

Pay teachers according to expertise, report finds

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Australia aims to be ranked among the top five countries in the world by 2025 for student performance in reading, science and maths literacy. Credit: AAP Image/Dan Peled

Governments should invest in postgraduate school teacher education and primary-level specialist teachers in maths and science, according to a new green paper released today by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education.

The Asian Century White Paper set out an aim of having Australia rank as a top five country in the world for [student performance](#) in reading, science and maths literacy by 2025 but several policy changes are urgently needed to meet that goal, the new paper said.

The researchers called for policies that:

- differentiate teacher pay according to levels of expertise
- broaden selection into [teacher education](#) courses, to include non-academic attributes such as communication skills and resilience
- include more professional development for school teachers based on interpreting assessment data, targeted instruction and collaboration
- introduce effective instructional preparation for leaders and aspiring leaders, based on the Australian Professional Standard for Principals

What does not work

The paper also included a section on what has not worked, saying that much of recent debate on education policy has centred on what Finnish education expert Pasi Sahlberg has called the Global Educational Reform Movement.

"This agenda, which is informed by market-based notions of choice, competition, accountability and [standardisation](#), has been replicated unsuccessfully by a number of Western countries, none of which are high performers internationally," the report said.

"These policies are based on an argument that schools, like businesses, should thrive depending on their ability to meet or create consumer demands. This leads to providing autonomy to [local schools](#), enhancing choice for parents, and the provision of more information, so that

consumers can drive out the bad schools and support development of good schools. While this approach may seem logical, it has a number of issues."

Among the problems were:

- **Autonomy:** "Arguments in favour of autonomy ignore that Australia already has high levels of autonomy in our system, and this has not addressed many of the issues our schools face," the report said.
- **Test-based accountability:** "While there are a number of reasons for introducing national testing, including providing data for the Government's school improvement agenda and offering accountability to taxpayers, national testing has not yet driven any improvements in student learning. Assessment for accountability does not improve student outcomes," the report said.
- **Promotion of choice:** "The promotion of school choice initiatives overseas, such as charter schools in the US and free schools in England and Wales, have failed to make the improvements promised. Instead of focusing on autonomy, choice and creating a 'market' of schooling (which entrenches disadvantage), Australia should focus on making every neighbourhood school excellent," the report said.

Collaboration, not competition

Adam Smith, a board member at Australian Council for Educational Research said there was a need for different forms of assessing the capacity of people wanting to enter the teaching profession.

"We know, for example, that less than 30% of entrants into the teaching profession come through the ATAR score," he said.

Mr Smith said that policy should not foster a culture of competition between schools.

"I think there's actually great value in having a system of school education, and that our focus needs to be on collaboration and not on competition. Part of this report makes a point around some of the highest performing systems in the world have less of a focus on competition, and I think that is really critical," he said.

Stop the drift

Rachel Wilson, a senior lecturer in educational assessment and evaluation at the University of Sydney welcomed the report.

"The need to focus on building a teaching profession of high calibre individuals is the most important focus. There is substantial evidence of an overall decline in mean percentile rankings for teacher education entry since 1983 – the drift has to stop," she said.

"This year, substantial numbers of teacher education students in NSW undergraduate programs have ATARS in the bottom quartile. If this persists, we cannot hope to maintain our standards, or compete internationally, never mind address the 2025 goals."

She said any shift to provide differential teacher pay must be done in a meaningful way.

"We need to shift from checklist, CV-style approaches to more practice oriented accreditation with observation in schools and this could be linked to within school teacher-to-teacher and principal observation appraisals, as well as through an external assessor," she said.

Dr Richard Niesche, an [education policy](#) expert from the University of

Queensland said the report's call for leadership development for teachers needed to be focused squarely on social justice and equity goals.

"I think too often leadership is geared towards efficiency and effectiveness rather than alleviating disadvantage. We know disadvantage and inequality are huge problems in our education system and as such school leadership needs to have at its core, principles of equity and social justice," he said.

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