



Tasmanian 100% Literacy Alliance



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Today is International Literacy Day. It's a day to reflect on opportunities that being literate provides us in everyday life. But it is also a day to acknowledge that not everyone benefits from being literate, and, as result their life chances are considerably compromised compared with those who are literate.

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

In February 2021, the 100% Literacy 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, 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”.

At the time, Minister 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”.

NAPLAN data for 2021 sets the benchmark from which to work for the Tasmanian Government to achieve their target that all Grade seven students start the 2030 school year above the expected standard of reading.

In 2021, nearly 1 in 4 grade seven students (23.3%), started grade 7 at or below that standard. This is the benchmark from which the Government has the next 9 years to achieve its target.

The inability 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.

Much work needs to be done to ensure the ambitious, yet achievable, target is met by 2030. It must be achieved if Tasmania is to close the gap between us and the other states in all the areas where education affects the course of people's lives, particularly income and job security, and health.

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

It is important 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.

The NAPLAN data released last month shows an alarming trend for Tasmanian educational outcomes over time. The proportion of Tasmanian students starting year 7 above the expected standard for reading has been declining since 2008. Significantly, the NAPLAN data also shows that of the 20 standards for the 4 year groups, 14 have recorded long term decline. Only 6 have recorded improvement. This has long term impacts for our economy and society. It impacts school completion rates and educational attainment rates, the pursuit of further education and training and obtaining meaningful work. Most importantly though, it impacts an individual's life chances.

It's time for action. It's urgent.

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