

Why it is time to target teaching to the needs of every Australian child ^[1]



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Dr Pete Goss, School Education Director, Grattan Institute

A huge spread of achievement levels in Australian classrooms is making it hard for teachers to implement best education practice and target their teaching to the needs of every individual student, according to a new Grattan Institute report.

Targeted teaching: how better use of data can improve student learning ^[2] builds on a range of studies to show that at any given year level there is a five to six year difference between the most advanced and the least advanced ten per cent of students.

We have known this for a long time. A 2006 study of 3000 Victorian and Tasmanian students shows that in Year Eight mathematics there may be as much as eight year levels difference between the top and bottom students.

Yet the spread of achievement makes it essential that schools and education systems target teaching to the individual needs of every child, says Grattan School Education Director, Pete Goss.

‘Despite heroic efforts by many teachers, our most advanced students are not adequately stretched while our least advanced are not properly supported,’ says Dr Goss.

?These gaps are showing up in PISA tests ? Australia lags behind the best international performers in teaching the most advanced and least advanced students.?

The report argues that the best teachers and schools focus single-mindedly on what each student knows now, target their teaching to what each student is ready to learn next, and track every student?s progress over time.

?The best schools in Australia are not necessarily those with the best ATAR or NAPLAN scores but those that enable every student to make the greatest progress in learning, regardless of where they start from,? says Dr Goss. ?Every teacher, principal and education expert knows this to be the case ? the challenge is to implement targeted teaching properly.?

Streaming students or holding back low performers is not the answer, says Dr Goss. Instead, ?school systems must give teachers the time, tools and training to collect the best evidence about what students need to learn next and use it as the basis of their teaching.?

The report recommends greater use of proven programs that help schools better target their teaching. One highly-regarded NSW program could be rolled out to the bottom 20 per cent of primary schools nationally at a cost of about \$300 million a year. This would improve both literacy and numeracy in the vital early years. ?The educational and social rewards will more than repay the cost,? says Dr Goss.

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More information

[Targeted teaching: how better use of data can improve student learning](#) ^[2] ? Grattan Institute

[Targeted teaching: How to get the best from our schoolchildren](#) ^[4] ? *The Australian*

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