

Friday 13 September 2019

Education Updates

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General Achievement Test to be Revamped in 2021

The Victorian Government is continuing with its plans to overhaul the general achievement test for VCE and VCAL students, according to a report in *The Age*. [Click here to read more...](#)

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The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) latest education snapshot says teacher salaries in Australia are 'among the highest across OECD countries at all levels of education'. [Click here to read more...](#)

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Labor to Support Choice and Affordability Fund – Media Report

The Guardian has reported that Labor will not support a Greens motion in the Senate to disallow the Australian Government's \$1.2 billion Choice and Affordability Fund.

The fund is part of the school funding model announced by Prime Minister Scott Morrison last year (see [Weekly Briefing 26/2018](#)). It was intended to address:

specific challenges in the non-government school sector, such as supporting schools in drought-affected areas, schools that need help to improve performance and to deliver choice in communities.

Australian Shadow Education Minister Tanya Plibersek said before the Federal election that while Labor would match the government's funding for non-government schools, she had concerns about the fund and its modelling (see [Weekly Briefing 12/2019](#)).

This week, two days after Greens Senator [Mehreen Faruqi moved](#) that the funding package be disallowed, Ms Plibersek [told the parliament](#) that Labor welcomed the 'restoration of funding' to non-government schools, saying that what was 'critically missing' in the budget was the restoration of 'funding cuts from public schools'.

The Guardian reported that Senator Faruqi criticised Labor for helping the government implement a 'private school slush fund that has no justification, no accountability and no guarantee the cash won't go to subsidising fees for wealthy private schools'.

- Labor defends \$1.2bn private school package it previously called a 'slush fund'. *The Guardian*, 10 September 2019

Eastern States Proceed with NAPLAN Review

The Victorian, New South Wales and Queensland governments say their upcoming review of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) will determine if the program is meeting the needs of governments and school communities, or if it should be replaced.

The three states have pushed ahead with their plan to review NAPLAN despite, opposition from the Australian Government (see [Weekly Briefing 19/2019](#)).

According to the [newly released terms of reference](#), the review will determine what standardised testing should aim to achieve and how well NAPLAN meets those ends. It will consider how the program aligns with the curriculum, and how it compares with effective standardised testing programs elsewhere in the world.

The review will also look at the impact of the tests on school communities, and how to keep schools and students engaged in the program.

The review panel will include former Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) chair, Professor Barry McGaw, Professor Claire Wyatt-Smith, and Professor William Loudon. It will present interim findings in December, before delivering its final report in June 2020.

Victorian Education Minister James Merlino said the review might recommend 'scrapping NAPLAN all together and replacing it with something new' but said some form of standardised testing 'would always' be needed.

Australian Education Minister [Dan Tehan said on ABC AM](#) that there were already two reviews of NAPLAN underway – one on the transition to NAPLAN Online, and another on how NAPLAN results were presented – and that the states would do better to focus on the results, instead of 'obsessing' over the test.

- NAPLAN overhaul bid. Adam Carey, *The Age*, 12 September 2019
- Review triggers race to dumb down standards. Kevin Donnelly, *The Australian*, 13 September 2019
- Obsess on results, not NAPLAN, states told. Rebecca Urban, *The Australian*, 13 September 2019
- Interview with Dan Tehan, Sabra Lane, *ABC AM*, 13 September 2019

General Achievement Test to be Revamped in 2021

The Victorian Government is continuing with its plans to overhaul the general achievement test (GAT) for VCE and VCAL students, according to a report in *The Age*.

The government promised to update the GAT at the 2018 Victorian election, as part of a broader pledge to revamp the VCE and VCAL system (see [Weekly Briefing 29/2018](#)).

VCAL students will be expected to sit the GAT as well as VCE students, and it will be modified to include assessments of literacy and numeracy. From 2021, GAT results will include whether students had met the literacy and numeracy standards.

The Age reported that Mr Merlino said the three-hour GAT would be broken in two parts, to 'make it easier for students to demonstrate their skills and abilities', and that the new test would be 'trialled extensively' next year before being fully implemented in 2021

- New test for Year 11 and 12 students. Adam Carey, *The Age*, 10 September 2019

Victoria a 'safer place for children' after Confessional Laws Pass Parliament

Priests will face criminal charges if they fail to report child abuse, even if it is disclosed during confession, after legislation removing reporting exemptions for priests passed the Victorian Parliament.

The [Children Legislation Amendment Bill 2019](#) passed the upper house with bipartisan support and without amendment, less than a month after it was introduced into parliament by the Minister for Child Protection, Mr Luke Donnellan (see [Weekly Briefing 23/2019](#)).

It adds people in religious ministries to the list of those who must report a 'reasonable belief of physical or sexual child abuse' to child protection authorities, and removes exemptions in the current legislation that allowed Catholic priests to keep confessions of abuse made during reconciliation secret.

[Mr Donnellan said](#) the 'special treatment for churches has ended', and that Victoria had become 'a safer place for children'.

Senior Catholic clergy, however, say priests will not reveal what has been told to them in confession, even if it means going to gaol.

In August, Melbourne Archbishop [Peter Comensoli wrote in *The Age*](#) that while he 'grieves daily' for those whose lives have been 'devastated and destroyed through multiple failures by the Catholic Church', he would continue to 'uphold the Seal of Confession'.

The Age reported that Premier Daniel Andrews said that Victorian law is 'written by the Parliament of Victoria, it's not made in Rome and there are very significant penalties for anybody and everybody who breaks the Victorian law'.

As well as removing mandatory reporting exemptions for the clergy, the bill addresses other areas related to child protection, including:

- limiting the rights of people who have committed (or been charged with) serious offences, such as murder or rape, to appeal if their application for a Working with Children check is rejected
- making it clear that immunisation is part of routine medical care, guaranteeing vaccines for children in out-of-home care
- amending the rules of the Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care program to ensure that siblings can all participate, even if they aren't all Aboriginal.

- Law compels clergy to report abuse. Noel Towell and Simone Fox Knob, *The Age*, 12 September 2019

Australian Teachers Paid 'significantly above' OECD Average

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) latest education snapshot says teacher salaries in Australia are 'among the highest across OECD countries at all levels of education'.

The OECD's annual [Education at a Glance report](#) provides international comparisons of various facets of education, and is accompanied by individual snapshots for OECD countries, [including Australia](#).

Australia's snapshot draws attention to four areas:

- the high salaries of teachers, especially lower secondary teachers, relative to the average for OECD countries.
- the strong employment prospects for young adults with upper secondary vocational education, (especially men)
- the low enrolment of 3-year-old children in early childhood education and care
- the growing gender gap in tertiary education – 60 per cent of young women were tertiary educated in 2018 compared to 44 per cent of young men.

With regards to teacher salaries, the report finds that Australian teachers are paid well above the OECD average, but that teachers progress to the top pay bracket relatively early in their career, leading to a 'flat distribution' of salaries.

It says there are strong financial incentives for teachers to become school leaders, with head teacher salaries 'also among the highest across OECD countries'.

- Teachers need more time and fewer classes, not more pay. Blaise Joseph and Glenn Fahey, Australian Financial Review, 11 September 2019
- Nation's teachers 'well paid'. Tim Dodd, *The Australian*, 11 September 2019

More Kids Staying in School

School retention rates have increased by 10 per cent since 2008, according to the latest Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report.

According to the report, [Australia's welfare 2019](#), the apparent retention rate to Year 12 (or equivalent qualification) rose from 75 per cent in 2008 to 85 per cent in 2018.

The report finds that more girls were staying in school – 89 per cent of female students stayed in school to Year 12, compared with only 81 per cent of male students.

It finds that Year 12 attainment rates have increased steadily 'over the past few decades' and that by 2018 more than three quarters (78 per cent) of people aged 15–64 had attained a Year 12 or equivalent qualification.

- Schools operating on kids' wavelengths, at last. Paul Garvey, *The Australian*, 11 September 2019

Free Tampons for Government School Students

The Victorian Government has started providing free sanitary pads and tampons for students in government schools.

The government is spending more than \$20 million to provide free sanitary items in all female, unisex and accessible bathrooms at government schools.

The decision fulfils a Labor promise at the 2018 Victorian election.

Victorian Minister for Women and Youth [Gabrielle Williams said](#) that while getting your period was normal, it can be a source of anxiety or embarrassment for some young girls.

'This will help to reduce the stigma and make it easier for girls at school,' she said.