

WRITTEN BRIEFING

EDUCATION, ARTS AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Investigation into the 2025 teaching of the incorrect Ancient History topic in nine Queensland high schools: Panel Report

Background information

On 28 October 2025, nine Queensland high schools – two non-state and seven state high schools – out of a total of 173 state and non-state schools teaching Ancient History, were identified as having taught the incorrect subject content for the Ancient History external exam.

The nine schools had continued to teach the topic of Augustus Caesar, rather than the new topic for the 2025 exam, Julius Caesar. The impacted schools were:

- Brisbane State High School (SHS)
- Flagstone Community College
- Meridan State College
- Redcliffe SHS
- Yeronga SHS
- James Nash SHS
- Kuranda District State College
- St Theresa's Catholic College
- West Moreton Anglican College

In November 2025, at the request of the Minister for Education and the Arts, the Director-General of the Department of Education established a three-person panel to investigate the matter.

The investigation

The panel was chaired by Dr Grant Webb, an external education system operations and improvement expert.

On 4 December 2025, the panel delivered its report titled '*Investigation into the 2025 teaching of the incorrect Ancient History topic in nine Queensland High Schools*' (the Report), with two key findings:

- **Finding One** focuses on the school-specific processes and communication protocols. There was no single point of failure in any school. It was found the nine schools each experienced the event differently when multiple systemic and school-based control gaps occurred, creating what the panel described as 'the perfect storm' of risk. Multiple unintended, circumstantial factors, such as staffing transitions and challenging handovers, contributed to the error.
- **Finding Two** focuses on the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA), whose responsibilities include setting topics for external exams. It was found QCAA's communication with schools, and its change management processes, did not effectively anticipate and mitigate against misalignment between teaching and external exam topic in all schools.

The Report has been released publicly on the Department of Education's website (<https://qed.qld.gov.au/our-publications/reports/Documents/ancient-history-incident-panel-report.pdf>).

The panel held 27 consultation meetings and met with 63 stakeholders, which included professional associations, schools, peak bodies, unions and regulatory authorities (see **Appendix 2** of the Report).

QCAA had advised schools of the change in topic for the 2025 Ancient History external examination in memos sent to school principals in 2023 and 2024. However, the volume of undifferentiated memos sent by the QCAA made it difficult for schools to discern critical messages.

In addition, the continued use of mock examinations and resources on Augustus on the QCAA's website, combined with the lack of Julius Caesar resources, reinforced a confirmation bias that Augustus remained the 2025 external examination topic.

Further, in 2025, no validation process was held for Ancient History in which all schools are required to provide topic validation through QCAA procedures, as was the case for other general subjects, such as English.

Impact on students

All nine schools impacted submitted applications to QCAA's *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments – Illness and Misadventure* process, for supporting students whose exam performance is affected by illness or unexpected events.

Of the 140 students affected by the topic error, 122 chose to sit the external exam. All 140 of these students achieved a pass (C or above), and more than 40% received an A grade.

Update on Department's response to the panel report

Late December 2025, the Director-General of the Department of Education wrote to the Executive Director, Queensland Catholic Education Commission – now known as Catholic Education Queensland Limited, and to the Chief Executive Officer, Independent Schools Queensland.

Each letter provided a copy of the Panel Report and requested that the two non-state schools impacted be supported in implementing best practice. The letters further requested advice be provided to the Director-General by the end of Term 1, 2026 of the actions taken to address the panel's findings.

In January 2026, the Director-General sent letters to each of the seven state high school principals, which were copied to the relevant Regional Director. The letters included a copy of the Panel Report and the request that the principals implement effective risk mitigation protocols, including consulting with their Regional Director about adopting best practices.

State and non-state schools have been asked to consider the Report's findings and the implementation of best practices so that schools have in place proper processes for ensuring alignment between subject content and external exam topics. Best practices would include:

- appropriate administrative arrangements for the receipt, triaging and storage of QCAA memos; and
- processes for ensuring QCAA memos about subject content are shared with relevant teaching staff, including new and/or relief teaching staff.

Both state and non-state schools have been asked to report on the actions they have taken in response to the panel's findings by the end of Term 1, 2026. The non-state school peaks are to provide advice to the Director-General, whereas in the state school system, Regional Directors have been asked to report to the Deputy Director-General, School and Regional Operations and Performance, on the actions taken by principals of the impacted state schools.

In the state school system, Term 1, 2026 ends 2 April 2026.