

National Statement of Commitment to Transform Education

Australia recognises the power of education to transform lives and, through targeted actions and continuous improvement, is committed to meeting Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 as a global benchmark for ensuring inclusive and equitable access to quality education and promoting lifelong learning.

Australia recognises the interconnected nature of the SDGs, that represent the agreed standards and values of the international development system. Australia will engage with UNESCO and member states to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and advance a more inclusive and equitable future for learners, particularly through initiatives that respond to the technological changes accelerated by the pandemic to capitalise on the benefits of the digital age.

Australia meets the majority of targets under SDG 4 and we are committed to continuous improvement to exceed all targets. We will do this by prioritising increased education participation and outcomes for vulnerable, disadvantaged and underrepresented learners, through collaboration between sub-national governments, peak bodies, industry associations, teachers and students. Reflecting on the global pandemic, we recognise the importance of prioritising student and staff mental and physical wellbeing in quality education delivery and ensuring resilient education systems.

Australia works internationally, especially within the Indo-Pacific region, to drive outcomes for inclusive and equitable quality education. Australia's development investments are strongly committed to improving foundational skills and learning, particularly for girls, First Nations students, and children with disability. Australia also works to develop tools that enable countries to monitor progress against SDG 4. Australia contributes to initiatives such as the Global Partnership for Education to support a safer and more prosperous region.

Improving outcomes for young learners

Australia is committed to the ongoing implementation of the Alice Springs (Mpartnwe) Education Declaration as our national vision for education to improve outcomes for young Australians. The Declaration has two goals: (i) promoting excellence and equity in education, and (ii) all young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.

Australia's commitment to transform education begins with a sustained reform effort in early childhood education. This includes targets such as a minimum of 15 hours of preschool a week for all children in the year before they start school, improving children's preparedness for school, and developing ways to measure the benefits of preschool.

Australia's targets for school education continually evolve in response to trends, challenges, opportunities and evidence-based data identifying where improvements can be made. The Australian Education Research Organisation contributes to this by producing high quality evidence on education practice and policy. Additionally, the current National School Reform Agreement (2019 – 2023) outlines national goals and targets to improve student outcomes and achieve excellence in classrooms, which are measured annually.

Australia monitors and evaluates our progress against these goals through mechanisms such as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), which assesses students twice each in primary and high school. NAPLAN results demonstrate that more students are achieving minimum standards over time, with at least 89 per cent of all students meeting these standards for reading and numeracy.

Equitable and inclusive access to quality education

Australia prioritises initiatives that identify and address barriers to accessing education, acknowledging that some Australians continue to experience barriers to participating in quality education and lifelong learning. These groups include First Nations learners, learners with disability, learners in regional and remote areas, learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and learners that are culturally and linguistically diverse. Australia is committed to working with education providers and communities to encourage learners from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups to engage in education, including boosting higher education and vocational education and training participation and outcomes. High quality education can have life-changing impacts for many students from underrepresented groups, where they may be the first in their families to complete secondary school or access tertiary studies.

The Australian Government has a particular focus on lifting the educational outcomes of our First Nations population, with all Australian governments endorsing the 2020 National Agreement on Closing the Gap. We are working to establish the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership so all Australian governments can work in genuine partnership with First Nations peoples to drive community-led early childhood outcomes. The Australian Government funds measures to lift First Nations student outcomes, attendance and engagement in school, with a target of increasing the proportion of First Nations people attaining year 12 or equivalent to 96 per cent by 2031. These initiatives include improving remote school infrastructure, creating partnerships between high-performing metropolitan and regional and remote schools, and scaling up primary school reading programs.

Australia supports people with disability achieve their full potential through measures that focus on quality, inclusivity, and accessible education and lifelong learning. Under *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031*, all Australian governments have committed to build capability in delivering inclusive education to improve educational outcomes for school students with disability, as well as improving the transition of young people with disability from education to employment.

The Australian Government is implementing the recommendations of a 2020 review of the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*. This work aims to enable learners with disability to access and participate in education on the same basis as their peers without disability, through supporting learners, families and education providers to understand their rights and obligations. As children and young people with disability have been among the most vulnerable during the pandemic, in 2022 the Australian Government Department of Education will commence a review of the impact of COVID on students with disability, informed by the experiences of students, their families and educators.

Australia is also focused on accessible early childhood education and care. The Australian Government has committed to make it more affordable for Australian families by increasing the maximum Child Care Subsidy to 90 per cent for the first child in care, meaning that 96 per cent of families using child care and claiming the subsidy will receive greater financial assistance.

To respond to current and emerging skills needs, Australia recognises the need to support equitable access to lifelong learning, including formal learning such as higher education and vocational education and training, as well as informal and non-formal learning. Lifelong learning has an important role in helping disadvantaged community members, for example, through improving adult literacy and numeracy, and developing digital literacy.

Teacher workforce challenges

Teachers have the greatest in-school influence on student achievement. Australia is committed to ensuring high quality teaching and learning. As a part of achieving this, all Australian teachers are required to have an accredited higher education qualification. However, shortages in the supply of teachers is a challenge

that affects school communities across Australia, particularly in regional and remote locations and in some subject areas.

Australia is addressing the issue of teacher demand, supply and retention through a National Teacher Workforce Action Plan, to increase the number of people entering and remaining in the profession. This Plan will prioritise elevating the profession, improving teacher supply, strengthening initial teacher education, maximising the time to teach and better understanding future teacher workforce needs. Other initiatives include awarding bursaries to high-performing school leavers to complete a teaching degree, providing additional incentives for teachers who undertake placements in rural, regional, and remote schools, practical and paid work experience during studies, and expanding pathways into teaching for mid-career professionals in other fields.

It is also important that teachers are equipped to support culturally diverse students. The Australian Government supports enhanced cultural competency in the Australian teaching workforce, and has commissioned a project to better support teachers and school leaders to critically understand, continually develop, and effectively enact their cultural competency.

Australia is also experiencing early childhood education and care workforce shortages with a growing demand for Bachelor-degree qualified staff, particularly in remote locations. The Australian Government is working in partnership with state and territory governments and peak bodies to progress the next steps of the National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy, following its release in October 2021.

Education transformation for the future

Technology will continue to be a central part of learning as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. We recognise that education transformation in the digital age – which includes developments such as artificial intelligence, machine learning and big data – needs to be just and equitable, enabling improved educational outcomes for all.

From 2023, the Australian Curriculum will include an expanded Digital Literacy component to ensure teachers better understand how school students can confidently use technology. This will ensure students develop digital skills in addition to literacy and numeracy, as well as support capability development for high quality and engaging online learning offerings.

Australia is committed to harnessing the benefits of new approaches to delivering education, including for students in disadvantaged communities. We note that while the digital transformation of education presents many opportunities for enhancing access to education, it also risks exacerbating existing inequities, and there are challenges with ensuring vulnerable and disadvantaged populations have access to the infrastructure they need. Increasingly, we will need to manage other challenges, including cybersecurity, digital ethics, privacy and online safety.

Lifelong learning can support all learners to become informed and active global citizens, with the skills to respond to the social, economic, environmental and technological challenges of the future. Australia is embracing innovative and flexible learning options for education delivery – such as online and hybrid learning models, and micro-credentials – as mechanisms to address current and emerging skill needs through quick and flexible options for upskilling and reskilling.