Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Limited

Review of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

Discussion Paper



Review of the Teacher Standards Discussion paper

AITSL

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands, sea countries, and waterways from across Australia. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and living cultures, and to Elders past and present.

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1. Introduction

Commissioning of the Review of the Teacher Standards

In April 2026, Education Ministers agreed to commission the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) to review the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (Teacher Standards or Standards). The Review of the Teacher Standards (the Review) is considering the extent to which the Teacher Standards remain relevant, evidence-informed and aligned with an understanding of effective practice for the teaching of children and young people. This includes identifying areas where the Teacher Standards still serve their intended purposes effectively, as well as those areas that may need to be strengthened or improved, and then providing recommendations on any revisions needed. The Review commenced in May 2026 with a final report due to Education Ministers in March 2027.

Scope of the Review

Governance

The Review is being conducted under the following governance arrangements.

Education Ministers established the Review and set its scope, with the AITSL Board retaining strategic oversight of the Review.

A Standards Project Reference Group (Standards PRG) provides advice to AITSL on running the Review, including identifying key risks and opportunities. The Standards PRG contains representation from 43 partners and stakeholders encompassing regulatory bodies, Government school systems, national Catholic and independent education employers and organisations, unions, national education agencies, peak principal, teacher and parent associations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and the initial teacher education (ITE) sector.

Four professional panels provide practice-informed advice grounded in their experiences with the Teacher Standards. The 51 panel members were nominated by a range of organisations including systems, sectors, principal and teacher associations and unions. The four professional panels comprise early childhood teachers, school teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders, including deputy and assistant principals, and school principals.

Nine existing AITSL-established consultative groups provide advice on aspects of the Review. The groups contain approximately 150 members comprising teachers, leaders, systems, sectors, regulatory bodies, ITE providers, education experts, and principal and other professional associations to develop policies, tools, and resources that support quality teaching and leadership.

In addition to utilising AITSL's established consultative groups, AITSL has conducted one-on-one consultation meetings with 40 education organisations.

Twelve national and international expert advisors have been appointed to provide independent scholarly and technical advice to AITSL, in areas where AITSL does not hold specific expertise. The advisors provide targeted support in areas related to the Teacher Standards, when additional expertise is required.

Evidence inputs

The Review's evidence inputs include an environmental scan, a review of the relevant literature, expert written submissions from invited experts, an online survey open to anyone over 18 years of age including members of the profession, and focus groups. Detailed information on these evidence inputs is provided in Section 4.

Impact assessment

An independent impact assessment will identify and assess the potential financial and other implications of revising the Teacher Standards (particularly in regard to implementation of those changes) to inform Education Ministers about the implementation of revised Teacher Standards. The impact assessment will include advice on sequencing, appropriate lead times for implementing change and the mapping of potential financial and other impacts across ITE accreditation, including program design, teacher registration and certification, performance and development processes, professional learning, industrial instruments, teacher and leader workload and learning outcomes for children and young people.

Discussion paper

This Discussion Paper synthesises and examines the findings from the evidence inputs and consultation against the Teacher Standards to identify key areas for improvement, and test potential actions with the profession and partners. The Discussion Paper does not include recommendations. Responses to the Discussion Paper will be drawn on, together with findings from the evidence inputs and impact assessment, to inform AITSL's final report on the Review.

Final report with recommendations

A final report with options and AITSL's recommendations for improving the Teacher Standards will be developed for consideration by Education Ministers. The final report is due to be submitted to Ministers in March 2027. It will not include suggested wording changes to the Teacher Standards.

Revising the Teacher Standards

Subject to the consideration of the final report by Ministers and any agreed direction for change, AITSL would then lead the drafting of revisions to the Teacher Standards, including further consultation and validation of the proposed Standards with the profession.

Responding to the Discussion Paper

All members of the education and broader community are invited to respond to the Discussion Paper. In particular, AITSL would like to hear perspectives on the identified areas for improvement and potential actions raised. AITSL also welcomes any additional commentary on how the Teacher Standards may be improved or alternative actions not raised.

Feedback on the Discussion Paper can be provided through written submission or an online survey with further details here: https://www.aitsl.edu.au/the-standards/teacher-standards/review-of-the-teacher-standards.

2. Background

This section briefly outlines the current purposes and intent of the Teacher Standards, providing context for the evidence base presented in this paper.

Purpose of the Teacher Standards

The Teacher Standards were agreed by Education Ministers in 2010 with an overarching purpose of supporting quality teaching and, through that, improved learning for every child and young person. They make explicit the knowledge, practice and professional engagement that effective teaching requires.

The Teacher Standards were written for teachers in school settings. However, the elevation of the importance of early childhood education through the introduction of the *National Quality Standard* (NQS) for early childhood education and care, from 2012, saw the introduction of a qualified teacher in early childhood education and care settings educating preschool-aged children. This policy change has seen the Teacher Standards applied to early childhood teachers.

In addition to contributing to improving learning for every child and young person, the Teacher Standards serve four connected purposes:

- **A shared understanding of high-quality, effective teaching**. They give teachers, school leaders, teacher educators and the community a common language for describing the complex work of teaching.
- **A foundation for professional growth**. They help teachers reflect on their practice, receive useful feedback and identify what to learn next.
- **Coherence across a teaching career**. They connect initial teacher education, registration, performance and development, professional learning, and the recognition of Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers, describing the development of knowledge and practice throughout a teacher's career.
- **Public confidence and professional standing**. They make the profession's expertise and expectations visible, articulating what it means to be a qualified, effective teacher.

Since their implementation, the Teacher Standards have been embedded in many policies, processes and legislation, including the accreditation of initial teacher education (ITE) programs, supporting the induction of new teachers, providing a basis for the registration of teachers, providing a structure to guide the professional learning and the performance and development of teachers, providing the basis for industrial agreements, and recognising highly effective, exemplary teaching through the teacher certification process.

Structure of the Teacher Standards

There are 7 Standards and 37 focus areas and descriptors across 4 career stages. They are organised and identify expectations of teachers under 3 domains of teaching:

Domains of teaching	Standards
Professional Knowledge	1. Know students and how they learn 2. Know the content and how to teach it
Professional Practice	3. Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning 4. Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments 5. Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning
Professional Engagement	6. Engage in professional learning 7. Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community

The 37 focus areas describe the key components of each Standard. The descriptors describe teaching quality for each focus area at each career stage.

The Teacher Standards also establish professional expectations: for teachers to analyse and reflect on their own practice; engage in individual and collaborative professional learning; and work effectively with colleagues, parents/carers, and the broader community. In addition, they provide a framework that supports professional ethics and conduct, both in teachers' own practice and in their interactions with others.

Career stages in the Teacher Standards

The Teacher Standards are organised into 4 career stages that reflect the continuum of a school teacher's developing professional expertise from undergraduate preparation through to being an exemplary classroom practitioner and a leader in the profession: Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead.

Graduate

The Graduate career stage describes the expected knowledge, practice and engagement of graduates when they complete their ITE course. The Graduate career stage provides the foundation for the accreditation of ITE programs, providing preservice teachers with fundamental theoretical knowledge and understanding accompanied by targeted practical application. Graduates from accredited programs qualify for provisional registration (called accreditation in NSW) in each state or territory.

The Graduate career stage forms one part of the requirements for ITE program accreditation and teacher registration. ITE programs and applicants for registration must also meet other applicable national and jurisdictional requirements.

Proficient

The Proficient career stage is designed to articulate the knowledge, practice and engagement expected of teachers who can independently plan and implement effective teaching and learning experiences for children and young people. These teachers draw on their professional knowledge and

reflect critically on their practice to exercise professional judgement, seeking advice from colleagues and support when needed.

The Proficient career stage also supports beginning teachers in applying theoretical knowledge across an increasingly diverse range of teaching contexts.

All teachers in school-aged learning environments and most early childhood teachers in Australia are required to gain and maintain registration/accreditation in order to work in learning environments with children and young people.

The Proficient career stage underpins processes for full teacher registration in Australia. Teachers seeking to move from provisional to full registration are required to demonstrate that they meet the Proficient career stage, alongside other applicable registration requirements.

Highly Accomplished

The Highly Accomplished career stage is designed to describe the expectations of highly effective, skilled classroom practitioners who routinely work independently and collaboratively to improve their own practice and the practice of colleagues. The Highly Accomplished descriptors provide the basis for national certification as a Highly Accomplished teacher.

Lead

The Lead career stage is designed to describe teachers who are recognised and respected by colleagues, parents/carers and the community as exemplary teachers. They have demonstrated consistent and innovative teaching practices over time and have initiated and led activities focused on improving educational opportunities for all children and young people. The Lead descriptors provide the basis for national certification as a Lead teacher.

Certification at Highly Accomplished and Lead career stages is voluntary and is implemented by certifying authorities in participating jurisdictions and sectors.

3. Context of the Review of the Teacher Standards

The Teacher Standards were developed 16 years ago with school teachers, for school teachers and have not been formally reviewed since they were first adopted.

Since the inception of the Teacher Standards in 2010, there have been marked shifts in the context in which compulsory education has been delivered.

Australian education has experienced significant social, technological and institutional change. Schools have increasingly operated in a context of digital saturation, widespread use of online platforms, growing awareness of mental health, trauma and disability, rising family and economic pressures, and heightened public visibility. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated these trends, exposing inequalities in digital access and increasing expectations that schools respond to wellbeing, social fragmentation and inequality alongside their core teaching role.

The use of technology has increased in everyday schooling through learning platforms, data systems and, more recently, artificial intelligence. At the same time, climate anxiety, misinformation, declining trust in institutions and broader social fragmentation have influenced students' experiences and community expectations of schools. Policy activity intensified through curriculum and assessment reform, wellbeing initiatives and workforce strategies, often adding to existing demands on educators.

Within schools, inclusion has become increasingly prominent, while data collection, reporting and accountability requirements have expanded. Teachers are being given growing responsibility for supporting student wellbeing, engagement and diverse learning needs alongside instructional expectations. Concerns about workload, burnout, workforce shortages and professional sustainability have become more pronounced. Overall, the period has been characterised less by transition than by the accumulation of unresolved pressures under conditions of rapid social and technological change, creating increasingly complex expectations of schools, teachers and education systems.

The Teacher Standards were also not designed to define the work of early childhood teachers, nor make explicit the elements of high-quality, effective teaching in birth to 5 education and care contexts, given that at the time of the Standards' development, there was not yet a national focus on learning in early childhood education and care services.

The Review was initiated in response to views expressed by early childhood and school teachers, school leaders and the broader profession about the relevance and appropriateness of the current Teacher Standards for supporting teaching quality and effectiveness in birth to 5 education and in the compulsory years of education.

The purpose of the Review is not to assume change is needed, but to examine how the Teacher Standards work in practice and whether they remain current and align with the strongest evidence and views of the profession about effective teaching.

The Review also provides an opportunity to consider how the Teacher Standards are being used across different contexts and to ensure they continue to reflect what teachers of school-aged children and young people need to know and be able to do to optimise the learning of children and young people at the relevant career stages. It also affords an opportunity to determine how to best define the work of early childhood teachers and make explicit the elements of high-quality, early childhood teaching and learning that will improve the educational, developmental and wellbeing outcomes for children in the birth to 5 age group.

In addition, since 2010, there has been considerable relevant, evidence-based educational research published. In response to that research, some systems and schools have moved to setting expectations of teaching practice informed by this evidence. There have also been other substantive

policy changes, such as the introduction of Core Content in ITE that have implications for the content of the Teacher Standards.

Since the Teacher Standards were developed, significant national reforms have strengthened expectations for evidence-based teaching in ITE. In particular, the *Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel (2023)* informed the introduction of mandatory Core Content in ITE programs, covering the brain and learning, effective pedagogical practices, classroom management and responsive teaching. The Review provides an opportunity to consider the alignment between these nationally agreed expectations for beginning teachers and the knowledge and practices articulated in the Teacher Standards, particularly at the Graduate career stage.

During the consultation and evidence gathering phase of the Review, it became clear that feedback from some stakeholders was strongly driven by concerns about the impact of any agreed revisions to the Teacher Standards.

There is no doubt that any agreed revisions to the Teacher Standards will be accompanied by an effort to ensure effective implementation. Recognising this, the recommendations to Ministers will be accompanied by a detailed impact assessment that considers the impact on stakeholders using the Teacher Standards. This means that Ministers will be provided with information about the financial, industrial, employment, accreditation, registration and workload impacts on stakeholders, together with details on the likely benefits of any proposed revisions.

In addition, any agreed revisions to the Teacher Standards will need to be phased in through a nationally agreed multi-year transition arrangement.

4. How evidence was gathered to inform the Review

Evidence for the Review of the Teacher Standards was gathered in a variety of ways and forms the evidence base for this discussion paper. The analysis considers multiple sources of evidence inputs, including stakeholder perspectives on the architecture, content and application of the Teacher Standards and current published research on effective teaching. National and international expert advisors provided additional, targeted advice to AITSL in their respective areas of expertise.

The evidence explored 3 key questions:

1. To what extent do the Teacher Standards align with research evidence on effective teacher practice and what changes to the Standards are indicated by the evidence?
2. To what extent do the Teacher Standards represent progression in expertise at teaching children and young people across career stages, and what revisions would strengthen this progression?
3. To what extent does the current structure and content of the Teacher Standards support their purpose, intended and current uses, and what changes to the Standards are indicated?

Each source of evidence provides an important perspective and has been considered as part of the overall evidence base. Where evidence sources converge, this provides a stronger basis for identifying potential areas for improvement. Where views or findings diverge, consideration must be given to the strength and rigour of the available evidence, the purposes and intended uses of the Teacher Standards, and the feasibility and practical implications of implementation at scale.

In the first phase of the review, evidence contributing to the Discussion Paper was gathered in the following five ways.

Literature review

The purpose of the literature review was to undertake a review of peer-reviewed literature published in English which addressed two of the key research questions specified below:

1. To what extent do the Teacher Standards align with research evidence on effective teacher practice, and what changes to the Standards are indicated by the evidence?
2. To what extent do the Teacher Standards represent progression in expertise at teaching children and young people across career stages, and what agreed revisions could strengthen this progression?

Aligning with the Education Ministers Meeting commissioning of the Review, the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO), Australia's national education evidence body, was engaged to undertake the literature review. This work was critical in providing evidence on the extent to which the current Teacher Standards align with contemporary research on effective teaching practice and represent progression in classroom teaching expertise across career stages.

Environmental scan

The purpose of the environmental scan was to:

1. map references to the Teacher Standards in formal publications associated with teacher registration, certification, ITE program accreditation, performance and development, professional learning and teacher industrial agreements

2. identify recent developments relating to the content, structure and career stages of the Teacher Standards that may inform consideration of whether, and how, the Teacher Standards could be improved
3. review alignment of the Teacher Standards with enduring Australian policies and priorities.

AITSL requested and received documents from all jurisdictions. In total, the environmental scan examined 237 documents. The documents included 32 international documents and 152 usage documents such as industrial instruments, position descriptions and performance and development frameworks.

Recent developments were drawn from an analysis of 27 major Australian reports, such as the *Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel, 2023* and the *National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy*. Enduring priorities were taken from formal documents such as the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, 2019*, *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia V2.0*, 2022 (EYLF V2.0), and the *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (2025–2034)* and the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*.

Targeted focus groups

The purpose of the focus groups was to gather in-depth information in response to a set of guiding questions. The questions were designed to:

- generate rich and detailed data from participants with relevant expertise
- explore participants' experiences with, perspectives on, and use of the Teacher Standards
- link to the research questions that were developed for the Review.

Ninety-three (93) participants attended 21 topic-specific focus groups. The participants included teachers of children and young people in birth to 5 education and care services and those who teach in the compulsory years of education. They also included leaders and stakeholders using the Teacher Standards. The focus group membership was based on demonstrated experience with the Teacher Standards to elicit informed, credible insights as well as increasing the trustworthiness of the data.

National survey

The purpose of the survey was to enable individuals over 18 years of age to share their views on the Teacher Standards. The survey was designed to explore:

- how the Teacher Standards are understood and used across different contexts
- whether they continue to support high-quality teaching practice
- what changes or improvements may be needed.

3,930 people responded to the survey. Over 70% of respondents were education practitioners, predominantly registered teachers and leaders from both birth to 5 and school settings. The remaining respondents were spread across ITE staff, pre-service teachers, system, regulatory and educational organisations and parents, carers, community members and others. There was broad representation across jurisdictions, sectors and remoteness. This range of respondents provided AITSL with insights from people across diverse roles, contexts and locations.

Written expert submissions

The expert submissions sought written advice from experts in related fields on the extent to which the Teacher Standards promote effective teacher practice that improves educational outcomes for children and young people. These educational outcomes include both student learning and wellbeing. Expert submissions also addressed the intended uses of the Teacher Standards for registration, certification, professional learning, performance and development, and industrial agreements.

Fifty-three (53) written submissions were received, with 29 academic submissions and 24 organisation submissions.

Feedback from partners and stakeholders

Separate to the formal collection of evidence described above, feedback was collected from a wide range of partners and stakeholders, as the Review progressed. It provided an opportunity to meet with key members of the education community and enabled AITSL to be informed of the contexts and policy objectives of partners and stakeholders in relation to the Review. This information assisted AITSL to frame options for consideration in this paper and is summarised for each improvement area in the next section.

5. Improvement Areas

AITSL puts learners at the centre of their work. Better outcomes for children and young people are the ultimate measure of success of how well the Review supports teachers to deliver high-quality, effective teaching. Australia's teachers need to be confident in the evidence which underpins their Standards. AITSL is drawing on rigorous and relevant research evidence identified in the literature review by AERO that meets nationally agreed medium to high Standards of Evidence. The profession can have confidence that this evidence base will guide them, when using their professional judgement, to effectively teach the children and young people they are responsible for. To ensure that the Review is grounded in the reality of teaching in Australian classrooms and learning environments, AITSL has engaged comprehensively with the profession and wider education community. All views and differing perspectives have been gathered and analysed. A national and international environmental scan has provided rich information about standards internationally and the expectations of teachers across Australia.

The environmental scan identified a range of enduring national policies and reform priorities that provide important context for the Review and assisted AITSL to prioritise areas for improvement. The *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (2019)* establishes Australia's shared commitment to excellence and equity in education. It called for strengthening of early childhood education and improvement of schooling through quality teaching, wellbeing, foundational learning and lifelong learning. More recently, the *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (2025–2034)* established national reform priorities for strengthening evidence-based teaching practices, high-quality, evidence-based professional learning, literacy and numeracy, and student wellbeing and engagement. Together, these commitments reinforce the importance of ensuring the Teacher Standards remain aligned with national priorities for effective teaching and learning.

Other national frameworks establish more specific expectations relevant to the content of the Teacher Standards. The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (2015)* and *National Agreement on Closing the Gap (2020)* reinforce commitments to culturally responsive education, cultural safety and meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities. The *Disability Standards for Education 2005* establish legislative requirements relating to access, participation and reasonable adjustments for students with disability, while the *National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2021)* highlights the importance of supportive environments and coordinated approaches to children's wellbeing. These frameworks provide important considerations for how the Teacher Standards articulate teachers' professional responsibilities, while recognising that education providers and systems also have roles and responsibilities in relation to supporting children and young people to learn.

In early childhood education, the *National Quality Framework*, *Early Years Learning Framework V2.0 (2022)* and *Shaping Our Future: A Ten-Year Strategy to Ensure a Sustainable, High-Quality Children's Education and Care Workforce (2022–2031)* establish expectations for quality teaching, professional practice and workforce development. These frameworks are particularly relevant to considering how the Teacher Standards reflect effective teaching in birth-to-five settings and support a shared professional identity across educational contexts.

National teacher preparation and workforce reforms also have implications for the Standards. The *Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures* and the mandatory Core Content informed by *Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel (2023)* establish expectations for graduate teacher preparation and evidence-based teaching practices. The *Framework for Teacher Registration in Australia* establishes nationally agreed principles and elements for teacher registration, including assessment against the Teacher

Standards, while the *National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (2022)* identified priorities for teacher preparation, professional growth and career pathways. Together, these frameworks reinforce the importance of maintaining coherence between the Teacher Standards and their established uses across ITE, registration, professional learning and career progression.

Using the evidence gathered and subsequent analysis, this paper identifies 7 possible areas for improvement. These improvement areas have emerged through the review to date as the key areas for potential change, noting that others may surface in response to this Discussion Paper. To adequately represent the research on effective teaching practice conducted separately in early childhood birth to 5 contexts and school contexts, the findings related to these two areas have been presented in different Improvement Areas. Improvement Areas 1, 5 and 6 describe findings from school research, while Improvement Area 4 describes findings related to research in early childhood contexts.

In the remainder of this paper, each of these 7 identified improvement areas will be discussed. In each area, the evidence from the literature review is described and compared with the evidence gathered through the national survey, the environmental scan, expert submissions, focus groups and ongoing partner and stakeholder consultation. A high-level comparative analysis of the key findings with the content of the Teacher Standards is provided. Examples demonstrate potential focus areas which could be improved. Finally, a series of potential actions, not exhaustive or mutually exclusive, are provided for consideration and response. These actions have been identified in light of the preceding information and generally follow an increasing scale of change.

Improvement Area 1 – Safe and supportive conditions for learning in schools

The conditions for a safe, supportive learning environment are drawn from research examining school environments. The companion research regarding early childhood education is provided in Improvement Area 4.

What the literature review found

The literature review identified several conditions that support learning in schools, including knowledge and practices for:

1. engaged classrooms through effective classroom management
2. responding to diverse learning, communication, emotional, physical, sensory, and social needs
3. supporting wellbeing and relationships for learning
4. reflexivity, responsiveness and cultural safety
5. family engagement in learning.

Key finding – Engaged classrooms through effective classroom management

A key finding of the literature review is that effective management of classrooms is an important part of creating safe, supportive and inclusive learning environments where children and young people in schools can focus on learning. Effective management works alongside high-quality instruction and includes building positive relationships, maintaining high expectations with appropriate support, creating culturally safe environments, and explicitly teaching routines and expected behaviours. Research indicates these practices support engagement, reduce disruptions and help children and young people in schools participate successfully in learning.

Teachers should:

- build positive relationships with and between children and young people, parents/carers and communities
- create culturally safe and responsive learning environments
- maintain high expectations with appropriate support
- explicitly teach, model and reinforce learning-focused behaviours and routines
- respond to disengagement and behaviour concerns in ways that support inclusion and learning.

Key finding – Responding to the diverse needs of children and young people in schools

Teachers need to respond to the diverse learning, communication, emotional, physical, sensory and social needs of children and young people in schools. The literature indicates that effective teaching strategies, combined with positive teacher–child interactions and targeted support, can help all children and young people in schools to achieve learning objectives. Key strategies include explicit instruction, scaffolding, flexible grouping, teaching cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and the targeted use of technology.

These strategies help remove barriers to learning and provide appropriate support while maintaining high expectations. This aligns with the requirement to provide reasonable adjustments so children and

young people with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as their peers, consistent with the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*, and Australia's commitment to equity and excellence in education.

The findings also highlight the importance of coordinated, whole-school approaches to identifying and responding to the diverse learning and support needs of children and young people, including ensuring access to appropriate levels of support. Frameworks such as a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) can help schools organise and deliver these supports. Teachers play an important role in contributing to the implementation of these approaches and supporting children and young people to access the support they need.

Effective teaching requires inclusive whole-group instruction, ongoing monitoring of learner progress, and the use of assessment data to plan and review individualised and group supports and reasonable adjustments. Teachers should work collaboratively with parents/carers, school leaders and specialist and support staff to ensure all children and young people in schools can access, participate in and succeed in learning.

Key finding – Supporting wellbeing and relationships for learning

Wellbeing encompasses children and young people's emotional, social, cognitive and physical functioning, all of which influence their capacity to engage in learning.

Research identifies several effective teaching strategies that support student wellbeing and learning outcomes in schools. Fostering children and young people's sense of belonging has the strongest relationship with wellbeing for learning. Other effective teaching strategies include building positive relationships between the teacher and child or young person, providing social and emotional support, fostering self-efficacy, establishing clear expectations and routines, and facilitating positive peer relationships. Social and emotional learning approaches and evidence-based classroom management practices are also associated with improved wellbeing, resilience and achievement.

Effective teaching supports wellbeing for learning by fostering belonging, building positive relationships, strengthening self-efficacy, providing social and emotional support, and establishing clear expectations through culturally responsive and evidence-based practice.

Key finding – Reflexivity, responsiveness and cultural safety

Culturally safe learning environments are foundational to meeting the learning needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and are associated with improved engagement, wellbeing and achievement. Research highlights effective teaching strategies that support cultural safety and responsiveness, including self-reflection and reflexivity, building trusting relationships with children and young people, parents/carers and communities, affirming children and young people's cultural identity, and maintaining high expectations through strengths-based approaches. These practices help foster belonging, respect and positive learning outcomes.

Effective teaching requires understanding local contexts and diverse perspectives on educational success, engaging in ongoing reflective practice, building respectful partnerships with parents/carers and communities, affirming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities and knowledges, and communicating high expectations with appropriate support. These practices help create culturally safe learning environments where all children and young people can participate, belong and succeed.

Key finding – Family engagement in learning

Recognising parents/carers as partners in learning is an important aspect of effective teaching. Research indicates that respectful, trusting partnerships between teachers and parents/carers can reinforce effective teaching and are associated with improved student learning, wellbeing and

engagement. Parents/carers provide valuable knowledge about their child or young person's strengths, background and learning needs, which complements teachers' professional expertise and supports more responsive teaching. Regular communication, shared expectations and collaboration between home and the learning environment can strengthen student achievement, confidence and engagement, while enabling early identification and response to learning challenges.

Effective teaching involves building respectful two-way partnerships with parents/carers, valuing their perspectives and maintaining regular communication about learning and progress, including the role the home learning environment can play in supporting their child. Teachers should work collaboratively with parents/carers to establish shared goals, address barriers to learning and support meaningful learning opportunities at home.

What we heard

Within the survey, a majority supported making teaching practices that contribute to student wellbeing more explicit within the Teacher Standards. Written responses frequently linked wellbeing with learning and engagement, highlighting the importance of positive relationships and supportive environments. However, respondents also cautioned against describing teachers as broadly responsible for all wellbeing outcomes, or expecting them to provide specialist mental health care. Their responses highlighted the importance of clear expectations and boundaries for teachers, alongside shared responsibilities across parents/carers, schools, systems and specialist services.

Focus group participants described respectful and trusting relationships as central to effective teaching and creating positive conditions for learning. Early childhood participants particularly emphasised relationships with children and partnerships with parents/carers. In discussions about performance and development, participants favoured describing observable practices, such as building trusting relationships and culturally responsive practice.

Expert submissions similarly called for greater emphasis on teacher-learner relationships, learner participation, positive approaches to behaviour and predictable, supportive learning environments. They also highlighted teachers' responsibilities for recognising and responding to wellbeing concerns, while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries. Submissions emphasised that differences among learners are an expected part of teaching. They favoured planning for varied learning needs and responding to individual circumstances, rather than making assumptions about particular groups. Specialist disability submissions saw inclusive approaches as complementing, rather than replacing, specific responsibilities associated with children and young people with disability, including reasonable adjustments and targeted support.

Stakeholder feedback aligned with the literature review findings on the conditions that enable safe and supportive learning environments. What we heard from partners and stakeholders was broad agreement that effective classroom management, responsiveness to diverse learner needs, student wellbeing, cultural safety and family engagement are fundamental enablers of engagement and learning.

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of creating inclusive learning environments where children and young people feel safe, respected, supported and able to participate fully in learning. However, this was balanced by feedback recognising the growing complexity of learning environments and the need for teachers to be equipped to respond to an increasingly diverse range of needs. Against this backdrop, stakeholders identified positive relationships, belonging, inclusive practices, recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, and meaningful partnerships with parents/carers and communities as critical foundations for learning, engagement and wellbeing. Partners and stakeholders further supported stronger alignment between the Teacher Standards and ITE Core

Content to help graduate teachers enter the profession with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively support diverse learners and learning environments.

While stakeholders strongly supported greater recognition of the conditions that support engagement, learning and wellbeing within the Teacher Standards, they also encouraged expectations that acknowledge the important role teachers play in creating safe, inclusive and supportive learning environments. At the same time, stakeholders recognised that learning, wellbeing and developmental outcomes are shaped by shared responsibilities across parents/carers, communities and education systems.

Environmental scan and other policy considerations

The environmental scan compared the Teacher Standards with expectations identified in Australian policies, reports and international teacher standards. It identified that expectations relating to the organisation of learning environments, routines, behaviour management and safety are already reflected in the Teacher Standards. However, expectations relating to building trusting relationships, fostering belonging, relationship-based approaches to behaviour support, recognising wellbeing concerns and referring learners for additional support are less explicit. Specific safeguarding responsibilities are also less clearly expressed, although safety and legal compliance are covered.

The Teacher Standards already cover participation and teaching adjustments for children and young people with disability, including relevant legal requirements. However, rights-based framing of disability inclusion, removing barriers to participation and making reasonable adjustments could be more explicit.

The mandatory ITE Core Content reinforces the importance of safe and supportive learning environments, particularly through its focus on classroom management. It emphasises evidence-based approaches to establishing positive and productive learning environments, including clear expectations, predictable routines, positive teacher–student relationships and proactive approaches to supporting student behaviour and engagement. This provides an important consideration for the Review in ensuring the Teacher Standards align with contemporary expectations of effective classroom management and the creation of environments that support student learning and wellbeing.

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (2019) and *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement* (2025–2034) establish enduring national commitments to student wellbeing, engagement and safe, supportive learning environments. Any potential revisions to the Teacher Standards should consider how teachers' professional responsibilities for creating positive conditions for learning align with these commitments, including fostering respectful relationships, belonging and positive behaviour. Importantly, revisions should also recognise that responsibility for student wellbeing and safety extends beyond individual teachers to schools, education systems, parents/carers and specialist services.

How the evidence for safe and supportive conditions for learning in schools is reflected in the Teacher Standards

There was broad alignment between the evidence provided by the literature review and that gathered through the survey, focus groups, expert submissions and stakeholder feedback. The scan identified that while the Teacher Standards identify some areas of practice related to safe and supportive learning environments, there were areas which were not well aligned with Australian policies, reports

and international teacher standards. Based on the range of evidence on the conditions for providing safe, supportive learning environments, there are improvements which could be made to update some of the focus areas and descriptors in relation to improving the effectiveness of teaching.

The evidence on safe, supportive conditions for learning suggests that some of the focus areas and descriptors align with the evidence base, while there are other focus areas and descriptors which only partially align or, in some cases, misalign.

The first example below shows misalignment between the evidence base and focus area 1.5, and the second example shows partial alignment between the evidence and focus area 1.6.

Example 1, focus area 1.5 *Differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities* demonstrates misalignment with the evidence. The term differentiation lacks a consistent definition or explanation in the literature, potentially leading to inconsistent understandings and applications in practice. A range of alternative terms, such as inclusive teaching and responsive teaching, may be considered as more reflective of the broader knowledge teachers require, and more inclusive than the narrower and more practice-oriented term *differentiation*.

Example 2, focus area 1.6 *Strategies to support full participation of students with disability* demonstrates partial alignment to the evidence. This focus area recognises the right of children and young people with disability to participate alongside their peers and to access meaningful supports that enable their participation. It also appropriately positions inclusive education as the responsibility of all teachers, rather than only specialist staff.

Since this descriptor is in the Professional Knowledge Domain, the descriptors could be made more specific by explicitly including teacher knowledge about inclusive practice, including how to support student participation throughout the learning process. This requires knowledge of how teachers can guide the acquisition of learning and provide responsive adjustments during the learning process.

The evidence would suggest that there is an opportunity to better align the focus areas and descriptors which relate to the evidence from the key literature review findings for elements of effective teaching which provide safe and supportive conditions for learning.

While the Teacher Standards are not intended to convey all the detail of a particular content area, the intent and language of the focus areas and the descriptors should align with underpinning elements of moderate to high confidence research.

The Teacher Standards currently include expectations relating to children and young people with disability, classroom management, student wellbeing and engagement with parents/carers. However, there are times when conditions for learning are missing or when the current language of the focus areas and descriptors misaligns with the evidence base or could fully align by refinement of the language.

Discussion analysis

A range of evidence has identified important aspects of professional knowledge and practice which could enhance the focus areas and descriptors which relate to forming safe and supportive learning environments. The Teacher Standards currently have some focus areas and descriptors which are open to interpretation, lacking detail and specificity which can lead to confusion or unreasonable expectations of teachers. The area of wellbeing in the descriptors in focus area 4.4 is an example of this potential confusion. It is unclear whether the Teacher Standards refer to wellbeing generally or specifically to wellbeing for learning. Greater alignment between the concepts identified in the research as underpinning effective teaching which provides safe and supportive conditions for learning in schools and the Teacher Standards, would strengthen the Standards as a tool for guiding

learning and improvement. While outside the scope of the Review, there is evidence to suggest that employers and schools should carefully consider the levels of support provided to teachers to implement effective teaching which provides safe and supportive conditions for learning in schools. The following section provides options for actions which could be taken to address the evidence.

Potential actions

1. No changes

Make no changes to update teaching expectations and effectiveness for the safe and supportive conditions for learning focus areas and descriptors. The Standards currently include expectations relating to children and young people with disability, classroom management, student wellbeing and engagement with parents/carers. However, adopting a position of no change means that some elements linked to research will remain missing and the current language of the focus areas and descriptors will not fully align with the evidence base.

Retaining the status quo will have no impact on improving current levels of support for teaching effectiveness provided by the Teacher Standards.

2. Strengthen guidance materials

Strengthen companion guidance materials and examples to clarify missing elements related to children and young people with disability, classroom management, student wellbeing and engagement with parents/carers in the Standards. In relation to children and young people with disability, for example, guidance materials could provide practical examples of how descriptors may be applied, including through reasonable adjustments, as well as supporting teachers to respond to the needs of gifted and talented learners, twice-exceptional learners and other forms of learner variability. The provision of additional supporting documentation enables greater clarity for teachers while retaining the relevant focus areas and associated descriptors within the Teacher Standards. This action on its own will not address the issues identified by the evidence base.

3. Strengthen existing focus areas and descriptors

Update existing focus areas and descriptors by strengthening links to literature review findings while considering other evidence inputs. Reframe the existing focus areas from being a label for the descriptors to being a statement of purpose of the descriptors. This enables the intent behind the existing focus areas to be linked with the research base at a high level. However, the impact of not adding or replacing any focus areas means that important improvement evidence from the literature review which does not fit into an existing focus area would be missed.

4. Align the focus areas and descriptors with the medium to high confidence evidence

Add, replace or revise focus areas and align wording of descriptors with the underpinning intent of the literature review evidence base and inform the changes with consideration of the other evidence inputs. This option enables the Standards to be updated, while balancing existing limited wording with sufficient specificity and detail to align with the evidence base. Also, reframe the existing focus area from being a label for the descriptors to being a statement of purpose of the descriptors. This enables the intent behind the descriptors to be linked with the research base at a high level.

Improvement Area 2 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education

When the Teacher Standards were first endorsed in 2010, a key and deliberate inclusion were the two focus areas related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education (1.4 and 2.4). The evidence base, policy environment and national imperative have coalesced since that time, warranting a further and deeper look at how the Teacher Standards can better reflect needs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.

What the literature review found

Key finding – Reflexivity, responsiveness and cultural safety

Culturally safe learning environments are foundational to meeting the learning needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, their parent/carers and communities. Cultural safety and culturally responsive pedagogy can provide benefits for student engagement, support, belonging, and student wellbeing. When children and young people feel safe, supported, and welcome at school or other learning environments, they are more likely to engage with those environments and develop positive relationships with peers and teachers.

Culturally responsive pedagogy can positively affect the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, as such approaches can influence non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators' attitudes, expectations, and understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people's experiences.

Key finding – The importance of high expectations for children and young people from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds

High expectations have a positive effect on self-esteem, motivation and academic interest, thereby influencing student achievement. Teachers should recognise that success in learning may be defined and understood widely to include consideration for children and young people's confidence, developing cultural identity and relationships, and making contributions to community.

Key finding – Embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principles and perspectives across the Teacher Standards

Recognise the knowledge and practice of reflexivity, relationality and responsiveness as important elements of effective teaching and be embedded across the Teacher Standards.

What we heard

Participants in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus group discussions considered that the current focus areas provided important recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, but their discrete treatment could isolate these expectations from broader teaching practice. Participants emphasised that responsibility should be shared by all teachers rather than concentrated to specific contexts or confined to specific parts of the Teacher Standards. They called for clearer expectations concerning knowledge of learners and their communities, cultural capability, reflection on assumptions and bias, culturally responsive teaching and supportive learning conditions. However,

participants also recognised that dispersing expectations throughout the Teacher Standards could reduce their visibility.

Expert submissions identified that the current Teacher Standards can blur two distinct professional responsibilities: teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, and developing all learners' understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, cultures, languages and knowledges. Submissions support retaining explicit expectations for this curriculum content for all learners, while making clear that this is the responsibility of all teachers. Specialist submissions emphasised that teaching should be accurate, respectful, with appropriate recognition of local knowledge, cultural protocols and community authority.

Submissions also supported stronger recognition of culturally responsive professional practice, including trusting relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners and sustained respectful relationships with parents/carers, Elders and communities. Specialist evidence emphasised trust, reciprocity, and appropriate guidance and recognition of community authority. These expectations extend beyond curriculum and instructional practices to professional engagement and collaboration.

What we heard from partners and stakeholders was strong support for strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education within the Teacher Standards, with broad agreement that it should be reflected across the Teacher Standards rather than just be limited to existing references within focus areas 1.4 and 2.4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders consistently emphasised the importance of teaching all children and young people about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, languages and knowledges, alongside culturally responsive practice, anti-racism, cultural safety and stronger partnerships with parent/carers, carers and communities. The majority of partners and stakeholders supported culturally responsive teaching as a capability that benefits all learners and noted that the Teacher Standards should avoid creating the impression that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education is only relevant when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners are present. Several early childhood stakeholders noted the value of a holistic approach that naturally incorporates culture, family, and community engagement, and suggested there may be opportunities for school-based settings to draw on this more explicitly. Partners and stakeholders had mixed views on including areas such as reflexivity, resilience, cultural bias, and positionality within the Teacher Standards; however, they noted that cultural responsiveness and associated areas could be highlighted further in the preamble and in any support materials.

Partners and stakeholders cautioned against approaches that could become tokenistic, overly compliance-focused, or limited to a small set of descriptors. Several groups of stakeholders favoured keeping the Teacher Standards broad, concise and enduring, suggesting that practical examples and implementation guidance should be provided in supporting resources rather than expanding the Teacher Standards.

Environmental scan and other policy considerations

The environmental scan identified expectations in enduring Australian priorities for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledges, languages, and connections to Country, accurately and respectfully, while affirming learners' identities and challenging racism and bias. Major Australian reports also distinguish teachers' own cultural knowledge from their responsibilities to teach this content. They identified expectations for culturally safe learning environments and respectful engagement with parents/carers, Elders and communities, including recognition of cultural protocols, community authority and self-determination.

The scan found that histories, cultures and reconciliation were present within the Teacher Standards. However, critical reflection on teachers' cultural assumptions and biases, cultural safety and recognition of community authority and protocols are less explicit.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (2015) and *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* (2020) establish enduring national commitments to improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, including through culturally responsive education, meaningful partnerships and recognition of cultural authority and self-determination. Any potential revisions to the Teacher Standards need to consider how these commitments are reflected in expectations for all teachers, including culturally safe practice, respectful engagement with parents/carers and communities, and teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, languages and knowledges. Consideration should also be given to retaining the visibility of these expectations while recognising their relevance across professional knowledge, practice and engagement.

How the evidence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education is reflected in the Teacher Standards

The Teacher Standards provide a foundation for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners through focus areas 1.4 and 2.4. However, the richer framework presented in this key finding is not explicitly articulated in the Standards. Concepts such as self-reflection and reflexivity, responsiveness to student needs, understanding local contexts and diverse perspectives on educational success, engaging in ongoing reflexive practice, cultural responsiveness, culturally responsive pedagogy, cultural safety, strengths-based approaches, affirming children and young people's cultural identity, affirming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities and knowledges, belonging, connection to Country, partnerships with Elders, reciprocity, community decision-making, building trusting and respectful relationships with children and young people, parents/carers and communities, and maintaining or communicating high expectations with appropriate support are not explicitly represented in the current Standard focus areas and descriptors.

Two examples are provided below which demonstrate partial alignment of focus areas with the evidence base for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in the current Teacher Standards and describe the gaps which also exist.

The first example is focus area 1.4 *Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*. It partially aligns with the evidence base, but also demonstrates a gap. The focus area recognises that effective teaching practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people is grounded in teachers' understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities, cultures, and ways of being, knowing and learning, as well as an understanding of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The gap exists because teachers' effectiveness also relies on their ability to critically reflect on their own beliefs, assumptions and biases to foster culturally safe, inclusive and responsive learning environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and all children.

The second example is focus area 2.4 *Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians*. This focus area partially aligns with the evidence base, but also demonstrates a gap. The focus area recognises that effective teaching practice involves ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives actively inform curriculum decision-making and are embedded in the everyday enactments of curriculum. The gap overlaps with the gap in focus area 1.4 because the current framing of the focus area refers to demonstrating "broad knowledge, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages", which appears to be a repetition of the framing used for focus area 1.4. Limited visibility is given to the specific practices that support the effective embedding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in practice, for example cultural responsiveness as an enabler of teaching practice in this area.

Discussion analysis

Culturally responsive teaching requires more than the application of a discrete set of strategies. Teachers draw on knowledge of individual learners and their cultural and educational contexts, substantive knowledge relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and knowledge systems, and reflexive awareness of how their own assumptions and positioning shape professional judgement.

These expectations should also be read alongside the key findings of Improvement Area 5 - *Effective teaching aligns with how children and young people in schools learn* and broader findings on teacher professional judgement, responsive teaching, supportive learning environments, and partnerships with parents/carers. These broader findings have particular significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners and are integral to culturally responsive practice.

Teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, languages and knowledges is a responsibility for all teachers and part of the education of all learners. This can be extended to Country, rights, diversity and contemporary contexts, with teaching expected to be accurate, respectful and appropriately responsive to local context and cultural authority.

Potential actions

1. No changes

Retain the current focus areas and descriptors without amendment. The focus areas and descriptors include expectations relating to teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners and developing learners' understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages. Retaining these expectations preserves their visibility within the Standards while allowing teachers to apply them in ways that respond to local context and cultural authority. However, no change would miss an opportunity to strengthen the profession's contribution to governments' existing commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap or respond to the broader application of culturally responsive practice across teachers' work, which may remain less explicit.

2. Strengthen support and guidance materials

Strengthen national guidance materials and examples to illustrate culturally responsive practice across the Teacher Standards. This includes guidance to support how the focus areas and descriptors could be applied in different contexts, including consideration of Country, local cultures and knowledges, community cultural authority, relationships with parents/carers and communities, and teacher reflexivity. The purpose of this guidance would be to strengthen understanding of culturally responsive practice without prescribing a single national approach or reducing the visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expectations. This action on its own will not address the issues in the Standards identified by the evidence base.

3. Strengthen existing focus areas

Update and clarify expectations in current dedicated (and potentially other) focus areas. This includes stronger recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, languages and knowledges and culturally responsive practice. Additionally, expectations would be added around supporting cultural safety, anti-racism practices, building respectful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, and recognition of local cultural authority, protocols and expertise. This maintains visibility but continues to position the expectations in discrete locations.

4. Signal the need to embed related practice across the Standards

Ensure that a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education is identified in an introductory and overarching section of the Teacher Standards. While this focus would not be used for a regulatory purpose, it would help position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and perspectives as an important consideration across all Standards. This option could work in coherence with other options including existing targeted descriptors or strengthened descriptors.

Improvement Area 3 – Responding to the diverse learning needs of children and young people

The Teacher Standards currently apply to teachers working across all school settings, including mainstream and specialist schools, and reflect the knowledge and practices required to respond effectively to the diverse needs of children and young people. Effective teaching recognises learner variability and combines inclusive teaching practices with targeted and individualised support, including reasonable adjustments for students with disability, to enable all learners to access, participate in and progress in their learning.

What the literature review found

The literature review identifies responding to diverse learning needs of children and young people as an essential component of effective teaching, highlighting the importance of inclusive instructional practices, targeted supports and reasonable adjustments to enable all children and young people to access, participate in and progress in learning. The findings emphasise both high-quality whole-group instruction and the specific responsibilities of teachers in supporting children and young people with disability.

For children and young people with disability, teachers need to identify individual strengths and needs, and plan, implement and review reasonable adjustments to teaching, curriculum and learning environments, in partnership with the parents, carers and the young person. These adjustments enable children and young people with disability to access and participate in education on the same basis as their peers, consistent with the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and *Disability Standards for Education 2005*. Assessment, individualised planning and collaboration with parents/carers and specialists are essential to monitoring progress and evaluating support.

The evidence also supports tiered approaches, including MTSS, which combine high-quality whole-group instruction with targeted and increasingly intensive supports. While evidence for targeted supports is strong, evidence for MTSS as an overarching framework is less conclusive.

Teachers should:

- plan and deliver high-quality, inclusive whole-group instruction that responds to diverse learning needs
- use assessment evidence and professional judgement to identify learning needs, monitor progress and adapt instruction and support
- identify, implement and review reasonable adjustments and individualised learning plans for children and young people with disability, where required
- support children and young people’s access to targeted and increasingly intensive supports through tiered approaches
- collaborate with children and young people, their parents/carers, school leaders and specialist and support staff to plan and evaluate individualised supports and adjustments.

Key finding – High-quality inclusive instruction provides the foundation for responding to diverse student needs

The evidence indicates that effective teaching combines high-quality, evidence-based whole-group instruction with targeted and individualised support, responsive to student need. Practices including explicit instruction, scaffolding, flexible grouping, active participation and cognitive and metacognitive strategies support learning across diverse student populations, including children and young people with disability. Teachers need to recognise learner variability, including differences in cognitive processing, communication, physical and sensory needs, and adapt the intensity, frequency and duration of instruction and support accordingly. This requires maintaining high expectations for all children and young people while identifying and addressing barriers to curriculum access, participation and learning.

This finding complements the evidence on creating safe and supportive learning environments referenced in Improvement Area 1, which emphasises positive relationships, management of learning environments, behaviour and wellbeing as important conditions for learning. While closely interconnected, responding to diverse student needs, including disability, requires additional consideration of the instructional practices, reasonable adjustments and targeted supports necessary to ensure equitable access, participation and progress in learning.

Key finding – Supporting children and young people with disability requires explicit attention to reasonable adjustments and individualised planning

Supporting children and young people with disability requires explicit attention to reasonable adjustments and individualised planning. The evidence highlights the importance of teachers identifying children and young people's strengths, preferences and learning needs, using assessment information to inform instruction and planning. For children and young people with disability, this includes planning, implementing, monitoring and reviewing reasonable adjustments to teaching, curriculum and learning environments to enable access and participation on the same basis as children and young people without disability. Where required, teachers should establish individualised learning objectives linked to curriculum expectations and monitor progress against these objectives. Effective implementation requires collaboration with children and young people, parents/carers, school leaders, specialist and support staff, and relevant allied health professionals, recognising that responsibility for providing appropriate support is shared.

Key finding – Tiered approaches provide a framework for responding to different levels of support required by children and young people

The evidence supports approaches that combine high-quality whole-group instruction with increasingly targeted and intensive supports according to identified student needs. Tiered approaches such as the MTSS, provide one way of organising and coordinating these supports. These approaches draw on screening, diagnostic assessment and ongoing progress monitoring to identify children and young people requiring additional support, determine appropriate strategies and evaluate their effectiveness. Teachers contribute through delivering inclusive whole-group instruction, using assessment evidence to identify learning needs, collaborating in the implementation of targeted interventions and monitoring student progress. While the evidence supporting effective instruction and targeted interventions is well established, the effectiveness of MTSS as an overarching framework has not yet been comprehensively evaluated and needs to be continually evaluated while it is used. Nevertheless, the literature review identifies a sound evidence base to inform the use of coordinated, tiered approaches such as MTSS in Australian schools.

What we heard

Among survey respondents asked whether the Teacher Standards should include expectations about supporting children and young people with diverse learning needs, 88% of parents, carers, community members and other respondents supported their inclusion. In open written responses, some respondents commenting on ITE identified the teaching of children and young people with disability and related legal obligations as areas requiring greater attention. Other written responses called for stronger recognition of the full range of learner variability.

Focus group participants identified teaching children and young people with disability and complex learning needs among the aspects of practice that could be more clearly represented in the Teacher Standards. Some also identified limited recognition of collaboration with parents/carers and other professionals. In discussions about advanced expertise, participants identified differentiation and inclusive practice as aspects of increasingly sophisticated teaching practice.

A broad theme within expert submissions was that differences among learners should be recognised as an ordinary feature of teaching, rather than treated as an exception. Submissions supported teaching that anticipates these differences and responds to individual strengths and needs. Specialist disability and inclusion submissions reinforced this approach, while cautioning against making assumptions about individual learners based on their membership of particular groups.

Specialist submissions also emphasised that inclusive teaching approaches do not replace specific responsibilities for children and young people with disability. While universal and inclusive approaches can reduce barriers for many learners, they should complement reasonable adjustments and targeted support where required. The nature of these adjustments and supports depends on the individual learner and context. Other expert evidence also supported stronger recognition of collaboration with parents/carers, colleagues and specialists.

What we heard from stakeholders was broad agreement that all learners should be able to access, participate in and progress in learning through inclusive teaching practices, high expectations and responsive support. Partners and stakeholders consistently called out the increasing diversity and complexity of learning environments and the need for teachers to be equipped to identify and respond to a wide range of learning, communication, cultural, social, emotional and wellbeing needs. Partners and stakeholders highlighted the importance of high-quality instruction, assessment, professional judgement and collaboration with parents/carers, support staff, paraprofessionals (teacher assistants) and allied health professionals in responding to the diverse learning needs of children and young people. There was also strong support for recognising disability inclusion, including the role of teachers in planning, implementing and reviewing reasonable adjustments. At the same time, partners and stakeholders emphasised that inclusion is strengthened through collaborative teacher practice, targeted supports and shared responsibility across educational settings and systems.

Stakeholders noted that the Teacher Standards apply across a range of contexts, including mainstream classrooms, specialist schools (including alternative learning environments) for students with disability, and specialist education programs within mainstream schools. They highlighted the value of targeted guidance and illustrations of practice to support their interpretation and application across all contexts. Examples could demonstrate how teachers meet the Standards through differentiated and specialised instruction, individualised learning plans, reasonable adjustments, communication supports and collaboration with parent/carers, allied health professionals and specialist staff, while maintaining consistent professional expectations across settings.

Environmental scan and other policy considerations

The environmental scan identified enduring expectations, in Australian priorities, for teachers to identify and reduce barriers to learning and participation, consult about and implement reasonable adjustments, and adapt teaching and assessment. Major Australian reports further identified expectations for teachers to understand the functional effects of disability and relevant legal and human-rights obligations. They also emphasised using evidence and professional judgement to determine reasonable adjustments, and working with children and young people, parent/carers and specialists to implement, monitor and review support.

International comparator standards similarly identified expectations for teachers to remove barriers, maintain high expectations and adapt curriculum, instruction, assessment and support for children and young people with disability.

The Disability Standards for Education 2005, established under the *Disability Discrimination Act* 1992, provide the legislative foundation for ensuring students with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as students without disability. Any potential revisions to the Teacher Standards must remain consistent with these requirements, including expectations relating to consultation, reasonable adjustments and participation in learning. Revisions should also consider how inclusive teaching practices and targeted support are represented, while maintaining a clear distinction between teachers' professional responsibilities and the legal obligations of education providers.

How the evidence for responding to the diverse learning needs of children and young people is reflected in the Teacher Standards

The current Teacher Standards establish expectations for responding to diverse learning needs, particularly through Standard 1 (Know students and how they learn), including focus areas 1.3, 1.5 and 1.6. These address students from diverse backgrounds, differentiation across the full range of abilities and strategies to support students with disability. Related expectations are reflected in Standard 3 (planning and implementing teaching), Standard 4 (supportive learning environments) and Standard 5 (assessment and feedback). While these provide a foundation for inclusive practice, the evidence suggests opportunities to more explicitly recognise learner variability as an inherent feature of teaching, with greater emphasis on anticipating and removing barriers to learning, maintaining high expectations and providing high-quality, inclusive whole-class instruction alongside targeted and individualised support.

The Teacher Standards explicitly reference legislative requirements and teaching strategies that support the participation and learning of children and young people with disability (focus area 1.6). However, they provide less explicit guidance on the processes involved in identifying, planning, implementing, monitoring and reviewing reasonable adjustments, informed by assessment evidence, consultation and professional judgement. The literature review, environmental scan and consultation findings suggest scope to strengthen expectations concerning individualised planning, ongoing progress monitoring and collaboration with children and young people, parents/carers, specialists and support staff, while recognising that responsibility for meeting disability-related obligations extends beyond individual teachers to education providers and systems.

The evidence identifies opportunities to strengthen the connection between inclusive instruction, assessment-informed adaptation and targeted intervention across the Teacher Standards. For

example, Focus Area 1.5 *Differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities* demonstrates partial alignment with the evidence. While it recognises the importance of responding to students' diverse learning needs, it does not explicitly capture the broader knowledge teachers require to deliver inclusive teaching, maintain high expectations with appropriate support, and understand tiered approaches to intervention. Similarly, Focus Area 1.6 *Strategies to support full participation of students with disability* demonstrates partial alignment, recognising teachers' responsibilities for supporting participation but providing limited specificity about inclusive teaching practices and responsive adjustments throughout the learning process.

Focus Area 3.3 *Use teaching strategies* demonstrates areas of misalignment with the evidence, as its emphasis on using a range of strategies does not sufficiently recognise the importance of purposefully selecting and adapting teaching approaches in response to students' learning needs and stages of learning. Focus Area 5.4 *Interpret student data* demonstrates partial alignment, recognising the importance of assessment information but placing greater emphasis on interpreting data than using it to inform responsive teaching, targeted intervention and support at whole-class, small-group and individual levels.

These examples highlight opportunities to strengthen the connections between inclusive whole-class instruction, ongoing assessment to inform teaching and increasingly targeted and intensive support.

Across the evidence inputs, there is broad support for retaining the existing foundations while strengthening the clarity, coherence and practical application of expectations for inclusive teaching and disability support.

Discussion analysis

The evidence has identified opportunities to strengthen the focus areas and descriptors relating to inclusive teaching and supporting children and young people with disability. Greater alignment with the evidence base could provide clearer expectations for responding to diverse learning needs, delivering inclusive instruction, implementing reasonable adjustments and providing targeted support. In considering potential changes, the importance of alignment with relevant national policies and legislative obligations, including the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*, is also recognised, while ensuring the Teacher Standards remain sufficiently enduring to accommodate evolving policy, legislation and evidence.

Importantly, expectations must remain reasonable and achievable for individual teachers, recognising that effective inclusive education is a shared responsibility. While teachers play a critical role in identifying and responding to learners’ needs, effective implementation relies on supportive school and system leadership, appropriate resourcing and collaboration with other professionals.

Reasonable adjustments, in particular, may need to be considered across a child or young person's broader educational experience, requiring coordinated planning, implementation and review involving multiple teachers, school leaders, teaching assistants, allied health professionals and parents/carers. The Standards should therefore clearly articulate teachers’ professional responsibilities without implying that individual teachers are solely accountable for decisions, supports or outcomes that depend on broader school and system arrangements.

Together, these considerations provide an opportunity to strengthen the Standards as a tool for guiding professional practice, learning and improvement, while maintaining appropriate boundaries around individual teacher responsibilities. The following section presents potential actions for addressing these findings.

Potential actions

1. No changes

Retain the existing focus areas and descriptors without amendment. The Teacher Standards currently include expectations relating to differentiation (1.5), supporting students with disability (1.6), planning and implementing teaching, assessment and collaboration with parents/carers. However, adopting a position of no change would mean that aspects of the evidence base, including learner variability, inclusive whole-class instruction, reasonable adjustments, assessment-informed adaptation and targeted support, would remain less explicit. This maintains the current descriptors without strengthening alignment with contemporary evidence on inclusive teaching and disability support.

2. Strengthen guidance materials

Strengthen supporting guidance, examples and illustrations of practice. Guidance materials could clarify how teachers provide high-quality inclusive whole-class instruction, respond to learner variability, identify and remove barriers to learning, and plan, implement and review reasonable adjustments for children and young people with disability. It could also illustrate the use of assessment evidence, targeted and increasingly intensive interventions, and collaboration with children and young people, parents/carers and specialists. This action would improve the practical application of the Standards without changing existing expectations or removing explicit disability-specific responsibilities. This action on its own will not address the issues in the Standards identified by the evidence base.

3. Strengthen existing focus areas and descriptors

Make targeted revisions to existing focus areas and descriptors, particularly 1.5 and 1.6, informed by the literature review and other evidence inputs. Changes could strengthen recognition of learner variability as an inherent feature of teaching, high-quality inclusive instruction, proactive adaptation and the identification and removal of barriers to learning. Focus area 1.6 could more explicitly reflect teachers' responsibilities for planning, implementing, monitoring and reviewing reasonable adjustments, consistent with legislative obligations. Related descriptors across Standards 3, 4, 5 and 7 could be refined to strengthen assessment-informed teaching, targeted support and collaboration. This action would retain the existing architecture while improving clarity, coherence and alignment with the evidence base. However, the impact of not adding or replacing any focus areas means that important improvement evidence from the literature review which does not fit into an existing focus area would be missed.

4. Align focus areas and descriptors with the evidence base

Undertake more substantial revisions to relevant focus areas and descriptors to align expectations with the strongest available evidence on inclusive teaching and disability support, informed by other evidence inputs. This could include adding, replacing or consolidating focus areas to establish clearer expectations for inclusive whole-class instruction, responsive and adaptive teaching, assessment-informed targeted interventions and reasonable adjustments for children and young people with disability. Revisions could also strengthen the connections between Standards 1, 3, 4, 5 and 7, recognising inclusion as integral to effective teaching while retaining explicit disability-specific responsibilities. Focus areas could be reframed as statements of purpose, with descriptors articulating observable professional practices and progression across career stages. This action would provide greater coherence and specificity, while requiring consideration of implementation implications and the boundaries of individual teacher responsibilities.

Improvement Area 4 – Effective teaching practice in birth to 5 settings

The information below examines effective teaching in birth to 5 settings, noting that Improvement Areas 1, 5 and 6 focus on the teaching of school age children.

What the literature review found

Effective teaching in birth to five years of age (birth to 5) settings requires an integrated understanding of how young children learn and develop, recognising that learning, development and wellbeing are closely interconnected. The evidence highlights the importance of responsive relationships, play and meaningful interactions as foundations for learning. Effective teaching extends beyond planned experiences to include everyday interactions, routines and transitions, through which children develop knowledge, skills, agency and a sense of belonging.

The research also emphasises the importance of intentional teaching, professional judgement and responsive practice. Effective teachers draw on their knowledge of child development, curriculum and individual learning needs to plan, enact and adapt teaching across child-led, guided and adult-led experiences. Ongoing observation, assessment and critical reflection inform these decisions, alongside inclusive and culturally responsive practices and strong partnerships with parents/carers.

Drawing on the literature review, effective teachers in birth to 5 settings should:

- Build high-quality interactions through positive, responsive and culturally safe relationships with children recognising their individual strengths, identities, capabilities, interests and needs, and drawing on these relationships to inform meaningful learning experiences.
- Understand how children learn and develop, recognising the interconnected nature of learning, development and wellbeing from birth, and the importance of foundational capabilities across cognitive, language, physical, social and emotional domains.
- Recognise play as foundational to learning in early childhood contexts, using professional judgement to balance child-led, guided and adult-led experiences that extend children's thinking, knowledge and skills.
- Plan and enact intentional teaching throughout the day, including planned and spontaneous learning experiences, routines, interactions and transitions.
- Use observation, assessment and critical reflection to understand children's learning and development, identify progress and inform responsive planning and teaching.
- Create inclusive, safe and supportive learning environments that promote belonging, agency, participation, positive behaviour and developing self-regulation.
- Respond to children's diverse learning and developmental needs, adapting teaching strategies, environments and support to enable meaningful participation and progress.
- Build respectful, collaborative partnerships with parents/carers, valuing their knowledge, cultures, languages and aspirations and supporting continuity of learning between home and early childhood settings.
- Understand and apply relevant curriculum frameworks, particularly the EYLF V2.0, to inform curriculum decisions, teaching practices and assessment.

These key elements are described further below in the six key findings that characterise effective teaching practice in birth to 5 settings. These findings highlight the knowledge, skills and professional practices that underpin high-quality early childhood teaching and provide a basis for considering their representation in the current Teacher Standards.

Key finding – Responsive relationships and play are foundational to children's learning and development

The evidence identifies positive, warm and responsive relationships as central to effective teaching in birth to 5 settings. High-quality teacher–child interactions support children's cognitive, social and emotional development and provide a secure foundation for exploration, participation and learning. These relationships are particularly important in the earliest years, when responsive interactions contribute to brain development and emerging communication and self-regulation. Effective teachers develop a deep understanding of each child's strengths, interests, capabilities and needs through meaningful interactions, active listening and sustained engagement. Culturally responsive and respectful relationships are also essential for recognising children's identities, languages and ways of knowing, and supporting their sense of belonging and security.

Play is similarly identified as a fundamental context for learning, development and wellbeing. Through play, children explore ideas, develop relationships, solve problems and build knowledge and skills across developmental domains, with evidence highlighting the particular value of socio-dramatic play in supporting language development. The evidence emphasises that effective play-based learning requires intentional and responsive teaching, rather than relying exclusively on child-directed activity. Teachers exercise professional judgement to balance child-led play, guided play and adult-led experiences, recognising when to observe, participate, scaffold or introduce new concepts. This includes respecting children's agency and choices while creating opportunities to extend thinking, language, mathematical understanding and other foundational capabilities.

Key finding – Effective teaching recognises the interconnectedness of learning, development and wellbeing

The research highlights that children's learning, development and wellbeing are deeply interconnected from birth. Cognitive, physical, language, social and emotional development influence and reinforce one another, meaning effective teaching requires an understanding of how these domains interact rather than treating them as separate areas of learning. For example, emerging executive functions, including working memory, attention and self-regulation, support children's capacity to participate in learning, develop relationships and engage in increasingly complex activities. Similarly, physical development, oral language, communication and socio-emotional capabilities provide important foundations for early literacy, mathematical thinking and other learning.

Effective teachers draw on their knowledge of developmental trajectories to provide meaningful, appropriately challenging learning experiences that respond to children's individual capabilities and progress. This includes intentionally supporting oral language, vocabulary, phonological awareness and communication, early literacy and mathematical thinking through play, conversations, shared reading, exploration and everyday routines. The evidence also emphasises the importance of recognising children's diverse developmental pathways, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and existing knowledge. Teachers need to adapt their strategies to support children's participation and progress while maintaining high expectations and recognising that learning occurs across all aspects of the early childhood program. The early home learning environment is critical to future development and supports primary care, with the home learning environment accelerating children’s learning and wellbeing.

Key finding – Intentional teaching and professional judgement underpin effective pedagogical practice

The evidence consistently identifies professional judgement and intentional teaching as central to effective practice in birth to 5 settings. Teachers require a strong understanding of child development, emergent curriculum, and content knowledge, pedagogical approaches and the individual children they teach, alongside a repertoire of strategies they can select and adapt to support learning.

Intentional teaching involves making deliberate decisions about what children are learning, why particular strategies are appropriate and when and how to intervene. This may include planned learning experiences, spontaneous opportunities arising through play, and purposeful interactions during everyday routines and transitions. Effective teaching therefore requires teachers to move flexibly between child-led, guided and adult-led approaches according to children's learning needs, interests and intended outcomes.

Professional judgement also involves ongoing critical reflection on the effectiveness of teaching strategies, learning experiences and environments. Teachers consider how their own beliefs, assumptions and pedagogical decisions influence children's experiences and opportunities to learn, and adapt their practice in response. The evidence highlights the importance of reflexivity and cultural responsiveness, particularly in recognising the identities, cultures, languages and ways of knowing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Effective teaching is therefore characterised by deliberate, reflective and responsive decision-making rather than the consistent application of a single pedagogical approach.

Key finding – Observation, assessment and reflection inform responsive teaching and ongoing learning

The literature identifies observation, assessment and evaluation as essential components of effective teaching in birth to 5 settings. Teachers use ongoing observations and interpretations of children's learning to understand children's knowledge, capabilities, interests and developmental progress, and to identify opportunities to extend learning. Consistent with the EYLF V2.0 planning cycle, effective practice involves an iterative process of observing, assessing, planning, implementing and evaluating learning experiences. Assessment is embedded within everyday interactions, play and routines, enabling teachers to gather evidence of children's learning across different contexts and over time. This evidence informs intentional decisions about teaching strategies, experiential learning environments and the support individual children may require.

The research also emphasises that assessment should recognise children's diverse ways of demonstrating learning and incorporate multiple sources of evidence, including children's perspectives and information shared by parents/carers. Effective teachers use this information to identify progress, inform future learning goals and evaluate the impact of their teaching. Critical reflection is integral to this process, enabling teachers to examine whether their approaches are supporting children's learning, development and wellbeing and make appropriate adjustments. Professional dialogue and collaboration with colleagues and parents/carers further strengthen assessment and planning by contributing different perspectives on children's learning and experiences.

Key finding – Safe, inclusive and responsive environments support children's participation, belonging and positive behaviour

The evidence highlights the importance of intentionally designed learning environments and continuous provision that support children's physical and emotional safety, participation, exploration and wellbeing. Effective environments extend beyond the physical arrangement of spaces and resources to encompass relationships, routines, interactions and the broader social and cultural context. Teachers create accessible, engaging and appropriately challenging indoor and outdoor environments that respond to children's diverse strengths, interests, developmental capabilities and support needs. The availability of open-ended materials, opportunities for exploration and meaningful participation in decisions about learning environments can strengthen children's agency, creativity, problem-solving and sense of belonging.

Predictable routines, positive relationships and responsive behaviour guidance are also identified as important conditions for learning. Everyday experiences, including mealtimes, transitions and care routines, provide opportunities to strengthen relationships, support language development and foster

children's emerging independence and self-regulation. The research emphasises developmentally and culturally appropriate, proactive approaches to guiding behaviour, including modelling, positive reinforcement, co-regulation and supporting children to resolve conflicts. Teachers need to understand the relationship between behaviour, emotional development and individual learning needs, adapting their responses rather than relying on uniform behavioural approaches. Inclusive and culturally responsive practices further support children to feel recognised, valued and connected within their learning communities.

Key finding – Partnerships with parents/carers strengthen children's learning, development and wellbeing

The evidence identifies respectful, reciprocal partnerships with parents/carers as a core component of effective teaching in birth to 5 settings. Parents/carers are children's first and most influential teachers and provide essential knowledge about their identities, cultures, languages, strengths, interests and developmental experiences. Effective teachers recognise and value this knowledge, using it to inform curriculum decisions, assessment and teaching strategies. Strong partnerships support continuity between home and early childhood settings, strengthen children's sense of identity and belonging, and contribute to their participation and engagement in learning. The research also highlights the importance of recognising diverse family structures, experiences and cultural contexts when developing these relationships.

Effective parent/carer engagement involves ongoing, accessible and two-way communication rather than occasional information sharing. Teachers work collaboratively with parents/carers to understand children's progress, establish shared learning goals, identify barriers to participation and develop responsive approaches to support learning and development. This may include sharing observations and assessment information, recognising learning that occurs at home and identifying practical opportunities for families to support children's learning through everyday activities. The evidence indicates that sustained partnerships, grounded in mutual respect and shared understanding, can strengthen children's learning experiences and support positive developmental outcomes.

What we heard

Evidence from the survey, focus groups and expert submissions indicates broad support for a national professional framework that recognises early childhood teachers as part of a unified teaching profession. However, there is consistent concern that the current Teacher Standards do not adequately reflect the distinctive nature of teaching in birth to 5 settings. The survey found that only 24.2% to 30.2% of respondents with an early childhood role, setting or area of work agreed that the Standards were fit for purpose, reflected early childhood practice and progression, or included descriptors applicable across settings. Focus group participants similarly identified school-oriented terminology and limited recognition of play-based and intentional teaching, holistic development, responsive relationships, child agency, family partnerships and observation-based assessment. Experts reinforced that meaningful inclusion requires more than replacing terms such as ‘student’ with ‘child’ or ‘classroom’ with ‘learning environment’; the underlying expectations of teaching, curriculum, assessment and professional practice must also be relevant to early childhood contexts.

Experts highlighted the importance of recognising the developmental differences between birth to 5 and school-aged learning, noting that within this age group development is wide-ranging: babies, toddlers and preschool-aged children have varied needs. Relationships, play, intentional teaching and developmentally appropriate experiences play a key role in establishing foundations for language, literacy, numeracy, scientific thinking and executive functioning and self-regulation. Some emphasised the distinction between biologically primary and secondary knowledge, arguing that early learning environments should support naturally developing capabilities while teachers intentionally

foster the foundational knowledge and skills needed for later learning. Others stressed the importance of explicit guidance, modelling and purposeful adult interactions within play-based and experiential learning. Across these perspectives, there was recognition of the need for strong teacher knowledge of child development, professional judgement and responsive pedagogical practice, including recognition of the distinctive needs and learning of infants and toddlers. Experts also raised concerns about variability in ITE, service contexts and the interpretation of professional expectations, reinforcing the importance of alignment with the EYLF V2.0 and the NQS.

The evidence presents differing views on how the Teacher Standards should respond to these concerns. While some stakeholders and experts advocate for separate early childhood standards, particularly to recognise the distinctive nature of teaching children from birth to 2 years, others strongly favour retaining a common national framework to preserve professional parity, consistency, registration arrangements and workforce mobility. In the survey, 49.6% of relevant respondents supported dedicated early childhood standards, although the qualitative evidence did not establish a clear preferred model. Suggested approaches include retaining the existing Standards with strengthened guidance such as elaborations, revising common descriptors to better reflect, or at a minimum, not exclude, early childhood practice, or adopting a hybrid model with shared professional expectations but with early childhood-specific descriptors. Across these perspectives, there is broad agreement on the need for more meaningful recognition of early childhood pedagogy, stronger alignment with the EYLF V2.0 and NQS, and clearer guidance on how professional expectations and progression can be demonstrated across diverse early childhood settings. The evidence therefore supports further consideration of how to balance a unified national teaching profession with the distinctive knowledge and practices required for effective teaching from birth to 5.

Environmental scan and other policy considerations

The environmental scan found that Australia's application of a common set of Teacher Standards across early childhood, primary and secondary settings is uncommon internationally. Of the 10 comparator jurisdictions examined, only New Zealand applies the same standards to early childhood teachers across all settings, alongside primary and secondary teachers. Five (5) jurisdictions apply common standards to early childhood teachers working within schools or school systems, while 4 have separate arrangements for early childhood teachers. The scan also identified examples of jurisdictions providing additional guidance for particular educational stages or contexts. This highlights different international approaches to balancing common professional expectations with the distinctive requirements of early childhood teaching, although no single preferred model emerges from the comparison.

The content analysis found that the same broad areas of teacher capability apply across early childhood and school settings, but some expectations may require different expression. For just over half of the capabilities examined, the same underlying expectations applied across settings, while others may warrant setting-specific focus areas or descriptors. Although the current Teacher Standards strongly represent foundational capabilities such as learner development, curriculum knowledge, planning and assessment, the scan identified opportunities to strengthen the explicit recognition of play-based and intentional experiential teaching, learner agency, relationships, family partnerships, transitions and collaboration across services. These findings suggest that greater recognition of early childhood practice may require more than changes to terminology, including consideration of how common professional expectations are expressed and demonstrated in different settings. However, the scan cautions that its source documents were not selected to comprehensively represent both early childhood and school settings, and these findings should therefore be interpreted alongside the other evidence inputs.

The *National Quality Framework (NQF)*, *Early Years Learning Framework V2.0* (2022) and *Shaping Our Future: A Ten-Year Strategy to Ensure a Sustainable, High-Quality Children's Education and Care Workforce* (2022–2031) establish enduring national expectations for quality early childhood education and professional practice. Recent *National Quality Framework child safety reforms* (2025–2026) further strengthen expectations for safeguarding children, promoting child-safe cultures and ensuring children's safety, rights and best interests are paramount in early childhood settings. Any potential revisions to the Teacher Standards should consider alignment with these frameworks, particularly their recognition of play-based learning, intentional teaching, responsive relationships, holistic development, assessment, partnerships with parents/carers and child-safe practices. Consideration should also be given to how the Standards can authentically reflect early childhood teachers' professional practice and career progression, while supporting a shared professional identity across educational settings.

Additionally, while the Teacher Standards form the basis for ITE accreditation in Australia, carried out by state and territory teacher regulatory authorities, birth to 5 teacher education programs are approved by the Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). These programs and approval process use the NQF and are not currently underpinned by the Teacher Standards. The Review provides an opportunity for greater harmonisation between the two systems of program approval.

How the evidence for effective teaching practice in birth to 5 settings is reflected in the Teacher Standards

The findings demonstrate that teaching practice across birth to 5 and school settings has shared professional foundations of core knowledge and practice. The current structure and organisation of the Teacher Standards can function as a framework for describing teaching practice across both settings. There is broad alignment between the evidence base for effective birth-to-5 teaching and the 7 Standards, domains of teaching and some focus areas. However, alignment becomes weaker at the descriptor level, where many of the specific concepts, frameworks, pedagogical approaches and knowledge bases identified in the literature review are either only partially represented or absent from the Teacher Standards. To implement some of the findings on effective teaching in birth to 5 settings may require new focus areas.

Based on the range of evidence for effective teaching practice in birth to 5 settings, there are improvements that could be made to introduce focus areas, update focus areas and descriptors in relation to improving the effectiveness of teaching.

Two examples are provided below which demonstrate misalignment and partial alignment of focus areas with the evidence base for effective teaching practice in birth to 5 settings in the current Teacher Standards and describe the gaps which also exist.

The first example is focus area *1.2 Understand how students learn demonstrates a partial alignment with the evidence.* The focus area adequately captures the need for teaching practice to be responsive to how children learn, highlighting the role of research and collegiality in supporting effective teaching practice and teachers' knowledge extension in this area. However, a gap arises because the focus area implicitly reflects the view that learning is separate from development and wellbeing, and explicitly refers to school-based teaching practices and terminology (e.g. structuring teaching programs). Evidence shows that effective teaching in birth to 5 settings relies on understanding the interconnected nature of children's learning with physical and emotional safety, wellbeing and human connection.

The second example is focus area 2.2 *Content selection and organisation*. The focus area is misaligned with the evidence-base because it explicitly refers to concepts and content of teaching practices typical of school settings. The gap exists with the evidence base because the findings demonstrate that teaching practice in birth to 5 settings includes all aspects of curriculum (planned and spontaneous experiences), environments, routines and transitions.

Discussion analysis

Taken together, the evidence highlights the need for the Teacher Standards to more explicitly reflect the distinctive knowledge, skills and practices of teachers working in birth to 5 settings. Early childhood teachers and sector stakeholders have consistently emphasised that the Standards should meaningfully represent their professional context, including play-based and intentional experiential teaching, holistic development, responsive relationships, child agency and family partnerships. This requires more than changes to school-oriented terminology; the expectations themselves must be relevant, recognisable and applicable to everyday teaching practice across diverse early childhood settings.

At the same time, stakeholders, particularly early childhood teachers, have emphasised the importance of professional parity, recognition and belonging within a unified teaching profession. While views differ on whether this is best achieved through common, merged or separate standards, there is concern that a separate framework could inadvertently position early childhood teachers as distinct from, or of lesser professional standing than teachers of children and young people in the compulsory years of schooling. The central challenge for the Review is therefore to balance authentic recognition of early childhood teaching with a shared professional identity, ensuring that the Standards are both meaningful across different educational contexts and equally affirm the expertise and professionalism of all teachers.

The potential actions consider two important, and sometimes competing, priorities identified by stakeholders: ensuring the Teacher Standards authentically reflect teaching practice in birth to 5 settings, while maintaining professional parity, recognition and coherence across the teaching profession.

Potential actions

1. No changes

Retain the current Teacher Standards, without changes. Continue to rely on the existing framework and glossary to support interpretation and application in birth to 5 settings.

This action maintains a single national framework for all teachers, supporting professional parity, consistency and workforce mobility and avoids disruption to established registration, certification and ITE processes. It does not, however, address stakeholder concerns that the Teacher Standards are predominantly school-oriented or address gaps identified in the evidence relating to play-based and intentional teaching, holistic development and responsive relationships.

2. Strengthen national support and guidance materials

Develop nationally consistent guidance and supporting resources to clarify their application in birth to 5 settings. Resources could include early childhood-specific elaborations, practice examples, evidence illustrations and assessment guidance aligned with EYLF V2.0 and the NQS.

For example, guidance could illustrate how focus area 3.3 (Use teaching strategies) is demonstrated through child-led, guided and adult-led play, or how focus area 5.1 (Assess student learning) is enacted through observation, documentation and ongoing assessment and planning cycles.

This action offers a relatively low-disruption approach that could improve consistency in how the Teacher Standards are interpreted and applied across diverse early childhood settings. On its own it does not, however, address school-oriented language or underlying conceptual gaps within the Teacher Standards themselves.

3. Change the terminology of context-linked terms within the Teacher Standards to make them more inclusive of early childhood

Replace school-oriented terms within the Teacher Standards, focus areas and descriptors (e.g. school, student, classroom) with more inclusive terminology (e.g. setting, child/young person and room/group). This would create a symbolic indication of the applicability of the Teacher Standards across birth to 5 settings but not address the conceptual gaps within them.

4. Change the language of relevant Standards, focus areas and descriptors to make the Standards apply to both early childhood and school age teaching

Revise relevant language to encompass teaching practice across early childhood and school settings in the same standard descriptor. Changes would extend beyond replacing school-oriented terminology to modifying the Standards to have more inclusive and generic descriptions of teaching, curriculum, assessment and learning environments for children and young people, across birth to 18.

This option responds to some of the concerns raised by stakeholders, with early childhood teaching placed in equal consideration as school-based teaching. It may be challenging, however, in developing language that meaningfully represents, and is useful in support of, both early childhood and school-based teaching, given the need for generic and less specific descriptors in this option. Broader descriptors may lack the specificity and detail required to adequately capture distinctive early childhood practices, particularly for infants and toddlers.

5. Introduce alternative early childhood-specific focus areas and/or descriptors into the Teacher Standards

Retain a common national framework, including common Standards and career stages, while introducing, as required, early childhood-specific focus areas, descriptors and wording where the evidence identifies substantive differences in professional knowledge, practice or engagement. Common focus areas and descriptors would be retained where expectations apply across settings, with targeted modifications and additions where necessary to authentically represent birth to 5 teaching.

This would potentially balance a shared professional identity with authentic recognition of distinctive early childhood knowledge and practices. It allows targeted changes where evidence demonstrates meaningful differences, while maintaining common expectations and supporting professional parity and mobility. However, it introduces greater complexity in determining which focus areas and

descriptors require modification or addition and how equivalent expectations and career progression are demonstrated across settings. This may create additional requirements for registration, certification and assessment, and risks positioning early childhood teachers as a distinct subgroup if not carefully implemented. Producing an authentic document including both teaching contexts may impact the readability of the document.

6. Develop a separate set of standards for early childhood teachers

Develop a dedicated set of professional standards for teachers working in birth to 5 settings, reflecting the distinctive knowledge, skills and practices required for effective early childhood teaching. These would be informed by evidence on child development, play-based and intentional teaching, holistic learning, responsive relationships, family partnerships and assessment, and aligned with the EYLF V2.0 and NQS.

A separate framework could retain common professional domains and career stages to support comparability with the existing Teacher Standards, while establishing early childhood-specific expectations and descriptors.

This action could provide the opportunity to authentically represent the distinctive nature of birth to 5 teaching, particularly the developmental and pedagogical differences associated with infants and toddlers. It could strengthen alignment with early childhood regulatory frameworks and provide clearer expectations for teacher preparation, professional learning and career progression.

However, there are risks in creating a perceived division or hierarchy between early childhood and school-based teachers, potentially undermining professional parity and mobility. This option would require substantial development, consultation and implementation, with implications for registration, accreditation and certification. Stakeholder evidence does not demonstrate broad support for separate standards.

Improvement Area 5 – Effective teaching aligns with how children and young people in schools learn

The information below examines effective teaching in school environments. The companion discussion regarding early childhood education is provided in Improvement Area 4.

What the literature review found

The literature review identified that several pedagogical approaches, including explicit instruction, formative assessment and mastery learning, have been consistently identified as effective in improving learning outcomes for children and young people in schools across diverse contexts and cohorts. The review found that their impact depends on teachers using their professional judgement to make informed pedagogical decisions that respond to the individual learning needs of children and young people, and provide appropriate support for learning progress. Effective teaching recognises that learning develops through interconnected stages, including acquiring new knowledge, consolidating learning through time, practice and feedback, developing mastery, and applying, transferring and generating knowledge in increasingly complex and unfamiliar contexts.

The literature review also noted that while children and young people in schools share common cognitive processes involved in acquiring, consolidating and retaining knowledge, they do not all progress through learning in the same way or at the same pace. Teachers must therefore use assessment evidence, professional judgement and ongoing reflection to evaluate the impact of their teaching and adjust the intensity, frequency and duration of teaching. This supports continuous improvement, ensuring approaches remain responsive while maintaining high expectations and equipping all children and young people in schools with the knowledge and strategies needed for success.

This section provides a high-level overview of key research findings on how effective teaching supports:

1. processing, acquisition, retention and consolidation of learning
2. mastery, application and generation of learning
3. self-efficacy and self-regulated learning of children and young people in schools
4. strong foundations in literacy, language and numeracy.

Key finding – How new learning is processed, acquired, retained and consolidated

There are three important aspects to this finding.

Cognitive processes and memory systems

Learning occurs when children and young people process new information in working memory and transfer it as knowledge to be stored in long-term memory. Research identifies that when dealing with new information working memory is severely limited in capacity and duration and can be affected by cognitive overload, stress and other barriers to learning. In contrast, long-term memory has no known capacity or duration limits. Once stored in long-term memory, knowledge can be transferred back to working memory as needed. Working memory has no known capacity or duration limits when dealing

with knowledge previously stored in long-term memory. When knowledge has been stored in long-term memory and can be retrieved automatically, working memory is freed to engage in more complex, higher-order thinking.

Knowledge is strengthened through encoding, consolidation and retrieval. New learning is most effective when it connects to children and young people's prior knowledge, cultural knowledge and existing understanding, and when content is carefully sequenced and presented in manageable chunks.

Effective teaching should sequence learning logically, connect new content to prior knowledge, reduce cognitive overload, and provide opportunities for retrieval and practice to strengthen knowledge in long-term memory.

Retaining and consolidating learning through spaced retrieval practice

Learning is strengthened when children and young people regularly recall and apply previously learned knowledge. Research shows that retrieval practice, spaced learning and repeated opportunities for recall improve retention, consolidation and long-term access to knowledge. Single exposures to information are rarely sufficient for lasting learning.

Effective teaching should include regular retrieval practice, spaced review and opportunities for children and young people to apply learning in varied contexts. These approaches strengthen memory, support long-term retention and promote deeper learning.

Cognitive differences in information processing

All students acquire, retain and consolidate knowledge through the same cognitive processes, but individual cognitive differences, such as information processing capacity and prior knowledge, can influence the supports and intensity of instruction that students need. Information enters our sensory memory, it is manipulated in our working memory, is encoded in our long-term memory and retrieved from long-term memory when needed. Responding to diverse learning needs ─ including differences in information processing capacity ─ can require different degrees of breaking down content and steps, and providing more opportunities and guidance for revisiting, recalling and practising learning as needed to support retention. Children and young people require varying supports to effectively encode, retain and recall information and benefit from practices that enable them to process information, without overload. Research indicates that effective teaching supports learning by reducing cognitive load through explicit instruction, chunking content, visual supports, retrieval practice and scaffolding. These strategies benefit all children and young people and are particularly important for children and young people with diverse learning needs. Research also indicates that gifted and talented children and young people may require greater challenge, complexity and opportunities for advanced learning. Formative assessment helps identify when additional support or greater challenge is required.

Effective teaching in schools requires adapting the intensity, frequency and duration of support to children and young people's learning needs while maintaining high expectations. Teachers should use assessment evidence to inform their professional judgement to provide appropriate adjustments, targeted scaffolding and challenging learning opportunities that enable all children and young people to progress.

Key finding – Mastery, application and generation of learning

Children and young people develop mastery when they acquire, retain and fluently apply knowledge, skills and conceptual understanding across contexts. Varied practice strengthens mental models, enabling children and young people to recognise patterns, transfer learning, solve unfamiliar problems and generate new ideas. Strong mental models reduce cognitive load, allowing children and young

people to analyse, evaluate and create. Generative activities such as explaining, summarising and representing concepts help children and young people demonstrate and extend mastery.

The literature review suggests that teachers should build fluency, provide varied and increasingly complex practice, strengthen mental models, and create opportunities for children and young people to apply, extend and generate new understandings in unfamiliar contexts.

Key finding – Self-efficacy and self-regulated learning of children and young people in schools

Research indicates that children and young people's self-efficacy develops through successful learning experiences where they retrieve and apply their consolidated knowledge. It supports engagement, persistence and increasingly complex learning. Evidence-based strategies such as retrieval practice, spacing, interleaving and elaboration strengthen retention and application of knowledge. Children and young people's capacity for self-regulated learning develops progressively and often requires explicit teaching and scaffolding. Teachers should provide high-quality instruction, targeted support and feedback, and use evidence-based learning strategies while supporting children and young people to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning.

Key finding – Strong foundations in language, literacy and numeracy

Language, literacy and numeracy are foundational for learning across the curriculum and strongly influence educational outcomes. Evidence highlights the importance of explicit, evidence-based instruction, early identification of learning gaps and timely intervention. Strong assessment practices and a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) can improve achievement for most children and young people. Children and young people with English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D), including many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, benefit from explicit language instruction integrated within curriculum learning, with high expectations supported by targeted scaffolding and language development opportunities.

The literature review suggests that teachers should use assessment data to identify learning needs, provide evidence-based instruction and early intervention, and support EAL/D children and young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, through explicit language teaching, targeted scaffolding and high expectations for learning.

What we heard

Within the survey, support for giving greater emphasis to core teaching practices with the highest impact on student learning was strongest among education practitioners and pre-service teachers (72% and 75% respectively), compared with 38% of ITE providers. Written responses included suggestions for clearer recognition of evidence-based teaching strategies, including cognitive load and explicit teaching. Some respondents commenting on ITE also identified feedback and data use as areas for greater attention. Other responses called for more prescriptive guidance about effective teaching. Some respondents particularly supported greater attention to these areas in ITE, while others cautioned that excessive prescription could constrain teachers' judgement or weaken the ability of the Teacher Standards to accommodate different contexts.

Focus group participants expressed mixed views on giving instructional practices greater prominence in the Teacher Standards. Some participants supported a stronger instructional core to ensure that central aspects of classroom teaching receive sufficient attention. Others cautioned that prioritising

particular practices could create a hierarchy and diminish the importance of interconnected aspects of instruction, professional knowledge, inclusion, relationships and engagement. Participants discussing Graduate expectations questioned whether the Teacher Standards adequately represent beginning teachers' ability to apply knowledge, interpret classroom circumstances, make professional decisions and adapt teaching when planned approaches do not work.

Expert submissions broadly supported strengthening expectations relating to research-informed knowledge of how learning occurs and teachers' capacity to critically engage with evidence. However, submissions differed on how formal research evidence should be balanced with professional expertise, evidence about learners and contextual knowledge. Some submissions requested greater recognition of foundational literacy and numeracy expectations within the instructional core, alongside disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. However, there were also cautions against both highly prescriptive lists of approved practices and descriptions so general that they provide little guidance.

What we heard from stakeholders was strong support for recognising evidence-informed practice, teacher expertise, use of professional judgement and understanding learning, as central to effective teaching and improved outcomes for children and young people. Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of assessment, curriculum knowledge and informed pedagogical decision-making in supporting learning progress while maintaining high expectations for all learners.

At the same time, respondents consistently cautioned against the Teacher Standards privileging particular pedagogical approaches or being interpreted as endorsing a single model of practice. While the literature review identified approaches such as explicit instruction, formative assessment and mastery learning as having a strong evidence base, stakeholders emphasised the importance of professional judgement and reflective practice in determining how these approaches are applied across different contexts and educational settings.

Environmental scan and other policy considerations

The environmental scan identified expectations within major Australian reports that teachers understand how learners develop, acquire and retain knowledge, and progress towards increasing expertise. The reports also identified expectations for teachers to select explicit, evidence-informed, active and intentional pedagogies, including play-based pedagogies, where relevant, to suit learners and intentional teaching approaches. Analysis of enduring Australian priorities identified a broader, related expectation for teachers to plan and deliver accessible, challenging and coherent learning using appropriate curriculum and teaching approaches.

These findings broadly align with the *Strong Beginnings* Core Content requirements for ITE, particularly those relating to the brain and learning and effective pedagogical practices. Both emphasise understanding how students acquire, retain and apply knowledge, alongside evidence-based approaches to instruction, practice, assessment and feedback. This provides an opportunity to consider whether the Teacher Standards sufficiently articulate these foundational expectations, while recognising that Core Content provides greater specificity for ITE.

The *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement* (2025–2034) establish national commitments to strengthening evidence-based teaching practices and improving literacy and numeracy outcomes. These commitments are supported by national ITE reforms arising from *Strong Beginnings: Report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel* (2023), which introduced greater specificity about the knowledge and practices graduate teachers should acquire. Any potential revisions to the Teacher Standards should consider alignment with these national reform directions, particularly the extent to which the

Graduate career stage reflects contemporary evidence about how children and young people learn and the knowledge teachers require to support effective learning.

How the evidence for effective teaching which aligns with how children and young people in schools learn is reflected in the Teacher Standards

An analysis and comparison of the evidence about effective teaching aligned with how the brain learns and the current wording in the Teacher Standards indicates alignment exists between the evidence and the titles of the Standards and the current domains. Standard 1, for example, appropriately recognises that knowing students and how they learn is fundamental to effective teaching.

This suggests that any revisions to align the Standards to the evidence would best be addressed through changes to focus areas and descriptors and would be accompanied by a set of updated definitions of terms in the Standards document. By way of illustration, two examples of where this type of change could occur are included below:

Example 1: The evidence indicates the essential knowledge teachers need to understand how children and young people in schools learn. It could be argued that Standard 1, Know students and how they learn, focus area 1.2 *Understand how students learn* is only partially aligned with this evidence as it does not include knowledge of the learning processes through which children and young people acquire, consolidate, retain and apply knowledge and skills.

Example 2: The evidence indicates that the cognitive mechanisms for learning are consistent across learning areas and that evidence-based approaches, including explicit instruction, modelling, scaffolding and management of cognitive load, are broadly applicable. It could be argued that Standard 2 – Know the content and how to teach it, in focus area 2.1 *Content and teaching strategies of the teaching area,* provides insufficient guidance on effective teaching strategies. Referring to *teaching strategies of the teaching area* without further clarification may imply that each learning area requires a distinct pedagogy, risking the prioritisation of discipline-specific practices over well-established, evidence-informed principles of teaching and learning.

Discussion analysis

The research articulates an understanding of how the brain learns. It also identifies the effective teaching practices which complement that understanding. This research brings a new conceptual positioning to underpin aspects of the knowledge and practice domains of the Teacher Standards. An analysis of this evidence with the Teacher Standards suggests that there are some focus areas and descriptors which would benefit from revision and areas where replacements are needed. AITSL is mindful that evidence from the environmental scan, focus groups, expert submissions and survey supports targeted strengthening, clarification and improvement rather than unrestricted expansion. A minimalist approach to articulating alignment with the new literature would be foregrounded in any revisions.

From our partners and stakeholders, we also heard that there was support for giving greater emphasis to high-impact, core teaching practices. It was strongly supported in the survey by education practitioners and pre-service teachers, with 72% and 75% agreement. The survey represented the data collection tool with the largest participant sample size, however, support could

be seen across all evidence sets in this section. Reflecting evidence of how children and young people learn in the Teacher Standards is therefore an option to be explored.

Another action for change could be to shift the focus area from simply having a title to having the function of describing the purpose of the focus area. This would increase the specificity and detail present in the Standards, enabling evidence to be aligned with the standards through short purpose statements. These short focus area statements would utilise relevant effective teaching concepts to provide the purpose for the set of descriptors. This concept was successfully incorporated into the *Australian Professional Standards for Middle Leaders* (Middle Leader Standards), noting they do not serve a regulatory purpose. Requests for specificity and detail in the Standards have been identified in evidence of what we heard (refer to Improvement Area 7 for more detail).

Potential actions

1. No changes

Make no changes to update focus areas and descriptors for effective teaching which aligns with how school-aged children and young people learn. Adopting a position of no change means that some evidence of effective teaching will not be reflected in the focus area and standard descriptors. This retains the status quo and will not improve current levels of support for teaching effectiveness provided by the Teacher Standards. As a positive outcome, it will require no changes to industrial, legislative or system processes and pose no temporary increase in workload across the profession to accommodate revised Teacher Standards.

2. Strengthen guidance materials

Strengthen associated guidance materials and examples to clarify missing elements of effective teaching. Guidance, for example, could unpack for teachers the knowledge about how children and young people learn and the effective teaching which aligns with that knowledge. This action on its own will not address the issues in the Standards identified by the evidence base.

3. Strengthen existing focus areas and descriptors

Limit changes by updating existing focus areas and descriptors by strengthening links to findings of the literature review where appropriate. Reframe the existing focus area from being a label for the set of descriptors to being a statement of purpose about the desired impact of the descriptors. This enables the intent behind the descriptors to be linked with the research base at a high level. These changes will leave some key areas of effective teaching research which do not fit within current focus areas missing from the Standards.

4. Align the focus areas and descriptors with the medium to high confidence evidence

Remove, add, replace or revise focus areas and descriptors to align with the medium- to-high confidence effective teaching knowledge and practices identified in the literature review. Inform the changes with consideration of the other evidence inputs. This option enables the Standards to be updated, while balancing existing limited wording with sufficient specificity and detail to align with the evidence base. Also, reframe the existing focus area from being a label for the set of descriptors to being a statement of purpose about the desired impact of the descriptors. This enables the intent behind the descriptors to be linked with the research base at a high level.

Improvement Area 6 – Planning for effective teaching and learning in schools

The evidence for this improvement area relates to effective knowledge and practice for teaching children and young people in schools and other learning environments for school-aged children and young people. Improvement Area 4 – Effective teaching practice in birth to 5 settings - provides comparative information about knowledge and practice for effective teaching of children and young people in birth to 5 centres.

What the literature review found

Planning for and implementing effective teaching and learning in schools and other learning environments for school-aged children and young people is a key aspect of the professional practice of teachers. Four key findings from the literature review are outlined below. They provide insight into the medium-to-high confidence literature related to effective teaching knowledge and practice in this area.

Key finding – Structure and sequence of learning

Effective teaching aligns learning goals, instruction and assessment. Evidence shows learning is strengthened when teachers sequence content from simple to complex, build on prior knowledge, and use explicit instruction, modelling and guided application of new learning. Strong instructional planning draws on subject and pedagogical knowledge to select appropriate explanations, examples and learning activities. Learning is further enhanced when instructional materials are designed to manage cognitive load, focus attention on key information, and effectively integrate visual, verbal and written representations.

To maximise the impact of teaching on learning, teachers should align learning intentions, instruction and assessment; sequence learning from simple to complex; build on prior knowledge; use explicit instruction and modelling; monitor progress through assessment; and design multimedia resources that manage cognitive load and support understanding, recall, application and transfer of learning.

Key finding – Assessment, reporting and use of data

Formative and summative uses of assessment provide complementary evidence of student learning and are most effective when aligned with curriculum, instruction and learning goals. Assessment for formative use supports learning through ongoing monitoring, feedback and instructional adjustment, while summative interpretations of assessment evaluate achievement and inform future teaching. Screening, diagnostic assessment and progress monitoring support the early identification of learning needs, targeted intervention and evaluation of support strategies, including within a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). Effective reporting draws on multiple sources of evidence to communicate achievement, progress, strengths, needs and next steps, supporting children and young people, parents/carers and teachers.

To maximise the impact of teaching, teachers should plan for and use formative interpretations of assessment to monitor learning, provide feedback and inform responsive teaching. They should draw on formative, summative, screening and diagnostic assessment data to identify needs, guide instructional decisions, support the adaptive and responsive provision of high-quality, inclusive instruction for all children and young people, evaluate interventions, and communicate student

achievement, progress, strengths, needs and next steps with children and young people, parents/carers and colleagues.

Key finding – Safe and effective use of educational technology

Educational technology can support learning, engagement, feedback, progress monitoring and inclusion when used purposefully alongside evidence-based teaching practices. Evidence indicates that technology does not improve learning outcomes on its own; its effectiveness depends on teachers' professional judgement and their integration of technology, pedagogy and curriculum knowledge. Digital and assistive technologies can support diverse learning needs, while immersive technologies can provide authentic learning experiences. Effective use of edtech requires careful evaluation of its benefits, limitations and implementation, alongside attention to safety, digital literacy, ethical use and equitable access for all children and young people.

To maximise the impact of teaching, teachers should use edtech to complement evidence-based practice, make informed decisions about its use for learning and inclusion, and explicitly teach safe, ethical and responsible digital participation.

Key finding – Safe and effective use of AI

Generative AI is a general-purpose cognitive technology that can support teaching, planning, resource development and administrative tasks when used alongside teacher expertise. Evidence indicates that AI is most effective when teachers critically evaluate its outputs and make informed professional judgements about when and how it should be used. While AI can enhance efficiency, reduce workload and provide feedback, scaffolding and personalised support, inappropriate use may reduce opportunities for student learning. Effective use requires attention to accuracy, ethics, privacy, bias, academic integrity and AI literacy, while maintaining human oversight of educational decisions.

Although the evidence base for the safe and effective use of AI is emerging and evolving, the potential for AI to disrupt and negatively impact children and young people's learning requires a careful and cautious approach to its use in schools. To maximise the impact of teaching, teachers should use AI critically and responsibly, make informed judgements about when AI supports learning, preserve opportunities for children and young people's independent cognitive effort, and develop children and young people's capability to use AI safely, ethically and effectively.

What we heard

The survey didn't specifically pose questions related to this improvement area. However, some respondents identified opportunities for clearer recognition of contemporary digital capabilities, including effective use of digital technologies and AI literacy. Others questioned the need for separate ICT descriptors or raised concerns about technology overuse. These views were expressed in written responses and did not establish a consistent preferred direction for change.

Focus group discussions highlighted the importance of applying professional judgement in planning and teaching as central to effective teaching, including adapting when planned approaches were unsuccessful. Participants describe increasingly sophisticated classroom expertise through more responsive instructional decisions, more nuanced interpretation of assessment evidence and understanding when and why to adapt teaching approaches. These findings were particularly evidenced in discussions about ITE and career stage progression. Separately, registration and ITE focus group discussions identified digital technologies and AI as current issues, including their implications for planning and expectations of beginning teachers.

Expert submissions provided broad support for representing planning, instruction, assessment, feedback and evaluation as connected aspects of responsive teaching. Submissions considered that the Teacher Standards distribute them across different areas, which can make their relationship less visible. Specialist submissions also highlighted the importance of developmentally appropriate assessment and emphasised using a range of assessment practices to inform teaching decisions.

Specialist technology evidence reinforced the distinction between simply using technology and critically evaluating its educational, ethical and accessibility implications. It emphasised the importance of professional judgement in determining when and how technology should be used to support learning, while partners and stakeholders noted the importance of exercising professional judgement within the frameworks, policies and requirements agreed nationally, or by schools, systems or sectors. AI, privacy, bias, digital citizenship, assessment integrity, accessibility and online teaching were identified as insufficiently captured by the Teaching Standards, and partners and stakeholders cautioned against relying only on teacher judgement (in the absence of frameworks, policies or requirements) in an area where the evidence base is still emerging. Submissions differed on whether AI should be explicitly named in revised Standards or whether broader, technology-neutral language would remain more relevant as technologies change.

Partner and stakeholder feedback strongly reinforced the literature review findings that effective planning is central to high-quality teaching and learning. Partners and stakeholders provided broad support for planning that brings together curriculum knowledge, relevant lesson sequence frameworks and guidance, assessment, and teachers' understanding of their impact on learning progress. At the same time, stakeholders called out the growing complexity of planning for teachers in early childhood and school settings, including responding to diverse learner needs, integrating technology effectively and drawing on multiple sources of evidence to inform teacher practice. While there was support for strengthening references to evidence-informed approaches, assessment and educational technology, many stakeholders consistently cautioned against overly prescriptive expectations. Some partners and stakeholders specifically called out the need to de-emphasise the design of teaching programs in the Standards, drawing on existing, regularly updated school/system-wide planning. Feedback broadly reflected a preference for Teacher Standards that recognise the role of teacher expertise and professional judgement in adapting planning, instruction and assessment to different learners, contexts and developmental stages.

Stakeholder feedback identified that collaborative practice and ongoing professional learning play an important role in strengthening teaching quality and improving learning. It identified that teachers develop and refine their knowledge and practice through opportunities to plan collaboratively, share expertise, examine evidence of student learning, reflect on teaching approaches and evaluate their effectiveness. Effective professional learning is sustained, connected to classroom practice and responsive to the learning needs of children and young people. Collaborative planning, assessment moderation and professional inquiry can support shared understandings of effective teaching and collective responsibility for student learning and wellbeing. These practices require supportive school conditions, including opportunities for collaboration, support from leaders and time for professional learning.

To maximise the impact of teaching on learning, teachers should engage in ongoing professional learning and collaborative practice to strengthen their knowledge, share expertise, critically examine evidence and continually evaluate and improve their teaching. Schools and systems also play an important role in establishing the conditions and structures that enable meaningful collaboration and professional learning.

Environmental scan and other policy considerations

The environmental scan identified expectations in enduring Australian priorities for teachers to plan accessible, challenging and coherent learning activities, and use assessment, observation and feedback to evaluate progress and adjust teaching. Analysis of major Australian reports and the international teacher standards reviewed also described planning curriculum-aligned learning, using varied assessments for formative and summative purposes, providing useful feedback, interpreting multiple sources of learning evidence and clearly reporting progress to learners and parents/carers.

Analysis of Australian reports and international teacher standards identified expectations for teachers to use digital and assistive technologies purposefully to support learning, accessibility, assessment and communication, while developing learners' digital capabilities. They also emphasised safe and ethical technology use, including privacy and data protection. The analysis additionally identified expectations for teachers to understand the benefits, limitations and risks of AI, exercise professional judgement, maintain human oversight and recognise and respond to online harm.

The *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement* (2025–2034) reinforce national priorities for evidence-based teaching, while the mandatory ITE Core Content informed by *Strong Beginnings* (2023) establishes more explicit expectations for graduate teachers' knowledge of effective pedagogical practices. Any potential revisions to the Teacher Standards should consider alignment with these expectations, particularly how teachers draw on curriculum knowledge, assessment evidence and professional judgement to plan, implement, evaluate and adapt teaching.

How the evidence for planning for effective teaching and learning in schools is reflected in the Teacher Standards

An analysis and comparison of the evidence about planning for effective teaching and learning in schools and the current wording in the Teacher Standards indicates alignment exists between the evidence and the titles of the Standards and the current domains. Standard 3, for example, appropriately recognises that planning for and implementing effective teaching and learning is fundamental to effective teaching.

This suggests that any revisions to align the Standards to the evidence would best be addressed through changes to focus areas and descriptors and would be accompanied by a set of updated definitions of terms in the Standards document. By way of illustration, two examples of where this type of change could occur are included below:

The evidence on Improvement Area 6 - Planning for effective teaching and learning in schools suggests that some of the focus areas and descriptors align with the evidence base, while there are other focus areas and descriptors which only partially align or, in some cases, misalign. Two examples are provided below.

Example 1. Focus area 3.2 - *Plan, structure and sequence learning programs* - demonstrates where the focus area both partially aligns and misaligns with the evidence. In terms of partial alignment, the set of descriptors in this focus area provide specific information in which planning is focused on knowing and engaging learners, promoting learning and creating productive learning environments. To align with effective teaching practices, specificity about structuring and sequencing learning across the phases of the learning process should emphasise supporting children and young people to acquire, consolidate, master and apply knowledge and skills with increasing independence. Learning should build systematically on prior knowledge and progress from simple to increasingly complex knowledge, skills and concepts. Content should also be organised into manageable chunks to

optimise cognitive load during learning acquisition. While planning is identified as important, key aspects of the practices of effective teaching are missing.

Example 2. Focus area 3.2 is also a demonstration of misalignment with evidence of effective teaching. The dual emphasis of this focus area on designing plans to promote engagement rather than a clear focus on learning may have limited impact on children and young people's sustained motivation and self-efficacy. Well-sequenced teaching that enables children and young people to experience learning success and develop self-efficacy is more likely to support sustained engagement.

In light of the evidence provided, this focus area could also be considered to place insufficient emphasis on the importance of regular student practice, including the planning and sequencing of learning to provide opportunities for spaced retrieval practice.

Discussion analysis

The key findings of the literature review related to Improvement Area 6 broadly align with areas identified from the information gathered through the survey, focus groups, expert submissions, stakeholder feedback and the environmental scan. The literature review key findings and the other evidence gathered are highly aligned in emphasising the integration of planning, instruction, assessment and feedback, the use of assessment evidence to inform and improve teaching, and the importance of professional judgement in effective practice. The literature review findings related to this improvement area provide a more detailed evidence-based account of instructional design, assessment, educational technology and AI, while evidence gathered from other sources contributes stronger emphasis on responsive teaching, teacher expertise, developmental progression, stakeholder perspectives and the role of professional judgement in adapting teaching to address diverse learner needs. When the evidence gathered is compared with the evidence in the literature review for this improvement area, most of the areas of stronger emphasis are described within the literature review. Additionally, stakeholders called out the importance of collaborative practice and ongoing professional learning as important considerations in planning, implementing and improving effective teaching in schools. Neither of these important areas were in scope for the literature review.

Given the alignment of much of the evidence and the number of focus areas and descriptors which are only partially aligned or are misaligned with the key findings, there is a strong case for revision of the related focus areas and descriptors to better align with the evidence base.

Potential actions

1. No changes

Make no changes to update focus areas and descriptors for planning for Improvement Area 6 - Planning for effective teaching and learning in schools. This retains the status quo and will not improve current levels of support for teaching effectiveness provided by the Teacher Standards.

2. Strengthen guidance materials

Strengthen associated guidance materials and examples to clarify missing elements of effective teaching. Guidance, for example, could unpack for teachers the knowledge and practice about how to

plan for effective teaching and learning in schools. This action on its own will not address the issues in the Standards identified by the evidence base.

3. Strengthen existing focus areas and descriptors

Limit changes by updating existing focus areas and descriptors by strengthening links to findings of the literature review where possible. Reframe the existing focus area from being a label for the set of descriptors to being a statement of purpose about the desired impact of the set of descriptors. This enables the intent behind the descriptors to be linked with the research base at a high level. These changes will leave out some key areas of effective teaching research which do not fit within current focus areas from the Standards.

4. Align the focus areas and descriptors with the medium to high confidence evidence

With a bias towards only necessary change, remove, add, replace or revise focus areas and descriptors to align with the medium to high-confidence effective teaching knowledge and practices identified in the literature review. Inform the changes with consideration of the other evidence inputs. This option enables the Standards to be updated, while balancing existing limited wording with sufficient specificity and detail to align with the evidence base. Also, reframe the existing focus area from being a label for the set of descriptors to being a statement of purpose about the desired impact of the descriptors. This enables the intent behind the descriptors to be linked with the research base at a high level.

Improvement Area 7 – Adjust the architecture and language of the Standards

The architecture of the Teacher Standards comprises 4 key career stages, 3 teaching domains, and 7 Standards. The 7 Standards are further described through 37 focus area descriptors at each career stage (a total of 148 descriptors). The full Teacher Standards policy document also contains important introductory sections, including a preamble and description of professional capability at each career stage. The evidence and consultation have raised several issues and opportunities in relation to the architecture of the Teacher Standards. These include how expertise progression is articulated, improving clarity of language in, and a rationalisation of, descriptors, as well as consideration for the introduction of teaching dispositions.

What the literature review found

Expertise progression in schools and other Foundation – Year 12 (F-12) learning environments

The literature review identified 5 key findings on how teaching expertise progresses in schools and other F-12 learning environments across knowledge and integration, professional judgement, automated practice, cultural responsiveness and adaptive expertise.

Key finding – Knowledge and integration

Teacher expertise progresses through the integration and organisation of professional knowledge, rather than the accumulation of knowledge alone. Novice teachers draw on content knowledge (content of curriculum subject matter), pedagogical knowledge (knowledge of teaching methods) and pedagogical content knowledge (knowledge of how particular topics are best taught and where students struggle with them) as separate forms of knowledge. Through experience and deliberate practice, teachers build their expertise by integrating these into curriculum scripts that organise lesson goals, curriculum content, anticipated student responses and pedagogical actions. Expert teachers are distinguished not by how much they know, but by how effectively they organise and apply their knowledge to support student learning.

Key finding – Professional judgement

A key feature of expertise progression is the increasing capability to use professional judgement to recognise, interpret and respond to children and young people’s learning needs. Novice teachers primarily focus on instructional delivery and rely on established rules, standard practices and external resources. As expertise develops, teachers increasingly draw on curriculum scripts to recognise important cues about student learning, interpret their meaning and make judgements about how to modify their practice.

Key finding – Automatised practice

Automatisation supports expertise progression by enabling teachers to focus on student learning and build trusting relationships. Automated classroom routines free teachers’ cognitive resources to monitor and respond to students' learning needs in real time and support consistent interactions that cultivate trust. Effective instructional practices include building on prior learning, scaffolding understanding, structuring formative assessment in planning and using it dynamically during teaching to provide point-in-time feedback.

Key finding – Cultural responsiveness

Expert teaching from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective may also be understood as cultural responsiveness, as expert teaching is adaptive and relational. Expert teaching involves building trusting relationships with students and parents/carers, recognising students' strengths, and contextualising curriculum through both Western and local knowledge systems. The capability of cultural responsiveness depends on knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, languages and cultures, while understanding threshold concepts such as race, Country, relationality, policy and evidence as enablers for teachers to exercise informed professional judgement and reflexivity about how knowledge is constructed and valued.

Key finding – Adaptive expertise

Expertise is characterised by increasingly sophisticated judgement, but it is not developed through experience alone, nor does it progress in a linear way. Advanced expertise involves responding effectively to familiar situations and adapting practice in response to novel contexts. Expertise depends on knowledge, skill, and judgement working together, and progression is supported by deliberate engagement in practice and the refinement of professional knowledge, rather than time in the profession alone.

Expertise progression in birth to 5 settings

The literature identifies 5 key findings on how teaching expertise progresses in birth to 5 settings, including increasingly sophisticated knowledge application, professional judgement, responsiveness, relational practice and adaptability.

Key finding – Dynamic knowledge application

Expertise progression in birth to 5 settings is characterised by an increasingly sophisticated capability to apply knowledge dynamically in practice. Teaching proficiency builds on professional knowledge but extends to professional understandings of how that knowledge is enacted effectively in practice. Expertise development involves building contextual knowledge of teaching and learning and moving from knowing what to do to knowing how to do it effectively within a particular context. Knowledge of children's learning, development and curriculum is continually revisited and refined through collegial learning, critical reflection and engagement with practice.

Key finding – Responsive and intentional practice

Expert early childhood teachers build secure, responsive relationships with children and parents/carers and use deep knowledge of each child to inform teaching and curriculum decision-making. They recognise and respond to children's cues, interests, strengths, and developmental needs, confidently use play-based intentional teaching, and adapt learning environments to remain responsive to children. Expert teachers also intentionally integrate learning and wellbeing opportunities across developmental domains and adapt planned and spontaneous learning opportunities, routines and transitions to children's strengths, interests and needs.

Key finding – Critical reflection and professional judgement

Critical reflection is both a key characteristic of expert early childhood teachers and a central mechanism through which expertise develops. Expert teachers use observation, assessment and critical reflection to plan, document, respond to and support children's learning and development, while also evaluating their own practice and identifying opportunities for improvement. They exercise professional judgement by drawing on evidence, theory and contextual knowledge rather than relying solely on prescribed approaches. Engagement with research and evidence strengthens their capability to connect theory with practice and make informed pedagogical decisions.

Key finding – Collaboration and professional influence

As expertise develops, early childhood teachers build greater confidence and skill in communicating and collaborating with children, parents/carers and colleagues. They develop a deeper understanding of their professional role, responsibilities, values and ethical obligations. This can lead to greater influence on others' practice through mentoring, contributing to professional dialogue and supporting continuous improvement. However, influencing others through leadership, mentoring, collaboration, and quality improvement is not required to develop and achieve expertise in teaching.

Key finding – Adaptive expertise

Early childhood teachers continually observe, assess, prioritise and respond to multiple and competing demands while adapting to children's learning, developmental and wellbeing needs in real time. Expertise progression requires teachers to strengthen their professional capabilities throughout their career and develop adaptive, flexible dispositions that support high levels of multitasking, responsiveness and task rotation. Overall, expertise development in birth to 5 settings follows similar underlying processes to those in school-based settings, including movement towards greater knowledge integration, professional judgement, responsiveness and relational expertise.

What we heard

Most survey respondents agreed that the structure of the Teacher Standards is easy to understand (75% - 82% across respondent groups) and that the relationship between domains, Standards, focus areas and descriptors is clear (67% - 73%). However, agreement was lower that the structure supports consistent interpretation (51% – 58%) or practical use (51% - 62%). Written responses called for clearer language, practical examples and greater guidance. There was also good support (71% - 76%) for making the focus areas relating to effective teaching easier to identify.

Views on simplifying the Teacher Standards were mixed. Support for fewer Standards and descriptors ranged from 47% to 65%, while only 8% to 16% supported adding more. At the same time, 54% to 63% supported more specific and detailed descriptors. Some focus group participants found the layered structure and terminology difficult to interpret, particularly when first encountered. Participants favoured clearer wording to improve consistency but cautioned that overly prescriptive language could limit professional judgement and appropriate application across different contexts.

Survey respondents and stakeholders consulted largely supported retaining the Graduate and Proficient career stages as currently structured, but views about higher stages were more mixed. Support for placing greater emphasis on advanced classroom practice ranged from 43% to 58% at Highly Accomplished, compared with 27% to 37% at Lead. Written responses and consulted stakeholders and partners highlighted both the need for clearer recognition of advanced expertise being applied in a classroom or other learning environment (advanced classroom expertise) as well as the value of retaining a career stage focused on professional influence beyond a teacher's own classroom. Several stakeholders suggested that the current Lead career stage descriptors largely reflected the practices of middle leaders, and questioned its value within the Teacher Standards. An additional comment made by some consulted stakeholders was that the label 'Proficient' had slightly negative connotations and was not fitting for the teaching profession.

Focus group participants and consulted stakeholders also noted that Proficient encompasses teachers with widely differing expertise, without clearly representing continuing development. Advanced classroom expertise was associated with increasingly sophisticated judgement, responsiveness and the ability to manage complexity. While mentoring and professional influence were recognised as legitimate aspects of higher career stages, participants considered that these expectations could overshadow growth in teachers' own classroom practice.

Expert submissions similarly favoured retaining the recognisable high-level structure of the Teacher Standards, while improving the coherence of its more detailed elements. Some raised concerns that

the number of focus areas and descriptors, unclear relationships between them and their apparent equal weighting can make teaching appear as a collection of separate competencies rather than integrated professional practice. This can encourage checklist-based interpretation and obscure how teaching practices connect and overlap. Submissions supported clarifying the purpose and relationship between elements and removing duplication where warranted. Submissions also supported practical, context-specific guidance to improve interpretation, provided it is clearly distinguished from formal requirements and allows for different approaches across teaching contexts.

Expert submissions and many consulted stakeholders identified a need to make continuing classroom expertise beyond Proficient more visible, particularly at Highly Accomplished, while retaining wider professional influence at Lead. Mentoring and developing colleagues were valued, but were not considered exclusive indicators of advanced expertise, as these activities can also occur at Proficient. Several stakeholders raised that an overwhelming majority of teachers certified or operating at the Lead career stage were in a formal middle leadership position and therefore the Middle Leader Standards had more relevance for them. Submissions and consulted stakeholders also called for clearer relationships between the advanced career stages, Middle Leader Standards and the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* (Principal Standard), distinguishing growth in teaching expertise from progression into formal leadership.

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of the Teacher Standards better reflecting how teaching, learning, assessment, wellbeing and professional engagement work together in practice. While stakeholders supported improvements to clarity and representation, they consistently cautioned against adding unnecessary complexity.

Survey respondents and stakeholders raised mixed interest in the inclusion of teaching dispositions into the broader Teacher Standards policy document. Examples of dispositions raised in these discussions included areas such as empathy, open-mindedness and resilience.

There was broad consensus that dispositions should not be brought into any assessed or regulated part of the Teacher Standards architecture, and therefore, if introduced, should sit outside of the Standards, focus areas and descriptors. However, among survey respondents, 31.5% of teachers and 50.1% of school leaders expressed support for the introduction of dispositions in some form. Consulted partners and stakeholders were generally open to further consideration, but cautioned that any dispositions must be an attribute that can be developed, and not a fixed character trait. Many stakeholders could see benefit in dispositions aiding the identification of appropriate professional learning and professional conversations, as well as their ability to support teachers in creating socially cohesive, safe and supportive learning environments. However, many stakeholders stressed that dispositions must not implicitly or explicitly be used to limit or reduce the demographic diversity of the teaching workforce.

Environmental scan and other policy considerations

The environmental scan found that the structure of the Teacher Standards is deeply embedded across ITE, registration, certification, professional learning, and industrial arrangements. Career stages, Standards, focus areas and descriptors are used to varying degrees within these processes. Structural change would therefore require changes to many existing documents, policies, assessment processes and workforce arrangements.

The scan also found that the overall structure has clear international parallels, with several of the 10 comparator jurisdictions using domains, standards and subdivisions of standards. However, Australia's use of career stages within a common set of teacher standards is uncommon, and no single alternative model predominates.

Only 3 of the 10 comparator jurisdictions explicitly represented progression in teaching expertise. All 3 included increasing professional influence or development of others, while some also represented growing complexity of practice, learner responsiveness and learner agency.

It is instructive to consider the current data on the teacher workforce. In 2024, the Australian Teacher Workforce Dataset published data on the number of registered teachers in Australia. There were 567,103 registered teachers. Of those teachers 461,491 teachers were fully registered, that is they were registered at the Proficient career stage. This represents 81% of the teaching workforce. A further 13% are provisionally registered with the remainder not registered and working under an alternative authorisation to teach or remaining on the register as non-practising teachers. As of December 2025, 2,263 teachers have been certified as being a Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher, representing 0.4% of all registered teachers.

How is the evidence for the Standards architecture reflected in the Teacher Standards?

The literature review provided an evidence base for considering the effectiveness of the career stages at describing progression in teaching expertise.

Capabilities for expert teaching progression

The following 5 interdependent capability areas were identified in the implications of the literature review as relevant to teaching expertise progression in both F-12 teaching and birth to 5 settings:

- Integrated knowledge systems – the capability to integrate, organise and reorganise multiple forms of professional knowledge to inform responsive professional practice
- Adaptive teaching skills – the capability to automatise the enactment of effective teaching practices, freeing cognitive resources to allow for judgement and adaptive teaching and learning decisions in response to context and children/students
- Applied judgement – the capability to interpret information from the learning context and draw on relevant professional knowledge to determine when and how to adapt teaching in response
- Relational capability – the capability to establish and sustain relationships that support children/students' safety, participation and learning and collaboration with others
- Reflexivity – the capability to examine one's own knowledge, assumptions, beliefs and practice, recognise how these influence teaching, and take action to improve teaching and learning.

Two examples of low alignment between the evidence base for teaching progression and the current career stages are provided below.

The first example considers the Highly Accomplished career stage within the Professional Knowledge domain. A comparison with the evidence base suggests that alignment with the development of teaching expertise from Proficient to Highly Accomplished is low. Expertise in Highly Accomplished is represented through an expansion of professional influence and professional responsibilities. Eight of twelve descriptors are oriented towards supporting colleagues. The term "support" appears 5 times, "colleagues" 8 times, and related terms such as "provide advice", "work with" and "model" also appear. This is unlike the Graduate and Proficient stages, where the focus is on the individual teacher's demonstration and enactment of knowledge. While supporting colleagues represents a legitimate form of professional contribution, it provides limited evidence of how teachers' expertise in professional knowledge and practice should be represented, to improve learning outcomes for children and young people. This differs from the expertise progression literature which locates progression in the re-organisation and integration of professional knowledge for application across contexts.

Like the Proficient stage, the 4 descriptors that focus more directly on the teacher's own practice (1.1, 1.2, 2.2 and 2.3) similarly represent progression primarily through intensified descriptions of practice rather than through changes in underlying knowledge structures to support practice. Teachers are expected to select from a flexible and effective repertoire of teaching strategies (1.1), expand understanding of how students learn (1.2), and demonstrate innovative practice in the selection and organisation of content (2.2). Terms such as "effective" and "innovative" describe a broadening of applied practices and potential increase in quality without specifying the knowledge structures or professional reasoning that indicate expertise in teaching that improves learning.

The second example considers the Lead career stage. A comparison with the evidence base suggests that alignment with the development of teaching expertise from Highly Accomplished to Lead is low.

At the Lead career stage, expertise in the Professional Knowledge domain is represented primarily as comprising school leadership responsibilities. "Lead" is the dominant verb across the descriptors, appearing 9 times and forming the basis of 8 of 12 descriptors. Six descriptors are directed towards school objectives, including leading programs, policies, initiatives and processes, 5 towards leading colleagues and one towards engaging with the community (1.4). The latter may reflect aspects of relational capability and reflexivity, although these are framed within the broader responsibilities of organisational leadership. The remaining verbs (evaluate, develop, initiate, and monitor) are similarly used in the context of describing acts of organisational leadership. Like the Highly Accomplished stage, progression at the Lead stage is represented through an expansion of professional influence rather than through the continued development of the teacher’s own classroom practice.

As with the Proficient and Highly Accomplished stages, progression is also represented largely through language intensifiers. Nine of the twelve descriptors include terms such as *comprehensive* (twice), *exemplary* (twice), *effective* (twice) and *expert.* These terms indicate higher expectations of practice without specifying the capabilities that distinguish expert teaching from novice teaching.

Discussion analysis

Changes to the architecture should preserve the established functions of the Teacher Standards in ITE, registration and certification, and consider implications for implementation and teacher workload. While the evidence and consultation do not establish a case for wholesale structural redesign, it does indicate there is benefit in better describing teaching expertise progression, improving language specificity and detail, and reducing duplication, as well as consideration of dispositions in the introductory section of the Teacher Standards.

While it is acknowledged that there would likely be more teachers operating at (or partially within) the Highly Accomplished or Lead career stages than the relatively small proportion of teachers currently certified at those levels, redesign of the higher career stages would expand the support offered by those career stages to a greater cohort of teachers. It would help facilitate the design and undertaking of more appropriate professional learning for teachers who have met the Proficient career stage, and subsequently, allow for greater numbers of certified teachers. This would support Australia reaching the target of 10,000 Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers, set by Education Ministers in 2022 under the *National Teacher Workforce Action Plan*. Consideration should also be given to coherence with the Principal Standard and Middle Leader Standards, while recognising their distinct purposes and uses.

The evidence and consultation feedback was broadly aligned on calling for greater specificity, detail simplification and if possible, a removal of duplication within the Standards. However, these aims are not independent of each other or independent of other evidence on what should be retained or improved within the current Teacher Standards.

Views on the addition of dispositions vary, but, as set out above, there is broad consensus that they should not be part of any regulatory or formal assessment processes if introduced in the Teacher Standards.

Potential actions – career stage focus

1. No changes

Retain the 4 career stages as they are, noting there are current support materials (including AITSL's Classroom Practice Continuum) that more explicitly draw out expert teaching at the Highly Accomplished and Lead career stages.

2. Minor changes to current descriptors at the Highly Accomplished and Lead career stages

Retain the 4 career stages as they are, but revise descriptors to make explicit increasing teaching expertise in the Highly Accomplished and Lead teacher career stages. This could benefit professional learning relevance but, without other reductions in descriptors, would add more complexity to the Teacher Standards at the higher career stages.

3. Introduce a new career stage

Retain the current career stages as they are, but add a new career stage (nominally titled 'Accomplished') in between Proficient and Highly Accomplished, to create five career stages with the Teacher Standards.

The new career stage would reflect increased teaching expertise, without the explicit focus of supporting or leading colleagues' practice. It would, however, add a further set of descriptors to the Teacher Standards, and does not address the relevance of the Lead career stage to teaching. Consideration could be given to certifying practice at this career stage, in line with current teacher certification.

4. Retain four career stages, but with a shift in focus of the higher career stages

While retaining the current four career stage structure, the focus of Highly Accomplished would be changed to centre on advanced teaching expertise, while Lead would largely comprise the current focus of the Highly Accomplished career stage (i.e. a focus on supporting colleagues' practice). This shift would address many of the issues discussed, without resultant changes to career stages identified in key policies, legislation and industrial arrangements.

It should be noted that in this action, the current function of the Lead career stage, leading colleagues and improvements across and outside a setting, would be removed. This would be mitigated by that focus being captured within the Middle Leader Standards. Consideration could also be given to the fourth career stage comprising a blend of the current Highly Accomplished and Lead career stages.

Potential actions – descriptor language

1. No changes

Broadly retain the current levels of specificity and detail, overlap and number of descriptors. Adopting this position would mean no related changes to industrial or system processes are required, but it will not address issues raised in the evidence calling for improved simplification and specificity.

2. Make minor changes to current descriptors

Make minor revisions to remove obvious duplication and confusing language but broadly retain the focus of current descriptors. This would result in minimal changes to the overall structure and intent of the Teacher Standards but not fully address the current lack of specificity.

3. Undertake significant revisions to descriptor language

Seek to simplify, remove duplication and make the language in descriptors more specific. This could also result in a rationalisation of some descriptors, seeking to reduce the overall number.

Potential actions – teaching dispositions

1. No changes

Retain the current focus of the Teacher Standards on knowledge, skills and demonstrated practice without broadening to include teaching dispositions. The Teacher Standards would therefore provide limited support for reflection, professional conversations and learning focused on areas such as empathy, open-mindedness and resilience.

2. Introduce dispositions into the introductory section of the Teacher Standards

Relevant teaching dispositions would be placed into the introductory section of the Teacher Standards (e.g. within the preamble). This would provide an anchor to utilise the dispositions for development but ensure they are not drawn on for any formal regulatory or assessment processes.

3. Introduce dispositions into the Teacher Standards

This would firmly place teaching dispositions into the regulatory framework, underpinning ITE accreditation, registration, professional learning, certification and potentially industrial arrangements. It would support significant emphasis placed on these traits but could risk misuse, inconsistent application and a homogenisation of the teaching workforce.