



20 FEB, 2025

New strategy to transform state's literacy

Launceston Examiner

Department
of Education

Page 1 of 1

New strategy to transform state's literacy

EDITORIAL

FIFTY per cent of Tasmanian adults struggle to read at a level that daily life requires. Forty per cent of students read below grade level. Despite the status quo, we should be optimistic about literacy in Tasmania.

After years of debate and advocacy, the Department for Education, Children and Young People's (DECYP) Lifting Literacy plan came to be. This plan reflects the best bets we have for ensuring literacy proficiency and includes powerful levers previously absent in policy or practice at scale.

Schools are now expected to teach critical elements of reading in structured and explicit ways, assess reading using the same reliable tools, adopt high-quality curriculum materials, dedicate a minimum of one hour per day to literacy teaching, provide literacy-rich environments, and ensure support for students most behind. I work with many Australian systems, and this is the best plan I've seen.

Education systems often fail when adopting policies. They do too much, too fast and underestimate what it will take to achieve their aims.

Unsuccessful initiatives deplete the capacity of schools to believe in the merit of future change. Within DECYP, we've carefully considered risks and mitigation. Schools have time to build expertise and embed practices in sustainable ways and DECYP is funding resources and training over several years.

We have three priorities. Priority one is word recognition. Progress will be best measured by Year 1 Phonics Check results, which already saw a five per cent increase from 2023-24. Priority two is reading fluency

(accuracy, rate and expression). Progress will be best measured by fluency data we are collecting across Years 1-8. Priority three is comprehension, which depends on word recognition and fluency, but also vocabulary, language, knowledge, strategies and cumulative exposure to rich, complex texts. This is what NAPLAN measures.

Improvements in Tasmania's NAPLAN data will be the consequence of getting every piece of the puzzle right over several years. Before you critique 2025, 2026 and even 2027 NAPLAN data and say, "This isn't working", remember each priority and its metrics.

School improvement journeys take up to five years. We have hundreds of schools trying to do this work commensurately.

It requires relentless attention to detail, collective effort, strong leadership, and unwavering commitment. We must be realistic about the challenge, but I'm confident outcomes and opportunities for Tasmanian students will have shifted significantly in a decade.

The Independent Education Review affirmed the value, direction, and early impact of Lifting Literacy. The enthusiasm from the Premier and Minister for Education, through to the coalface is contagious.

We can lift literacy in Tasmania, and we will. Everyone is ready for the long haul. Thank a teacher today and wish them well as they deliver on our commitment to Tasmanian students across 2025 and beyond.

■ Emina McLean is a former Head of Primary English. She is a lecturer, researcher, advisor and consultant, working with DECYP to deliver the Lifting Literacy plan and Minimum Schooling Guarantee.