

Submission to the AITSL review of teacher registration

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Background

Rooty Hill High School and its staff have worked with the professional standards since their introduction and, before that, since the NSW professional standards were introduced in October 2005. The staff strongly support registration in a standards framework based on our experience over many years as the school in NSW with the highest number of beginning teachers (2006-2012) and with large numbers of beginning teachers in most years. The school has been recognised as a leader in professional practice in a standards framework and has been asked to share its practice at a state, national and international level in the last five years.

In 2013 this school was asked to lead a trial by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) of government school based delivery of professional learning at all levels of the standards and, as a former president of the NSW Secondary Principals Council, I had a direct involvement in the design and delivery of many of the national procedures at a state level.

In addition, as a school we recognise the value of the graduate standards as a baseline but have some uncertainty about how some universities use the standards directly as classroom observation tools, rather than as over-arching statements addressed by classroom and other professional practice indicators.

We look forward to the opportunity to take part in the 2018 review of the domains and standards later this year and would welcome a visit from either of the panels to understand the successful application of registration in a standards framework in school practice. We wish to provide advice on:

- The operation of the national framework in NSW
- Teacher standards and teaching quality
- Benefits and success measures

The operation of national framework in NSW

One of the strengths of the current framework (and the standards) is that it positions Australia as a world leader in establishing entry and initial registration levels for teachers based on professional assessment and professional benchmarks. In our opinion and, based on 12 years of evidence from accreditation and registration practice at this school, the framework has enabled systems and schools to set benchmarks. In this school, the result has been a shift to higher quality teaching practice, especially among beginning teachers. They are more confident and, supported by mentors, their professional practice develops more quickly than in the previous models that were in place in NSW.

With insight based on the ways we operated before the implementation of the proficient and then the graduate standards, we would consider that, once registration against standards is embedded as part of the school's work practices, the school's teaching and professional practices reach a tipping point where the standards can be seen as the key lens through which to frame and/or underpin

approaches to professional learning plans, accommodations for students with exceptional needs, school projects, action learning, classroom observation and collaborative action on programming, lesson design and assessment.

Some of our “young guns” do wonder why they have to do one 5 year accreditation cycle at proficient before they attempt the higher standards. We have not yet reached a school wide consensus on this system imposed implementation requirement.

At a systems level, this school welcomes the changes in NSW that will shift the corporate implementation and monitoring to NESAs from 2018. There were challenges in dealing with a second level of bureaucracy imposed by the Department of Education in relation to accreditation; in relation to critical probity checks and the sharing of information there was considerable value in the role taken by the DoE as the employer in ensuring qualifications, criminal record checks and working with children checks prior to giving approval to teach. On occasions, the timelines between when the universities provided qualification data and when the teacher was issued with an approval to teach in a government school made initial employment more difficult. However a strong focus on case by case management has ensured considerable quality in the processes for professional employment in NSW government schools.

We would like to make a particular comment on the registration of VET teachers in schools. In our experience, VET teachers fall into 3 main groups in NSW:

1. Those employed by TAFE and available to teach in NSW high schools on a fee for service basis and/or at the TAFE – with students attending there. In general these teachers are of a high quality and, if they were to be registered, their registration should be consistent with current TAFE/RTO practice in NSW.
2. Those who are currently teachers and have added additional qualifications to their initial teacher qualifications through additional system, RTO or school funded training. These teachers are already registered in a standards framework and meet both teacher registration and RTO benchmarks and ongoing training. We support this continuing for those teachers who have previous industry experiences outside school education.
3. Those who have retrained from industry and been appointed to teach VET (and other trade related subjects – especially in Technical and Applied Studies). There was a large retraining program of this type throughout the 1990s and as late as 2008 in NSW and current shortages would suggest there is a need to look at this type of program again. Having said that, in our experience, there are teachers who were employed, especially in the Industrial Arts, Construction and Metals areas whose own levels of literacy and numeracy would no longer reach the level required for professional employment in NSW secondary schools. Where teacher literacy and numeracy is not at the same level demanded by the syllabus (especially in Years 10-12) there is a measurable impact on student outcomes. Subject-based literacy and numeracy needs to be a consideration and requiring at least AQSF Level 6 standards should be a minimum pre-entry requirement for retrained VET teachers as part of an “graduate standards” or equivalent qualification. Once employed these teachers should be required to meet the same professional standards as other colleagues working in the school.

Teacher Standards and Teaching Quality

Based on evidence held in this school, the thoughtful and rigorous use of teacher standards at this school has resulted in a significant shift in the ways our teachers work and view their own professional practice. The number of our teachers being recognised for their work in professional and awards programs in the last 5 years is one piece of evidence of which we are very proud; as is the number of schools approaching our school for advice and professional learning in relation to professional practice and teaching quality.

We wish to emphasise that, in our view “proficient” is the initial level of registration for practising teachers and that systems (often populated by well-meaning staff with limited or dated experience in schools) have failed to recognise that the majority of teachers in schools in NSW are performing well above the proficient level. A sad consequence has been an overall failure by government to recognise the benchmarks and quality of the work being done in the vast majority of Australian schools. The use of narrow curriculum-content free measures, such as NAPLAN, have exacerbated the tendency of governments and the community to misrepresent the complexity and demands of the work teachers do.

We would want to be very clear that “teacher quality” is used in Australia as a pejorative term that excludes, limits and offends us because it focuses on “playing the person” not the work or task the person is doing each day. In all our work, we are focused on “teaching quality” and the implied inclusion and collaboration that create improvements in teaching and learning for all students in the school, not just some of them.

In NSW the term “teaching quality” was sensibly adopted by previous Ministers and Secretaries some years ago in support of the standards framework. The new language allowed the system and the school to focus on those ways of knowing, doing and being that are the hallmark of the teaching profession. It removed the focus from the person to those things the person in the role does to improve her or his classroom and teaching practice. The language is not fixed and creates a working metaphor in which schools can design professional learning and practices that improve the quality of the teaching in the whole school.

One of the reasons that this school is now working with so many other schools (across all sectors) is our capacity to measure the impact of the teaching and learning practices in the school and design school-based responses to areas in which we wish to innovate and improve our practice.

Given that 60-80% of our students start high school below grade average, the capacity to improve teaching and learning practice is critical. Designing professional learning and classroom teaching and learning practice at the “highly accomplished” and “lead” levels of the standards has enabled our teachers to work together to co-design ways to “lift” the quality of the day to day practice of our work. We would not have done this nearly as easily had we not had a standards framework to underpin our professional thinking, planning, implementation and evidence collection.

As a result of this deep work, we do have evidence informed views on how the standards could be updated and redesigned/re-aligned – this will be the subject of the submission on Teacher Standards we plan to make later in the year.

Benefits and success measures

If the national framework can be implemented with consistency and agreement on the indicators (evidence) of each level of the standards it will provide a rich source of data to schools, systems and government on the quality of teaching in Australia and, critically, it will provide a measure that is not directly impacted by school context, school funding or the nature of the students in each class. We think this is the significant benefit of carefully articulated standards and a national approach.

At this stage, we are only in a position to comment on the success measures we have seen at this school since moving to the careful use of the standards:

- A higher quality of teaching and learning practice in the 20-25 practicum teachers and interns hosted by the school each year as measured by their practicum reports and classroom observations.
- The employment of graduates who have a much deeper understanding of the key aspects of their work as teachers – in each of the three domains of professional knowledge, professional practice and professional commitment.
- An increased trajectory in the ability of beginning teachers to evaluate, annotate and provide evidence for their accreditation at proficient level. This is both a combination of the starting point of teachers who have achieved graduate standards, a professional school culture with a standards focus and the provision of subject-based mentors who have completed the accreditation process in recent years.
- The delivery of 50+ hours of registered professional learning at highly accomplished and/or lead level for teaching staff and, in the case of classroom observation, leaders from other schools in 2016 and 2017 designed by teachers at this school to ensure that the school's professional learning has a focus on growth and development using the professional standards.
- A measurable improvement in the quality of programming, lesson design and classroom practice observations. Our teachers used the higher standards and best practice international research to design classroom indicators and protocols that are now used across the school.
- A deep engagement by all teaching staff in the professional learning process, action research and cross-faculty professional learning teams. As a result, our teachers were asked to mentor two other schools and were invited to present to senior corporate staff on the application of the NSW DoE Professional Development Framework using the teacher standards.
- A measurable shift in the professional, intellectual, social and community capital of the school, during the implementation of the 2015-2017 school plans where there was a focus on professional practice using the teacher standards. One result was the selection of the school in 2016 and 2017 as one of the 40 *Most Innovative Schools* in Australia by *Educator* magazine.
- A measurable improvement in student engagement including consistent performance above state average in the NSW DoE *Tell Them from Me* survey.
- Improved student results including improved HSC results in 2017 and 70% of students performing above state average on the VALID Science assessment in 2017 (a measure that includes both STEM and ACARA capability measures).

These examples are not included to promote the school; we have included them to demonstrate how the effective implementation of the teacher standards in a school context can build a rich professional culture and underpin the improvement of teaching practice for all teachers in a school. It requires that school leaders and teachers understand the standards and design professional practices that embed the demonstration of the standards as part of each day's work – not as something that is done only for accreditation or promotion by individual teachers. At this school it is about a measurable change for every teacher and for our whole school teaching and learning practice.