



Research Agenda 2021–2022



Australian
Education
Research
Organisation

AERO produces a Research Agenda that identifies the high-level priority areas on which it will work during that period. These priorities are underpinned by AERO’s vision of achieving excellence and equity in educational outcomes for all children and young people through effective use of evidence.

AERO has seven priority areas for July 2021–December 2022, some of which may continue into future years.

AERO has identified these priorities by considering demand (the areas the education community nominate as the most pressing challenges) and impact (the areas the evidence base suggests would most improve excellence and equity in educational outcomes).

Within each priority area, AERO will generate, synthesise and curate rigorous research, so as to present high-quality evidence that is relevant and accessible to education practitioners and policymakers.

- ① Literacy and numeracy
- ② Wellbeing of children and young people
- ③ Continuity of learning and development across ECEC and schools
- ④ Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- ⑤ Addressing educational disadvantage
- ⑥ Supporting continuous school improvement
- ⑦ Examining evidence use in ECEC and schools

1 Literacy and numeracy

AERO will undertake research projects that provide practical guidance for practitioners and policymakers in both the school and early childhood education and care (ECEC) sectors. The aim of these projects is to improve the literacy and numeracy outcomes of all children and young people.

Rationale: Data from NAPLAN and international assessments suggest that the performance of Australia’s students in literacy and numeracy needs to show greater improvement. Literacy and numeracy are critical foundations, equipping students to access learning in all other parts of the curriculum. We need a clearer understanding of which students need more support and in which areas. We also need to translate and make high-quality evidence accessible for teachers so they can know how to better support students’ literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

Potential projects may explore questions such as:

- Which literacy and numeracy skills are most in need of improvement? How can teachers best teach these skills?
- What accounts for the decline in student performance at the high end of achievement?



2 Wellbeing of children and young people

AERO will undertake research projects that provide practical guidance for practitioners and policymakers in both the school and ECEC sectors. The aim of these projects is to improve wellbeing outcomes so that children and young people are better able to learn and develop.

Rationale: The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration states that education must support the wellbeing, mental health and resilience of young people alongside the focus on literacy, numeracy and learning the curriculum. AERO’s consultation with stakeholders has further stressed the importance of managing behaviour and supporting engagement, wellbeing and mental health in our children and young people. Across Australia there is a multitude of resources on wellbeing and engagement, from surveys to frameworks to programs, yet these resources are disparate and there remain many gaps in existing research.

Potential projects may explore questions such as:

- What data collections are available that can give us better understanding of the national state of children and young people’s wellbeing?
- What evidence-based practices can educators, teachers and leaders adopt to engage parents, carers and families in supporting the wellbeing and successful learning of children and young people, in early childhood settings and at school?



3 Continuity of learning and development across ECEC and schools

AERO will undertake research projects that help strengthen the links between ECEC services and schools. The aim of these projects is to minimise disruptions to children’s learning and development by strengthening capacity across the ECEC and school sectors.

Rationale: Every year, approximately 320,000 children transition from preschool to the first year of school, and approximately 650,000 students access outside school hours care services. Practitioners and policymakers need to be equipped with evidence-based strategies for supporting children who are most at risk of disrupted learning as they move between ECEC services and schools. AERO’s consultations also highlighted that these transition points can be opportunities for improved learning and development for all children if ECEC services and schools can be supported to learn from and build on each others’ strengths.

Potential projects may explore questions such as:

- What evidence-based practices and policies support children with disability and developmental delay moving between the ECEC and school sectors?
- How do we address the issue of increasing developmental vulnerability of children not proficient in English over the past decade?



4 Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

AERO will undertake research projects examining practices and policies across ECEC and schools that will improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Rationale: There has been a plethora of policies and initiatives over the past decade but a persistent gap exists in the academic achievement and educational attainment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people compared with others. AERO’s consultations with stakeholders have recommended that overcoming educational disadvantage for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children and young people should be a stand-alone priority for AERO.

Potential projects may explore questions such as:

- What is the evidence base for approaches to cultural responsiveness? How does teacher cultural responsiveness improve student outcomes?
- What does the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) reveal about predictors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s learning and development?

5 Addressing educational disadvantage

AERO will undertake research projects that aim to reduce educational disadvantage. AERO will provide practitioners in both ECEC and schools with practical guidance for improving outcomes for key disadvantaged cohorts. AERO will also undertake research projects that identify promising policy levers to reduce inequity.

Rationale: Research shows that educational disadvantage is faced by many children and young people in Australia, including Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children and young people, those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, those with disability, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and those in rural and remote settings. These children and young people often underachieve compared to their more advantaged peers. For example, in PISA 2018, there was a three-year difference in average performance between Australian students in the lowest and highest SES quartiles. Practitioners and policymakers need concrete evidence-based guidance so that young Australians of all backgrounds are supported to achieve their full potential.

Potential projects may explore questions such as:

- What are practical, evidence-based ways teachers can support students at and below the National Minimum Standard (NMS)?
- Given the importance of learning time for student achievement, what school-based practices can improve attendance for disadvantaged students?



6 Supporting continuous school improvement

AERO will undertake research projects that provide practical guidance for school leaders and policymakers to improve student learning outcomes in schools in the middle of the performance spectrum and where achievement has been static over time.

Rationale: All Australian children and young people should have the opportunity to learn and develop to their full potential. There are large numbers of students enrolled in schools in the middle of the performance spectrum where achievement levels have not improved for an extended period of time. Identification, synthesis and communication of successful approaches to improve outcomes for students in these schools would support the efforts many school leaders and systems already make in this regard.

Potential projects may explore questions such as:

- What characterises schools that have achieved sustained improvement in learning outcomes in local and national measures over several years? Do these factors differ across schools operating in different contexts?
- What does existing evidence tell us about how school leaders can best lead improvement in their schools, particularly for students in the middle of the performance spectrum?
- What system- or sector-level approaches have been associated with sustained improvement in schools that had not previously shown improvement for some time?



7

Examining evidence use in ECEC and schools

This ongoing agenda priority involves research projects that aim to understand the extent to which education practitioners and policymakers in ECEC and schools are currently using evidence and evidence-based practices, as well as any supports and barriers to effectively implementing evidence in their practice.

Rationale: AERO’s objectives include generating and making high-quality evidence accessible. However, for this evidence to improve child and student outcomes, it must be used by teachers and educators. This is why AERO has a third over-arching purpose to encourage adoption and effective implementation of evidence in practice and policy. To support this purpose, we will conduct research that examines the current state of evidence use in the Australian education system, and investigate how to increase the use of evidence-based strategies.

Potential projects may explore questions such as:

- How can we measure the use of evidence in practice?
- What makes evidence relevant? How do we know when evidence produced in one context is applicable to other contexts?
- What professional learning is most successful in encouraging and sustaining evidence-based teaching practices in schools and ECEC services?

