

# Building systems and schools where staff and students flourish

Prof. Scott Eacott



UNSW  
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4 QUALITY EDUCATION



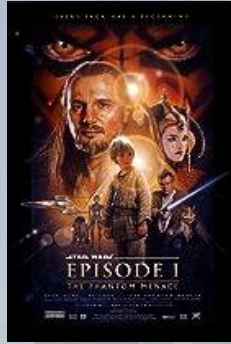
9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



Path A  
Prequels



Creativity,  
curiosity,  
partnership, &  
judgement

The original  
trilogy



Hope,  
Collaboration,  
overcoming  
adversity

Path B  
Sequels



Belonging,  
resilience,  
knowledge, &  
background

# Building education systems for equity and inclusion

Academy of the  
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Final Report

Project Lead  
Professor Scott Eacott  
Gonski Institute for Education  
UNSW Sydney

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## PURSUING EQUITABLE EXCELLENCE

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# IMPROVING SCHOOL SYSTEMS THROUGH SYSTEMIC DESIGN

## Schooling for equitable excellence: principles of systemic design

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**Abstract**  
**Purpose** – Education is a key institution of modern society, long recognized for its central role in the reproduction of inequities and with the potential to challenge them. Schools behave as their systems are designed. Achieving equity and excellence is not possible through attempts to fix “the school” or educators. Principles of systemic design that incorporate equity and excellence are needed to increase the likelihood of desirable outcomes.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Using the social contract as a design principle, this paper systematically builds an empirical model of school provision, aimed at equitable excellence.

**Findings** – Equitable excellence in school provision is possible if choice is available across provision and socio-educational (dis)advantage, schools have autonomy over fiscal, personnel and curricular matters, public accountability is linked to academic outcomes and social impact, all moderated by the quality of teaching.

**Research limitations/implications** – Data-driven empirical modelling is particularly attractive to policy makers, systemic authors and researchers when theory (if any) is not available to yield the necessary insights to support the functionality and effectiveness of systems to deliver equitable outcomes at scale. Empirical examples can be used to test the explanatory power of the novel model – and refine it when necessary.

**Practical implications** – The empirical model and threshold questions are the genesis of a common language for assessing relevant costs and benefits of initiatives for government and system designers. Significantly, establishing a threshold question and tests of legitimacy and strength to accompany the novel model provides a more principled way of prioritizing the competing demands on public investment in education.

**Originality/value** – Establishing a threshold question and tests for legitimacy and strength to accompany the novel model provides a more principled way of prioritizing the competing demands to accompany.

**Keywords** Equity, Excellence, School, System, Choice, Autonomy, Accountability  
**Paper type** Research paper



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**Introduction**  
Education is a key institution of modern society, long recognized for its central role in the reproduction of inequities and with the potential to challenge them (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, 1978; Durkheim, 1966, 1939). Schools, as a major vehicle for education, bring social, civic, economic, technological and environmental benefits to society. Most nation-states have legislated compulsory school attendance for their citizens, establishing a social contract with the State. This has created an issue for explanatory frameworks in educational administration and leadership. Since Simon's (1945, 1932) articulation of organizational theory as a distinct field of study, and its appropriation into educational administration, there has been an assumed symmetry between “the organization” and its proxy “the school”, as the core theoretical and empirical object. As a result, too much attention has been granted to the school and how to fix schools (or even individuals within them), generating a default individualism as a focus rather than the design of school systems. With enduring inequities in school systems on a global scale, to deliver on the social contract it is arguably time to shift the unit of analysis from the school to the system to create the necessary conditions for different outcomes.

In this paper, the analytical focus is shifted from “the school” to the intentional design of school systems. Schools behave as their systems are designed. Inequities in schooling are the product of systemic design more so than the actions of individual schools. Interventions trying to improve schools are unlikely to succeed without adequate attention to systemic design. Built on underlying theories of justice and social contract (Rawls, 1971), situated





Sustainable Development Goal 4

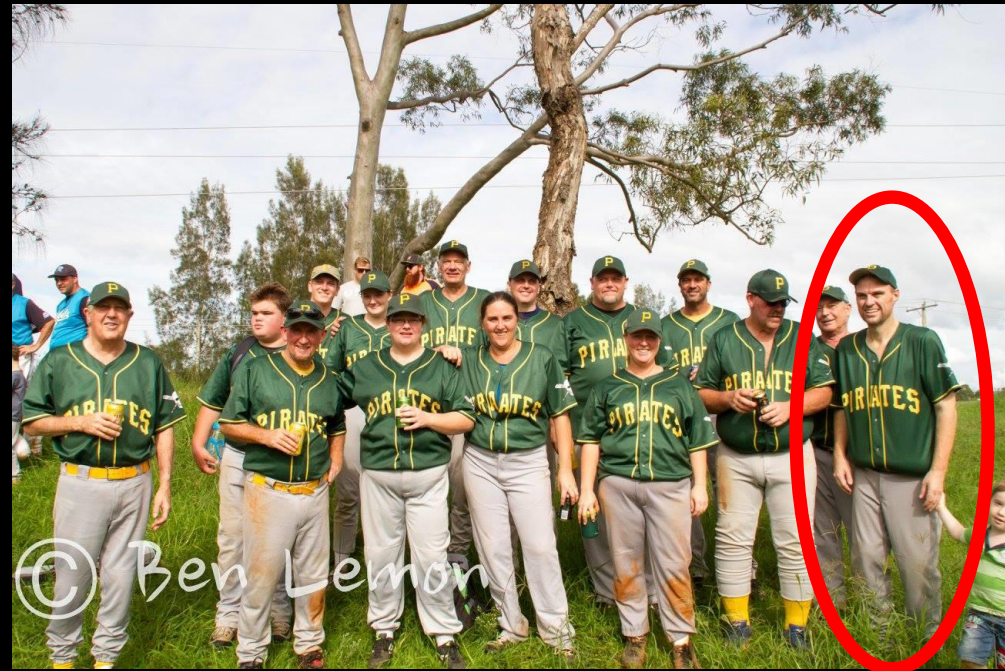
Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration

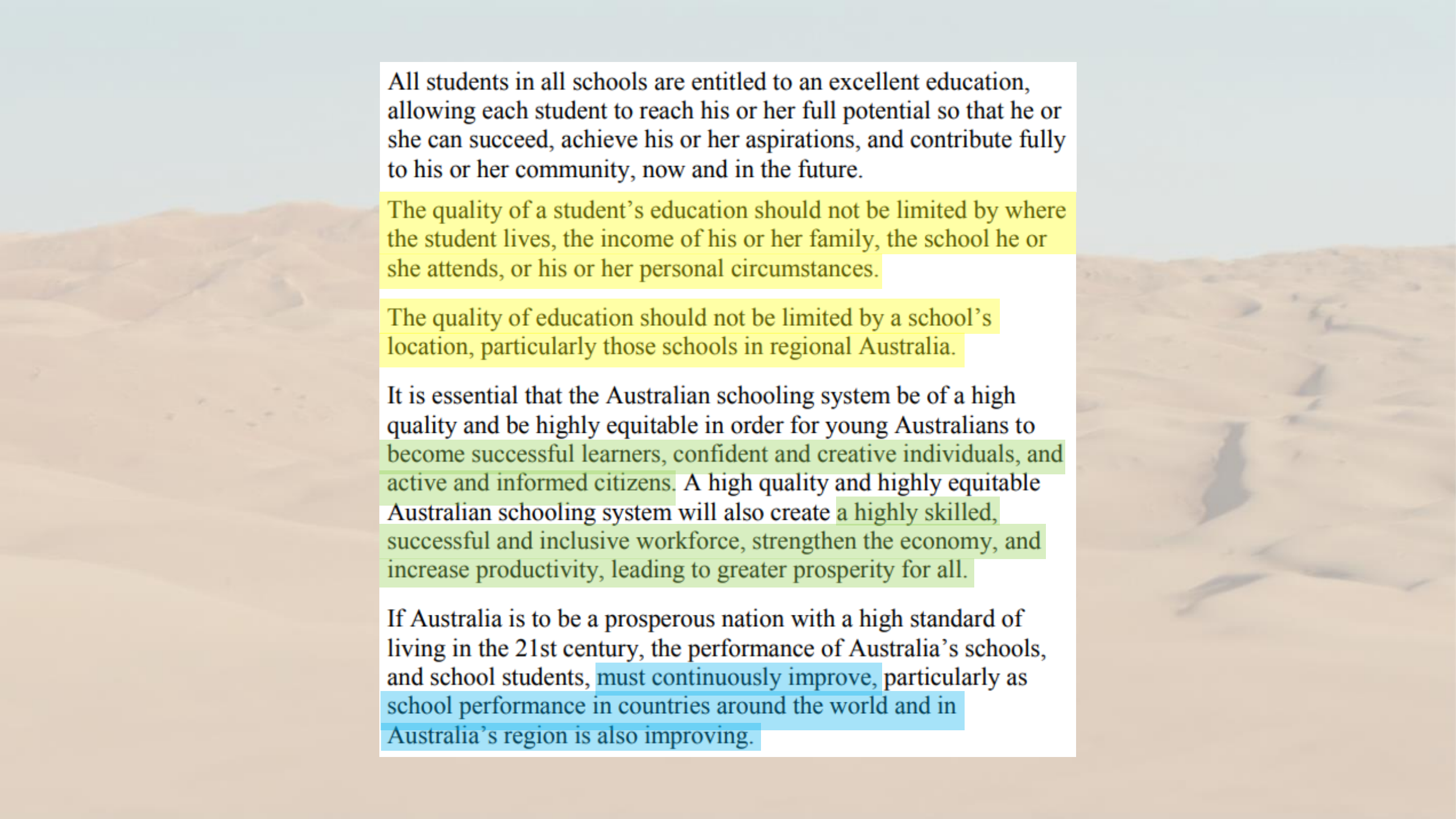
The Australian Education Act 2013 (CTH)

The Education and Children's Service Act 2019 (SA)

Purpose statement for public education

# Contested purposes





All students in all schools are entitled to an excellent education, allowing each student to reach his or her full potential so that he or she can succeed, achieve his or her aspirations, and contribute fully to his or her community, now and in the future.

The quality of a student's education should not be limited by where the student lives, the income of his or her family, the school he or she attends, or his or her personal circumstances.

The quality of education should not be limited by a school's location, particularly those schools in regional Australia.

It is essential that the Australian schooling system be of a high quality and be highly equitable in order for young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. A high quality and highly equitable Australian schooling system will also create a highly skilled, successful and inclusive workforce, strengthen the economy, and increase productivity, leading to greater prosperity for all.

If Australia is to be a prosperous nation with a high standard of living in the 21st century, the performance of Australia's schools, and school students, must continuously improve, particularly as school performance in countries around the world and in Australia's region is also improving.

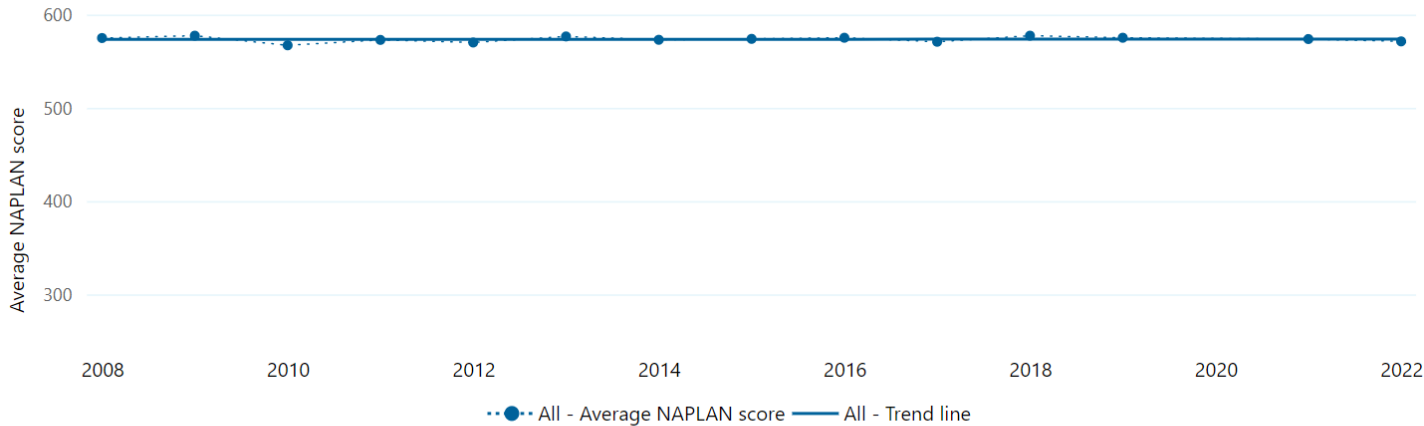


## Report card revealed: How SA students rank against the nation

The 2023 NAPLAN results have been released with South Australia's rankings against the rest of the country changing. See how our students stack up.

[READ MORE >](#)

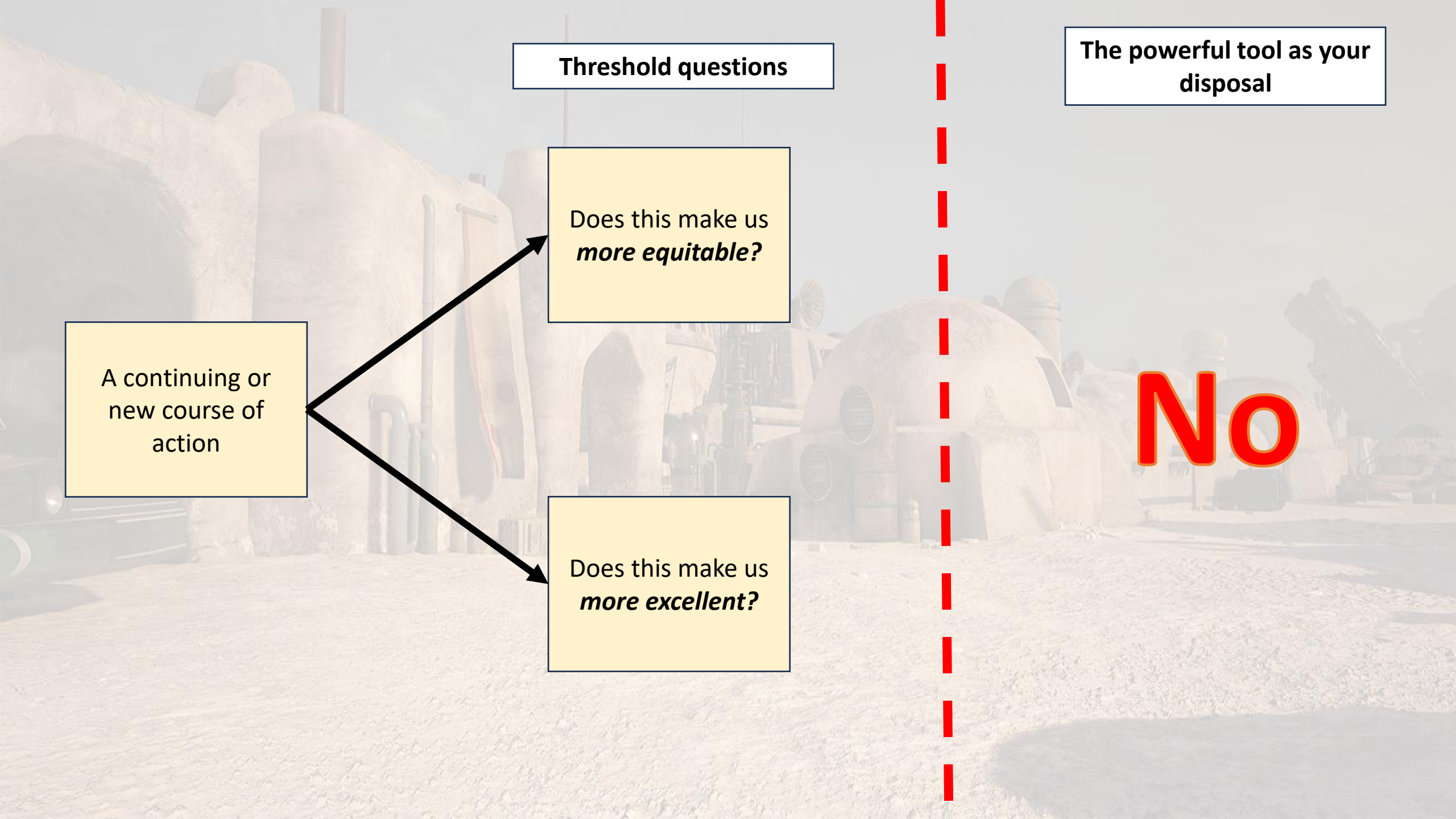
Trend in average NAPLAN score for Year 9 students in reading, South Australia 2008-2022



Subgroup	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022
All	574.9	577.4	567.1	572.9	570.1 #	576.6	573.0 #	574.0 #	575.2 #	570.9 #	577.4 #	575.2 #	573.8	571.3 #

Rankings	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	SA Rank 2022	SA Rank 2023
<b>Reading</b>								
Y3	2	1	6	3	5	4	4	3
Y5	2	1	Equal 4	3	Equal 4	6	5	3
Y7	2	1	5	4	3	6	5	4
Y9	3	2	5	4	1	6	4	4
<b>Writing</b>								
Y3	1	2	5	4	3	6	4	4
Y5	2	1	5	4	3	6	5	4
Y7	2	1	5	4	3	6	4	4
Y9	3	2	5	4	1	6	4	4
<b>Spelling</b>								
Y3	1	2	5	3	4	6	4	3
Y5	1	2	5	4	3	6	4	4
Y7	1	2	5	4	3	6	5	4
Y9	1	2	4	5	3	6	4	5
<b>Grammar</b>								
Y3	1	2	5	4	3	6	4	4
Y5	1	2	4	5	3	6	5	5
Y7	1	2	4	5	3	6	5	5
Y9	3	1	4	5	2	6	4	5
<b>Numeracy</b>								
Y3	2	1	6	4	3	5	4	4
Y5	1	2	4	5	3	6	4	5
Y7	1	2	4	5	3	6	5	5
Y9	2	3	5	4	1	6	4	4





**Threshold questions**

**The powerful tool as your disposal**

A continuing or new course of action

Does this make us *more equitable?*

Does this make us *more excellent?*

**No**

Test of legitimacy

Test of strength

*Equity* or  
*Excellence* as  
defined by ...

How much *more*  
equitable or  
excellent?

Return on  
investment

What is the *cost* for staff  
compared to the rewards?



What is the *cost* for  
students compared to the  
rewards?

Well being

Equity and excellence

Effective learners

Learner agency

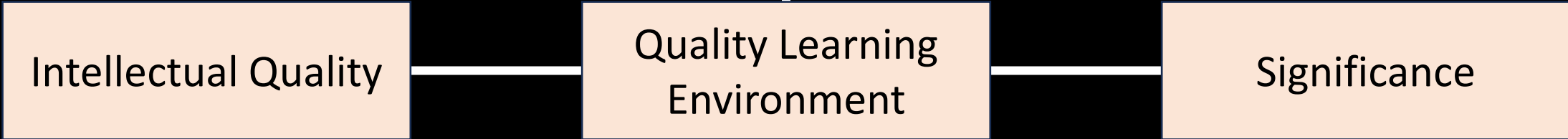


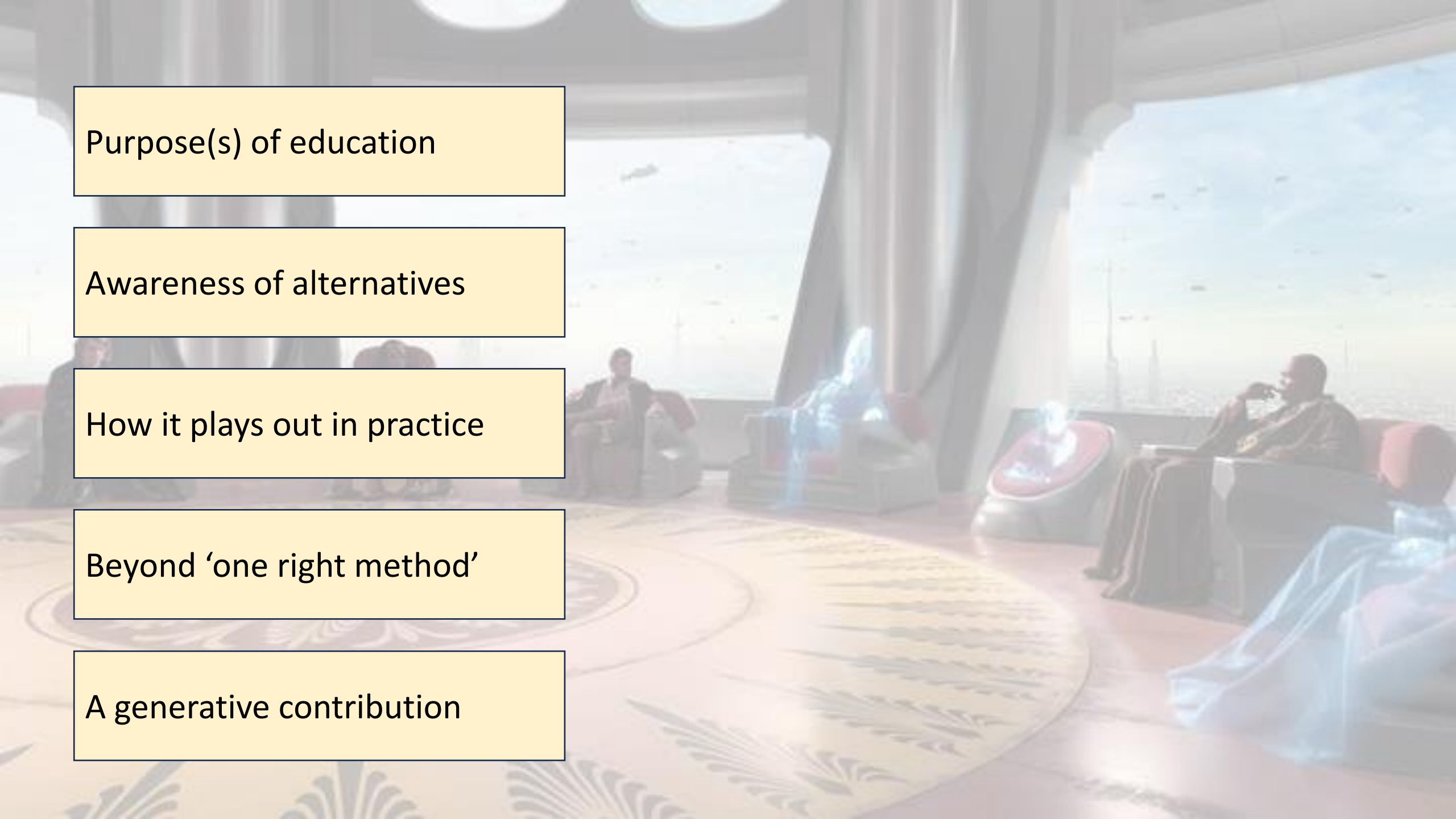
# Amy, a principal

We are a really good school. We are effective. **We say we will educate the kids in a holistic manner, and that is what we do.** Although we are answerable to our political masters, at the same time you have to be true to yourself and enact what we see as a good education.



# The Quality Teaching Model



A futuristic lounge with large windows overlooking a city. Several people are sitting on modern, curved furniture. A glowing blue figure is visible in the center. The room has a circular pattern on the floor and large pillars.

Purpose(s) of education

Awareness of alternatives

How it plays out in practice

Beyond 'one right method'

A generative contribution

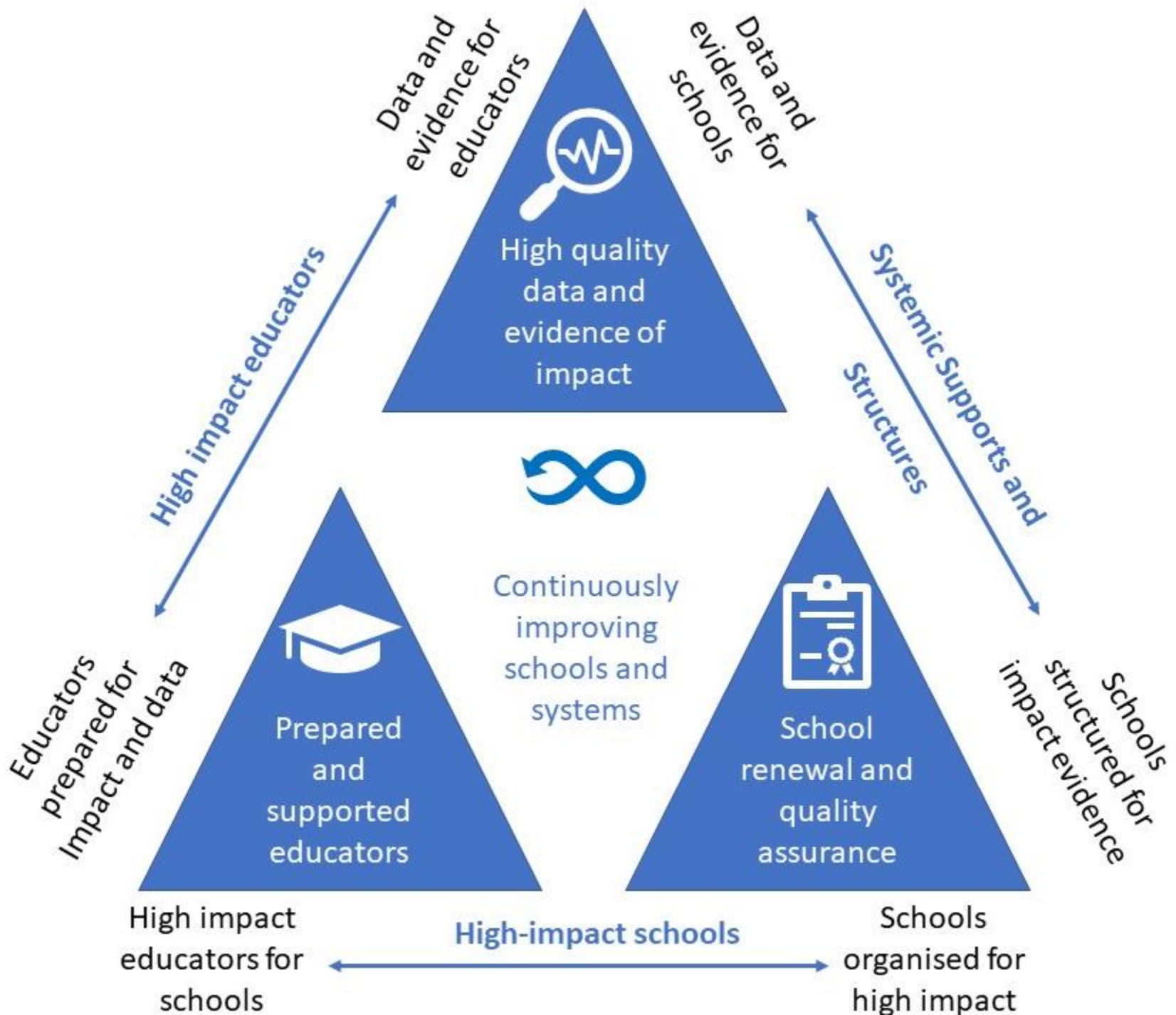
# Tensions and pressures

**Systems** want to  
reduce variance  
and inefficiencies

**Schools** are in  
the middle of it  
all

**Students / Staff**  
want to be  
known & valued

**Society** wants  
standardisation  
and  
personalisation





# Principles to practice

Meetings

Supports for staff

Supervision

Supports for students

Recruitment

Supports for community

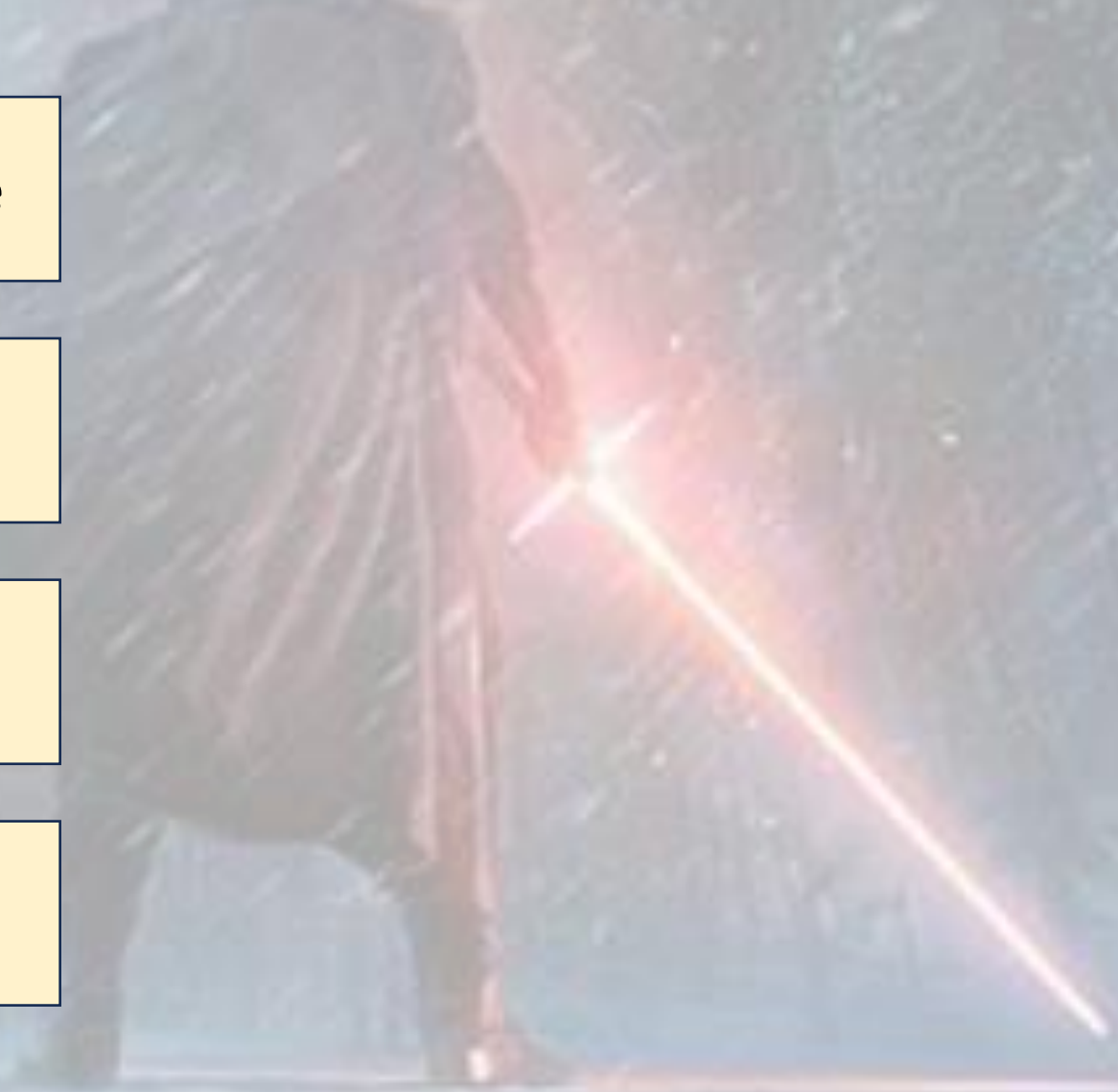
# Why this matters, or the 'so what?'

Justification in the face of critique

Mechanism to identify violations

Prosecute additions / alternatives

A principled approach to making important resourcing decisions





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