

# New Directions for our schools

## A National Action Plan on Literacy and Numeracy



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# Executive Summary

When a young Australian does not have basic literacy and numeracy skills, it severely limits not only the opportunities for the individual student, but it also limits the opportunities for our nation.

If Australia is to remain competitive in the global economy, we must increase the number of exceptional school graduates, the average performance of all school graduates and reduce the number of those who do not complete secondary schooling.

Labor believes that in addition to existing benchmark tests in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, we should carry out a school entry evaluation of children's readiness to learn so as to better target resources where additional support is needed.

We also need to encourage strong leadership and invest additional resources in our schools to deal with identified needs through specialist literacy and numeracy teachers who can act as literacy and numeracy coaches or school coordinators.

A Rudd Labor Government will establish, in partnership with State and Territory Governments and the Catholic and Independent school sectors, a ***National Action Plan on Literacy and Numeracy***.

Labor's National Action Plan will target schools, teacher training and individual student support to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes.

## **Literacy and Numeracy in Schools**

Labor will:

- Strengthen children's literacy and numeracy development in their pre-school years through the funding of a universal year of early childhood education and care for all four year olds;
- Implement a *Healthy Kids Check* and the *Australian Early Development Index* in consultation with State and Territory Governments and the Catholic and Independent school sectors to assess the health, development and wellbeing of all children in their first year of school;
- Work to develop, in cooperation with State and Territory Governments and the Catholic and Independent school sectors, Individual Learning Plans focused on literacy and numeracy for all Australian children from Year 1 onwards. These plans would be based on health and development assessments and benchmark results; and
- Develop a national curriculum includes specific literacy and numeracy standards, and that these standards are reflected in the curriculum in all years of schooling from K-12.

Labor will provide dedicated funding to the States and Territories and the Catholic and Independent school sectors for additional literacy and numeracy support to schools to implement literacy and numeracy initiatives that begin in the first year of school.

This funding will be available for initiatives such as:

- Providing a qualified literacy or numeracy teacher to work at the school;
- Providing for a teacher to become a 'head teacher', school 'coach' or literacy or numeracy coordinator, developing a literacy or numeracy plan for the school, and providing support to both teachers and students;
- Providing homework centres for children who need extra support;
- Providing professional development in literacy and numeracy for the school's teachers;
- Providing extra literacy and numeracy teaching resources
- Providing dedicated additional resources to assist Indigenous children; and
- Involving parents in the literacy and numeracy education of their children.

### **Improving Teachers' Literacy and Numeracy Skills**

Labor will work with the Council of Deans of Education to ensure that:

- All trainee teachers are assessed so that they meet necessary literacy and numeracy skills and standards when they enter and leave University. Students would not be able to graduate without having the appropriate skills and standards.
- All teacher training courses include modules on the teaching of literacy and numeracy to ensure all teachers can confidently teach individual students using a variety of methods, including phonics.

### **Support for Parents**

Labor will develop educational material for parents of younger children on the value of reading and activity that helps build numeracy, such as packs of fun educational games and tasks. This material will be provided to childcare, maternal and child health settings, playgroups and preschools.

### **Other Measures**

Labor will continue to fund the *Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs Program*, support the national literacy and numeracy benchmarks and evaluate the effectiveness of the *Reading Assistance Voucher* scheme following recent criticism of this program.

This paper builds on Federal Labor's Education Revolution. Labor has already released six education policy directions papers:

- The Australian economy needs an education revolution;
- New Directions for Early Childhood Education: Universal Access to Early Learning for Four Year Olds;
- New Directions for Maths and Science;
- New Directions for our Schools: Establishing a National Curriculum to improve our children's educational outcomes
- New Directions for our Schools: Local Schools Working Together; and
- New Directions for Australian Children: Helping parents keep their kids healthy and ready to learn at the start of school life.

# Introduction

Literacy and numeracy are the building blocks that an individual's participation in society and the economy rely upon.

The ability to read, write and count is fundamental, not only to being able to participate in school, but to carry out simple everyday tasks in adult life with dignity and independence.

The head of the National Institute of Child Health & Human Development in the United States notes that:

*the development of reading serves the major foundational academic ability for all school-based learning. Without the ability to read, the opportunities for academic and occupational success are limited. Moreover, because of its importance, difficulty in learning to read crushes the excitement and love of learning, which most children have when they enter school...*

*...research has consistently shown that if children do not learn to understand and use language, to read and write, to calculate and reason mathematically, to solve problems, and to communicate their ideas and perspectives, their opportunities for a fulfilling and rewarding life are seriously compromised.<sup>1</sup>*

Despite the essential significance of literacy and numeracy and recognition of its importance by government at all levels, too many young Australian students are falling behind in these areas.

Nearly ten years ago, Commonwealth, State and Territory Education Ministers agreed on a national goal:

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

Despite that agreement a decade ago, the results in the *2005 National Report on Schooling* show we are still a long way from reaching that goal.

The report outlines the performance of Australian students in Years 3, 5, and 7 against nationally agreed benchmarks in reading, writing and numeracy.

The results of testing across Australia in 2005 show that around one in five children in Year 7 are not meeting the benchmarks for numeracy, and around one in ten are not meeting reading and writing benchmarks.

The results for Indigenous children are dramatically worse, with more than a third of Indigenous children in Year 7 failing to meet reading benchmarks, and more than half failing to meet numeracy benchmarks.

Not only do these results severely limit the opportunities for these individual students, but they also limit the opportunities for our nation.

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<sup>1</sup> Rowe, K (2005), *Literature Review: National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy*, Department of Education, Science and Training, p.7.

If Australia is to remain competitive in the global economy, we must increase the number of exceptional school graduates, the average performance of all school graduates and reduce the number of those who do not complete secondary schooling.

This cannot be done if students are unable to meet basic standards and benchmarks in literacy and numeracy.

From time to time over the last eleven years, the Howard Government has spoken about the need to address literacy and numeracy in our schools. After a decade in Government, too many of our young Australians are still falling behind in the basics.

Some fanfare has accompanied the development of literacy and numeracy benchmarks. While recognising that these tools help diagnose the scope and size of the problems we face as a community, unless some intervention occurs after publication of the benchmarks, they do not of themselves provide a means to improve literacy and numeracy.

Labor believes it is important that objective information on the abilities of students in these core areas is collected and made available to parents and the community. It is also essential that the information is understood, and vital that we take action in the face of an objective analysis of this information.

It is not enough just to assess and rank student achievements. These tests have been carried out since 1999, and on the basis of the results, little progress has been made.

We must be able to intervene, target and provide assistance to students who need help to reach these benchmarks, and to continue reaching them, as they progress through their schooling.

Our failure to intervene and provide sufficient assistance and support to individual students, teachers and schools has meant an increasing number of students fail over time to keep up against the literacy and numeracy benchmarks.

For example, six per cent of Year 3 students did not meet numeracy benchmarks in 2001. By 2003 ten per cent of the total student cohort did not meet the Year 5 benchmarks for numeracy and in 2005, 18 per cent failed to meet the benchmarks in Year 7.

This New Directions paper sets out a plan for the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and the Catholic and Independent school sectors to work together across Australia to deliver policies and programs, to not just measure literacy and numeracy in Australia, but to actually do something to improve it.

This paper builds on Federal Labor's Education Revolution. Labor has already released five education policy directions papers:

- ***The Australian economy needs an education revolution: New Directions Paper on the critical link between long term prosperity, productivity growth and human capital investment*** which argues that we cannot take our current prosperity for granted. Not only is productivity growth beginning to slow, but resource prices are likely to unwind over the coming years, the ageing of the population will place significant pressure on public finances and reduce workforce participation, and the global marketplace is becoming increasingly competitive as China and India continue their transformation into economic superpowers.

- ***New Directions for Early Childhood Education: Universal Access to Early Learning for Four Year Olds*** which sets out a \$450 million plan to give a universal right of access for all four year olds to fifteen hours a week of high quality early childhood education delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher.
- ***New Directions for Maths and Science*** which provides financial incentives totalling \$111 million for students to study maths and science at university and then use their degrees within the maths and science professions, particularly teaching.
- ***New Directions for our Schools: Establishing a National Curriculum to improve our children's educational outcomes*** which sets out a plan for a national curriculum delivered in partnership with State and Territory Governments and educational experts, informed by the needs of students and their parents.
- ***New Directions for our Schools: Local Schools Working Together*** which sets out an innovative pilot program to fund the construction of shared facilities between government and non-government schools. \$62.5 million will be made available to provide high quality classrooms, sporting fields, science labs, libraries, trade workshops and assembly halls in new growth areas.
- ***New Directions for Australian Children: Helping parents keep their kids healthy and ready to learn at the start of school life*** which sets out a plan for a universal *Healthy Kids Check*, a *Healthy Habits for Life* guide for parents and \$16.9 million for the national rollout of the *Australian Early Development Index* to ensure Australian children make a healthy transition to school.

## How can we improve Australia's literacy and numeracy standards?

There are many factors which lead to young Australians not being able to reach the minimum literacy and numeracy standards necessary for them to engage productively in our society.

The recently released *2005 National Report on Schooling* shows that many young Australian students are not able to undertake basic tasks in literacy and numeracy.

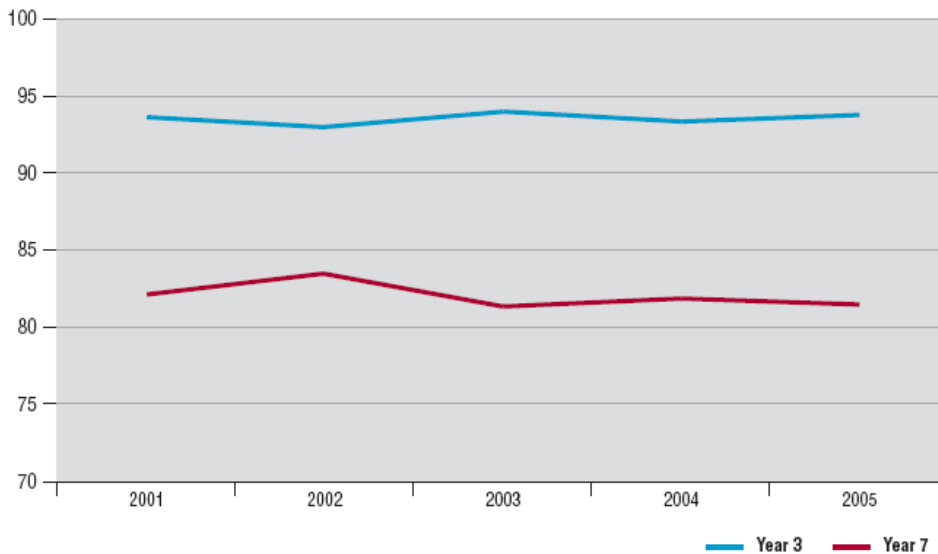
The Report outlines the performance of Australian students in Years 3, 5, and 7 against nationally agreed benchmarks in reading, writing and numeracy.

The results of testing across Australia in 2005 show that in Year 7:

- 18 per cent of students were not meeting the benchmark for numeracy;
- 10 per cent were not meeting the benchmark for reading; and
- 8 per cent were not reaching the benchmark for writing.

Charts 1 to 3 below illustrate the results of the national benchmarks in numeracy, reading and writing for both Year 3 and Year 7 students since 2001.

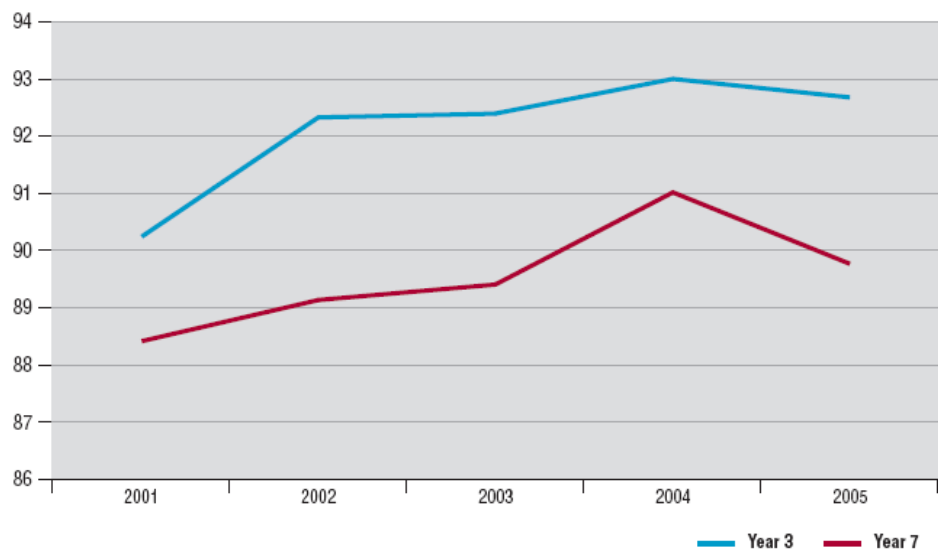
**Chart 1: Percentage of students meeting numeracy benchmarks over time**



Source: 2005 National Report on Schooling

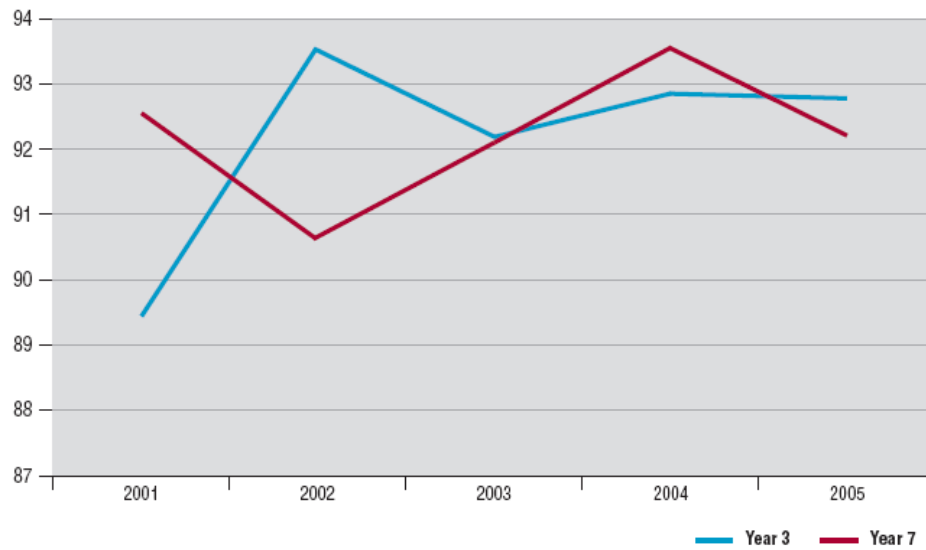
While there is a level of improvement in some of the results, the proportion of students not meeting the benchmarks is of concern. There is also a significant and worrying gap between the percentage of students meeting the benchmarks in Year 3, but not able to meet these in Year 7.

**Chart 2: Percentage of students meeting reading benchmarks over time**



Source: 2005 National Report on Schooling

**Chart 3: Percentage of students meeting writing benchmarks over time**

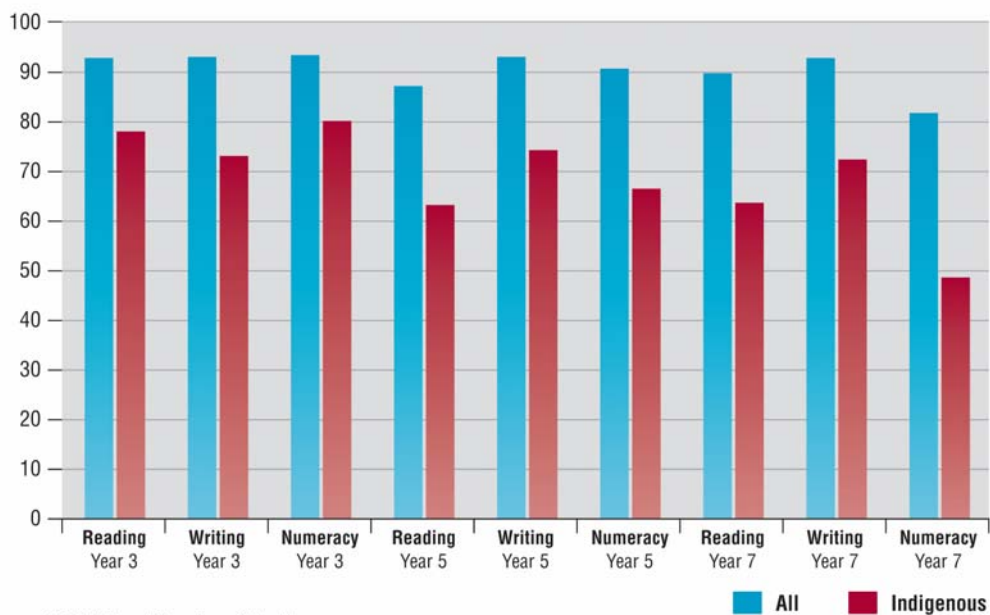


Source: 2005 National Report on Schooling

The results for Indigenous children are dramatically worse: 36 per cent of Indigenous children in Year 7 fail to meet the reading benchmarks, and 52 per cent fail to meet the numeracy benchmarks.

When comparing the results across all benchmarks in 2005, there is a striking gap between the results of all students, and those of Indigenous students as seen in Chart 4.

**Chart 4: Percentage of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students meeting literacy and numeracy benchmarks in 2005**



Source: 2005 National Report on Schooling

The factors affecting the performance of students in literacy and numeracy have been thoroughly researched both in Australia and internationally.

For example, one study of factors that influence student outcomes found that 50 per cent of what a student achieves is determined by the student themselves. In other words, what students themselves bring to the table substantially influences their achievement.<sup>2</sup>

This highlights the significance of what parents can do in early childhood, as well as the quality of early childhood education and the care environment.

In addition, there are several variables that influence student outcomes that good public policy can have a positive influence on.

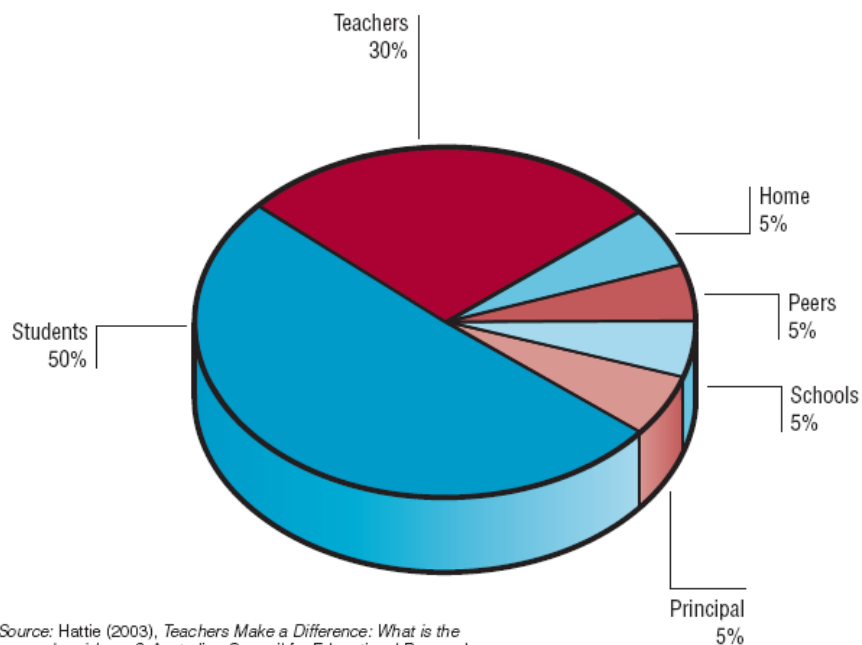
The level of expectation and encouragement students receive in their home throughout their school years and the interest a parent takes in a child's education is important in consolidating the good work done at school.

The leadership of the principal at the school the child attends clearly has significant influence, due to their ability to shape the climate of the school. The atmosphere and attitudes to learning that exist in a school are important in how a child feels in the classroom.

**Teachers and teaching**

The quality of a child's teacher in the classroom is a critical variable in determining student performance. In the piece of research referred to above, it accounted for 30 per cent of the determinative factors in a student's outcome.<sup>3</sup>

**Chart 5: Influences on student performance**



<sup>2</sup> Hattie, JA (2003), *Teachers make a difference: What is the research evidence?*, Background paper to invited address presented at the 2003 ACER Research Conference, Melbourne, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

It is the quality of what teachers do in the classroom that has the greatest potential to change the educational outcomes of students in numeracy and literacy. It is therefore essential in any examination of literacy and numeracy to address how those disciplines are actually taught.

The 2005 *Teaching Reading Report* examined the way literacy is taught in Australian schools.

The Report recommended a number of improvements to the way literacy is taught, from the methods teachers use to the literacy levels of the teachers themselves. It found clear evidence that:

*...direct systematic instruction in phonics during the early years of schooling is an essential foundation for teaching children to read.*

*All students learn best when teachers adopt an integrated approach to reading that explicitly teaches phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary knowledge, and comprehension.*<sup>4</sup>

Phonics is the method of teaching reading that concentrates on individual letters and sounds. Whole language methods approach the word as a whole and attach a meaning to it. The Report found that phonics was seen these days to be unfashionable.

The Howard Government's sole response to the *Teaching Reading Report* it commissioned, has been the *Reading Assistance Voucher Program* and its predecessor, the *Tutorial Voucher Initiative*.

These programs have been subject to criticism, firstly because only one third of eligible students took up the initial vouchers, and more recently because of the failure to use phonics to teach children the basic skills they need to read properly.

In any event, these vouchers do not provide assistance until students are in Year 3, when they could potentially already be well behind their peers.

The Literacy and Numeracy Review conducted by Professor Bill Loudon in 2006 in Western Australia also recommended:

*Developing additional resources for teachers in oral language, including awareness of sounds in words (phonological awareness), phonics and vocabulary.*<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that we need to ensure that both trainee teachers and teachers generally learn a variety of methods of teaching literacy and are able to apply these to individual students in the classroom.

Similarly in numeracy, having teachers who are confident in both the subject matter and the teaching methods is vital if they are to provide a quality education.

A 2006 study by the Australian Council of Deans of Science, *The Preparation of Mathematics Teachers in Australia*, found that:

- 8 per cent of maths teachers had not studied any maths at university;

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<sup>4</sup> Rowe, K (2005), *Teaching Reading*, Department of Education, Science and Training.

<sup>5</sup> Loudon, B (2007), *Literacy and Numeracy Review*, Department of Education and Training, Western Australia.

- around 20 per cent of maths teachers had not studied maths beyond first year University, including 23 per cent of junior school teachers;
- around 25 per cent of maths teachers did not have a major in maths, including 17 per cent of teachers of intermediate and advanced senior school maths;
- many maths teachers had studied no maths teaching methods whatsoever, including around 30 per cent of those who taught only at the junior or middle school level; and
- teachers under the age of 30 were significantly less likely than their older colleagues to hold a maths major or to have studied maths teaching methods.

This trend for new teachers not to have training or qualifications in the core areas they teach was confirmed in a recent survey of beginning teachers by the Australian Joint Principals' Associations.

It found 27 per cent of new teachers indicated that they are teaching outside their area of expertise. This was felt most strongly in English and Mathematics – the subjects where the core skills of literacy and numeracy are based.<sup>6</sup>

The literacy and numeracy abilities of teachers themselves have emerged as one of the key issues in recent research.

The House of Representatives Inquiry into Teacher Education recommended that students entering teaching courses at University should undergo literacy and numeracy testing.<sup>7</sup>

This finding is supported by the Loudon Review which stresses the importance of strong personal literacy and numeracy skills in beginning teachers.

If we are to provide our children with the highest quality education, we must impose high expectations and standards on the abilities and skills of their teachers.

Along with strong personal literacy and numeracy skills and an ability to teach in different methods dependent upon an individual students needs, the Loudon Review noted the need for strong curricula and professional development in these key areas.

The research generally points to the need for professional development and support programs for teachers, both beginning and experienced, to ensure they gain and retain the literacy and numeracy skills to assist students who are having difficulty.

### ***Identifying and supporting students***

While teachers have an all important impact on student educational outcomes, there is also a fundamental need to recognise that 'at-risk' groups require additional support to ensure they do not fall behind: children from disadvantaged backgrounds, Indigenous children, children with learning difficulties and children with disabilities all need extra support to ensure they get a real chance in life.

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<sup>6</sup> Australia's Joint Principal's Associations (2007), Beginning Teacher Survey 2006, [http://aspa.asn.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=149&Itemid=38](http://aspa.asn.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=149&Itemid=38)

<sup>7</sup> House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training (2007), *Top of the Class: Report on the inquiry into teacher education*, p.58.

As the results of the *2005 National Report on Schooling* highlight, around half of all Indigenous children are failing to reach the numeracy benchmarks, and more than a third are failing to meet the reading benchmarks by Year 7.

Special attention must be given to improving the outcomes for Indigenous students. The research supports the need not only for extra classroom support for 'at-risk' children, but diagnostic assessment to identify these children in the early years of their schooling.

In Indigenous communities, where low school attendance is often a pressing problem, literacy and numeracy skills foster a continued engagement with formal schooling. Children feel that they can participate, understand and keep up with classroom and other activities at a basic level.

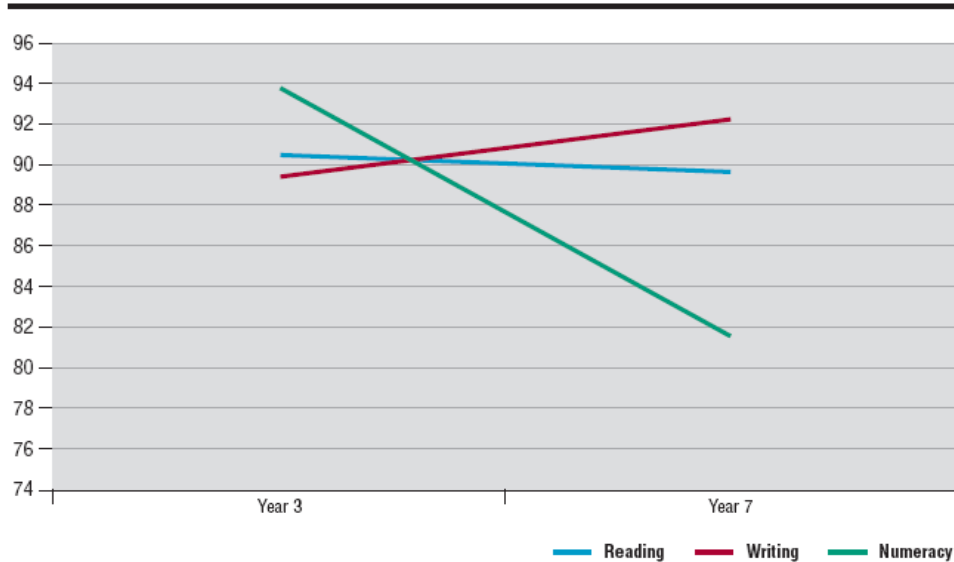
Changes to Commonwealth funding for programs for Indigenous children have lessened the resources available to each child and tied communities up in funding applications. This has delayed the implementation of much needed assistance to this group.

Adequate and dedicated resources must be provided to Indigenous children if we are to have any chance to substantially lessen the proportion of students failing to meet literacy and numeracy benchmarks.

It is important that students who are struggling or may be at risk are identified early so that they can be assisted through intervention programs such as Reading Recovery. Reading Recovery provides one-on-one tuition to identified students to ensure they are not left behind.<sup>8</sup>

However, it is not just Indigenous and at-risk students who can benefit from intervention programs. The *2005 National Report on Schooling* showed that in a given student cohort, there was an increase in the percentage of students who did not reach the benchmarks in literacy and numeracy.

**Chart 6: Cohort trends: percentage of students in Year 3 in 2001 meeting benchmarks over time**



<sup>8</sup> <http://education.qld.gov.au/students/procedure/program/reading-recovery/>

Chart 6 shows students who were meeting the Year 3 benchmarks in 2001 were not necessarily meeting them four years later when they undertook the Year 7 benchmark tests in 2005. While there was a slight improvement in writing, both reading and numeracy achievement declined.

Intervention and support programs are essential if we are to move beyond just measuring to the productive goal of increasing the number of students who meet the benchmarks and who continue to meet them throughout their school careers.

Ensuring these programs are targeted to individual students will help to address the issue of students who meet the benchmarks in primary school, but fall through the cracks in later years. This suggests the need for both an ability to identify and monitor the performance of individual children as they move through the years and also an ability to develop learning plans to help them meet or exceed literacy and numeracy benchmarks.

Early intervention is crucial to giving children the best possible chance of attaining literacy and numeracy skills that will equip them to participate effectively in society and the economy.

Leading developmental research shows that children rapidly develop from birth to age five. Development programs during these early years improve readiness to learn, literacy and numeracy, school performance, school retention and socialisation. They also decrease the number of students repeating grades and needing special education.<sup>9</sup>

The Loudon Review recognised the importance of targeted action in the very early years (pre-primary) if literacy and numeracy outcomes were to improve across the board.

It makes a series of recommendations surrounding early years, including the development of a pre-primary diagnostic assessment, on-entry assessment of literacy and numeracy skills at schools and follow-up support for children.

A plan for the development of pre-school literacy and numeracy skills through play-based learning is outlined in Labor's *New Directions for Early Childhood Education* paper. Labor has committed \$450 million to give all four year olds access to fifteen hours a week of high quality early childhood education delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher.

Understanding where children are at when they commence their formal schooling goes beyond identifying the skills they already possess.

Undetected disabilities and learning difficulties often lead to children struggling to learn, behavioural problems and disengagement – all factors that maximise the chance of poor literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Labor's *New Directions for Australian Children: Helping parents keep their kids healthy and ready to learn at the start of school life*, commits to a Healthy Kids Check, health advice for parents and a national roll-out of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) for all students to ensure health and learning difficulties are identified early and are able to be addressed immediately.

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<sup>9</sup> NSW Commission for Children and Young People (2004), *A Head Start for Australia: An Early Years Framework*.

The AEDI will see teachers conducting questionnaires with children in their first year of school across five areas including:

- Physical health and wellbeing.
- Social knowledge and competence.
- Emotional health and maturity.
- Language and cognitive development.
- Communication skills and general knowledge.

The Index will enable teachers to individually assess each child's development and help tailor appropriate learning programs. Parents will gain an insight into how their child is developing.

Labor's approach is to strengthen children's literacy and numeracy skills through preschool activities and to identify barriers to literacy and numeracy from the start of school.

The Howard Government's *Reading Assistance Vouchers* do not provide assistance until students are in Year 3, when they could potentially be well behind their peers.

Both the Teaching Reading Report and the Loudon Review recommend the development of literacy and numeracy plans either in individual schools or at a systemic level.

It is also the case that literacy and numeracy are recognised as being important beyond the primary years. The Teaching Reading report recommends,

*that literacy teaching continue throughout schooling (K-12) in all areas of the curriculum. Literacy must be the responsibility of all teachers across the curriculum, to provide an educationally sound program meeting the specific skill and knowledge needs of individual children from diverse backgrounds and locations.*<sup>10</sup>

Labor's commitment to the development of a national curriculum in cooperation with the States and Territories will provide the means to ensure that literacy and numeracy development are explicitly enshrined in the curriculum from K-12.

Labor also believes it is important to develop Individual Learning Plans for children covering literacy and numeracy to ensure that resources and support are tailored to the needs of each child.

Individual Learning Plans are necessary if we are to reduce the number of children who fail to meet Year 3 benchmarks and the increasing numbers who fail at Year 7.

Leadership in literacy, either through the school principal or a specialist literacy teacher is important, along with the role of parents.

### **Parents**

The involvement of parents is vital in helping to develop pre-school age children's reading, writing and numeracy skills as well as consolidating the work done in the classroom, especially for students who are at risk of falling behind.

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<sup>10</sup> Rowe, *op cit.*

Parents are critical in improving children's outcomes. By encouraging parents to hold high expectations of their children's academic performance, we can foster increased involvement of both parents and children in education.

The Brotherhood of Saint Laurence administers a number of initiatives designed to help at risk families overcome social and educational disadvantage, including the *Home Interaction Program for Parents and Young Children*. The principle of the program is to encourage parental involvement in a child's education, especially in the pre-primary years.

Through the program, parents spend regular time each day with their child doing fun, educational activities. A Home Tutor, also a parent in the same community, provides weekly activity packs for the parents to use. Not only do children thrive, but parents gain the confidence and skills necessary to be part of their child's education, development and overall wellbeing.<sup>11</sup>

All these factors influence the educational outcomes of our children.

To truly address the complexity of the literacy and numeracy problem in our schools any response needs to be comprehensive and include initiatives to address teacher quality; provide diagnostic assessment; target resources; increase the capacity and leadership of schools to intervene; help parents get involved; and provide extra support outside the classroom for struggling students.

## State and Territory initiatives to improve literacy and numeracy

Despite the clear need to do more in literacy and numeracy, there are already a number of State and Territory programs targeted at improving the literacy and numeracy outcomes of young Australians.

All States and Territories recognise the importance of literacy and numeracy as part of the school curriculum. The form of these programs however, varies significantly. It is generally recognised that programs and initiatives for improving literacy outcomes are more advanced than those for numeracy.

### Literacy Programs

Strategies for improving literacy outcomes exist across Australia.

New South Wales has a *State Literacy Strategy*. Queensland has the *Literacy – the Key to Learning: Framework for Action 2006-2008*. Victoria has a *Literacy and Numeracy Plan*. Tasmania has an *Interim Literacy Strategy*. Western Australia has undertaken a *Literacy and Numeracy Review*. Other States and the Territories have targeted literacy and numeracy curriculum plans for different stages of schooling.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.bsl.org.au/main.asp?PageId=547>

The approaches of the States and Territories generally include programs or recognition of the importance of some or all of the areas covered above.

### ***Programs for students 'at-risk'***

The New South Wales *State Literacy Strategy* includes a Support Teacher Learning Difficulties (STLD) program that provides an extra teacher where students with learning difficulties are identified. The STLD plays an important role in assisting the classroom teacher both inside and outside the classroom.

The role appears to be most effective when support occurs in class. Team teaching (with teachers' aides and support teachers) provides immediate support for 'at-risk' students and indirectly assists the literacy improvement of other students by freeing up the classroom teacher.

In Victoria, a range of targeted initiatives are directed towards improving underperforming schools or delivering targeted resources to meet the needs of individual students. Programs cover students with hearing problems, language difficulties, as well as Reading Recovery and early intervention programs.

Reading Recovery is carried out in most States, including South Australia where it is part of the *South Australian Early Years Literacy Program*. In South Australia, the program encourages schools to consider how they can use Reading Recovery programs as a means of targeted intervention for their youngest students.

A purpose built Reading Recovery Centre was established in South Australia in 2003. Reading Recovery teachers also assist in developing teaching strategies and provide professional development for classroom teachers.

The *Time for Talk* program developed in Western Australia is an oral language package that supports students from an Indigenous or non-English speaking background in the early years of schooling. It uses an assessment tool and supportive activities to develop standard Australian English while encouraging students to build upon their first language.

### ***Teacher-centred initiatives***

New South Wales has committed to recruiting an extra 200 reading recovery teachers. The *State Literacy Strategy* establishes school literacy teams to coordinate a whole-school approach to the teaching of literacy.

In Queensland, *Regional Literacy Managers* provide professional development for all Queensland government school teachers. Every teacher in every classroom is specifically trained to teach literacy.

Literacy leader professional learning modules for both primary and secondary teachers are proposed for Victoria. This will be supported by a professional learning program offered through the Victorian Education Department.

The Northern Territory has literacy specific professional development ranging from whole school sessions to the classroom itself.

An *Early Literacy Officer* program exists in the Australian Capital Territory, where teachers receive support from a specialist literacy officer. The Early Literacy Officer spends six weeks in each school to provide an extra resource in literacy for Kindergarten to Year 3 teachers, along with extra professional development and classroom support in literacy.

### ***Programs about Methods of Teaching Literacy***

Schools across the country teach literacy using a number of methods, including phonics.

The Australian Capital Territory runs professional learning that aims to provide teachers with a good understanding of phonics, within and alongside other meaningful teaching methods so they can meet the needs of each individual child.

### ***Literacy as part of the school curriculum***

Professional development in the Northern Territory is provided to teachers so they can develop literacy plans, and the Northern Territory Education Department provides resources for the implementation of these plans.

Student assessments in the early years of school are carried out in New South Wales and are used to develop individual learning plans for students.

### ***Provision of Literacy Resources***

Resources in the classroom are provided through literacy programs across the States and Territories. There are also resources available to parents in some jurisdictions.

In the Australian Capital Territory, the *Parents as Tutors Program* operates as a joint project between the University of Canberra and the Australian Capital Territory Department of Education. It was set up to assist families with children who are experiencing severe literacy difficulties. Parents are provided with intensive training in literacy development and bring their children to the Centre an hour a week.

New South Wales provides practical advice and information to parents about how they can best support their child's early development and reinforce in the home what is being taught in the classroom.

### ***Diagnostic tools***

Victoria makes a *School Entry Assessment Kit* available to all schools to allow teachers to assess new students on their transition to school. The Kit consists of three tasks designed to assess oral use of language, emergent concepts about print and numeracy. These tasks provide information for teachers about the skills of each new student and assist school management in making decisions about programs and resources.

New South Wales has recently announced a similar assessment of the reading, writing, and counting abilities of all children entering Kindergarten. This new diagnostic tool will be developed in consultation with practising classroom teachers and principals and is expected to be available across primary schools by 2010.

Tasmania's *Interim Literacy Strategy* aims to determine what support schools need to further improve literacy.

## Numeracy Programs

Numeracy programs are often included with the literacy programs of State and Territory Governments. There are, however, major differences in the approaches to teaching literacy and numeracy. A number of the States and Territories have specific targeted programs for numeracy.

New South Wales' *State Numeracy Plan 2006-2008* is designed to guide schools to improve numeracy.

The plan involves a State-wide coordinated approach to numeracy, with identification of and support for needs, school planning, assessment and reporting and professional learning. It includes elements to involve parents in the process.

Other States and Territories are developing frameworks to ensure a strategic, targeted approach to the teaching of numeracy.

Across Australia, a number of programs focus specifically on lifting numeracy standards, usually through a combination of professional development, diagnostic testing and intensive support for struggling students.

The *Mathematics Intervention* program in Victoria aims to identify and then assist, children in Year 1 at risk of not coping with the mathematics curriculum.

The program features elements of Mathematics Recovery and offers children the chance to experience success in mathematics by developing the basic concepts of numbers upon which they build their understanding of mathematics. Children work in small groups to assist with the development of their mathematical skills.

Also in Victoria, the *Early Years Numeracy* program is a comprehensive approach to numeracy achievement in the early years of schooling. The implementation of the program is supported by teacher professional development.

The New South Wales *Count Me In Too* program is a numeracy project operating across primary schools in the State and in the Australian Capital Territory. This project aims to improve the educational outcomes in mathematics for all students through professional development of teachers. It is designed to assist teachers to broaden their knowledge of how children learn mathematics and solve arithmetic tasks.

The *Mathematics Recovery* program is the numeracy equivalent to Reading Recovery in literacy. In New South Wales, Mathematics Recovery involves specialist teachers working to advance the mathematical knowledge of first-grade students to a level where they can learn successfully in a regular class.

*First Steps in Mathematics* in Western Australia enables teachers to diagnose, plan, implement and evaluate their students' learning in maths. Diagnostic tools help teachers to identify specific topics such as measurement or space where students are having difficulty understanding concepts.

# Labor's National Action Plan on Literacy and Numeracy

Ensuring young people can read, write and count is essential to enabling young Australians to fully participate in society.

It is also vital to our nation's future economic prosperity that we dramatically reduce the proportion of students who fall behind in these key areas and fail to acquire the skills to contribute to the modern economy.

There are a range of programs across Australia to try and improve the literacy and numeracy outcomes of our young people. State and Territory Governments are investing in literacy and numeracy improvement of young Australian school children. Any response to literacy and numeracy must be comprehensive and cover a number of elements which involve teachers, parents, schools, principals and be supported with resources from government.

Across the States and Territories, gaps exist in some of these areas. It is these gaps that need to be filled in order to provide a comprehensive, effective national approach to improving literacy and numeracy.

However, a greater national effort and a more nationally consistent approach is required to reduce the number of Australians failing to meet literacy and numeracy benchmarks.

Current Howard Government funding for literacy and numeracy is primarily targeted towards 'at-risk' groups through the *Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs* program.

While it is important to ensure those groups who are most likely to fall behind, especially Indigenous students, are provided with support it is not just the most disadvantaged students who are failing to meet the benchmarks.

A Rudd Labor Government will move beyond benchmarking and assessment. Along with existing benchmark tests in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, we should carry out a school entry evaluation which includes a focus on literacy and numeracy skills.

Having obtained this data, we then need to use the information to direct extra resources where intervention is required.

Increasing performance in literacy and numeracy relies on investing in many facets of our education system: improving teacher quality in numeracy and literacy through more comprehensive teacher education courses, better student teacher practicum and ongoing literacy and numeracy professional development.

We need to encourage strong leadership and additional resources in our schools to deal with identified needs through specialist literacy and numeracy teachers, who can act as literacy and numeracy coaches or school coordinators.

Increasing parental involvement and helping parents consolidate good work done in the classroom is important, as are homework or after school centres where those who are struggling can receive further assistance.

We will establish, in partnership with State and Territory Governments and the Catholic and Independent school sectors, a National Action Plan on Literacy and Numeracy.

Labor's National Action Plan on Literacy and Numeracy will target schools, teacher training and individual student support to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes.

### **Literacy and Numeracy in Schools**

Labor will:

- Strengthen children's literacy and numeracy development in their pre-school years through the funding of a universal year of early childhood education and care for all four year olds.
- Implement a *Healthy Kids Check* and the *Australian Early Development Index* in consultation with State and Territory Governments and the Catholic and Independent school sectors to assess the health, development and wellbeing of all children in their first year of school.
- Work to develop, in cooperation with State and Territory Governments and the Catholic and Independent school sectors, Individual Learning Plans focused on literacy and numeracy for all Australian children from Year 1 onwards. These plans would be based on health and development assessments and benchmark results; and
- Develop a national curriculum includes specific literacy and numeracy standards, and that these standards are reflected in the curriculum in all years of schooling from K-12.

Labor will provide dedicated funding to the States and Territories and Catholic and Independent school sectors for additional literacy and numeracy support to schools to implement literacy and numeracy initiatives that begin in the first year of school.

This funding will be available for initiatives such as:

- Providing a qualified literacy or numeracy teacher to work at the school;
- Providing for a teacher to become a 'head teacher', school 'coach' or literacy or numeracy coordinator, developing a literacy or numeracy plan for the school, and providing support to both teachers and students;
- Providing homework centres for children who need extra support;
- Providing professional development in literacy and numeracy for the school's teachers;
- Providing extra literacy and numeracy teaching resources
- Providing dedicated additional resources to assist Indigenous children; and
- Involving parents in the literacy and numeracy education of their children.

### **Improving Teachers' Literacy and Numeracy Skills**

Labor will work with the Council of Deans of Education to ensure that:

- All trainee teachers are assessed so that they meet necessary literacy and numeracy skills and standards when they enter and leave University. Students would not be able to graduate without having the appropriate skills and standards.
- All teacher training courses include modules on the teaching of literacy and numeracy to ensure all teachers can confidently teach individual students using a variety of methods, including phonics.

### **Support for Parents**

Labor will develop educational material for parents of younger children on the value of reading and activities that help build numeracy such as packs of fun educational games and tasks. This material will be provided to childcare, maternal and child health settings, playgroups and preschools.

Labor will also discuss with State and Territory Governments and the Catholic and Independent school sectors, the possible adoption of a partnerships program between local schools and community organisations to provide programs for parents with younger children attending a local community school.

One such program is the Brotherhood of St Lawrence's *Home Interaction Program for Parents and Young Children* which helps parents of pre-school aged children from disadvantaged communities work with their children to develop reading and maths skills.

### **Future Directions**

Detailed funding for Labor's National Action Plan on Literacy and Numeracy will be announced prior to the election as part of Labor's Schools policy.

Labor will continue to fund the *Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs Program*, and examine a possible expansion of the community support element of the program which provides funding to community based, non-school organisations to support children with special needs. This is currently targeted towards community organisations that help children with disabilities.

However, there are many organisations undertaking valuable work in engaging parents, at risk students and pre-primary students in literacy and numeracy in a much broader sense that could benefit from Commonwealth support.

The *Reading Assistance Voucher Program* has been the subject of some recent criticism. The planned review of the program will be carried out at the end of 2007 to ensure the program is providing students with appropriate and effective tuition. The findings of this review will help determine the future of this program.