

2023

Submission to the Tasmanian Literacy Advisory Panel: Final Consultation Paper – towards a Community- wide Framework for a Literate Tasmania



PREPARED BY THE TASMANIAN 100% LITERACY ALLIANCE

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Contents

Our Main Messages	2
Overview of submission.....	2
Specific Recommendations.....	4
Literacy Advisory Panel’s Terms of Reference.....	7
Efficacy of existing approaches.....	7
Developments in education and literacy since 2021.....	9
How to achieve a Literate Tasmania.....	10
Early Years.....	11
Schooling.....	12
Structured Literacy in schools by 2026.....	12
Tiered Instruction: Response to Intervention (RTI) or Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)	13
NAPLAN.....	14
Systematic, synthetic phonics (SSP) and the Year 1 Phonics Check	15
Primary school recommendations	15
Secondary school recommendations.....	16
Adult community	16
Justice system	17
Initial Teacher Education (ITE)	17
Implementation is critical to success.....	18
Appendix A – Road Map to a Literate Tasmania – 10 year plan.....	0

Our Main Messages

1. The Tasmanian Government has committed to 100% literacy – we celebrate this!
2. This is a just commitment since everyone needs to know how to read and write to exercise their rights as citizens.
3. Ability to read and write remain the core of any more complex concept of literacy.
4. Knowledge exists about how to teach all children to read and write.
5. But not all teachers know how to teach all children to read and write; so
6. All teachers need professional development to ensure they can use the effective means to teach students to read and write.
7. All teaching needs to be evaluated by measuring the success of students' learning to read and write.
8. Standards for what is successful learning by Tasmanian children should be no less than for the rest of Australia, and indeed should be higher since all of Australia has a problem.
9. In particular, our Indigenous students need to achieve at the same level as other students as soon as possible.
10. Achieving 100% literacy should be resourced as it needs to be, as this investment will save public funds in the near-medium-term and long-term though decreased costs of alienation and offending, and through increased productivity.
11. We should all acknowledge how bold this commitment to 100% literacy is. We are being tough with ourselves as Tasmanians and leaders. We should not rest on laurels until this commitment is seen through to its equity-making end. And we should not allow clichés and narratives about Tasmania's 'exceptionalism' to woo us to reduce our focus on the urgent importance of this task.
12. Therefore, we should trumpet '100% Literacy' widely and celebrate meeting our targets on the way.

Overview of submission

The Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance (Alliance) supports the Tasmanian Government's goal of 100 per cent literacy in Tasmania.

The Alliance is encouraged by Premier Rockliff's and Minister Jaensch's recent announcement to develop a system-wide, whole of school approach to ensure all Tasmanian primary schools use evidence-based, structured literacy, including implementing systematic, synthetic phonics and the Year 1 Phonics Check¹ by 2026. This is a welcome extension of the 2021 announcement that all grade 7 Tasmanian students will start high school above the expected level for reading by no later than 2030².

¹ https://www.premier.tas.gov.au/site_resources_2015/additional_releases/improving-literacy-in-tasmanian-primary-schools

²

https://www.premier.tas.gov.au/site_resources_2015/additional_releases/new_literacy_target_to_improve_education_outcomes2 and

https://www.premier.tas.gov.au/site_resources_2015/additional_releases/new_literacy_target_to_improve_education_outcomes

The Alliance maintains that implementation is paramount to successfully achieve these life-changing targets for our society and economy. Implementation must be at scale, consistent and well-resourced.

The Premier and Minister for Education have recognised that reading and writing are foundational skills which every child has a right to master. Reading is the ability to *decode* writing back into its spoken language form; and writing is the ability to *encode* spoken language into its written form. Being literate is the skill of both encoding and decoding language *in the fullness of all that language is and can be used for*. The Premier and Minister for Education recognise that much greater effort is required by the Tasmanian Government to ensure that all Tasmanians become literate adults. The definition set by the Government's Literacy Advisory Panel (Panel) is endorsed by the Alliance.

"Literacy involves listening to, reading, viewing, speaking, writing, and creating texts, and using and modifying language for different purposes in a range of contexts. Literacy encompasses the knowledge and skills needed to access, understand, analyse, and evaluate information, make meaning, express thoughts and emotions, present ideas and opinions, interact with others. It involves a continuum of learning to enable individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society." (p.4)³

Despite this definition by the Panel, and its references to a structured approach to literacy in its final Consultation Report, the report remains primarily focussed on the 'big six of reading' rather than the wider understanding of becoming, and being, literate.

For this reason, and, because of the short timeframe to respond to the Final Consultation Report the Alliance's submission focusses on the importance of structured literacy instruction in the schooling system. Because if this is implemented with fidelity, it will have the greatest long-term impact and achieve a Literate Tasmania. Moreover, over time, it will reduce the demand for community-wide services to support literacy improvement.

This submission should be read in conjunction with the Alliance's previous papers:

- 1) A Road Map to a Literate Tasmania
- 2) Submission to the Tasmanian Child and Young Person's Well-being Strategy consultation
- 3) Submission to the Australian Government Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training Inquiry into Adult Literacy
- 4) Submission to the Literacy Advisory Panel's Setting the Scene Community Consultation Paper

In this submission, the Alliance also reviews the Terms of Reference for the Panel, developments since the 2021 Road Map, the changes to NAPLAN, and makes specific recommendations about how to achieve a Literate Tasmania. This includes reiterating the recommendations from the 10-year plan in the 2021 Road Map to a Literate Tasmania.

The Alliance acknowledges, and celebrates, that some individual teachers, schools and other educators are independently pursuing professional learning in evidence-based best practice for reading and writing instruction. They are making positive changes to their literacy pedagogy. The Alliance reiterates its position that to achieve 100% literacy, evidence-based literacy instruction needs to be scaled in a co-ordinated, comprehensive, consistent and systematic way. This will

³ Tasmanian Literacy Advisory Panel (2022) Tasmania's Communitywide Framework, Paper One, Setting the Scene, Tasmanian Government

remove the variance in literacy instruction between and within schools and sectors. It will also reduce the workload and personal investment of our education sector workforce.

It is critical to emphasise that evidence-based policies, practices and interventions which are poorly implemented – or not implemented at all – will not produce the desired outcome of 100% literacy in Tasmania. A principles-based framework document will not suffice to deliver change at the scale and with the urgency required to achieve a Literate Tasmania.

To implement any action plan to achieve 100% literacy in Tasmania, the Government should harness the strategies and methods of implementation science. Implementation science is a method for ensuring that research – evidence – translates into practice effectively.

Tasmanians deserve a whole of state, community-wide approach to achieving a Literate Tasmania.

Specific Recommendations

In the Alliance’s 2021 Road Map to a Literate Tasmania a 10-year plan is outlined for 2021 to 2031. It details the required actions to achieve 100% literacy in Tasmania - see Appendix A. This plan and recommended actions remain relevant. The plan included recommendations to:

1. Establish an independent body to drive implementation of a community-wide literacy framework to achieve 100% literate Tasmania
2. Implement strategies to address immediate shortages in workforce/resources
3. Implement strategies to address medium/long term workforce needs
4. Implement a ten-year plan to achieve the Primary Reading Pledge objective ‘close to zero children start grade 7 at or below the national minimum standard for reading’
5. Develop a four-year plan to achieve at or near zero children leaving Secondary School in Grades 10 below the national minimum standard (NMS) for reading
6. Develop a four-year plan to achieve at or near zero adults or young people leaving justice programs below the NMS for reading
7. Develop a four-year plan to achieve at or near zero adults leaving adult literacy intervention programs below the NMS for reading
8. Invest in Professional Learning / Training to ensure effective implementation of strategies to achieve 100% literacy

Some of these recommendations have been actioned, most have not.

The below table outlines the Alliance’s additional recommendations to the 10 Year Plan within the Road Map to a Literate Tasmania.

<i>Literacy Advisory Panel's Terms of Reference</i>	
1	All the policies, programs and practices currently in place and identified by the Panel should be assessed for their alignment with the Science of Reading evidence. Those that don't meet at least high levels of confidence should not be continued. Funding attached to these policies, programs and/or practices should be redirected to investment in any new resources, policies, programs and practices which are designed and implemented to meet at least high levels of confidence according to the evidence.
2	As an additional outcome from undertaking Recommendation 1, develop a resource for educators, schools and other community organisations which lists services, programs, resources and consultants where the product or service has been assessed as aligning to the Science of Reading or Science of Learning evidence-base with a high level of confidence.

How to achieve a Literate Tasmania

3 That the Tasmanian Government implements the GAPS test as part of the 4-year-old Child Health Nurse check to identify any language deficiencies in children of pre-school age. Given that the Panel notes that only 45% of four-year-olds attend their Child Health Nurse check, in the instance whereby a child starts school at either kindergarten or preparatory without having undertaken the GAPS test, then the test should be implemented within the first two weeks of the school year.

4 Given that the knowledge of Science of Reading and its practical application through structured literacy instruction is a substantial shift from current teaching practices, and the short time frame provided by the Tasmanian Government to ensure its practices by 2026, educators must be provided with extensive professional development and support by experts and practitioners in the evidence-base. This professional development should include knowledge in the why, what and how through training, coaching mentoring and resources over a period of time to allow for acquisition of knowledge and skill, practice, reflection, consolidation and confidence.

NAPLAN

5 The Alliance proposes that the target should be that 'by 2032, all Year 3, 5, 7, and 9 students will meet the national **strong** proficiency reading and writing standards.' This is as 'developing proficiency' suggests that a student is not yet at the level of reading and writing expected for proficiency and would require additional support and intervention.

6 That the Minister for Education works with ACARA to ensure comparison of NAPLAN results with previous time series data is possible and enables the Tasmanian Government to track progress over time.

Systematic, synthetic phonics (SSP) and the Year 1 Phonics Check

7 Educators should be provided with extensive professional development in systematic, synthetic phonics instruction to ensure that Tasmanian students are able to meet the Year 1 Phonics Check benchmark. Educators should also be provided with professional learning to administer the check, assess and analyse the results and develop an intervention plan, if required.

8 The Year 1 Phonics Check should be administered in Term 1 and Term 4. By administering the Check early in Term 1, educators will be able to ensure structured literacy instruction is appropriately targeted at the whole-class level and provide Tier 2 and 3 intervention where required. By repeating the check in Term 4, educators will be able to track progress and provide the next year's Grade 2 educator with a baseline for each student.

9 Ensure that each Tasmanian government school is using an evidence-based scope and sequence supported by decodable readers which are matched to that scope and sequence by 2023.

Primary School

Refer to the 10 Year Plan in the Road Map to a Literate Tasmania

10 Provide intervention at the intensity required to ensure that all students who have progressed to the next grade level not at the expected level for reading and writing so that they can catch up

11 In an effort to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline associated with low levels of language and literacy, screen all students experiencing exclusionary practices within the education system for language and literacy challenges and other undiagnosed developmental disorders or disabilities. Provide intervention and wrap around support services *at the intensity indicated* by holistic allied-health and health assessment.

12 Provide all new workforce entrants (including new graduates) with intensive professional learning in the evidence-base knowledge (Science of Reading) and practical skills (structured literacy) prior to the start of the school year and throughout their first teaching year until the ITE courses provide this content, knowledge and opportunity for skill acquisition.

Secondary School

	Refer to the 10 Year Plan in the Road Map to a Literate Tasmania
13	The Tasmanian Government should introduce a literacy benchmark to successfully complete the Tasmanian Certificate of Education, similar to that used in Western Australia, OLNA ⁴ . The OLNA is an online literacy and numeracy assessment. It is designed to enable students to successfully meet the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) requirement of demonstrating the minimum standard of literacy and numeracy. To successfully meet the literacy requirement in reading and writing, students must demonstrate the skills regarded as essential to meet the demands of everyday life and work in a knowledge-based economy. These skills are described in Level 3 of the Australian Core Skills Framework and are equivalent to Band 8 of the Year 9 NAPLAN reading and writing tests.
14	Provide intervention at the intensity required to ensure that all students who have progressed to the next grade level not at the expected level for reading and writing so that they can catch up.
15	In an effort to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline associated with low levels of language and literacy, screen all students experiencing exclusionary practices within the education system for language and literacy challenges, such as Developmental Language Disorder or Dyslexia and other undiagnosed developmental disorders or disabilities. Provide intervention and wrap around support services at the intensity <i>indicated</i> by holistic allied-health and health assessment.
16	Provide all new workforce entrants (including new graduates) with intensive professional learning in the evidence-base knowledge (Science of Reading) and practical skills (structured literacy) prior to the start of the school year and throughout their first teaching year until the ITE courses provide this content and opportunity for knowledge and skill acquisition.

Adult Community

	Refer to the 10 year plan in the 2021 Road Map for a Literate Tasmania
17	Screen all adults accessing adult literacy support for undiagnosed language or reading disorders and other undiagnosed developmental disorders or disabilities. Provide intervention and wrap around support services <i>at the intensity indicated</i> by holistic allied-health and health assessment.

Justice System

	Refer to the 10 year plan in the 2021 Road Map for a Literate Tasmania
18	Screen all youth and adults newly presenting to justice programs for undiagnosed language or reading disorders (specific learning impairments) and other undiagnosed developmental disorders or disabilities. Provide intervention and wrap around support services <i>at the intensity indicated</i> by holistic allied-health and health assessment.

Initial Teacher Education

19	The Tasmanian Government needs to work with the ITE providers (Universities) to ensure that course content aligns with the evidence-base knowledge (Science of Reading) and the opportunity to develop the practical skills (structured literacy) so that graduates are classroom ready.
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Implementation is critical to success

20	That the three-year Action Plan to implement the Lifting Literacy initiative/s is made available for public consultation.
21	In implementing the Community-wide Framework for achieving 100% literacy in Tasmania the Government should harness the strategies and methods of implementation science.

⁴ <https://senior-secondary.scsa.wa.edu.au/assessment/olna>

Literacy Advisory Panel's Terms of Reference

In the Final Consultation Report, the Panel reiterated the expectation that their work will stimulate a Community-wide Framework for a Literate Tasmania as set out in the Terms of Reference⁵.

However, an important component of one actionable item was omitted.

The Final Consultation Report⁶ claims "All that remains for the Panel to complete its work is to finalise the Framework and make recommendations to the Premier about achieving a literate Tasmania."⁷ It lists the following as actions under the Terms of Reference:

- i. review current literacy policies, approaches and supports in place in Tasmania in the early years, schools, and adult learning environments,
- ii. map existing effort and consider the effectiveness of existing literacy measures and targets,
- iii. consider the effectiveness of existing literacy measures and targets, and
- iv. make targeted recommendations to build upon existing literacy approaches and supports in the early years, schools, adult learning environments

However, the second actionable item should have read "*Map existing effort, including the organisations, plans and activity that currently support the establishment of a Literate Tasmania and identifies any gaps. These may include evidence-to-practice gaps, and/or program, cohort or skills-gaps.*"

The Alliance acknowledges that the Panel produced an extensive list of policies, approaches and supports for literacy in its first consultation paper, Setting the Scene. However, the Alliance cannot see evidence that these policies, approaches and supports have been mapped against the evidence for effectiveness. It is also not clearly documented if effort was undertaken to identify any specific evidence-to-practice gaps, and/or if program, cohort or skills-gaps were identified⁸.

The Alliance believes that this work should be undertaken to ensure that every policy, approach and support in place for literacy development are implemented according to evidence-informed best practice, which provides the greatest potential return on investment.

Efficacy of existing approaches

In producing a list of policies, approaches and supports without mapping for effectiveness against the evidence-base, the Panel assumes that the provision of these initiatives automatically translates to productive investment that improves the literacy outcomes of the recipients/participants. This is a dangerous assumption.

These questions need to be asked:

- How do the policies, approaches and supports on the extensive list provided in the Setting the Scene paper actually map to the evidence?
- Do they meet the efficacy test?

⁵ https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/literacy/literacy_advisory_panel_tor

⁶ See page 3 of the Final Consultation Report

⁷ Page 3

⁸ On page 9 the final report refers to a cohort gap relating to members of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Communities and the LGBTQIA+ community and on page 35 it is stated that "The Panel's gap analysis suggested this may also extend to geographical diversity" in relation to volunteer literacy tutors. In no other way is a gap analysis mentioned. However, it is noted that of the groups consulted, employer and business groups were not included, despite being very vocal about low levels of literacy and numeracy in the workplace and the impact on productivity, safety and pursuing investment opportunities.

- What is the opportunity cost of these approaches?
- Are some of these programs causing harm?
- Is there duplication?
- How could the investment in improving literacy development in Tasmania be more efficient and effective?

In its Final Consultation Report, the Panel states “There are many services and programs providing literacy support in the community, however, the Panel was unable to determine the efficacy of many of these as evaluation had not been embedded into them”.⁹ The Alliance does not accept that an assessment of alignment to the evidence of a policy, approach or support, is not possible. This is because evaluation of *services and programs*, is not an assessment of whether or not the *policy, approach or support* aligns to the evidence.

A review of the documentation for each policy, approach and support service providing for literacy development, including the overview, purpose and intended outcome/s should quickly indicate whether the initiative is aligned to the evidence or not. This approach has been undertaken in two other instances to assess approaches for alignment with the evidence from a literacy perspective.

- 1) A 2019 report into Initial Teacher Education (ITE)¹⁰ shows that in 81 (70%) of the 116 literacy units reviewed, none of the five essential elements of effective evidence-based reading instruction were mentioned in the unit outlines. All five essential elements were referred to in only 6% of literacy unit outline.
- 2) A review of 20 intervention programs used in Australia¹¹ found that only one program had a large and robust evidence base supporting its use; seven programs were either ineffective or unsupported by sufficient evidence to produce the desired outcomes; and that eight interventions incorporated inefficient instructional practices (either completely or partially) which are not aligned with the consistent research findings about the best ways to teach literacy.

The Alliance therefore maintains that these policies, approaches and supports should all be independently assessed against the evidence base. This process could be outsourced or undertaken using a tool similar to that developed by the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO).

The AERO evidence rubric is a tool to help evaluate the effectiveness of a new or existing policy, program or practice against standards of evidence. The evidence rubric can be used to analyse a particular approach in two ways: to decide whether or not to implement a certain approach in context or to assess confidence in the effectiveness of an existing approach.

Recommendation 1: All the policies, programs and practices currently in place and identified by the Panel should be assessed for their alignment with the Science of Reading evidence. Those that don’t meet at least high levels of confidence should not be continued. Funding attached to these policies, programs and/or practices should be redirected to investment in any new resources,

⁹ Page 39

¹⁰ Buckingham, J. and Meeks, L., (2019), Short-changed: Preparation to teaching reading in Initial Teacher Education, Research Report, MultiLit and Five from Five.

policies, programs and practices which are designed and implemented to meet at least high levels of confidence according to the evidence.

Recommendation 2: As an additional outcome from undertaking Recommendation 1, develop a resource for educators, schools and other community organisations which lists services, programs, resources and consultants where the product or service has been assessed as aligning to the Science of Reading or Science of Learning evidence-base with a high level of confidence.

Developments in education and literacy since 2021

Since the Road Map was released in 2021, there have been several new developments, reviews and initiatives at a national level to improve educational outcomes, including literacy outcomes. These include:

- The establishment of the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)
 - Established in late 2021, AERO is a centralised body to synthesise, produce and provide the evidence-base to improve educational outcomes to its stakeholders; the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments.
- The Quality Initial Teacher Education Review
 - Released in February 2022, the report contains 17 recommendations addressing issues ranging from raising the status of teaching and attracting high-quality candidates to ensuring that ITE programs are high-quality, evidence-based, and practically relevant.
 - In response to the review, the Australian Government announced it will establish a new Initial Teacher Education Quality Assessment Expert Panel, which will develop new minimum and excellence threshold standards for ITE courses.
- Australian Government Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training Inquiry into Adult Literacy
 - The inquiry examined the importance of developing strong language, literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy (LLND) skills, overcoming barriers to learning, and the ability of existing adult education programs and providers to meet demand.
 - The Committee released its report and recommendations on 22 March 2022.
 - It found that while Australia aspires to a world class school system, which provides universal access to quality education, the reality is that too many children are falling through the cracks. This failure at a school system level has a detrimental impact on work and life choices as an adult.
 - Too many Australians leave school with language, literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy (LLND) skills gaps that limit opportunities and life choices including reduced labour force participation and wages, poorer health outcomes and incarceration.
 - The Committee made 15 recommendations to be undertaken within a specified time frame, by March 2023. A number of these recommendations highlight the inadequacy of the schooling system in supporting marginalised students, those with learning disabilities, of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent or those when English is not their first language.
- Australian Curriculum V 9.0
 - On 1 April 2022, the Australia's Education Ministers endorsed a revised Version 9.0 of the Australian Curriculum to be implemented in 2023. The review of the Australian

- Curriculum in 2020 and 2021 was specifically tasked with refining and reducing the amount of content across all eight learning areas of the Australian Curriculum F-10, with a priority on the primary years, to focus on essential content or core concepts.
- The Prep to Year 2 English and literacy curriculum was considerably reworked to reflect the evidence-base for the acquisition of literacy knowledge and skills.
 - Tasmania adopted the new curriculum for implementation in 2023.
- Productivity Commission Inquiry into the National School Reform Agreement (NSRA)
 - The Inquiry found that the NSRA’s initiatives have done little, so far, to improve student outcomes.
 - Numerous recommendations were made, including;
 - Support quality teaching and effective school leadership: priorities could include reducing low value tasks and out of field teaching, disseminating best practice, and producing evidence backed resources that teachers and leaders trust and use.
 - Support all students to achieve basic levels of literacy and numeracy: the next school reform agreement should include specific targets and measures to support these students.
 - Reduce differences in achievement across students: Governments should consider augmenting priority equity cohorts, and adopt new approaches, developed and implemented in consultation with the relevant parties, to lift outcomes for all students.
 - Promote wellbeing: many children and young people struggle with poor wellbeing because of experiences in and outside their schools. Teachers need more support to help students to manage these issues and achieve their potential.
 - National Teacher Workforce Action Plan
 - Developed in late 2022 to address the national issue of teacher workforce shortages.
 - Designed to increase the number of people choosing to become teachers and ensure that existing teachers remain in the profession.
 - Improving teacher supply – To increase the number of people choosing teaching as a career.
 - Strengthening initial teacher education – To ensure initial teacher education supports teacher supply and delivers classroom ready graduates.
 - Keeping the teachers we have – To improve retention by increasing support for teachers, enhancing career pathways, reducing unnecessary workload and freeing up teachers to focus on core teaching tasks and collaboration.
 - Elevating the profession – To recognise the value teachers bring to students, communities and the economy.
 - Better understanding future teacher workforce needs – To improve the information available for teacher workforce planning

How to achieve a Literate Tasmania

This section describes how a Literate Tasmania can be achieved at each stage of the life cycle, and within the community.

Early Years

As the Final Consultation Report noted, the first 1,000 days of a child's life are a critical period of language and literacy development where the foundations are built for future literacy learning and development¹². The Panel also noted that a baby is born with a brain that is ready to process oral language. Human brains are therefore wired to speak but are not wired to read and write. And that reading and writing are skills that must be explicitly taught¹³.

There are some early signs that may place a child at risk for the acquisition of literacy skills. Preschool children with speech and language delays and disorders are at high risk of problems learning to read and write when they enter school¹⁴. These disorders can also affect their peer relationships and lead to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties¹⁵, which confound the process of learning. Other factors include physical or medical conditions such as preterm birth requiring placement in a neonatal intensive care unit, chronic ear infections, foetal alcohol syndrome, cerebral palsy, developmental disorders (e.g. intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum), poverty, home literacy environment, and family history of language or literacy disabilities, such as dyslexia. Early screening of language difficulties and diagnosis by appropriate allied health professionals is critical in arresting risks to emergent literacy development.

GAPS, the Grammar and Phonology Screen¹⁶, is a free, ten-minute test enabling professionals in education, health and social care, to establish whether children have, or are at risk of, the challenge of language difficulties or disorders. The GAPS test, for three and a half to six and half year olds, is a quick and simple screening test used to assess the grammatical abilities and key pre-reading skills of children. The test assesses whether the child has appropriate knowledge of how to use grammatical rules to create sentences and whether they know the rules underlying how to add sounds together to correctly make words - language skills crucial if they are to understand instructions and learn to communicate in spoken and written form. Those who show difficulty at this level should undertake further assessment as a high priority from education psychologists and/or speech and language pathologists for formal diagnoses and recommendations for intervention. Intervention must occur swiftly and be provided at the intensity required.

Recommendation 3: that the Tasmanian Government implements the GAPS test as part of the 4-year-old Child Health Nurse check to identify any language deficiencies in children of pre-school age. Given that the Panel notes that only 45% of four-year-olds attend their Child Health Nurse check, in the instance whereby a child starts school at either kindergarten or preparatory without having undertaken the GAPS test, then the test should be implemented within the first two weeks of the school year.

¹² Page 24

¹³ Page 23

¹⁴ Hayiou-Thomas M, Carroll J, Leavett R, Hulme C, & Snowling M (2016) 'When does speech sound disorder matter for literacy? The role of disordered speech errors, co-occurring language impairment and family risk of dyslexia'. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 58: 197–205.

¹⁵ Murphy S, Faulkner D, & Farley L (2014) 'The behaviour of young children with social communication disorders during dyadic interaction with peers'. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 42: 277–89.

¹⁶ [GAPS - HvdL Foundation](#), [Grammar and Phonology Screening Test | Early Years Measures Database | Education Endowment Foundation](#) | [EEF](#)

Schooling

To achieve the long-term aim of 100% literacy for the adult population, the Tasmanian Government must ensure that all Tasmanians successfully complete their schooling by meeting the literacy standard expected to be able to participate in further education, training, work and society. Investing at scale in the professional development, training, coaching and resources in **structured literacy** instruction as a system-wide, whole-school, whole-class tiered approach in both primary school and secondary school will provide the greatest impact in achieving 100 per cent literacy in Tasmania over the long term.

Structured Literacy in schools by 2026

Structured Literacy is the practical application of the evidence - Science of Reading (SOR) - in the classroom.

In his State of the State address¹⁷ on 28th of February, 2023, Premier Rockliff committed to a whole of system, whole of school approach to “ensuring there is an evidence-based, structured approach to literacy in all Tasmanian primary schools” and that “all schools with primary-aged children are able to demonstrate they are implementing the elements of evidence based structured literacy as advised by the panel, by 2026.”

In Tasmania, there are around 3,800 primary school teachers, around 2,240 of whom are employed in government schools¹⁸. Each of these primary school teachers as well as support staff such as teacher assistants, will need to be upskilled. In many cases, they will need to be retrained in structured literacy instruction and explicit teaching practices by 2026. This will require a significant, co-ordinated investment in implementation to achieve the scale and consistency required and reduce the variance in literacy instruction currently occurring within and between schools. In 2023, Catholic Education Tasmania (CET) began implementing an evidence-based system-wide, whole-of-school Science of Learning approach, referred to as Insights, in all their primary schools. This approach is informed by the highly successful Catalyst¹⁹ school improvement system with its foundations in structured literacy and explicit teaching practices. Developed by Canberra Goulburn Catholic Education, if successfully implemented by CET, the gap in student and school outcomes in Tasmania will likely widen further without a similar investment and approach by the Tasmanian Government in the provision of evidence-based public education.

Structured Literacy instruction includes all vital components of reading comprehension and writing (decoding, encoding and language comprehension) and their underpinning sub-components – phonology, morphology, orthography, syntax, semantics and discourse level language.

While the Panel’s Final Consultation Report refer to structured literacy as the Big Six of Reading, incorporating systematic, synthetic phonics, structured literacy encompasses all the elements required to become literate, as per the Panel’s definition of literacy.

Critically, structured literacy instruction is explicitly, systematically and cumulatively taught so that progress is monitored in a diagnostic and responsive way to ensure all children develop literacy proficiency and it should be done so in a whole-of-school, whole class, tiered approach.

¹⁷ <https://www.premier.tas.gov.au/speeches/state-of-the-state-address>

¹⁸ ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2021

¹⁹ For more information see <https://catalyst.cg.catholic.edu.au/>

The Panel stated that “A structured literacy approach does not mean that all children must be taught the same content/strategies at the same time. [Because] there are some children who may not be able to or are not ready to engage in a learning environment at particular times due to issues such as trauma and absenteeism”²⁰. However, structured literacy instruction provided through a tiered approach, provides for the support required, whether needs-based disability support or trauma-informed support. It enables all students to engage in learning and progress together.

In fact, structured literacy instruction implemented from Prep onwards ensures that all children, particularly those most at-risk of literacy difficulties, receive the high-quality literacy instruction they need for reading, writing and academic success.

Structured Literacy from the first year of schooling that is explicit, systematic and cumulative, diagnostic and responsive, ensures all children are able to read and engage with rich, grade level and complex texts when they reach the upper primary years and secondary school.

A comprehensive overview of high-fidelity structured literacy instruction in Australian schools is provided by Reading Science in Schools in their *Structured Literacy in Foundation to Year 2* and *Structured Literacy in Year 3 to 6* frameworks which should form the baseline for structured literacy instruction implementation in Tasmanian schools by 2026.

These Reading Science in Schools frameworks provide an overview of structured literacy and tiered approaches and explicitly outline what needs to be taught by year, aligned to the Australian Curriculum. The framework includes a daily and weekly guideline for each year including what and how to teach, with resources. See Appendix B and C for copies of the frameworks.

Importantly, structured literacy instruction is also pertinent in secondary schooling teaching practices.

Recommendation 4: Given that the knowledge of Science of Reading and its practical application through structured literacy instruction is a substantial shift from current teaching practices, and the short time frame provided by the Tasmanian Government to ensure its practices by 2026, educators must be provided with extensive professional development and support by experts and practitioners in the evidence-base. This professional development should include knowledge in the why, what and how through training, coaching mentoring and resources over a period of time to allow for acquisition of knowledge and skill, practice, reflection, consolidation and confidence.

Tiered Instruction: Response to Intervention (RTI) or Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)
Tiered approaches to literacy instruction should be non-categorical and child-centred to ensure that all students reach their reading and writing potential.

To achieve the target that all year 7 students start high school above the expected level by no later than 2030, it is critical that structured literacy practices are implemented with fidelity using a tiered approach, consistently and at scale. Critically, the tiered approach is only effective if Tier 1 instruction provides for a strong foundation of evidence-based teaching instruction at the whole class level, otherwise too many students require the resource intensive interventions at Tiers 2 or 3.

Schools which implement structured literacy with high fidelity vastly reduce and, in some cases, eliminate the need for intervention.

²⁰ Page 30

From around the fourth year of implementation, schools should have a significantly reduced need for Tier 2 intervention programs. However, an Rtl or MTSS approach does acknowledge that even with high quality initial (Tier 1) instruction – whole class instruction -, a small number of children may need additional support through a small group (Tier 2) intervention, and an even smaller number may need specialised, individual support (Tier 3 intervention).

To achieve the best possible literacy outcomes for all students, high fidelity implementation of structured literacy instruction from Prep to Year 2 will provide the strongest results and enable all students to read to learn from grade 3, which should also be through a structured literacy approach.

Importantly, while the Panel’s Final Consultation Report refers to ‘waves’ of instruction synonymously with ‘tiers’. ‘Waves’ is now an outdated term and ‘tiered instruction’ is more universally accepted. ***The Alliance recommends this terminology be revised and brought into alignment with the terminology of the respected, contemporary literature.***

NAPLAN

In 2021, when the then Minister for Education, now Premier, announced the target that all grade 7 students will start high school above the expected level of reading by no later than 2030, the National Assessment Plan - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) reported ‘national minimum standards’ which would have enabled this target to be monitored. In February 2023, the Education Ministers announced that NAPLAN reporting is moving away from national minimum standards to ‘proficiency standards’ from 2023²¹.

The new proficiency standards have four levels of achievement for each year level, the numerical bands and the national minimum standard will be replaced, with the following four achievement standards:

- exceeding
- strong
- developing, and
- needs additional support.

According to the Panel’s Final Consultation Report, the Panel will consider a new target of ‘by 2032, all Year 3, 5, 7, and 9 students will meet the national proficiency reading and writing standards.’²²

Recommendation 5: The Alliance proposes that the target should be that ‘by 2032, all Year 3, 5, 7, and 9 students will meet the national **strong proficiency reading and writing standards.’ This is as ‘developing proficiency’ suggests that a student is not yet at the level of reading and writing expected for proficiency and would require additional support and intervention.**

Unfortunately, the replacement of the numerical bands and national minimum standard marks the start of a new time series, preventing comparison and tracking of change over time at individual, school and jurisdiction level. However, at the Ministers Meeting, Ministers also agreed that individual jurisdictions could work with ACARA on the feasibility of comparative or research studies utilising data from previous time series²³.

²¹ <https://www.jasonclare.com.au/media/portfolio-media-releases/5365-education-ministers-meeting-communique-naplan-update>

²² Page 56

²³ <https://www.jasonclare.com.au/media/portfolio-media-releases/5365-education-ministers-meeting-communique-naplan-update>

Recommendation 6: That the Minister for Education works with ACARA to ensure comparison of NAPLAN results with previous time series data is possible and enables the Tasmanian Government to track progress over time.

Systematic, synthetic phonics (SSP) and the Year 1 Phonics Check

In his State of the State address and subsequent media release, Premier Rockliff announced that systematic, synthetic phonics is to be implemented and the Australian Government Year 1 Phonics Check would be mandated in all Tasmanian government schools in 2023. Furthermore, he committed to aggregating the data and reporting the results annually. These were both recommendations of the Alliance in the 2021 Road Map to a Literate Tasmania.

The Panel’s Final Consultation Report refers to developing ‘scopes and sequences’ for each school in consultation with AERO. In systematic, synthetic phonics instruction, a scope and sequence provides the explicit, systematic and structured order in which Grapheme Phoneme Correspondences (GPC) – the relationships between sounds and spellings – are taught for reading and spelling. The scope and sequence should be supported with decodable readers which match the order in which GPCs are being taught.

Different series of decodable books have different scope and sequences, as a result they do not always introduce GPCs in the same order. When using decodable texts as part of structured literacy instruction, it is important that beginner readers are only given texts to read that contain the GPCs that they have been taught. There are already several evidence-based scopes and sequences available freely for use and matched to decodable readers, with Australian content. See for example the SPELD NSW [scope and sequence](#) and their [Decodable Book Selector](#) which matches scopes and sequences to various providers of decodable readers.

Recommendation 7: Educators should be provided with extensive professional development in systematic, synthetic phonics instruction to ensure that Tasmanian students are able to meet the Year 1 Phonics Check benchmark. Educators should also be provided with professional learning to administer the check, assess and analyse the results and develop an intervention plan, if required.

Recommendation 8: The Year 1 Phonics Check should be administered in Term 1 and Term 4. By administering the Check early in Term 1, educators will be able to ensure structured literacy instruction is appropriately targeted at the whole-class level and provide Tier 2 and 3 intervention where required. By repeating the check in Term 4, educators will be able to track progress and provide the next year’s Grade 2 educator with a baseline for each student.

Recommendation 9: Ensure that each Tasmanian government school is using an evidence-based scope and sequence supported by decodable readers which are matched to that scope and sequence by 2023.

Primary school recommendations

Refer to the 10 Year Plan in the Road Map to a Literate Tasmania.

Additional to 2021 Road Map:

Recommendation 10: Provide intervention at the intensity required to ensure that all students who have progressed to the next grade level not at the expected level for reading and writing so that they can catch up.²⁴

²⁴ This will only be a requirement until structured literacy is implemented with fidelity under a tiered approach

Recommendation 11: In an effort to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline associated with low levels of language and literacy, screen all students experiencing exclusionary practices within the education system for language and literacy challenges and other undiagnosed developmental disorders or disabilities. Provide intervention and wrap around support services *at the intensity indicated* by holistic allied-health and health assessment.

Recommendation 12: Provide all new workforce entrants (including new graduates) with intensive professional learning in the evidence-base knowledge (Science of Reading) and practical skills (structured literacy) prior to the start of the school year and throughout their first teaching year until the ITE courses provide this content, knowledge and opportunity for skill acquisition.

Secondary school recommendations

Refer to the 10 Year Plan in the Road Map to a Literate Tasmania

Additional to 2021 Road Map:

Recommendation 13: The Tasmanian Government should introduce a literacy benchmark to successfully complete the Tasmanian Certificate of Education, similar to that used in Western Australia, OLNA²⁵. The OLNA is an online literacy and numeracy assessment. It is designed to enable students to successfully meet the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) requirement of demonstrating the minimum standard of literacy and numeracy. To successfully meet the literacy requirement in reading and writing, students must demonstrate the skills regarded as essential to meet the demands of everyday life and work in a knowledge-based economy. These skills are described in Level 3 of the Australian Core Skills Framework and are equivalent to Band 8 of the Year 9 NAPLAN reading and writing tests.

Recommendation 14: Provide intervention at the intensity required to ensure that all students who have progressed to the next grade level not at the expected level for reading and writing so that they can catch up.²⁶

Recommendation 15: In an effort to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline associated with low levels of language and literacy, screen all students experiencing exclusionary practices within the education system for language and literacy challenges, such as Developmental Language Disorder or Dyslexia and other undiagnosed developmental disorders or disabilities. Provide intervention and wrap around support services at the intensity *indicated* by holistic allied-health and health assessment.

Recommendation 16: Provide all new workforce entrants (including new graduates) with intensive professional learning in the evidence-base knowledge (Science of Reading) and practical skills (structured literacy) prior to the start of the school year and throughout their first teaching year until the ITE courses provide this content and opportunity for knowledge and skill acquisition.

Adult community

Refer to the 10 year plan in the 2021 Road Map for a Literate Tasmania.

Additional to 2021 Road Map:

²⁵ <https://senior-secondary.scsa.wa.edu.au/assessment/olna>

²⁶ This will only be a requirement until structured literacy is implemented with fidelity under a tiered approach

Recommendation 17: Screen all adults accessing adult literacy support for undiagnosed language or reading disorders and other undiagnosed developmental disorders or disabilities. Provide intervention and wrap around support services *at the intensity indicated* by holistic allied-health and health assessment.

Justice system

Refer to the 10 year plan in the 2021 Road Map for a Literate Tasmania.

Additional to 2021 Road Map:

Recommendation 18: Screen all youth and adults newly presenting to justice programs for undiagnosed language or reading disorders (specific learning impairments) and other undiagnosed developmental disorders or disabilities. Provide intervention and wrap around support services *at the intensity indicated* by holistic allied-health and health assessment.

Importantly, in developing the Youth Justice Blueprint, education (and literacy) should be positioned as a protective and preventative factor, not solely as a rehabilitative factor.

Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

The greatest barrier for to achieving 100% literacy for Tasmanians into the future is the lack of scale and consistency in evidence-based literacy instruction within the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) degree.

Despite the importance of ITE being identified in three critical reviews at national level; the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review, the Productivity Commission Inquiry into the National School Reform Agreement and the National Teacher Workforce Plan, ITE as an issue is completely absent in the Panel's Final Consultation Report apart from a fleeting comment "The University of Tasmania and TasTAFE should ensure graduate educator readiness to deliver quality literacy instruction through Tasmanian scopes and sequences as evaluated by AERO"²⁷.

If Tasmania is to achieve 100% literacy, then our university needs to provide pre-service teachers with the knowledge (evidence) and skills (practice) in structured literacy instruction during their degrees so that they are classroom ready upon graduation.

In the majority of Australian universities, pre-service teachers are not taught the knowledge (Science of Reading) nor practical skills (structured literacy) that research shows have the greatest impact on literacy and subsequent educational outcomes.

A 2019 report²⁸ shows that in 81 (70%) of the 116 literacy units reviewed, none of the five essential elements of effective evidence-based reading instruction were mentioned in the unit outlines. All five essential elements were referred to in only 6% of literacy unit outlines.

Most Tasmanian primary school educators were initially trained in 'whole language' or 'balanced literacy' reading instruction, however, these approaches have now been extensively disproven as the most effective way to teach life-long literacy knowledge and skills.

²⁷ Pages 32 and 34

²⁸ Buckingham, J. and Meeks, L., (2019), Short-changed: Preparation to teaching reading in Initial Teacher Education, Research Report, MultiLit and Five from Five.

Despite this evidence, initial teacher education (ITE), professional learning for practicing teachers and associated resources still align with the balanced literacy approach to teaching reading.

Unless our pre-service teachers are equipped with the knowledge and skill to provide evidence-based literacy instruction, Tasmanian will not achieve the long-term aspiration of 100% literate adults.

Recommendation 19: The Tasmanian Government needs to work with the ITE providers (Universities) to ensure that course content aligns with the evidence-base knowledge (Science of Reading) and the opportunity to develop the practical skills (structured literacy) so that graduates are classroom ready.

Implementation is critical to success

While the Final Consultation Report asserts that “Any new policies, programs or initiatives that are sponsored by the Government under the Community-wide Framework should include evaluation. This includes measurement indicators of success, outcomes, evaluation against standards of evidence/best practice for literacy development.”²⁹, the Alliance contends that it is implementation that is critical to achieving successful outcomes, and therefore any evaluation should also include assessment of the initiatives’ implementation.

Evidence-based policies, practices and interventions that are poorly implemented – or not implemented at all – will not produce the desired outcome of achieving 100 per cent literacy in Tasmania. A principles-based framework document will not suffice to deliver change at the scale and with the urgency required to achieve a Literate Tasmania. As the Literacy Alliance’s 2021 Road Map states, this issue requires **urgent action, at scale**.

The Alliance interprets from the Panel’s Final Consultation Paper that the Panel intends to recommend to the Government that an initial three-year action plan is developed, and reviewed and updated over a ten-year period, to implement the work under Lifting Literacy. The Alliance agrees that the Action Plan will be vital to ensuring the Government’s success in delivering on its promises with respect to a 100% literate Tasmania.

Recommendation 20: That the three-year Action Plan to implement the Lifting Literacy initiative/s is made available for public consultation.

Recommendation 21: In implementing the Community-wide Framework for achieving 100 per cent literacy in Tasmania the Government should harness the strategies and methods of implementation science.

Implementation science is a method for ensuring that research – evidence – translates into practice effectively.

Implementation science facilitates the uptake of evidence-based practice and research into regular use by practitioners and policymakers and aims to systematically close the gap between what we know and what we do (often referred to as the know-do gap).

Informed by the disciplines of knowledge translation, program evaluation, service design and science and innovation, implementation science identifies and addresses the barriers that slow or halt the uptake of proven evidence-based practices and interventions.

²⁹ Page 39

Importantly, intervention science differs from evaluation and intervention effectiveness in that it focusses on the strategies used to implement the evidence-based practices rather than just the outcomes.

END.

4. Ten-year plan to achieve the Primary Reading Pledge objective 'close to zero children start grade 7 at or below the national minimum standard for reading'											
4.1	Kinder/Pre-school: Introduce grammar and phonology screener (GAPS) from 3.5 years of age. Instruction and intervention based on SoR structured literacy - oral language, vocabulary, comprehension.										
4.2	Prep students: PIP assessments. Instruction and intervention based on SoR, including oral language, phonological and phonemic awareness.										
4.3	Grade 1: Phonics Check, PAT assessment, Standardised assessment of language - phonological processing, word retrieval and letter-sound knowledge. Instruction and intervention based on SoR structured literacy.										
4.4	Grade 2: G1 Phonics screener follow up, PAT, Standardised assessment of language as required - language, phonological processing, word retrieval, letter-sound knowledge, reading comprehension and fluency. Instruction and intervention based on SoR structured literacy, systematic synthetic phonics.										
4.5	Grade 3: NAPLAN/PAT, Standardised assessments as required - language, phonological processing, word retrieval, letter-sound knowledge, reading comprehension and fluency. Instruction based on SoR structured literacy, Tier 2 and 3 intervention (as per Primary Reading Pledge) as required.										
4.6	Grade 4: PAT, Standardised assessments as required - language, phonological processing, word retrieval, letter-sound knowledge, reading comprehension and fluency. Instruction based on SoR structured literacy, Tier 2 and 3 intervention as required.										
4.7	Grade 5: NAPLAN, PAT. Standardised assessments as required (as per G4). Instruction based on SoR structured literacy, Tier 2 and 3 intervention as per Primary Reading Pledge as required.										
4.8	Grade 6: PAT. Standardised assessment as required (as per G5). Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention as required.										
4.9	Grade 7: NAPLAN, PAT. Standardised assessments as required (as per G6). Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention as required.										
4.10	Grade 8: Standardised assessments as required (as per G7). Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention as required.										
4.11	Mandate adoption of phonics screener by all primary schools by 2022										
4.12	All schools resourced with decodeable readers appropriate for stages of reading										
5. Four-year plan to achieve at or near zero children leaving Secondary School in Grades 10 below the national minimum standard (NMS) for reading											
5.1	All Grade 7s screened* for oral language and literacy to identify children at-risk.										
5.2	Targeted and whole-class SoR structured literacy intervention		G7	G7-8	G7-9	G7-10					

8.8	Professional learning for Libraries Tasmania Literacy Coordinators in Justice settings as per adult literacy plan											
8.9	Professional learning for Ashley School teams in SoR structured literacy intervention*											
9. All strategies: continuous improvement according to data-driven evidence												



March 2023