



ACPPA Position Paper – Initial Teacher Education

About ACPPA - The Australian Catholic Primary Principals Association is the peak body representing Catholic Primary Principals in Australia. Formed in 1984, ACPPA represents Catholic Primary Principals and leaders from over 1220 primary schools and 150 combined primary/secondary schools, which educate more than 400,000 primary students, representing 20% of primary-aged children in Australia. ACPPA gives voice to contemporary issues facing education in Australia.

Executive Summary

Australia faces a growing teacher workforce challenge. Too many graduates enter classrooms insufficiently prepared for the realities of teaching, while too many leave the profession within their first five years. Catholic primary school principals are increasingly required to bridge the gap between university preparation and classroom practice through extensive induction and mentoring.

ACPPA believes initial teacher education (ITE) must place greater emphasis on authentic school-based learning, stronger university–school partnerships, and practical classroom readiness. Effective teacher preparation is critical to improving teacher retention, workforce sustainability, and student outcomes.

Background

Initial teacher education in Australia is primarily university-based, supported by professional experience placements. While national accreditation standards exist, concerns remain regarding graduate readiness, particularly in behaviour management, differentiation, family engagement, and supporting diverse learners.

The 2023 Strong Beginnings Report and ACPPA's own research have highlighted persistent gaps between teacher preparation and classroom realities. Workforce data also shows declining completion rates and continuing challenges in attracting and retaining teachers.

Research consistently demonstrates that graduates who spend more time learning in authentic school settings are better prepared, more confident, and more likely to remain in the profession. Strengthening school-based learning must therefore be a central focus of ITE reform.

Key Issues

Graduate Readiness

Many graduates enter teaching without sufficient experience managing the full complexity of classroom practice, including planning, assessment, reporting, behaviour support, and family engagement.

Integration of Theory and Practice

Teacher preparation programs do not always effectively connect university learning with classroom application, limiting opportunities for candidates to develop practical expertise.

University–School Partnerships

Schools play a critical role in teacher preparation but are often underutilised in the design and delivery of ITE programs.

Teacher Retention

Insufficient preparation contributes to early-career stress and attrition, placing additional pressure on schools and the broader workforce.

ACPPA Position

ACPPA advocates for:

- Increased school-based learning throughout all ITE programs.
- Professional experience models that progressively develop teacher capability through observation, co-teaching, and extended classroom responsibility.
- Opportunities for teacher candidates to experience the full annual cycle of teaching and learning.
- Strong partnerships between universities, Catholic education authorities, and schools in the design, delivery, and evaluation of ITE programs.
- Recognition and support for mentor teachers through training, resourcing, and professional recognition.
- Structured transition-to-profession programs that support graduates during their early years of teaching.
- National reforms that prioritise classroom readiness as the primary measure of ITE effectiveness.

ACPPA believes that high-quality teacher preparation is essential to addressing workforce shortages, strengthening teacher retention, and improving student outcomes. Catholic primary school principals stand ready to work collaboratively with governments, universities, and education authorities to ensure every graduate enters the profession equipped to succeed.

References

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