

Submission to the Senate Standing Committee Inquiry into Academic Standards of School Education

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Government of South Australia

Department of Education and
Children's Services

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Introduction

The Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS), delivers high quality primary and secondary education to more than 160 000 school students in over 600 schools across the state. DECS is also responsible for ensuring the provision of children's services and pre schooling throughout South Australia which is unique in Australia. DECS provides for the education of children and students across all areas of the curriculum and preparing young people to be active and productive members of a democratic society.

As a community, we want young people to develop the skills, knowledge and values they need to be responsible citizens who contribute to a vibrant South Australia.

We take pride in knowing our students are immersed in an education that not only delivers the key skills young people need but also our rigorous curriculum standards enables our young people to achieve their full potential.

The South Australian Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee Inquiry in Academic Standards of School Education.

Term of Reference 1

Whether school education prepares students adequately for further education, training and employment, including, but not limited to:

- a) *the extent to which each stage of schooling (early primary; middle schooling; senior secondary) equips students with the required knowledge and skills to progress successfully through to the next stage; and*
- b) *the extent to which schools provide students with the core knowledge and skills they need to participate in further education and training, and as members of the community.*

Nationally, Australia has declared its goals for schooling for this new century. All Australian governments have affirmed the purposes and nature of schooling for our children and students in their declaration of the *National goals for schooling in the twenty-first century*.

*Schooling provides a foundation for young Australian's intellectual
physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development...
Schooling should develop fully the talents and capacities
of all students.*

Ministerial Council on Education,
Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
(MCEETYA) 1999

South Australian education has been developed in the spirit of these national, and international directions. These aspirations are supported with a school curriculum that is designed for rigour, relevance, and that embodies high standards. The curriculum is also designed to deliver a coherent progression through stages of schooling and to provide pathways to further education and training or employment in the senior secondary years.

1.1 Early Years Education

Children's learning in school builds on their learning experiences in prior settings which include family, childcare, preschool and community.

In the first years of school children have the opportunity to explore and practice new learning experiences in a supportive environment. Teachers use a range of methodologies, approaches and strategies to support the abilities and needs of individuals and groups of students.

Learning environments are established that enable children to successfully engage with and achieve through the curriculum.

Opportunities are provided for children to build on prior knowledge, develop and continually practice their new skills and understandings with support given to individuals and groups as needed to achieve learning goals.

1.2 Early Years Curriculum

In South Australia in the early years, Birth – Age 8, South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework is divided into three phases:

- Birth – Age 3
- Age 3 – 5
- Reception – Year 2

South Australia is the only education jurisdiction in Australia to include the years prior to schooling in its curriculum framework. The Early Years Band of the SACSA Framework supports educators with responsibility for the care and education of our youngest children as they work together with families and communities to implement curriculum in local contexts.

Teachers in the first years of school use the 3rd phase of the Early Years Band: Reception – Year 2 from the South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework and also refer to the Age 3 – Age 5 phase to determine the most appropriate learning programs for children as they progress towards the achievement of Curriculum Standard 1.

Teachers make decisions about children's learning recognising that:

- Learning takes place in authentic and real world situations
- Learning involves initiation, negotiation and mediation
- Content and skill development is understood within the framework of the child's prior knowledge
- Learning is assessed formatively, with the child actively engaged in the process
- Teachers facilitate and encourage multiple perspectives and representations of realities and futures.

School Entry Assessment

School Entry Assessment is a resource developed in South Australia by the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) in 1999 following a trial in 1998 to determine children's literacy and numeracy development on entry to school.

School Entry Assessment assists teachers to consider and assess a range of factors which are important for children's literacy and numeracy learning eg social skills, learning and thinking skills, dispositions and physical development in the early years.

School Entry Assessment is mandated and records children's literacy and numeracy development in a child's first year after 10 weeks at school.

School Entry Assessment is part of data collected to inform the Individual Learning Plans for Aboriginal children in the early years.

The School Entry Assessment data complements data collected through running records and the proposed Australian Early Development Index.

Running Records

Running Records Data Collection for Year 1 and 2 children is an expectation in all DECS schools at the end of Term 3. Over 18,000 running records for Years 1 and 2 children were collected in the November 2006 and collection continues in 2007 and beyond.

Running Records provide a framework for observing and analysing reading behaviours, and provide diagnostic information for classroom teachers to identify children's instructional levels in reading, successful strategies they are using and the next step for teaching.

Early Years Literacy Program

The Early Years Literacy Program is a comprehensive four year state funded program, 2004/5-2007, which involves more than 4 000 early years' teachers. This funding provides resources, professional development and materials to assist teachers in increasing children's literacy engagement and achievement.

The program is based on contemporary research, policy and practice. All schools and pre-schools are expected to address the following Program Design Elements in their Site Literacy Plans:

- Effective teaching and learning for young children
- Effective use of evidence and data
- Whole site commitment and focus
- Professional learning and leadership
- Working within community.

The South Australian Government is committed to ongoing literacy improvements and this remains a major priority. Formal evaluation of the Early Years Literacy Program in 2007 will inform future directions and shape the next early years initiative for 2008 and beyond.

Birth – Age 8 Strategy

In South Australia, DECS responsibilities include early childhood education and care, Birth – Age 8. The state provides the South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework and support for children in family day care, long day care, preschool and the first years of school.

The use of the SACSA framework is mandated in preschool and school.

As a result of the South Australian Government's 'Inquiry into Early Childhood' in 2004, South Australia is moving towards establishing Birth – Age 8 Children's Centres which integrate cross agency programs and resources to support the equitable growth, promotion and continuity in learning and development across the early years.

Recommendations of the Inquiry also include building a system which improves transitions through the stages of early childhood including the 5 – 8 year old stage in Junior Primary School.

1.3 Primary and Middle Years Education

Primary or ages 9 – 11 learning builds on the knowledge, skills and understandings developed in the Early Years. Teachers understand the changing nature of students and provide learning experiences that are meaningful, practical and take advantage of the student's natural curiosity.

During the Middle Years of schooling or ages 12-15 students characteristically experience significant changes: emotionally, socially, physically and cognitively. For individuals this phase of their development is often one of sensitivity, uncertainty, developing identity and personal independence along with a desire for stronger peer relationships. An appropriate teaching and learning environment is important to ensure students remain engaged in purposeful, relevant and challenging learning and enjoy relationships which will maintain engagement and sustain their transition to the senior years of schooling.

The South Australian Curriculum and Standards Accountability Framework provides teachers with the curriculum scope and standards to support the planning, programming and assessment appropriate for students from Birth- Year 10. The SACSA supports all students to build their capacity, skills and abilities for lifelong learning.

1.4 Primary and Middle Years Curriculum

The South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework was written during 1999 and 2000, and was built on the national Curriculum Statements and Profiles¹ which was South Australia's curriculum during the mid to late 1990s.

Characteristics of the SACSA Framework include:

- Birth to Year 10
- Maintenance of the eight nationally agreed Required Areas of Study.² Arts, Design and Technology, English, Health and Physical Education, Languages, Mathematics, Science and Society and Environment
- One cohesive framework in which major concepts in each of the Learning Areas are developed progressively across the years of care and education.

The SACSA Framework is structured into 4 Curriculum Bands which describe expected learning during the 4 developmental phases of children and students in care and education:

- Early Years Band - birth to age 8
- Primary Years Band - age 9 to age 11
- Middle Years Band - age 12 to age 15

¹ Curriculum Corporation, 1993

² MCEETYA (April 1989) *The Hobart Declaration on Schooling*; reaffirmed April 1999 *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century*

- Senior Years Band (which includes Senior Secondary education in Years 11 and 12 leading towards achievement of the South Australian Certificate of Education) – age 16 to age 18. A number of secondary schools also provide adults the opportunity to undertake studies towards the South Australian Certificate of Education.

In South Australia our curriculum framework describes a single, cohesive Birth to Year 10 curriculum entitlement for all students. Within the SACSA Framework, teachers are asked to reference students' performance in relation to described levels of quality or standards expected at particular points of schooling. The Curriculum Standards in the SACSA Framework are presented as performance standards, that is they depict the developing capabilities of children and students along a continuum of ever-improving performance. From Year 2 the Curriculum Standards are aligned with years of schooling as follows:

- *Towards the end of Year 2* Standard 1
- *Towards the end of Year 4* Standard 2
- *Towards the end of Year 6* Standard 3
- *Towards the end of Year 8* Standard 4
- *Towards the end of Year 10* Standard 5

The Standards in the SACSA Framework were calibrated by the Australian Council for Educational Research³ in 2000 to describe high expectations for students at these 2 year junctures.

Teachers in South Australian government schools are required to assess and report on their students' performance against the SACSA Standards.

Vocational Education Within The SACSA Framework

To encourage a culture of lifelong learning, by developing creative, innovative and collaborative ways of living and working; and to consider the evolving future possibilities for work and recreation in their lives, components of Enterprise and Vocational Education, as identified by MCEETYA in 1999⁴, were explicitly included in the Curriculum Standards in each Learning Area.

Enterprise and Vocational Education comprises the following components:

- Key Competencies
- Enterprise education
- Career education
- Work-based learning
- Community-based learning, and
- Vocational Education and Training (VET).

³ ACER (July 2000) *Calibration of the South Australian Outcome Statements*, DETE

⁴ MCEETYA (April 1999) *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century*

These components offer a powerful means by which children and students can develop the skills, understandings and dispositions to be active and lifelong students in a knowledge society and economy and more enterprising and innovative within their community and working lives.

Quality Assurance Processes

The Moving Forward with SACSA strategy was launched in 2005 to strengthen the capacity of teachers to deliver improved learning outcomes for all students by supporting teachers to:

- use student achievement data to promote the progress of every student
- improve their practice through a focus on collaborative moderation of student work
- enhance the consistency of teachers' judgements about student achievement of SACSA Standards through collaborative processes at the school, district and state level
- ensure the continuation of high expectations for student achievement and to quality assure data collection processes through the development of a state-wide peer moderation process
- meet their curriculum accountability requirements.

The Moving Forward with SACSA strategy includes a number of aspects designed to quality assure the credibility, validity and reliability of data generated by teacher judgements of student achievement. Principals are provided with support and resources to organise opportunities for teachers to plan together, develop shared understandings of Standards across the school, participate in professional development around curriculum, pedagogy and assessment alignment and collaboratively consider student work in relation to the achievement of SACSA Standards.

Annotated work samples that demonstrate achievement of the Standards, and other support materials have been developed and provided to schools and districts to aid their work.

Many schools now have processes in place to enhance the consistency of teacher judgements across all the learning areas and across all the levels of schooling.

To improve inter-school reliability, in 2007 over 120 teachers have been trained to act as peer reviewers who will use collaborative moderation protocols, using student work samples supplied by nominated schools, to provide feedback to the schools about the quality of their judgements about student achievement.

International Baccalaureate and the SACSA Framework

The SACSA Framework is the required curriculum framework for South Australian government schools. Because it is a framework, schools have the flexibility of using a range of resources to support students achieve the SACSA Standards. Some schools have found the International Baccalaureate Primary Years, Middle Years and Diploma programs to be a useful programming tool.

1.5 Specific Programs

Specific programs are in place to strengthen and broaden aspects of the knowledge, skills and understandings students need to participate in schooling, further education and training as well as become productive members of the community include:

Responsible Gambling Education Strategy

The Responsible Gambling Education Strategy has used a creative approach to learning through curriculum resources that provide a structured opportunity for students to safely experience and critically reflect on the consequences of choices they make about gambling. Students become informed consumers, able to negotiate potential pitfalls in society which enhances the capacity of their communities to contribute effectively to minimising harm in relation to gambling.

ARTSsmart Strategy

ARTSsmart - a Strategy for arts education in South Australian schools and preschools, is a joint initiative of the Department of Education and Children's Services and Arts SA.

ARTSsmart has enabled since 2004, in excess of 8000 students in schools and preschools with high concentrations of students from low socio-economic backgrounds and preschools to work with over 90 artists on high quality arts projects. In addition, ARTSsmart has supported nearly 5000 students from ARTSsmart schools to attend a live professional performance in a theatre. For many students this is their first such experience.

Currently ARTSsmart's key priority is the development of quality assurance measures for schools and preschools, artist and arts companies to help raise the standard of arts education in South Australia. The strategy continues to promote and support a broad range of existing high quality arts and education programs that include the Come Out Festival, Artists in Schools and the Minister's Arts Awards for Teachers and Artists.

The Science and Mathematics Strategy (SciMas2)

The strategy aims to increase the number of students studying science and mathematics and to address the fall in the number of qualified mathematics and science teachers. There are action learning projects and other professional learning opportunities for teachers to improve practice and engage students in maths and science learning as well as opportunities to connect with scientists in a range of industry contexts. Another strand of the project has initiatives to encourage experienced teachers to country schools and provide retraining opportunities for existing teachers to retrain as mathematics or science teachers.

Sustainable schools

Education for sustainability encourages active citizenship through planning, implementing and reviewing school practices to achieve sustainable outcomes. It values practical and hands-on student learning that involves a collaborative process of inquiry, action and reflection to continuously improve sustainable behaviours.

Premier's Reading Challenge

In 2004 the Premier of South Australia launched the Premier's Reading Challenge, an initiative to encourage children to enjoy reading and to raise literacy levels. Students from Reception to year 9 in government, non-government and home education families participate in the challenge. 90, 915 students completed the challenge in 2006. Anecdotal evidence from an open survey demonstrates that the Premier's Reading Challenge is having a substantial impact on the motivation for students to read more books and that it is particularly encouraging boys and reluctant readers to read. The Premier's Reading Challenge helps to make reading popular both in classrooms and for leisure. Other benefits reported include that the challenge has:

- raised the profile of reading and literacy in the school and in families
- raised the profile of both school and public libraries
- given students a focus for their reading
- encouraged students to read more books
- built self-esteem in students through completing the challenge.

1.6 Senior Years Education

Senior secondary students come from a range of linguistic, cultural and social backgrounds. They bring to their learning prior knowledge and experiences, needs, interests, concerns, expectations and aspirations, each in an individual way.

To meet the needs of this range of students, the learning process is complex, dynamic, interactive and cyclical, not linear. It involves students continuously extending, elaborating, reformulating and reflecting upon their frameworks of knowledge and values.

Within this concept of progress in learning, students are seen as active students who learn at different rates and need multiple challenges. They are supported in developing responsibility for their own learning, and enthusiasm for continuous learning.

1.7 Senior Years Curriculum

In the Senior Years Band of the SACS framework, the organisation of learning is increasingly diversified. It includes Year 10 curriculum, with Standard 5 representing the level of performance of students towards the end of Year 10.

In addition, the organisation of learning in the Senior Years Band comprises externally constructed and increasingly specialised Years 11 and 12 curriculum, such as the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE), Vocational Education and Training (VET), and other curriculum, quality assured at this level by the accrediting authority under the Australian Qualifications Framework or equivalent. This is discussed in the Term of Reference Two section.

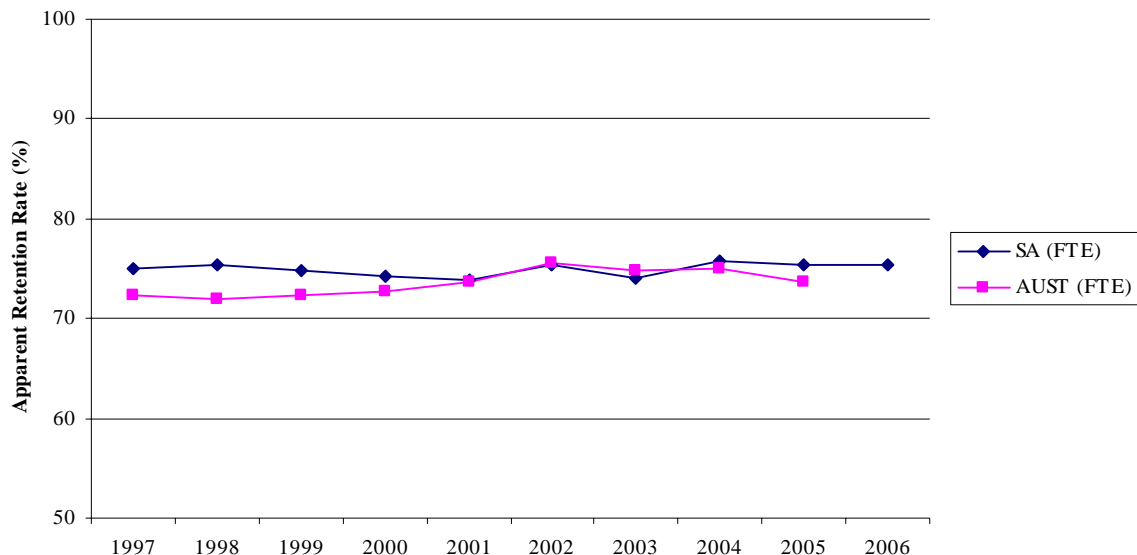
1.8 Youth Engagement and School To Work Transition Strategies

The South Australian Government has instituted a number of initiatives to facilitate Youth Engagement and School to Work transition.

The South Australian Youth Engagement Strategies focussed on the following areas:

1. Targeted intervention
2. School-community partnerships
3. Personalised learning
4. Pathways development
5. Career development.

The following graph sets out the apparent retention rate from Year 10 to Year 12. It indicates that South Australia is on par with the Australia-wide average and suggests that the youth engagement strategies are starting to lead to an improvement in retention.



1. Targeted Intervention

School Retention Action Plan (SRAP)

The major program of targeted intervention has been the South Australian Government School Retention Action Plan, part of the Youth Engagement Strategy.

The Government's School Retention Action Plan was implemented to support students at highest risk of disengagement or already disengaged from learning. Led by the South Australian Social Inclusion Board, government agencies have focussed attention

specifically on Aboriginal young people and those living in regional areas of South Australia.

Mentoring and cohort specific curricula have been key strategies used in the SRAP.

Mentoring Strategies include:

Community mentoring

250 community mentors in 7 pilot programs across 37 schools supported 281 young people identified as at risk to remain engaged in learning and make a successful transition from primary to secondary schooling since the program commenced.

Year 10 students mentoring

80 teacher mentors, mentored 3,236 year 10 students across 45 schools with secondary enrolments to remain at school or make successful transitions to further training and / or employment.

Senior student mentoring

1,811 young people identified as at risk in years 11 and 12 were supported to remain in learning until the end of year 12 to complete their SACE, further education / training or gain sustainable employment in 2006. A destination survey conducted in June 2006 identified that 82% of the year 12 young people who participated in the program in 2005 had made successful transition for further learning as well.

Redesigned curriculum for 'at risk' senior students

Schools being assisted to design relevant and engaging curricula for students at risk of leaving school early and to make allowances for the many complexities of their lives. Some curricula are case-specific and others cohort-specific and include pre-industry courses, young mums' programs and those designed for Indigenous young people.

2. School-Community Partnerships

Local communities across the state work together with schools through the School Retention Action Plan's Innovative Community Action Networks and Futures Connect clusters to develop community responses to local issues.

Innovative Community Action Networks (ICANs)

Through Innovative Community Action Networks (ICANs) established, as part of the School Retention Action Plan, 2,559 young people with multiple issues of disadvantage have participated in programs established in collaboration with their schools, local communities and community-based support agencies. The development of innovative and responsive engagement and retention policy is a key outcome sought from implementation of ICANs.

Futures Connect

The South Australian Government established the Futures Connect Strategy in 2003. The Futures Connect initiative is designed to assist students to make successful transitions through and from school by establishing a range of programs that encompass enterprise and vocational learning, community and work-based learning, career development, vocational education and training, school-based apprenticeships, and other pathways. One of the essential components of Futures Connect has been the development of local partnerships between schools and communities.

Futures Connect provides a Transition Broker in each school district to work with stakeholders to develop local education and training options for students. These include promoting the development of individual learning plans for every student, providing leadership for school and cluster youth engagement teams, creating employer-endorsed intensive learning and training programmes in a greater range of industry areas that align to the needs of the state's economy, and managing and using school-business-community partnerships to shape training and learning opportunities for individual students.

3. Personalised Learning

Individual learning plan

The Individual Learning Plan (ILP) has been developed as part of the Futures Connect Strategy as a tool to enable young people to research their pathway options and plan their learning around their needs and interests. The ILP enables young people to document and understand the skills and experiences they develop within school, community and workplace settings. The feasibility of producing a web-based version is currently being investigated.

Students with disabilities

As part of the Youth Engagement Strategy, schools now work in partnership with Disability Employment Networks, Registered Training Organisations and employers to offer a Transition Program for young people with a disability. Students build their employability skills, participate in an industry accredited and nationally recognised vocational education and training (VET) course which is aligned with their interests.

4. Pathways to Further Learning, Training and Employment

Our pathways to further learning, training and employment strategies aim to enable all young people to achieve a threshold qualification through publically subsidised education and training within a seamless transition system.

Pathways to University

An innovative 'SAFE Futures' program has been trialled successfully in 2006, with at risk students. This program has achieved strong rates of retention and engagement. It involves students studying as a cohort to gain university entrance by integrating learning from 3 SACE Stage 2 subjects as part of their studies.

University of South Australia Portfolio Entry Scheme

Portfolio Entry enables students to be admitted to the University on the basis of the work they have undertaken at school and other community-based activities rather than through a Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER). Students provide evidence in their portfolio against criteria that the University has developed. It is a small alternative entry scheme, targeted to 12 northern suburban schools, providing a pathway for identified students which would otherwise not be available to them.

Vocational education and training (VET), including school-based apprenticeships

As part of Futures Connect, South Australian Government secondary schools have continued to be supported to provide quality vocational education and training (including school-based apprenticeships) to students to enable their achievement of the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) and nationally recognised VET qualifications. Schools have been provided with additional funding and access to district and centrally based staff through Futures Connect to support their programs.

VET in Schools and school-based apprenticeship programs are well established in SA secondary schools and provide students with technical and workplace skills that better prepare them for the world of work beyond school and which articulate into further training and education.

All VET in Schools and school-based apprenticeship programs are based on industry agreed qualifications and the curriculum derives from nationally accredited Training Packages. All VET in Schools and school-based apprenticeship programs offered in DECS schools contribute to the SACE.

VET in Schools programs range from several units of competence embedded within school subjects, through to special VET subjects created by the Senior Secondary Board of South Australia, and to full training sector VET Certificates (most often at Certificate 1 or 2 levels).

An increasing number of students are taking up school-based apprenticeships. Vocational students and apprentices are supported by a broad range of industry areas, including retail, automotive, business, food processing industries, engineering and construction.

School-based apprenticeship programs are designed in accordance with the national guidelines promulgated by the former Australian National Training Authority. All training is provided either by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) or by teachers (under the supervision of RTOs). The level of academic achievement is quality assured by RTOs.

Trade Schools

As part of its 2006 election commitments, the South Australian Government has allocated \$24.8m for the establishment of 10 “Trade Schools for the Future” across the state. These form part of a major reform of South Australia’s secondary school system. “Trade Schools for the Future” are proposed to include a focus on advanced technologies and link business / industry and training providers to local schools.

“Trade Schools for the Future” will be hosted by existing government schools and will address areas of skill shortage in the South Australian economy and workforce. Their key aim is to maximise the number of students entering into Contracts of Training as school-based apprentices, either as trade apprentices or higher-level trainees. They will also assist neighbouring schools to develop and deliver curriculum that takes better account of the needs of business and local industry and that articulates into Trade School programs.

5. Career Development

Our career development strategies are designed to assist all young people to develop competencies to plan and manage their careers and maintain work-life balance.

Australian Career Development Studies

Australian Career Development Studies (ACDS) is a professional skills development program for career advisers. Successful completion of the program leads to a nationally accredited qualification. Each secondary school has had staff receive training in ACDS to assist them to take on leadership roles within their school’s career development for young people.

Australian Blueprint for Career Development

The Australian Blueprint for Career Development (ABCD) is a systematic organizing framework for developing, delivering and reviewing career related programmes, resources and services. South Australia is participating in national trials of the ABCD, being funded by the Ministerial Committee on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).

Participating schools are developing and trialling programs in learning areas, whole school models and pastoral care models to ensure that students experience curriculum that provides them with the skills, competencies and knowledge to better manage their lives in a lifelong learning context.

1.9 Literacy and Numeracy

Core literacy and numeracy skills are fundamental requirements for learning and are essential for work and life opportunities beyond school. South Australian schools and pre-schools use whole site approaches that are planned, implemented and regularly evaluated with staff and community for sustained literacy and numeracy improvement. School leaders and teachers collect, analyse and respond to a range of data sets related to literacy and numeracy achievement. The annual Year 3, 5 and 7 (Year 9 from 2007) Literacy and Numeracy Test results for example, are cross referenced with other learning outcomes data to identify areas for focussed attention to meet the learning needs of individual students and groups of students. Literacy and/or numeracy interventions are then developed, implemented and monitored.

South Australia has a range of literacy and numeracy initiatives to ensure that students have the skills necessary to engage with their learning at each stage of schooling and successfully transition to the next level. Primary and middle years initiatives build on the solid literacy and numeracy foundation developed in the early years and prepare students for success in the senior years of schooling and future pathways beyond school.

Major literacy initiatives include;

- *South Australian Accelerated Literacy Program (SAALP)*

Accelerated Literacy (formerly known as Scaffolded Literacy) covers reading, writing, spelling and speaking. Its aim is to significantly increase the literacy levels of low achieving students. Accelerated Literacy has been used successfully in remote Aboriginal schools and some other government schools, for a number of years, and Accelerated Literacy teaching methods are now offered state-wide, predominantly to mainstream schools from Reception to Year 10. Fifty schools are currently involved in the program.

- *The Premier's Reading Challenge*

In 2006, 90% of all schools in South Australia participated in the Premier's Reading Challenge with over 90,000 students awarded either a certificate or a bronze, silver or gold medal from the Premier.

Major numeracy initiatives include;

- *Mathematics for Learning Inclusion Project*

This project focuses on improving learning outcomes, for primary years students from low socio-economic backgrounds, including Indigenous students. The program funds 8 coordinators to support students and teachers across clusters of schools with a focus on Mathematics, particularly in Years 3, 4 and 5. Teachers are developing knowledge and skills in the explicit teaching of mathematics and in teaching, learning and assessment practices that support the development of broad based numeracy skills.

- *First Steps in Mathematics*

This professional learning program is designed to improve learning outcomes for students by supporting teachers to further their own understandings of mathematics, understand how students learn mathematics and plan learning experiences to progress each student. The program is suitable for teachers of Reception to Year 8 with particular courses aimed at improving outcomes for Indigenous students. Forty - four facilitators have been trained in First Steps in Mathematics (Number) and approximately 1500 teachers have completed the teacher course.

1.10 Special Needs and Equity Programs

The Department of Education and Children's Services provides a range of additional support and resources to maximise the participation and achievement of students with special needs.

The Disability Support Program provides additional funding to schools to support over 12,000 students with disabilities in mainstream classes with their learning and curriculum access needs.

As well, over 2,000 students receive specialist teaching and learning programs through special classes and special schools.

All schools have access to district specialist staff, including psychologists, speech pathologists and teachers with expertise in a range of disabilities including vision and hearing. These specialist staff work with teachers, students and their families to identify curriculum needs and learning difficulties and the best strategies to improve learning outcomes.

Schools also receive additional funding to assist students with learning difficulties directly through their budget.

Learning Inclusion Programs

This program provides significant curriculum support and extra funding to schools with high concentrations of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The focus is on improving students' literacy and numeracy. Schools receive direct grants and are also able to participate in curriculum leadership and innovation programs including, currently, the Mathematics for Learning Inclusion Program.

Gifted Education

All schools are required to address the needs of gifted students by providing differentiated programs within year levels and, where appropriate, by accelerating gifted students. Three secondary schools are funded as Centres of Excellence in Gifted Education through the Ignite Secondary Program for Gifted Students. These schools receive extra funding in order to provide additional classes for gifted secondary students and support for primary schools across the state that are identifying and providing specific programs for gifted students.

English as a Second Language

Students who have English as a second language are developing the English language skills to achieve required curriculum outcomes at their year level of schooling. These language skills are described in the ESL Scope and Scales as 14 levels of language development, from Scale 1 to Scale 14. The table below indicates the link between the language required to achieve curriculum standards at each year level and SACSA Curriculum Standard.

Year	2	4	6	8	10
Curriculum Standard	1	2	3	4	5
ESL Scale	6	8	10	12	14

The degree of support provided to ESL students is linked directly to their language level, as assessed using the ESL Scales. Intervention is aligned to providing ESL students with the language skills needed for curriculum success at each stage of schooling. This support model is unique to South Australia.

New arrivals with minimal English are supported through access to intensive English language programs in New Arrivals Program centres for up to 2 years, with curriculum and pedagogy informed by the ESL Scope and Scales and exit criteria based on ESL Scales related to year level.

1.11 Reporting Student Achievement Information

South Australia has a comprehensive reporting system that provides achievement information to both the student and their families/caregivers at all stages of student learning. Formal reporting to students and their families/caregivers involves the following:

- Planned reporting by teachers to students and families/ caregivers occurs a minimum of three times a year. Two of these, mid-year and end of the year reports, must be in writing and include the Australian Government requirements outlined below.
- Student learning achievement in years R-10 is referenced against the mandated Curriculum Standards in the eight learning areas of the South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework.

- Schools are required to include the mandated aspects of the Australian Government requirements into their local reporting systems for students in years 1-10.

These include:

- > Plain English reports to parents and caregivers twice per year
 - > A five point scale, A-E achievement levels or specified word equivalents for year 1-7
 - > A-E achievement levels for year 8-10
 - > Where word equivalents are used it is necessary to indicate on each report that the five point scale equates to the achievement levels A-E
 - > Schools with more than 10 students in a particular year level are obliged to prepare information that shows the number of students in each of the 5 achievement levels in each year level so that parents can receive, on request, comparative information about their child's progress.
 - > Achievement levels or the worded equivalents are referenced against the expected year level Curriculum Standards within the SACSA Framework.
- School Entry Assessment is used to record a child's literacy and numeracy level after the first 10 weeks of reception. This is mandated and informs the planning and programming needs of the child and/or cohorts of children.
 - Year 1 and 2 children receive a running record of their progress in reading at the end of term 3.
 - Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 students participate in the national tests of literacy and numeracy, a report is provided to parents which shows the individuals achievement in comparison to national benchmarks and state averages.
 - Year 11 and 12 students receive a minimum of 3 reports a year detailing their progress and or/achievement in relation to the subjects and or course they are enrolled in. At the end of the school year, SSABSA provide a record of achievement to students.

Term of Reference 2

The standards of academic achievement expected of students qualifying for the senior secondary school certificate in each state and territory.

2.1 Current SACE

The current South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) exists to certify students' successful completion of secondary education and attest to their readiness for entry into post-school studies and employment. Since it was introduced in 1992 the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia (SSABSA) has applied quality assurance to the SACE, to ensure its currency, relevance and value to senior secondary students.

The Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia (SSABSA) is an independent authority of the South Australian Government. SSABSA serves Year 11 and Year 12 students in all schools, and administers the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE).

As an independent statutory authority, SSABSA, serves all members of the three school sectors: the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia, the Catholic Education South Australia and the Department of Education and Children's Services. It also assesses the achievement of students in the Northern Territory and at centres in South-East Asia.

The SACE is an internationally recognised credential undertaken in South Australia, Northern Territory and parts of Asia. It was designed to ensure that students leave school with a strong general education. The international standard quality of its operations is certified under the ISO 9000 program by the Société Generale de Surveillance.

To meet the requirements of the certificate, students take a balanced range of studies, generally over two - three years, although no particular time limit is specified. Stage 1 of the SACE is usually studied in Year 11 and Stage 2 of the SACE is usually studied in Year 12. Students may negotiate alterations to this schedule. The studies must include English or English as Second Language, Australian Studies, and Mathematics at Stage 1 (Year 11), as well as a selection from other subject groups. To be awarded the SACE, students must:

- study 22 semester (half-year) units, some of which must be combined to form full-year programs at Stage 2
- reach a level of satisfactory achievement in at least 16 of the 22 units
- meet the subject pattern requirements.

2.2 Academic Standards

Stage 1

The *Memorandum of Assessment Principles and Practices* between SSABSA and South Australian schools offering Stage 1 programs covers all approaches to Stage 1 assessment and moderation practices. All teachers are required to develop teaching programs derived from curriculum statements, which includes an assessment plan.

The acceptance of school assessments by the Board for Stage 1 of the SACE and their recording towards the SACE are based upon the set of understandings between SSABSA and schools described in the *Memorandum of Assessment Principles and Practices*. Assessment plans must be submitted and approved for all subjects offered and are approved for the current calendar year. The same assessment plan may be submitted for up to three consecutive years. There is a general Stage 1 moderation visit to each school or advice provided on assessment at Stage 1 by an Assessment Field Officer (AFO).

Moderation involves:

Evaluation of the Moderation Procedure

- conduct a sample moderation exercise at the end of the teaching period in a selection of classes for the purposes of evaluating the moderation procedure.

Teaching Programs

- make teaching programs available to help in the moderation of sample classes as requested
- have any program variations that necessitate changes to the assessment plan noted on the school copy of the plan.

Verification of Student Work

- support teaching and learning processes that result in the submission by students of assessment work that is their own, produced without undue assistance from other people or sources
- report breaches of rules (as defined by the Board) to SSABSA.

Stage 2

SSABSA provides a quality assurance process to ensure that student school-based assessment outcomes are comparable regardless of school location. The process seeks to ensure that teachers are provided with a range of opportunities to be directly involved at a systems level in the moderation (assessment standards support and validation) processes and/or to receive information and advice on their assessment measurement standards.

The assessment components described in each Stage 2 curriculum statement are categorised in terms of how and where each component is marked. For operational purposes, each assessment component belongs to one of the following eight categories:

External Assessment

- Written examinations — SSABSA sets and marks examinations
- Practical examinations — SSABSA sets specifications and marks examinations
- Studies — SSABSA sets specifications and marks studies
- Investigations — SSABSA sets specifications; SSABSA and teachers mark investigations.

School Assessment

In each of the following moderation processes, teachers mark the school assessments and SSABSA validates the marks. The four categories of moderation used by SSABSA are:

- Central moderation
- Group moderation
- School-based moderation
- Statistical moderation.

Each of these categories of moderation has operational periods or due dates associated with them, and student deadlines.

Moderation – Quality Assurance of School-based Assessment

SSABSA provides in-course standards support moderation (selected subjects) and end-of-course standards validation (all subjects).

Assessment Standards Support is designed to guide the teacher's marking standard during the course. All assessment standards support takes the form of non-statistical moderation.

Assessment Standards Validation takes place at the end of the course and may involve changes to student results to ensure statewide comparability of marking standards. In some subjects, assessment standards validation takes the form of non-statistical moderation; in other subjects, it takes the form of statistical moderation.

Assessment Standards Validation Process

SSABSA conducts an assessment standards validation process for all school assessment at Stage 2. This process applies to all summative assessment results submitted by teachers. These assessment results are a record of the performance of students in each class at the end of the teaching program and are provided to SSABSA either in June or November each year.

Comparability of assessment is delivered by open and transparent dialogue between teachers and SSABSA on curriculum and assessment and, in particular, on clear assessment requirements, understood conditions of assessment, and a common understanding of assessment criteria. This dialogue takes place through assessment standards validation, or moderation. Moderation is a process by which assessment results are compared with certain standards and any necessary adjustments are made. SSABSA uses the previously mentioned four forms of assessment standards validation.

Central moderation

Schools submit student materials and results sheets to a SSABSA central venue for validation of marks by a SSABSA moderation panel under the leadership of a Chief Moderator.

Group moderation

Teachers bring student materials to group meetings of subject teachers. A SSABSA moderator guides the teachers in validating the marking standards. Where necessary, cross-group validation of marks is conducted by a SSABSA moderation panel under the leadership of a Chief Moderator.

School-based moderation

SSABSA moderators visit the school to view the student materials, such as practicals or performance, and validate the marking standards of the teachers.

Statistical moderation

Statistical moderation only applies to those subjects that have an external assessment component. In subjects that are statistically moderated, external assessment results are taken as the standard for moderation of those school assessment results not included in central, group, or school-based moderation (i.e. non-statistical) processes.

The SACE is the basic requirement for entry to higher education. The higher education institutions use a tertiary entrance rank (TER), derived from SACE studies, to rank students for selection to particular courses. To be eligible for a TER, students must complete five Stage 2 (Year 12) subjects.

2.3 South Australian SACE Review

The South Australian Government has set a target of retaining 90% of year 12 students to complete the SACE or equivalent by 2014 and raising the school leaving age to 17 in 2009. It is expected that this will assist young people to build their capabilities and knowledge to be active and productive participants in society and redress the state's skills shortage.

In light of rapid technological and social change the State Government endorsed the review of the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) in 2006 and provided funding for the future SACE to better meet the diverse needs of students and to improve the retention of students and SACE completion.

In 2006, the Minister for Education and Children's Services formed a SACE Review Implementation Steering Committee, supported by a Secretariat, to commence the implementation process. The Steering Committee and Secretariat include representatives from the Independent, Catholic and Government school sectors. The Government has endorsed the general direction of the Report and an office has been established to recommend the evolution and implementation of the future SACE. Core work at present is centred on the investigation and clarification of key recommendations.

The future SACE will certify separate, distinct subjects and courses based on performance standards and reported by levels of achievement. The compulsory subjects will include Literacy, Numeracy, a Personal Learning Plan, Extended Learning Initiative plus choice in a wide range of subjects at year 11 and 12 levels. Stage 1 will

be assessed by teachers. Stage 2 is expected to be assessed on the basis of 30 per cent external (beyond the school) assessment and 70 per cent moderated teacher assessment for all subjects. Teachers will be more involved in moderation processes, with quality assurance systems in place across the State to ensure consistency and quality of standards. Statistical information to support quality assurance will continue to be available for both teacher moderation and the external assessment process. An A to E scale will be used to report student results at both Stage 1 and Stage 2 levels. Students' results will continue to be provided for calculation of a Tertiary Entrance Ranking.

South Australia is committed to strengthening partnerships between schools, the community, industry and further education so that young people are supported both inside and outside school to engage in work, training, education and community and civic life in various combinations. The intention is to enable all young people to access the full range of learning opportunities and experiences provided by the education and training systems. The goal is that all young people have the opportunity to achieve their full potential through 'learning or earning'.

Term of Reference 3

How such academic standards compare between states and territories and with those of other countries.

3.1 International, States and Territories Comparability

Australia participates in two international studies of academic achievement, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

Programme for International Student Assessment

The goal of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is to measure competencies that will equip students to participate productively and adaptively in their life beyond school education. The PISA assessment focuses on young people's ability to apply their knowledge and skills to real-life problems and situations. The emphasis is on whether students, are able to analyse, reason and communicate their ideas effectively in real life situations.

PISA is an internationally standardised assessment of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy skills and knowledge to real life problems and situations.

The student population for PISA is 15 years olds. The first assessment was in 2000, the second in 2003 and included all 30 OECD countries. In Australia 321 schools and over 12,500 students participated in PISA.

From the 2003 PISA among 41 countries, Australia is significantly outperformed only by Finland in reading; Hong Kong- China, Finland, Korea and Netherlands in mathematical literacy; and Finland, Japan and Korea in scientific literacy.

In PISA 2003, Australia achieved significantly higher than the OECD average in every domain.

Between 2000 and 2003 Australia's performance in *mathematical literacy*, *scientific literacy* and *reading literacy*, did not change significantly.

The PISA 2003 results for the South Australian students are excellent and are similar to the 2000 South Australian results. This shows that the standards exemplified by PISA have not declined in South Australia between 2000 and 2003.

In 2003 South Australia was ranked 3rd by the average score for all Australian States and Territories in *mathematical*, *scientific*, *reading literacy* and *problem solving*. Ranking was almost the same for the 2000 PISA results.

Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)

Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), is designed to help countries (approximately 50 countries) improve student learning in mathematics and science. It collects educational achievement data at years four and eight to provide information about trends in performance over time together with extensive background information to address concerns about the quantity, quality, and content of teaching.

TIMSS is conducted on a four year cycle (1994/95, 1998/99, 2002/03 and 2006/07).

In the 2002/03 TIMSS, Australia's average score was on par with the international average in Year 4 Mathematics and significantly higher than the international average higher for Year 4 Science, Year 8 Mathematics and Science². South Australia's Year 4 Mathematics average score was lower than both the Australian and the international average. South Australian Year 4 Science, Year 8 Mathematics and Science average scores were higher than the international average³. The TIMSS 2002/03 results for South Australian students are better when compared with the 1994 results.

Literacy and Numeracy Comparability

In March 1997, all State, Territory and Commonwealth education ministers agreed on the national goal:

that every child leaving primary school should be numerate and able to read, write and spell at an appropriate level.

and an additional sub-goal:

that every child commencing school from 1998 will achieve a minimum acceptable literacy and numeracy standard within four years.

To help support the achievement of these goals, ministers also agreed to the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan, including developing national literacy and numeracy benchmarks for years 3, 5 and 7, assessing student progress against these benchmarks and national reporting of benchmark data.

South Australia currently manages and administers its own whole of cohort literacy and numeracy tests for years 3, 5 and 7 and collaborated with Victoria and the Northern Territory to develop and implement a Year 9 test that was held in May 2007. South Australia is committed to working with other jurisdictions to prepare for national tests in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 from 2008.

South Australia closely monitors the literacy and numeracy achievement demonstrated through the South Australian Literacy and Numeracy (LaN) Tests with particular attention paid to benchmark achievement. Literacy and numeracy benchmarks at years 3, 5 and 7 represent minimum standards of performance below which students will have difficulty progressing satisfactorily at school. The latest available nationally comparative benchmark data published in the MCEETYA National Report on Schooling (2005) shows that South Australia generally performs around the national average in the achievement of benchmarks in reading, writing and numeracy at years 3 and 5 but that South Australia is significantly above the national average in year 7 Reading and year 7 Numeracy. Considering the established link between students' socio-economic backgrounds and test results and the high levels of disadvantage in some sections of the South Australian community, this is an encouraging result, though one that South Australia is committed to improving further. The results also show a clear need for South Australia to focus attention on lifting the performance of Indigenous learners who currently achieve benchmark levels at a much lower rate than the whole cohort. This issue is not isolated to South Australia and needs to be addressed nationally.

National testing programs are aimed at driving school improvement and enhancing outcomes for all students. South Australia has established state-wide targets for improvements in literacy and numeracy and these targets influence the development of school improvement plans. School leaders and teachers analyse the LaN Test data along with school based assessment data, determining patterns and trends of achievement, to evaluate programs, inform curriculum planning and guide resource allocation across the school. Teachers also interrogate the data to support them to meet the needs of individual students and groups of students in their classes.

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