



Response to the ACT Government's *Inquiry into literacy and numeracy in ACT public schools*

SUBMITTED BY THE TEACHERS AND TEACHING RESEARCH CENTRE
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FEBRUARY 2024

Inquiry into literacy and numeracy in ACT public schools

The Teachers and Teaching Research Centre (TTRC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the ACT Government's *Inquiry into literacy and numeracy in ACT public schools*.

Established in 2013, the TTRC is led by Laureate Professor Jenny Gore AM and sits within the School of Education at the University of Newcastle. The TTRC is an Australian leader in high quality, high impact educational research into initial teacher education, quality teaching, teacher development, school change, leadership, student aspirations, equity, and STEM education.

Our submission responds to key questions posed in the *Literacy and Numeracy Education Expert Panel Consultation Paper* where our large and unique evidence base can inform policy decisions. Additional information can be found in the supporting documentation provided with this submission.

We make six key recommendations:

1. Provide opportunities for all ACT teachers to participate in QTR, through funding for program costs and teacher time, policy support, and Directorate communications.
2. Fund rigorous research into the effectiveness of current teaching practice and the impact of the ACT Government's education reform initiatives.
3. Promote the free, online, evidence-based *Aspirations* professional development course for teachers.
4. Provide opportunities for all parts of the teaching workforce, including casual teachers, learning support officers, returning teachers, and tutors, to participate in QT professional development.
5. Leverage the federally funded *Strengthening Induction through Quality Teaching Rounds* project through research approval and Directorate communications to schools.
6. Commission the development of a middle leader professional development program.

We welcome an opportunity to meet with the esteemed panel to elaborate further on our significant research and recommendations for the teaching of literacy and numeracy in ACT public schools.

Responses to consultation questions

Chapter 2: The teaching of literacy and numeracy in ACT public schools

- 1. What supports are required to ensure the literacy and numeracy outcomes within the Australian Curriculum are met? Are there examples of system-wide or school-based supports that have been found to be particularly effective?**

Central to this submission is our work on Quality Teaching Rounds (QTR) professional development. QTR (in conjunction with the QT Model – a pedagogical framework for understanding high quality teaching practice) is a powerful example of a school-based and system-wide support that can produce rapid and statistically significant improvements in literacy and numeracy outcomes, based on the best and most recent evidence available.

QTR brings together teachers, at any stage of their careers and from any grade or subject, to learn from each other and improve their pedagogy. QTR was comprehensively examined through multiple randomised controlled trials (the gold standard for education research) conducted as part of the *Building Capacity for Quality Teaching in Australian Schools, 2018–2023* project. This five-year \$17.2M project was funded by the Paul Ramsay Foundation, with an additional \$18M cash and/or in-kind support from the NSW Department of Education, Australian Research Council, and the University of Newcastle. The project explored what QTR could do for schooling in Australia, with a specific focus on improving teaching quality and, through this mechanism, improving student outcomes, including greater equity.

Three randomised controlled trials conducted during this project produced robust evidence of positive effects on student achievement using ACER’s progressive achievement tests (PATs).¹ The magnitude of additional growth was two to three months compared with the relevant control group, between Terms 1 and 4 of the school year, and the effects were slightly greater in low-ICSEA schools. Across the RCTs, positive effects on student achievement were found in:

- two subjects (maths and reading)
- two stages (Years 3–4 and Years 5–6)
- two states (NSW and Queensland)
- two modes (face-to-face and fully online PD), and
- an independent trial conducted by the University of Queensland.^{2,3,4}

Our current four-year partnership with Cessnock High School (2020–2024) also demonstrates the significant impact of implementing QTR at a whole-school level. Through this partnership with the University the school has achieved the following results:

- 2023 NAPLAN results showed the highest growth from Year 7 to Year 9 for any high school in the Hunter Region and the 11th highest among all schools in the state.
- HSC scores grew by more than 50% in 2022 and were replicated in 2023.
- Student attendance and engagement grew by 7% in the past year – triple that of the school average across the state.
- 2023 data show positive behaviour referrals are up 130% on last year, while negative behaviours have significantly decreased.
- More parents than ever before are engaging with the school as partners in supporting student learning.

The positive change that is occurring at Cessnock High School and the impact on school culture and community are highlighted in the following statement by one of the school’s deputies:

We’re still a very disadvantaged community, but just because you’re poor doesn’t mean you can’t learn. The expectation is classrooms are for learning. We say it all the time to the kids, and they can finish that sentence – “classrooms are for learning.” That’s what’s going on, and we have high expectations of kids being engaged in the learning and doing well.

Cessnock High School, School Executive

¹ Gore, J., Miller, A., Fray, L., & Patfield, S. (2023). *Building capacity for quality teaching in Australian schools 2018–2023: Final report to the Paul Ramsay Foundation*. Teachers and Teaching Research Centre, The University of Newcastle. <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.13/1493345>

² Gore, J., Miller, A., Fray, L., Harris, J., & Prieto-Rodriguez, E. (2021). Improving student achievement through professional development: Results from a randomised controlled trial of Quality Teaching Rounds. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 101, Article 103297. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103297>

³ Harris, J., Miller, D., Gore, J., & Holmes, M. (2022). *Building capacity for quality teaching in Australian schools: QTR Digital RCT final report*. Teachers and Teaching Research Centre, The University of Newcastle. https://www.newcastle.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/909005/QTR-Digital-RCT-Report-with-ISBN.pdf

⁴ Povey, J., Porter, M., Kennedy, L., Potia, A., Bellotti, M., & Austerberry, S. (2023, February). *Building capacity for quality teaching in Australian Schools: Queensland replication study – final report*. Institute for Social Science Research, University of Queensland. https://www.newcastle.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/909004/QLD-RCT-Final-Report-with-ISBN.pdf

This project is having a positive impact on the community of teachers, who are rejuvenated by their success, and the community of students, who are likely to hold more positive views of schooling than many in the Cessnock community before them.

Scalable and sustainable models for whole-school partnership-based implementation were piloted in 30 additional schools within the *Building Capacity* program of research. These one- or two-year partnerships helped leaders build organisational capacity for the implementation of QTR, increased teachers' confidence in Rounds, provided a gentle form of accountability, and ensured the schools felt supported throughout the partnership. Engagement in QTR was associated with positive effects on school culture and efficacy outcomes for teachers and the partnership approach enabled them to effectively sustain QTR implementation, with fidelity.⁵

We have seen the impact of system-level endorsement of QTR in NSW where, as part of the last whole-of-system planning cycle in 2020, QTR was mapped to the NSW Department's School Excellence Framework and schools were supported with example school plans. This level of system support resulted in one in seven NSW schools explicitly including QTR as a strategic direction in their school plans. QTR, by design, is a sustainable model of teacher professional development; after the initial two-day workshop schools can continue to support and embed QTR with no further external input. This means, over time, they can engage increasing numbers of teachers in a way that is both cost-effective and capable of delivering the wide-ranging benefits of the program.

Importantly, teachers universally value QTR and the QT Model.⁶

Every single person has come away going, "I wish we could do that more because you never get the chance to just go in and watch what other people do and then have those conversations afterwards." So, there's not a single person who has come away from it going, "That's not for me." Not at all.

Annabel, QTR Liaison, partnerships project

I see it as being a really wonderful way of enabling growth in professional practice, in actually how to become an even better teacher. I see it as helping people work together to embed their practice and understand and speak the same language. People just use different words for different things. [QTR] gives you the language to be able to compare notes and share observations. It's a really big enabler.

Kamai, Principal, Fountain View Secondary College

Despite being positioned within a performative education system, QTR is a collaborative approach to PD that enables teachers to support each other's professional growth. Teachers evaluate and improve practice using meaningful professional criteria rather than metrics external to teaching. Opening up classrooms and watching each other teach fosters teachers' accountability to their peers and their students. In this case, observing each other is neither performative nor terrifying; instead, it is productive and satisfying.⁷

Teachers embrace QTR because it enacts accountability in a way that is professionally validating. It seeks improvement in terms that resonate with teachers' own values and philosophies, enabling them to engage

⁵ Miller, D., Harris, J., Gore, J., Fray, L., Patfield, S. (2023). *Supporting Quality Teaching in Australian Schools: Hunter and NSW School Partnerships Final Report*. The University of Newcastle.

https://www.newcastle.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/956348/APPEND~4.PDF

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Gore, J., Rickards, B., & Fray, L. (2023). From performative to professional accountability: Re-imagining 'the field of judgement' through teacher professional development. *Journal of Education Policy*, 38(3), 452–473.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2022.2080274>

with concepts and language for quality teaching That go beyond simplistic and partial measures of their own and their students' performance.

QTR is a strategic approach to empowering teachers to exercise professional judgment while *giving account* to their colleagues. In so doing, QTR can help teachers recapture the pleasure and energy of the teaching learning relationship, and still attend closely to student outcomes.

At the heart of QTR is the QT Model. Developed by Associate Professor James Ladwig and Laureate Professor Jenny Gore, the QT Model centres on three dimensions of quality teaching derived from research:

1. Intellectual quality – developing deep understanding of important ideas
2. Quality learning environment – ensuring positive classrooms that boost student learning
3. Significance – connecting learning to students' lives and the wider world.

Underpinning each dimension are elements of teaching practice for which there is evidence of impact on student outcomes.⁸ The QT Model was developed for the NSW Department of Education, has been its framework for quality pedagogy since 2003, and has been subjected to extensive and rigorous testing during the past two decades.

Both the QT Model and the QTR approach to PD focus on the underlying quality of teaching regardless of the specific pedagogical approach, subject being taught, year level of students, or teachers' years of experience. This focus on pedagogical quality sets the Model and QTR apart from other interventions based on specific content or teaching approaches, such as explicit teaching. The Model can be used as a lens through which to address the quality of all teaching, including whole-school and systemic efforts. Indeed, our research consistently demonstrates how the QT Model can deliver precisely the kinds of improvement in teaching and student learning sought by systems and governments when it is embedded in teaching practice using the QTR approach to professional development.⁹

This compelling research presents the ACT Government with a clear example of an existing low-cost, scalable approach to supporting teachers to deliver high quality teaching to ensure the literacy and numeracy outcomes of their students (**Recommendation 1**).

⁸ Ladwig, J., & King, M. (2003). *Quality teaching in NSW public schools: An annotated bibliography*. NSW Department of Education and Training Professional Support and Curriculum Directorate.

⁹ Bowe, J., & Gore, J. (2017). Reassembling teacher professional development: The case for Quality Teaching Rounds. *Teachers and Teaching*, 23, 352–366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2016.1206522>

Quality Teaching Rounds

Successive randomised controlled trials show teacher participation in the award-winning, evidence-backed Quality Teaching Rounds professional development program improves student outcomes in literacy and numeracy by two to three months in just one school year compared to a matched control group.

These results were slightly stronger in disadvantaged settings, signalling the power of this approach to narrow equity gaps.

QTR brings teachers together to learn from each other and enhance their practice. It involves groups of four teachers working through a process of observation and analysis of teaching practice, which has been shown through rigorous research to improve the quality of teaching, student academic achievement, and how teachers feel about their work.

QTR has been trialled and successfully implemented in both primary and secondary schools and in a range of specialist contexts, including: small, rural, and remote schools; highly disadvantaged schools; schools for specific purposes; hospital schools; environmental education centres; and distance education centres.

QTR is universally valued by teachers who participate. It raises the status of the profession by respecting the complexity and intellectual rigour of teaching. Participation in QTR boosts teacher morale and confidence, which are critical factors in addressing teacher retention and the widespread teacher shortage.

QTR is accredited professional development with the ACT Teacher Quality Institute.

The two-day QTR Foundational Workshop is accredited by the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. The QT Model and QTR are also strongly endorsed by the NSW Teachers' Federation and supported by the Australian Education Union and the Australian Primary and Secondary Principals' Associations.

A cost-benefit analysis conducted by Deloitte Access Economics identified QTR as a "very low-cost intervention" and provided a "conservative" estimated uplift in Gross State Product (GSP) of between \$40 and \$150 for every dollar spent on QTR.¹⁰

In addition, QTR has been highlighted or recommended in the following policy documents:

- *NSW Productivity Commission: 2020 Green Paper and 2021 White Paper: Rebooting the Economy*
- *NSW Department of Education Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation: What Works Best, School Excellence Framework School Excellence in Action, and the Guide to Evidence-Based Models of Collaborative Inquiry*
- *Australian Productivity Commission: Review of the National School Reform Agreement Interim Report 2022*
- *Australian Government: Next Steps: Quality Initial Teacher Education Review 2022, and the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan 2022*

¹⁰ Deloitte Access Economics. (2020). *Quality Teaching Rounds – Cost benefit analysis*. Report to the Teachers and Teaching Research Centre.

2. What teaching practices have been found to consistently improve literacy and numeracy outcomes?

Our work seeks to raise the discourse on pedagogy from a discussion about particular teaching techniques or practices to a more nuanced view that treats teaching holistically and honours the complexity of classroom practice.

While there are effective practices for teaching literacy and numeracy – including phonics, which should form part of all literacy programs and assessment interventions, such as the Year 1 phonics screening, which will provide teachers with important diagnostic data – we argue the most important consideration is that teachers are supported to deliver high quality teaching in all contexts.

Frustratingly, “evidence-based teaching practices” are often simplified and pitched in opposition to one another¹¹ (for example, explicit instruction versus inquiry approaches) when what matters most is the quality of the pedagogy.¹² By reducing teaching to a set of techniques or “practices,” we overlook the fact that it is possible to teach well or badly using any method (including explicit instruction and inquiry approaches). This simplification (or oversight) risks unsatisfactory outcomes from the current dominant reform agenda.

“Evidence-based practices” currently in vogue that are derived from brain and learning science have not, in many cases, been rigorously tested in school classrooms under randomised controlled trial conditions. Proponents often assume a straightforward link between laboratory-based scientific evidence and its practical application in the classroom.¹³ This does not mean such practices should not be in the mix. However, rigorous research into these and other practices must continue to be funded by governments and education departments (**Recommendation 2**).

Effective teaching requires more than knowledge of and skills in delivering specific practices. It requires understanding of the social and emotional contexts of schools and classrooms, and the capacity to adapt to students’ needs and to classroom dynamics. It requires an understanding of how to employ a suite of techniques in ways that deliver quality learning outcomes. Graduate teachers and experienced teachers alike should be equipped with a broad range of knowledge and skills for the classroom. Most importantly, teachers require a comprehensive understanding of high-quality pedagogy to underpin their practice and ensure their readiness for the classroom.

This is where a conceptual framework such as the QT Model, and its application in the classroom through QTR professional development, is valuable. It does not prescribe or dictate a particular way of teaching. Rather, it can be used in conjunction with all teaching strategies and school programs – such as specific literacy and numeracy programs – to underpin teaching with a fundamental understanding of what good teaching looks like in any given classroom and thereby deliver better outcomes (**Recommendation 1**).

¹¹ Reid, A. (2021, August 17). Teachers use many teaching approaches to impart knowledge. Pitting one against another harms education. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/teachers-use-many-teaching-approaches-to-impart-knowledge-pitting-one-against-another-harms-education-166178>

¹² Gore, J. (2022, February 7). Ideological battles over the curriculum and pedagogy miss the complexities of teaching. *EducationHQ*. <https://educationhq.com/news/ideological-battles-over-the-curriculum-and-pedagogy-miss-the-complexities-of-teaching-113237>

¹³ Beale, J. (2020). Educational neuroscience and educational neuroscientism. In J. Harrington, J. Beale, A. Fancourt, & C. Lutz (Eds.), *The ‘BrainCanDo’ handbook of teaching and learning: Practical strategies to bring psychology and neuroscience into the classroom*. Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/The-BrainCanDo-Handbook-of-Teaching-and-Learning-Practical-Strategies/Harrington-Beale-Fancourt-Lutz/p/book/9780367187057>

The QT Model

The QT Model clearly articulates teaching that makes a difference for students. It comprehensively attends to matters of curriculum, student engagement, and equity within classroom and assessment practice.

The QT Model was developed by Associate Professor James Ladwig and Laureate Professor Jenny Gore in 2003 for the NSW Department of Education and is based on robust evidence of teaching that makes a positive difference to student learning as well as hundreds of hours of classroom observation and analysis.

The QT Model treats teaching holistically, honours the complexity of teaching, and respects what teachers already know and do in the classroom. The QT Model centres on three key dimensions:

1. **Intellectual Quality:** Developing deep understanding of important knowledge
2. **Quality Learning Environment:** Ensuring positive classrooms that boost student learning
3. **Significance:** Connecting learning to students' lives and the wider world

3. Are there curriculum and teaching practices, approaches or supports in ACT public schools that are working well or are not having the desired impact? Are there any lessons the Education Directorate can take away from what is/is not working, and what should they stop, start or expand upon to improve outcomes?

QTR has a long and proud history in ACT public schools. In 2012, 156 teachers from 18 government schools in the ACT participated in the *Investigating QTR to Support Teacher Professional Learning* study, which provided some of the earliest evidence that QTR is a positive experience for teachers. It led to a series of modifications, honing the QTR process into the version that is used today which typically involves groups of four teachers undertaking four days of in-school QTR.¹⁴

Since then, several ACT schools and their school leaders have continued to embed QTR. Lake Tuggeranong College, Telopea Park School, and Lyneham Primary School are three such schools where teachers have regular opportunities to participate in QTR. Lyneham Primary School's systematic approach to embedding QTR was profiled in the *Canberra Times* in 2023 after the school trialled the program in 2022 and found it so successful they rolled it out for all teachers in 2023.¹⁵

As elaborated in our response to Question 2, there is a frustrating trend in policy directives to treat teachers as technicians rather than professionals with autonomy and agency to engage in complex intellectual work. This trend is the result of reducing pedagogy to a series of techniques as opposed to a broader conception of pedagogy that is informed by theories, values, and evidence to support the accumulation of professional knowledge among teachers. Acknowledging that teachers are professionals, who adapt teaching practices

¹⁴ Gore, J., Bowe, J., Mockler, N., Smith, M., Ellis, H., & Lyell, A. (2013). *Investigating 'Quality Teaching Rounds' to support teacher professional learning: Research report*. The University of Newcastle.

¹⁵ Lansdown, S. (2023, July 27). Quality teaching rounds expands to boost teacher morale and student achievement. *Canberra Times*. <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/8285048/it-gave-you-more-confidence-program-that-boosts-teacher-morale-to-be-expanded/>

to suit their students' needs, is more important than the rigid implementation of any particular teaching strategy. Supporting teachers to understand the underlying quality of their teaching, regardless of the approach, is core to the QT Model and to QTR.¹⁶

Like the example of Cessnock High School outlined in our response to Question 1, Kotara School provides an additional case study of the success of implementing QTR at a whole-school level in a vastly different context.

Kotara School is a School for Specific Purposes spanning two sites: Kotara campus which supports 28 students from Years 2–6; and Nexus Education, an inpatient facility at the John Hunter Hospital which supports students of all ages (predominantly high school) experiencing acute mental health issues. Over a period of two years (2020–2021), the school partnered with the University of Newcastle in a whole-school approach to improving teaching and learning through QTR and the QT Model. Despite this partnership taking place during one of the most disrupted periods of schooling in modern Australian history, progressive achievement tests in mathematics and reading demonstrated increased student achievement in the 2021 school year. In addition, there were measurable improvements in teaching quality, teacher efficacy, collaboration, teacher wellbeing, and perceptions of leadership during the project.¹⁷

Another key challenge that persists in Australia despite reform efforts is a decline in high-level mathematics participation and, alarmingly, the underrepresentation of girls in STEM subjects. Our research on student aspirations and the relationship between gender and STEM participation reveals persistent stereotypes including the notion that only some students have a 'mathematics brain' and these students are almost invariably male. We found the way in which language is used by both students and their teachers feeds such stereotypes and results in girls 'counting-out' the possibility of pursuing high-level mathematics.¹⁸

An outcome of this research, funded by the Australian Department of Education, is the free online self-paced professional development course, *Aspirations: Supporting Students' Futures*,¹⁹ accredited by the ACT Teacher Quality Institute. Teachers who have completed the highly rated course report that they gained: (1) access to robust evidence of factors affecting aspirations; (2) relevant theoretical perspectives to conceptualise aspirations in new ways; and (3) insights on practical strategies with which they might nurture student pathways to higher education.²⁰ This course should be made widely available for ACT teachers and school leaders (**Recommendation 3**). A similar course was developed for parents, carers, and community members to understand their roles in shaping and nurturing the aspirations of young Australians.

4. Does the Education Directorate's approach of suggesting but not mandating teaching approaches support improved learning outcomes or would a greater degree of evidence-based prescription be more effective?

External regulation and mandating of content and teaching approaches erodes teachers' sense of professionalism, disregards their expertise, and contributes to a devaluing of the profession – all of which are factors that have contributed to the current teacher shortage and falling standards.²¹

¹⁶ Gore, J., & Patfield, S. (in press). *Rethinking pedagogy: The central plank in school improvement*. In D. Wyse, V. Baumfield, N. Mockler, & M. Reardon (Eds.), *The BERA-SAGE handbook of research-informed education practice and policy*. Sage.

¹⁷ Fray, L., Gore, J., Miller, D., Harris, J., Leonard, C., Foggett, J., & Dean, Y. (2022, March). *Supporting Quality Teaching at Kotara School (SSP) 2022: Final report*. https://www.newcastle.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/956350/Appendix-E-Supporting-Quality-Teaching-at-Kotara.pdf

¹⁸ Jaremus, F., Gore, J., Prieto, E., & Fray, L. (2020). Girls are still being 'counted-out': Teacher expectations of high-level mathematics students. *Education Studies in Mathematics*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10649-020-09986-9>

¹⁹ The University of Newcastle. (2018). *Aspirations*. <https://www.aspirations.edu.au/>

²⁰ Prieto, E., Sincock, K., Patfield, S. et al. (2024). New possibilities for engaging school teachers in widening participation: Professional development to support student aspirations. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 51, 167–193. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-022-00592-7>

²¹ Ibid.

The flexibility and autonomy of decision-making in ACT schools is a point of pride among ACT teachers and school leaders and contributes to their sense of professional identity. (**Recommendation 1**)

Teachers are best placed to make informed decisions about the right approach and strategies for their students. Depending on the context, the lesson, and the needs of the students, almost all teaching approaches (explicit instruction, inquiry-based, etc.) can be valid and impactful. They are complementary rather than competing. Instead of mandating teaching approaches, teachers must be provided with opportunities to engage in evidence-backed, pedagogy-focused professional learning, such as QTR, that provides the building blocks for delivering great teaching, regardless of the context. Such an approach would also contribute to raising the status of the teaching profession while boosting teacher morale and fortifying their professional identities.

Teachers and school leaders are also incredibly busy, increasingly so as schools become more and more complex. Teachers can be supported in delivering high quality teaching through the dissemination and translation of research on evidence-based practice and evidence-backed interventions.

Additionally, the ACT Government should ensure that the policy outcomes of this Inquiry are properly evaluated through independent, robust, and rigorous research methodologies. (**Recommendation 2**)

Chapter 4: Supporting all students to achieve literacy and numeracy outcomes

11. What evidence-based supports and interventions are most effective for supporting students who have not yet reached expected proficiency in literacy and numeracy? Are there any particular supports that are more effective for students from specific equity cohorts (e.g. EALD, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students)?

Randomised controlled trial evidence demonstrates that participation in QTR can improve student achievement growth in literacy and numeracy by an additional two to three months compared to a control group, in just one school year. In a 2019 trial, where data were analysed by school ICSEA, these effects were stronger in more disadvantaged schools, signalling the potential for QTR to be a key mechanism in narrowing equity gaps.²² This finding is critical in the context of the recently released 2023 NAPLAN data which highlight the urgent need to support students from key equity cohorts to meet and exceed minimum proficiency standards.²³ Importantly, wide-scale implementation of QTR could lift results for all students, including those in the upper NAPLAN bands. (**Recommendation 1**)

QTR involves just four days of in-school teacher-led professional development and is applicable across grades and subject areas and for teachers at all stages of their careers. It has also been used in diverse settings such as distance education, hospital schools, Schools for Specific Purposes, and environmental education centres, with positive results for both students and teachers. A study involving 32 casual teachers from 8 NSW public schools participating in QTR also demonstrated how this approach can support this often neglected, but integral, part of the teaching workforce.²⁴ Additionally, QTR has significant potential to support teachers teaching outside of their specialist field and those returning to work after periods of absence. (**Recommendation 4**)

Grounding teaching practice, assessment practice, and curriculum materials in the QT Model and providing time and opportunity for teachers to participate in QTR can help the government to achieve its objectives of

²² Ibid.

²³ Hunter, J., Stobart, A., & Haywood, A. (2024). The Reading Guarantee: How to give every child the best chance of success. *Grattan Institute*. <https://grattan.edu.au/report/reading-guarantee/>

²⁴ Led by Jenny Gore, Jess Harris, Drew Miller, Leanne Fray, and Jacqui Briskham, the study was funded by the NSW Department of Education (2021–2022) and is titled “Investigating the efficacy, complexity and sustainability of teacher change.” https://www.newcastle.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/956351/Appendix-F-Casual-Teacher-Project-Report-to-NSW-DOE.pdf

delivering more equitable outcomes for students and, simultaneously, enhancing the professional experience and professional growth of teachers.

13. Should the Education Directorate consider targeted small group or individual tutoring to support students to improve literacy and numeracy? If so, what models should be adopted?

There is decent evidence²⁵ that tutoring programs can work, but not all tutoring programs are effective. The latest data from the NSW tutoring program is illustrative of the ineffectiveness of tutoring if not done well.²⁶ Research on small group tuition, for example, indicates that the quality of the teaching in small groups may be as important as, if not more important than, the precise size of the group.²⁷ The implementation of any approaches to tutoring used by schools to help improve student learning outcomes should be rigorously evaluated. **(Recommendation 2)**

The success of the tutoring programs being used by schools will depend heavily on the quality of tutoring they provide. Tutors need to be clear about what they're trying to achieve and how best to help. For such programs to succeed, the quality of the teaching of these tutors will be paramount. Engagement of tutors in QT/QTR professional development is one way to ensure that tutoring is effective. **(Recommendation 4)**

Chapter 5: Supporting staff to deliver quality literacy and numeracy education

15. What system-wide and school-based professional learning and coaching best support educators with literacy and numeracy instruction and improvement? Are there any that best support early career teachers as they commence, or middle leaders with literacy and numeracy instructional leadership?

Regarding Early Career Teachers:

The Australian Government has funded the University of Newcastle to expand QTR to support the induction of early career teachers as part of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan. The project, *Strengthening Induction through Quality Teaching Rounds*, aims to address the teacher shortage and lift outcomes for both students and teachers, based on the compelling evidence that sits behind QTR.

The four-year project will support 1,600 early career teachers and their more experienced colleagues from schools across Australia to take part in QTR over the four-year period, 2023–2026. The project will support teachers to remain in the profession by improving teacher morale, confidence, and job satisfaction. It will have the added benefits of lifting teaching quality and improving student outcomes, highlighting the advantages of investing in initiatives with broad impact.

All teachers involved will access a free QTR professional development workshop (valued at \$935 per teacher) as well as a range of other implementation and mentoring supports.

²⁵ Slavin, R. (2021, January 28). *Highlight tutoring among post-COVID solutions* [Blog post].

<https://robertslavinsblog.wordpress.com/2021/01/28/highlight-tutoring-among-post-covid-solutions/>

²⁶ Harris, C., & Carroll, L. (2024, February 13). Hundreds of millions spent on tutoring for struggling kids. The results are now in. *Sydney Morning Herald*. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/hundreds-of-millions-spent-on-tutoring-for-struggling-kids-the-results-are-now-in-20240212-p5f47l.html>

²⁷ Gore, J. (2021, March 22). COVID coaches: Tutoring only works when backed by quality teaching directed at the students who really missed out. *EduResearch Matters*. <https://blog.aare.edu.au/covid-coaching-money-tutoring-will-only-work-if-its-backed-by-quality-teaching-directed-at-the-kids-who-missed-out/>

The ACT Education Directorate is one of only two government education systems in Australia that has not yet approved the research aspect of the *Strengthening Induction* project for its schools in 2024. While schools can engage without doing the research, the opportunity to do so is not being actively promoted by the project team or at a system level.

The ACT Government should leverage the existing NTWAP project, *Strengthening Induction through Quality Teaching Rounds*, by providing research approval and supporting the project with direct communications to its schools about the opportunity. **(Recommendation 5)**

Regarding Middle Leaders:

In 2020, the TTRC partnered with the University of Wollongong and the NSW School Leadership Institute to develop a first-of-its-kind professional learning program for middle leaders in NSW public schools.

The Middle Leadership Development Program is a 12-month program (two days per term) that covers five key themes: identity, improvement, influence, belonging, and leading high-performing teams. In addition, participants select to study one of the three specialist themes: leading Aboriginal education, leading assessment and pedagogy, or leading staff performance and development through coaching.

The MLDP has just commenced its second cohort. More than 400 middle leaders have so far participated.

The power of QTR to drive school improvement is integrated throughout the program. It not only improves teaching and builds leadership capacity, QTR also:

- builds agreement about good pedagogical practice
- enhances pedagogy through a structured process of reciprocal lesson observations
- builds collegial culture by flattening power hierarchies

As a result, engagement in QTR by middle leaders produces school-wide benefits such as:

- new ‘sayings’ in the form of shared language for describing quality teaching
- new ‘doings’ through the development of new structures for conducting observations of lesson quality
- new ‘relatings’ as evident in the increased collegiality and respect between middle leaders and teachers.²⁸

The ACT Government should commission the development of specific middle leader professional development that focuses on leading school improvement through pedagogy. **(Recommendation 6)**

²⁸ Harris, J., Jaremus, F., & Gore, J. (2024). Building middle leading practice through pedagogy-focused professional development. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432241231001>

Keeping the teachers we have

The Australian Government has funded the University of Newcastle to expand Quality Teaching Rounds to support the induction of early career teachers as part of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan. The project, *Strengthening Induction through Quality Teaching Rounds*, aims to address the teacher shortage and lift outcomes for both students and teachers, based on the compelling evidence that sits behind QTR.

The project will enable 1,600 early career teachers and their more experienced colleagues from schools across Australia to take part in QTR over the next four years. The project will support teachers to remain in the profession by improving teacher morale, confidence, and job satisfaction. It will have the added benefits of lifting teaching quality and improving student outcomes, highlighting the advantages of investing in initiatives with broad impact.

QTR was a transformational experience for early career teacher, Kaitlin Heggen, at Hambledon Public School. Kaitlin's transition into the classroom after university was complicated by COVID-19 lockdowns and remote learning. She considered leaving the profession numerous times in her first year but, after participating in QTR, she now has greater confidence, feels supported by strong collegial relationships, and is more certain about her career in teaching.

Nick Short, who moved to Cobar High School on a NSW Teach Rural scholarship, had initially planned to stay only three years and earn his transfer points but has now been in Cobar for six years. QTR is part of a long-term strategy to support new and experienced teachers alike at Cobar High. Nick reports that by building strong relationships and improving their teaching through QTR, staff feel encouraged to stay longer while ensuring their students receive high quality learning experiences.²⁹

16. What are the most effective ways for the Education Directorate and principals to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness/impact of professional learning and coaching support for educators and school leaders, particularly early career teachers and middle leaders?

If the ACT Education Directorate leverages the existing *Strengthening Induction* project to support its early career teachers, it will gain valuable insights into the effectiveness and impact of QTR through regular reporting to project partners and research publications. Similarly, if it were to commission the development of a middle leaders' development program, it should build in a budget for research and evaluation.

(Recommendations 5 & 6)

One readily available tool the Education Directorate and its schools can use to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of professional learning and other interventions is the *QT Pulse: School Health Longitudinal Survey*.³⁰ This robust survey tool provides school leaders (from any school or sector) with insightful data each term on their staff's perceptions of teaching and learning, morale, and school environment, with

²⁹ Carey, T. (2023). One thousand new teachers set to benefit from Quality Teaching Rounds. *The University of Newcastle Newsroom*. <https://www.newcastle.edu.au/newsroom/featured/one-thousand-new-teachers-set-to-benefit-from-quality-teaching-rounds>

³⁰ QT Academy. (2024). *QT Pulse: School Health Longitudinal Survey*. <https://qtacademy.edu.au/qt-pulse-school-health-longitudinal-survey/>

results delivered within five days of survey completion and tracked longitudinally to obtain powerful evidence on the direction of the school that can help drive meaningful school-wide change.

17. What current professional learning and coaching policies and approaches are working well/not having the desired impact? How do we know? How can the Education Directorate expand upon or leverage successful approaches to improve outcomes?

So much of the current professional development that is available to schools and teachers is based on substandard evidence, where it is based on any evidence at all. The ACT Education Directorate can be confident that endorsement of QTR for its schools will have the desired impact on teaching and learning outcomes, based on a decades-long program of research. (**Recommendation 1**)

This research includes several randomised controlled trials: the first in 2014–15 in NSW which demonstrated QTR improved teaching quality and teacher morale;³¹ a 2019 NSW trial which confirmed these results for teacher outcomes and produced the first evidence of two-months' additional growth in mathematics achievement;³² a 2021 trial of QTR Digital which again demonstrated positive effects for teachers and found two-months' additional growth in reading achievement;³³ and an independent trial in QLD which produced three-months' additional growth in reading achievement.³⁴ This research has been published in tier one international peer-reviewed journals, including a large number of papers based on qualitative data collected as part of the program of RCTs, which show that QTR rejuvenates experienced teachers,³⁵ supports beginning teachers,³⁶ is a highly effective alternative to content-focused professional development,³⁷ empowers all teachers,³⁸ and can be effectively scaled through attention to its underlying mechanisms.³⁹

In addition, QTR won the 2022 Engagement Australia Excellence Award for Outstanding Engagement for Research Impact,⁴⁰ is embedded in diverse classrooms in every state and territory in Australia, and has been/is being piloted in new contexts in Albania, Sweden, the UK, Japan, and Indonesia.

As is now our constant refrain, it is important that the ACT Education Directorate adequately funds independent, robust, and rigorous research into the interventions that are implemented out of this Inquiry process to fully understand their effects in ACT schools. (**Recommendation 2**)

³¹ Gore, J., Lloyd, A., Smith, M., Bowe, J., Ellis, H., & Lubans, D. (2017). Effects of professional development on the quality of teaching: Results from a randomised controlled trial of Quality Teaching Rounds. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 68, 99–113. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.08.007>

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Gore, J., & Rickards, B. (2020). Rejuvenating experienced teachers through Quality Teaching Rounds professional development. *Educational Change*, 22, 335–354. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-020-09386-z>

³⁶ Gore, J. M., & Bowe, J. M. (2015). Interrupting attrition? Re-shaping the transition from preservice to inservice teaching through Quality Teaching Rounds. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 73, 77–88. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2015.05.006>

³⁷ Gore, J., & Rosser, B. (2020). Beyond content-focused professional development: Powerful professional learning across grades and subjects. *Professional Development in Education*, 48(2), 218–232. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2020.1725904>

³⁸ Gore, J. (2020). Why isn't this empowering? The discursive positioning of teachers in efforts to improve teaching. In A. Brown & E. Wisby (Eds.), *Knowledge, policy and practice: The struggle for social justice in education* (pp. 199–216). UCL IOE Press.

³⁹ Patfield, S., Gore, J., & Harris, J. (2022). Scaling up effective professional development: Toward successful adaptation through attention to underlying mechanisms. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 116, Article 103756. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103756>

⁴⁰ Engagement Australia. (2022). 2022 Excellence Award Winners. <https://engagementaustralia.org.au/2022-excellence-award-winners/>

Chapter 6: School-wide improvement of literacy and numeracy

18. How can the ACT use evidence-based school improvement planning cycles to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes?

QTR has been mapped to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers,⁴¹ the National School Improvement Tool,⁴² and the NSW School Excellence Framework,⁴³ demonstrating its applicability in developing teachers at all stages of their careers.

The National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) was developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research for the Federal Department of Education in 2012 and updated in 2023. We have developed a document that demonstrates the alignment of QTR and the QT Model with the nine domains of the NSIT and provides school leaders with a summary, detailed mapping, and evaluation instruments for schools.

We have helped school leaders integrate QTR into their strategic plans by mapping it to the NSW School Excellence Framework and *What Works Best* documentation. This interactive resource provides a comprehensive analysis of how and why schools that engage in QTR can connect, strengthen, and evaluate their practices in line with system-wide priorities.

As documented in responses to previous questions, two examples illustrate the impact of QTR when adopted at a whole-school level as part of a long-term school strategic plan.

1. Cessnock High School is a highly disadvantaged school in the NSW Hunter region which, in 2020, partnered with the Teachers and Teaching Research Centre on a four-year project to embed Quality Teaching across the school. This partnership encompassed whole-school professional development in QTR and deep engagement with the QT Model for assessment tasks and programming activities.

In 2023, Cessnock High School was ranked first in the Hunter region and 11th overall in the state for their growth in NAPLAN results from Year 7 to 9. Cessnock students' HSC results also improved by nearly 50 percent in 2022, a result that was replicated in 2023.

2. During 2020–21, Kotara School partnered with the TTRC to implement a Quality Teaching Action Plan focused on QTR in conjunction with ongoing curriculum refinement designed to improve teaching quality and student outcomes at the school.

Kotara School is a School for Specific Purposes spanning two sites: Kotara campus, which supports 28 students from Years 2–6; and Nexus Education, an inpatient facility at the John Hunter Hospital which supports students of all ages (predominantly high school) experiencing acute mental health issues. The project led to a significant turnaround in teaching quality and student engagement, maintained beyond the two-year scope of the project through an ongoing strategic approach to staff collaboration. As a result, Kotara School developed a highly collaborative culture and has taken on a regional leadership role in mainstream and special education settings.⁴⁴

An additional 30 schools in disadvantaged contexts took place in either one- or two-year partnerships as part of a pilot program within the *Building Capacity* program of research.⁴⁵ These partnerships demonstrate

⁴¹ QT Academy. (2023). *What is QTR? Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*. <https://qtacademy.edu.au/what-is-qtr/#apst>

⁴² QT Academy. (2022). *Aligning Quality Teaching Rounds with the National School Improvement Tool*. <https://qtacademy.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/NSIT-print-friendly.pdf>

⁴³ QT Academy. (2020). *Quality Teaching Rounds and school excellence*. <https://qtacademy.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/QT-A-School-Excellence-Brochure-Final.pdf>

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

the power of QTR in achieving the kind of outcomes sought by all Australian governments when undertaken in a long-term, strategic, and systematic way.

List of Recommendations

1. Provide opportunities for all ACT teachers to participate in QTR, through funding for program costs and teacher time, policy support, and Directorate communications.
2. Fund rigorous research into the effectiveness of current teaching practice and practices and the impact of the ACT Government's education reform initiatives.
3. Promote the free, online, evidence-based Aspirations professional development course for teachers.
4. Provide opportunities for all parts of the teaching workforce, such as casual teachers, learning support officers, returning teachers, and tutors, to participate in QT professional development.
5. Leverage the federally funded *Strengthening Induction through Quality Teaching Rounds* project through research approval and Directorate communications to schools.
6. Commission the development of a middle leader professional development program.