

Head of Department – Curriculum

POSITION PAPER

October 2020



Supporting State School Leaders Since 1966
Queensland Association of State School Principals

Head of Department – Curriculum positions in primary schools:

- Lead implementation of the dynamic Australian Curriculum and the assessment and reporting framework in the wide range of primary school contexts in all parts of Queensland.
- Implement personalised, evidence-based, professional development for teachers.
- Enhance teachers' skills by modelling lessons and sharing best practice in pedagogy.
- Observe teachers in class, and then provide them with personalised, developmental feedback.
- Work with teachers in year level groups to facilitate collaborative planning, as well as refine assessment pieces and assessment standards, supporting the diverse learning needs of students.

The role is flexible enough to respond to local contexts and provides a primary sector leadership pathway to allow excellent teachers to share their expertise.

Heads of Department – Curriculum are directed by the Principal, with a focus on developing less experienced teachers and continually building and expanding the skills of excellent teachers, as well as sharing best practice.

Rationale

Recent research findings have proven the consensus within schools that the key to improved student outcomes is the quality of the teacher. A 2019 studyⁱ found that teachers impact student achievement more than any other aspect of schooling. The Grattan Instituteⁱⁱ references a study that found the best teachers were able to move their students forward one-and-a-half years in just one year, while the least effective teachers were only able to move their students forward half-a-year in the same time.

It has been shown that, other than the child's background and circumstances, the efficacy of teachers and their teaching is the largest determinant factor in the educational success of a child.ⁱⁱⁱ The most effective way to increase student achievement is to **increase the effectiveness of classroom teaching practices**.

Researchⁱⁱⁱ around the world also highlights that teacher quality is strongly tied to structures in schools which **explicitly support** the work of teachers to improve student learning outcomes. It is proven that teachers become better teachers through a continuous process of directed, focused and research-based ongoing learning and development.

QASSP believes Queensland state primary school children would be better prepared for the later years of schooling if their teachers were supported to grow, refine and expand their skills by experienced and able Heads of Department – Curriculum.

Universal access to Heads of Department – Curriculum – a role focused on improving teacher quality – would significantly enhance the capability of state primary schools to deliver quality teaching and learning. Queensland students would receive an education equal to, or even better than the world's best education systems. This proactive step would also shift primary school resourcing closer to that of other sectors and systems, where universal access to curriculum support positions (Heads of Department or HODs) has been in place for many decades.

Primary school teachers are currently expected to teach and understand six of the eight key learning areas, unlike their secondary school colleagues who are typically responsible for two key learning areas, with a

subject specialist HOD to support them. We believe Heads of Department – Curriculum (HOD-C) allocations in primary schools should be based on the secondary school HOD model, which allows for one HOD for every 100 students or part thereof. The HODs in secondary schools have a 0.5 teaching load. This resource is needed now in our primary schools.

Heads of Department – Curriculum in primary schools assist teachers to grow their skills to expertly deliver all the mandatory Key Learning Areas and so develop the whole child, thus meeting the needs of individual students within their own classroom contexts – an inclusion-focused model.

Our best teachers are provided with the leadership opportunity to build on their excellent pedagogy and share their skills with other teachers for the ultimate benefit of all students.

QASSP believes that funding should be placed where it is most effective; in ongoing, focused, personalised, professional learning within the school. This will be effective while our best teachers remain teaching and while they continue to have a significant role influencing their colleagues. This is an investment to assist teachers to achieve excellence.

Universal access to Heads of Department – Curriculum positions:

- Affords our best teachers leadership opportunities and increased remuneration.
- Provides time to lead teachers at all stages of professional growth.
- Creates a climate to build a *system that learns*, creating professional learning communities that ensure quality teaching occurs in all classrooms – a *world-class system*.

The Grattan Institute states that high performing school systems: develop their teachers to be effective; put in place systems to ensure that all children are able to benefit from good teaching practices; recognise, develop and reward effective teachers and teaching. The model suggested would enhance teacher quality in a way that is based on international best practice, is self-sustaining in Queensland schools and beneficial to current and future generations of Queensland students. This would bring teaching and learning support resources for Queensland primary schools into alignment with other sector and systems.

Applicability

QASSP believe Heads of Department - Curriculum allocations in primary schools should be based on the same resourcing that is provided to our students' older siblings, which allows one HOD for every 100 students or part thereof. The HODs in this sector have a 0.5 teaching load. This resource is needed now in our primary schools. Gradual implementation is attainable, as additional state and federal funding flows to education in coming years as part of the Quality Schools package and state co-contributions, but significant strides are needed now.

QASSP would also advocate that this model in primary schools allow flexibility to suit the local context. For example, a school of 530 students may choose to have two full-time non-teaching HOD-Cs and one with a 0.5 teaching load or five HOD-Cs with 0.5 teaching load and responsibilities for specific key learning areas. Every primary school in our State requires access to this important resource, including small schools which would benefit from a fractional allocation for the HOD-C position, commensurate with school size.

'Effective classroom teaching is critical to the future of young Australians. Research shows that teachers and school leaders have the greatest influence on student engagement and achievement in schools.' DET (Teaching and School Leadership) 2020 [Link](#)

ⁱ Teachers Matter – Understanding Teachers' Impact on Student Achievement – 2019 [Link](#)

ⁱⁱ and ⁱⁱⁱ What Teachers Want – Grattan Institute – 2010 [Link](#)

^{iv} Making Time for Great Teaching – Grattan Institute – 2014 [Link](#)

^v John Hattie 2009