

Making time for great teaching

A guide for principals

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This guide accompanies Grattan Institute's 2022 report,
Making time for great teaching: How better government policy can help

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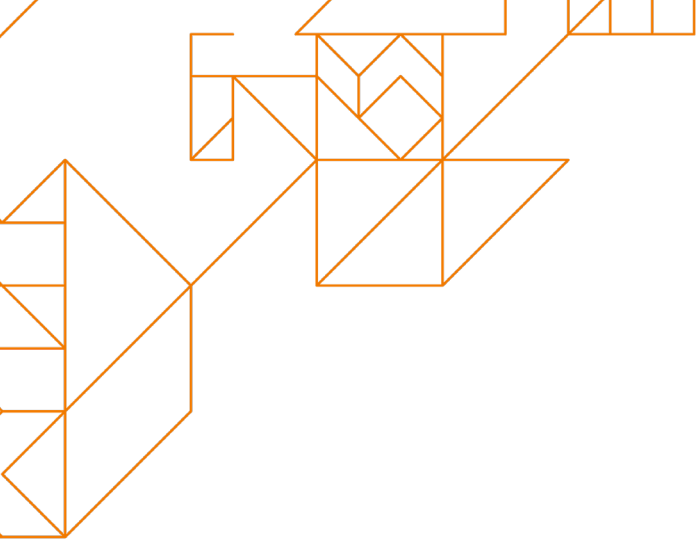


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Recommendations from Grattan Institute's report
Making time for great teaching: How better government policy can help

GRATTAN
Institute

Our new survey of 5,442 teachers and school leaders shows that...

Teachers don't have time to prepare effectively for class



We expect more from teachers today



There is increasing complexity in the classroom

Teachers report that they always or frequently...

92% ...do not get enough time to prepare for effective teaching

86% ...do not get enough time to prepare for high quality lesson planning

Tinkering won't work – governments should adopt bold strategies

Three reform directions

1. Let teachers teach



Better match teachers' work to teachers' expertise

2. Work smarter



Reduce unnecessary tasks, including in curriculum planning

3. Reorganise teachers' work



Ensure schools have flexibility on class size and workflow

Examples of reforms

68% of teachers would agree to other staff covering their extra-curricular activities - **saving 2 hours a week on average**

88% of teachers say they would save time if they had high-quality common unit plans, lesson plans and assessments - **saving 3 hours a week on average**

Majority of teachers agree workloads would reduce if teachers did more planning together for 2-to-3 days before each term

Majority of teachers would prefer a slightly larger class size in exchange for extra preparation time - **saving 2 hours a week on average**

We are calling for immediate action from governments

- Invest \$60 million to pilot reform options
- Provide more training to school leaders

Overview

A 2021 Grattan Institute survey of 5,000 Australian teachers found that more than 90 per cent say they don't have enough time to prepare effectively for classroom teaching. And they report feeling overwhelmed by everything they are expected to achieve. Worryingly, many school leaders feel powerless to support them.

In our 2022 report, [*Making time for great teaching: How better government policy can help*](#), we set out what governments should do to tackle this problem.

But school leaders do not need to wait while governments embark on new reforms. This guide accompanies that report and sets out practical actions school leaders can take now to make more time for effective teaching in their school. Opportunities for improvement are likely to differ from school to school.

While no single strategy is likely to overcome all the workload challenges teachers face, implementing a combination of well-chosen strategies can make a significant difference.

We recommend school leaders adopt four strategies:

- Manage teachers' time strategically, by setting clear priorities and allocating resources accordingly ([Section 1](#)).
- Let teachers teach, by better matching teachers' work to their expertise. This includes delegating to other staff tasks that don't require teaching expertise, and drawing effectively on specialist and support staff for complex teaching and learning tasks ([Section 2](#)).
- Help teachers to work smarter, by reducing unnecessary tasks, not only in administration but also core teaching work. This includes streamlining curriculum planning, reducing the variety of subjects

for individual teachers, cutting back on lower-priority extra-curricular activities, and reducing the number of meetings and administrative requirements ([Section 3](#)).

- Rethink the way teachers' work is organised, by increasing class sizes to 'buy' extra preparation time (where appropriate), streamlining curriculum offerings, and using non-term time for collaborative teacher preparation ([Section 4](#)).

In [Section 5](#), we recommend that school leaders seek opportunities for mentoring and training on ways they can make more time for effective teaching.

The full results of our 2021 survey of Australian teachers and school leaders are reported in our 2022 report, [*Making time for great teaching: How better government policy can help*](#). A summary of that report, including recommendations to governments on key reform directions, can be seen on page 17.



SECTION 1

Prioritise time for effective teaching

The first step for school leaders is to set clear priorities for their school and staff. There is always more that schools and teachers can do to support students' growth and enrich their experiences. But focusing on a small number of clear priorities and managing resources strategically is essential to protect teacher time to focus on effective teaching and learning – the core goal of schools.

Manage school resources strategically

The most precious resource schools have is time – students' time and teachers' time. There is a hard limit on the amount of time schools have available to work with students – before the end of class, the end of term and, ultimately, the end of school. Deciding how to spend this time is the most important strategic resource decision school leaders make.

Strategic resource management requires much more than simply balancing the school's budget at the end of the year or ensuring spending decisions are consistent with financial rules and policies. It involves deliberate choices to allocate resources, including teachers' and students' time, in ways that increase the odds of achieving school goals. It is not easy. Many school leaders will need better training and support to do it well.¹

As shown in our 2022 report, [*Making time for great teaching: How better government policy can help*](#),² school leaders often face barriers to the strategic allocation of resources. And once resource allocation decisions have been made, they can be hard to change. Often resources are allocated in particular ways simply because 'that is the way it has always been done'. Sometimes it can be hard to



Box 1: In our 2014 report we identified strategies to make more time for great teaching

In 2014, Grattan Institute identified strategies to free-up three periods a week for teachers to focus on high value professional learning, within existing school resources.^a We worked with six schools, in NSW, Victoria, and Queensland, across primary and secondary, government and non-government sectors, advantaged and disadvantaged.

Through close consultation with school staff, we identified several options. In five of the six schools, we identified more than 80 periods a year of time savings per teacher (two periods a week on average). Most of the savings were found by reducing the time teachers spend on ineffective professional development, staff meetings, school assemblies, and supervising extra-curricular activities. Many of the potential time savings we identified remain highly relevant for schools today.^b

^a See our 2014 report, [*Making time for great teaching*](#).

^b For further discussion see Sharples et al (2018).

¹ Strategic resource management is referred to in school leadership frameworks such as the [*Australian Professional Standard for Principals*](#), the Australian Council for Educational Research [*School Improvement Tool*](#), and the Victorian Department of Education and Training's [*Framework for Improving Student Outcomes*](#).

² See Section 2.3 of [*Making time for great teaching: How better government policy can help*](#).

suggest changes because of a worry that discussion might spark anxiety or opposition within a school community.

But changes can be made. Our 2014 report, *Making time for great teaching*, showed that most schools have opportunities to free up more time for teachers to focus on school priorities (see Box 1). And with effective leadership, clear communication, and consultation, school leaders can build a compelling case for change, and an implementation strategy that puts the new approaches into action. The payoff for teachers and students can be significant.

Set clear priorities, and allocate resources accordingly

Establishing clear priorities is essential to manage school resources strategically. But it is only the first step. School leaders also need to ensure resources are aligned to these priorities.

School leaders need a clear picture of how discretionary budgets are spent in their school, how student time is used in the classroom and at home, and how teachers' work is organised across the day and throughout the year. School leaders should consult widely with their communities to build this picture.

For our 2014 report, for example, we interviewed a cross-section of staff in each of the six case-study schools to understand how they spent their time, the pressures they were under, and where they thought opportunities for significant time savings might lie. We also reviewed school budgets, where possible, to identify areas where discretionary spending was more or less closely aligned to school priorities.³ Through this process, we were able to identify several viable opportunities to free up teacher time.

Once school leaders develop a clear picture of how resources are currently spent, they can work with staff on ways to allocate resources more strategically, in line with school priorities.

Box 2 recounts lessons from two former school principals, who now work with several schools to help them set clear priorities and allocate school resources strategically.



³ *Making time for great teaching*: Jensen et al (2014)



Box 2: Setting clear priorities – a tale of two principals

We interviewed two former school principals who now help school leaders across NSW, the ACT, and South Australia to set clear priorities and allocate teacher time and resources.

Natalie,^a a former principal of a large metropolitan government primary school in South Australia, emphasised the importance of setting formal improvement priorities, to stop ‘absolutely everything becoming a priority’. According to Natalie, setting priorities should always be tied to improved student learning – ‘the core purpose of schooling’. Broader goals, such as students being ‘confident’, ‘active’, or ‘life-long learners’, were better thought of as part of a school’s ‘cultural conditions’ rather than the focus of specific improvement priorities.

She also stressed the importance of schools choosing just one or two priorities a year, so they could invest enough resources, particularly school leaders’ time and attention, to achieve change. Schools often underestimated the effort required to shift practice. As she advises schools: ‘We’re not going to get different outcomes unless we have different inputs.’

Natalie called for teachers to ‘be really selective and really careful about what we put our attention and time into’. She singled out meetings: ‘Sometimes we have used consultation as a reason to try and get everyone involved in everything. But then you just have a whole heap of meetings for a whole heap of purposes.’

She said some teachers felt pressure to create impressive visual displays in their classrooms.

‘It’s something that happens more and more frequently, but even an hour or two that a classroom teacher has to allocate to decorating a classroom door is an hour or two that’s taken away from something else.’

Natalie suggested schools set clear expectations about classroom displays (‘well-organised’ and ‘appealing’, but not like a ‘David Jones window’) and choose only a small number of events to celebrate each year, to ease the burden on teachers.

Tina,^b a former principal of a large non-government secondary school in regional NSW, said she had a breakthrough moment when she and her school’s other leaders visited a high-performing school nearby. The mentor school had a singular focus on its teaching and learning priorities. Tina said the visit ‘changed the whole trajectory of what we were doing’ at her school.

Tina’s team set to work getting rid of the ‘distractions’ in their school that were ‘bombarding middle leaders’, in particular. They rebuilt the school timetable to limit the number of periods to five each day, reducing the lesson-planning load as well as time lost to transitions between classes. They also streamlined the excursions schedule to ease the logistical and time burden on teachers. And they tightly focused their meetings on teaching and learning. ‘We just stopped talking about distracting things,’ Tina told us.

^a A pseudonym.

^b A pseudonym.

SECTION 2

Let teachers teach

Effective use of the wider school workforce can reduce pressure on teachers' time

The wider school workforce in Australia has grown significantly in recent decades.⁴ While it can be difficult for school leaders to recruit staff for some positions, there is still a lot that can be done now with the existing workforce.

Specialist and support staff in schools can be used better to reduce pressures on teacher time. There are two ways schools can better utilise the wider workforce to ensure teachers spend more of their time on classroom teaching:

- delegate to other staff tasks that don't require teaching expertise; and
- draw more effectively on specialist and support staff to support complex teaching activities.

Delegate to other staff tasks that don't require teaching expertise

Where appropriate, school leaders should delegate tasks that are often added to teachers' plates but don't require teaching expertise. This could include supervision duties (such as yard duty and bus duty) as well as co-ordinating excursions, extra-curricular activities, and the logistics for engaging with families.

In some instances (and within the constraints of existing industrial and regulatory frameworks), supervision duties can be assigned to non-teaching staff, who can be just as effective in discharging these responsibilities.

Our 2021 survey suggested an additional two hours a week of time for teachers could be freed up if non-teaching staff took on some of their extra-curricular activities.⁵



The experiences of a Melbourne school principal who delegates a range of tasks to non-teaching staff are recounted in Box 3.

Draw more effectively on specialist and support staff to support complex teaching activities

School leaders should work with teachers to identify aspects of their teaching responsibilities that could be delivered more effectively with help from:

- support staff, such as teaching assistants, or
- specialist staff with expert skills in particular areas, such as disability, speech pathology, and student behaviour.

⁴ In secondary schools between 1990 and 2019, the ratio of specialist support staff to students increased by 110 per cent, and the ratio of administrative staff and teaching assistants to students increased by 145 per cent: Grattan analysis of ABS (2021). By contrast, the ratio of teaching staff to students increased by 22 per cent in primary schools and 2 per cent in secondary schools. For further detail see Section 3.2 in our main report, [Making time for great teaching: How better government policy can help](#).

⁵ See Figure 3.3 in our main report, [Making time for great teaching: How better government policy can help](#).

Support staff, such as teaching assistants, can help teachers concentrate on their practice in the classroom by performing tasks such as marking the roll or collecting permission slips.

In addition, highly specialised professional staff can work directly with students with complex needs, or can support teachers to develop the specific skills needed to help these students in the classroom.

Both specialist and support staff can help to implement a well-planned ‘response to intervention’ model, where students with the highest and most complex needs receive the most intensive teaching support. Under this model, teachers are responsible for delivering high-quality universal classroom instruction (known as Tier 1) as well as intensive teaching for higher-needs students (Tiers 2 and 3) – but they are not expected to do it all by themselves.⁶

Careful deployment of specialist and support staff is key. It is possible to devote significant resources to employing additional staff in schools but achieve no, or very little, improvement in student performance or a reduction in the work pressures on teachers.

For example, big investments in teaching assistants in the UK in the early 2000s did not boost student learning. More recent work has shown that teaching assistants can help deliver good student results under certain conditions.⁷

School leaders should act carefully to ensure the wider workforce in their school is integrated successfully and deployed in line with their strategic priorities to improve student outcomes.

Box 3: Making strategic use of education support staff: freeing up teacher time at Elevation Secondary College

Elevation Secondary College is a new government school in outer metropolitan Melbourne, serving a low socio-economic community. When it opened in 2020, with just Year 7 students, the principal needed to think strategically about how best to allocate his staff:

‘We had 140 kids and 11 teachers. If we didn’t utilise education support staff, then every teacher would have been doing five yard duties a week.’

After reviewing regulatory requirements, the principal allocated education support staff to take on teachers’ ‘other duties’, such as yard duty and homework club. Of the 12 support staff at the school, nine now have supervision responsibilities, including the business manager. As a result, the principal has freed up an extra one-to-two hours each week for every teacher, and all teachers are now allocated an hour a week during the school day to plan collaboratively in subject teams.

The principal uses education support staff for a range of other activities that are aligned with their skills and experience. For instance, one education support staff member was previously a social worker in an Indigenous organisation. She draws on these skills to coordinate the college’s Koori support program. Another multi-lingual education support staff member has a role as a multicultural education aide, using her language skills to engage with families. The college also uses support staff who are trainee teachers to assist classroom teachers by providing additional literacy and numeracy support for struggling students.

The principal also includes education support staff in recruitment processes. Elevation Secondary College is a growing school – hiring 20-to-30 new staff a year – so recruitment activities (which include assessing all applications and conducting panel interviews of shortlisted candidates) take a significant amount of staff time. Using support staff in recruitment processes has twin benefits: it relieves pressure on teachers’ time, and it brings a broader set of perspectives to the task.

⁶ For further discussion see Box 2 in Chapter 4 of [Making time for great teaching: How better government policy can help](#), which cites the National Center on Response to Intervention (2010); Haan (2021); and D. Fuchs and L. S. Fuchs (2017).

⁷ For a summary of the evidence see the Education Endowment Foundation’s [guidance booklet](#) and [teaching assistant evidence summary](#); Education Endowment Foundation (n.d) and Sharpley et al (2018)

SECTION 3

Help teachers to work smarter



School leaders can help teachers to work smarter across a range of different aspects of their roles, not only by reducing unnecessary administration, but also in core aspects of teaching work, such as curriculum planning.

Reduce unnecessary tasks in curriculum planning and lesson preparation

School leaders and heads of departments should review existing approaches to curriculum and lesson planning in their school, to ensure teachers are not asked to ‘reinvent the wheel’.

Our 2021 survey identified significant opportunities to overhaul existing approaches to curriculum and lesson planning to increase teacher time for effective teaching.

More than half of teachers in our survey reported that teachers at their school spend a great deal of time ‘re-inventing the wheel’ when preparing lessons. More than 40 per cent said teachers at their school do not have access to common, detailed lesson plans, unit plans, and assessments.⁸

Our survey shows that teachers are strongly in favour of more support in this area, and that it could save teachers a significant amount of time. A large majority of teachers (88 per cent) indicated that having access to common units, plans, and assessments could save them time: about **three hours** a week, on average.⁹ Better access to high-quality common resources could also support more effective teaching and improve student learning.

Box 4 describes one primary school’s approach to developing shared literacy resources, while also

⁸ See Figure 4.2 of our main report, [Making time for great teaching: How better government policy can help](#).

⁹ See Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4 of our main report, [Making time for great teaching: How better government policy can help](#).

Box 4: Developing high-quality, shared curriculum resources and lesson plans at Docklands Primary School

Docklands Primary is a new school in central Melbourne. Its top priority in its first year was to establish effective literacy instruction. The principal invested up-front in the development of high-quality, shared curriculum resources and lesson plans for literacy and English, common assessment schedules, and instructional coaching for teachers.

The school's literacy planning is led by a literacy expert with a background in speech pathology and primary education. She has concentrated on the curriculum scope and sequencing, common assessment schedules, and lesson plans for the daily literacy block, which focuses on systematic phonics instruction, oral reading fluency, and handwriting. She has also helped teachers plan the common English blocks for each year-level.

This coordinated approach to curriculum and lesson planning, supported by specialist expertise, has enabled Docklands to develop rigorous, shared lesson plans that are highly sequenced from Prep to Year 6. This approach ensures all students have similar learning opportunities, regardless of the class they are in. It will also save teachers considerable time in future years.

With literacy planning now well-established, teachers already have more time to focus on honing their classroom delivery and responding to student needs, supported by their instructional coach.

As the principal explained, Docklands Primary's approach means individual teachers avoid

spending 'hours and hours' searching for resources on Google, as many teachers elsewhere currently do. Instead, their time can be spent asking:

'... how are we going to teach this concept, how are we going to check that students have mastered it? And then, what are we going to do if they haven't? What errors and misconceptions are we anticipating, and how are we going to address those when they come up?'

In allocating resources, the principal had to choose whether to use non-teaching specialists to assist teachers to develop exceptional 'Tier 1' classroom practices, or to use these specialists to help with targeted interventions for struggling students ('Tier 2' or 'Tier 3' supports). 'You could use your specialists a million different ways, but you have to narrow that down and think about how to get the best bang for your buck,' he explained.

In line with the overarching priority to establish exceptional classroom-based literacy instruction in the school's first year, he decided to direct the focus of the two specialist roles on Tier 1 curriculum development, lesson planning, and teaching practice. The principal explained that establishing 'high-quality instruction from the classroom teacher, all day every day' would mean 'far fewer students fall through the cracks and need Tier 3 intervention in the first place'.

As a new school, Docklands Primary is still developing its approach to teaching and learning. It is committed to evaluating the results of its approach over time and making further refinements as the school grows.



building teachers' skills in delivering high-quality literacy instruction in their classrooms.

Reduce the variety of subjects each teacher takes

Schools can also make preparation time 'stretch' further by reducing the variety of subjects each teacher takes.

It is much easier for a teacher to prepare for multiple classes in the same subject and year level (for example, Year 7 and 8 English) than in multiple subjects and year levels (for example, a mix of English, history, social science, and geography subjects spread across Years 7 to 12).¹⁰ In primary schools, teachers could benefit from greater use of specialist teachers for subjects such as science, civics, or maths, to reduce their workloads. These considerations should be built into subject allocations each year.

Cut back lower-priority extra-curricular activities and events

School leaders should consider cutting the number of excursions or special events the school offers. Auditing these activities to ensure they remain fit for purpose – and removing those that are not – can free up significant teacher time.

Clear agreement on a school's core goals and priorities is essential for this strategy. Often extra-curricular activities will provide some benefit for students or teachers. But school leaders need

to decide whether the activities provide enough benefit to justify the resources, including teachers' (or students') time, that are invested in them.

Ballarat Clarendon College, in Victoria, provides a sophisticated example of this strategy in action (see Box 5).

Cut unnecessary school meetings and administrative requirements

Working collaboratively with staff, school leaders should review the existing administrative requirements they impose on teachers, including data collection, reporting obligations, and meetings.

Our 2014 report suggested that streamlining school meetings could save almost 20 hours a year for a typical teacher.¹¹ Across a school workforce, that adds up quickly: for the average school with 30 teaching staff, the total time saved by streamlining meetings would equate to 600 hours a year across the school, equivalent to about 16 weeks of work for a single teacher.

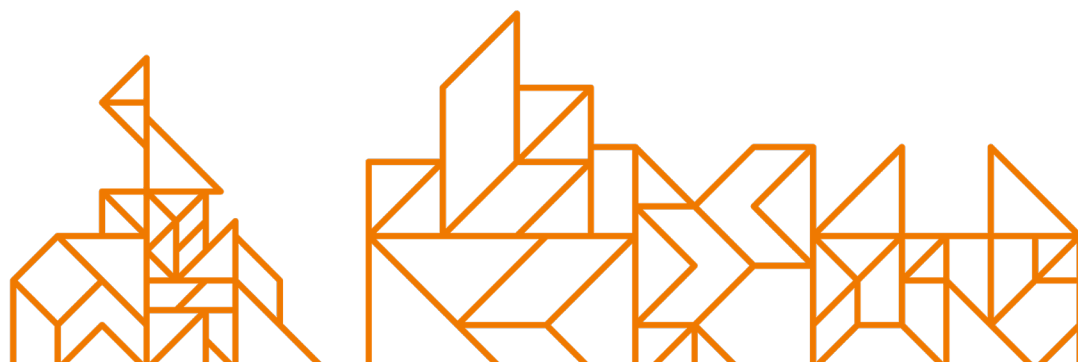
The Australian Institute for Education and School Leadership (AITSL) School Workload Reduction Toolkit provides a good place for school leaders to start thinking about this effort. Inspired by a similar resource in the UK, it provides detailed, practical, step-by-step advice for school leaders on ways to reduce teacher workloads.¹² Case studies show how some schools have reduced workload by setting up clear email protocols, reducing the number or length of meetings, modifying teacher timetables, and letting go of some extra-curricular activities.

¹⁰ Atteberry et al (2017); and Ost and Schiman (2015).

¹¹ See p. 8, footnote 27 and Appendix C of our 2014 report, [Making time for great teaching](#).

¹² The UK toolkit is available here: [UK Department of Education](#) (2018). The AITSL toolkit is available here: [AITSL](#) (2021).





Box 5: Minimising unplanned disruptions: managing the events calendar at Ballarat Clarendon College

Ballarat Clarendon College is a large, high-performing independent school in regional Victoria, with students from the Foundation year to Year 12. It has a detailed and carefully sequenced centralised curriculum, developed and refined by teachers over many years. This investment means teachers have a clear understanding of the scope, sequence, and pacing of curriculum content for each subject and year level, and teachers are equipped with detailed lesson plans. It also enables Clarendon to deliver a 'low variance' curriculum, where all students receive similar learning, supported by a high level of instructional coherence.

Because school leaders know exactly how much classroom time they need to protect from disruptions, they can plan effectively for Clarendon's other activities and events each year. For example, they know that Year 5 English requires 154 lessons, while Year 8 maths requires 119 lessons (all 70 minutes long), and that enough classroom time must be set aside for these lessons each year.

Well before the start of the school year, leaders 'step out' the lesson and assessment schedule along with key Clarendon events, such as camps, excursions, sports days, and concerts, mapping them all onto the school's annual calendar. Once agreed, the calendar is centrally managed and largely fixed.

New events that require students to miss class time can only be added to the calendar after a rigorous assessment of the costs and benefits of each event, including the impact on any classes that would be affected. As a result, there are

few unplanned disruptions each year, which allows teachers to avoid the last-minute panic common in other schools in Term 4 as they scramble to finish their lessons and make up for lost time.

As the Head of Curriculum at Clarendon explained:

'The most precious commodity we have as a school, and it would be the same for every school, is classroom time. We have to be really intentional about how we spend that time. To do that, we need the picture not only in the micro about what's happening in an individual class, but also what's happening across classes.

'The "stepping out" process really is an attempt to try and get all that information into one place [the centralised Clarendon calendar], to help us make informed decisions and to understand the consequences of changes in planning that may occur, and how that plays out towards the end of the year.'

Clarendon's approach leaves less room for individual ad hoc choices to add events or excursions to the school program, but it removes the stress of continued disruptions that often arise for teachers. It also means that teachers' and students' time is focused on the most important activities.

The Head of Curriculum explained:

'There are heaps of different things we could do with the limited time that we have. And they're probably all things that have some benefit. But the question is, what's our priority? What's going to give the greatest benefit and how does the benefit sit in terms of all the other things that we do? Our decision-making has to be based upon that broad landscape of benefits.'

SECTION 4

Rethink the way teachers' work is organised

The fundamental way teachers' work is organised in schools – such as the number of face-to-face teaching hours required each week, the number of students in each class, and expectations about the work teachers do during term breaks – can have a large impact on the effective use of teachers' time.

Industrial agreements in different states and school sectors shape many aspects of how teachers' work is organised. But there is often some flexibility within existing agreements to organise teachers' work more effectively, so that teachers have more time to prepare for class.

Within current industrial settings, school leaders should explore opportunities to make sensible, cost-effective changes to class sizes, use of non-term time, curriculum offerings, and class allocations to give teachers more time to prepare for effective teaching.

Make small increases in class sizes, where appropriate, in exchange for more preparation time

Running smaller class sizes is very costly and often has minimal benefit for student learning.¹³ The pressure small classes place on school budgets can make it much harder for school leaders to invest in quality teaching, which will generally have a bigger impact on student performance.

School leaders should try to keep class sizes as close to regulated maximums as possible, unless there is a compelling reason not to. This approach can save schools a significant amount of money, which can be used to 'buy' more preparation time for teachers.

Our 2021 survey showed that most teachers are

willing to teach slightly larger classes if the costs saved are invested in more preparation time for teachers.¹⁴

While industrial agreements will often limit a school's room to move across the board, there may still be some classes where numbers could be increased by combining small classes or streamlining subject offerings.

Do more preparation and planning in non-term time

Teachers' workloads are often 'lumpy' over the year. Teachers can feel intense pressure on their time during term, but then have more downtime in non-term time (student holidays). In some cases, teachers can be trapped in a vicious cycle, where significant pressures during term time leads to them feeling burnt-out by the end of each term, making it harder for them to focus on preparation and planning activities during the term breaks.

School leaders should work with teachers to consider how non-term time can be used to prepare for the intensity of term time.¹⁵ Shifting some curriculum planning and preparation activities to non-term time can help teachers better smooth their workload over the year, potentially improving their well-being and reducing the risk of burn-out.

In our 2021 survey, most teachers and school leaders said teachers' term-time workload would be reduced if schools required teachers to spend an additional 2-to-3 days working together at school before the start of each term.¹⁶ These days would be in addition to the existing planning days most teachers are already required to attend during non-term time.¹⁷

¹³ Chingos (2012) and Jepsen and Rivkin (2009). There is some evidence that small class sizes can make a difference for educationally disadvantaged students. For further discussion of this evidence see Box 5 of the main report, [Making time for great teaching: How better government policy can help](#) (2022).

¹⁴ For discussion of these survey findings see Section 5.21 of our main report, [Making time for great teaching: How better government policy can help](#) (2022).

¹⁵ The employment conditions relating to teachers' annual leave and requirements to work during the school holiday periods will be relevant here, and there is significant variation across states and territories and sectors.

¹⁶ Teachers would use these days on, for example, curriculum and lesson planning, high-quality professional learning, or developing strategies to support struggling students.

¹⁷ For further discussion of these survey findings see Chapter 5 of our main report, [Making time for great teaching: How better government policy can help](#).

Streamline curriculum offerings or partner with other schools to offer shared subjects

Small schools often feel they have no choice but to run several small classes so they can offer a broad range of subjects to their students. But this is very costly and can stretch teachers very thin. Innovative approaches to delivering shared subjects between nearby schools can make a significant difference, allowing each school to offer a broader range of subjects while easing pressure on budgets and overburdened teachers.

Box 6 shows how a partnering approach between schools has been achieved in Nathalia, in rural Victoria. This approach would also be feasible in metropolitan areas.



Box 6: Sharing teacher resources – the Nathalia example

Nathalia is a small rural community in northern Victoria. The district has two secondary schools, Nathalia Secondary College and St Mary of the Angels Catholic Secondary College, located very close to each other. Together, they have about 730 students.

The two schools offer a shared VCE program, spanning 24 Unit 3 & 4 subjects in addition to English. This is a much broader subject offering than either school could sustain financially on their own. Without the partnership, Nathalia Secondary College estimates it could offer only 7 Unit 3 & 4 subjects, while St Mary's says it would offer only 19 subjects.

Students study English at their enrolled school but are free to choose elective classes from either school. This is made possible by the schools' proximity to each other as well as a common timetabling approach across the schools.

By offering a shared VCE program, student numbers are high enough to offer classes in specialist subject areas, such as History, Drama, Specialist Maths, and Systems Engineering.

In some instances, the schools combine Unit 1 & 2 and Unit 3 & 4 subjects into a single class. When this happens, teachers are allocated additional preparation time.

The two schools also collaborate to deliver Vocational Education and Training subjects to students and shared professional development for teachers.

The approach has considerable benefits for students, expanding their academic learning and their social connections. But it also benefits teachers at the schools. Both school principals say it is easier to retain specialist teachers when they are confident their subjects can run each year.

The two principals emphasise that the 40-year partnership between their schools 'doesn't just happen' without ongoing effort. They attribute their success to a common commitment to putting 'kids at the centre' of their resource decisions, and their efforts to ensure all new staff and the broader Nathalia community understand and value the partnership. The principals are also committed to improving communication and coordination between their schools, including an upcoming project to develop a shared calendar of events and to align administrative processes for excursions.

SECTION 5

Seek mentoring and training



To make changes that increase time for effective teaching, school leaders need not only financial and strategic skills but also change-management skills. They must embark on a change process that brings staff, students, and parents along with them.

In our survey, more than 40 per cent of school leaders felt cultural resistance from teachers and other staff to changing the way they work was an issue or a major issue at their school impacting their ability to increase teachers' time for effective teaching.¹⁸

We recommend that governments provide more opportunities for training and better guidance for school leaders on these issues. But in the meantime, school leaders can seek out opportunities to develop their skills in this area too.

School leaders should seek opportunities for training, advice, or support from other experienced leaders and mentors to improve time for great teaching in their school.

School leaders can learn from each other through formal or informal networks and mentoring relationships, as well as from organisational specialists with skills in school-level strategic resource management. On-site coaching may be particularly helpful. Coaches can help schools identify how they can best organise their school's resources, including staff and time, to achieve their strategic objectives.

Change is not easy, but with the right guidance and good local decision-making, the payoff for teachers and students will be significant.

¹⁸ See Figure 2.7 of [Making time for great teaching: How better government policy can help](#).

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