



# Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance



**The Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance calls for urgent action to address Tasmania’s deteriorating literacy skills – reading, spelling, and writing.**

Wednesday 8 September is International Literacy Day. It’s a day to reflect on the opportunities that being literate provides us in everyday life. But it is also a day to acknowledge that not everyone has the benefit of being literate, and as a result their life chances are considerably compromised compared with those who *are* literate.

Underpinning being literate are the abilities to read, spell and write.

The Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance calls for the Tasmanian Government to:

- 1) urgently prioritise addressing Tasmanian students’ deteriorating literacy skills – reading, spelling and writing;
- 2) ensure that the recently announced Literacy Advisory Panel consults with leading, Australian and international experts in the evidence-base of reading and literacy instruction to inform their final report to the Premier in June 2022;
- 3) expand the Child and Well-being Strategy to more comprehensively acknowledge, and action, the mutually dependent relationship between literacy, education and well-being; and
- 4) mandate the use of the Year 1 Phonics Check.

## **Urgently prioritise addressing Tasmanian students’ deteriorating literacy skills**

NAPLAN results released last month reveal an alarming trend for the literacy and numeracy skills of Tasmanian students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

Of the 20 measures of reading, spelling, punctuation and grammar, writing and numeracy, 14 recorded long-term decline since 2008. Only 6 recorded marginal improvements over that time.

In 2021, 30% of Year 9 students could not read at the level expected to engage in learning in the wider curriculum. In 2015, when these students were in grade 3, only 16.5% did not meet the expected standard. For grade 7s, nearly 25%, could not read at the level expected to engage in learning. In 2017, when these students were in grade 3, only 14.3% did not meet that standard.

In March 2021, the Tasmanian Government announced “an ambitious new target that by Year 7 all students will meet an expected reading standard that is above the national minimum, ...by no later than 2030”.

Much work needs to be done to ensure this ambitious, but achievable, target is met by 2030.

Since these announcements in March there is a new Minister for Education yet little visible progress towards implementing a plan to achieve the target.

Lisa Denny, Workforce Demographer and Member of the Alliance says the deterioration of Tasmanian children’s reading ability requires urgent attention. It has long term ramifications for Tasmanians, our economy and our society.

**Ensure that the recently announced Literacy Advisory Panel consults with leading Australian and international experts in the evidence-base of reading and literacy instruction to inform its final report to the Premier in June 2022.**

In its [Road Map to a Literate Tasmania](#), presented to the Tasmanian Government in February 2021, the 100% Literacy Alliance called for an independent, expert advisory panel or Ministerial Taskforce (including whole-of-government, community wide stakeholders and leading experts from Tasmania and other jurisdictions), to undertake a review of current practices and resources, develop an implementation plan and short- and medium-term measurable targets, aligned with the long-term goal for #100PercentLiteracy in Tasmania.

While the Alliance commends the Government's establishment of a Panel to develop a community-wide framework to achieve a Literate Tasmania, it is concerned that the Panel as announced is not independent from Government. Of the eight members of the recently announced Literacy Advisory Panel, five are employees of the Department of Education and one is a contracted consultant to the Department of Education.

The reality is, the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, and Co-Chair of the Literacy Advisory Panel could convene a meeting of five of the panel members at any time without the need for a formal Literacy Advisory Panel.

The Alliance calls on the Government to ensure that the Panel engages and consults with the independent expertise in the scientific evidence-base of reading and literacy instruction needed to undertake the review of current literacy programs in the education system, and the wider supports across the community, as set out in its [Terms of Reference](#). This review should extend to the practices of initial teacher education and the teaching of reading, spelling and writing.

It is critical that the report provided to the Premier in June 2022 by the Panel recommending policies and practices to improve literacy outcomes in Tasmania is underpinned by the evidence-base. If the Panel does not recommend changing what we do, how can we expect to change what we achieve?

**Expand the Child and Well-being Strategy to more comprehensively acknowledge, and action, the mutually dependent relationship between literacy, education and well-being**

While the Alliance wholly supports the Child and Youth Well-being Strategy and the investment in young people, of concern is that the Well-being Strategy appears to assume that well-being underpins educational outcomes. The relationship is not uni-directional, the relationship between education and well-being are mutually dependent. Educational engagement and experience and outcomes impact well-being. Yet the well-being strategy did little to address the learning theme within its actions. See attached Alliance submission to the Child and Youth Well-being Strategy explaining the direct relationship.

The Strategy, associated actions and measures are vague in relation to education and well-being. While, the Strategy acknowledges there is a need to "Provide additional support for students when and where they need it" and "Have their individual learning needs addressed to allow them to realise their learning potential", there are no specific actions nor measures of progress.

Amelia Jones, Alliance member and Chair of Square Pegs Dyslexia Association, said the missed opportunity to address the massive gap in existing support programs for children with dyslexia and other specific learning disabilities was incredibly disappointing. Achieving equal access to education and opportunity for these children is vital to meeting the Government's literacy target.

## **Mandate the Year 1 Phonics Check**

The Tasmanian Government currently provides access to the Year 1 Phonics Check to all schools after 35 schools piloted the check in 2020.

The Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance calls for the Year 1 Phonics Check to be mandated and professional learning provided to all classroom teachers to support administration of the 5-minute check, evidence-based reading instruction, and targeted intervention strategies when needed.

Rosie Martin, Alliance member, speech and language pathologist and founder of Connect42, says, “Phonics is essential to learning to read and the Year 1 Phonics Check provides a vital early indication of whether a student is progressing in phonics and the underpinning skills of literacy. The Check is easy to deliver, enjoyable for students, and provides an excellent snapshot of phonics knowledge. Data-driven school teams can immediately use this information to tailor intervention and instruction to their students’ individual and collective learning needs.”

In 2018, the South Australian Government mandated the Year 1 Phonics Check and provided extensive professional learning support to teachers to support its implementation. Over 3 years to 2020, a 20 percentage point improvement in students’ reading was evident, increasing from 43% of South Australian students meeting the expected level in 2018 to 63% in 2020. See [here](#).

Being unable to read at the standard expected in the respective grade level impacts all other NAPLAN literacy domains; spelling, writing, punctuation and grammar as well as the ability to engage successfully in the wider school curriculum. It also detrimentally impacts well-being.

These skills are the cornerstones and the foundations of an individual’s future life chances. However, they are not easily acquired, they are learned skills which need to be explicitly taught.

If a young person does not have these foundational skills, they will not engage in learning and are less likely to complete school successfully, pursue further education or training and secure meaningful work.

It’s time for action. It’s urgent.

8 September 2021

## Background

In August 2020, the Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance formed to be a collective voice to advocate for improved literacy outcomes for Tasmanians through informed, evidence-based practices and policy development. The Alliance was borne out of the Communicating: the Heart of Literacy symposium hosted by Connect 42 in November 2018.

We believe the right to be able to read, spell and write is urgent and requires an urgent response from the Tasmanian Government.

In February 2021, the Alliance presented a [Road Map to a Literate Tasmania](#) to the Tasmanian Government.

This Road Map called for three immediate actions and provided a long-term plan to achieve a community-wide Literate Tasmania by 2031:

- 1) Develop a strategic, whole-of-government, community-wide framework to achieve a Literate Tasmania, at scale and with a sense of urgency. This strategy should be informed by an independent, expert advisory panel or Ministerial Taskforce (including whole-of-government, community wide stakeholders and leading experts from Tasmania and other jurisdictions), and include a review of current practices and resources, an implementation plan and short- and medium-term measurable targets, aligned with the long-term goal for #100PercentLiteracy in Tasmania.
- 2) Adopt and implement as an immediate priority the recommendations of the Primary Reading Pledge and invest in the resources and capacity building required to achieve the goal of close to zero Tasmanians starting grade 7 at or below the national minimum standard (NMS) for reading by 2031.
- 3) Proactively support literacy improvement throughout the wider community, including in the early years (pre-school), secondary schooling, adult education, the justice system, and among other vulnerable Tasmanians.

In March 2021, the Tasmanian Government announced “an ambitious new target that by Year 7 all students will meet an expected reading standard that is above the national minimum, and by no later than 2030”. See Media Release [here](#).

At the time, Education Minister, Jeremy Rockliff, acknowledged that meeting this target would require a concerted and sustained effort and that critical to the success will be ensuring we have the systems and processes to help identify as early as possible, those learners who are not meeting the expected standards, so that intense support can be provided where needed.

As such, he also announced that the Government would “establish an expert advisory panel to oversee the development of a community-wide framework to achieve a Literate Tasmania”.

Not only does poor literacy affect educational outcomes at an individual level, but it has widespread implications for our whole community and economy. Poor literacy – communication through reading, spelling and writing – impacts the type of jobs people can get and the income they can achieve, the types of industries we have, and the type of investment we attract to our state.

Much work needs to be done to ensure the ambitious, but achievable, target is met by 2030.

Since these announcements in March there is a new Minister for Education yet little visible progress towards implementing a plan to achieve the target.