** (2015) (NSW Department of Education, n.d.[54]). Related international efforts indicate that a national approach could support practitioners across the country to implement evidence-based, responsive supports (see 'International experiences').

When it comes to strengthening the quality of school leadership, the **Australian Professional Standard for Principals** (2011) established the foundations for related initiatives. These include **Leading for Impact: Australian Guidelines for School Leadership and Development** (2018), which support a nationally coherent, standards- and evidence-based approach to leadership development. **Leadership Profiles** describe the Standards in more detail, drawing on insights from practice. These tools have informed the design of **Future Leaders** (2021), a leadership development programme for high-performing teachers who aspire to lead in outer regional, remote, and very remote schools. An interim evaluation highlights the programme's alignment with Government objectives and best practices (e.g. peer networking, coaching or individual school innovation projects). As well as expanding to other jurisdictions, it recommends increasing efforts to encourage more applications, including from under-represented groups, and developing a clearer pathway for those who have completed the programme (dandolopartners, 2021[55]).

Although the Teacher Standards have helped to define proficiency levels for teachers at different career stages, a 2015 report identified a need to improve their use in the assessment of pre-service and novice teachers, and to ensure the alignment of the Graduate level standards with the demands of the classroom (Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, 2014[56]). The **Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership** (AITSL) has been working with partners in the state and territories to ensure that graduates from initial teacher education are robustly assessed against the standards (AITSL, n.d.[57]).

Finally, at the early childhood level, efforts are ongoing to increase the quality of early childhood education and care professionals. The **Shaping Our Future: A ten-year strategy to ensure a sustainable, high-quality children's education and care workforce (2022-31)** is a collaboration between all governments, the ECEC sector, and other key stakeholders to address workforce challenges in the sector. Following a consultation process that began in 2020, some 21 actions were identified to be implemented in the short (3 years), medium (6 years) and long term (10 years). These relate to focus areas such as attraction and retention, data and evidence and professional recognition (e.g. status, pay and conditions of ECEC professionals). Stakeholders also worked collaboratively to develop the implementation and evaluation plan, which includes qualitative and quantitative indicators embedded across each action and focus area. They will showcase best practice and reflect on progress in biennial national workforce forums (National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy, 2022[58]). OECD evidence highlights the importance of developing relevant indicators to direct implementation towards achieving policy goals. Involving stakeholders in this process can help to ensure that indicators are embedded in practice (OECD, 2022[59]).

Spotlight 3. Tackling teacher shortage in Australia

In recent years, countries have experienced increased teacher shortage. Teacher shortage takes many forms, including a lack of teachers with specialised training for specific student cohorts, a lack of teacher workforce diversity, or high rates of educators teaching outside their area of expertise. The shortage can be exacerbated by greater student enrolments, a drop of enrolees in teaching degrees, challenges in teacher retention and an ageing teaching workforce. As shown by multiple sources of evidence available to the OECD, and as consistently expressed by those stakeholders involved in exchanges with the OECD, Australia is currently experiencing teacher shortages across the country and at different levels of the system. Contributing factors identified include a perceived moderate social esteem of the profession, a growing student population, working conditions (e.g. in terms of salary, workload or employment arrangements), and difficulty to attract specific profiles of teachers. Teacher shortage in the present could also contribute to a school leader shortage in the near future, as school leaders are frequently recruited from the teacher population (Department of Education, 2022[52]; Productivity Commission, 2023[36]).

Efforts to address shortages in Australia have ranged from creating career pathways that keep high-achieving teachers in the profession, or reward high achievement financially, to schemes that facilitate mid-career transitions into teaching for professionals outside education. Most recently, the Education Ministers tasked a multistakeholder working group to develop a **National Teacher Workforce Action Plan** (2022) bringing a national focus to the challenge. The Plan includes short-, medium- and long-term actions across five priority areas covering attraction, initial training, retention, elevating the profession, and future workforce planning (Department of Education, 2022[60]). Proposed measures aim to build on and complement efforts already in progress at sub-national level. Examples include:

- In 2021, **New South Wales** launched the **Teacher Supply Strategy 2021-31** to recruit 3 700 teachers with appropriate subject qualifications, with 1 600 coming in the first five years (NSW Department of Education, n.d.[61]). The Strategy envisages multiple channels of teacher recruitment, including overseas and interstate recruitment and a programme to attract mid-career professionals into teaching (NSW Department of Education, n.d.[62]). In addition to this broad educator workforce strategy, the government has implemented the Mathematics Strategy 2025, which aims to improve quality teaching of mathematics through a handful of initiatives. For example, current university students, industry professionals, and secondary students working towards a High School Certificate can apply for **teach.MathsNOW** scholarships through which they will receive up to AUD 50 000 in course contribution fee payments, as well as a completion allowance of at least AUD 5 000 (NSW Department of Education, n.d.[63]).

- In 2022, **Queensland** launched the **Turn to Teaching (TTT)** programme, which aims to increase the supply and diversity of teachers by providing a pathway to teaching for people who already hold an undergraduate degree. The programme provides students with an AUD 20 000 scholarship in the first year, followed by a paid internship in the second year. Interns carry a half teaching load while receiving a full-time salary plus the entitlements of a full-time teacher, and professional guidance from a supervising teacher and a mentor teacher. Approximately 50 pre-service teachers started in this programme in 2022. Programme participants are to be employed under the Permission to Teach (PTT) programme, an arrangement by which Queensland College of Teachers grants registration under certain criteria to students in initial teacher education in order to allow them to teach in a school following strict limitations (O'Flaherty, 2022[64]).

- The **Australian Capital Territory (ACT)** government, in collaboration with the Australian Education Union (ACT branch) established a **Teacher Shortage Taskforce** (2021) to enable ongoing dialogue on teacher recruitment and retention. The work was informed by workforce data and insights from a survey of teachers. The taskforce's final report made numerous recommendations, including developing incentive structures for relief teachers, enhancing workforce data on early-career teachers to support their transition and retention, establishing a committee to identify and address the drivers of teacher and school leader workload, and developing a five-year Classroom Teacher Attraction and Retention Plan. Other efforts are planned as part of broader priority areas. For example, the government has outlined the establishment of the 'Educational Leader' career pathways in its Early Childhood Strategy (Australian Capital Territory Government, 2020[65]) as an effort to improve workforce capability and retention in ECEC.

- **Victoria** has undertaken efforts to enhance professional learning and career pathways for teachers and school leaders. The **Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership** (2022) builds on the work of the former Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership by providing training, mentoring and coaching for emerging and established school leaders and highly skilled teachers (Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership, n.d.[66]). This includes, for example, the Teaching Excellence Program, a one-year advanced professional learning programme developing practitioner inquiry, teacher agency, reflective practice and research. The Career Stage Programmes also target aspiring and current school leaders to develop leadership capability.

The teacher shortage in Australia presents a tension between the urgent need of filling classrooms now and the important consideration of improving teacher quality with the help of higher rates of teacher retention.

Building on **international experiences** to move forward

Improving learning conditions in schools was an international policy trend identified from 2008-2019. Nurturing positive learning climates and interactions for learning across the range of spaces where learning occurs has been linked to resilience. This includes taking steps to prevent harmful behaviours between learners, including bullying and cyberbullying, as well as developing mechanisms capable of measuring the impact of efforts to enhance interactions between learners (OECD, 2021[10]).

- **International example:** **Denmark**'s annual well-being surveys for public schoolchildren (2014) has a 40-question version administered amongst students in grades 4-9, which includes 10 items related to social well-being. Results from the survey are considered by the government in yearly evaluations of school well-being (Niclasen, Keilow and Obel, 2018[67]). The survey and the analyses allow public school stakeholders at municipal level to monitor changes and trends in school environments and to make improvements (Larsen, Leme and Simonsen, 2020[68]). For example, analyses of survey results have pointed to a meaningful correlation between student social well-being and student and parental disadvantage (Larsen, Leme and Simonsen, 2020[68]). Outcomes from this survey help policy makers and educators to identify factors affecting student social well-being and take confidence in the validity of how student social well-being is measured.

- **Possible relevance for Australia:** One area for attention facing Australian schools is the classroom environment and the prevalence of bullying. Various Australian education system actors, such as the National Centre Against Bullying and the Student Wellbeing Hub, seek to provide students, educators and parents with resources to improve school climate and student well-being. At the same time, recent examples of nationwide efforts to measure student well-being appear to be combined with narrower research questions, such as the relationship between connectedness at school and mental health. For example, the *Young Minds Matter* survey reached over 6 000 families and included questions related to bullying and cyberbullying but did not pursue insights of school climate at the local level (Goodsell et al., 2017[69]). Drawing on the Danish example, establishing a nationwide survey could support Australian educators to understand macro trends of student well-being, understand how background factors and well-being interact, and make targeted interventions at local level (B. H., Morris, R., Gorard, S., Kokotsaki, D., & S. Abdi, 2020[70]) (see also 'Evaluation and Assessment').

Attracting teachers to *hard-to-staff* schools, including in disadvantaged or remote locations, and better supporting teaching and learning is a feature identified in previous OECD analysis for high-performing school systems (OECD, 2014[71]). Past a basic threshold, quality education does not necessarily equate to just providing more resources, but with how resources are provided.

- **International example:** The Teacher Transfer Initiative, an intervention in 10 school districts across 7 states in the **United States**, aimed to reallocate high-quality teachers to disadvantaged schools. Within each district, teachers with the best outcomes in terms of raising student achievement (controlling for subject and grade) were designated high-performing teachers and deemed eligible to participate. These high-performing teachers could earn up to USD 20 000 over two years by relocating to a disadvantaged school, with pay-outs made in instalments and contingent upon remaining at the school throughout the treatment period. High-performing teachers who were initially located at a socio-economically disadvantaged school were incentivised to stay at the school and could earn USD 10 000 over the same two-year period. The intervention showed a positive impact on retention, as well as mathematics and reading test scores at primary level. Researchers hint at the possibility that the incentive may be more cost-efficient than hiring additional staff to reduce class sizes in order to attain the same improvement of student outcomes; however, they caution that actual cost-efficiency depends on multiple factors not considered in the analysis [**Read More**].

- **Possible relevance for Australia:** This initiative provides evidence to national and sub-national governments in Australia of the opportunities and limitations of financial incentives in attracting higher-quality teachers to lower-performing schools. In particular, such incentives can increase teacher retention, as long as the incentive continues; however, the positive retention effect appears to decay when payment ends, while positive effects on student outcomes were only identified at primary level, but not at lower secondary level (B. H., Morris, R., Gorard, S., Kokotsaki, D., & S. Abdi, 2020[70]).

- **International example:** In **Canada**, the Nunavut Northern Allowance is a sum paid on top of base salaries to teachers who work in remote communities. The allowance ranges between CAD 15 016 and CAD 34 455 per annum according to the school community in which a teacher serves. The allowance paid to teachers is intended to address the higher cost of living in remote Nunavut communities. The amount is set according to the difference in the cost of living between an individual community and larger designated southern centres (Government of Nunavut, n.d.[72]). A similar approach was considered in Alaska (United States), where, in 2015, researchers investigated creating a uniform salary scale for teachers with differentials based on the geographic location of the school community in which teachers served (Dayna Jean, Hirshberg and Hill, 2016[73]). It was found that the salary differentials that would compensate teachers for the attractiveness of a particular school community relative to the base location (Anchorage) ranged between 0.85 and 2.01, and noted that remote and rural communities had high differentials.

- **Possible relevance for Australia:** Optimising incentive schemes for attracting teachers to rural, remote and very remote schools in Australia can support efforts to bolster equality of educational resources. Ongoing initiatives in Australia, such as the Rural Teacher Incentive in New South Wales, offer benefits and incentives, albeit on a narrower range and with less community specificity than the Nunavut Northern Allowance. For example, although over 150 NSW schools attract the Rural Teacher Incentive, only three possible incentive amounts apply: AUD 20 000, AUD 25 000 and AUD 30 000. In practice, only six of the participating schools attract the highest incentive. This suggests that there could be additional space for further tailoring incentive packages to local contexts so that the demand for filling teaching posts is better reflected by the benefits package [**Read More**].

Some policy pointers for action

As Australia strives to navigate and overcome teacher shortage challenges and enhance the quality of school environments and their conduciveness to learning, some **policy pointers for school improvement** emerge, building on previous analysis to support Australia in moving forward:

3. **Develop a trusted and empowered school leadership and teaching profession**, along with conducive learning environments where both educational staff and students can thrive, by:

   - **Supporting a stronger school leadership profession**, as school leadership comprises a group of (shared) tasks that include instructional leadership and human resource and financial management. At school level, it can improve teaching and learning by developing the right school climate; at local level, the sharing of experiences and collaboration among schools can support greater equity across schools, and; at system level, school leaders are essential for the success of education reforms, as they are the first catalysts of change in education institutions.

   - **Strengthening teaching by examining barriers faced by teachers** to balance change and innovation in teaching with time available and workloads, but also to ensure the attractiveness of the profession for the longer term. The former includes strengthening communities of practice clustered by similar contexts within or across States and territories (e.g. on diagnostic or formative assessment, powerful pedagogies, or classroom management), while the latter includes revising strategies to address teacher shortage, such as by revising workloads to prevent burnout, but also to help them focus better on pedagogical quality.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT: AUSTRALIA CAN BETTER CHANNEL ROBUST EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT INTO REDUCING LEARNING GAPS

Defining strategies for evaluation and assessment is an important step towards improving student outcomes and developing a more equitable education system. In Australia, the Commonwealth Government and States and territories work together to implement a national **evaluation and assessment framework**. While the Commonwealth is more involved in ECEC and higher education through national certification, regulation, and assessment frameworks, States and territories play a leading role at school level. To support consistency, the Measurement Framework for Schooling Australia outlines agreed performance measures, with annual reporting cycles on participation, achievement, attainment and equity. The framework is aligned to the Alice Springs declaration (see 'Equity and Quality') and informs the annual National Report on Schooling in Australia. As pointed out by multiple actors to the OECD, the pandemic and other recent disruptions have enhanced awareness for developing a broader understanding of learning progress. Also, a recent review (2022) called for broadening the framework to include student well-being and more nuanced equity data. Moreover, in 2017, the Education Evidence Base review found that there is a gap in the evaluation of what works best to improve education outcomes. Recent measures aim to tackle this (see 'National policy efforts').

System evaluation can help decision makers to craft evidence-informed policies and increase transparency. At school level, Australia's system evaluation comprises participation in international assessments (i.e. PISA, PIRLS and TIMMS), as well as national assessments which include annual, census-based literacy and numeracy tests (NAPLAN, 2008) for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, and sample assessments in additional subjects every three years for Years 6 and 10. National proficient standards support each assessment, and recent efforts aim to show improvement alongside performance. In VET, system evaluation can support alignment with ever-changing labour markets. In Australia, efforts are currently underway to enhance national VET data collection and analysis (see 'National policy efforts').

School evaluation in Australia is under the authority of States and territories and both internal and external evaluation processes are common. In PISA 2018, Australian school leaders almost universally (99%) reported conducting self-evaluation of their school (OECD average of 95%), although nearly half of these reported doing so voluntarily. In contrast, 82% reported that external evaluation is mandatory (OECD average: 64%). However, the approaches followed in Australia are diverse. Since 2013, the Commonwealth Government has encouraged States and territories to require internal and external school evaluation against the National School Improvement Tool (2013) or equivalent framework. School leaders may require further support, however. In TALIS 2018, 14% of school leaders in Australia reported a high need for professional development on using data for school improvement, making it by far the highest need area among those included. Australia's My School website (2010) acts as an additional tool for school accountability and transparency by facilitating access to school-level data. A review had found it a valuable tool, although with concerns around the misinterpretation and misuse of the available data (Grahame Cook Consulting, 2014[74]). At ECEC level, services are regulated and assessed by State or territory regulatory authorities against seven quality areas defined in the National Quality Standard (see 'Equity and Quality'). The process includes the submission of a Quality Improvement Plan, an assessment visit by the regulatory authority and a final report published online.

According to OECD research, **teacher appraisal** models involving an improvement and a career progression component can foster the professional development of teachers. In Australia, opportunities for professional appraisal appear common, though quality may vary. In TALIS 2018, nearly all (98%) lower secondary principals reported that their teachers are formally appraised annually, usually by school leaders and/or their teams, or the teacher's mentor. The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and the Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework (2013) (see 'School Improvement') should inform appraisal, but implementation and follow-up procedures are determined by schools. In TALIS 2018, nearly all school leaders in Australia reported that, following formal appraisal, measures to remedy weaknesses are discussed with the teacher, a development or training plan is implemented and/or a mentor appointed. Nevertheless, only 77% of teachers in Australia reported that the feedback they had received in the 12 months prior to the TALIS 2018 survey had a positive impact on their practice. This is important for teacher quality and retention in the context of shortages (see 'School Improvement'): Australia has among the highest positive relationships between receiving impactful feedback and teacher job satisfaction.

Strong **student assessment** practices can inform and shape effective initiatives for educational improvement. In Australia, NAPLAN ensures students are assessed against the national curriculum at key moments in their schooling; teachers and parents receive student-level results. NAPLAN has evolved as part of efforts to enhance student outcomes (see 'National policy efforts'). However, primarily intended as a system evaluation tool, NAPLAN only provides a snapshot of performance in a relatively narrow set of curriculum areas, periodically. As such, enhancing teachers' capacity for regular teacher assessment *of* and *for* learning are also crucial, as it can help to effectively empower them as professionals and to better use any tools made available to them. In Australia, a relatively high index of student feedback in PISA 2018, at 0.35 (OECD average: 0.01), indicates that 15-year-olds feel they often receive teachers' feedback on their strengths and how to improve. Furthermore, in TALIS 2018, only 6% of lower secondary teachers reported a high level of need for professional development in this area, a figure higher only than those reported by teachers in a handful of countries. In this context, however, two of the three main causes of stress as reported by teachers in Australia in TALIS 2018 were assessment-related. Given the importance of teacher-led diagnostic and formative assessment practices for improving student outcomes, efforts to support teachers in this regard will need to be carefully designed and delivered (see 'National policy efforts').

Where does Australia stand on education **evaluation and assessment**?

Key strengths

- Australia has a robust culture of standards setting, accountability, evaluation and reform across all education levels.
- A set of reliable national and international assessment tools informs school-level system evaluation.
- In early childhood, a holistic and improvement-focused learner assessment tool supports the transition to school.

Key challenges

- Although an important component of the overall evaluation and assessment framework, the purpose and use of NAPLAN is not always well understood.
- Although commonly in place, school accountability efforts and teacher appraisal are diverse and may not always foster improvement as desired.
- The critical contribution of teachers and their classroom-based formative assessment to the overall evaluation and assessment framework risks being overlooked.

Building on **national policy efforts in Australia** to move forward

The **Australian Education Research Organisation** (AERO, 2021) is an independent national evidence institute established to inform teacher practice, system improvement and policy development, in response to calls to enhance the national evidence base. With a research scope covering ECEC and schools, AERO seeks not only to generate high-quality evidence, but to present it in an approachable way that enables educators and policy makers to adopt and implement lessons from this evidence in practice. Current priority areas include literacy and numeracy, well-being, school improvement, and equity challenges (AERO, 2023[75]). OECD research (2022) finds that common challenges facing such knowledge brokerage agencies internationally include stakeholder engagement, balancing responsiveness with reliability and financial sustainability.

NAPLAN has undergone several modifications since its introduction. From 2018, NAPLAN has been transitioning to an online format, allowing for the introduction of an adaptive test design. Education Ministers at national, state and territory level set the goal of all schools participating in the computer-based NAPLAN assessment by 2022. Since 2020, efforts have been made to enhance reporting to encompass aspects of achievement as well as performance by reporting on how a school's literacy and numeracy outcomes change over time. In 2022, Education Ministers decided to administer NAPLAN earlier in the school year with a view to allowing teachers and schools more time to use the results to inform interventions. More recent discussions include proposals for more, including younger, year groups to be tested and more subjects to be covered. A recent systematic review (2020) of NAPLAN-related literature found that while NAPLAN has helped to expose equity gaps and target funding to high-need schools, there are a lot of miscommunications and misinterpretations surrounding its purpose and role. These challenges were also evident in the OECD's exchanges with actors. Moving forward, Australia will need to ensure that efforts to make full use of NAPLAN respect the intentions of the assessment design, account for stakeholder perceptions and carefully weigh up the cost-benefits of frequent high-stakes testing.

At ECEC level, the **Australian Early Development Census** (AEDC, 2015), which built on the former Australian Early Development Index programme (2009), is a national data collection of early child development held every three years as children enter their first year of school. Teachers report data relating to five key domains of early childhood development: physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, and communication and general knowledge. Results are reported at the community, state and national (not individual) levels via the AEDC **data explorer** platform and, for the latter, in a national report; school data are made available to principals but are not publicly available. Results from 2021 show that the majority of children were 'developmentally on track' for each domain; however, the share of children on track in all domains decreased slightly between 2018 and 2021, for the first time since 2009.

The Australian Government is working with States and territories and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research to improve the availability of VET data through the **VET Data Streamlining program** (2020). The programme aims to simplify, reduce and shorten reporting procedures across the VET sector and improve data quality, so as to enhance the VET data system's capacity to contribute to improving outcomes at a national level. These efforts have been developed in response to findings from key reviews of VET which found that, for example, the VET sector would benefit from improvements to the strategic collection, analysis and circulation of data (2018). The programme includes the introduction of a new VET information standard redefining the data VET providers must collect, a new Student and Training Activity Reporting System to allow system-to-system data exchange and close-to-real-time updates, and policy and governance improvements. Implementation is in the early stages, but the initial focus on engaging with various stakeholders and through various means indicates awareness of the importance of stakeholder buy-in for such policy efforts.

Building on **international experiences** to move forward

Developing a coherent evaluation and assessment framework was among the most frequently observed policy priorities for education systems from 2008-19. Related principles of action include providing a clear rationale and compelling narrative to underpin the framework, bringing together all components and all stakeholders (OECD, 2019[22]).

- **International example: New Zealand**'s Position Paper on Assessment (2011) provides a formal statement of the national vision for student assessment in school education. It places assessment at the heart of effective teaching and learning, and describes what the assessment landscape should look like if it is to contribute to system-wide improvement. The intention was to promote a shared philosophy among all stakeholders across education and wider society. The Paper outlines six principles which broadly inform and direct policy processes. These were informed by a comprehensive expert review of assessment practices and include a presentation of the context, current assessment practices and approaches, as well as a detailed illustration of how assessment can drive learning for the learner, the school and the system. Although updates and reviews have been periodically considered, as of 2021, it remains in place, having informed and directed policy reviews across multiple political administrations [**Read More**].

- **Possible relevance for Australia:** This example could support Australia to commence a collaborative process that revisits the core aims of assessment in Australian schooling, establishing an agreed vision for all education actors. This vision can then be used as a framework against which current assessment practices can be mapped and potentially realigned, newly proposed assessment practices can be considered for alignment, and missing components can be identified. In this way, Australia can seek to build greater consensus around the aims and uses of different components of the evaluation and assessment framework.

Building assessment competencies among teachers and school leaders was a commonly identified policy priority from 2008-19 (OECD, 2019[22]). More recently, as part of COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, many countries have promoted formative assessment strategies within trends towards broader approaches to student assessment in the context of lockdowns and potential learning losses (OECD, 2020[76]). In 2021, supporting education actors to understand evidence (including student-assessment evidence), unpack it as needed and use it for impact was noted as a key policy pointer for resilience in education systems (OECD, 2021[10]).

- **International example: Norway**'s Assessment for Learning Programme (2010-18) aimed to support schools, municipalities, and training providers to embed formative assessment practices and cultures. National authorities set the programme's guiding principles, organised seminars for participating municipalities and provided online training and resources for schools. Local authorities were charged with establishing learning networks, many building on existing network structures. An evaluation (2018) identified the network model, which combined professional development activities, knowledge sharing and reflection as a crucial success factor. In addition, the focus on building expertise at the school and local authority level has helped ensure longevity. In many cases, participation increased the use of classroom formative assessment and strengthened a culture of research and development among schools. More recently, formative assessment has been established as one of the core principles of Norway's core curriculum (2020) and a bank of resources to support assessment for learning across the curriculum, including resources focused on supporting teachers' collaborative learning, has been produced [**Read More**].

- **Possible relevance for Australia:** Despite the very different national contexts, elements of this example could support Australia (either at national or sub-national level) to empower teachers to implement quality school-level student assessment practices that drive learning. Firstly, the programme, prioritised investment in people and their relationships at local and institutional level. The network model and local and institutional leadership were key to the success and sustainability of efforts. Secondly, although centrally-developed tools and resources to support teachers were introduced in 2020, this was after the initial capacity development had taken place and, even then, promoted collaborative approaches.

Capturing broader student learning outcomes was identified as a policy trend for 2008-19 (OECD, 2019[22]) while efforts to better value student well-being were more recently seen as key to enhancing learner resilience (OECD, 2021[10]).

- **International example: Denmark**'s Measurement and Improvement of students' well-being initiative (2014) requires schools to monitor students' well-being, annually, from kindergarten to grade 9, using a digital student survey. The aim is not to follow well-being of individual students, but to uncover well-being at school, local and system level in order to refocus educational culture towards better supporting well-being to enhance student learning. An expert group developed the well-being measures in partnership with national agencies and these have since undergone further enhancement. An early evaluation (2015) identified areas for improvement, including a need to capture student well-being more comprehensively and to support educators to use the results more effectively (See also 'School Improvement') [**Read More**].

- **Possible relevance for Australia:** This approach to monitoring student well-being not only helps broaden the basis on which schools and systems are judged to be supporting student outcomes but is also focused on improvement over performance. In Australia, a recent review called for the inclusion of a student well-being measure in national performance reporting. The Danish example can offer insights into the challenges and possible ways forward in developing and implementing such a tool.

Some policy pointers for action

As Australia strives to optimise assessment, feedback and improvement opportunities to reduce gaps in student performance and drive up outcomes, some **policy pointers for evaluation and assessment** emerge, building on previous analysis to support Australia in moving forward:

4. **Foster greater coherence and clarity between the different components** of the overall evaluation and assessment framework for school education by:

    - **Revisiting the guiding principles for the framework** to establish a shared understanding of the purpose of evaluation and assessment within the Australian school system.

    - **Reclarifying the role of different components and instruments** to better align intended purpose, technical value and use.

    - **Rebalancing the focus across different components** to better recognise, value and nurture teachers' critical role in assessing students, ensuring that nurturing this key capacity in teachers precedes and supports any possible effort to develop additional instruments for their use.

5. **Explore the strategic broadening of the evidence base** across the education system to better capture a holistic vision of student outcomes by:

    - **Monitoring student outcomes at individual level** as they move through the education system and beyond, in order to help prevent or address possible increasing learning gaps, including collecting comparable data on student well-being.

    - **Developing a picture of how vulnerabilities accumulate for students** through their interactions with their families, schools and communities.

GOVERNANCE: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY ACROSS ACTORS AT MULTIPLE LEVELS IN AUSTRALIA MEAN A NEED FOR CO-ORDINATION FOR WIDER REFORM

System governance in education in Australia varies by level and sector. The Commonwealth Government takes a more leading role in the governance of childcare and higher education, while States and territories have predominant responsibility for pre-school, schooling and vocational education. At these levels too, the Commonwealth Government collaborates with the sub-national governments to define national goals, priorities and reform actions in areas where national co-ordination is beneficial. Yet, with regards to school education at least, efforts to reach national consensus on goals and reform actions have not consistently translated into policy action. At Commonwealth level, entities involved in national education policy include:

- The *Department of Education*, which works in collaboration with all jurisdictions with shared responsibility for education policy for ECEC and schools and primary responsibility for higher education policy; the *Department of Employment and Workplace Relations* shares responsibility with States and territories for skills policy.

- The *National Federation Reform Council* (2020), the *Skills and Workforce National Cabinet Reform Committee* (2020), the *Skills Ministers' Meeting* and the *Education Ministers' Meeting,* which bring together key figures from the Commonwealth and State and territory governments to support inter-governmental decision making.

- The national quality regulators including the *Australian Children's Education Quality and Care Authority* (ACEQCA, 2011) for ECEC, the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency* (TEQSA, 2011) for tertiary education and the *Australian Skills Quality Authority* (AQSA, 2011) for vocational education.

- The *Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority* (ACARA), which develops curriculum, student assessment policies and national data collection (including NAPLAN), and reports on school outcomes.

- The *Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership* (AITSL), which is responsible for delivering national reforms involving standards for teachers and school leaders.

- The *Australian Education Research Organisation* (2020), Australia's national education evidence body and the *National Centre for Vocational Education Research (1981),* responsible for collecting, managing, analysing and communicating research and statistics on the VET sector.

- *Education Services Australia (2010),* a ministerial non-profit organisation, which works with education systems to develop data and assessment systems and digital resources and services to advance national priorities.

Key **education stakeholder bodies** in Australia include teacher unions (e.g. Australian Education Union, Independent Education Union), industry groups (e.g. Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Australian Industry Group), non-government associations (e.g. Independent Schools Council Australia), representative bodies for providers in ECEC, VET and higher education, and parents' groups. However, during the preparation of this report, the OECD formed the view that meaningful participation in decision making appears underdeveloped for certain stakeholders in Australia. This view is shared by other sources of evidence. At school level, in TALIS 2018, only 67% of teachers agreed that their school provides staff with opportunities to actively participate in school decisions, and 61% felt the same for students (OECD averages: 77% and 71%). At policy level, a [review](#) (2019) of the Australian Public Service across all sectors recommended strengthening capacity to shape and nurture stakeholder partnerships.

In Australia, **ECEC** is governed by both Commonwealth Government and State and territory laws. Services may be operated by a range of providers, such as government authorities or non-government schools, community-based organisations, or private-for-profit providers. The Commonwealth Government shares policy responsibility for childcare with States and territories, manages specialised education and care programmes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and provides funding to ACECQA. States and territories deliver pre-school education and develop the curriculum, and State and territory regulators ensure compliance with quality and safety requirements across ECEC. Despite the complex governance arrangements at this level, the National Quality Framework has helped provide national consistency in key areas (see 'Equity and Quality').

States and territories deliver education in **schools** and employ and manage school staff, regulating all government and non-government schools within their jurisdiction, and overseeing the management and administration of all school resources. Together, the Commonwealth, state and territory governments guide the objectives and orientation of the system as a whole. As such, school curriculum, professional standards for teachers and principals, and key equity goals are agreed upon nationally. The Commonwealth Government also has influence through conditions placed on the transfer of public funds for schools. Australia had a higher level of school autonomy than on average across the OECD in 2017: 52% of key decisions in education were taken at the school level (OECD average of 34%). In **VET**, governance structures are similar: VET is delivered in either Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes, which are government funded, or through registered training organisations (RTO), which may be privately or publicly funded; States and territories manage service delivery across all VET programmes in their jurisdiction.

The Australian Government, TEQSA, and higher education providers share decision making in **higher education**. Most universities were established under state or territory legislation, so state and territory governments also have a role in university governance. While the Australian Government has policy responsibility, most Australian universities have the authority to accredit their courses and are responsible for their academic standards and quality assurance.

Where does Australia stand on **governance**?

Key strengths

- A country-wide vision for education across levels and sectors is clearly defined and periodically reviewed to adapt education goals to a changing context.
- Interactions between Australian governments have been streamlined and formalised to support a focus on strategic priorities and emphasise the delivery of effective outcomes.

Key challenges

- National goals and reform agreements do not consistently translate into policy action at national or sub-national level, and consensus can break down as policy aims come up against the diversity of sub-national contextual realities.
- Beyond inter-governmental collaboration, there is scope to involve the existing broad range of actors more systematically and meaningfully both in policy processes and decision making at institution level.
- The diversity of actors playing a role in the delivery of education generally, but particularly in ECEC and VET, may contribute to variability in quality and inhibit capacity to reach certain priority equity groups.

Building on **national policy efforts in Australia** to move forward

Since 2010, **The Australian Curriculum** has set out the learning standards for students from Foundation to Year 10. It is a national curricular strategy that sets learning goals along three axes–cross-curriculum priorities, learning areas, and general capabilities–and has undergone regular revision since its implementation in 2010. Some States and territories adopt and adapt the national curriculum to reflect local contexts. The current version, Version 9.0, was adopted in April 2022, and will be implemented from 2023. The curriculum was updated to make it more manageable for teachers and to more clearly identify the essential content students should be learning. This is the first update of the curriculum to take place since late 2018 and will reflect findings of the 2020-21 Australian Curriculum Review (2022). Prior to the review of the Australian Curriculum, ACARA published the fifth version of **The Shape of the Australian Curriculum** (2020), which lays out the rationale dimensions and structure of the Australian Curriculum. This was the first such revision of The Shape of the Australian Curriculum since 2012, and notably reflects the most recent vision for Australian Education expressed in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (2019).

At ECEC level, the **National Quality Framework** (NQF, 2012) is an agreement between the Commonwealth Government and State and territory governments to jointly strive for stronger educational and developmental outcomes for children through ECEC settings. The agreement aims to harmonise standards for ECEC services, and State and territory regulatory authorities are responsible for evaluating services in their jurisdictions. The 2019 NQF Review made recommendations for regulatory change, including to strengthen the safety of children in ECEC services and improve oversight and compliance tools for regulatory authorities. Changes will come into effect across Australia in 2023.

The **National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development** (NASWD, 2009), agreed between national and state governments, defined education goals for VET systems. Progress towards these goals—which include reducing the number of Australians without at least a Certificate III qualification, increasing the number of Australians with higher-level qualifications, and improving outcomes for VET graduates—was monitored by the Productivity Commission. The NASWD was underpinned by a legislated Specific Purpose Payment requiring the Commonwealth to transfer approximately AUD 1.6 billion (indexed) to the States each year in effectively untied funding to assist with the costs of VET delivery. In 2020, the Productivity Commission reported that there had been mixed progress towards key performance targets of the NASWD. The Commission recognised improvements in the share of working-age adults with at least a Certificate III qualification and those with, or working towards, a non-school qualification; however, it also identified that targets to halve the share of Australians aged 20-64 without at least a Certificate III and to double the number of higher-level qualification completions had not been met. Furthermore, the share of employers who expressed that the training met their needs deteriorated. The Commission also found that implementation was hindered by targets that were too ambitious, quickly became irrelevant as reform consensus dissipated and were insufficiently tied to tangible policy commitments. In its interactions for the preparation of this report, the OECD also took note of perceived reform fatigue identified by some stakeholders. Skills Ministers and the National Cabinet have agreed a vision and guiding principles for the development of a new **National Skills Agreement**, including for longer-term reforms. Principles include higher-quality delivery, more equitable access and participation, stronger use of data to make informed decisions, and greater national consistency. It remains unclear, however, how the new agreement will overcome some of the implementation and accountability challenges experienced through the NASWD. Negotiations for this agreement will take place over 2023.

Building on **international experiences** to move forward

Introducing or enhancing quality assurance mechanisms was a commonly identified policy priority across education systems from 2008-19, with a key related principle of action being the development of quality standards (OECD, 2019[22]).

- **International example:** According to the OECD, the **Flemish Community of Belgium**'s OK quality framework (Referentiekader Onderwijskwaliteit, 2018) marks a significant shift in efforts to make accountability processes more meaningful for schools in a system where stakeholders value educational freedom. The framework was co-constructed by different education stakeholders with the aim of developing a common understanding of school quality. This process began with an in-depth literature review and a survey that gathered feedback from students, parents, teaching professionals, trade unions, and other key actors. The resulting framework presents 37 areas of educational quality which inform schools' quality and policy improvement path and the feedback they receive in inspections. Placing the development of the learner at the core of the framework generated a broad base of support among stakeholders, while the process of co-creation gives these stakeholders ownership. This can reduce the frustrations that arise when accountability is perceived to be purely based on compliancy. **[Read More]**.

- **Possible relevance for Australia:** Despite the significant differences in the scale of the Flemish and Australian education systems, the co-creation of a common language around educational quality could help to develop more constructive accountability relationships between schools, State and territory governments, and the Commonwealth Government. The OECD report also highlights the importance of shared ownership in building trust in a system with high school autonomy (Education Inspectorate, n.d.[77]).

Building stronger links between providers and employers is a key principle of action identified to support countries to address the commonly identified policy priority of reducing high levels of skills mismatch by making VET systems more labour market-relevant (OECD, 2018[27]).

- **International example:** **Germany**'s National Skills Strategy aims to improve co-ordination and co-operation between the different partners within an adult learning system that includes second-chance education, vocational upskilling and reskilling courses, short-cycle higher education, and informal learning. It brings together 17 key actors, including federal ministries and representatives of federal states, trade unions, employer organisations, and other social and economic partners. These partners have outlined a joint approach to responding to structural changes in the labour market brought on by digitalisation and automation, based on 10 overarching objectives with corresponding commitments (e.g. enhancing transparency of the training offer to support learners to identify suitable opportunities, expanding training provision in response to structural changes, and improving strategic foresight and the use of data). The process of developing and implementing these goals has helped to strengthen the governance of lifelong learning in Germany, and participating stakeholders reported to the OECD that they appreciated the platform for exchange and policy development. However, Germany has experienced challenges in agreeing concrete commitments among a diverse group of stakeholders **[Read More, 1, 2]**.

- **Possible relevance for Australia:** The National Skills Agreement. This collaborative governance framework provides a model that Australia could use to engage partners from the VET, higher education, and adult learning sectors and from different levels of government in setting shared goals for skills formation. At the same time, the German experience highlights the importance of setting concrete goals for different areas of action, defining a theory of change about how individual actions contribute to objectives, and developing meaningful indicators to monitor progress.

Engaging stakeholders in decision making was another common policy priority for education systems from 2008-19. Related principles of action include engaging parents, students and school communities and promoting networking or peer learning (OECD, 2019[22]).

- **International example:** **New Zealand**'s Education Work Programme (2018) drew on insights from the Education Conversation, a consultation exercise that involved 43 000 New Zealanders. The Ministry of Education made particular efforts to recruit participants from groups that have previously been underrepresented in the discussions about the future of education and learning, such as learners, parents, people with learning support needs and Indigenous groups. An online survey gathered the views of 16 000 respondents, while the Ministry organised face-to-face meetings with some communities. A diverse group of 1 400 education stakeholders took part in a 2-day education summit, where they worked in small groups to discuss ideas for the future of education around six overarching topics: Ways of Learning; Ways of Teaching; Lifelong Learning: Skills and Abilities; Enabling Self-Fulfilling lives; and Creating a Thriving Society. The current Education Work Programme (2021) seeks to address systemic issues such as falling levels of achievement in mathematics and science, declining rates of attendance, and high levels of bullying **[Read More]**.

- **Possible relevance for Australia:** In the context of Australia's preparations for the National School Reform Agreement, New Zealand's approach to engaging students and parents in goal setting and policy design could complement existing mechanisms for collaboration between the Commonwealth and State and territory governments, and with Indigenous groups. Involving these stakeholders in the later stages of the policy process, such as implementation and monitoring, could deepen their influence and role in the implementation of the reform and strengthen the evidence base for future policy making (OECD, 2020[78]).

Some policy pointers for action

As Australia endeavours to ensure government actors and other stakeholders across the education system work together in a co-ordinated, complementary and responsive manner to deliver on shared goals, some **policy pointers for governance** emerge, building on previous analysis to support Australia in moving forward:

6. **Capitalise on the negotiation of new national and bilateral agreements** for schools and skills in 2023 to explore new approaches that could favour more successful implementation by:

    - **Establishing a process where the goals are revisited and revised periodically** within their longer mandate**,** with the support of performance indicators against which progress can be benchmarked annually, to ensure greater responsiveness to a wider context of uncertainty and instability.

    - **Strengthening participation mechanisms of key stakeholders** (e.g. teachers, school leaders, providers and learners) to better take account of the kind of measures that could influence impactful change at ground level and better engage those actors in key reform processes for the next years.

FUNDING: ONGOING EFFORTS TO IMPROVE EQUITY, TRANSPARENCY AND EFFICIENCY IN FUNDING ALLOCATIONS, BUT DIMINISHING RETURNS PERSIST

Among OECD education systems from 2008-19, enhancing the **efficiency and equity of education spending** were key policy priorities (OECD, 2019[22]). As per the evidence reviewed and exchanges with Australian education actors, policy discussions around Australian education funding appear focused on both. Australia's overall expenditure on primary to tertiary education as a share of national wealth is high by international comparison, at 6.1% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019 (OECD average: 4.9%). However, student performance and equity outcomes (see 'Equity and Quality') suggest that funding is still not consistently used in the most impactful ways.

Per-student funding in Australia is consistently higher than the OECD average from primary to tertiary education but programmes prior to compulsory education and vocational programmes are less well-funded in international comparison. For example, in 2019, annual expenditure in Australia per student was USD 11 340 at primary level and USD 20 625 at tertiary level (including spending on research and development), compared to OECD averages of USD 9 923 and USD 17 559. In contrast, at ECEC level, per-student funding is below average, at USD 9 243 (OECD average: USD 10 724) with the deficit falling on the youngest children (i.e. those in early childhood educational development programmes as opposed to pre-primary). In addition, students in vocational programmes at upper secondary level in Australia are comparatively less well-funded, at USD 9 769 (OECD average: 12 465). Although this may in part be related to the nature of VET provision in Australia at this level (see 'Preparing Students for the Future'), short-cycle tertiary programmes and post-secondary non-tertiary programmes, often vocationally oriented, also received less funding per student in Australia than equivalent education programmes in many other OECD countries in 2019.

Australia has a relatively high share of primary to tertiary education expenditure coming from **private sources** (including international) at 33% (OECD average: 16%). They are particularly important in early childhood and higher education, where households contribute substantial shares. For example, at 35%, the relative share of private spending (after public to private transfers) on ECEC in Australia was high in 2019 (OECD average: 18%). Some measures exist to support families with these costs, namely the means-tested and activity-tested Child Care Subsidy (2018); expanding this is a policy commitment of the current Commonwealth Government (see 'National policy efforts').

Funding revenue and expenditure responsibilities for **primary and secondary schools** in Australia are shared between the Commonwealth Government and States and territories, and have been undergoing considerable reform in recent years. Transition to the new model is ongoing; in 2021, Commonwealth Government transfers accounted for around 18% of funds for government schools and 78% of funds for non-government schools, moving to 20% and 80% by 2023 (OECD, 2022[79]). For all schools, transfers to States and territories consist of per-student base funding with adaptations according to student and school characteristics. States and territories then allocate funds to non-government school authorities through restricted block grants, and to government schools either directly or via their own formula. The Australian Education Act (2013) requires States and territories to meet their minimum funding contribution requirements, as outlined in bilateral reform agreements with the Commonwealth Government as a condition for receiving Commonwealth funding. In addition, each State or territory is required to set out specific actions for boosting student performance as part of the bilateral agreements under the NSRA (see 'Governance'). In PISA 2018, Australian school leaders in disadvantaged schools, rural or public schools were more likely to report shortages than their peers in advantaged, city or private schools, by large margins (OECD, 2022[79]).

In **vocational education and training** in Australia, States and territories fund VET programmes with support from the Commonwealth Government, through the National Agreement on Skills and Workforce Development (see 'Preparing Students for the Future'), for around one-third of funding. A national VET Student Loans programme exists for tertiary-level qualifications, and collaborative initiatives between the Commonwealth and States and territories have seen a growing number of fee-free programmes available in high-demand areas.

Public funding of **higher education** in Australia comes predominantly from the Commonwealth Government, with 91% of initial funds originating from this level. Funding is allocated to institutions through various programmes, including the Commonwealth Grant Scheme, which subsidises course places and more targeted programmes for key equity groups (see 'Preparing Students for the Future') or priority courses. However, public funds account for only 34% of funding at tertiary level, with 51% coming from household contributions and 15% from other private sources in 2019. Australia belongs to a group of countries, along with Chile, England (United Kingdom), New Zealand and the United States, for which high education tuition fees are offset through the provision of high financial support to students. On average, in 2018, national students studying for a master's degree in Australia paid USD 9 006 for tuition in public institutions and USD 12 504 in private institutions. This represented an increase of 32% on fees charged in 2009/10. Nevertheless, the majority (83%) of national tertiary students benefitted from a loan in 2019/20 at an average annual amount of USD 3 925 per student. The average debt level at graduation was USD 19 819; repayment schemes are income-contingent. Other financial support is available through public scholarships (merit- and needs-based) and needs-based grants. Schemes include comprehensive programmes for specific pathways–such as the Youth Allowance for young apprentices and the Austudy for older students entering higher education–and targeted programmes and subsidies for specific groups, such as the Relocation Scholarship and the Tertiary Access Payment, which are particularly helpful for students from remote and rural areas, and the ABSTUDY benefits for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students.

Where does Australia stand on education funding?

Key strengths	Key challenges
• Australia dedicates a large share of national wealth to education. • A high relative share of private funds is offset by public subsidies in ECEC and tertiary education. • Targeted funding to support disadvantaged students, in particular Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students, exists from ECEC through to higher education.	• High spending on education has not always translated to improved student performance or equity across the system. • In terms of per-student funding, ECEC and VET programmes appear less well-funded than other programmes and education levels in Australia, despite being priority policy sectors. • Targeted equity funding still appears not to reach the students and schools who need it most in sufficient amounts to redress equity gaps, despite ongoing policy efforts.

Building on national policy efforts in Australia to move forward

The launch of the **Child Care Package** (2018) ushered in the introduction of the **Child Care Subsidy** (CCS) and the implementation of programmes under the **Child Care Safety Net**. The Child Care Subsidy aimed, in part, at addressing recommendations for greater simplicity, access, and flexibility in the ECEC system, with lower cost of childcare for eligible families via fee reductions paid directly to service providers. The changes also involved making the system more progressive, with an increase in the subsidy available to most lower-income families, and a decrease in that available for most higher-income families. The CCS is available for all approved childcare services, including long-day-care and family day care. Currently, the CCS subsidises costs for all eligible families for up to 30 hours of childcare a week; further subsidies are household income-dependent. Beyond the Child Care Subsidy, programmes under the Child Care Safety Net provide targeted assistance to ensure inclusion and access to quality ECEC, in particular for children from disadvantaged communities (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2021[80]). However, a 2020 review found that even after subsidies, the cost of childcare in Australia continues to dissuade some families from placing their child in ECEC. From March 2022, changes to the CCS increased the subsidy for second children and children aged five and under. From July 2023, the maximum CCS rate will be lifted to 90% for families earning AUD 80 000 or less, and the subsidy rates increased for families earning less than AUD 530 000.

The **Preschool Reform Funding Agreement** (2022-2025), combines a AUD 1 340 funding commitment per child from the Commonwealth Government through the end of 2025, with reform targets to improve child participation, maximise the benefits of preschool by improving outcomes, along with preschool data. Its predecessor, the National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (UANP) (2018-21), was found to have led to different costs for families as States and territories were granted wide flexibility with the funding they received. The new Agreement requires States and territories to pass on the per-child contribution received from the Commonwealth to benefit children in the pre-school setting they attend. Also, State and territory governments are responsible for preschool delivery and may pursue reform over and above national settings at their own discretion. For example, in 2019 the ACT aimed that from the beginning of 2020, 3-year-olds most in need—specifically, families experiencing disadvantage and vulnerability—would be able to access 15 hours per week, 600 hours per year of free, quality early childhood education (see here). In 2022, New South Wales and Victoria made similar announcements, with substantial future investment to expand preschool offerings to 30 hours per week and increase access for 3-year-olds.

Australia has made efforts to move from highly heterogeneous funding systems, determined largely at state and territory level, to a more nationally consistent system compatible with regional diversity. National analysis shows that historical arrangements have led to overfunding in the non-government school sector, with underfunding in the government school sector. School-age education in Australia has been the subject of extensive study in the form of two landmark reports prepared in 2011 and 2017/18 ('Gonski reviews'). The first report provided the foundation for The Australian Education Act 2013, which set a school funding model. Named the **Schooling Resource Standard (SRS)** (2014), it defines a basic amount of funding per student that varies according to education level, and six additional needs-based loadings based on student and school characteristics. The SRS estimates how much total public funding any school (including non-government) in Australia would require to meet its students' basic needs and the educational outcomes expected by the government (i.e. 80% or more students achieve minimum learning standards in NAPLAN on average over 3 years). For non-government schools, the SRS is reduced according to the "capacity to contribute" of each school's community, calculated since 2020 through a direct measure of parental income. Implementation of the new funding model has been incremental. Reflecting established responsibilities for school funding, the Commonwealth will fund at least 20% of the SRS for government schools and 80% of the SRS for non-government schools by 2023. Schools that have been historically funded below the new share should transition to it by 2023, while schools funded in excess will transition by 2029. State and territory governments have agreed to minimum funding contributions, expressed as percentages of the SRS, in bilateral agreements with the Commonwealth under the National School Reform Agreement [**Read More**]. Concomitantly, States and territories will continue to have flexibility to distribute Commonwealth Government funding differently to the SRS allocation via their own needs-based funding models.

Building on **international experiences** to move forward

Increasing or maintaining educational expenditure was a common policy priority for education systems from 2008-19. Related principles of action include introducing new funding at early education levels or reorienting funding to these levels from higher levels. This follows empirical evidence that the highest returns to education are seen in the earliest years (2019[22]).

- **International example:** Since 2019, **Germany** has focused policy efforts in ECEC (0-6 year-olds) on raising quality while increasing affordability. The Good Daycare Facilities Act (2019), a joint, multi-year quality process by the federal government and Länder, sees EUR 5.5 billion in federal funds directed to programmes designed and delivered at Länder level over four years. These programmes must address one or more priority areas agreed upon by the federal and sub-national governments from a pool of ten quality goals co-constructed with relevant municipal authorities, social partners, academics and other partner organisations. At the same time, the Act introduced a nationwide obligation for Länder to implement means-tested parental contributions, and to ensure that families receiving social welfare payments are exempt; 11 Länder made further commitments to increasing affordability in their bilateral agreements. By 2022, just under 100% of municipalities had introduced means-based parental contributions, although criteria varied. The first evaluation report (2021) notes that some Länder have committed to extending their efforts beyond the term of the initial agreement by codifying certain provisions in law. It also identifies the financing model (e.g. upwards goal-finding process, action and financing concept for the bilateral agreements) as an innovative solution to pursuing equity while preserving diversity in a federal system [**Read More**].

- **Possible relevance for Australia:** As part of the current Commonwealth Government's commitment to increase the affordability of childcare, Australia could usefully combine financial investment with strategic efforts to raise quality and national minimum requirements with state-level additional commitments as Germany has done. Moreover, the example illustrates how agreements can be developed for the entire ECEC age range; in Australia the National Pre-School Reform Agreement focuses specifically on the year immediately preceding primary education.

Improving equity in resource allocation was another commonly identified policy priority across education systems from 2008-19. Providing targeted support to disadvantaged population sub-groups is a key principle of action, while related international policy trends include support for socio-economically disadvantaged children and schools (OECD, 2019[22]).

- **International example:** In **England** (United Kingdom), the Pupil Premium programme (2011) assigns additional earmarked equity funding from central government directly to schools (both local authority schools and academies) for each eligible student according to socio-economic criteria (e.g. children on free school meals, children who are in the care of their local authority). This enables school leadership teams to tailor interventions to their context. To help them use the money effectively, schools can commission pupil premium school reviews led by a school leader with experience of improving learning outcomes for disadvantaged students, and consult a library of practice-based evidence led by the Education Endowment Foundation. Schools are held accountable through a mandatory statement on the school website explaining how they are using the funds, school inspections, and performance tables. The programme has been widely evaluated: recent independent analysis (2022) concludes that it has reduced the clustering of disadvantaged students in primary and secondary schools and reduced the attainment gap at primary level, with less clear improvements at secondary level, partly inhibited by changes to assessment practices. The programme has been expanded, both in terms of widening eligibility and increasing funding, several times [**Read More**].

- **Possible relevance for Australia:** Similarities in both the school funding and governance structures (i.e. needs-based formulae, centrally-funded schools and locally/regionally-funded schools) between England and Australia and shared challenges (i.e. social segregation and attainment gaps between different groups of students) mean there is great opportunity for peer learning. The Pupil Premium programme illustrates how school funding can be more closely tied to equity outcomes while enhancing school-level practices that can benefit the entire student cohort.

Enhancing efficiency in the use of resources was an international policy priority reported by both the OECD and participating education systems from 2008-19. Introducing performance-based funding in post-secondary and higher education was identified as a related policy trend over the same period (OECD, 2019[22]).

- **International example:** Finland introduced a reform of VET funding (2018) which streamlined funding for vocational upper secondary, apprenticeships and adult learning into a single entity model divided into four strands. Strategic planning receives up to 4% of the total budget; the remaining share is split between core (70%), performance-based (20%–according to completed qualifications and modules) and effectiveness-based (10%–according to student feedback on access to employment and further studies). The new system will be fully operational from 2023. The OECD reported that the performance component incentivises providers to better support students, while the effectiveness component encourages collaboration with employers. However, the OECD also warned of the need for close monitoring to avoid efforts to game the system [**Read More**].

- **Possible relevance for Australia:** As the current Commonwealth Government looks to enhance funding for vocational education considerably, it will be important to ensure that funding structures incentivise high-quality delivery on both learning and employment outcomes.

Some policy pointers for action

As Australia aims to improve the efficiency and equity of education spending, some **policy pointers for funding** emerge, building on previous analysis to support Australia in moving forward:

7. **Direct funding strategically** to areas where it can have the highest positive impact on educational outcomes by:

   - **Allocating better funding for ECEC and vocational education** in further education expenditure increases, to ensure it adequately reflects the political prioritisation and high returns to ECEC and vocational education, both for individuals and society, and with regards to education and employment.

   - **Examining the need for further approaches to equity funding** at school level, complementing needs-based allocations, for example, with earmarked funds. These additional targeted resources could be used in ways that make the system more responsive to more nuanced needs in specific contexts.

   - **Continuing to explore ways of allocating funding to evidence-informed impactful or innovative approaches** that are conducive to both better and more equitable outcomes for students, their learning environments, and their communities.

ANNEX A: STRUCTURE OF AUSTRALIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM
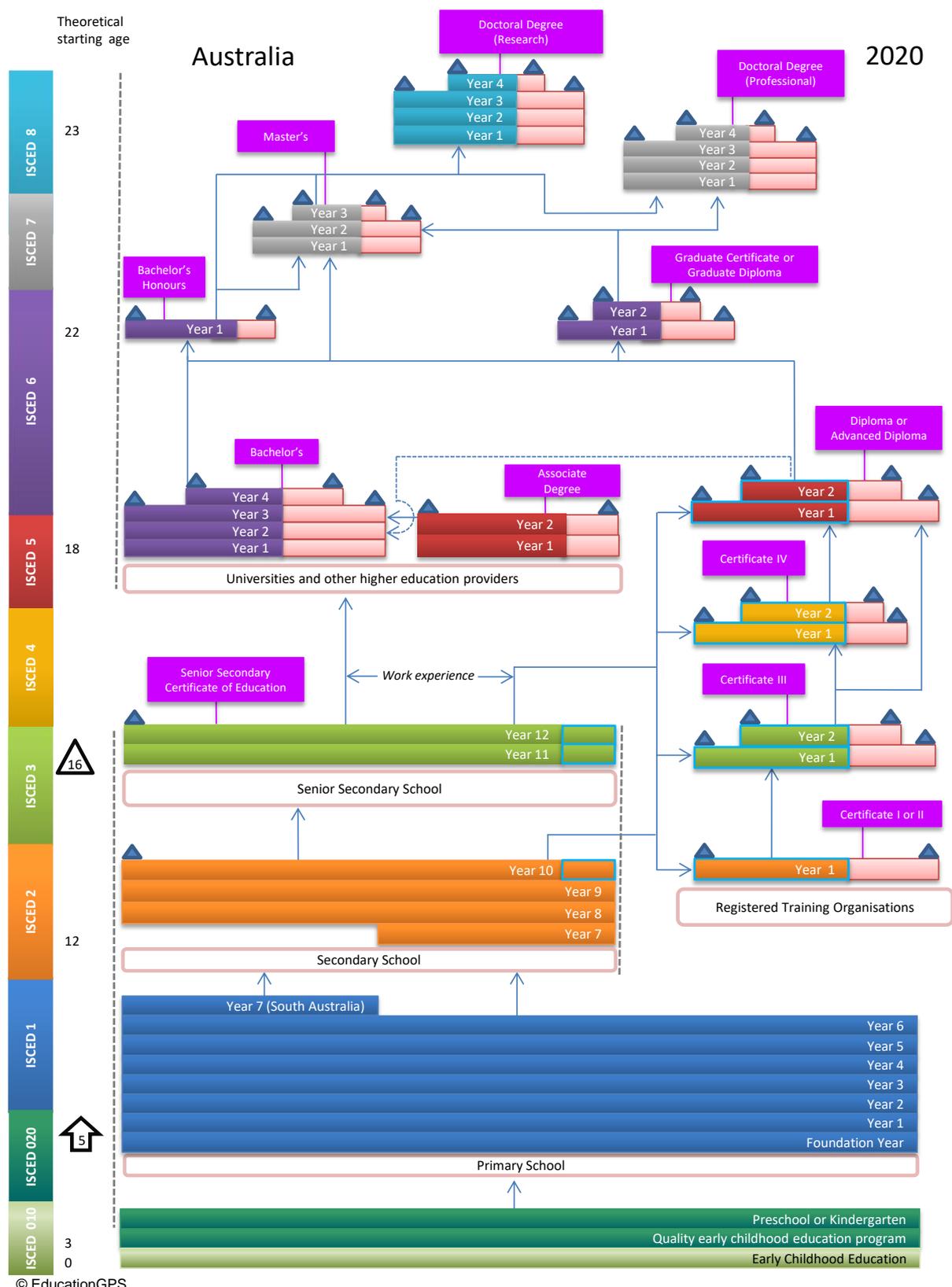
Note: The key for the interpretation of this table is available at the source link below.

Source: OECD (2020[81])**,** "Australia: Overview of the Education System", OECD Education GPS, https://gpseducation.oecd.org/Content/MapOfEducationSystem/AUS/AUS_2011_EN.pdf (accessed on 19 January 2023).

ANNEX B: STATISTICS

	List of key indicators[1,2]	Australia	Average or total	Min OECD	Max OECD
	Background information (OECD Statistics)				
1	GDP per capita in equivalent USD converted using PPPs, 2021	61 977	48 958	17 437	131 278
2	GDP growth, 2021	3.6%	5.6%	1.7%	13.6%
3	Population density, inhab/km[2], 2021	3	38	3	521
4	Population aged less than 15 as a share of total population, 2021	18.5	17.6	11.8	27.9
5	Foreign-born population as a share of total population, 2019	29.9	m	2.0	47.3
	Education outcomes				
6	Mean performance in reading (PISA 2018)	503	487	412	523
7	Average three-year trend in reading performance (PISA 2018)[3,4]	**-4.4**	0.4	**-4.9**	**7.1**
	Average three-year trend in mathematics performance (PISA 2018)[3,4]	**-7.2**	-0.6	**-9.1**	**6.4**
	Average three-year trend in science performance (PISA 2018)[3,4]	**-6.5**	-1.9	**-10.7**	**6.4**
8	Share of 3 to 5-year-olds enrolled in ECE (ISCED 0) and primary education, 2020 (EAG 2022)	81.6%	87.4%	42.2%	100%
9	***Educational attainment of the population aged 25-34 by type of attainment, 2021 (EAG 2022)***				
	At least upper secondary education	91.0%	86.3%	55.0%	98.0%
	Tertiary education	54.3%	46.9%	27.1%	69.3%
	Vocational upper-secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education	19.6%	23.7%	1.5%	49.3%
10	***Unemployment rates of 25-34 year-olds by educational attainment, 2021 (EAG 2022)***				
	Below upper secondary	10.1%	15.0%	3.9%	39.1%
	Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary	5.4%	8.4%	3.5%	20.4%
	Tertiary education	3.5%	5.9%	1.5%	20.4%
	Students				
	Policy lever 1: Equity and quality				
11	First age of selection in the education system (PISA 2018)	16	14	10	16
12	Share of students performing below Level 2 in reading (PISA 2018)	19.6%	22.6%	11.1%	49.9%
	Share of students performing at Level 5 or above in reading (PISA 2018)	13.0%	8.7%	0.8%	15.0%
13	Isolation index in schools for high-achieving students in reading as compared to all other students (PISA 2018)[5]	0.15	0.21	0.07	0.39
	Isolation index in schools for socio-economically disadvantaged students as compared to all other students (PISA 2018)[5]	0.20	0.17	0.09	0.27
14	Share of students reporting having repeated at least a grade in primary, lower secondary or upper secondary education (PISA 2018)	5.9	11.4	0.9	40.8
15	Share of variance in reading performance in PISA explained by the index of economic, social and cultural status (PISA 2018)	10.1%	12.0%	6.2%	19.1%
16	Score difference between girls and boys in reading (PISA 2018)[3]	**31**	**30**	**10**	**52**
	Policy lever 2: Preparing students for the future				
17	Adjusted mean proficiency in literacy among 16-64 year-olds on a scale of 500 (Survey of Adult Skills, PIAAC, 2012)	280.4	267.7	220.1	296.2
18	Difference in literacy scores between youngest (25-34) and oldest (55-65) adults (Survey of Adult Skills, PIAAC, 2012)	10.9	15.6	-8.3	37.6
19	***Share of students in upper secondary education, by programme orientation, in 2020 (EAG 2022)***				
	General programmes	48.6%	57.7%	29.2%	91.5%
	Vocational programmes	51.4%	42.3%	8.5%	70.8%
	Share of students enrolled in combined school- and work-based programmes as a percentage of all students enrolled in vocational education[6]	31.0%	m	1.9%	100.0%
20	First-time graduation rates from tertiary education for students below the age of 30, excluding international students, 2020 (EAG 2022)[7]	36.6%	37.8%	5.9%	59.1%
21	Share of 18-24 year-olds not in education, employment or training, 2021 (EAG 2022)	11.3%	16.1%	4.6%	32.2%

List of key indicators	Australia	Average or total	Min OECD	Max OECD
Institutions				
Policy lever 3: School improvement				
The learning environment (PISA 2018)				
22 Mean index of teacher support in language-of-instruction lessons	0.25	0.01	-0.61	0.47
Mean index of students' sense of belonging	-0.19	0.00	-0.28	0.46
23 Share of principals reporting that teachers have the necessary skills to integrate digital devices in instruction	67.7%	64.6%	27.3%	84.1%
Share of principals reporting that the types of engagement occur "quite a bit" or "a lot" (TALIS 2018)				
24 Parental/guardian involvement in school activities	35.8%	47.9%	22.5%	89.2%
School co-operation with the local community	76.0%	71.6%	26.2%	97.8%
25 Average class size in lower secondary public schools, 2019 (EAG 2021)[8]	22	23	16	36
26 Ratio of actual teachers' salaries [2021] to earnings for full-time, full-year adult workers with tertiary education [2020], lower secondary education, general programmes (EAG 2022)	0.99	0.90	0.60	1.47
27 Share of teachers who believe the teaching profession is valued in society (TALIS 2018)	44.7%	25.8%	4.5%	67.0%
Policy lever 4: Evaluation and assessment				
28 ***Share of students in schools where the following arrangements aimed at quality assurance and improvement are used, either mandatorily or on the schools' initiative (PISA 2018)***				
Internal/Self-evaluation	99.2%	94.7%	46.1%	100.0%
External evaluation	91.6%	76.9%	8.5%	100.0%
29 Mean index of perceived teacher feedback (PISA 2018)	0.35	0.01	-0.41	0.53
30 Share of lower secondary teachers whose school principals report formally appraising their teachers at least once a year (TALIS 2018)	44.5%	63.5%	11.3%	98.1%
Systems				
Policy lever 5: Governance				
31 ***Percentage of decisions taken at each level of government in public lower secondary education, 2017 (EAG 2018)***				
Central	0.0%	23.8%	0.0%	83.3%
State	47.9%	10.3%	0.0%	62.5%
Regional/Sub-regional	a	4.9%	0.0%	33.3%
Local	a	13.3%	0.0%	71.9%
School	52.1%	34.0%	0.0%	91.7%
Multiple levels	0.0%	13.8%	0.0%	100.0%
Policy lever 6: Funding				
32 Expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP (from primary to tertiary), 2019 (EAG 2022)	6.1%	4.9%	3.2%	6.6%
33 ***Annual expenditure per student by educational institutions, for all services, in equivalent USD converted using PPPs for GDP, 2019 (EAG 2022)***				
Pre-primary education	9 599	9 598	1 450	21 938
Primary education	11 340	9 923	2 977	22 203
Lower secondary education	14 494	11 417	2 546	25 141
Upper secondary education	13 487	11 711	3 406	24 381
Tertiary education	20 625	17 559	4 192	51 978
34 ***Relative proportions of expenditure on educational institutions (primary to tertiary) in 2019 (EAG 2022)***				
Public sources	67.0%	82.5%	63.6%	97.3%
All private sources (includes international sources)	33.0%	16.4%	1.7%	36.4%

Notes:

1. The average, total, minimums and maximums refer to OECD education systems except in the Survey of Adult Skills where they refer to participating countries. For indicators 6, 12 and 15-16 the average value refers to the arithmetic mean across all OECD Member countries (and Colombia), excluding Spain.

2. "m" is included when data is not available; "NP" is included if the country is not participating in the study; "a": included when the category is not applicable.

3. Statistically significant values are shown in bold (PISA only).

4. The average three year trend is the average change in PISA score points from a country's/economy's earliest participation to PISA 2018.

5. The isolation indices range from 0 to 1, with 0 corresponding to no segregation and 1 to full segregation.

6. Calculations based on data available in OECD.stat.

7. OECD average not available for countries and economies with data available for 2020.

8. Data for Australia should be considered indicative only and should not be taken to represent actual class size.

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NOTES

1. On 25 May 2018, the OECD Council invited Colombia to become a Member. While Colombia is included in the OECD averages reported in this publication for data from Education at a Glance, the Programme for International Student Assessment and the Teaching and Learning International Survey, at the time of preparation of these OECD datasets, Colombia was in the process of completing its domestic procedures for ratification and the deposit of Colombia's instrument of accession to the OECD Convention was pending.

2. The participation rate of Australia in this question was too low to ensure comparability.

This Education Policy Perspective has been authorised by Andreas Schleicher, Director of the Directorate for Education and Skills, OECD.

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