LIBERAL NATIONALS
School Education Values Statement
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FOREWORDS

From the Leaders of the Liberal Nationals

We are the first leaders of the Liberal and National Parties to be both entirely educated in government schools, and we are determined that under our leadership, Victoria will continue its proud tradition of being the intellectual capital of Australia.

We are committed to the state education system providing a world class education for all Victorians no matter their background, where they live be it rural or regional Victoria or Melbourne, at the lowest possible cost for parents. We are mindful of the need to raise outcomes for students in regional areas, and also of the need to provide adequate educational support for children with disabilities, including autism. We are also committed to providing choice to Victorian parents in education, noting there is a greater proportion of Victorian students in Catholic and independent schools than any other state in Australia.

The education of young Victorians is one of the most important roles of state government. A high quality and engaging experience at school is vital for all students to enable them to be the best they can and live fulfilling lives. As two parties committed to a society based on the principles of equality of opportunity, reward for effort, and advancement by merit, nothing in our society could be more important than a world class education system that can be accessed by everyone.

Yet, despite massive increases to the education budget, student outcomes are stagnating according to the recent OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests. Other testing programmes, including NAPLAN, TIMSS and PIRLS, echo this depressing fact.

For example, year 9 NAPLAN reading results continued a downward trend to below 2008 levels, while the year 7 reading score was the same as in 2014. In numeracy, Victorian students in years 5 and 9 have gone backwards since 2015.

This stagnation of literacy and numeracy standards is affecting young Victorians’ opportunity to go on to higher education or to one day get a job. Throughout 2018, we will be making announcements both state-wide and at the local level of important reforms to improve student outcomes and improve infrastructure in schools.

Three critical elements of our education system have broken down in recent years: teaching the basics, maintaining discipline and instilling sound values. Basic literacy and numeracy skills remain the foundation for meaningful employment, and need to be the foundation of our curriculum.

The values that underpin our education system must reflect the values of Victorian parents: aspiration, excellence, personal responsibility, respect and reward for effort.

By focusing on the basics, restoring discipline and instilling sound values, we can make Victorian schools an example that the rest of the nation will want to follow.

Matthew Guy MP
Leader of the Liberals
Leader of the Opposition

Peter Walsh MP
Leader of The Nationals
From the Shadow Minister for Education

This Values Statement sets the framework for the Liberal and National Parties’ education policies in the lead up to the 2018 Victorian state election. It is a values proposition on what cultural change we believe is required in the Victorian education sector to improve student outcomes. It also provides some context as to where Labor and its ideological fellow travellers in the education establishment are getting it wrong, and broadly, how this can and should be improved.

Recently, Andreas Schleicher, head of the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), visited Australia. Mr Schleicher had a simple message. “Australia used to have one of the world’s leading school systems, but in the past decade learning outcomes have dropped to levels closer to the average of school systems in the industrialised world.”

However, the Productivity Commission found that “real government expenditure (state and federal) on schools increased by 24 per cent (from $40.7 billion to $50.4 billion) between 2004-05 and 2013-14, or almost 14 per cent per student across government and non-government schools. This is not to say that funding does not matter, but rather that increasing expenditure alone does not guarantee an improvement in outcomes.” In Victoria, despite the state government massively increasing spending on education between 2001 ($6.1bn) and 2017 ($15.392bn), PISA results have barely changed. We scored 516 for reading in 2000 and 507 in 2015. We scored 513 for scientific literacy in 2006 – we achieved the same in 2015. For maths, we scored 511 in 2003 but dropped to 499 by 2015.

Indeed, the stagnation of literacy and numeracy standards is affecting our economy and global competitiveness. Our neighbours in South East Asia are leaving us behind with Singapore topping the charts for PISA in 2015. Worryingly, the OECD’s “Policy Insights from the Survey of Adult Skills” shows there are three million working age Australian adults with either low numeracy or literacy skills, or both.

I regard these statistics as alarming in the extreme, and they show what has been happening in the education sector must change. As the former Dean of the Melbourne Graduate School of Education Field Rickards wrote, “too many policies impact factors outside the classroom, leading to many millions of dollars spent for little gain in student or teacher learning.”

Teaching is one of the most important jobs in our society, and we need to recognise and reward our best teachers and encourage our best and brightest to take up careers in education.

One of the reasons for the decline in student outcomes is, as Andreas Schleicher himself observed, that Australia’s curriculum “is a mile wide and an inch deep. It’s very crowded, with a lot of content.” Teachers in Victoria are under increasing pressure to cram more non-core curriculum into class time. It is not hard to see why teachers desperately want the curriculum streamlined so they can focus on the core subjects that constitute a rigorous and enriching education.

It’s high time to rethink our approach to education by putting student outcomes first, or risk the second largest state in the nation slipping even further behind the best in the world.

Tim Smith MP
Shadow Minister for Education
Introduction

The aim of Victoria’s education system is to enable every child to be the best that they can be. It’s about the students, it’s about providing hope to parents, and it’s about helping and supporting teachers and parents so that every child reaches their full potential.

The University of Melbourne’s Professor John Hattie argues we must think of student achievement in terms of students’ level of intellectual growth from one year to the next. This is best described as, “a year’s learning for a year’s input”.

Whatever level a student is at on the first day of Term 1, he or she deserves to have made at least a year’s worth of progress by the end of Term 4. “Despite heroic efforts by many teachers, our most advanced students are not being adequately stretched, while our least advanced are not being properly supported, and fall further behind over time”.

The Liberal and National Parties stand fundamentally as parties committed to social mobility through high quality state education. There is no greater responsibility than educating future generations to ensure the continued peace and prosperity of both Victoria and the nation.

Education is a significant driver to improve productivity and to meet the challenges of an increasingly globalised economy, where the disruption caused by new technologies is revolutionising the workplace and how people live and interact.

Education is also vital to ensure future citizens maximise their ability to lead fulfilling and rewarding lives, and to be in a position to contribute to the common good and the wellbeing of society.

Based on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), it is clear that standards are either flatlining or declining and that Victoria’s education system is underperforming.

Too many students leave school without the necessary knowledge, ability and skills to successfully undertake further study or to enter the workforce. Increasing numbers of students are also leaving school without the resilience and well-being needed to cope with the challenges and demands of a society characterised by rapid change and dislocation.


As argued by Prof. John Hattie, teachers are one of the most significant influences on student performance.\(^2\) Surveys suggest that many beginning teachers plan to leave the workforce as a result of bureaucratic overload, and red tape that takes valuable time and resources away from teaching students. Compared to stronger performing education systems, Victoria’s curriculum lacks academic rigour, and is consumed by ideology and educational fads. Static or declining learning outcomes are a consequence of too many demands on teachers’ time.

Mandating controversial gender and sexuality programs like Safe Schools takes time away from teaching the basics, and proves that the Andrews Government is more concerned about politically correct ideology than essential learning.

If successful at the next election, an incoming Liberal Nationals Government will commit to raising standards and strengthening outcomes. Central to this task is:

- implementing an academically based curriculum that promotes deep learning and that gives students an understanding and appreciation of Australian values and what makes Australia unique
- developing a curriculum that is benchmarked against stronger performing education systems and that is evidence-based
- ensuring teacher quality and giving teachers the resources and time to mentor one another and to get on with what they do best - educating
- promoting an education system that sets high expectations and that rewards effort, ability and a commitment to excellence

A future Liberal Nationals Government will also be committed to diversity and choice in education where parents can choose between government, Catholic and independent schools.

**Context**

**Falling standards**

While much of the debate surrounding education focuses on the need to increase investment, the reality is that just spending more is not the solution to raising standards. As noted by the OECD, based on an analysis of the PISA results “the success of a country’s education system depends more on how educational resources are invested than on the volume of investment”.\(^3\)

Evidenced by PISA and TIMSS results released late 2016, it is clear that despite the additional billions spent on education over the last 15 to 20 years, results for Australian students have flat-lined and in many instances gone backwards.

In relation to Australia’s PISA results, the ‘Reform of the Federation Discussion Paper’ notes:

Even with this larger investment over the past ten years, we still have not seen the improvements in performance we should expect. The performance of Australian students has slipped by some measures. We now have fewer high achievers and more low performers than a decade ago and average test scores have declined.\(^4\)

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\(^3\) OECD. 201. ‘Does money buy strong performance in PISA?’. Pisa In Focus 13. OECD.

Australia’s performance in the TIMSS tests is also cause for concern and, once again, proves that additional spending by itself cannot guarantee improved results. In addition to Australia’s results failing to improve over a 12-year period, we are now being outperformed by education systems we once outranked. Based on analysis of TIMSS results, Dr Sue Thompson from the Australian Council for Educational Research concludes: “countries including Canada, England, Ireland, Northern Ireland and the United States have improved and now outperform Australia”.

**Victorian NAPLAN Results**

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**Numeracy**

Stagnation in Numeracy despite increased funding – NAPLAN Report for 2017

**Reading**

Stagnation in Reading despite increased funding – NAPLAN Report for 2017

**Spelling**

Stagnation in Spelling despite increased funding – NAPLAN Report for 2017

**Grammar**

Stagnation in Grammar despite increased – NAPLAN Report for 2017

While there has been some minor movement in NAPLAN results over the period 2008 – 2015, it is also the case that despite additional expenditure students’ performance has not made any significant improvement. As noted by the Chief Executive Officer of the body responsible for NAPLAN, Robert Randall:

> The 2015 results show that at a national level we are seeing little change in student achievement in these important areas of learning. While stability is good, the community may well expect more improvement over time.⁶

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As acknowledged in the report commissioned by the Victorian Government and chaired by the Hon Steve Bracks, test results for Victorian students have also failed to improve and in some instances gone backwards. The report states:

Students in Victoria perform well compared to the rest of Australia and international benchmarks. Yet, for nearly a decade, education outcomes in Victoria overall have not improved... Recent increases in investment have not produced better learning outcomes across the student population (p 3).

Compared with Daniel Andrews’ lofty pledge in Opposition, the ‘Education State’ has proven a hollow slogan; we are nowhere near leading the world. Victoria doesn’t even have a full-time Education Minister.

“I want us to be the education state, whether it’s kinder, primary school, secondary school, vocational education, apprenticeships, training right through to higher education, research, postgraduate work. I want to see us lead our nation and I want to see us lead the world, and I think there’s every chance we can do that if we get our priorities right and we invest in those things.”

In today’s digital environment the pressure is on for Australia to hone its competitive advantage against the rest of the world, and we must strive for excellence. Maintaining educational standards is not an option, and we must always aim for better learning outcomes.

While test results are not the only indicator of school effectiveness, it is beyond doubt that unless students master essential learning in areas like science, mathematics and literacy then further learning will be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Given the impact of the new technologies and the increasing complexity and challenges faced by the 21st century workplace it is especially vital that students reach the highest standards of performance in these core subjects.

It is also essential that education authorities and schools set high expectations based on all students working hard to achieve their best. When identifying the reasons Australian students underperform, the head of the OECD’s education directorate Andreas Schleicher argues “it is perhaps too easy for students to do well in Australia” and that the education system is characterised by “tolerance of failure”. OECD research associated with the PISA tests shows that students who are resilient and committed to excel (described as self-efficacy) achieve the strongest results.

As argued by Ludger Woessmann and Eric Hanushek, education is one of the main drivers of increased productivity and economic efficiency. Research carried out by the OECD also makes the point that improvements in basic literacy and numeracy can lead to a significant increase in an economy’s Gross Domestic Product. Not surprisingly, given the PISA, TIMSS and NAPLAN results the OECD also notes that Australia is in danger of “being left behind in terms of innovation and economic growth”.

Ideology instead of improving outcomes

At the same time that standards are falling and schools and teachers are being asked to improve performance, programs like Safe Schools add to curriculum clutter and impose a politically correct gender and sexuality agenda on schools. Unlike other state governments, the Andrews Labor Government is mandating the Safe
Schools program as compulsory in all government secondary schools.\textsuperscript{14}

While schools have a vitally important part to play in teaching students about respecting and valuing others and not engaging in bullying or anti-social behaviour, programs like Safe Schools impose a radical post-modernist worldview on sex and gender by:

- seeking to replace parents in teaching students about controversial and sensitive issues
- adopting a view of gender where it is a social construct and defined as fluid and limitless
- introducing adult concepts regarding diversity, sexual preferences and gender prematurely that is confusing and unnecessary for young children

The Victorian curriculum Foundation to Year 10, similar to the National Curriculum, adopts 3 cross-curriculum priorities that are “embedded in the curriculum areas”.\textsuperscript{15} These priorities are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia and Sustainability. Whilst we agree with the importance of these topics, we believe greater value would result from not having cross curriculum priorities which serve only to dilute the teaching of core competencies; namely, literacy, numeracy and writing skills.

This is not to suggest that politicians should be able to dictate the contents of the curriculum; rather that the curriculum should reflect the ideas and the traditions that have stood the test of time. The curriculum should conserve and pass on our shared cultural inheritance. It should distil what the generations who have come before us have deemed to be worth knowing as well as equipping young people with the technical skills and values they need to negotiate a complex economy and an advanced democracy.

Students should be taught to be proud of this nation’s democratic heritage and society. But the lack of knowledge that level 6 and year 10 students have of citizenship and civics is deeply concerning.

A test, conducted by the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, suggests students lack an understanding of our national institutions, the historical basis for them and the important principles and values that have shaped our society. Of the sample of students tested, only 38 per cent of year 10 students achieved at or above the proficient standard. In Victoria, we scored only 39 per cent for year 10 – it’s a massive fail, Victoria’s lowest mark since data was first collected for this test in 2004.

It is very important to teach students to respect our history, to know something of our current challenges and to encourage participation and service to our peaceful democracy.

Introducing students to the “best which has been thought and said” is a fundamental duty of government, yet a survey by the Lowy Institute found that only 52 per cent of 18 to 29-year-olds agree with the notion that democracy is preferable to any other kind of government. In 2014, it was as low as 42 per cent.\textsuperscript{16}

Our secondary school humanities curriculum in Victoria is well meaning but fails to inspire children to understand and respect Australian history and values.

Foundational events that occurred in Europe and North America before 1788 that underpin our national and state institutions are barely spoken of. Concepts like the inherent dignity of the individual, religious tolerance, the principles of the Western enlightenment – such as freedom of speech, equality before the law and government by consent.

\textsuperscript{14} James Merlino, the education minister, states: “The Victorian Government has made a clear commitment to expand the Safe Schools program to all government secondary schools by the end of 2018”. Retrieved 16 October, 2017 from http://www.jamesmerlino.com.au/news/safe-schools-program/


Ensuring all students understand that Australians from multicultural backgrounds have built one of the world’s oldest continuous democracies and robust economies is a story of which to be very proud. Of course, there are aspects of this nation’s history we are not proud of, particularly the shameful treatment of the Indigenous peoples, and that must be taught in depth as well.

The curriculum should attempt to inspire young people with the ideas and values that have helped make this nation a beacon of hope and justice. It should emphasise what generations who have come before us have deemed worth conserving and that we are very lucky to call Australia home.
Our Vision

Since the time Sir Robert Menzies was Prime Minister, the Liberal Nationals have valued education as vital to the wellbeing and prosperity of society as well as the individual's ability to lead a fulfilling and rewarding life. Significant initiatives during Menzies' time as Prime Minister include state aid to Catholic and independent schools, the introduction of Commonwealth scholarships and increased funding for universities. At the state level "the Bolte Government built twice as many high schools as all the governments in the 100 years before it. It more than doubled the number of technical schools in Victoria. It built two new universities. It dramatically cut student–staff ratios at all levels. The number of school students doubled; the number of university students more than quadrupled. Little of the growth in schools was due to federal funding – these were all state initiatives."17

The Liberal Nationals vision of education is one that recognises the right of every child, regardless of where they live, their social background or their gender or ethnicity, to experience a rich and challenging education based on what Victoria's Blackburn Report describes as "our best validated knowledge and artistic achievements".18 As such, the Liberal Nationals are committed to equality of opportunity instead of equality of outcomes and education providing a range of future opportunities for all students.

It is also important that education acknowledges that not all students have the same ability, motivation, interests or future plans once they leave school and that a one size-fits-all approach often leads to a curriculum characterised by lack of innovation and mediocrity. It is vital that students are offered a variety of pathways through secondary school that encompass academic studies as well as those associated with new technologies and vocational education and training.

Education should reward ability, application and effort where students are motivated to achieve excellence. Similar to high performing education systems as measured by international tests schools must set high expectations and provide a classroom environment that stimulates and challenges students to achieve to the best of their ability. In addition to supporting disadvantaged students, it is also important that higher performing students are properly challenged and supported to achieve world’s best educational outcomes.

In relation to our education system, research carried out by Melbourne-based Prof. Brian Caldwell concludes that schools are suffering as a result of a 'command and control' approach exerted by state and commonwealth governments and bureaucracies. When describing the recent history of school policy, Prof. Caldwell argues:

... what has been achieved to date has simply melded state and territory bureaucracies into a single-framework of decision-making that may ultimately have no impact on how students learn. Australia may end up with one of the most centralised and bureaucratically organised systems of education in the world".19

In opposition to this inflexible and intrusive model, Prof. Caldwell argues that schools deserve greater flexibility. He states:

There is a powerful educational logic to locating a higher level of authority, responsibility and accountability for curriculum, teaching and assessment at the school level. Each school has a unique mix of students in respect to their needs, interests, aptitudes and ambitions; indeed, each classroom has a unique mix. A capacity to adapt a curriculum that meets international standards to this unique mix is essential (p 6).20

Principals should be free from the shackles of centralised, bureaucratic control and have greater flexibility. Principals and teachers around Victoria express their dismay at the amount of time they have to spend undertaking administrative tasks that ought to be the role of non-teaching staff.

Increased flexibility would also afford parents their increasing expectations of choice and diversity in education. A Victorian report investigating school autonomy and accountability makes such a point when stating: “school level autonomy is intended to facilitate the tailoring of service delivery to the particular needs of students and parents, and thereby to avoid the inflexibilities of one size fits all approaches.”

If schools are to be more effective and if standards are to improve, it is vital that schools are given greater flexibility and put in a position, within a broad and earned accountability regime, where they can manage themselves and determine how they operate.

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Our Values

A future Liberal Nationals Government is committed to an education system characterised by:

• a rigorous curriculum benchmarked against international best-practice and that includes a systematic and comprehensive study of “our best validated knowledge and artistic achievements”. If standards are to improve one of the key ingredients is a rigorous and effective curriculum benchmarked against world’s best practice.

• meritocracy and the belief that ability, effort and achievement must be properly promoted and rewarded. One of the defining characteristics of stronger performing education systems is the belief that all students are capable of doing better if there are high standards and success is acknowledged and rewarded. Instead of diluting the curriculum and lowering standards on the basis that some students are incapable of achievement schools should promote excellence.

• schools that set high expectations and are characterised by disciplined and orderly classrooms. Australian classrooms, compared to other OECD education systems, have an unacceptably high incidence of classroom disruption and unruly behaviour. Schools need to be given greater freedom to manage unruly and disruptive students and schools need to set clear consequences for bad behaviour.22

• equality of opportunity for all students, regardless of background, location, ethnicity, gender or sexuality. The Auditor-General has reported that “In terms of educational attainment, rural children and young people lag behind their metropolitan peers in several ways: absence rates are higher, with the disparity more pronounced in secondary years; a lower percentage of students meet the national minimum standards for reading and numeracy; fewer students complete year 12; the proportion of 15 – 24 year olds with a Certificate IV qualification or higher is much lower and far fewer students go on to attend university.”23

• a school curriculum that inculcates: resilience, respect for others, humility, truth telling and a commitment to reciprocity and the common good. In addition to education leading to further study and employment it is vital that it deals with the characteristics and virtues that underpin ethical behaviour and a commitment to our broader Australian society. Students also need to gain the confidence and self-assurance to cope with the challenges they will invariably face in life.

• properly rewarded and resourced teachers who are masters of their area of study. Research proves that committed, knowledgeable and well-resourced teachers are essential if students are to achieve to the best of their ability. As such, teachers need to be properly rewarded and have the time to mentor one another and to focus on improving their classroom practice.

• choice and diversity in education where Catholic, independent and government schools are properly funded. In addition to properly resourcing and supporting state schools it is important that non-government schools that educate approximately 36.7 per cent of students are also supported.24

• greater autonomy for principals so they can focus on educational leadership, not administration.

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Key Elements

If elected as the next Victorian government the Liberal Nationals will be committed to:

- reducing the curriculum overload by adopting a core/elective approach to the curriculum that ensures a proper balance between what is mandatory and what is school based. One of the key recommendations of the 2014 National Curriculum review is to reduce the crowded curriculum in order that teachers can focus on teaching essential knowledge, understanding and skills to a greater degree of detail and depth. Providing more time for a locally tailored curriculum also gives schools greater autonomy and flexibility to style the elective part of the curriculum to best suit their students’ abilities and interests.

- promoting increased choice and diversity by allowing schools to specialise in areas like the humanities, STEM, music, the performing arts and languages. The danger of a one size-fits-all approach to the curriculum is that it fails to meet the needs and interests of all students and that it leads to mediocrity. Schools need to be able to specialise in order to ensure that what they offer is properly resourced and taught in depth by specialist teachers.

- internationally benchmarking the Foundation to Year 10 curriculum to ensure it is world’s best, especially in Mathematics, English, Science and Technology. It is crucial that key subjects and areas of study are evaluated against the curriculums of stronger performing education systems to ensure what occurs in Victorian schools is academically rigorous and evidence-based.

- ensuring that the school curriculum, especially in subjects like civics and citizenship, history and literature, gives students a thorough grounding in Australian values and what makes Australia such a peaceful and prosperous nation. Australia is a liberal democracy and it is vital in a time of international uncertainty and rapid change that students leave school culturally literate and able to identify and acknowledge what makes our culture unique and why it is so worthwhile preserving.

- removing the Safe Schools gender and sexuality program and implementing a broad based and inclusive anti-bullying and resilience program for all students, especially focussed on cyberbullying. Increasingly more students are expressing concerns about being bullied and schools have an important role to play in addressing the issue.

- ensuring that classroom practice (pedagogy) is evidence-based and not driven by ideology or educational fads. If standards are to improve, schools need to ensure that classroom practice is based on what research indicates is the most effective theory and practice.

- ensuring that all students are taught by effective and competent teachers, by imposing rigorous minimum entry standards for new teachers coming into the state education system.

- evaluating teacher education programs to ensure they best prepare prospective teachers for the classroom and monitor their effectiveness over time. Teachers are a critical part of the learning process and it is vital that beginning teachers have the knowledge and skills to master what is becoming an increasingly challenging profession.

- properly resourcing and supporting school leaders and teachers by reducing red tape and streamlining what is a bureaucratic and intrusive accountability system. Surveys suggest that schools are often overwhelmed by state and federal government red-tape and bureaucratic demands that lead to unnecessary duplication and expensive compliance costs. Schools need to be given the space and time to focus on teaching and learning.
empowering principals to have greater control over managing their schools. In addition to quality teachers, a rigorous curriculum and evidence-based pedagogy, school leadership is critical if standards and educational outcomes are to improve. If principals are to be effective they must have greater autonomy so that decision making occurs, as far as practicable, closest to the classroom.

Tim Smith MP
Shadow Minister for Education