



**Flinders**  
UNIVERSITY

CEPSW Educational Leadership Industry Report #2

# IT'S TIME TO REFLECT

What is the cost of the South Australian Education Department's pursuit of becoming a "World Class" Education System by 2028?

Dr Andrew Bills & Nigel Howard

**It's Time to Reflect:**

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## Meet the Authors



Andrew Bills



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Andrew Bills and Nigel Howard have been working all of their careers pondering the question: *Who's in, Who's Out* and taking steps in schools and in policy terms to do something about it. They both share a background in special education and inclusive school innovation within public mainstream school settings, *struggling to affirm the right of all to access, participation and success in schooling*. This report seeks to explain and open these issues as they present across SA public education in current times.

## Our First CEPSW Industry Report: "It's Time to Act"



In our first Flinders University CEPSW Industry report, we made the case for a cross sectoral response to school disengagement and detachment in South Australia. We noted that young people begin the journey from disengagement to detachment early in their schooling careers. We looked at the early warning signs of absenteeism, truancy, suspension, and exclusion and their strong correlation with poverty, location, indigeneity, and disability. We looked at how young people disengaging from school said that they didn't fit in, and in many cases were made to feel they didn't fit in.

The responses of young people to their experiences of schooling are complex. We know that what is best for young people is to stay connected to learning and schooling through a school that is part of and belongs to their community. The school that they are enrolled in should provide the education and care that make all young people feel as though they belong to help them gain the knowledge, skills and capabilities that will allow them to successfully negotiate and thrive in their next life transition.

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## Introduction

This second Industry paper considers what Pasi Sahlberg (2012) has called the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) which has changed the nature of the educational landscape across Australia to the cost of young people and the community at large. The fundamental aspects of GERM are Competition, Standardisation, School Choice and Test-Based Accountability which run parallel to what has been described as a diminishing of the public purposes of schooling (Reid, 2019). To date, our politicians, educational bureaucrats and policy makers rarely question how GERM policy and practice is impacting our schools, our teachers and our students. Rather, they are turning the GERM screws tighter to better serve the needs of a systems obsession with numerical measurement. With the GERM in play, this report seeks to answer two fundamental SA Public Education questions:

## Two Key Questions

### > **How did we catch the GERM?**

*[considering the antecedents to the Education Department's pursuit of becoming a World Class Education System by 2028].*

**Discussed in Section 1.**

### > **What can the Education Department, Principals and teachers do differently to enable better schooling outcomes for all young people?**

**Discussed in Section 2.**

The report problematises these two questions through document analysis of the SA Education Department's public education policy agendas over a 30-year period, and through the lens of Knowledge Management theory, makes the case for a **World Class Equity and Inclusion agenda** that aligns with the goals of the **Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration** (2019) to enable ALL young people to thrive in their schooling.

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## How did we catch the GERM?

### Antecedents to the Education Department's embrace of becoming "World Class" by 2028

Like most OECD education systems, the South Australian Education Department was enticed by the New Public Management NPM efficiency and effectiveness mantra in the late 1990s, which has amplified in intensity since that time. Over the last 30 years, four significant policy change epochs impacted SA public education, namely, (1) the arrival of (NPM) in the 1990s, (2) the beginning of SA's version of local school management in 1999, (3) the introduction of the 'Partnerships' agenda in 2014, and finally, in 2018, (4) the pursuit of becoming a World Class Education System by 2028. All these policy junctures have significantly impacted the professional identities of Principals and teachers and their work in schools. To this end, we undertake an abridged historiographical approach explained by Gale (2001) as encompassing three key questions:

- (1) What were the 'public issues' and 'private troubles' within a particular policy domain during some previous period and how were they addressed?
- (2) What are they now? and
- (3) What is the nature of the change from the first to the second? (p. 385)

#### **Before New Public Management**

SA has a deep history and memory of active participation of teachers and school leaders in the development of policy at a school, regional and state level, going back to the "Freedom and Authority" memo by the then Director General of Education, Albie Jones. The memo granted School Principals:

... the widest liberty to vary courses, to alter the timetable, to decide the organisation of the school and government within the school, to experiment with teaching methods, assessment of student achievement and in extra-curricular activities. (Memorandum to Heads of Departmental Schools cited in Kaminsky, 1981, p.198)

At this time, a uniquely South Australian curriculum settlement emerged as a "prioritising of social justice; a focus on the individual student and his or her development; and a quest for a commonality of curriculum provision with an alternative to academic subjects as its core foundation". (Collins & Yates, 2009, p.127) However, the last three decades has seen a gradual stepping back from the "freedom and authority" of SA Principals that had been the hallmark of the South Australian public education system (Reid, 2011; Collins and Yates, 2009). Over this time the authority of Principals to shape their schools, inform their district priorities and be heard in central office has been eroded away by successive waves of neoliberal educational reform. We argue the last decade has seen the silencing of Principal autonomy (Thomson, 2010) to the central authority in the name of serving the system.

#### **1990s: New Public Management (NPM)**

The SA Education Department embraced the efficiency and effectiveness logics of New Public Management (NPM) in the 1990s, borrowing from the New Public Management agendas taking hold in many OECD education systems (Bills, 2020). This bureaucratic shift arose from the logics of capitalism, bringing private business institutional acumen for cost reduction into how education bureaucracies should best function and behave. According to Semmens (2014, p. 115),

Pusey (1991) marked the rise of the neoliberal policy logic in Commonwealth departments through the term of 'economic rationalism' and described this variously as giving primacy to economics over politics or society, employing a range of objectivist means by which to describe policy contexts and settings, and the use of cost-benefit analyses as the central means of determining what is appropriate policy... Moreover, this type of rationalism is extended to an 'economizing of education policy' (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.18).

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Welch (1998) indicated that all Australian education departments in the 1990s 'ramped up' an agenda of business and market principles of efficiency and quality control upon schools, and in so doing, began to reposition the principles of social justice and equality towards ones of economics and business management, the hallmarks of economic rationalism, a component of neoliberal governance in education systems (Connell, 2013). Welch (1998) argued that the efficiency rhetoric was made attractive to school leaders through offering a 'semblance' of greater school autonomy while delivering on a very effective means of Principal control.

... the procedures of competitive formula funding to disguise cuts in public expenditure. Individual institutions are left with the freedom to manage their own contraction. (Welch, 1998, p. 190)

The pursuit of greater efficiency and effectiveness under New Public Management worked to undermine the notion of public education as a fully humanistic endeavour because literally everything under its banner including the schooling lives of young people, teachers and parents became commodified, measured and reduced to its market value. In South Australia the freedom and autonomy granted to Principals was departmentally translated into greater freedom through a "global budget" as a trade-off for greater compliance to Departmental priorities of NAPLAN literacy results over social justice initiatives.

**1999: SA's version of Local School Management**

In 1999, the SA Education Department's policy commitment to 'social justice' in schooling was reshaped with the onset of South Australia's version of local school management called

'Partnerships 21' (P21). Following the introduction of P21, the words 'social justice' no longer configured in the bureaucracy policy discourse. Rogers (2016) argued the demise of the concept of social justice was evident in the dilution of one of the eight principles guiding the P21 scheme—namely, fairness—with fairness reframed as a reallocation of resources differentially to assist students "achieve the standards and benchmarks of the SACSA (South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability Framework) and to gain access to pathways that best assist their development and success". (Kilvert & O'Toole et al., 2001, p.4)

For South Australian Principals who were used to a high degree of autonomy, the sleight of hand was an intensification of their workloads into low-level tasks, devolved to the school with responsibility for policy leadership centralised. P21 signalled the emergence of a general trend in school public policy governance, devolving former key responsibilities from the bureaucracy to the individual, in this case the School Principal. For the bureaucracy, removing themselves from the spotlight of school resourcing and placing resource management responsibilities upon the shoulders of school leaders removed a potentially politically damaging bureaucratic burden. P21 effectively heightened management of risk to school leaders. This approach is noted by Pollitt (1990):

Change management initiatives on the basis of NPM often lead to de-centralization only in a few areas – usually those areas and tasks which are either operational, of secondary importance, or unpopular. (pp. 55–7)

During this time, Principals held onto the freedom to "shape their schools" in return for demonstrating that they

could meet the outcomes that the DfE prescribed. Schools had the ability to innovate within their region and tailor their organisation and curriculum to reflect their student cohort. Overall freedoms were eroded but innovative Principals, in concert with their Education Director could still find the gaps within which to experiment in the name of social justice.

**2014: 'Partnerships'**

Despite these erosions of freedom, Principals still exercised considerable policy influence through their regions. The regions enabled geographically bounded groups of schools to work together to share resources, professional learning and to act as a forum to inform and be informed by the regional Educational Director. Schools established their own working groups with other schools in their area to tackle issues such as vocational education, literacy, and professional learning on a regional basis. Schools and Principals related to their regional offices as their first point of contact within the Education Department. However, Central office saw the regions as a barrier between the central bureaucracy and the schools, and addressed this concern in new policy in 2014, when the Education Department implemented its Local 'Partnerships' Policy.

The Education Department website at this time claimed Partnerships represented a better way to build professional leadership capacity within dedicated schooling regions (Department for Education, 2014, p.1). Under Partnerships, school leaders (early years, primary and secondary) were told by their central bureaucracy which schools to work with, requiring twice a term Partnership meetings to engage in analysis of regional, school and pre-school data, predominantly

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**On the  
Department's  
"World Class"  
Universal Scale Measure**

There are many questions raised by the statistical methodology employed here – including the validity and reliability of the test themselves – which cast serious doubt about the plausibility of the 'Universal Scale'.

*Emeritus Professor  
Alan Reid, AM, 2020*

NAPLAN growth (or lack of), promoting the idea of self-managed school improvement processes; essentially a capacity-building logic. These meetings were chaired by the Educational Director of each Partnership acting as the line manager and gatekeeper of promotional opportunities for tenured Principals.

This model builds on the work within the department towards the development of a self-improving school system. (Education Department Website, 2018, accessed 1 November, 2018)

It didn't take long for Partnerships to fully embrace the pillars of the GERM and move from capacity building intent into a surveillance and control technology, rendering leaders more visible to the executive level of the bureaucracy and giving more jurisdictional power to EDs who, as the conduit between the Executive Directors situated in central office of the Department and the School Principals, became pivotal to the promotion prospects of all tenured School Principals (Bills, 2020; Reid, 2019). According to Robinson (2015), such shifts have resulted in an increased focus on managing, coupled with strengthening control through data and information systems, making the individual more accountable and responsible to the central bureaucracy from a distance.

**2018: The Education Department Hires McKinsey Co.**

In 2007, the McKinsey organisation made a global footprint in the international education market when it published its 'Going from Good to Great' educational system improvement manifesto titled: *How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better*. This research was headed up by one of Tony Blair's backroom boys (Guardian 14/06/2011) Michael Barber, alongside

Mona Mourshed, CEO of Generation who both worked for the McKinsey firm. They examined the common attributes of high-performing school systems to answer, 'why is it that some school systems consistently perform better and improve faster than others?' (Barber and Mourshed, 2007, p. 1). In attempting to answer this question, they studied 25 of the world's school systems, including ten of the top system performers in the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).

The report paid keen attention to PISA results, triennial testing of small country samples of year 10 students in their reading and literacy abilities in science and mathematics across the OECD. Their report also linked quantitative data insights (e.g., from PISA) with qualitative data garnered from interviews with high level stakeholders working in PISA. From this, the McKinsey researchers identified high performing and rapidly improving school systems and highlighted what they inferred as practice and policy commonalities. The McKinsey research conclusions were hardly enlightening but are important to reiterate all the same:

The experiences of these top school systems suggest that three things matter most: 1) getting the right people to become teachers, 2) developing them into effective instructors, and 3) ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every child. (Barber and Mourshed, 2007, p. 5)

Having declared that schooling was in crisis, McKinsey developed their own solution to the crisis with their school improvement consultancy 'gospel' of change (Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010) available at a price to all OECD education systems. Their solution was simple; education is too important to be left to educators responding

to local need and needed the hard cold efficiency and effectiveness of business acumen. This meant the bureaucratic "Centre" needed to take control and ensure everyone was on the same page working towards the same goals.

On the 18th September, 2017 the SA Public Education System purchased the McKinsey consultancy prescriptions for school improvement for over 1 million dollars (Government of South Australia, 2017, p. 1), to offer the SA education system a school improvement guide to go from 'Good to Great' in ten years. Under the Advertiser headline: 'SA Education Department wants to match the world's best', Tim Williams reported on August 31, 2018, that "McKinsey has a universal scale for comparing whole education systems...and that SA's public system fell within its "good range, albeit at the lower end of that range".

**Ambition for World Class Status**

The DfE Chief Executive, Mr Rick Perse, stated in "The Advertiser"; "Our ambition is to be a great system, a world class system within ten years". But what are the defining attributes of world class? A simple Google search shows a number of institutions across Australia and the world lay claim and in some cases ownership of the title "World Class". For example, McKinsey lays claim to World Class Teams, World Class Sales Operations, World Class Integration of Oil and Gas, World Class Consulting Services, World Class Patents, World Class Energy and a "World Class AI sailor" who helped New Zealand defend the Americas Cup. Overuse makes the term meaningless.

Ultimately, the answer to, "what is a world class education system?", is a value judgement that requires a democratic settlement of



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**Public Education  
in South Australia  
has caught the GERM**

The fundamental aspects of the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) are Competition, Standardisation, School Choice and Test-Based Accountability which run parallel to what has been described as the diminishing public purposes of schooling.

representative stakeholder voices. In Australia this settlement can be found in the 2019 “Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration” which declares its school equity and inclusion goals for all students in unambiguously Australian terms. The important point to consider here is that any public education system that purchases the McKinsey GERM reveals executive level bureaucratic leaders comfortable with narrowing the goals of the system by buying into the neo-liberalisation of education, described by Connell (2013) as seeing education increasingly as:

... an industry, and educational institutions have been forced to conduct themselves more and more like profit-seeking firms. Policy changes across the sector have been introduced by different governments, state and federal, and in different forms. But the policy changes all move in the same direction – increasing the grip of market logic on schools, universities and technical education. (Connell, 2013, p. 102)

The McKinsey purchase has invoked heightened accountability of public schools to regulatory performativity’s driven by the bureaucratic ‘centre’. School improvement is largely measured by NAPLAN growth and SACE completion metrics. World Class Departmental policy has enabled the bureaucratic ‘centre’ to exert greater policy control over schools by holding them accountable to narrow data performativity requirements.

**School Improvement Handbook**

In 2018, all school leaders were given a centrally determined school improvement handbook offering a step-by-step process to institute departmentally sanctioned school improvement approaches (Jenson, 2017, 2018). The handbook aligned with the school improvement logic driving

the international ‘Good to Great’ work of McKinsey Co., even though this work faced staunch academic critique (Reid, 2019, Raffe & Semple, 2011). For example, the research of Raffe and Semple indicated that the McKinsey ‘Good to Great’ research conclusions rested on a:

... flawed methodology which, among other things, relies on policy makers’ own top down accounts of their policies and fails to compare improving school systems with non improving ones. (2011, p. 1)

Despite this, the SA Education Department bureaucracy heralded the McKinsey initiative as the road map to becoming a World Class Education system within ten years (Williams, 2018). Following the McKinsey unofficial motto, “Everything can be measured, and what is measured can be managed” (Guardian, 2011), the McKinsey GERM causality thesis for school improvement became compelling to bureaucracies seeking more command and control over Principal work. With SA Education Directors positioned as the conduit between the Centre and schools, the Department soon recognised that when they increased their numbers by 50 percent in 2018, Central Office automatically unleashed greater supervisory power and knowledge control. With the Education Director then reporting back to the Centre about Principal compliance (or lack of), the messaging from the Centre to tenured School Principals was louder, clearer and more persuasive. If Principals wanted to win their next job, then compliance to the Centre was necessary. This managerial approach to school improvement (O’Mahoney & Sturdy, 2016) soon became the core agenda item of Partnership meetings, weakening Principal autonomy and responsiveness to their communities while strengthening Central Office control.

But “World Class” did not stop here. School improvement became measured centrally by a combination of McKinsey-determined numerical data sets used by the Department to sort and sift the performance of each school. This resulted in a data dashboard for each school which drove school improvement conversations.

**McKinsey:** How would you describe the success of the education-reform program since 2018? What were some pivotal moments, and how do you plan to sustain this going forward?

**Rick Persse:** I think a pivotal moment was having a “single source of truth” in a dashboard. Others were the abilities to plot each school and to have conversations about where they were on the maturity model. (McKinsey, 2021, p.5)

The ‘maturity model’ involves the deliberate scaling of schools from low to high. This means if you are a Principal of a school that is not improving at a sufficient rate, then you can expect to be reviewed by the DfE quality school improvement section more frequently or engaged in more Education Director line management supervisory conversations.

**Rick Persse:** I neglected to say each school was plotted on a maturity model; however, we never published the results, because we didn’t want a league table kind of conversation. (McKinsey, 2021, p.5)

Unfortunately, schools ranked as low on the maturity scale are often the most disadvantaged, poorly resourced and in some instances, geographically isolated, so that Principals who take up such challenging appointments are likely to face greater institutional scrutiny (Ball, 2018). Problematic of course when we think about the need for disadvantaged schools to have the best leaders because of their presenting complexities and

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challenges. This approach fails to incentivise extended leadership in school communities hit hard by disadvantage. This is because the ambition of McKinsey and its school improvement rationale is to,

... necessarily divert attention away from other purposes of schooling (e.g. equity and access; social cohesion and citizenship; personal development and capability) and onto measurable academic standards. (Auld & Morris, 2014, p. 136)

**The Numerics of World Class**

Under World Class, the quality of all public schools is identified by mapping school results in the National Assessment Program- Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) against a McKinsey designed Universal Scale drawn from PISA, TIMMS and PIRLS results (Reid, 2019). The intricate statistical wizardry that goes into this calculation has never been publicly released, so we must simply trust in the expertise and acumen of its creators. Measurement of collective schooling quality to a single number, a fantastical feat when you think about it, marginalises the social and democratic purposes of schooling, play-based learning for children and the contribution of the Liberal-Arts for developing the capabilities of creative and critical thinking for a richer democracy and a more productive and cohesive society (Zhao, 2017; Biesta, 2015). This abstract measurement approach also means schools most challenged by serving communities of disadvantage are poorly served by their bureaucracy because:

Such data-driven accountability systems, even when they attempt to factor in socio-economic background, have the side-effect of obscuring the real lives of students. Data-fication reduces the complex disadvantages experienced by diverse young people to a single monochrome, or in a parody of intersectionality, create spurious entities. (Wrigley, 2018, p. 270)

Taken together, these critical policy moves indicate the rise and rise of New Public Management quality control processes (Diefenbach, 2009) and the superiority of Central Office bureaucratic knowledge (even though at the time of writing only one Departmental Executive has an educational background) over the knowledge of leaders and teachers in schools. World Class system measurement now determines 'good' schools from 'bad', compliant leaders from non-compliant, and competent teachers from incompetent (Lingard, 2013). The current World Class agenda is illustrated in figure 1 opposite.

Pasi Sahlberg, the former Director General of Finland's education system and now the lead researcher for the Gonski Institute saw along with Egan (2018) how the Global Economic Reform Movement (GERM) paradigm has increasingly been adopted in concert with the neo-liberalising of policy by education systems across the world. As is the case with McKinsey, GERM has a strong association with measuring school system improvement using high stakes assessment systems such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).

Many countries around the world, including Australia, have been infected by GERM, as governments use the data provided by powerful international groups such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank as the centrepiece of evidence-based policy, and contract private multinational corporations and consultancy companies like Pearson and McKinsey to develop educational strategies. (Reid, 2019, p.xvi)

The "freedom and authority" that Principals had to innovate has closed. It was no longer enough for schools to pursue their own direction even when demonstrating improved learning outcomes - Freedom and Authority is now Command and Control.

**The Education Department are now Custodians of the "Single Source of Truth"**

I think a pivotal moment was having a "single source of truth" in a dashboard. Others were the abilities to plot each school and to have conversations about where they were on the maturity model.

*Rick Persse, CE SA Education Department in McKinsey, 2021, p.5*

**From “Freedom and Authority” to “Command and Control”**

The “freedom and authority” that Principals once had to innovate has closed. It is no longer enough for schools to pursue their own direction even when demonstrating improved learning outcomes – “Freedom and Authority” is now “Command and Control”.

Figure 1

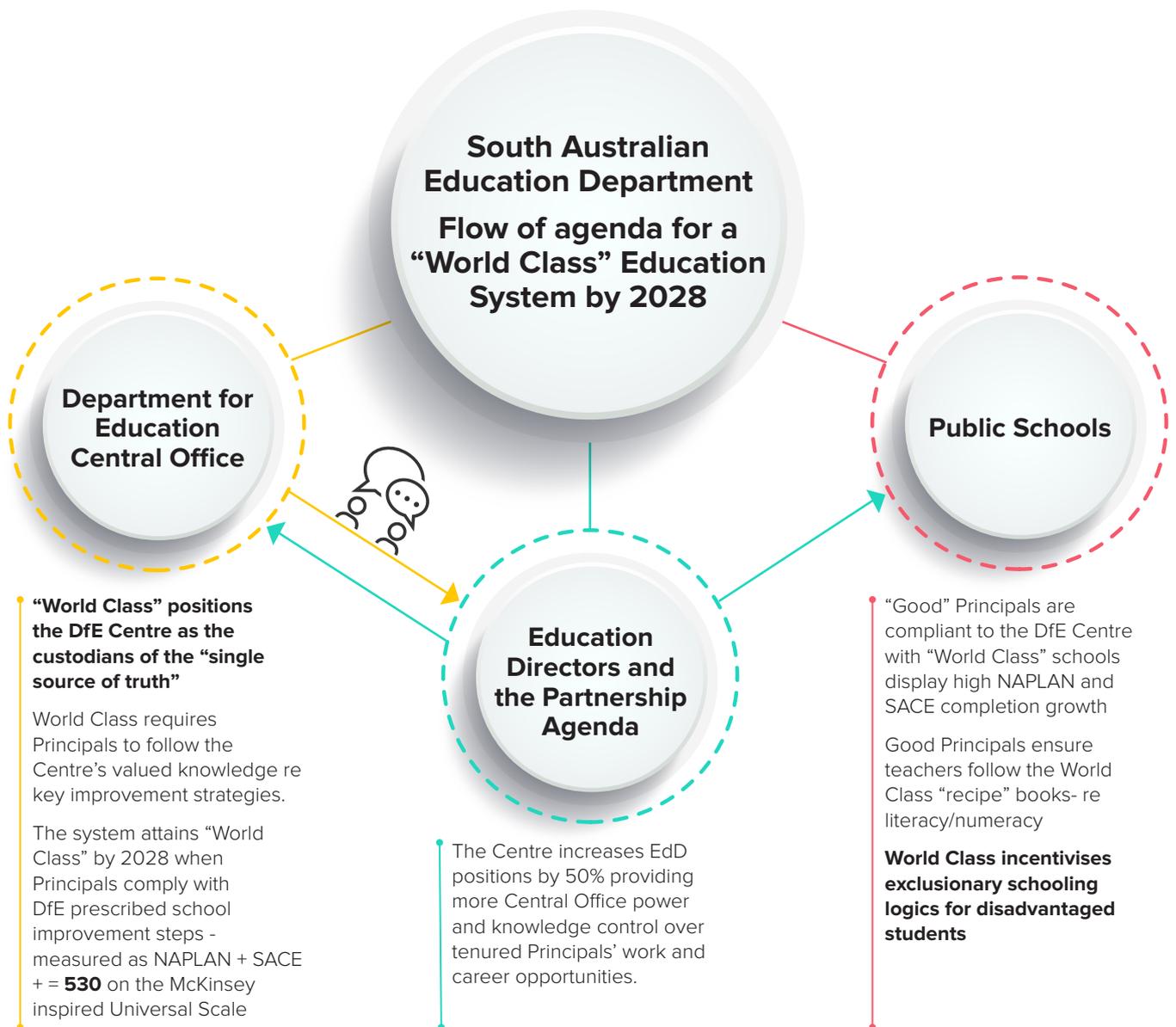


Figure 1: The Underpinning Logics and Knowledge Flow of the Department’s “World Class” Agenda

**World Class  
Measures Incentivise  
School Exclusion**

Without a change of approach, the germ of "World Class" will squeeze low NAPLAN and SACE performing students (predominantly disadvantaged students) out of the mainstream because its measurement priorities promote NAPLAN teaching to the test, student boredom and diluting the public-school principle of inclusion for all, because tenured Principals will fare better career wise if lower results and/or more troublesome students are placed elsewhere.



Photo: Suzanne Tucker/Shutterstock.com

## What can the Education Department, Principals and teachers do differently to enable better schooling outcomes for all young people?

As SA public schools come increasingly under the gaze of the Centre to conform to the image of the “good school”, compliance pressure works to deter Principals and teachers from innovation that is responsive to the local community and the needs of students (Bills & Howard 2022 In Press). As discussed in Section 1, schools that serve disadvantaged communities feel this the most. Placing their efforts into increasing narrow test scores takes them away from innovative learning approaches that can engage young people in actively participating in an education they find fun and interesting. Alongside this, increased workload of test-based and standardised accountability is resulting in higher rates of teacher burnout (Santoro, 2021; Dolan, 2020).

### **The Impact of World Class on Young People**

But it is the effect on young people that are in the process of disengaging and detaching from school that we are most concerned about. As we detailed in our last report, school disengagement and detachment is not a single event but a “journey” that affects different people differently. (Bills & Howard, 2021) If schools are not responsive to young people and their lifeworld’s, this will increase their feeling of not fitting in. Unfortunately, despite the release of the Education Minister’s commissioned 2020 Graham “Suspension, Exclusion and Expulsion” (SEE) report that detailed the inequities of current DfE suspension and exclusion arrangements, and their effect, to date, no concerted action has been undertaken to consult with students, parents or schools to address the issues except for a politically expedient promise of millions of dollars sometime in the near future. Without a change of approach, the germ of ‘World Class’ will squeeze low NAPLAN and SACE performing students (predominantly disadvantaged students) out of the mainstream because its measurement priorities promote NAPLAN teaching to the test, student boredom and diluting the public-school principle of inclusion. Holding this in place, will mean that delivering on the recommendations in the SEE report will be compromised.

### **A New “World Class” Policy Direction is Needed**

Our current research shows that new and emerging schools in the Catholic and Independent schooling sectors can use their “freedom and authority” to become leaders of change. [See box quotes throughout this section]. We also know that non-government schools by and large work in a “freedom and authority” paradigm. For public schools, the now vanquished Freedom and Authority Memo has meant the freedom of Principals to innovate in the interests of young people is now done in shackles.

Therefore, a new “World Class” policy direction is now all the more urgent given the gap between the educational outcomes of students from high- and low-SES backgrounds continues to increase (Bonnor & Shepherd, 2014). If we consider the Knowledge Management and Education Policy literature, we recognise how the current World Class agenda takes a top-down approach to knowledge sharing and policy creation. This approach fails to take account of the valuable knowledge

Figure 2

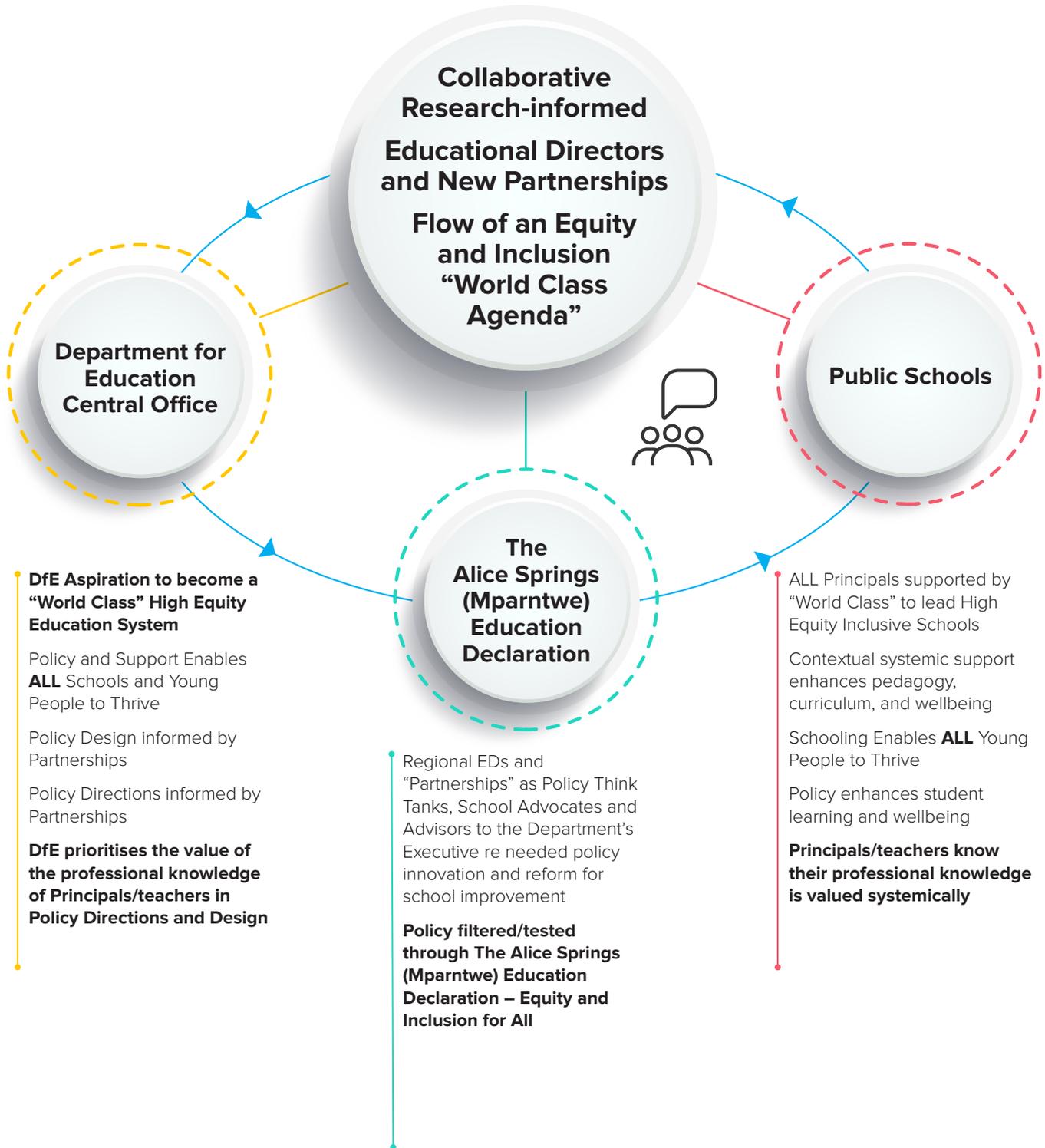


Figure 2: The Underpinning Logics and Knowledge Flow of an Equity-Based "World Class" Agenda

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that Principals and teachers have that can infuse the system with greater knowledge resources for use in determining policy needs, directions and design. With the valued knowledge of the Centre ruling supreme [essentially NPM process knowledge], and the Central Office layering of Executive staff largely without any lived experience as school educators, systemic knowledge creation opportunities for good policy and practice are difficult at best. Therefore, we propose a new World Class agenda that aligns to best practice Knowledge Management and Education Policy theory to ensure that knowledge creation, sharing and retention activities are maximised using an open, iterative and collaborative system of research and inquiry. Mindful of what Reid (2019, p. 278) says:

This model is not a bottom-up approach. Rather, it is constructed upon an iterative dynamic between the various layers of the system...central office will involve responding to the implications of what is emerging from inquiry and research in relation to these priorities- meeting the needs identified by schools for learning and professional development resources, providing arenas in which the new professional knowledge can be shared and debated, altering policies to reflect new insights.

Based on our current research in the Catholic Education and Independent schooling sectors with the Specialised Assistance Schools, we would add the condition of care to such a model, with all policy efforts filtered and tested through the school inclusion and equity aspirations of the **Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration**. We illustrate the logics of this approach in Figure 2 opposite

### **An Equity-Based World Class Agenda**

Having an aspiration for an Equity-Based World Class public education

system would herald the return of trust in the professional knowledge and practices of our Principals and teachers. It would take the **Mparntwe** Education Declaration seriously in both policy and practice and reap the benefits of a system that maximises the knowledge it has at its disposal to best address the challenges experienced by all schools, particularly those serving disadvantaged communities. Knowledge sharing would be fundamental to the existing Partnerships structure where Principals speak freely about their challenges and resourcing needs and engage in collective discussions about needed policy reform.

The role of the Education Director would be to represent the key learning and messages of the Partnership and take these messages to the Centre for policy consideration. It would also be to represent the key learning and policy intent of the Centre with a view to discussing whether these iterations meet the school 'pub' test. New policy would be tested by schools through research and inquiry into its appropriateness and then fed back to the Centre through the conduit of the Education Director. The approach would be organic and ever changing and may involve action research or appreciative inquiry methodologies enacted across the system. The system would be open to university and external stakeholder support/critique to help understand the dimensions of various challenges and how best to lift educational opportunity in partnership with schools and the components of the education system.

An Equity-Based "World Class" agenda would be futures-focussed, research informed and resource efficient because all valuable system resources would be utilised. It would also better address current education problems in relation to early school

leaving, absenteeism and rising youth mental health issues because local knowledge and inquiry would promote teaching and learning innovation. Building systemic professional trust in the professionalism of Principals and teachers would enhance their wellbeing and entice more talented teachers into leadership positions. It is important that a new approach to World Class reflects the knowledge, skills and experience of school leaders, teachers, parents, and the wider community and that the Centre exists to bring these different points of view together so we can discuss and deliberate on an Equity-based World Class System that has its roots in South Australian soil.

**Having "Freedom and Authority" enables authentic curriculum and authentic schooling practices to thrive**

And then I guess it's trying to have authentic curriculum, so that it relates to the students, rather than it's something that belongs in this world of school and has no connection to the world outside.

*Principal in the Flinders University CEPSW & CESA "REAL Hope" Project*

**It's Time to Reflect:**

What is the cost of the South Australian Education Department's pursuit of becoming a "World Class" Education System by 2028?



**Having "Freedom and Authority" enables learning to be holistic and meaningful**

Learning at NGUTU COLLEGE in Adelaide is meaningful and long-lasting and happens because:

- Education is holistic, bringing together the emotional, physical, social, cultural, spiritual, creative and cognitive selves in connected ways.
- Learners are trusted and empowered to have agency in their learning.
- Engaging and meaningful experiences are real-life, hands-on and playful.

Principal in the Flinders University CEPSW "Growing NGUTU" Project.

Photo: LeManna/Shutterstock.com

# Recommendations

- 1 Schools are given the freedom and authority to reflect the lives and aspirations of their community within an educational framework that seeks to advance the quality of life for young people in schools and the South Australian Community.
- 2 The wishes of parents' students, school and community leaders are reflected in developing a high-quality, culturally responsive framework for equity and excellence.
- 3 School Partnerships are resourced as research informed incubators for school reform and innovation with support from the Centre to enable successful reforms to be reflected across the system.
- 4 Any alternative sites and placements must be designed as an integral part of a high quality system and offer a meaningful education for all young people.
- 5 The Department recognises the need for local solutions to local problems in schools rather than standardised responses.
- 6 The Department places the Alice Springs **Mparntwe** Education Declaration, the Public Education Statement and the insights from Principals through the Partnerships front and centre as the filter and test of good policy and the catalyst for policy (re)design.
- 7 The Department ensures no policy hits schools that works against the promotion of equity and inclusion.
- 8 The Department returns trust in the professional expertise and experience of its leaders and teachers in how it listens, responds and works with schools.
- 9 The Department embraces best practice Knowledge Management and Education Policy theory through engineering an open, iterative and caring system of inquiry and research.
- 10 The Department dispenses with measuring only that which can be easily measured and seeks more holistic, accurate and socially just ways to represent school improvement and what constitutes a "good" school.

## Having "Freedom and Authority" enables schools to place students at the centre

But, the word responsiveness I think is very important, because a lot of what we've done, in our middle school, is responsive, so for example, setting up what we call our learning teams in Year 7 and 8 was a response to bringing students into a high school scenario without shocking them from a primary school.

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## Having "Freedom and Authority" enables schools to foster a pedagogy of care

So we had a student start here yesterday who's living independently, and he hasn't been at school for 18 months, and he's enrolled in the school but he hasn't been attending. And so, straight away, staff are like, okay, we need to know a little bit about his story, we need to make sure he has a really good first day, we need to make sure we touch base with him. So you don't even have to tell people around here. They know that this is what they have to do for that kid, on his first day.

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**Having "Freedom and Authority" enables schools to promote belongingness**

But it's more a school that makes young people feel like they belong to something, and it's not necessarily their understanding of school, like a structured school. It needs to be more a sense of a village. How do you put it, use the term family a bit more loosely, extended family I suppose . . .

*Principal in the Flinders University CEPSW & CESA "REAL Hope" Project*

# IT'S TIME TO REFLECT

About Flinders University College for Education, Psychology and Social Work

*Through our world-class teaching and research, we equip students with the skill, commitment and vision to protect vulnerable communities and advance human development.*

*Our educators deliver an environment of inclusion, cooperation and opportunity that offers our graduates a learning experience that will last a lifetime. We are a forward thinking, future focused place to research, study and work, supported by placement opportunities, innovative teaching and industry connected researchers. The College of Education, Psychology and Social Work is dedicated to cultivating bright minds and inspiring innovative, passionate and highly skilled citizens for future ready careers, and delivering connections for life.*



Acknowledgement of Country

Flinders University was established on the lands of the Kaurna nation, with the first University campus, Bedford Park, located on the ancestral body of Ngannu near Warriparinga. Warriparinga is a significant site in the complex and multi-layered Dreaming of the Kaurna ancestor, Tjilbruke. For the Kaurna nation, Tjilbruke was a keeper of the fire and a peace maker/law maker. Tjilbruke is part of the living culture and traditions of the Kaurna people. His spirit lives in the Land and Waters, in the Kaurna people and in the glossy ibis (known as Tjilbruke for the Kaurna). Through Tjilbruke, the Kaurna people continue their creative relationship with their Country, its spirituality and its stories.

Flinders University acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians, both past and present, of the various locations the University operates on, and recognises their continued relationship and responsibility to these Lands and waters.



**Flinders**  
UNIVERSITY

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