

Implementing effective tiered interventions in secondary schools

Survey of school and support staff

May 2023



*Implementing effective tiered interventions in secondary schools.
Survey of school and support staff.*

Authors: Paul Weldon, Jonathan Heard, Jess Thompson and Tanya Stephenson

The Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd
19 Prospect Hill Road
Camberwell VIC 3124
Phone: 03 9277 5555
ABN 19 004 398 145

www.acer.org

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The views expressed in this report are based on survey and interview responses, as understood by the authors. They do not necessarily represent the views of AERO or school sector authorities.

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Executive summary

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) conducted an online survey and a series of interviews as part of a project commissioned by the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO). The survey and interviews were focused on students in Years 7 to 9 who lack the foundational literacy and numeracy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum, in schools where most students have these skills. These students will, throughout this report, be referred to as “struggling students”. The students in scope are likely to struggle to engage in classes without significant differentiation on the part of classroom teachers, and the skill disparity may be so great that differentiating lessons for them is not feasible. The project sought to address the 4 questions below.

1. What methods and/or assessments do schools use to identify students in this cohort?
2. What frameworks do schools use to make decisions on how to support these students?
3. What supports are provided?
4. What confidence do school leaders and teachers have in the approaches currently used?

The survey was designed with 3 cohorts in mind: school leaders, teachers and external consultants who work with schools in literacy or numeracy. The survey was promoted by ACER through bulletins sent out to over 64,000 *Teacher* magazine subscribers on 11 May and 2 June 2022. The survey was also promoted by 3 literacy/numeracy organisations, on their websites and via newsletters. The survey closed on 24 June 2022.

In total, 382 viable responses were received: 280 to the literacy section and 245 to the numeracy section. Responses from school leaders were low (33 about literacy and 28 about numeracy), so enrolment items answered by school leaders only are unlikely to be representative. About 70% of responses were from teachers or leading teachers (197 about literacy and 175 about numeracy). School-based responses were distributed in similar proportions to teacher numbers across states and sectors, and by school size and geolocation. As such, while a sample of convenience, responses overall appear to be reasonably representative, with the caveat that respondents are likely to be biased towards school contexts with high proportions of students struggling with literacy or numeracy, or that are concerned about the support currently provided to these students.

There were some external respondents (34 about literacy and 22 about numeracy) who had a variety of roles consulting across schools. Responses by this group have been presented separately to those of school respondents, for comparison.

In addition, 28 survey respondents were also interviewed. Respondents represented a range of states, sectors, geolocations, and school types, and provided additional detail about the context in which literacy and numeracy support is provided.

Survey responses are presented in the body of the report following the structure used in the survey, with commentary based on the interviews where appropriate. Findings are summarised here under the 4 project questions.

1. What methods and/or assessments do schools use to identify students in this cohort?

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) Year 5 results were commonly used as an initial means of identifying struggling students entering secondary school (Year 7), and was the most common assessment data received, though teacher judgement in the form of curriculum grades was also commonly provided as part of enrolment data. School leaders did indicate that struggling students in literacy and numeracy were flagged at least sometimes in enrolment data they received, but they were often not aware of the definition used to flag students.

Responses about definitions were low but it appears likely that the most common definitions of struggling students were those who were below minimum national standard in NAPLAN or had received a D or failing grade in their previous year as reported in teacher judgement data.

Nearly half of responding school leaders (44%) said that they identified students struggling with literacy based on enrolment data, and a further 44 per cent did so sometimes. Only one-fifth of school leaders (22%) identified students struggling with numeracy based on enrolment data, although about two-thirds (65%) did so sometimes. Most school leaders noted that they either used a local definition, or identified students based on a variety of assessments without setting any specific definition.

Most respondents said that their schools specifically identified and monitored students lacking foundational literacy or numeracy skills, using a wide range of assessments, and most undertook ongoing assessment. Among teacher respondents, NAPLAN, ACER's Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT) and school-based assessment, including teacher judgement, were used by a majority.

2. What frameworks do schools use to make decisions on how to support these students?

In the absence of specific definitions and funding targeted to literacy and numeracy programs it was not clear that schools had a formal framework in place guiding specific decisions about this cohort. Most systems have allocated funding to interventions that indirectly support this cohort, but the approach taken to identify and support students ranged across systems and appeared to include a high level of school discretion. For example, Victorian government schools do have specific funding for students in Years 7 to 12 who are below the National Minimum Standard (NMS) in NAPLAN. The funding covers the time of teachers to work directly with these students, however, schools choose how they support the students, including mode (in-class, withdrawal), time per week, assessments, and pedagogy or programs.

As noted below, schools used many different methods of support. From interviews, it was clear that some schools had strategies in place and were quite targeted in how and why they supported students. For other schools, it seemed ad hoc, based on student preference, teacher availability and personal expertise, and what could be achieved around competing issues such as curriculum requirements, student wellbeing and attendance in other subjects.

3. What supports are provided?

Only about half of schools said that they provided specific additional support in literacy (58%), although a further third (34%) said they did so sometimes. Issues affecting the provision of support commonly included lack of funding (64%), lack of qualified or experienced staff (61%) and lack of available staff (59%). These issues tended to be more prevalent in government schools and in regional and remote areas. In interviews, teachers also noted a lack of funding for professional learning (PL), including a lack of time available to undertake PL.

In addition, factors that affected the provision of support included student engagement/behaviour (69%) and attendance (55%), student wellbeing (69%), and different cultural or language barriers (59%). In interviews, teachers noted that the lack of age-appropriate literacy resources (across all subjects, including numeracy) was a significant issue both in terms of student disengagement and in the time and effort required by teachers to differentiate in this way by creating or sourcing appropriate material.

Secondary trained English or maths teachers were most commonly providing literacy or numeracy support, and in both cases, about two-thirds had received intervention training. Support was also regularly offered by teacher aides (33%), of whom, only about one-third had received any intervention training (37%).

In literacy, in-class support was most common (89%), and identified students received on average about 86 minutes of support per week. Withdrawal was less common (58%) and had a similar average time per week (89 minutes). Streamed or timetabled classes (41%), while less common, appeared to be more formal in terms of an allocation and provided considerably more support on average, at 199 minutes per week. Support outside usual school classes, such as before or after school, or at lunch time (32%) averaged about 60 minutes per week.

In-class support was also most common in numeracy (83%), with students receiving an average 80 minutes of support per week. Streamed or time-tabled classes (49%) were as common as withdrawal (48%) and again, streamed classes provided more support on average (172 minutes, compared to withdrawal at 66 minutes). Support outside usual class time was the same as for literacy (31%), although averaging slightly higher time per week (85 minutes).

4. What confidence do school leaders and teachers have in the approaches currently used?

Overall, about 2 in 5 respondents (41%) indicated that they were not really, or not at all confident in the approach their school was taking to support students. School leaders were less confident than teachers, and staff in government schools were less confident than their non-government counterparts. Similarly, teachers in rural areas were less confident than their colleagues in metropolitan areas.

In interviews, teachers were quite confident in the methods they used to identify struggling students, but were less confident that all students were getting the required support. One notable concern about the support provided, whether in-class, in separate streamed or timetabled classes, or by withdrawal, was the tendency for that support to enable access to at-level curriculum material rather than develop foundational literacy skills. Enabling access by use of age-appropriate low-literacy materials improved student engagement and allowed students to participate in classes, but teachers were concerned that this would not result in growth in literacy skills.

Another issue noted by many, particularly in numeracy, was the rigour of the maths curriculum, which required teachers to teach a range of concepts in a very short amount of time. This made it difficult to cater for students who were behind, particularly in a mixed-ability class, in which the teacher had to maintain a steady pace of lesson delivery to ensure the full curriculum was delivered over the year.

1 Introduction and Methodology

1.1 Overview of the project

AERO has 7 priority areas identified in its Research Agenda 2021 to 2022. These include ‘addressing educational disadvantage.’ To support this priority, AERO is conducting a project focused on students starting secondary school who are significantly behind their peers and struggle to engage with classroom content without significant differentiation from classroom teachers.

The project aims to better understand this student cohort and to develop guidance for school leaders on how they can be identified and supported. The project comprises multiple elements to meet these objectives, including background data analysis, a survey of school staff, an evidence review, an analysis of gaps between current and best practice, and the development of resources for schools and jurisdictions that will help schools to meet gaps in their current practice.

As part of this project, AERO contracted ACER to conduct 2 elements of the work: a landscape scan that looked at the policy and program settings under which schools operate in each jurisdiction, and a survey of school and external support personnel involved in the support of the student cohort in scope.

The student cohort of interest includes those in Years 7 to 9 who lack the foundational literacy and numeracy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum, in schools where the majority of students have these skills (i.e. special schools, and students with an intellectual disability who require specific disability support are not in scope in this instance).

The students in scope may have a skill disparity so great that differentiating lessons is not feasible. They may participate in withdrawal programs that focus on developing foundational skills, and other significant learning interventions.

1.2 Organisation of the report

This report comprises 3 chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the survey development and administration, and respondent demographics. The second chapter looks at the results of the survey for literacy, while the third chapter looks at the results for numeracy. The additional detail and context provided by interview responses is included in the appropriate sections that discuss survey responses.

1.3 Survey development

Before developing the survey, the first part of the project involved a landscape scan and interviews with staff in departments of education. This was undertaken to provide an understanding of the context in which schools were operating in terms of policies and funded programs in the area of literacy or numeracy support for students in Years 7 to 9. In addition, the landscape scan looked at what literacy/numeracy assessments were available for this cohort, and any ‘off-the-shelf’ programs of support that schools could use.

The data on assessments and programs from the landscape scan was then used to inform survey items in these areas. The survey was designed to gain insights into the 4 questions below, identified by AERO.

1. What methods and/or assessments do schools use to identify students in this cohort?
2. What frameworks do schools use to make decisions on how to support these students?

3. What supports are provided?
4. What confidence do school leaders and teachers have in the approaches currently used?

The survey was designed with 3 cohorts in mind: school leaders, teachers, and external consultants who work with schools in literacy or numeracy. School leaders were asked to respond to a set of items relating to external data they receive as part of student enrolment. Teachers were asked about data the school collected directly from students. Teachers and school leaders otherwise received the same questions (although in some cases, leaders were not required to provide as much detail). External consultants received a separate set of questions appropriate to their role.

The draft survey was provided to AERO for feedback, finalised and entered into ACER’s survey software. The complete survey is documented in Appendix 1.

1.4 Survey methodology

The survey was promoted by ACER through bulletins sent out to over 64,000 *Teacher* magazine subscribers. The key dates in the survey administration were as follows:

- 11 May 2022: survey went live online; *Teacher* bulletin sent out
- 2 June 2022: second *Teacher* bulletin sent out
- 24 June 2022: online survey closed.

The survey was also promoted by 3 literacy/numeracy organisations, on their websites and via newsletters.

1.5 Response rates and population characteristics

In total, there were over 1,200 responses to the survey, of which 530 were complete responses and others were partial. There were a high number of spam responses to the survey, including from overseas participants, perhaps in response to a prize draw incentive that was attached to the survey and promoted in the bulletin. Following extensive cleaning of the dataset, a final total of 382 respondents was obtained.

The survey was split into 2 parts, one for literacy and one for numeracy. As shown in Table 1.1, over one-third of respondents filled out the literacy section and one-quarter filled out the numeracy section. Over one-third of respondents completed both sections. In total, there were 280 responses to the literacy section and 245 to the numeracy section.

Table 1.1 Number and proportion of responses by response area

Response area	N	%
Literacy	137	35.9
Numeracy	102	26.7
Literacy and Numeracy	143	37.4
Total	382	100.0

Respondents were asked to indicate their role. Three-quarters of respondents were teachers, with the remaining responses from school leaders (10%), support staff external to schools (10%) and other school personnel (6%). As Table 1.2 shows, the proportion of these roles were very similar for literacy and numeracy respondents. A slightly higher proportion of external school support personnel responded in the literacy area (12%), while for numeracy, there was a slightly higher response by in-school education support staff (6.5%).

Table 1.2 Number and proportion of responses by role, by response area

Role	Literacy respondents		Numeracy respondents		All respondents	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
School leader	33	11.8	28	11.4	37	9.7
Leading teacher	85	30.4	73	29.8	118	30.9
Teacher	112	40.0	102	41.6	165	43.2
Education support role	12	4.3	16	6.5	18	4.7
Other school role	4	1.4	4	1.6	5	1.3
Non-school support role	34	12.1	22	9.0	39	10.2
Total	280	100.0	245	100.0	382	100.0

Table 1.3 shows the proportion of responses received by state and territory, compared to the proportion of teaching staff current in schools in 2021.¹ New South Wales and Victoria had the highest response rates, though based on the proportion of teaching staff in these states, they are somewhat under-represented. South Australia is over-represented (19% of respondents, compared to 7% of the teacher workforce in Australia). The 2 territories (ACT and NT) are also over-represented proportionally, while Tasmania is under-represented, however given the overall response rate to the survey, actual numbers of respondents in these 3 cases are very low.

There are some differences in responses by literacy and numeracy, notably in South Australia, which has a much higher response rate to numeracy, and Western Australia and NSW, which have higher response rates in literacy.

Table 1.3 Number and proportion of responses by state, by response area

State	Literacy respondents		Numeracy respondents		All respondents		% Teaching staff, 2021
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
ACT	11	3.9	7	2.9	13	3.4	1.8
NSW	79	28.2	51	20.8	90	23.6	30.1
NT	6	2.1	7	2.9	10	2.6	1.1
QLD	53	18.9	50	20.4	69	18.1	20.4
SA	28	10.0	60	24.5	71	18.6	6.8
TAS	3	1.1	3	1.2	5	1.3	2.2
VIC	64	22.9	49	20.0	83	21.7	27.1
WA	36	12.9	18	7.3	41	10.7	10.6
Total	280	100.0	245	100.0	382	100.0	100.0

Looking at responses by sector, Table 1.4 shows similar proportions responding to the literacy and numeracy sections of the survey. Overall, compared to the proportions of teachers in each sector, there was a higher response rate from the independent sector. The government sector response rate was lower compared to the overall numbers in the sector, however accounted for nearly half of all survey responses.

¹ Teaching staff proportions by state, 2021 (in Table 1.3 and 1.4) taken from Table 50a of the Schools Australia dataset, released by the ABS in February 2022. See <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release>

Table 1.4 Number and proportion of responses by sector, by response area

Sector	Literacy respondents		Numeracy respondents		All respondents		% Teaching staff, 2021
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Government	128	45.7	118	48.2	187	49.0	63.5
Catholic	62	22.1	46	18.8	82	21.5	19.2
Independent	90	32.1	81	33.1	113	29.6	17.4
Total	280	100.0	245	100.0	382	100.0	100.0

Responses by geolocation are about the same for literacy and numeracy respondents. Over half of respondents are based in metropolitan areas, just under one-third in regional areas, and about 14% in rural or remote areas, as shown in Table 1.5.

Table 1.5 Proportion of responses by geolocation, by response area

Geolocation	Literacy %	Numeracy %	All %
Metropolitan	54.1	54.7	56.0
Regional	31.3	30.9	30.9
Rural	14.6	14.3	13.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

The most common secondary school type was those that include senior secondary (Years 11 and 12), which accounted for 80% of schools, including those schools that also have a primary school attached, as shown in Table 1.6. About 12% of schools finished at Year 10 (F to 10 and 7 to 10). Just under half of respondents (44%) were in schools that included a primary school (F to 9, F to 10, F to 12).

Table 1.6 Proportion of responses by school type, by response area

School type	Literacy %	Numeracy %	All %
F-9	2.0	2.2	2.6
F-10	6.9	6.7	7.0
F-12	35.4	35.0	34.1
7-10	4.9	6.3	5.2
7-12	44.3	42.6	45.2
Other	6.5	7.2	5.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

1.6 Reported student numbers

Responses were well represented across school sizes, as shown in Table 1.7. Similar proportions of respondents came from smaller schools, with slightly lower numbers from larger schools. Based on average school size, numbers are reasonably representative.

Table 1.7 Average number of Year 7 students enrolled

Average number of Y7 students enrolled	Literacy respondents		Numeracy respondents		All respondents		Ave School size %
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Up to 50 students	52	22.0	29	26.1	69	21.2	27.7
51-100 students	57	24.2	29	26.1	73	22.4	13.6
101-150 students	52	22.0	22	19.8	80	24.5	25.7
151-200 students	32	13.6	12	10.8	47	14.4	12.0
Over 200 students	43	18.2	19	17.1	57	17.5	21.0
Total	236	100.0	111	100.0	326	100.0	100.0

Note: Average school size is based on ABS Schools, Table 33a Non-special Schools by Secondary Enrolment, 2021. These proportions are indicative only as the calculation is based on an estimate of the number of Year 7 students enrolled by dividing overall secondary enrolment by 5.5 (which assumes all schools have equal students in each year from Y7 to Y10 and a smaller cohort in 11-12).

1.7 Potential response bias

The survey used a sample of convenience in that it did not randomly sample teachers and school leaders from a representative portion of Australian schools or teaching staff. By promoting the survey through ACER's *Teacher* magazine subscription base, the survey was able to reach a wide sample of people involved in the Australian education sector. Promotion through literacy and numeracy organisations may also have attracted respondents working in the literacy or numeracy areas. The tables presented above show that the survey was able to attract a broadly representative field of respondents, based on state, sector, geolocation and school size (that is, no one area is notably over- or under-represented).

Because the sample was not randomly chosen from teachers working in the area, it is possible that there is a bias towards teachers with particular concerns, and therefore either to schools with larger concentrations of struggling students than would have been the case in a random sample, or to teachers who may have more negative perceptions of the support provided in their schools. That is, school staff who are comfortable with the support provided to students, or who are at a school with few students in this category, may have been less inclined to respond. This possibility may have been offset by the incentive of being entered into a prize draw, and by passionate staff with expertise in the area willing to take the time to share practice, with the aim of assisting understanding at a research and policy level.

As the survey used a sample of convenience, it is not possible to gauge the extent to which responses are representative (for example, using standard errors). That is, if the survey was run again with another group of teachers of a similar size and demographic, we do not know how similar their responses would be to the ones we have. This is particularly the case for school leaders, as the number of respondents in this category was very low. The number of teachers is high enough to consider the responses to be indicative, bearing in mind the cautions about potential bias as noted above.

1.8 Interview methodology

Almost one-quarter (23% n=87) of respondents agreed to be approached for an interview and provided contact details. 28 interviews were conducted with 31 participants via virtual meetings. These interviews were conducted in July to September 2022 to better understand the Year 7 to 9 student cohort and gain deeper insights into the supports provided to them. The schedule of questions asked in each interview is provided in Appendix 2. Interview participants were based across different school contexts, as shown in Table 1.8, including 7 participants each from the Catholic and independent sectors, and 17 from the government sector.

Table 1.8 Interview participants

Participant	Role	State	Sector	Geolocation
1	Leading Teacher	VIC	Government	Metropolitan
2	School Leader	NSW	Independent	Rural
3	Leading Teacher	QLD	Catholic	Regional
4	Teacher	NT	Independent	Metropolitan
5	Leading Teacher	WA	Independent	Regional
6	Teacher	TAS	Catholic	Rural
7	School Leader	SA	Independent	Metropolitan
8	Leading Teacher	VIC	Catholic	Regional
9	Teacher	QLD	Catholic	Regional
10	Leading Teacher	ACT	Independent	Metropolitan
11	Non-school support role	QLD	Catholic	Regional
12	Teacher	SA	Independent	Metropolitan
13	Non-school support role	QLD	Government	-
14	Teacher	NSW	Catholic	Metropolitan
15	Leading Teacher	SA	Independent	Metropolitan
16	Non-school support role	NSW	Catholic	-
17	Teacher	WA	Government	Metropolitan
18	Teacher	VIC	Government	Metropolitan
19	Teacher	VIC	Government	Regional
20	Leading Teacher	VIC	Government	Regional
21	Teacher	NT	Government	Remote
22	Teacher	QLD	Government	Rural
23	Teacher & numeracy coach	TAS	Government	Remote
24	Teacher	WA	Government	Regional
25	Teacher	ACT	Government	Metropolitan
26	Teacher	VIC	Government	Regional
27	Group: Principal, 3 teachers	WA	Government	Metropolitan
28	Leading Teacher	NSW	Government	Metropolitan

2 Struggling students: Literacy

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of all questions asked in the literacy section of the survey, including responses from non-school personnel. Themes and quotations from interviews are interspersed with the findings where appropriate, to add detail and context.

2.2 Proportion of struggling students

Survey respondents were asked how many Year 7 students their school enrolled each year, on average. Immediately following this question, the survey provided a general definition of the in-scope student cohort:

The cohort of interest in this study are students in Years 7-9 who lack the foundational literacy skills required to engage with a secondary curriculum, in schools where most students have these skills (special schools, and students with an intellectual disability are not in scope in this instance).

The students in scope are likely to struggle to engage in classes without significant differentiation on the part of classroom teachers, and the skill disparity may be so great that differentiating lessons for them is not feasible. They may be participating in withdrawal programs that focus on developing these foundational skills, and other out-of-class interventions.

Based on this definition, respondents were asked to indicate how many Year 7 students in their school each year, on average, they had in this cohort, in need of literacy support. From the responses to these 2 questions, Table 2.1 shows the proportion of Year 7 students considered to be struggling with literacy averaged by school size, sector, and geolocation.

Table 2.1. Average proportion of struggling Year 7 students by school size, sector, and geolocation

Average Year 7 enrolment	Average proportion of struggling Y7 students	N	Std. Dev.
Up to 50 students	50.3%	45	30.8
51-100 students	31.9%	57	19.7
101-150 students	27.8%	51	14.9
151-200 students	25.7%	32	18.8
Over 200 students	21.2%	41	19.7
Sector			
Government	38.9%	101	25.6
Catholic	28.5%	50	18.7
Independent	25.0%	79	20.9
Geolocation			
Metropolitan	28.3%	122	19.4
Regional	31.2%	73	25.1
Rural	45.8%	35	28.2
Total	31.9%	230	23.5

Overall, survey respondent perception of the average proportion of students in their schools struggling with literacy is notably high, at nearly one-third of all Year 7 students (32%). This is likely to be due to the lack of an explicit definition, though it is a concern that respondents feel that as many as one-third of students starting secondary school lack foundation literacy skills and are likely to struggle in classes without significant differentiation by teachers or additional support.

The variations shown in Table 2.1 by sector and geolocation are expected, with rural schools and the government sector more likely to be teaching a higher proportion of disadvantaged students. It is interesting that smaller schools have higher ratios of struggling students – this may also relate to location, as rural schools tend to be smaller, but it is not clear what the reasons may be for this finding.

Table 2.2 provides further detail on the breakdown of proportions of struggling students by sector. Nearly one-quarter of teachers in government schools (23%) have indicated that more than half of their Year 7 students struggle with literacy, compared to under 10% in the Catholic and independent sectors.

Table 2.2 Proportion of Year 7 students deemed to be struggling with literacy, by sector

<i>Proportion of Year 7 cohort deemed to be struggling with literacy</i>	Sector			All %
	Government %	Catholic %	Independent %	
Up to 10%	6.9	10.0	17.7	11.3
10.1 to 20%	25.7	32.0	36.7	30.9
20.1 to 30%	17.8	22.0	26.6	21.7
30.1 to 40%	11.9	18.0	7.6	11.7
40.1 to 50%	14.9	10.0	2.5	9.6
Over 50%	22.8	8.0	8.9	14.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 2.3 provides further detail on the breakdown of proportions of struggling students by geolocation. About half of respondents in metropolitan (43%) and regional areas (48%) indicated that up to 20% of their Year 7 cohorts were struggling with literacy. In comparison, almost one-third of rural respondents (31%) said that over half of their students were struggling with literacy.

Table 2.3 Proportion of Year 7 students deemed to be struggling with literacy, by geolocation

<i>Proportion of Year 7 cohort deemed to be struggling with literacy</i>	Geolocation			All %
	Metropolitan %	Regional %	Rural %	
Up to 10%	12.3	15.1	--	11.3
10.1 to 20%	31.1	32.9	25.7	30.9
20.1 to 30%	25.4	20.5	11.4	21.7
30.1 to 40%	13.1	8.2	14.3	11.7
40.1 to 50%	8.2	8.2	17.1	9.6
Over 50%	9.8	15.1	31.4	14.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

These responses are considerably higher than indicated by NAPLAN. ACARA, on the NAPLAN website, states:

Students who are below the national minimum standard have not achieved the learning outcomes expected for their year level. They are at risk of being unable to progress satisfactorily at school without targeted intervention.

It should be noted that students who are performing at the national minimum standard may also require additional assistance to enable them to achieve their potential.²

Taking students who were at or below the NMS (excluding those who were absent, withdrawn or exempt) in 2021, about 16% of Year 7 students across Australia require additional assistance in reading, 25% in writing and 23% in spelling and grammar.³ This compares to an overall reported rate in this survey of 32% of Year 7 students who are struggling with literacy. Students below NMS appear to be distributed unevenly across Australia, as reflected across the reported rates in the survey.

The expectations of the curriculum were a factor that came up regularly in interviews, when discussing the identification and prevalence of struggling students. There was perceived to be a gap between the expectations of the primary curriculum progression between Years 3 to 6 and Years 7 to 10. In addition, notably for maths but in English as well, there was seen to be a high volume of material to be covered each year, which means teachers must move through each subject or concept rapidly.

Taken together, this can mean students entering Year 7, even if they are at the expected curriculum level at the end of Year 6, can quickly begin to struggle if they are not able to keep up with the expectations of the curriculum (as well as negotiating the social and cultural expectations of secondary school). That is, they may be capable, but need more time to understand concepts than is allowed by the requirements of the curriculum. Students who are even a little behind when they enter Year 7 can struggle with the new expectations of secondary school almost immediately. This is compounded for students who are further behind.

2.3 Enrolment data

A set of 10 items were asked of school leaders about the information they receive on incoming students, whether they receive data that indicate the students' level of ability in literacy, and whether struggling students are already flagged in any way. In total, only 33 school leaders responded to the literacy survey, so these results should be treated with caution, as it is not possible to gauge the extent to which responses are representative of Australian secondary schools.

As shown in Table 2.2, most schools receive data, at least sometimes, on student literacy levels when those students enter secondary school at Year 7. Over one-third of respondents indicated they do not always receive such data, and this increased to half of respondents for students who enter their schools at Years 8 or 9.

² ACARA NAPLAN website (accessed 5 July 2022): <https://www.nap.edu.au/results-and-reports/how-to-interpret/standards>

³ ACARA 2021 NAPLAN national report, Tables 7.R1, 7.W1 and 7.G1. See <https://nap.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2021-naplan-national-report.pdf>

Table 2.4 Proportion of schools receiving data on student literacy ability, by year of intake

<i>Do you/your school receive data that indicate each student's level of ability in literacy?</i>	Year 7 intake		Year 8/9 intake	
	N	%	N	%
Yes	19	57.6	13	39.4
Sometimes	13	39.4	17	51.5
No	-	-	2	6.1
Unsure	1	3.0	1	3.0
Total	33	100.0	33	100.0

School leaders were asked to indicate the most common data sources they received. Table 2.5 shows that NAPLAN and subject grades are the most commonly received data.

Table 2.5 Literacy data typically received, by year of intake

<i>What data do you typically receive?</i>	Year 7 intake		Year 8/9 intake	
	N	%	N	%
NAPLAN	28	87.5	27	90.0
Subject data/grades (e.g. English)	24	75.0	24	80.0
ACER PAT-Reading	14	43.8	6	20.0
Other	7	21.0	3	10.0

Most school leaders indicated that struggling students are sometimes already identified in the information they receive at enrolment (Table 2.6). Where these students are pre-identified, most school leaders noted that they were not made aware of the definition or cut-off score used to identify these students (Table 2.7).

Table 2.6 Students pre-identified by enrolment data

<i>The cohort of interest in this study are students in years 7-9 who lack the foundational literacy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum</i>			
<i>Are these students <u>pre-identified or flagged</u> for you in any way, in any of the data you receive when a student enrolls at your school?</i>			
	N	%	
Yes	7	21.2	
Sometimes	22	66.7	
No	3	9.1	
Unsure	1	3.0	
Total	33	100.0	

Table 2.7 Definition provided for pre-identified enrolment data

<i>Are you made aware of what definition or 'cut-off' score is used to identify this cohort of students in any of the data you receive?</i>	N	%
Yes	8	27.6
No	21	72.4
Total	29	100.0

School leaders who were aware of the definition used to identify struggling students provided some information on what data or definitions were being used, as shown in Table 2.8. Respondent numbers were too low to get a sense of the more commonly used data.

Table 2.8 Definitions used in pre-identified data

<i>Please indicate the definition or cut-off score that is used, and in relation to which data.</i>	N
D or failing grade at school	2
Below NMS in NAPLAN	2
Stanine 4 or lower (PAT or NAPLAN?)	1
Classroom teacher observations	1
Reading age in relation to chronological age	1
A range of data/assessments and cut-off scores	2

Just under one half of respondents (44%) noted that they identified struggling students based on the enrolment data they received, while another 44% indicated they only did so sometimes. Based on responses in the next section, as well as interviews, and uncertainty about how students have been flagged (see Table 2.7), it may be that most schools rely on their own assessment program to identify students rather than on data supplied at enrolment.

Table 2.9 School level identification of struggling student cohort

<i>Do you/does your school specifically identify this cohort of students, using the enrolment data you receive?</i>	School respondents		Non-school respondents	
	N	%	N	%
Yes	11	44.0	18	56.3
Sometimes	11	44.0	11	34.4
No	3	9.1	3	9.4
Unsure	--	--	--	--
Total	25	100.0	32	100.0

It is also notable that most schools do not use a set definition (Table 2.10). Interviews with government departments and the landscape scan also found that set or recognised definitions were not widely used, except as a reporting mechanism (NAPLAN). In some states, a definition might be used at a policy level, as a means of targeting funding. For example, in Victoria, the Middle Years Literacy and Numeracy Support (MYLNS) initiative provides funding for literacy and numeracy support based on the proportion of students in a school who are below the NMS in reading in NAPLAN. Schools, however, have capacity to include other students at their discretion, where there is enough funding to support this.

Responses from interviewees suggested that schools tend to respond to students on a sliding scale depending on the school context, the number of students whose assessments suggest they might be struggling, and the capacity of the school to provide support. It was also not always clear to what extent assessments clarified the level a student was operating at in terms of learning progressions and the Australian (or equivalent) curriculum grade level. This would make it difficult for teachers to know whether their in-class differentiation was suitable for a given student based on their assessment results.

Table 2.10 Source of definitions used at school level

<i>What definition do you apply?</i>	School respondents		Non-school respondents	
	N	%	N	%
We/schools use a definition provided by a head office (department or region, CEO)	4	18.2	4	13.8
We/schools use a definition decided within our school or school cluster/network	6	27.3	10	34.5
We/schools identify students who lack these skills but do not use a set definition	17	51.5	17	58.6

Table 2.11 Definitions used at school level

<i>Please enter the definition you use to identify this cohort. Please also indicate the data set or sets you apply this definition to.</i>	School N	Non-school N
Below average/undefined use of NAPLAN	3	4
At or below NMS in NAPLAN	2	8
Below average/undefined use of PAT	3	9
School-run assessment/general ability test for Y6-Y7	1	2
Literacy score in selective school entry test	1	--
Essential Assessment (undefined use)	--	1
Best Start (undefined use)	1	--
NEALE analysis	--	1
Below curriculum level – teacher judgement	1	4
Low EAL/D phase level	--	1

2.4 School-based identification of struggling students

The majority of respondents indicated that they specifically identified and monitored students who were struggling with literacy, although about one fifth of respondents said this only happened ‘sometimes’, as shown in Table 2.12. In interviews, several teachers noted that testing was undertaken across student cohorts, particularly in Year 7, early in Term 1, although some did note that students who were more clearly struggling tended to be prioritised. For example, a teacher in a Victorian government school reported:

In Year 7 we get information from primary schools. We get some NAPLAN results but not all – I’m not sure why we can’t get NAPLAN from the Department as what we get from schools is patchy. We ask for information to flag students who might need extra support. We may get an IEP, but mostly we are just told if a kid struggles with literacy. We do PAT testing and a writing task to try and flag issues. Where students are identified, we do Fountas and Pinnell to get an idea of the level their reading is at. At Year 8 and 9 we mostly rely on teacher judgement. NAPLAN isn’t useful as we get the information too late – it might help for the following year but not for current interventions. We also do PAT testing up until Year 10.

Commonly, an assortment of assessments were used (Table 2.13), and interviewees confirmed the findings of the survey that these tended to be NAPLAN, grades from primary school (Year 6), ACER's PATs and other assessments undertaken in Term 1, and teacher judgement, as teachers got to know students in their classes (Table 2.15).

Table 2.12 Identification of struggling students

<i>Do you/does your school <u>specifically</u> identify, diagnose and/or monitor students who may lack the foundational literacy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum as a cohort within your school?</i>	N	%
Yes	173	70.9
Sometimes	53	21.7
No	10	4.1
Unsure	8	3.3
Total	244	100.0

Table 2.13 Methods of identification of struggling students

<i>How do you identify these students in your school?</i>	N	%
Identification is ad hoc or informal, by teacher judgement	46	20.6
We use an assessment/range of assessments	177	79.4
Total	223	100.0

Table 2.14 Timing of student assessment

<i>At your school, do you only undertake an initial assessment of students (e.g. at start of Year 7 or upon enrolment) or do you undertake ongoing assessment of your students across years 7-9?</i>	N	%
Initial assessment	26	14.7
Ongoing assessment	144	81.4
Unsure	7	4.0
Total	177	100.0

As shown in Table 2.15, all assessments found in the landscape scan and included in the survey were being used, to an extent. As noted above, the most common assessments in use were NAPLAN, ACER's PAT and teacher judgement (grades etc.). However, and as noted in interviews, the uses of assessments might differ, with NAPLAN often used as an initial indicator of struggling students rather than to assess what level a student is actually at, or as a means of determining their eligibility (at the school level) for support.

Table 2.15 Literacy assessments

Literacy assessments	N	%
NAPLAN	129	76.3
Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT - ACER) – Reading, Spelling, Vocabulary, etc.	100	59.2
School-based assessments/Teacher Judgement (e.g. reported curriculum achievement based on teacher-developed common assessment tasks)	92	54.4
MultiLit placement tests	51	30.2
South Australian Spelling Test	44	26.0
York Assessment of Reading Comprehension (YARC - PAA)	41	24.3
ACARA Literacy Learning Progression	34	20.1
Running Records	32	18.9
Essential Assessment	19	11.2
CARS and STARS	18	10.7
BURT Word Reading Test (NZCER)	17	10.1
Wheldall Assessment of Reading Passages (WARP)	17	10.1
Single Word Spelling Test (SWST)	16	9.5
Diagnostic Spelling Test (DiST - MOTif Macquarie University)	13	7.7
PM Benchmarking (Nelson)	13	7.7
Waddington Diagnostic Reading and Spelling Tests	13	7.7
Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (NARA)	12	7.1
Compass assessment (ACER)	11	6.5
PROBE	11	6.5
QuickSmart	11	6.5
Reading Progress Test	11	6.5
Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP - Pearson)	10	5.9
Fountas and Pinnell (Heinemann)	10	5.9
Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST)	9	5.3
Test of Reading Comprehension (TORCH – ACER)	9	5.3
Test of Word Reading Ability 2 (TOWRE2 – Pearson)	8	4.7
Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)	7	4.1
Lexile	6	3.6
Oxford Word List	6	3.6
Phonics Screening Check (SA)	5	3.0
Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test (SPAT)	5	3.0
Words Their Way	5	3.0
Castles and Colthart 2 Test (MOTif Macquarie University)	4	2.4
Jolly Phonics	4	2.4
Test of Everyday Reading Comprehension (TERC - MOTif Macquarie University)	4	2.4
VCAA On Demand/Digital Assessment Library	4	8.7
Magic Words	1	0.6
Total	100.0	100.0

2.5 Support provided to struggling students

The section of the survey that asked respondents about the support provided to students opened with a reiteration of the broad definition of students in scope:

In this section of the survey, we are interested to learn about the nature of the support you provide to students in Years 7 to 9 who are identified as lacking the foundational literacy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum.

Please note: supports provided to students who attend special educational settings, and students with an intellectual disability, are not in scope for these questions.

Based on this definition, respondents were first asked whether their school provided any specific additional support, other than differentiated instruction or assessment provided by classroom teachers. Table 2.16 shows that just over half of respondents (57.5%) indicated that students are provided with specific additional support, while a further third (33.5%) said that students were sometimes provided with support.

Table 2.16 Provision of additional support to struggling students

<i>At your school, are students who fit this description provided any specific additional support in literacy? (Additional support is support other than differentiated instruction or assessment provided by their classroom teachers)</i>	N	%
Yes	134	57.5
Sometimes	78	33.5
No	13	5.6
Unsure	8	3.4
Total	233	100.0

Respondents were also asked to indicate if there were any issues that might make it difficult for a school to provide additional support to struggling students. Table 2.17 shows the results in the order of most frequent response by school personnel. The 2 most cited factors that might prevent support were lack of funding (63-64%) and lack of qualified and experienced teachers (61-69%). Twenty respondents provided text in the 'Other' option. These included lack of knowledge of effective interventions, lack of professional learning (PL), lack of time to prepare and develop interventions, lack of resources for students, students unwilling to engage, and lack of time within curriculum requirements.

Table 2.17 Issues that may prevent the provision of literacy support to struggling students

<i>Do any of the following issues currently make it difficult for your school to provide additional support to such students?</i>	School respondents		Non-school respondents	
	N	%	N	%
A lack of funding to provide additional supports	149	63.9	20	62.5
A lack of staff qualified/experienced in literacy	141	60.5	22	68.8
A lack of available staff	137	58.8	15	46.9
A belief that teachers are differentiating (or should be able to differentiate) to meet the literacy needs of these students	106	45.5	20	62.5
A lack of a clear definition/identification of these students in particular	78	33.5	14	43.8
A lack of parental support/desire for their children to be given	72	30.9	9	28.1
A lack of leadership in this area	55	23.6	14	43.8
It is not a priority at my school/at schools	15	6.4	6	18.8
None of these are issues at my school	11	4.7	--	--
Other	20	9.0	8	25.0

There were some differences in the prevalence of issues faced by sector, as shown in Table 2.18. A higher proportion of respondents in government schools indicated that lack of funding, lack of qualified staff and lack of available staff were issues for their schools.

Table 2.18 Issues that may prevent the provision of literacy support to struggling students, by sector

<i>Do any of the following issues currently make it difficult for your school to provide additional support to such students?</i>	Sector (school respondents)			All %
	Government %	Catholic %	Independent %	
A lack of funding to provide additional supports	72.0	64.6	52.6	63.9
A lack of staff qualified/experienced in literacy	64.5	60.4	55.1	60.5
A lack of available staff	68.2	52.1	50.0	58.8
A belief that teachers are differentiating (or should be able to differentiate) to meet the literacy needs of these students	42.1	56.3	43.6	45.5
A lack of a clear definition/identification of these students in particular	34.6	33.3	32.1	33.5
A lack of parental support/desire for their children to be given	29.0	33.3	32.1	30.9
A lack of leadership in this area	31.8	20.8	14.1	23.6
It is not a priority at my school/at schools	5.6	8.3	6.4	6.4
None of these are issues at my school	1.9	8.3	6.4	4.7

In the same way, Table 2.19 shows differences by geolocation, with about three-quarters of respondents in rural schools indicating issues with funding and staffing, compared to 52% to 61% of schools in metropolitan areas.

Table 2.19 Issues that may prevent the provision of literacy support to struggling students, by geolocation

<i>Do any of the following issues currently make it difficult for your school to provide additional support to such students?</i>	Sector (school respondents)			All %
	Metropolitan %	Regional %	Rural %	
A lack of funding to provide additional supports	57.5	70.4	74.3	63.9
A lack of staff qualified/experienced in literacy	61.4	53.5	71.4	60.5
A lack of available staff	52.0	63.4	74.3	58.8
A belief that teachers are differentiating (or should be able to differentiate) to meet the literacy needs of these students	47.2	45.1	40.0	45.5
A lack of a clear definition/identification of these students in particular	37.8	33.8	17.1	33.5
A lack of parental support/desire for their children to be given support	27.6	32.4	40.0	30.9
A lack of leadership in this area	23.6	21.1	28.6	23.6
It is not a priority at my school/at schools	6.3	7.0	5.7	6.4
None of these are issues at my school	4.7	5.6	2.9	4.7

A significant issue highlighted during participant interviews was the lack of funding and time provided for teachers to engage in PL aimed at supporting students in literacy. For example, a leading teacher from an independent school in regional Western Australia noted:

We do no teacher professional development (PD) across our school at all – we don't even have a PD budget. So, any sort of training is severely lacking. We've lost 3 of our Heads of Learning Area, which provided some of that training. We don't have a Head of English anymore so English gets ignored.

Teachers think they are differentiating, but they don't really know what differentiating means. It's frustrating to know that we don't do enough to assist these students. We also don't have enough Educational Assistants – we have 300 students with about 10% of those who need help, and we can't do it on our own.

This lack of available staff also presented as a major challenge for supporting students struggling with literacy across the different school contexts. A leading teacher at an independent school in metropolitan ACT further outlined some of the issues faced by teachers due to the limited staffing, as well as the lack of external support:

There's no external support that comes in at all. We've only got the 3 teachers which are in the Academic Engagement Team and they're there to cater across Years 7 to 12 – so there is lots of different issues that they're dealing with. It is really just up to the teacher all the time.

Similarly, a principal in a government school in WA noted that there were no external literacy experts employed to work across schools, and no targeted funding.

Parents seemed generally to be involved in the identification of students needing extra support in literacy across some schools. A teaching principal at a small independent school in regional NSW noted that most parents are aware, to an extent, of the need for additional support for their child, and so are not surprised to receive a letter from the school. However, as reflected in the responses to the survey, participants discussed the lack of active parental involvement as a barrier to the development of students' literacy skills. This differed based on the sector and SES of the school. As explained by a literacy teacher in a Catholic school in rural Tasmania:

This is one of the big things that has always been hard. Because it's such a low socioeconomic area, parents don't want to come in. We do try to have parent meeting nights, but we get maybe 5 to 6 parents in the secondary area. Down at the primary level we get more, but when the kids go into high school it's like the parents forget about them, which is very sad. They're just happy to send them off to school.

I quite often ring parents because I feel like if this child isn't giving me any work whatsoever then the parent needs to know that this is what's going on. How can we work together? So, I usually have phone calls. I've found that's really good, and I'm going to have teacher interviews but the only ones that come are the 'good' kids' parents, the ones that you don't really need to talk to.

A WA government school running a withdrawal program found that parents either knew their child was struggling and welcomed the support offered, or were taken by surprise, as they had not been aware of any issues during the primary years. Some parents, concerned that their child was not in a 'mainstream' class, would source additional assistance, such as tutors. The experience of this school was that most parents were engaged, to the extent of wanting to hear about their child's growth within the program, but that collaboration in terms of assisting the child in the home was far less prevalent.

There are a variety of student characteristics that may affect the provision of literacy support, as presented in Table 2.20. Over two-thirds of respondents (69%) indicated that classroom engagement and behaviour, and welfare or wellbeing concerns were factors in their decision-making. Other aspects likely to be related to the student cohort of a given school included students from a non-English speaking background, and Aboriginal students: groups that may need quite different types of literacy support.

Table 2.20 Factors other than literacy ability that may affect the provision of literacy support

<i>When considering how or if to provide literacy support to these students, what other factors do you consider, aside from their literacy ability?</i>	N	%
Classroom engagement/behaviour	147	69.3
Welfare or wellbeing concerns	147	69.3
Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)	124	58.5
Attendance data	117	55.2
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status	109	51.4
Medical or health concerns	102	48.1
Socio-Economic Status (SES)	89	42.0
Migrant or refugee status	66	31.1
Other	--	--

Disengagement and lack of resilience, particularly in Years 8 and 9, were widely seen as impacting student learning progression in literacy, which appears to have been worsened by periods of online learning resulting from responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. Across different school contexts, students seem to be reluctant to engage with literacy domains, particularly with comprehension and writing. Teachers stated that students often refuse to start writing on a particular topic or put in minimal effort:

Online learning made it even harder because those kids were just disengaged completely, and they're now coming back to class with huge gaps in their learning.

We've got a plagiarism checker within our learning management system and a lot of our Year 7s are literally just submitting the Wikipedia page. They will Google the question and then they will hope that the answer gets fed back to them, and then they will just put that answer down. It is a different ball game for some of these kids who can't even put a sentence together.

Several teachers highlighted the lack of age-appropriate literacy resources for students in Years 7, 8 and 9 who have low levels of literacy as adding to the issue of student disengagement:

Students in Years 8 and 9 don't want to be reading or seen to be reading something that only has 4 or 5 pages in it and looks like it's a primary school book. That's the biggest challenge in the area of reading – to be able to have age-appropriate texts and themes, but not seen as being really for babies because that's the best way to turn off a teenager from doing any intervention whatsoever.

An interview participant from a non-school support role who has worked towards developing such resources further emphasised this issue, stating that teachers and schools that are using age-appropriate resources for Years 7, 8 and 9 have provided positive feedback regarding students' increased engagement with the content while developing their literacy skills:

We have to create content that's really kid-centric – both age appropriate and interest appropriate. If you're searching online for online comprehension and reading exercises, a lot of them are American based, and a lot of them are just too broad in their interest. One was about a bridge in the UK which was 2,000 years old – you're not going to get a reluctant reader to engage with that text. If you can tap into their interest, whether it be football, haunted stories or dangerous animals, it engages them, it builds their confidence and then they're willing to engage with texts that are a little bit unfamiliar.

Some schools have found that the really disengaged students in Years 7 to 9 don't have enough resources that are age-appropriate for that child who is now 14 or 15 years old. That child does not want to be doing activities that are more at the nursery or early stage level. So that's really really important. You have to have content that even a 14-year-old child – they may be reading at an 8-year-old level – but that content still has to be very relevant and of high interest to them.

In addition to disengagement, several teachers mentioned low attendance numbers as a contributing factor to the challenge of supporting the students struggling in literacy, finding it difficult to ensure that the students turned up to school:

I think that that's our biggest issue systemically of not having time with the kids to be able to make a difference. Some Year 9 students continue to be disengaged and if we don't try to get them into school and have some meaningful learning, then they're just not going to catch up and they're not going to have the necessary skills to be able to go out the workforce.

Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds add to the complexity of catering to diverse needs. Providing these students with adequate and appropriate support to develop their foundational literacy skills was highlighted by several teachers in schools with large numbers of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD) students:

If you're defining literacy as reading and writing in your own language, then a lot of Indigenous students don't have those reading and writing skills in their own language, whereas other students from other countries may have that. The EALD issue goes beyond Indigenous students – there are students who also struggle with literacy in their own language that come from other cultures.

Lack of adequate funding, staffing and access to appropriate PL limits the capabilities of teachers to provide these students with the support that they need:

We've also got indigenous students, and we don't necessarily do them the best service because they've come in with lots of gaps in their learning too, and literacy for them is like a foreign language. We tend to just fall back on worksheets that can be given to the students so that they can work at their own pace, but it's not necessarily sitting with them and helping them because you've got 23 other students in the class that you're trying to teach at the same time. It's hard.

With regard to the scope of this project not including students with an intellectual disability, several teachers indicated that it was their opinion that many of their struggling students had undiagnosed learning difficulties (or related issues such as difficulty concentrating), and that this has been exacerbated during the COVID period, with higher numbers of students in Year 7 who have been flagged but not assessed during their primary school years. Some teachers also indicated that it was difficult to aid students in this area, as schools lacked access to professionals such as psychologists and speech therapists.

In the same way, several teachers commented that they were not experts in phonics, in teaching literacy or in diagnosing learning difficulties, so it was difficult for them to assess whether a student was struggling because of a learning difficulty, or because they had not been taught to read, or missed out on understanding literacy basics. In many cases, struggling students were dealing with other things: by the time they reach secondary school many are already aware that they are behind their peers and may be anxious or disengaged. Absence and behaviour issues were also common and tended to become more prevalent over time. These and other contextual issues (for example, poverty or an unsafe home environment) were complicating factors that teachers and schools were dealing with amongst this student cohort.

Respondents were asked who at their school was providing literacy support to students. As shown in Table 2.21, about 2 in 5 (39%) indicated that support was provided by a secondary-trained English teacher. Of these English teachers, about two-thirds (67%) had received training in literacy support. One-third of respondents said that support was being provided by a teaching assistant, only about one-third of whom (37%) had received training in the area. It was less common for other secondary teachers, or primary teachers, to be in the role.

Table 2.21 Staff providing literacy support and proportion trained in literacy support

<i>Who at your school provides the literacy support to these students?</i>	%	Trained in literacy support
A secondary trained English teacher	39.2	66.7%
A teaching assistant	32.7	36.7%
A secondary trained non-English teacher	13.7	61.9%
A primary trained teacher	9.8	ND
A speech pathologist	2.0	ND
Other	2.6	ND
Total	100.0	53%

The most common form of support provided was in-class support, with about 9 out of 10 respondents (89%) indicating that this was one of the supports offered. Just over half of respondents indicated that the support was based on withdrawal from usual classes. There were 27 responses to the 'Other' option, however 14 of these could be recoded as they referred to a timetabled option or an extra-curricular option. Other responses were difficult to categorise as they were not clearly explained, not specifically referring to literacy, or referred to support provided out of the school context, such as tutoring arranged by parents.

As shown in Table 2.22, non-school respondents differed somewhat in their view, with about three-quarters (73%) indicating that withdrawal was the most common form of support they saw.

Table 2.22 Forms of literacy support

<i>Which of the following forms of literacy support are these students offered?</i>	School respondents		Non-school respondents	
	N	%	N	%
In-class	178	88.6	18	60.0
Withdrawal	117	58.2	22	73.3
Time-tabled classes	94	46.8	15	50.0
Extra-curricular	66	32.8	8	26.7
Other	13	6.5	6	20.0

The average amount of time per week spent supporting students (Table 2.23) was similar for in-class and withdrawal modes (86-89 minutes), while students attending time-tabled classes for support received more than twice the amount of support time on average (199 minutes). Students receiving support outside usual class hours (before school, lunchtime or after school) received less time on average (about one hour).

Table 2.23 Average minutes per week of literacy support

<i>Minutes per week of support</i>	In class %	Withdrawal %	Time-tabled class %	Extra- curricular %
Up to 30 minutes	28.3	25.5	4.7	25.5
31-60 minutes	34.1	34.0	9.4	44.7
61-120 minutes	18.8	19.1	15.6	25.5
121-180 minutes	5.8	7.4	9.4	2.1
181-240 minutes	8.7	9.6	35.9	2.1
Above 240 minutes	4.3	4.3	25.0	--
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Average minutes	85.8	89.2	198.8	63.4

Respondents were also asked about the format of support, in terms of the number of students per teacher for each mode (except for time-tabled classes where it is assumed that the student group would be up to a standard class size). Responses showed that the most common groupings in-class were small groups of students with a teacher (60%), or one-on-one (58%). Small groups were the most common in withdrawal (72%), while assistance outside normal class time was more varied, as shown in Table 2.24.

Table 2.24 Format of literacy support

<i>Format of support</i>	School respondents		
	In class %	Withdrawal %	Extra- curricular %
One-on-one (individual student with one teacher)	58.4	48.7	29.7
Student pairs (two students with one teacher)	40.4	31.6	21.9
Small groups (three to six students with one teacher)	60.1	71.8	40.6
Larger groups (seven or more students with one teacher)	30.9	22.2	39.1
	Non-school respondents		
One-on-one (individual student with one teacher)	72.2	63.6	50.0
Student pairs (two students with one teacher)	44.4	31.8	37.5
Small groups (three to six students with one teacher)	83.3	72.7	62.5
Larger groups (seven or more students with one teacher)	38.9	40.9	50.0

There were some differences in the length of support provided by schools, with about one-quarter of respondents (23%) indicating that their programs of support lasted less than a year, and just over one-quarter (27%) that programs lasted for a year. As shown in Table 2.25, about half of respondents indicated that literacy support lasted over multiple years. Responses from interviewees suggested that support came in many forms and while some support was provided, it was not necessarily a formal program.

Table 2.25 Length of literacy support program

<i>How long is the initial program of support you offer to students?</i>	N	%
Less than a year	43	22.5
One year	52	27.2
Multiple years	96	50.3
Total	191	100.0

In the same way, while the majority of survey respondents (69%) indicated that supported students were assessed at regular intervals (Table 2.26), this was often in the context of wider school practice, such as all Year 7 students being assessed in Term 1 and again in Term 4. As noted above, a wide variety of assessments was being used, and interviewees indicated that this could be based on the knowledge of those in a responsible role at the school, or on assessments made available to the school as part of a wider program (NAPLAN, or, for example, dioceses or governments making assessments like ACER’s PATs available to all their schools).

Table 2.26 Regularity of assessment

<i>Are the students who receive support assessed at regular intervals to determine whether they need to continue receiving support?</i>	N	%
Yes	131	68.9
Sometimes	33	17.4
No	10	5.3
Unsure	16	8.4
Total	190	100.0

Assessments could also be chosen based on student need, or as part of a package that included curriculum materials. Table 2.27 shows that about half of survey respondents indicated that their school used a recognised ‘off-the shelf’ literacy intervention program. Almost one-third of respondents (29%) said that their schools did not use an existing intervention program.

Table 2.27 Literacy intervention programs

<i>Has your school purchased or otherwise acquired a ‘pre-packaged’ literacy intervention program which is delivered to identified students as (part of) the support they are provided?</i>	N	%
Yes	95	49.5
No	56	29.2
Unsure	41	21.4
Total	192	100.0

About one third of respondents indicated that they used a specific literacy pedagogical approach, as shown in Table 2.28.

Table 2.28 Use of specific literacy pedagogical approach

<i>Does your school use a specific (i.e. named) literacy pedagogical approach, which is delivered to/used with the identified students as (part of) the support they are provided?</i>	N	%
Yes	64	33.3
Sometimes	29	15.1
No	58	30.2
Unsure	41	21.4
Total	192	100.0

The most common cited approach was Macquarie University’s Macqlit program, although Table 2.29 shows that a variety of programs or approaches are in use in schools.

Table 2.29 List of programs or approaches in use

<i>Programs or approaches used</i>	N	%
MULTILit (MacqLit)	66	56.4
CARS and STARS	19	16.2
QuickSmart	19	16.2
SRA Corrective Reading, Expressive writing, Spelling mastery	17	14.5
Essential Assessment	15	12.8
Accelerated Literacy	10	8.5
Reading to Learn	9	7.7
Reciprocal Teaching Strategy	9	7.7
Fountas and Pinnell	8	6.8
Simple View of Reading (SVR) model	8	6.8
Word Flyers	8	6.8
Literacy CAFÉ	5	4.3
Achieve 3000	4	3.4
Read 180	4	3.4
Strategic Instruction Model (SIM)	4	3.4
Other: Literacy planet	3	2.6
Other: Sounds Write	3	2.6
Other: Literacy pro	3	2.6
Other: Custom, school based	2	1.7
Other: Toe by Toe	2	1.7
Other	14	12.0

2.6 Interviewee perceptions of the support provided to struggling students

The format of support provided to these students typically ranged from in-class differentiation by teachers, additional in-class support from teacher aides or educational support (ES) staff, and withdrawal, either one on one or in small groups, with a teacher or a teacher aide. The level of differentiation and the intention behind it varied across the schools. Several interview participants discussed the purpose of differentiation or additional in-class support as primarily allowing students access to the curriculum rather than to *develop their foundational literacy skills*.

Across the different school contexts, differentiation was seen as a burden on teachers' already full workload. For example, a leading teacher from an independent school in the ACT said:

To be able to support those students, when I'm handing an assessment task out, I'll make sure that I do it in 3 different ways – they'll have it in front of them on a piece of paper, it'll be up on the screen, and I'll also be verbalizing it for them, or I'll create an informative video that runs through it. They can watch in their own time. But if I had a full-time load as a teacher, just trying to even be able to do those things constantly – the workload would be huge.

This was also highlighted by a leading teacher from an independent school in regional WA, who echoed several other teachers as having 'no choice but to teach to the middle':

It's a wall to climb when it comes to getting teachers to engage with differentiation, they say they are differentiating, but they don't really understand what that means. They think if they've said it and written it, that's differentiating.

Then you get that argument about 'so much other stuff to do, I'm just going cater for the middle' and it's really quite sad. They tend to just let it fall by the wayside, which is not great for those students.

It is worth noting that for most teachers, the need to differentiate is placed within the context of teaching 100 to 150 individual students every week. As reflected above, the purpose of differentiation appears to be to allow children access to the curriculum and to grade-level assessments of their knowledge, as opposed to focusing on the development of their foundational literacy skills, which most interviewees acknowledged was not commonly occurring either in class or where students were withdrawn. Even with the availability of teacher aides or ES staff, most interviewees stated that support staff tended to focus on assisting the students in completing their homework or other tasks:

The priority for the ES staff is clarification for the students. When the teachers presented the information, if that's still unclear to the students, the ES has a responsibility to be able to go to targeted students and clarify that information and even reteach what the teacher has just done with specific examples or alternative examples. It could be as far as sometimes scribing for students, especially those who struggle with spelling or handwriting. Or if they notice that maybe 2 or 3 students are struggling with the same concept, they have that discretion to be able to put those students together and go over the work or to direct the teacher to say 'these students need further teaching of that skill' and then the ES staff will move to roaming around to keep everybody else on task.

However, one school in regional Victoria intentionally focuses on the development of students' foundational literacy skills, suggesting that it is important to move teachers away from merely assisting students to complete tasks, when it is the development of their literacy skills that will ultimately allow them to independently complete tasks in future:

A lot of our work and a lot of our writing and reading comes back to that sentence level. And it's a process - we're trying to move teachers away from 'We've got to get this piece written so let's go, go, go - read the content, do the work.' There is no final piece. Let's have a look at where this child is actually struggling from that core level of literacy. They cannot construct a complex sentence? What is it that they're not doing, and how do we teach to that? Looking at those foundational skills to then grant them that equity and access to the curriculum each year.

Different views emerged regarding the practice of withdrawing students, with some teachers not in favour of it due to the risk of singling out teenage students who may be particularly self-conscious or concerned about the response of their peers:

We have a lot of voice and agency with the students. As teenagers, they don't like to be withdrawn from a class. They want to be in with their mates and they're quite happy to get extra assistance in the class. But they won't be taken out to be singled out as needing that extra assistance.

I suppose because they're used to having ES in the classroom, extra adults in the room don't seem to faze them, which is really good in that small setting. And nobody is really seen as being targeted.

However, other teachers discussed the positive impacts of withdrawal on students due to the more focused attention provided towards their literacy skill development. Some schools have flexible entry and exit points for the students participating in withdrawal, where students have voice and

agency to determine how long they would like to stay in withdrawal classes based on their progress. This is usually decided on a term-by-term basis. The type of support received during withdrawal emerged as an important aspect, where students appeared to be more engaged when the support was towards developing their core skills, as opposed to support being provided to help them complete homework or assessment tasks:

As Year 9 she's quite a popular girl, so it was like this stigma attached to being in a small class. And I said, 'this might just be for a short amount of time so that we can give you some strategies on how to approach writing and how to put some things in place that will help you long term.' So, when we started going through things, she was like, 'Oh, I actually really like this – this is really helpful for me.' I met with her last week, and I said, 'How do you think you're going?' She said, 'I am learning so much from being in this small class. I think I'd like to stay for one more term and then see how I go for Term 4.'

How students are spoken to about the interventions, whether in class or withdrawal, as reflected above, seems to be an important factor influencing their willingness to receive that support. The culture of the school, and student and staff attitudes and approach to different forms of support may also be factors. Most teachers interviewed discussed the importance of being clear and honest with the students about their abilities, and the reason why receiving the support will be beneficial for them and their future:

It's being honest with them and saying, 'It's to get you to a point where you can be confident in your reading and writing abilities.' And especially the Year 9s, we try to say, 'Well, you'll be going into a workplace soon for a part time job, so we want to make sure that you have the skills,' – to be able to put that real world context for them – the importance of having enough literacy skills to be able to meet the demands of the workforce.

Some interviewees argued that, for students who were a long way behind in literacy, withdrawal was the only effective means of improving their literacy levels, and they required several hours per week of intensive explicit instruction (or direct instruction methods). Teachers acknowledged that these methods could be quite repetitive and 'boring' for students, but that they generally stayed in the course because they could see real improvement. Teachers in schools offering these kinds of interventions also acknowledged that they required strong support from school leadership and committed teachers with an understanding of the intervention methodology.

2.7 Confidence in the support approaches used

Survey respondents were asked to give an indication of their level of confidence in the approach their school was taking to support students in Years 7 to 9 who lack foundational literacy skills. The wording of the question is shown in Table 2.30, along with the overall responses from school-based respondents and from those who were not based in a single school.

Overall, over half of school-based respondents (59%) indicated that they were at least somewhat confident in the support they provide to struggling students. Over one-quarter of respondents (28%) were not confident.

Non-school-based respondents were less positive, with about one-third (35%) not at all confident, and one-third (35%) not really confident in approaches taken in schools. Low response rates and different levels of engagement with schools by respondents meant that these results should be read with caution.

Table 2.30 Overall levels of confidence in approaches to student support

<i>How confident are you in the approach your school takes to supporting students in years 7-9 who are identified as lacking the foundational literacy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum?</i>	School respondents		Non-school respondents	
	N	%	N	%
Not at all confident	27	12.8	9	34.6
Not really confident	59	28.0	9	34.6
Somewhat confident	91	43.1	6	23.1
Very confident	34	16.1	2	7.7
Total	211	100.0	26	100.0

Table 2.31 looks at levels of confidence of school-based respondents by staff indicated to be providing the support, format of support, respondent role, sector and geolocation. Where teaching assistants (such as educational assistants and teacher aides) were noted to provide support, confidence was notably lower, with half of respondents (52%) not really or not at all confident. Confidence was highest where secondary-trained English teachers were providing support.

The differences between in class, withdrawal or timetabled forms of support was minimal, however it is interesting to note that confidence in extra-curricular support was considerably higher than for the other formats, with 32% of respondents whose schools had extra-curricular support indicating that they were very confident compared to 16 to 20% for the other formats.

School leaders (3%) were less likely to indicate high levels of confidence and more senior teachers (14%) were less confident than teachers more broadly (21%). A higher proportion of respondents from the government sector (19%) indicated that they were not at all confident about the approaches their schools were using to support students, compared to the Catholic (7%) and independent sectors (10%). Confidence also tended to be higher in metropolitan areas and lower the further the location was from large population centres.

Table 2.31 Levels of confidence in approaches to student support by role, sector and geolocation

Staff providing support	Not at all confident %	Not really confident %	Somewhat confident %	Very confident %
A secondary trained English teacher	5.0	20.0	48.3	26.7
A teaching assistant	16.0	36.0	44.0	4.0
A secondary trained non-English teacher	5.0	25.0	60.0	10.0
A primary trained teacher	21.4	7.1	42.9	28.6
Format of support				
In class	7.6	25.9	48.2	18.2
Withdrawal	6.3	27.9	49.5	16.2
Timetabled/streamed	10.5	19.7	50.0	19.7
Extra-curricular	6.3	14.3	47.6	31.7
Respondent role				
School leader	16.7	36.7	43.3	3.3

Staff providing support	Not at all confident %	Not really confident %	Somewhat confident %	Very confident %
Leading teacher	9.6	21.9	54.8	13.7
Teacher	14.9	28.7	35.1	21.3
Sector				
Government	18.7	25.3	40.7	15.4
Catholic	6.5	43.5	30.4	19.6
Independent	9.5	21.6	54.1	14.9
Geolocation				
Metropolitan	10.8	28.3	41.7	19.2
Regional	13.3	26.7	45.0	15.0
Rural	19.4	29.0	45.2	6.5
Total	12.8	28.0	43.1	16.1

During the interviews, most teachers across the different contexts indicated they were quite confident that the students who were struggling in literacy were identified through the various assessments conducted at the start of Year 7 and through discussions with colleagues and parents. However, most were not confident that all students were getting the required support. This was the case even where schools had programs in place, as they indicated they were often only able to cater to those who were furthest behind, and many other students who needed additional assistance did not receive it (through lack of funding and resourcing, including lack of teachers and education aides). Lack of attendance was also a factor impacting the identification and support for students.

Teachers highlighted that students who may require support but tended to ask their friends for help to get by in assessments also tended to 'fall through the cracks.' Students tend to be further disadvantaged in senior years, when most of the provided support in Years 7, 8 and 9 becomes unavailable:

I'd say there are easily 20% of the students that aren't getting the support that they need. Just judging by their handwriting ability, their spelling ability and their comprehension. I feel that we just try and get them across the line, but looking at what they're putting together, they need more support than they're actually getting, or not getting anything at all.

A lot of it gets pushed back onto the parents to get tutoring for the kids in terms of getting outside support, they're not coping with this at all. I think a lot of the parents do get that extra help outside where the kids get a tutor. But that only happens when they are in Years 11 and 12. So it's almost like they're drowning in Years 7 to 10 and not getting the skills or support, and then suddenly it gets to Year 11, and they've got to up the game and they can't do it. So, they suddenly have to get a tutor because they're not coping.

An important issue raised during the interviews was the influence of literacy on other subject areas such as science, maths, history, geography and visual arts. Teachers working within these subject areas raised concerns about the students' ability to effectively engage with these literacy-heavy subjects when they lack the foundational skills to do so. Participants described some processes of differentiation used to give students access to the content at some level, such as providing alternate texts in simpler language or setting separate tasks at a lower level, however, most secondary teachers within these subject areas have limited capability to improve student literacy, and therefore find it challenging to teach and engage the students in these subject areas:

It becomes even more difficult because the curriculum is quite content heavy in the area of history and geography, economics, civics – that whole area tends to be quite literacy-heavy, and those students tend to struggle. When you set certain work for them, their comprehension of what actually needs to be done, and what they need to do to be able to understand what they're learning – it tends to be lost in translation for them.

One school is trying to incorporate literacy-related instructional approaches into other subject areas to support these students further and to allow them to access the content. As explained by a Leading Teacher from a Catholic school in regional Victoria:

I'm in the process of talking to the Learning Area Leaders. Could we create a handbook on scientific writing and reading which then breaks it down and shows teachers' progressions in regard to how to teach scientific material to kids who are struggling with their reading comprehension?

Almost all teachers emphasised that it was crucial to provide the required literacy support to students while they are in Year 7, as during this period, students are still engaged and eager to develop their skills. Failure to do so at this stage leads to the risk of behaviour issues and further disengagement in Years 8 and 9:

A significant proportion are actually not getting the support that they need in literacy when they're struggling because it takes an investment of the school, the home, and the student. I think by the end of Year 7, students don't think that there's a possibility that they will ever catch up. That negativity breeds and their self-belief disappears – any that they did have. And it becomes much more difficult from there on and in high school - we've got to catch them at Year 7.

3 Struggling students: Numeracy

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of all questions asked in the numeracy section of the survey, including responses from non-school personnel. Themes and quotations from interviews are interspersed with the findings where appropriate, to add detail and context.

3.2 Proportion of struggling students

Respondents were asked to indicate, on average, how many Year 7 students annually met the following definition:

The cohort of interest in this study are students in Years 7 to 9 who lack the foundational literacy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum, in schools where most students have these skills (special schools, and students with an intellectual disability are not in scope in this instance).

The students in scope are likely to struggle to engage in classes without significant differentiation on the part of classroom teachers, and the skill disparity may be so great that differentiating lessons for them is not feasible. They may be participating in withdrawal programs that focus on developing these foundational skills, and other out-of-class interventions.

Table 3.1 shows that, as with the results for the literacy section, respondents have indicated that about one-third of their Year 7 cohort is struggling, on average. The results are similar to those presented in the literacy section, with smaller schools, government schools and schools in more rural areas having higher proportions on average than their counterparts.

Table 3.1. Average proportion of struggling Year 7 students by school size, sector, and geolocation

Average Year 7 enrolment	Average proportion of struggling Y7 students	N	Std. Dev.
Up to 50 students	51.0%	39	29.3
51-100 students	34.6%	48	22.8
101-150 students	25.3%	52	19.4
151-200 students	30.2%	28	24.9
Over 200 students	26.9%	34	25.9
Sector			
Government	39.3%	100	28.0
Catholic	24.4%	39	17.4
Independent	28.7%	69	24.2
Geolocation			
Metropolitan	28.0%	111	20.0
Regional	33.8%	65	29.8
Rural	48.8%	32	28.9
Total	33.0%	208	25.8

Table 3.2 provides further detail on the breakdown of proportions of struggling students by sector. As was the case for literacy, teachers in government schools were more likely to indicate that a high proportion of their students were struggling with numeracy, with 40% saying that 2 in 5 or more students (40%) were struggling, compared to 13% to 17% of teachers in the Catholic and independent sectors.

Table 3.2 Proportion of Year 7 students deemed to be struggling with numeracy, by sector

<i>Proportion of Year 7 cohort deemed to be struggling with numeracy</i>	Sector			All %
	Government %	Catholic %	Independent %	
Up to 10%	10.0	17.9	21.7	15.4
10.1 to 20%	24.0	28.2	26.1	25.5
20.1 to 30%	16.0	30.8	23.2	21.2
30.1 to 40%	10.0	10.3	11.6	10.6
40.1 to 50%	14.0	5.1	7.2	10.1
Over 50%	26.0	7.7	10.1	17.3
Total	100	100	100	100

Table 3.3 provides further detail on the breakdown of proportions of struggling students by geolocation. Over one-fifth of regional respondents (22%) and two-fifths of rural respondents (41%) indicated that half or more of their Year 7 cohorts struggle with numeracy.

Table 3.3 Proportion of Year 7 students deemed to be struggling with numeracy, by geolocation

<i>Proportion of Year 7 cohort deemed to be struggling with numeracy</i>	Geolocation			All %
	Metropolitan %	Regional %	Rural %	
Up to 10%	15.3	21.5	3.1	15.4
10.1 to 20%	24.3	30.8	18.8	25.5
20.1 to 30%	27.9	13.8	12.5	21.2
30.1 to 40%	15.3	--	15.6	10.6
40.1 to 50%	9.0	12.3	9.4	10.1
Over 50%	8.1	21.5	40.6	17.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

As noted in the literacy section, these responses are considerably higher than the average proportions deemed to be struggling with numeracy based on NAPLAN results. Taking students who were at or below the NMS (excluding those who were absent, withdrawn or exempt) in 2021, about 17% of Year 7 students across Australia require additional assistance in numeracy. The proportions reported in NAPLAN are higher in more rural and remote areas, as shown by Tasmania, which had about 23% of students at or below the NMS in 2021, and the NT, which had 45% in the same category.⁴

⁴ ACARA 2021 NAPLAN national report, Table 7.N1. See <https://nap.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2021-naplan-national-report.pdf>

3.3 Enrolment data

School leaders were asked about the information they receive on incoming students, related to numeracy. In total, 24 school leaders responded to the numeracy survey, so these results should be treated with caution due to the low response rate. Table 3.4 showed that all schools report at least sometimes receiving data on student numeracy levels, both when they enter secondary school at Year 7 and if they enter their school in Years 8 or 9.

Table 3.4 Proportion of schools receiving data on student numeracy ability, by year of intake

<i>Do you/your school receive data that indicate each student's level of ability in numeracy?</i>	Year 7 intake		Year 8/9 intake	
	N	%	N	%
Yes	15	62.5	11	45.8
Sometimes	9	37.5	13	54.2
No	--	--	--	--
Unsure	--	--	--	--
Total	24	100.0	24	100.0

Consistent with information from the literacy survey, Table 3.5 shows school leaders indicate receiving NAPLAN and subject grades most commonly.

Table 3.5 Numeracy data typically received, by year of intake

<i>What data do you typically receive?</i>	Year 7 intake		Year 8/9 intake	
	N	%	N	%
NAPLAN	24	100.0	20	83.3
Subject data/grades	19	79.2	22	91.7
ACER PAT-Maths	13	54.2	4	16.7
Other	4	14.3	2	7.1

Two-thirds of school leaders indicated that struggling students are sometimes pre-identified or flagged in the information they receive at enrolment (Table 3.6). Where these students are pre-identified, most school leaders report that they are unaware of the definition used to identify those who are struggling (Table 3.7). Where a definition was supplied, responses related to NAPLAN (either below NMS or average – no table has been included due to low response rates).

Table 3.6 Students pre-identified by enrolment data

The cohort of interest in this study are students in years 7-9 who lack the foundational numeracy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum

Are these students pre-identified or flagged for you in any way, in any of the data you receive when a student enrolls at your school?

	N	%
Yes	5	21.7
Sometimes	15	65.2
No	2	8.7
Unsure	1	4.3
Total	23	100.0

Table 3.7 Definition provided for pre-identified enrolment data

Are you made aware of what definition or 'cut-off' score is used to identify this cohort of students in any of the data you receive?

	N	%
Yes	6	30.0
No	14	70.0
Total	20	100.0

Table 3.8 shows that most school leaders, both within school and non-school, report that schools identify the struggling student cohort for numeracy at least sometimes. Around half of school leaders who identified this cohort did not use a set definition (see Table 3.9). Of those who did use a definition, half used the head office or department's definition and half used their own school or school cluster definition. For those that used their own definition, it tended to be those students who were below the NMS in NAPLAN.

Table 3.8 School level identification of struggling student cohort

<i>Do you/does your school specifically identify this cohort of students, using the enrolment data you receive?</i>	School respondents		Non-school respondents	
	N	%	N	%
Yes	5	21.7	6	35.3
Sometimes	15	65.2	8	47.1
No	2	8.7	3	17.6
Unsure	1	4.3	--	--
Total	23	100.0	17	100.0

Table 3.9 Source of definitions used at school level

<i>What definition do you apply?</i>	School respondents		Non-school respondents	
	N	%	N	%
We/schools use a definition provided by a head office (department or region, CEO)	4	20.0	4	28.6
We/schools use a definition decided within our school or school cluster/network	5	25.0	4	28.6
We/schools identify students who lack these skills but do not use a set definition	10	50.0	9	64.3

3.4 School-based identification of struggling students

Just under two-thirds of respondents (63%) indicated that their school identifies and monitors students lacking foundational numeracy skills. A further quarter (23%) of respondents said this happened sometimes, as shown in Table 3.10.

Table 3.10 Identification of struggling students

<i>Do you/does your school <u>specifically</u> identify, diagnose and/or monitor students who may lack the foundational numeracy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum as a cohort within your school?</i>	N	%
Yes	123	62.8
Sometimes	45	23.0
No	17	8.7
Unsure	11	5.6
Total	196	100.0

As was the case with literacy, an assessment/range of assessments were most commonly used to identify students (Table 3.11) and a large majority of schools undertook ongoing assessment (Table 3.12).

Table 3.11 Methods of identification of struggling students

<i>How do you identify these students in your school?</i>	N	%
Identification is ad hoc or informal, by teacher judgement	37	22.0
We use an assessment/range of assessments	131	78.0
Total	168	100.0

Table 3.12 Timing of student assessment

<i>At your school, do you only undertake an initial assessment of students (e.g. at start of Year 7 or upon enrolment) or do you undertake ongoing assessment of your students across years 7-9?</i>	N	%
Initial assessment	15	11.5
Ongoing assessment	109	83.2
Unsure	7	5.3
Total	131	100.0

As shown in Table 3.13 all of the assessments found in the landscape scan and included in the survey were being used, to an extent. As was the case with literacy, the most common assessments were NAPLAN and ACER's PAT Maths, followed by teacher judgement (school-based assessments and curriculum-based grading). As indicated by a teacher in a Tasmanian government school:

*We look at NAPLAN and PAT data, and reports from the previous year.
We [teachers at the school] have discussions early on in the year and professional meetings to look at whether learning has declined.*

Other assessments were used but were considerably less common overall.

Table 3.13 Numeracy assessments

Numeracy assessments	N	%
NAPLAN	93	75.0
Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT - ACER) – mathematics.	87	70.2
School-based assessments/Teacher Judgement (e.g. reported curriculum achievement based on teacher-developed common assessment tasks)	83	66.9
ACARA Numeracy Learning Progression	24	19.4
Essential Assessment	16	12.9
LAF for Multiplicative Thinking	14	11.3
QuickSmart	13	10.5
Compass assessment (ACER)	8	6.5
Maths Pat	7	5.6
On Demand (VIC)	5	4.0
Elementary Maths Mastery (EMM) Series	4	3.2
Individual Knowledge Assessment of Number (IKAN)	2	1.6
All Well and other university programs	1	0.8
Back to Front Maths	1	0.8
Best Start	1	0.8
SKSB	1	0.8
Cambridge pre/post tests set by teachers	1	0.8
Custom developed for enrolment	1	0.8
Keymath, Wiat	1	0.8
LLN	1	0.8
Mathematics Assessment Interview (MAI)	1	0.8
Mathspace diagnostic tool	1	0.8
Medical reports (e.g. Psychologist)	1	0.8
OLSAT Otis-Lennon School Ability Test, is a standardized test	1	0.8
One minute basic numbers tests (school developed)	1	0.8
Paul Swan Online Testing	1	0.8
Smarter Maths	1	0.8
Specialist assessments	1	0.8
Tierney Kennedy Assessments (BIIN) and Di Siemon	1	0.8

3.5 Support provided to struggling students

The section of the survey that asked respondents about the support provided to students opened with a reiteration of the broad definition of students in scope:

In this section of the survey, we are interested to learn about the nature of the support you provide to students in Years 7 to 9 who are identified as lacking the foundational numeracy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum.

Please note: supports provided to students who attend special educational settings, and students with an intellectual disability, are not in scope for these questions.

Based on this definition, respondents were first asked whether their school provided any specific additional support, other than differentiated instruction or assessment provided by classroom teachers. Table 3.14 shows that about half of respondents' schools provided additional support and a further 40% did so 'sometimes.'

Table 3.14 Provision of additional support to struggling students

At your school, are students who fit this description provided any specific additional support in numeracy? (Additional support is support other than differentiated instruction or assessment provided by their classroom teachers)		
	N	%
Yes	97	50.5
Sometimes	77	40.1
No	17	8.9
Unsure	1	0.5
Total	192	100.0

Respondents were also asked to indicate if there were any issues that might make it difficult for a school to provide additional support to struggling students. Table 3.15 shows the results in the order of most frequent response by school personnel. For both literacy (64%) and numeracy (65%), lack of funding was most cited as an issue. There are differences in the issues deemed most significant otherwise, with numeracy respondents highlighting a lack of available staff (55%) over a lack of qualified/experienced staff (36%), whereas literacy respondents rated a lack of qualified/experienced staff as an issue (61%) above that of a lack of available staff (59%).

The numeracy result on qualified staff is somewhat surprising given interviewee responses that highlighted the lack of staff qualified to teach maths as a particular problem, and the wider concern that maths is regularly being taught by out-of-field teachers.

Table 3.15 Issues that may prevent the provision of numeracy support to struggling students

<i>Do any of the following issues currently make it difficult for your school to provide additional support to such students?</i>	School respondents		Non-school respondents	
	N	%	N	%
A lack of funding to provide additional supports	125	64.8	11	64.7
A lack of available staff	106	54.9	10	58.8
A belief that teachers are differentiating (or should be able to differentiate) to meet the literacy needs of these students	82	42.5	11	64.7
A lack of a clear definition/identification of these students in particular	70	36.3	10	58.8
A lack of staff qualified/experienced in numeracy	70	36.3	10	58.8
A lack of parental support/desire for their children to be given support	47	24.4	5	29.4
A lack of leadership in this area	40	20.7	7	41.2
It is not a priority at my school	14	7.3	3	17.6
None of these are issues at my school	5	2.6	0	0.0
Other	16	8.3	2	11.8

Respondents in government schools were more likely to indicate that funding was an issue compared to staff from other sectors, and a higher proportion of government respondents also noted a lack of qualified/experienced staff (Table 3.16).

Table 3.16 Issues that may prevent the provision of numeracy support to struggling students, by sector

<i>Do any of the following issues currently make it difficult for your school to provide additional support to such students?</i>	Sector (school respondents)			All %
	Government %	Catholic %	Independent %	
A lack of funding to provide additional supports	74.4	51.4	59.1	64.8
A lack of available staff	58.9	51.4	51.5	54.9
A belief that teachers are differentiating (or should be able to differentiate) to meet the literacy needs of these students	42.2	45.9	40.9	42.5
A lack of a clear definition/identification of these students in particular	40.0	37.8	30.3	36.3
A lack of staff qualified/experienced in numeracy	41.1	32.4	31.8	36.3
A lack of parental support/desire for their children to be given support	22.2	29.7	24.2	24.4
A lack of leadership in this area	24.4	13.5	19.7	20.7
It is not a priority at my school/at schools	6.7	8.1	7.6	7.3
None of these are issues at my school	2.2	--	4.5	2.6

As was the case in literacy, respondents to the numeracy survey who were in rural or remote settings were more likely to indicate that funding, lack of available staff and lack of qualified/experienced staff were an issue (Table 3.17).

Table 3.17 Issues that may prevent the provision of numeracy support to struggling students, by geolocation

Do any of the following issues currently make it difficult for your school to provide additional support to such students?	Sector (school respondents)			All %
	Metropolitan %	Regional %	Rural %	
A lack of funding to provide additional supports	63.0	65.5	70.4	64.8
A lack of available staff	48.1	62.1	66.7	54.9
A belief that teachers are differentiating (or should be able to differentiate) to meet the literacy needs of these students	44.4	44.8	29.6	42.5
A lack of a clear definition/identification of these students in particular	35.2	36.2	40.7	36.3
A lack of qualified staff	30.6	32.8	66.7	36.3
A lack of parental support/desire for their children to be given support	24.1	22.4	29.6	24.4
A lack of leadership in this area	19.4	12.1	44.4	20.7
It is not a priority at my school/at schools	7.4	3.4	14.8	7.3
None of these are issues at my school	4.6	--	--	2.6

In the interviews, staffing was highlighted as a significant issue across the different school contexts, preventing the provision of adequate numeracy support to struggling students. The lack of qualified and available maths teachers impacted decisions regarding how to best support these students, with several schools having out-of-field or beginning teachers in their mathematics department. Access to support staff such as teacher aides seemed to be minimal, with some schools choosing not to use teacher aides for numeracy support even when available, since often the mathematics knowledge of the support staff was not at the level required. Lack of maths teachers generally has been a growing problem for some years and has been exacerbated by more recent teacher shortages and in-school teacher shortages related to the COVID-19 pandemic. A leading teacher from a Catholic school in regional Queensland explained:

They're out of field here or just starting, and that's fine, but not when that's half your maths department teaching kids that aren't good at maths. We have almost high school students teaching our kids, and they do not have the skill set that they need to deliver Year 9 or Year 7 maths. They're on probation, given Permission to Teach because we don't have people in front of kids. Massive problem.

We've got teachers that don't know much more about it than the kids. That's a tragedy, but that's true. They just don't have the way of explaining it or have the background. They don't know where the kids are going. They don't know where they have come from. They're just here. You put your best teacher with your good kids, or you put your best teacher with your bad kids. We shouldn't have to be making those decisions.

Similar issues were highlighted by a teacher from a Catholic school in NSW:

The other day I took a class of 56 students, trying to teach them trigonometry. It's not ideal. The reality is that we're doing what we can within limited time and a lot of different people talk about all the resources available. We really have few approaches from organisations or very little support from anyone. I'm not sure why we don't get a lot more support.

Additionally, lack of funding and PL opportunities impacted the ability of teachers to provide targeted and effective support to students struggling in maths. The teachers were confident in their ability to teach secondary Mathematics content but struggled to teach the subject at the lower primary level or to work with students with behavioural challenges and with those who are disengaged:

You're very much on your own. It seems ridiculous to me that there's not an overarching support that we can tap into because I need someone in an education position who is a specialist in disengaged kids or with the kids that I'm not trained to teach. We teach Pythagoras or we teach Algebra, I'm all good with that. But how do I teach a kid to count? I don't know. How do I do that?

There's no professional learning that I'm aware of, certainly no access. We'd be gobbling it up. We're quite fortunate that we have a reasonable degree of expertise in our staff and that's what we rely on to get a little bit of help. But in terms of professional development, definitely not.

Some interviewees did note that the current lack of PL opportunities was related to (or a result of) responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, however it does seem to be the case that there are more PL options in some states, or for some sectors or population centres than for others. Teachers from schools in low-SES areas also highlighted the lack of basic resources to be able to effectively support students in developing their foundational numeracy skills:

When we talk about maths resources, we're talking about the logistics of teaching, of having a projector up on the ceiling, having big dedicated white boards. We're not talking about fancy \$1,000,000 programs. We're talking very explicit teaching. I get a whiteboard marker and if students don't understand the equation, I actually write it on the table. If you give me a room that's set-up for mathematics, I could achieve a lot more.

Efforts made to engage parents in collaborative efforts to develop the students' numeracy skills were discussed, however, parent engagement seemed to be lacking across the schools, especially those in low-SES areas, due to reasons such as parents' own educational background:

Parent engagement is really poor. You could almost say it's non-existent and we've tried lots of different methods to engage parents. A lot of parents are, I guess, a little bit embarrassed because maybe their education level isn't great either. So, there's the, 'I don't want to get involved in maths. That's your job,' and that's fair enough.

For a lot of families, education is not a priority. If we say we've got Trolls on a Monday afternoon at 4pm, bring your boots – they will be there at 3:30pm with 3 pairs of footy boots ready to roll. But if we say you have to bring your calculator, your laptop, pens and paper, we'll get a mixed reception. We're trying to teach the students that education is very, very important.

There are a variety of student characteristics that may affect the provision of numeracy support, as presented in Table 3.18. As was the case for literacy, wellbeing concerns, and student engagement and behaviour were the most highly cited factors. Attendance patterns received about the same response proportionally as for literacy (55%). Students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were not considered to be a factor in numeracy to the extent that it was in literacy (59%).

Table 3.18 Factors other than numeracy ability that may affect the provision of numeracy support

<i>When considering how or if to provide numeracy support to these students, what other factors do you consider, aside from their numeracy ability?</i>	N	%
Welfare or wellbeing concerns	101	58.0
Classroom engagement/behaviour	97	55.7
Attendance patterns	97	55.7
Medical or health concerns	86	49.4
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status	80	46.0
Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)	79	45.4
Socio-Economic Status (SES)	69	39.7
Migrant or refugee status	52	29.9
Other	9	5.2

In interviews, disengagement was widely mentioned as impacting the provision of support to those struggling with numeracy. Due to COVID-19 and other reasons, some students have had several maths teachers in a single term due to high staff turnover, which has further contributed to their disengagement. As explained by a teacher in metropolitan NSW:

They're disengaged with the whole process, that's a massive obstacle we have as well. Particularly the young boys, they'll just put their pen down and not do anything.

Big part of the process is to actually get kids engaged in doing stuff. We've got a lot of kids that don't like engaging in work to the extent where they don't bring a pen, they won't bring an exercise book, they won't bring a calculator, and that would be probably 20% of our cohort across the school.

However, getting their test results immediately through programs such as SmarterMaths appeared to increase student engagement in numeracy. This factor was identified by several teachers, who mentioned that while they use NAPLAN as a form of assessment as well, the time lag between the administration of the assessment and getting the results made it largely ineffective in terms of student engagement.

It's made a massive difference. The students are actually now more engaged in maths. I mean, it's not perfect, they're not screaming to do more maths, but because they get their result on their spot, it's a real competitive thing. So, in our homework club we've actually seen students just practicing on SmarterMaths.

Attendance was also mentioned as a factor impacting the support provided to students struggling in numeracy, particularly in low-SES areas where a significant number of students do not attend school regularly:

You have to identify the students that you're going to get bang for your buck. The students that have really low attendance and are really poorly behaved - they should not be your first focus for numeracy intervention. Your first interventions should be those students who are attending. That's not to say we shouldn't focus on those students who aren't attending school. But it shouldn't be the numeracy teacher's job to fix those students who are not turning up to school.

How the students are spoken to about the importance of maths was considered an important factor towards increasing their engagement and effort in developing their skills:

We actually go in and we explain to them why maths is important. Everyone goes, 'Why do I need maths?' So, we actually go through that process. Deep down all students know that maths is important, and we show them – we'll go out in the playground, and we'll talk about measuring lines on the oval. We tell them they need to be at a certain level for their own life skills to be able to buy a car, buy a house, getting change from the canteen, whatever it may be.

We have very, very direct conversations. We don't shield the students, we just tell them directly and then they'll tell you themselves, 'I'm hopeless at maths. I don't know fractions. I don't know percentages. I don't know what this means.' Once the students actually know that you're not there to single them out or make them spend time after school or embarrass them – once they know that you genuinely want to help them, they're pretty good.

Students' literacy levels severely impacted their numeracy capabilities, and this was particularly challenging for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. In one school, teachers tried to raise students' maths-related literacy by engaging in 'explicit word-focused teaching', with Word Walls for mathematical terms to allow students access to the language of maths:

We identified that a lot of our students were unclassified as to what their literacy skills are. What we found is that in their home life, they're not getting a strong standard English vocabulary. We've got a lot of Sudanese kids and a lot of Pacific Islander kids. So, we're identifying a lot of English words or terminologies that were being used in numeracy that was actually foreign to them.

So now, from Years 7 to 12 maths, we're actually trying to change our methodology of teaching, identifying that students' literacy is probably on a lower standard and so our maths teaching should reflect that. These students are a classic example where they have no idea what you're speaking about, it's like speaking in a foreign language.

Staff reported to be providing numeracy support had similar proportions to literacy for the top two staff types, as shown in Table 3.19. As with literacy, teaching assistants were less likely to have received any training in numeracy support.

Table 3.19 Staff providing numeracy support and proportion trained in numeracy support

<i>Who at your school provides the numeracy support to these students?</i>	%	Trained in numeracy support
Secondary trained mathematics teacher	40.9	60.9
Teaching assistant	29.6	26.1
Other	14.5	47.6
Secondary trained non-mathematics teacher	8.8	57.1
Primary trained teacher	3.1	60.0
Unsure	3.1	20.0
Total	100.0	

In-class support was by far the most common form of support offered, as shown in Table 3.20. There were some differences compared to literacy, with streamed (or timetabled) classes more commonly offered than withdrawing students from class, whereas in literacy, students were more likely to be withdrawn (58%) than streamed (41%). That said, non-school-based respondents indicated that withdrawal was the most common form of support that they were aware of, as was the case for non-school respondents in literacy.

Table 3.20 Forms of numeracy support

<i>Which of the following forms of numeracy support are these students offered?</i>	School respondents		Non-school respondents	
	N	%	N	%
In-class	140	83.3	9	52.9
Withdrawal	80	47.6	11	64.7
Streamed classes	83	49.4	10	58.8
Extra-curricular	52	31.0	6	35.3
Other	17	10.1	3	17.6

As was the case for literacy, Table 3.21 shows that timetabled (or streamed) classes provided the most numeracy support per week, although the average for numeracy (172 minutes) was about 30 minutes less than for literacy (199 minutes). Average time spent with students withdrawn from classes was the lowest on average per week of the 4 forms of support, and about 20 minutes lower on average than for literacy. Time spent outside of class time (extra-curricular) also differed from literacy (63 minutes), with more time per week on average spent before or after classes, or during lunch times.

Table 3.21 Average minutes per week of numeracy support

<i>Minutes per week of support</i>	In class %	Withdrawal %	Time-tabled class %	Extra-curricular %
Up to 30 minutes	35.7	39.7	13.8	29.7
31-60 minutes	30.4	29.3	7.7	40.5
61-120 minutes	18.8	19.0	10.8	16.2
121-180 minutes	6.3	5.2	13.8	2.7
181-240 minutes	3.6	5.2	38.5	5.4
Above 240 minutes	5.4	1.7	15.4	5.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Average minutes	80.2	66.2	171.6	85.1

Teachers working with students in-class worked with one, 2, or small groups of students (Table 3.22). Where students were withdrawn, the most common format was small groups, and this was also the case for support provided out of class time. Numeracy support was less likely to be provided one-to-one when students were withdrawn (39%), compared to literacy (49%).

Table 3.22 Format of numeracy support

<i>Format of support</i>	School respondents		
	In class %	Withdrawal %	Extra- curricular %
One-on-one (individual student with one teacher)	63.6	38.8	34.6
Student pairs (two students with one teacher)	47.1	30.0	32.7
Small groups (three to six students with one teacher)	60.7	60.0	61.5
Larger groups (seven or more students with one teacher)	30.0	10.0	26.9
Non-school respondents			
One-on-one (individual student with one teacher)	100.0	72.7	66.7
Student pairs (two students with one teacher)	66.7	72.7	50.0
Small groups (three to six students with one teacher)	88.9	81.8	66.7
Larger groups (seven or more students with one teacher)	55.6	63.6	66.7

As was the case for literacy, schools most commonly indicated that they supported students over multiple years, as shown in Table 3.23.

Table 3.23 Length of numeracy support program

<i>How long is the initial program of support you offer to students?</i>	N	%
Less than a year	33	20.9
One year	57	36.1
Multiple years	68	43.0
Total	158	100.0

Similarly, students were regularly assessed, with about one-quarter of respondents indicating that this happened sometimes (27%), which suggests that assessments may have been taking place, but were not necessarily at set regular times, or were not undertaken specifically to determine whether support needed to be continued (Table 3.24).

Table 3.24 Regularity of assessment

<i>Are the students who receive support assessed at regular intervals to determine whether they need to continue receiving support?</i>	N	%
Yes	91	57.6
Sometimes	43	27.2
No	11	7.0
Unsure	13	8.2
Total	158	100.0

Pre-packaged numeracy intervention programs were less commonly used (35%) than was the case for literacy programs (50%), as shown in Table 3.25. Similarly, Table 3.26 shows that about one-quarter of respondents used a specific pedagogical approach to numeracy (26%) compared to one-third of literacy respondents (33%).

Table 3.25 Numeracy intervention programs

<i>Has your school purchased or otherwise acquired a 'pre-packaged' numeracy intervention program which is delivered to identified students as (part of) the support they are provided?</i>	N	%
Yes	55	34.8
No	69	43.7
Unsure	34	21.5
Total	158	100.0

Table 3.26 Use of specific numeracy pedagogical approach

<i>Does your school use a specific (i.e. named) numeracy pedagogical approach, which is delivered to/used with the identified students as (part of) the support they are provided?</i>	N	%
Yes	40	25.6
Sometimes	21	13.5
No	55	35.3
Unsure	40	25.6
Total	156	100.0

The most commonly cited program or approach was QuickSmart (28%), with Elementary Maths Mastery (24%) and Getting Ready in Numeracy (21%) also popular, as shown in Table 3.27.

Table 3.27 List of programs or approaches in use

<i>Programs or approaches used</i>	N	%
QuickSmart	21	27.6
Elementary Maths Mastery (EMM)	18	23.7
Getting Ready In Numeracy (GRIN)	16	21.1
Essential Assessment	15	19.7
Scaffolding Numeracy in the Middle Years (SNMY)	10	13.2
Maths Pathways	10	13.2
Achieve 3000	6	7.9
Manga High	6	7.9
Back-to-Front Maths	3	3.9
Taking Off With Numeracy (TOWN)	2	2.6
Big Ideas in Number	1	1.3
MYLANS	1	1.3
DfE training	1	1.3
Education Perfect	1	1.3
Extending Mathematical Understanding (EMU)	1	1.3
Maths Mastery	1	1.3
smartemaths	1	1.3
SRA Connecting Maths Concepts	1	1.3

3.6 Interviewee perceptions of the support provided to struggling students

The support provided to students struggling with numeracy ranged between in-class differentiation, streaming and withdrawal. As in the case of literacy support, some schools avoid withdrawing students from class due to the risk of it being perceived as a form of isolation and embarrassment, choosing instead to provide in-class intervention:

When you withdraw students, they actually think it's like a punishment or they don't like it because they're going, 'You show everyone that I'm bad at maths,' and no student wants that. So, we've moved away from that. What we do now is pretty much intervention in all classes.

However, providing in-class support for students who are behind their peers leads to further challenges for the teachers in relation to balancing the delivery of the curriculum with developing students' foundational numeracy skills:

The problem with when we do it in class is, we're actually impeding the syllabus so the teacher teaching that class falls behind in their program, which is less than ideal. At the moment we're punching through the syllabus. But we're not getting the results we want anyway. The syllabus is very crowded and so the teachers often don't want you to come to their class because they haven't finished their syllabus work so then they fall behind. There's that catch 22 and we don't have a solution for that yet.

Other schools discussed the streaming approach used instead, where students are streamed into different classes based on their numeracy ability levels. Some teachers discussed a flexible approach, where students can move between classes based on their progress:

Each of those classes will look different, and they don't stay fixed either. We move the students if we feel we need to, depending upon what the kids are able to cope with or if parents are negotiating that they want that change as well. There's nothing hard and fast about it, we do it very much with respect to where the kids are at and what they need.

One Catholic school in regional Queensland adopted a hybrid co-teaching model, where the learning support teacher would provide intervention support to the identified students, to be more inclusive. However, students identified as being 2 or more years behind their peers would be withdrawn from the classroom. Whether through streaming or through in-class support, teachers discussed the need to go back to the very basics of numeracy, most often to counting, the times tables and concepts such as Place Value, which require students to then follow a modified curriculum in an attempt to catch up to the regular curriculum:

What we're trying to do is we're trying to push as many of these kids through the top end. If we end up with streams of classes which are more or less mainstream, good job. But the reality is that we're probably not going to get there.

Participants across the different school contexts expressed significant concerns regarding the content-heavy nature of the Australian Curriculum, that also expects a high level of mathematics expertise from teachers. Balancing the development of students' foundational numeracy skills while also trying to keep up with the curriculum requirements was highlighted as a major challenge:

We deliver the curriculum in a fashion that we believe best suits our kids. If we tried to force everything into them, they would have very little success and that's why they disengage. It would be frightening the number of kids that wouldn't be able to cope.

When you look at every [maths] content descriptor in the Australian curriculum, you've got approximately one to 2 lessons per content descriptor and then you test them. Is it any wonder kids can't cope with that? And there's so many levels to it that if the kids aren't ready, you've got to backtrack them. And if you're backtracking them, then you're not on track with where you're supposed to be. And that's constant.

Nearly all participants discussed their focus on teaching students the foundation numeracy skills required in the 'real world.' As explained by a participant in a non-school-based support role for a Catholic school diocese in regional Queensland:

A lot of teachers are finding teaching becoming too onerous – we're trying to teach foundational skills and we're trying to teach the curriculum. I often talk to teachers about minimising curriculum. If you've got kids who haven't fully developed or are significantly behind in foundational skills, there's no point moving them through the curriculum until you develop them.

If we don't consistently go back to those key foundational skills, we can't move through the curriculum and then we end up with more kids significantly behind when they shouldn't be. And that's a very dangerous decision to make for kids. It needs to be made very, very carefully. If we don't try to go back and further develop those foundational skills, then kids can't move forward, they fall further and further behind, and it becomes harder to keep up.

3.7 Confidence in the support approaches used

Numeracy respondents were asked to indicate their confidence in the approach taken by their schools to support struggling students. As shown in Table 3.28, responses were similar to those of literacy respondents, with just over half (53%) indicating that they were at least somewhat confident, and just under half (47%) indicating that they were not really confident.

Table 3.28 Overall levels of confidence in approaches to student support

<i>How confident are you in the approach your school takes to supporting students in years 7-9 who are identified as lacking the foundational numeracy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum?</i>	School respondents		Non-school respondents	
	N	%	N	%
Not at all confident	27	15.3	6	37.5
Not really confident	55	31.3	4	25.0
Somewhat confident	74	42.0	4	25.0
Very confident	20	11.4	2	12.5
Total	176	100.0	16	100.0

Table 3.29 shows levels of confidence by the staff providing the support, format of the support, respondent role, sector and geolocation. Secondary trained mathematics teachers were most likely to be ‘somewhat confident’ or ‘very confident’, while secondary trained non-mathematics teachers were most likely to be ‘not at all confident’. Where the support was extra-curricular, teachers were more likely to be ‘somewhat confident’ or ‘very confident’.

As was the case for literacy, teachers were more likely to indicate that they were ‘very confident’ than were school leaders or leading teachers. There was little difference across the different groups in terms of those indicating that they were ‘somewhat confident’ or ‘not really confident.’ A higher proportion of government school respondents indicated that they were ‘not at all’ confident in the literacy support that they were providing, but for numeracy there was little difference between the sectors. Differences were more noticeable by geolocation, with higher proportions of regional and rural respondents more likely to indicate that they were not really, or not at all confident about the approaches they were using to support their students in numeracy.

Table 3.29 Levels of confidence in approaches to student support by role, sector and geolocation

Staff providing support	Not at all confident %	Not really confident %	Somewhat confident %	Very confident %
A secondary trained Mathematics teacher	2.8	30.6	47.2	15.4
A teaching assistant	28.6	33.3	33.3	4.8
A secondary trained non-Mathematics teacher	40.0	30.0	10.0	20.0
A primary trained teacher	-	-	66.7	33.3
Format of support				
In class	9.7	30.6	43.1	16.7
Withdrawal	11.1	26.7	44.4	17.8
Timetabled/streamed	15.2	26.1	39.1	19.6
Extra-curricular	3.7	18.5	48.1	29.6
Respondent role				
School leader	13.0	30.4	52.2	4.3
Leading teacher	10.5	38.6	47.4	3.5
Teacher	17.5	30.0	33.8	18.8
Sector				
Government	16.0	29.6	44.4	9.9
Catholic	18.2	36.4	36.4	9.1
Independent	12.9	30.6	41.9	14.5
Geolocation				
Metropolitan	13.8	23.4	50.0	12.8
Regional	14.5	41.8	30.9	12.7
Rural	22.2	37.0	37.0	3.7
Total	15.3	31.3	42.0	11.4

Teachers were generally confident in the approaches being used to identify students struggling in numeracy. However, as with literacy, concerns were raised widely about whether the identified students were getting the support they needed:

When we're looking at just differentiation - just needing some sort of additional support that would be done with the classroom teaching – you're probably looking at half of your cohort. So, of course there's students who slip through the cracks in terms of getting the right support.

A school leader from an independent school in SA discussed the tension between supporting students' mental health and wellbeing while also developing their literacy and numeracy skills. While the availability of helpful programs to support students struggling in numeracy was acknowledged, the ability to implement these programs was questioned due to the level of staffing required to do so effectively:

We probably do a little bit of plastering over the cracks with students without really helping them to develop the areas that are needed. I think our kids feel wonderfully well supported but I wonder if we're really giving them the development that they need in the areas that they need it. A lot of these students find school stressful and some of them have a lot of anxiety around school, so if we were to change our program, you're creating another issue for the students who don't want to come to school and students who are anxious about their learning.

You're always making decisions about what's in the best interests of these kids. I think from a mental health perspective our process has worked really well, but from a literacy and numeracy developmental perspective, I think there's much more that we can probably do.

Appendix 1: The Survey

The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) has commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to conduct this survey. We are interested to know how schools in Australia provide support for students in Years 7 to 9 who lack the foundational literacy and numeracy skills they need to engage with a secondary curriculum, in schools where most students have these skills.

For the purpose of this survey, special schools and specific interventions for students with an intellectual disability are not in scope.

Your participation will help AERO create resources and provide guidance for teachers of students in Years 7 to 9 who are struggling.

Incentives

To thank you for completing the survey, ACER will place you in a prize draw to win a **\$500 VISA gift card**.

If you'd like to be interviewed to help us learn more about your experiences, please register at the end of the survey. Those chosen to participate in an interview will receive a **\$100 VISA gift card** from ACER.

Confidentiality

Response data will be aggregated, and some data may be published within reports, which may be made publicly available. Please be assured that your responses will be anonymous and any identifying data you provide about yourself or your school will not be included in any analysis or reports.

Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary and will be taken as your informed consent to participate.

The survey should take 15 minutes, on average (longer if you answer both the literacy and numeracy strands). Thank you for your participation.

Page 2: Demographics

- DM01** What is your role?
- 1 School leader (*principal or assistant principal*)
 - 2 Leading Teacher (*teacher with additional, formal middle-level leadership responsibilities*)
 - 3 Teacher (*classroom and/or special programs teacher*)
 - 4 In-school education support role (*e.g. teacher aide*)
 - 5 *Other in-school role*
 - 6 Non-school-based support role (*e.g. literacy/numeracy coach*)

DM01a [if DM01=5] Please name and describe the role you have in your school:
[textbox]

DM01b [if DM01=6] Please name and describe the role you have:
[textbox]

DM01c [if DM01=6] How many schools do you currently work with?
[Integer text entry]

DM02 Your state/territory:

1	ACT	5	SA
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2	NSW	6	TAS
3	NT	7	VIC
4	QLD	8	WA

- DM03** Your sector:
- 1 Government
 - 2 Catholic
 - 3 Independent

- DM04** [if DM01=1-5] Your school location:
- 1 Metropolitan
 - 2 Regional
 - 3 Rural

- DM05** [if DM01=1-5] What type of school do you work in?
- 1 F-9
 - 2 F-10
 - 3 F-12
 - 4 7-10
 - 5 7-12
- Text Other _____

- DM06** [if DM01=1-5] What is the name of your school?
Please write the name out in full, as we may not be able to identify acronyms
Note: your school name will be matched with ACER's database to add details such as student numbers, ICSEA and geolocation, and to enable us to check that we have responses from a range of schools across Australia. We will not use school names in any analysis or reporting and we will remove names from the dataset once the additional data is added. Neither you nor your school will be identifiable in any reporting.
- Text _____

- DM07** Please indicate which version of the survey you are best placed to answer questions about in regard to support for struggling students in Years 7 to 9
This question will direct you to either the literacy or the numeracy version of the survey (or both versions if you select both).
- 1 Literacy
 - 2 Numeracy
 - 3 Literacy and numeracy

- DML08** How many years of experience do you have implementing literacy support for secondary students? (Round to the nearest full year. Enter '0' if you do not have any experience)
- INT [Integer text entry]

- DMN08** How many years of experience do you have implementing numeracy support for secondary students? (Round to the nearest full year)
- INT [Integer text entry]

- DM09** About how many Year 7 students does your school enrol each year (on average)
- [Integer text entry]

[Text1] The cohort of interest in this study are students in Years 7 to 9 who lack the foundational literacy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum, in schools where most students have these skills (special schools, and students with an intellectual disability are not in scope in this instance).

The students in scope are likely to struggle to engage in classes without significant differentiation on the part of classroom teachers, and the skill disparity may be so great that differentiating lessons for them is not feasible. They may be participating in withdrawal programs that focus on developing these foundational skills, and other out-of-class interventions.

DML10 About how many students in your school each year, on average, would you have in this cohort, in need of literacy support?
[Integer text entry] Year 7 students
[Integer text entry] Year 8 students
[Integer text entry] Year 9 students

DMN10 About how many Year 7 students in your school each year, on average, would you have in this cohort, in need of numeracy support?
[Integer text entry] Year 7 students
[Integer text entry] Year 8 students
[Integer text entry] Year 9 students

ALL LITERACY ITEMS

Enrolment data (Literacy) (School leaders only)

EDL01 When your school receives students at the Year 7 intake or earlier, do you/your school receive data that indicate each student's level of ability in literacy?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 No
- 4 Unsure

EDL03 [If 1 or 2 to **EDL01**] What data do you typically receive?
Select all that apply

- 1 NAPLAN
- 2 Subject data/grades (e.g. English)
- 3 ACER PAT-Reading
- 4 Other: (please indicate which other data you typically receive) _____

EDL04 When your school receives students at Year 8 or 9, do you/your school receive data that indicates each student's level of ability in literacy?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 No
- 4 Unsure

EDL06 [If 1 or 2 to **EDL04**] What data do you typically receive?
Select all that apply

- 1 NAPLAN

- 2 Subject data/grades (English)
- 3 PAT Reading
- 4 Other: (please indicate which other data you typically receive) _____

EDL07 *The cohort of interest in this study are students in Years 7 to 9 who lack the foundational literacy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum*
Are these students pre-identified or flagged for you in any way, in any of the data you receive when a student enrolls at your school?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 No
- 4 Unsure

EDL08 [If 1 or 2 to **EDL07**] Are you made aware of what definition or 'cut-off' score is used to identify this cohort of students in any of the data you receive?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

EDL09 [If 1 to **EDL08**] Please indicate the definition or cut-off score that is used, and in relation to which data.

[Text box]

EDL10 [If 2 or 3 to **EDL07**] Do you/does your school specifically identify this cohort of students, using the enrolment data you receive?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 No
- 4 Unsure

EDL11 [If 1 or 2 to **EDL10**] What definition do you apply?

Select all that apply

- 1 We use a definition provided by a head office (department or region, CEO)
- 2 We use a definition decided within our school or school cluster/network
- 3 We identify students who lack these skills but do not use a set definition

EDL12 [If 1 or 2 in **EDL11**] Please enter the definition you use to identify this cohort. Please also indicate the data set or sets you apply this definition to.

(E.g., this could be at or below National Minimum Standard in NAPLAN, or below an average in another assessment.)

[Text box]

School-based identification – Literacy (All school-based respondents)

The cohort of interest in this study are students in Years 7 to 9 who lack the foundational literacy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum, in schools where most students have these skills (special schools, and students with an intellectual disability are not in scope in this instance).

The students in scope are likely to struggle to engage in classes without significant differentiation on the part of classroom teachers, and the skill disparity may be so great that differentiating lessons for them is not feasible. They may be participating in withdrawal programs that focus on developing these foundational skills, and other out-of-class interventions.

*The next set of questions relates to the methods you might use at your school to identify and/or monitor this particular cohort of students, **aside from using any enrolment data you receive.***

SBL01 Do you/does your school specifically identify, diagnose and/or monitor students who may lack the foundational literacy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum as a cohort within your school?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 No
- 4 Unsure

SBL02 [If 2 in **SBL01**] Please explain the circumstances in which you/your school would identify, diagnose and monitor a student.
[Textbox]

SBL03 [If 1 or 2 in **SBL01**] How do you identify these students in your school?

- 1 Identification is ad hoc or informal, by teacher judgement
- 2 We use an assessment/range of assessments

SBL04 [If selected 2 in **SBL03**] At your school, do you only undertake an initial assessment of students (e.g. at start of Year 7 or upon enrolment) or do you undertake ongoing assessment of your students across Years 7 to 9?

- 1 Initial assessment
- 2 Ongoing assessment
- 3 Unsure

SBL05 [If either 1 or 2 in **SBL04**] What methods or instruments do you use to identify, diagnose and/or monitor students who may lack the foundational literacy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum?

ACARA Literacy Learning Progression
BURT Word Reading Test (NZCER)
CARS and STARS
Castles and Colthart 2 Test (MOTIf Macquarie University)
Compass assessment (ACER)
Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP - Pearson)
Diagnostic Spelling Test (DiST - MOTIf Macquarie University)
Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)
Essential Assessment
Fountas and Pinnell (Heinemann)
Jolly Phonics
Lexile
Magic Words

MultiLit placement tests
 NAPLAN
 Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (NARA)
 Oxford Word List
 Phonics Screening Check (SA)
 Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST)
 PM Benchmarking (Nelson)
 PROBE
 Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT - ACER) – Reading, Spelling, Vocabulary, etc.
 QuickSmart
 Reading Progress Test
 Running Records
 School-based assessments/Teacher Judgement (e.g. reported curriculum achievement based on teacher-developed common assessment tasks)
 Single Word Spelling Test (SWST)
 South Australian Spelling Test
 Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test (SPAT)
 Test of Everyday Reading Comprehension (TERC - MOTIf Macquarie University)
 Test of Reading Comprehension (TORCH – ACER)
 Test of Word Reading Ability 2 (TOWRE2 – Pearson)
 Waddington Diagnostic Reading and Spelling Tests
 Wheldall Assessment of Reading Passages (WARP)
 Words Their Way
 York Assessment of Reading Comprehension (YARC - PAA)
 VCAA On Demand/Digital Assessment Library
 Other: Please specify

Support provided - Literacy

SPL02 *In this section of the survey, we are interested to learn about the nature of the support you provide to students in Years 7 to 9 who are identified as lacking the foundational literacy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum.*

Please note: supports provided to students who attend special educational settings, and students with an intellectual disability, are not in scope for these questions.

[If 1 to **SPL01**] At your school, are students who fit this description provided any specific additional support in literacy?

(Additional support is support other than differentiated instruction or assessment provided by their classroom teachers)

- 1 Yes
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 No
- 4 Unsure

SPL03 Do any of the following issues currently make it difficult for your school to provide additional support to such students?

Select all that apply

- 1 A lack of a clear definition/identification of these students in particular

- 2 A lack of funding to provide additional supports
- 3 A lack of staff qualified/experienced in literacy
- 4 A lack of available staff
- 5 A lack of leadership in this area
- 6 A lack of parental support/desire for their children to be given additional support
- 7 A belief that teachers are differentiating (or should be able to differentiate) to
- 8 meet the literacy needs of these students
It is not a priority at my school
- 9 None of these are issues at my school
- 10 Other: please specify _____
- 11

SPL04 [If 1 to **SPL02**] When considering how or if to provide literacy support to these students, what other factors do you consider, aside from their literacy ability?
Select all that apply

- 1 Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD);
 - 2 Socio-Economic Status (SES)
 - 3 Welfare or wellbeing concerns
 - 4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status (ATSI)
 - 5 Migrant or refugee status
 - 6 Medical or health concerns
 - 7 Attendance data
 - 8 Classroom engagement/behaviour
- Text Other: _____

SPL05 [If any in **SPL04**] Please briefly explain in what ways any of the above listed additional factors you've selected either formally or informally determine how or if support is offered.
[Textbox]

(SPL06 – school leaders do not get asked how many minutes students receive)

SPL06 [If 1 to **SPL02**] Which of the following forms of literacy support are these students offered?
Select all that apply.

- 1 **In-class:** A support teacher or teacher's aide enters the class of another teacher to work with an identified student or students in that class.
 - [If select 1] **SPL061** On average, approximately how many minutes of in-class support does each identified student receive per week?
_____ minutes
- 2 **Withdrawal:** A support teacher or teacher's aide withdraws an identified student or students from their timetabled classes to work with them.
 - [If select 2] **SPL062** On average, approximately how many minutes of withdrawal-based support does each identified student receive per week?
_____ minutes
- 3 **Streamed classes:** A stream of English or an additional literacy elective is timetabled as a regular class for (predominantly or especially) identified students.

- [If select 3] **SPL063** On average, approximately how many minutes of a streamed class in English/literacy do identified students receive per week?
_____ minutes

4

Extra-curricular (e.g. lunchtime or before/after school) program: A regular number of sessions per week are offered to identified students for remedial literacy tutoring outside of normal class time.

- [If select 4] **SPL064** On average, approximately how many minutes of extra-curricular support does each identified student receive per week?
_____ minutes

5

Other: please specify _____

- [If select 5] **SPL065** On average, approximately how many minutes of this kind of support does each identified student receive per week?
_____ minutes

SPL07

[If 1 to **SPL02**] In what format are the support sessions offered?

Select all that apply.

In-class

- 1 One-to-one (individual student with one teacher)
- 2 Student pairs (2 students with one teacher)
- 3 Small groups (3 to 6 students with one teacher)
- 4 Larger groups (7 or more students with one teacher)
- 5 Other: Please specify _____

Withdrawal

- 6 One-to-one (individual student with one teacher)
- 7 Student pairs (2 students with one teacher)
- 8 Small groups (3 to 6 students with one teacher)
- 9 Larger groups (7 or more students with one teacher)
- 10 Other: Please specify _____

Extra-curricular

- 11 One-to-one (individual student with one teacher)
- 12 Student pairs (2 students with one teacher)
- 13 Small groups (3 to 6 students with one teacher)
- 14 Larger groups (7 or more students with one teacher)
- 15 Other: Please specify _____

Other

- 16 One-to-one (individual student with one teacher)
- 17 Student pairs (2 students with one teacher)
- 18 Small groups (3 to 6 students with one teacher)
- 19 Larger groups (7 or more students with one teacher)
- 20 Other: Please specify _____

SPL08

[If 1 to **SPL02**] Who at your school provides the literacy support to these students?

- 1 A secondary trained English teacher
- 2 A secondary trained non-English teacher
- 3 A primary trained teacher

- 4 A speech pathologist
- 5 A teaching assistant
- 6 Other: please specify _____
- 7 Unsure

SPL09 [If 1-6 in **SPL08**] Is this person specially trained in literacy support?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 Unsure

SPL10 [If 1 to **SPL02**] How long is the initial program of support you offer to students?

- 1 Less than a year
 - **SPL101** Please enter the approximate number of school weeks the program of support is provided for: _____
- 2 One year
- 3 Multiple years
 - **SPL103** Please enter the maximum number of school years the program lasts, on average: _____

SPL11 [If 1 to **SPL02**] Are the students who receive support assessed at regular intervals to determine whether they need to continue receiving support?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 No
- 4 Unsure

SPL12 [If 1 to **SPL02**] Has your school purchased or otherwise acquired a ‘pre-packaged’ literacy intervention program which is delivered to identified students as (part of) the support they are provided?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 3 Unsure

SPL13 [If 1 to **SPL02**] Does your school use a specific (i.e. named) literacy pedagogical approach, which is delivered to/used with the identified students as (part of) the support they are provided?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 No
- 4 Unsure

SPL14 [If 1 to either **SPL14** or **SPL15**] Which program(s) or approach(es) do you use? *Select all that apply.*

- 1 Accelerated Literacy
- 2 Achieve 3000
- 3 CARS and STARS
- 4 Essential Assessment
- 5 Fountas and Pinnell
- 6 Literacy CAFE
- 7 MULTILit (MacLit)

- 8 QuickSmart
- 9 Read 180
- 10 Reading to Learn
- 11 Reciprocal Teaching strategy
- 12 Simple View of reading (SVR) model
- 13 SRA Corrective Reading
- 14 Strategic Instruction Model (SIM)
- 15 Word Flyers
- 16 Other: please specify _____

Confidence in approaches used - Literacy

CAL01 How confident are you in the approach your school takes to supporting students in Years 7 to 9 who are identified as lacking the foundational literacy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum?

- 1 Not at all confident
- 2 Not really confident
- 3 Somewhat confident
- 4 Very confident

CAL02 Are there approaches to teaching literacy that you think are particularly effective? If so, can you tell us briefly about these approaches and why they are effective?

[Textbox]

CAL03 Are there approaches that you think are not really effective? If so, can you tell us briefly about these approaches and why they are ineffective?

[Textbox]

Literacy Items for NON-SCHOOL participants

Cohort Definition and identification

Def01 In your role, do you use a specific means to identify students in this cohort struggling with literacy?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 No
- 4 Unsure

Def02 [If 1 or 2 to **Def01**] What definition do the schools apply?

Select all that apply

- 1 Schools use a definition provided by a head office (department or region, Catholic Education Office)
- 2 Schools use a definition decided within the school or school cluster/network
- 3 Schools identify students who lack these skills but do not use a set definition

Def03 [If 1 or 2 in **EDL11**] Please enter the definition you or your schools use to identify this cohort. Please also indicate the data set or sets they apply this definition to.

(E.g., this could be at or below National Minimum Standard in NAPLAN, or below an average in another assessment.)

[Text box]

Def04 Do any of the following issues currently make it difficult for the schools you work with to provide additional support to such students?

Select all that apply

- 1 A lack of a clear definition/identification of these students in particular
- 2 A lack of funding to provide additional supports
- 3 A lack of staff qualified/experienced in literacy
- 4 A lack of available staff
- 5 A lack of leadership in this area
- 6 A lack of parental support/desire for their children to be given additional support
- 7 A belief that teachers are differentiating (or should be able to differentiate) to meet the literacy needs of these students
- 8 It is not a school priority
- 9 None of these are issues at these schools
- 10 Other: please specify _____

Def05 Which of the following forms of literacy support are the schools you work with offering these students?

Select all that apply.

- 1 **In-class:** A support teacher or teacher's aide enters the class of another teacher to work with an identified student or students in that class.
- 2 **Withdrawal:** A support teacher or teacher's aide withdraws an identified student or students from their timetabled classes to work with them.
- 3 **Streamed classes:** A stream of English or an additional literacy elective is timetabled as a regular class for (predominantly or especially) identified students.
- 4 **Extra-curricular (e.g. lunchtime or before/after school) program:** A regular number of sessions per week are offered to identified students for remedial literacy tutoring outside of normal class time
- 5 **Other:** please specify _____

Def051 In what format are the support sessions offered?

Def052

Def054 *Select all that apply.*

Def055

- 1 One-to-one (individual student with one teacher)
- 2 Student pairs (2 students with one teacher)
- 3 Small groups (3 to 6 students with one teacher)
- 4 Larger groups (7 or more students with one teacher)
- 5 Other: Please specify _____

Confidence in approaches used - Literacy

EXL01 How confident are you in the approaches your schools take to supporting students in Years 7 to 9 who are identified as lacking the foundational literacy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum?

- 1 Not at all confident
- 2 Not very confident
- 3 Somewhat confident
- 4 Very confident

EXL02 Are there approaches to teaching literacy that you think are particularly effective? If so, can you tell us briefly about these approaches and why they are effective?

[Textbox]

EXL03 Are there approaches that you think are not really effective? If so, can you tell us briefly about these approaches and why they are ineffective?

[Textbox]

ALL NUMERACY ITEMS

Enrolment data (Numeracy)

EDN01 When your school receives students at the Year 7 intake or earlier, do you/your school receive data that indicate each student's level of ability in numeracy?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 No
- 4 Unsure

EDN03 [If 1 or 2 to **EDN01**] What data do you typically receive?

- 1 NAPLAN
- 2 Subject data/grades (e.g. Maths)
- 3 PAT Maths
- 4 Other: (please indicate which other data you typically receive) _____

EDN04 When your school receives students at Year 8 or 9, do you/your school receive data that indicates each student's level of ability in numeracy?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 No
- 4 Unsure

EDN06 [If 1 or 2 to **EDN04**] What data do you typically receive?

- 1 NAPLAN
- 2 Subject data/grades (Maths)
- 3 PAT Maths
- 4 Other: (please indicate which other data you typically receive) _____

The cohort of interest in this study are students in Years 7 to 9 who lack the foundational numeracy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum, in schools where most students have these skills (special schools, and students with an intellectual disability are not in scope in this instance).

The students in scope are likely to struggle to engage in classes without significant differentiation on the part of classroom teachers, and the skill disparity may be so great that differentiating lessons for them is not feasible. They may be participating in withdrawal programs that focus on developing these foundational skills, and other out-of-class interventions.

EDN07 Are these students pre-identified or flagged for you in any way, in any of the data you receive when a student enrolls at your school?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 No
- 4 Unsure

EDN08 [If 1 or 2 to **EDN07**] Are you made aware of what definition or 'cut-off' score is used to identify this cohort of students in any of the data you receive?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No

EDN09 [If 1 to **EDN08**] Please indicate the definition or cut-off score that is used, and in relation to which data.
[Text box]

EDN10 [If 3 to **EDN07**] Do you/does your school specifically identify this cohort of students, using the enrolment data you receive?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 No
- 4 Unsure

EDN11 [If 1 or 2 to **EDN10**] What definition do you apply?
(A definition might be based on a minimum expected achievement level on an assessment, such as NAPLAN or ACER's PAT Maths)
Select all that apply

- 1 We use a definition provided by a head office (department or region, CEO)
- 2 We use a definition decided within our school or school cluster/network
- 3 We identify students who lack these skills but do not use a set definition

EDN12 [If 1 or 2 in **EDN11**] Please enter the definition you use to identify this cohort. Please also indicate the data set or sets you apply this definition to.
(E.g., this could be at or below National Minimum Standard in NAPLAN, or below an average in another assessment.)
[Text box]

School-based identification - Numeracy

The cohort of interest in this study are students in Years 7 to 9 who lack the foundational numeracy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum, in schools where most students have these skills (special schools, and students with an intellectual disability are not in scope in this instance).

The students in scope are likely to struggle to engage in classes without significant differentiation on the part of classroom teachers, and the skill disparity may be so great that differentiating lessons for them is not feasible. They may be participating in withdrawal programs that focus on developing these foundational skills, and other out-of-class interventions.

*The next set of questions relates to the methods you might use at your school to identify and/or monitor this particular cohort of students, **aside from using any enrolment data you receive.***

SBN01 Do you/does your school specifically identify, diagnose and/or monitor students who may lack the foundational numeracy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum as a cohort within your school?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 No
- 4 Unsure

SBN02 [If 2 in **SBN01**] Please explain the circumstances in which you/your school would identify, diagnose and monitor a student.
[Textbox]

SBN03 [If 1 or 2 in **SBN01**] How do you identify these students in your school?

- 1 Identification is ad hoc or informal, by teacher judgement
- 2 We use an assessment/range of assessments

SBN04 [If selected 2 in **SBN03**] At your school, do you only undertake an initial assessment of students (e.g. at start of Year 7 or upon enrolment) or do you undertake ongoing assessment of your students across Years 7 to 9?

- 1 Initial assessment
- 2 Ongoing assessment
- 3 Unsure

SBN05 [If either 1 or 2 in **SBN04**] What methods or instruments do you use to identify, diagnose and/or monitor students who may lack the foundational numeracy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum?

ACARA Numeracy Learning Progression
Compass assessment (ACER)
Essential Assessment
NAPLAN
Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT - ACER) – Mathematics
QuickSmart
School-based assessments/Teacher Judgement (e.g. reported curriculum achievement based on teacher-developed common assessment tasks)
Individual Knowledge Assessment of Number (IKAN)
Learning and Assessment Framework for Multiplicative Thinking (LAF)
EMM (Elementary Maths Mastery series)
[VIC] On Demand
Other: Please specify

Support provided - Numeracy

In this section of the survey, we are interested to learn about the nature of the support you provide to students in Years 7 to 9 who are identified as lacking the foundational numeracy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum.

Please note: supports provided to students who attend special educational settings, and students with an intellectual disability, are not in scope for these questions.

SPN02 [If 1 to **SPN01**] At your school, are students who fit this description provided any specific additional support in numeracy?
(Additional support = support other than differentiated instruction or assessment provided by their classroom teachers)

- 1 Yes
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 No
- 4 Unsure

SPN03 Do any of the following issues currently make it difficult for your school to provide additional support to such students?

Select all that apply

- 1 A lack of a clear definition/identification of these students in particular
- 2 A lack of funding to provide additional supports
- 3 A lack of qualified staff
- 4 A lack of available staff
- 5 A lack of leadership in this area
- 6 A lack of parental support/desire for their children to be given additional support
- 7 A belief that teachers are differentiating (or should be able to differentiate) to meet the numeracy or numeracy needs of these students
- 8 It is not a priority at my school
- 9 Other: please specify _____
- 10

SPN04 [If 1 to **SPN02**] When considering how or if to provide numeracy support to these students, what other factors do you consider, aside from their numeracy ability?

Select all that apply

- 1 Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)
- 2 Socio-Economic Status (SES)
- 3 Welfare or wellbeing concerns
- 4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status (ATSI)
- 5 Migrant or refugee status
- 6 Medical or health concerns
- 7 Attendance patterns
- 8 Classroom engagement/behaviour
- Text Other: _____

SPN05 [If any in **SPN04**] Please briefly explain in what ways any of the above listed additional factors you've selected either formally or informally determine how or if support is offered.

[Textbox]

- SPN06** [If 1 to **SPN02**] Which of the following forms of numeracy support are these students offered?
Select all that apply.
- 1 **In-class:** A support teacher or teacher’s aide enters the class of another teacher to work with an identified student or students in that class.
 ➤ [If select 1] **SPN061** On average, approximately how many minutes of in-class support does each identified student receive per week?
 _____ minutes
- 2 **Withdrawal:** A support teacher or teacher’s aide withdraws an identified student or students from their timetabled classes to work with them.
 ➤ [If select 2] **SPN062** On average, approximately how many minutes of withdrawal-based support does each identified student receive per week?
 _____ minutes
- 3 **Streamed classes:** A stream of mathematics or an additional numeracy elective is timetabled as a regular class for (predominantly or especially) identified students.
 ➤ [If select 3] **SPN063** On average, approximately how many minutes of a streamed class in mathematics/numeracy do identified students receive per week?
 _____ minutes
- 4 **Extra-curricular (e.g. lunchtime or before/after school) program:** A regular number of sessions per week are offered to identified students for remedial numeracy tutoring outside of normal class time
 ➤ [If select 4] **SPN064** On average, approximately how many minutes of extra-curricular support does each identified student receive per week?
 _____ minutes
- 5 **Other:** please specify _____
 ➤ [If select 5] **SPN065** On average, approximately how many minutes of this kind of support does each identified student receive per week?
 _____ minutes

- SPN08** [If 1 to **SPN02**] Who at your school provides the numeracy support to these students?
- 1 A secondary trained mathematics teacher
 2 A secondary trained non-mathematics teacher
 3 A primary trained teacher
 4 A teaching assistant
 5 Other: please specify _____
 6 Unsure

- SPN09** [If 1-6 in **SPN08**] Is this person specially trained in numeracy support?
- 1 Yes
 2 No
 3 Unsure

- SPN10** [If 1 to **SPN02**] How long is the initial program of support you offer to students?
- 1 Less than a year
 - **SPN101** Please enter the approximate number of school weeks _____
 - 2 One year
 - 3 Multiple years
 - **SPN103** Please enter the maximum number of school years _____

- SPN11** [If 1 to **SPN02**] Are the students who receive support assessed at regular intervals to determine whether they need to continue receiving support?
- 1 Yes
 - 2 No
 - 3 Sometimes
 - 4 Unsure

- SPN12** [If 1 to **SPN02**] Has your school purchased or otherwise acquired a 'pre-packaged' numeracy intervention program which is delivered to identified students as (part of) the support they are provided?
- 1 Yes
 - 2 No
 - 4 Unsure

- SPN13** [If 1 to **SPN02**] Does your school use a specific (i.e. named) numeracy pedagogical approach, which is delivered to/used with the identified students as (part of) the support they are provided?
- 1 Yes
 - 2 Sometimes
 - 3 No
 - 4 Unsure

- SPN14** [If 1 or 3 to either **SPN14** or **SPN15**] Which program(s) or approach(es) do you use?
- Select all that apply.*
- 1 Achieve 3000
 - 2 Elementary Maths Mastery (EMM)
 - 3 Essential Assessment
 - 4 Getting Ready In Numeracy (GRIN)
 - 5 Manga High
 - 6 QuickSmart
 - 7 Scaffolding Numeracy in the Middle Years (SNMY)
 - 8 Taking Off With Numeracy (TOWN)
 - 9 Other: please specify _____

Confidence in approaches used - Numeracy

- CAN01** How confident are you in the approach your school takes to supporting students in Years 7 to 9 who are identified as lacking the foundational numeracy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum?
- 1 Not at all confident
 - 2 Not very confident
 - 3 Somewhat confident
 - 4 Very confident

CAN02 Are there approaches to teaching numeracy that you think are particularly effective? If so, can you tell us briefly about these approaches and why they are effective?
[Textbox]

CAN03 Are there approaches that you think are not really effective? If so, can you tell us briefly about these approaches and why they are ineffective?
[Textbox]

Numeracy Items for NON-SCHOOL participants

Cohort Definition and identification

DeN01 In your role, do you use a specific means to identify students in this cohort struggling with numeracy?

- 1 Yes
- 2 Sometimes
- 3 No
- 4 Unsure

DeN02 [If 1 or 2 to **Def01**] What definition do the schools apply?

Select all that apply

- 1 Schools use a definition provided by a head office (department or region, Catholic Education Office)
- 2 Schools use a definition decided within the school or school cluster/network
- 3 Schools identify students who lack these skills but do not use a set definition

DeN03 [If 1 or 2 in **EDL11**] Please enter the definition you or your schools use to identify this cohort. Please also indicate the data set or sets they apply this definition to. (*E.g., this could be at or below National Minimum Standard in NAPLAN, or below an average in another assessment.*)

[Text box]

DeN04 Do any of the following issues currently make it difficult for the schools you work with to provide additional support to such students?

Select all that apply

- 1 A lack of a clear definition/identification of these students in particular
- 2 A lack of funding to provide additional supports
- 3 A lack of staff qualified/experienced in literacy
- 4 A lack of available staff
- 5 A lack of leadership in this area
- 6 A lack of parental support/desire for their children to be given additional support
- 7 A belief that teachers are differentiating (or should be able to differentiate) to meet the literacy needs of these students
- 8 It is not a school priority
- 9 Other: please specify _____

DeN05 Which of the following forms of numeracy support are the schools you work with offering these students?

Select all that apply.

- 1 **In-class:** A support teacher or teacher's aide enters the class of another teacher to work with an identified student or students in that class.
- 2 **Withdrawal:** A support teacher or teacher's aide withdraws an identified student or students from their timetabled classes to work with them.
- 3 **Streamed classes:** A stream of mathematics or an additional numeracy elective is timetabled as a regular class for (predominantly or especially) identified students.
- 4 **Extra-curricular (e.g. lunchtime or before/after school) program:** A regular number of sessions per week are offered to identified students for remedial numeracy tutoring outside of normal class time
- 5 **Other:** please specify _____

DeN051 In what format are the support sessions offered?

DeN052

DeN054 *Select all that apply.*

DeN055

- 1 One-to-one (individual student with one teacher)
- 2 Student pairs (2 students with one teacher)
- 3 Small groups (3 to 6 students with one teacher)
- 4 Larger groups (7 or more students with one teacher)
- 5 Other: Please specify _____

Confidence in approaches used - Numeracy

EXN01 How confident are you in the approaches your schools take to supporting students in Years 7 to 9 who are identified as lacking the foundational numeracy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum?

- 1 Not at all confident
- 2 Not very confident
- 3 Somewhat confident
- 4 Very confident

EXN02 Are there approaches to teaching numeracy that you think are particularly effective? If so, can you tell us briefly about these approaches and why they are effective?

[Textbox]

EXN03 Are there approaches that you think are not really effective? If so, can you tell us briefly about these approaches and why they are ineffective?

[Textbox]

ALL respondents

Final comment page

- AE01** If you have anything else you would like to share about your/your schools experience, approach or perspective on supporting struggling students in Years 7 to 9 in literacy or numeracy, please feel free to add any last comments in the space provided below.
[Textbox]

Prize draw and interview contact details

- CD01** Are you interested in being entered in the prize draw for a \$500 VISA gift card for your completion of this survey?
- 1 Yes
2 No

- CD02** [If 'Yes' to **CD001**] Please enter your email address in the space below.
*Please note your email address will not be used for any additional communication from ACER or AERO.
Your email address will not be associated with your responses and will be used solely for the prize draw. Once the prize draw has been drawn and claimed, your email address will be deleted from the survey database. Terms and Conditions for the prize draw are available here [link] – (test and make sure this opens in a separate browser tab)*
[Textbox]

- CD03** Would you be willing to be contacted by ACER for a follow-up interview?
- If you tick yes, ACER will associate your email address with your survey responses for the purpose of identifying people we would like to interview. We will only contact a small number of participants to request an interview. All interviewees will receive a \$100 VISA gift card as a thank you for their time.
Once we have completed this process, your email address will be dissociated from your responses.
If we do choose to contact you for an interview, we will provide additional information, however please be assured that you will not be identified in any reporting.*
- 1 Yes
2 No

- CD04** [If 'Yes' to **CD003**] Thank you for agreeing to be contacted for an interview. Please enter your email address here. This will be taken as consent to contact you. If we do contact you, you can decide whether you want to be interviewed once we provide further information to you
[Textbox]

END

Appendix 2: interview schedule

The cohort of interest in this study are students in Years 7 to 9 who lack the foundational literacy and numeracy skills that are required to engage with a secondary curriculum, in schools where the majority of students have these skills (special schools, and students with an intellectual disability are not in scope in this instance).

The students in scope are likely to struggle to engage in classes without significant differentiation on the part of classroom teachers, and the skill disparity may be so great that differentiating lessons for them is not feasible. They may be participating in withdrawal programs that focus on developing these foundational skills, and other out-of-class interventions.

How these students are defined, identified, and supported will likely vary across schools and systems. This project seeks to address the 4 questions below.

1. What methods and/or assessments do schools use to identify students in this cohort?
2. What frameworks do schools use to make decisions on how to support these students?
3. What supports are provided?
4. What confidence do school leaders and teachers have in the approaches currently used?

Thank you for answering our recent survey and for being willing to provide further detail in an interview.

About you: State, sector, school size, role, experience

Identifying students

1. How and when does your school identify students in Years 7 to 9 likely to struggle with literacy/numeracy? Do you use particular assessments or have a definition to assist you in that identification? How appropriate are the definitions/assessments you use? About how many/what proportion of students in Years 7 to 9 are identified each year, on average?

School decision-making

2. Who makes decisions at your school about who provides support and how it is provided (including staffing/funding)? Is anything specific provided (other than differentiation by teachers in class)?
3. Is your school supported (or are there supports available) by external sources – such as staff in a diocese/regional office? How do you access this support?
4. Are there any funded programs you have access to that specifically support literacy/numeracy for this cohort?
5. How do you talk to parents about intervention? How do you talk to students about intervention? Do you have regular discussions with your school leadership or peers about monitoring struggling students?

Support provided to students

6. How are students supported – e.g. how much time per week, in-class or by withdrawal, one on one or small groups etc. Who provides support – e.g. qualified/experience teacher, teacher aide, etc.
7. Does the support follow any formal curriculum/program? What assessments are used to assess growth/achievement? What materials do you use? Are there gaps – what kind of

resources would be useful?

8. If your school provides small group or 1:1 withdrawal support, where does a student need to be in their learning before they are withdrawn from the class?
9. If your school has a withdrawal program, how long is each withdrawal class and what makes way in the timetable for students to attend? What is the process in your school for a student transitioning out of withdrawal?

Confidence in support provided

10. Is the school aware of and assisting all students who need support in literacy/numeracy? What would be best practice?
11. Is the support provided helping them to improve? What is working? What could be improved?

Support provided to teachers

12. Do you/teachers at your school have access to any supports related to identifying, assessing and supporting struggling students? (e.g. professional learning and time to do it, consultants with relevant expertise from regional/dioceses office, etc.)
13. Do you get any advice/support regarding literacy/numeracy supports/resources that can be offered in a classroom setting?



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