



LITERACY AND NUMERACY STRATEGY 2017–2020

Message from the Minister

We know that literacy and numeracy skills are the foundation for success in learning and in life.

Any teacher or parent will tell you how wonderful it is to watch children develop confidence in these skills, and how heartbreaking it is when they fall behind.

That is why, when I became Minister for Education, my first priority was to address the literacy and numeracy needs of students who were performing below national standards. In 2012, this Government committed \$261 million to a *State Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan* to support students in Kindergarten to Year 2 whose literacy and numeracy development is at risk.

The past five years of this Action Plan have shown us that early intervention works. Action Plan schools are helping struggling students to improve their literacy and numeracy skills through instructional leadership, diagnostic assessment, differentiated teaching and targeted interventions. The Action Plan directs support to where it is most needed, and where it will have the greatest impact on improving student outcomes.

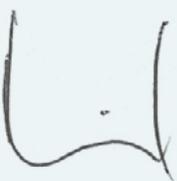
The Premier has set a challenging target: to increase the proportion of NSW students in the top two NAPLAN bands for reading and numeracy by 8 per cent by 2019. Evidence from our current Action Plan and the international literature tells us that we need to not only maintain our current effort, but extend it, if we want to improve the literacy and numeracy performance of all our students.

This new *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2017-2020* commits an additional \$340 million over the next four years to maintain our focus on early intervention. It also commits NSW schools to a relentless focus on explicit teaching and high expectations for all students across all sectors, by extending our literacy and numeracy focus up into secondary schools. Based on the best evidence available, our priorities over the next four years will be:

- A continued focus on intervention in the early years of schooling
- Clear guidance on explicit teaching and better, faster diagnostic assessments
- More support for literacy and numeracy in secondary schools
- Quality training for teacher education students in literacy and numeracy
- Rigorous evaluation to focus investment and effort on what works.

Teachers and schools can expect more support, guidance and professional learning in explicit teaching, assessment and points of intervention. Students can expect more clarity about their progress and areas needing improvement. And parents can expect clearer, more regular and more immediate information about their children's progress.

The *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2017-2020* requires action from all three school sectors, the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards, and the staff, students and parents in our schools. Their combined efforts will ensure our students have the essential literacy and numeracy skills they need because those literacy and numeracy skills are described clearly, taught explicitly, assessed meaningfully and reported regularly in all NSW schools over the next four years.



Adrian Piccoli MP
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

The five elements of the Strategy

A continued focus on intervention in the early years of schooling

We will:

- Maintain and increase our focus on early intervention.
- Invest \$340 million over the next four years, providing instructional leadership support to 673 schools to develop the literacy and numeracy skills of at-risk Kindergarten to Year 2 students.

Clear guidance on explicit teaching and better, faster diagnostic assessments

We will:

- Better support teachers with evidence-based literacy and numeracy learning progressions that map student literacy and numeracy development from Kindergarten to Year 10.
- Make quality online literacy and numeracy assessments, linked to the learning progressions, available to all NSW schools, to help teachers identify and target the support students need.
- Improve the Best Start assessment to give teachers an immediate and clear picture of the literacy and numeracy skills of students on entry to Kindergarten.

More support for literacy and numeracy in secondary schools

We will:

- Introduce a Best Start Year 7 assessment on entry to high school, to help teachers identify students needing additional assistance in literacy and numeracy and plan the support they need to succeed at secondary school.
- Strengthen the teaching of writing across all curriculum areas by providing additional resources and professional learning opportunities for secondary teachers.

Quality training for teacher education students in literacy and numeracy

We will:

- Ensure graduating primary and secondary teachers are better prepared to teach literacy and numeracy by strengthening initial teacher education programs across NSW.
- Provide quality support materials and professional learning for teaching and assessing literacy and numeracy.

Rigorous evaluation to focus investment and effort on what works

We will:

- Independently evaluate the impact of the early intervention program over the next four years.
- Evaluate specific literacy and numeracy programs commonly used in NSW schools to guide future investment.

For more information about the evidence paper that underpins the Strategy, 'How schools can improve literacy and numeracy performance and why it (still) matters', go to: www.cese.nsw.gov.au

A continued focus on intervention in the early years of schooling

What the evidence tells us

- Performance gaps related to disadvantage become apparent very early.
- Early intervention in early childhood education and the first few years of formal schooling can limit the impact of disadvantage, and reduce performance gaps.
- The skills students develop in the first three years of school enable them to take on progressively more demanding learning tasks, and to progress through school.
- Children who have not acquired sufficient reading skills by the end of Year 2 may struggle to successfully transition from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn'.
- The preliminary evaluation report on the (2012-2016) *State Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan* found that on most of the measures of Reading, Writing and Numeracy, at each year level and in each school sector, the percentage of students rated by their teachers as at or above the expected end of year standard increased in 2015. The final evaluation report is due in early 2017.
- Teaching experts working in the classroom with other teachers as instructional leaders are an effective strategy in schools wanting to improve the literacy and numeracy performance of their students.

What we have already done

- Provided \$261 million between 2012 and 2016 (funding equivalent to 900 full-time teaching positions) to target students in Kindergarten to Year 2 at risk of not meeting literacy and numeracy standards in 448 schools across NSW through the *State Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan*. That support focused on instructional leadership, diagnostic assessment, differentiated teaching and tiered interventions in each school.
- Delivered new syllabuses for students in Kindergarten to Year 6. These syllabuses are more explicit about the requirements of literacy and numeracy.
- Provided teachers with [Phonics: A guide for teachers](#), a classroom resource to support the development of phonological skills in primary school students, and [Grammar: A guide for Teachers K-6](#).
- Provided teachers with a series of [Kindergarten to Year 6 support documents](#) providing teaching guidance in the areas of number and algebra, measurement and geometry, and statistics and probability
- Developed guides for parents, including [Helping your child learn about grammar](#), [Helping your child learn to read](#), [Helping your child learn to write](#), and [Helping your child learn to do mathematics](#).

What we will do

- Provide \$340 million over the next four years to maintain and extend the focus on early intervention and instructional leadership in 673 schools across the state (533 government, 99 Catholic and 41 independent schools). This is fifty per cent more schools than were supported under the previous Action Plan.
- Identify students at risk of not meeting literacy and numeracy standards in Kindergarten to Year 2 in these 673 schools and, with the support of school-based instructional leadership, maintain a focus on diagnostic assessment, differentiated teaching and tiered interventions over the next four years.
- Enable other government schools to 'opt-in' to the early years model of instructional leadership support, including those schools wanting to use instructional leaders in Years 3-6.
- Identify quality professional learning opportunities for assessing and teaching literacy and numeracy across Kindergarten to Year 6, and develop additional teacher professional learning to fill any gaps.

When we will do it

2017 – 2020

673 schools across NSW provided with instructional leadership support to improve the literacy and numeracy of students in Kindergarten to Year 2 at risk of not meeting minimum standards.

Clear guidance on explicit teaching and better, faster diagnostic assessments

What the evidence tells us

- Teachers are most effective when they have accurate information about what their students know and are ready to learn next, and tailor their teaching accordingly.
- Students who experience explicit teaching practices perform better than students who do not.
- Explicit teaching is particularly effective in relation to literacy and numeracy.
- Learning progressions or continua support explicit teaching by enabling teachers to accurately determine students' current learning achievement and understand what needs to be learned next.
- Effective teachers use data and other evidence to constantly assess how well their students are progressing and tailor their teaching accordingly.
- Parental involvement in learning can have a large effect on children's academic performance.

What we have already done

- Provided schools with descriptions of the literacy and numeracy skills required by students, but in a variety of different forms. NSW literacy and numeracy continua are available to government schools and are used in a small number of non-government schools. Literacy and numeracy skill development is also described in the Australian Curriculum and in NSW syllabus documents.
- Provided teachers in government schools with a specialised software system to collect data on student achievement as identified on NSW literacy and numeracy continua.
- Developed the Best Start Kindergarten assessment that is used in all government schools to help teachers identify students' literacy and numeracy skills on entry to Kindergarten.
- Provided all NSW schools with a SMART data package so teachers can access diagnostic information about their students' NAPLAN results, as well as useful teaching resources that are linked to the curriculum.
- Implemented a 'Bump It Up' strategy in 137 NSW government schools to increase the number of students achieving in the top two NAPLAN performance bands.

What we will do

- Provide all teachers with new tools — literacy and numeracy learning progressions and online diagnostic assessments — that will assist them to more quickly and consistently identify and address individual student literacy and numeracy needs, and provide tailored support or interventions.
- Provide parents with clearer, more regular and more immediate information about their children’s progress
- Develop evidence-based literacy and numeracy learning progressions in partnership with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) that will describe the key elements of students’ literacy and numeracy development from Kindergarten to Year 10. These will replace the current NSW literacy and numeracy continua and will be available for teachers in all NSW schools.
- Make quality diagnostic, online and on-demand literacy and numeracy assessments, linked to the learning progressions, available to all NSW schools, to help teachers of students from Kindergarten to Year 10 identify and target the support students need. The just-in-time nature of these online assessments will increase teachers’ capacity to identify and target additional support if students are starting to struggle, and improve the level of reporting to parents on their child’s progress.
- Make professional learning available for teachers to support the use of the literacy and numeracy progressions, and the new online diagnostic assessments.
- Work with parents to develop resources that will support literacy and numeracy development at home.
- Ensure that teacher accreditation processes incorporate a range of options for the recognition of evidence and practice dedicated to literacy and numeracy teaching.

When we will do it

2017

Literacy and numeracy progressions and revised Best Start Kindergarten assessment trialled in the 673 Action Plan schools.

2018

Final literacy and numeracy progressions and revised Best Start Kindergarten assessment available to all NSW schools.

2017 – 2020

Online literacy and numeracy assessments made progressively available.

More support for literacy and numeracy in secondary schools

What the evidence tells us

- Early interventions should not be restricted to the early years - they must be followed up to be effective.
- Preliminary 2016 NAPLAN data shows that about 24% of Year 9 students in NSW are at or below the national minimum standard for Reading and about 20% are at or below the minimum standard for Numeracy.
- NSW NAPLAN data shows a decline in the mean scores for Writing across all year levels over the last five years.
- The number of students taking extension courses in English and mathematics has fallen over the past 10 years.
- Teaching writing is most effective when writing is integrated rather than isolated from the rest of the curriculum, and is used as a tool to promote content learning.

What we have already done

- Introduced a range of Higher School Certificate (HSC) reforms, including a minimum standard for literacy and numeracy for the award of the HSC. There will be multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate the standard, commencing with Year 9 NAPLAN results, and including online literacy and numeracy tests in Years 10 to 12. This will ensure that all students awarded the HSC have met basic benchmarks.
- Provided students who plan to leave school before completing their HSC with the option of taking online literacy and numeracy tests, to help them transition to further study or work.
- Provided all NSW schools with a SMART data package so teachers can access diagnostic information about their students' NAPLAN results, as well as useful teaching resources that are linked to the curriculum.
- Delivered new syllabuses in Years 7 to 10 that are more explicit about the requirements of literacy and numeracy.

What we will do

- Develop an online Best Start Year 7 literacy and numeracy assessment for use by English and mathematics teachers within the first five weeks of Year 7. This assessment will ensure teachers have access to accurate, diagnostic information about each student's literacy and numeracy upon entry to secondary school. It will inform the support provided to Year 7 students, allowing teachers to immediately put in place strategies to support students at risk of falling behind, and to more effectively target teaching for all students.
- Provide secondary teachers of English and mathematics with professional learning opportunities to support implementation of Best Start Year 7.
- Develop curriculum support materials to target any gaps in the learning of Year 9 and 10 students, to improve pathways for students wishing to study mathematics in Years 11 and 12.
- Introduce a common scale for mathematics courses, giving students in advanced courses better recognition of their efforts and encouraging them to study courses suited to their abilities.
- Develop new mathematics and English syllabuses for Years 11 and 12 with a stronger emphasis on literacy and numeracy development. These syllabuses will be more closely aligned with Level 3 of the Australian Core Skills Framework, a nationally agreed standard of the level of literacy and numeracy needed to succeed in everyday life and work.
- Develop a framework for teaching and assessing writing in NSW from Kindergarten to Year 10 linked to the new literacy learning progression. The framework will be informed by a study and survey of NSW teachers' knowledge and understanding of writing, and how they teach and assess writing.
- Provide teachers with professional learning opportunities for teaching and assessing writing in secondary schools across Key Learning Areas based on the new framework.

When we will do it

End 2016

New support materials targeting gaps in the mathematics learning of Years 9 and 10 students made available.

2017

First opportunity for Year 9 students to demonstrate that they have met minimum literacy and numeracy standards for the award of the HSC.

2018

Best Start Year 7 literacy and numeracy assessment trialled.

2019

Best Start Year 7 literacy and numeracy assessment made available.

2019 – 2020

New mathematics and English syllabuses for Years 11 and 12 implemented.

2020

Year 12 students must be able to demonstrate that they have met minimum literacy and numeracy standards prior to being awarded the HSC.

Quality training for teacher education students in literacy and numeracy

What the evidence tells us

- There is considerable variation across initial teacher education (ITE) providers in the amount of course time spent on literacy components and in the emphasis on reading assessment and remediation strategies.
- As research recommends an explicit and systematic approach to teaching reading, including the use of phonics, there is a need to consistently include these approaches in ITE programs.
- It is difficult to determine the extent to which teacher education students are given the opportunity to adequately experience the delivery of mathematics lessons during their professional experience placements.
- There is a considerable challenge implementing a consistent approach to primary mathematics teaching for beginning teachers.
- Teacher education students may not be confident in their mathematical competence or knowledge.

What we have already done

- Strengthened academic standards for entry into an undergraduate education course based on the achievement of three Band 5 HSC results, including one in English.
- Required teacher education students to pass a literacy and numeracy test prior to their final year professional experience placement, ensuring that graduate teachers have literacy and numeracy skills placing them in at least the top 30 per cent of the population.
- Introduced specialisations in mathematics and in science and technology within primary ITE, to strengthen discipline knowledge and pedagogy in these learning areas.
- Improved teacher professional experience through school and university partnership agreements, underpinned by a quality framework with set conditions and assessment standards.
- Reviewed the literacy and numeracy components of ITE programs in NSW, identifying a number of areas for improvement. Findings have been published by the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards in two reports: [Literacy learning in the early years](#), and [Learning to teach primary mathematics](#). The Board will work with ITE providers to implement these findings, through the actions listed below.

What we will do

- Develop and make available sample literacy assessment tasks and annotated and graded work samples for ITE providers and teacher education students.
- Provide support materials and training to assist ITE accreditation panels in their assessment of literacy education in ITE programs.
- Develop and make available comprehensive support materials for teacher education students, including a description of essential literacy teaching skills and an explicit guide to teaching phonics to students in Kindergarten in Year 2.
- Develop and make available best practice materials focusing on teaching mathematics for teacher education students during the professional experience.
- Develop and make available specific support materials and identify targeted professional learning with a focus on mathematics in Kindergarten to Year 6, for supervisors and mentors of teacher education students, and for beginning teachers.
- Provide teacher education students with a guide to existing resources and exemplars illustrating ways numeracy can be addressed across the Kindergarten to Year 6 curriculum.

When we will do it

During 2017

Support materials and professional learning on the teaching of literacy and numeracy made available.

Rigorous evaluation to focus investment and effort on what works

What the evidence tells us

- Investment in education must be guided by focusing on doing more of what works.
- Rigorous evaluations require suitable and reliable outcome measures.
- Widely-used interventions are not always the most effective. A 2015 evaluation of the impact of Reading Recovery on students' outcomes found that while the program had a modest short-term effect on the reading skills of the lowest performing students, it was not an effective intervention for students with more literacy skills, and effects had washed out for all students by the time they reached Year 3.

What we have already done

- Commissioned an independent, longitudinal evaluation of the current Kindergarten to Year 2 *State Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan*. Early indications are that the Action Plan is having a positive impact on students' learning outcomes. The final report is due in February 2017.
- Completed an evaluation of Reading Recovery, which has resulted in the Department reconsidering resource allocation for early literacy programs.
- Commenced an evaluation of L3, a Kindergarten to Year 2 literacy intervention that aims to reduce the risk of students not achieving expected literacy levels.
- Commissioned a randomised control trial of MiniLit, a program developed by Macquarie University to support a phonics-based approach to reading instruction.
- Provided NSW government schools with access to a new, value-added measure of the contribution they are making to student learning. This measure adjusts for factors that are outside the control of schools (such as students' socio-economic status).

What we will do

- Commission an independent evaluation of the next four years of the Kindergarten to Year 2 early intervention strategy in order to monitor implementation and assess impact.
- Continue to evaluate specific literacy and numeracy programs used commonly in NSW schools. These evaluations will help schools to make more informed decisions about the programs that will be most effective for their students, and ensure that, as a state, resources are allocated where they have the greatest impact.
- As a result of the evaluation of Reading Recovery, in 2017, government schools that have previously used their allocations for Reading Recovery may continue to do so, or they may choose to allocate that funding to another literacy intervention.
- Use the new online, diagnostic literacy and numeracy assessments to not only support the day-to-day work of teachers, but as a more regular and reliable source of information about student learning to inform evaluations.

When we will do it

2017 – 2020
Independent evaluation of the four-year Kindergarten to Year 2 early intervention strategy.
2017
Evaluation of L3 completed.
2017
Evaluation of MiniLit completed.