Queensland: A State Of Learning

Findings from the 2018 school reviews
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The Queensland Government is committed to giving all young Queenslanders a great start through a world-class education.

I know that our state schools do a fantastic job in providing this education. However, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. All state schools are committed to continual improvement and that’s why school reviews are so important.

The reviews give everyone — students, staff, parents and members of the wider community — an opportunity to provide feedback about their local school and help identify ways they can improve.

This report, *Queensland: a state of learning*, provides a comprehensive summary of the findings from the 275 school reviews that were conducted in 2018.

It provides detailed information on Queensland state school practices and how they can continue to advance learning outcomes.

It also reflects on the learning journey our school system has been on since the reviews started in 2015.

The report shows that we continue to learn and improve as a system, which is leading to better outcomes for students.

I want to thank everyone who has contributed to the development of this report, especially the many thousands of school staff, students, parents and community stakeholders who participated in the reviews.

Your feedback and support is contributing to the learning and growth of all schools and students across the state.

*The Honourable Grace Grace MP*

Minister for Education
Minister for Industrial Relations

It gives me great pleasure to release *Queensland: a state of learning*, the latest annual report by the School Improvement Unit (SIU).

Since 2015, the SIU has reviewed the teaching and learning practices of more than 1200 Queensland state schools and education centres, providing each school community with tailored, independent feedback to support their continuous improvement.

Last year marked the end of the first four-year school review cycle in Queensland. The new review cycle commenced this year, offering schools an opportunity to map their progress and receive quality feedback to help sustain momentum on their improvement journeys.

The importance of ‘systemness’ in helping to deliver the next lift in school improvement should not be undervalued. Research tells us that successful school improvement requires all levels of the system — central office, regions and schools — to work together and learn from one another.

This report is an important part of our system learning. Building on the SIU’s previous three annual reports, it shares practices identified in schools in 2018, as well as the key achievements our schools and centres have made over the past four years.

In addition to the annual report, we also launched our first insights papers this year. These short and informative reports are published each term, sharing learnings from recent school reviews and considerations to inform school practice.

I encourage you to read the report and discuss with your staff, peers and colleagues what the findings mean for your school and others within the system.

*Tony Cook*

Director-General
Department of Education
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Executive summary

Highlights from the 2018 school reviews
Between 2015 and 2018, the School Improvement Unit (SIU) conducted 1305 reviews across Queensland, engaging approximately a quarter of all schools in the review process each year. 2018 marked the end of the first four-year school review cycle in the state. This report presents findings from the 275 school reviews conducted in 2018, and identifies some key changes in school improvement practice over the past four years.

Each school review report provides insights into individual school practice. Together, the reports from the first four years of reviews provide valuable system-level learnings. They reveal shifts in practice resulting from new knowledge permeating the Queensland state school system through collaboration within and among schools and across the system.

Overall, the recommendations documented in school review reports over the last four years indicate a positive shift, reflecting the maturing approach of Queensland state schools and their leaders to school improvement. The challenge now, however, is to sustain these improvements.

Building on the SIU’s previous three annual reports, this report is the final part of a four-volume analysis of the first review cycle. The findings are intended to inform the continued improvement of Queensland state schools into the future. By describing the achievements of schools and the system, and outlining the next steps, the report can be used to promote reflection and collaborative conversations within and between school communities and their leaders, helping them to determine where they are at in their school improvement journey.

Achievements

Over the past four years, a number of achievements in Queensland state schools have been identified.

Strategic leadership

Many schools have moved on from foundational aspects of planning, such as identifying and narrowing improvement priorities, to addressing other, more advanced aspects of strategic leadership and direction setting. By the end of the cycle, the approach of many school leaders to school improvement has become more collaborative and strategic to include working with teachers to unpack the explicit improvement agenda, aligning school resources and processes with improvement priorities, and monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of improvement initiatives.

Over the last four years, there has been a greater focus on building a shared understanding of school improvement by collaboratively developing school improvement agendas. Each year, a greater number of schools were using a collaborative inquiry approach to identify improvement priorities and related problems of practice, and to generate improvement strategies.

In addition, the understanding of school improvement as a continuous and highly contextualised process has grown in the Queensland education system. This is evident in the many schools that have focused on building their capacity to improve by creating opportunities for collaborative reflection and inquiry.

Between 2015 and 2018, many school leaders embraced effective approaches to leading change, using evidence to inform their decisions and engaging staff in school improvement activities. Critical to this has been the growth of distributed leadership models. Each year has seen a greater proportion of schools using shared leadership to drive the improvement agenda, implement specific initiatives and draw together staff in reviewing a school’s vision.
Next steps

To build on the significant achievements identified across the Queensland state school system and to ensure their sustainability, further progress can be achieved through greater focus on collaboration, precision and alignment.

Greater collaboration in school improvement planning means engaging all school staff and the broader school community in developing the explicit improvement agenda and setting the direction for the school.

Greater precision can be brought by refining, clarifying and unpacking the key elements of the school improvement agenda with school staff. Refining and unpacking the school’s explicit improvement agenda means including specific priorities, targets, timelines, strategies, core practices, aligned responsibilities and measures of success. It also calls for clarifying expectations and accountabilities of all staff and developing a deep understanding of agreed changes.

Alignment can be enhanced by reviewing how the key school processes and resources support the improvement priorities. Alignment with improvement priorities concerns professional learning opportunities and planning, collegial engagement practices, whole-school frameworks, policies and practices, and roles and responsibilities of leaders.

A more collaborative approach to planning and professional learning can help schools further enhance staff capability. It is important to precisely define and communicate staff roles and accountabilities, collaboratively develop a whole-school professional learning plan, and ensure this plan, as well as professional learning opportunities offered to staff, are aligned to improvement priorities.

Professional learning collaboration is more than a professional learning activity; it is a way of working for the whole school. This could be achieved by involving all staff in a whole-school practice of observation, feedback and coaching, and continuous staff engagement in professional learning communities and networks within and beyond the school.

Greater depth, precision and alignment of data discussions with improvement priorities can be powerful in promoting a culture of self-reflection and self-evaluation. The use of data in schools can be enhanced by providing more time for teachers and leaders to collaboratively discuss student achievement and progress, and by ensuring data discussions are rigorous and systematic, and provide teachers with meaningful information and feedback to inform their practice.

More intentional collaboration opportunities for school teachers and leaders can help to enhance consistent implementation of pedagogical practices. Greater precision in refining pedagogical frameworks may help build a shared understanding of pedagogical practices.

Greater alignment of curriculum programs and assessment tasks with the Australian Curriculum is essential. Further work in this area requires collaboratively reviewing whole-school curriculum plans and building a shared understanding of Australian Curriculum expectations and consistent delivery of the content. Collaborative curriculum planning also includes unpacking success criteria and moderation practices to deepen understanding of, and promote coherence and consistency in, curriculum and assessment.
01
School improvement and reviews in Queensland state schools
1.1 Aims and focus of the report

Queensland state schools provide quality education to more than 550,000 students around the state (DoE 2018b). The Department of Education’s School Improvement Unit (SIU) is committed to supporting continuous improvement in all Queensland state schools and education centres. The SIU conducts school reviews that promote improvement and accountability. It also case manages schools requiring additional support, builds the capability of principals and other staff, undertakes research, and shares effective practice across the system. School reviews are an important mechanism for the department in supporting and monitoring Queensland state schools and centres.

Between 2015 and 2018, the SIU conducted 1305 school reviews. This annual report describes the practices of the 275 schools and education centres reviewed in 2018. During each review, review teams undertook extensive fieldwork, including discussions with principals, teachers, students, parents and community members, in order to provide independent feedback and suggest ways to further improve student outcomes. These findings are captured in review reports, the summary of which is shared with the school community. Principals work with their school community and assistant regional director (ARD) (or other principal supervisor) to respond to the review findings and guide further school improvement.

The report builds on the SIU’s previous three annual reports, and completes the analysis of the first four-year school review cycle. Review reports are the primary source of data for this annual report. Based on these data, findings were formulated regarding the practices and areas for improvement in Queensland state schools (for research methods details, see Appendix A). These findings are intended to inform further improvement in schools, and increase understanding of school improvement across the system.

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the report. It examines the Queensland education context and refers to contemporary research regarding school improvement. It also outlines the SIU’s approach to school reviews and its major activities in 2018.

Chapter 2 summarises the findings from the 2018 school reviews by considering school practices in three key areas: leadership, teaching and student learning support. This chapter includes case studies that feature potentially effective practices identified during school reviews.

Chapter 3, the final chapter of the report, summarises the achievements and progress made by Queensland state schools between 2015 and 2018, and determines areas of focus for further work by schools, regions and central office.

1.2 The challenge of school improvement

"Maximising every student’s learning growth every year requires … a sustained, long-term and coordinated improvement effort based on shared ambition, action and accountability."

(DET 2018, p. x)

School improvement remains a persistent challenge for researchers and education policy-makers. From the Melbourne Declaration in 2008 (MCEETYA 2008) to Gonski 2.0 in 2018 (DET 2018), there has been a recognition that Australian school education requires significant improvement. Approaches to school improvement have evolved over the past 40 years, with more recent analysis recognising the need to combine both top-down and bottom-up approaches (Hopkins et al. 2014; Sonnemann & Goss 2017). Processes that incorporate system requirements and, at the same time, encourage school initiatives embrace the best of both worlds.

Each school’s improvement journey takes place in a different context that determines the expectations of change and the resources available for change. ‘Schools are diverse and complex ecosystems’ (AISNSW 2017), and therefore have different starting points (Sammons et al. 2014) and different trajectories for improvement (Bellei et al. 2016). There is no single solution for successful school improvement, but rather a combination of factors specific to the school. The challenge is in identifying those elements and acting on them. This is the focus of the appreciative inquiry approach used in SIU school reviews, which is about working with schools collaboratively to identify where they are at, their successes and their next steps (SIU 2019b, p. 7). This approach is consistent with the differentiated approach advocated by Gonski (DET 2018, p. 10x).

1.3 Queensland context

State education in Queensland is delivered by the Queensland Government in accordance with the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006. Every state school student must be provided with an educational program that is appropriate to his or her age, ability, aptitude and development.

Enrolments in Queensland state schools continue to increase. From 2015 to 2018, they grew by 28,394 students (or 5.4 per cent). A total of 550,739 full-time students were enrolled in Queensland state schools as at August 2018 (DoE 2018b).

In 2018, there were 338,273 students enrolled in primary year levels (61.4 per cent of total state school enrolments) and 212,466 enrolled in secondary year levels (38.6 per cent). The half cohort of Prep Year students introduced in 2007 was in Year 11 in 2018, resulting in smaller enrolment numbers for this year level (DoE 2018b).
The Queensland population is relatively decentralised, and this is reflected in the geographical distribution of Queensland’s 1240 state schools and centres (DoE 2018c), with 80 per cent of schools operating outside the Metropolitan region (see Figure 1.1 below).

![School count by region, 2018](image)

**Figure 1.1: School count by region, 2018**


‘The Department of Education is committed to ensuring Queenslanders have the education and confidence they need to make a positive contribution to our state’ (DoE 2018a, p. 4). In July 2018, the department announced its strategic vision for the next four years, outlining the following objectives (DoE 2018a):

- every child making a confident start
- every student succeeding
- Queenslanders working in safe, productive and fair workplaces.

The department delivers high-quality services to meet the needs of Queenslanders through a culture of continuous improvement (DoE 2018a). Between 2017 and 2018, the department lifted enrolment in early childhood education, and continued to make progress in closing the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The number of students attaining a Queensland Certificate of Education also increased.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Coast</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darling Downs South West</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Queensland</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Queensland</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The department’s School Improvement Model was developed to provide schools with a common language and process to support ongoing school improvement. The model consists of the following components (DoE 2019b):

- the School Improvement Hierarchy, which helps schools identify where they are at in their improvement journey
- the Inquiry Cycle, which supports teachers and leaders to understand the steps needed to plan, enact and evaluate new practices
- the Standards of Evidence, which support teachers and school and system leaders to evaluate the impact of new practices.

The model and an inquiry approach can help schools with their school improvement planning and addressing problems of practice in order to improve student outcomes.

1.4 School reviews in Queensland

School reviews in Queensland are administered by the SIU. Located within the Office of the Director-General, the SIU is independent of other divisions and branches that provide strategic, policy and operational support to schools. The unit is led by an assistant director-general who reports to the director-general. The SIU is supported in shaping its strategic direction by two stakeholder groups that meet each term. The SIU Stakeholder Advisory Group consists of senior executive-level staff from principal associations, the Queensland Teachers’ Union, P&Cs Qld, Queensland Education Leadership Institute (QELI), the department’s State Schools Division, and a regional office. The SIU Working Group consists of senior officers from State Schools Division; Policy, Performance and Planning Division; Human Resources; Queensland State School Resourcing; Department of Education International; Internal Audit and a regional office.

The SIU school reviews have been conducted since 2015 and are a crucial part of the department’s school improvement agenda. Every state school, including independent public schools, special schools and outdoor and environmental education centres (O&EECs), is reviewed at least once every four years. The reviews are an important element of the department’s four-year school planning, reviewing and reporting cycle, which schools use to inform their practice and operations (see Figure 1.2 below).

During the reviews, reviewers use an appreciative inquiry approach to acknowledge the progress schools have made in their improvement journeys, and identify areas for further improvement or additional support (SIU 2019b, p. 7). Schools are reviewed against the nine domains of the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) (ACER 2012). In 2018, reviews also included specific lines of inquiry aligned with the department’s priorities in the areas of disability and inclusion, and early childhood education and care.
The school review process

The school review process starts in Term 4 of the year preceding the review, when the SIU analyses headline indicator performance data for all Queensland state schools (for further information on the department’s headline indicators, see the SIU’s review toolkit for principals, SIU 2019a). Based on this analysis, and in consultation with regional directors and ARDs, schools in the fourth year of their school planning, reviewing and reporting cycle are designated for one of three review types:

- full school: the standard review type for Queensland state schools
- priority support: for schools identified as needing additional support to further improve student outcomes
- self-determined: for schools identified as having a trajectory of sustained improvement.

Other schools that would benefit from a review in the upcoming year may also be nominated. The aim of the review process is to support schools in a differentiated way, with reviews tailored to a school’s context and needs.

All school reviews (with the exception of some self-determined reviews) are conducted by review teams trained and appointed by the SIU. There are four types of reviewers:

- senior reviewers — experienced principals appointed to the SIU to lead training, case manage priority support reviews, and oversee the reviews program
- internal reviewers — experienced state school principals seconded to the SIU to undertake school reviews
- principal peer reviewers — principals trained by the SIU in the use of the NSIT
- external reviewers — independent contractors engaged by the SIU.

Full school reviews are conducted by a review team appointed by the SIU, and usually include an internal reviewer, an external reviewer and a principal peer reviewer. For priority support reviews, principal peer reviewers are not included in the team, and the SIU continues to monitor and check in with the school for 12 months after the review to ensure the school receives the support it needs and is addressing the recommendations from the review. For schools allocated a self-determined review, the principal is responsible for determining the focus of the review, selecting reviewers and arranging all elements of the review process. The SIU provides the school with guidance and a set amount of funding for the review. It may also conduct the review, if requested by the principal.

School reviews in numbers

In 2018, 275 schools (22 per cent of all Queensland state schools) were reviewed by the SIU. This included seven special schools and one O&EEC. The 2018 review schools represented all SIU school types (see Appendix B, SIU school types) and education regions (see Figures 1.3 and 1.4 below).

Figure 1.3: Comparison of review schools and all Queensland state schools by SIU school type, 2018

Source: OneSchool, based on August 2018 collection.
Note: O&EECs, support units and associated units are not included.

Figure 1.4: Comparison of review schools and all Queensland state schools by region, 2018

Source: OneSchool, based on August 2018 collection.
Note: O&EECs, support units and associated units are not included.
As the above figures show, greater variation is evident in the regional distribution of the 2018 review schools in comparison with all Queensland state schools. In 2018, Central Queensland, Far North Queensland and North Coast regions were over-represented by around four to five per cent, while Metropolitan region was under-represented by just over five per cent. This variation is due to the nature of the review schedule, which is aligned with the four-year school review cycle that was established before the SIU started operations.

Of the 275 reviews conducted in 2018, 222 were full school reviews, 48 were priority support reviews and five were self-determined reviews (all of which were undertaken by the SIU). For the distribution by review type and term, see Table 1.1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review type</th>
<th>Term 1</th>
<th>Term 2</th>
<th>Term 3</th>
<th>Term 4</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full school</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority support</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-determined</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>55</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1: Number of school reviews, by review type and term, 2018

During 2018, the SIU continued to monitor schools that had a priority support review. The assistant director-general and senior reviewers undertook 222 check-in visits, stemming back to reviews conducted in 2016–18 (see Table 1.2 below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Check-in visits proceeding from:</th>
<th>3-month</th>
<th>6-month</th>
<th>9-month</th>
<th>12-month</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015 reviews</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 reviews</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017 reviews</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018 reviews</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>55</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2: Check-in visits conducted by the SIU, 2018

In 2018, the SIU also conducted reviews of four overseas schools licensed to provide the Australian/Queensland P–12 curriculum: Lihir International Primary School in Papua New Guinea (June); the Australian International School of Papua New Guinea (August); Nauru Secondary School (September); and the Hangzhou Dongfang High School in China (December).

In the four years since the SIU was established, 1305 school reviews have been conducted (see Figure 1.5 below). Reviews between 2015 and 2018 comprised 947 full school reviews, 279 priority support reviews and 79 self-determined reviews (44 of these were undertaken by the SIU).

As the above figure shows, in each year, most of the reviews conducted were full school reviews; self-determined reviews were the least common. The proportion of full school reviews has increased since 2015 (from 64 per cent to 81 per cent). The proportion of self-determined reviews and priority support reviews has decreased by 7 and 10 percentage points, respectively.

Figure 1.5: School reviews by year and review type, 2015–18

Note: Data include O&EECs, support units and associated units.
## 1.5 Other activities of the School Improvement Unit

### Training and capability building

The SIU continues to train principals in the use of the NSIT. By undertaking the training, principals develop a deeper understanding of the review process and how the NSIT can be used to support school improvement. Principals who complete the training are eligible to become principal peer reviewers and participate in a full school review. Peer reviewing is a valuable professional learning experience, providing principals with an opportunity to collaboratively analyse another school’s context and practice. In 2018, 199 principals acted as peer principal reviewers.

The SIU also offers NSIT training to associate school leaders, such as deputy principals and heads of curriculum, and other school staff. This training provides participants with insights into the NSIT, but does not qualify them to be principal peer reviewers. Principal and associate leader training is conducted by senior members of the SIU who travel to regional locations. Table 1.3 summarises the number of principals and associate leaders who completed their respective NSIT training in 2018.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Associate leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Queensland</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darling Downs South West</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Far North Queensland</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Coast</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Queensland</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>97</strong></td>
<td><strong>197</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.3: Principals and associate leaders trained by the SIU, by region, 2018

Since the school reviews program began in 2015, 1157 principals across Queensland have completed the NSIT training for principals, and 46 principals have undertaken associate leader training. Over this period, the SIU has also trained more than 1000 associate leaders and 270 teachers, and regional and central office staff.

### Research and sharing of effective practice

In addition to formal training, the SIU shares effective practice with wider audiences. Senior officers of the SIU regularly speak at forums such as professional development days, regional or school cluster meetings, and meetings with international delegations. In 2018:

- SIU staff presented at the 2018 Queensland Association of Special Education Leaders Conference, the Centres for Learning and Wellbeing principals’ orientation, an Early Childhood Education and Care workshop for authorised officers, the department’s Research Showcase Forum Series, and the Metropolitan Region Secondary Schools Cluster Breakfast.
- The SIU hosted and presented to visiting delegations from education departments from Tasmania, the Philippines, India, Taiwan, South Korea and China. Senior SIU reviewers also met with representatives of overseas schools that had been reviewed by the SIU.
- The director of the SIU was the keynote speaker at the Queensland Academies Partnership Schools Teacher Symposium, highlighting findings from the annual report and successful practices for highly capable students.

The SIU also contributes to growing knowledge and understanding of school improvement through its research, the results of which are shared in annual reports and other research outputs (shared within and beyond the department). In late 2018, the SIU presented at the Australian Association of Research for Education Conference and the Australasian Accountability Network Conference.

The SIU continued to link with other educational jurisdictions in 2018, including other school sectors, states and territories, and internationally. The unit’s assistant director-general and director delivered a series of presentations to leaders in the Queensland Catholic education sector on “supporting a culture of performance through school improvement”. The assistant director-general co-presented a paper entitled “Learning from and with each other: school improvement in mainstream and flexible learning spaces” at the Doing School Differently 2018 Conference, and the director presented to principals at the 2018 Malaysia–Queensland Leadership Program.
1.6 Feedback on School Improvement Unit activities

The SIU has a wide range of mechanisms to seek feedback on the school reviews program and other activities.

School reviews

SIU school reviews are regarded as a valuable process that helps to advance improvement in Queensland state schools. Since the reviews started in 2015, the SIU has surveyed principals after their review. In 2018, the response rate to the feedback survey from principals was 89.2 per cent. Of the principals who responded, 97.1 per cent reported that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the various components of their school review. Since the reviews started in 2015, satisfaction and response rates have steadily increased, with results in 2018 being the highest yet. Table 1.4 details the questions asked of principals in the 2018 survey and the rates of satisfaction.

How satisfied were you with the following aspects of the review: Total agreement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total agreement*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative nature of the review process</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usefulness of the review to the school</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial communication and notification regarding the review</td>
<td>96.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review chair communication</td>
<td>98.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct of reviewers during the review process</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity about key improvement strategies at review exit meeting</td>
<td>96.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.4: Principal responses to School Review Exit Survey, 2018

*Total agreement includes ‘satisfied’ and ‘very satisfied’ responses

In 2018, principals were also surveyed after the post-priority support review case management process, with a 59 per cent response rate. More than 80 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the process was supportive and collaborative, and that the check-in visits were valuable.

In addition to the surveys, the SIU holds a feedback forum each semester for principals who have had a school review, and another for ARDs. Feedback from these forums informs the continuous improvement of the SIU’s operations, communication and research functions.

Internal and external reviewers

Senior reviewers monitor the review process by visiting schools while reviews are underway, and provide internal reviewers with individual feedback on their work. Review chairs complete a short survey about the performance of external reviewers in line with contractual obligations. Both internal and external reviewers attend professional moderation sessions during the year in order to maintain contemporary, shared, valid and reliable standards.

Training activities

Participants of the NSIT training complete a form evaluating each training session. In 2018, the response rate for the survey on the two-day training for principals was 91 per cent. The average overall program satisfaction rating out of 10 was 9.60, with 100 per cent of participants satisfied/very satisfied with the quality of the program. The evaluation for the training for associate leaders had a response rate of 99 per cent, with an overall satisfaction rating of 9.04, and 97 per cent of participants satisfied/very satisfied with the program.

Annual report

In December 2018, the SIU conducted a survey seeking feedback from a sample of principals on the 2017 annual report. The response rate was 14 per cent. Results indicate that the report increased knowledge and understanding of school practices and school improvement for more than 80 per cent of respondents. Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the report would inform their leadership practice (75 per cent) and school improvement in their school (83 per cent). Nearly 60 per cent of respondents indicated that they shared the report with their associate leaders, and almost a third shared it with teaching staff. Ten per cent also stated that they shared the report with other staff and community members.

This chapter described the context of school improvement in Queensland, the SIU’s approach to school reviews, and other SIU activities. The following chapters discuss the practices identified in Queensland state schools in 2018, and draw findings to inform further school improvement.
02
School practices in 2018 review schools
This chapter discusses practices identified in Queensland state schools and centres that were reviewed in 2018. The three sections that follow consider practices related to school leadership, teaching and support for student learning. The three areas are interconnected and equally important, as strong leadership is vital for ensuring effective teaching practice and appropriate support for students. Research shows that ‘the more leaders focus their professional relationships, their work and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes’ (Robinson 2007b, p. 52).

The practices discussed in this chapter are illustrated by examples and case studies from schools reviewed in 2018.

2.1 School leadership

Effective school leadership is a key component of school improvement. Fullan (2014) identifies four key roles for school leaders: managers, learning leaders, change agents and system players. This section uses these roles to discuss leadership practices identified in review schools.

2.1.1 School leaders as managers

For a school to operate effectively, principals ‘must ensure that good management prevails in the school’ (Fullan 2014, p. 56). This means that basic functions, including human resources and budgets, are carried out effectively. To achieve this, Fullan emphasises the importance of sharing leadership, with the principal delegating key tasks to a ‘managerial team’ under their supervision (Fullan 2014, p. 57).

Leaders and leadership teams

The leadership teams in review schools were highly committed to improving student outcomes and wellbeing. While the majority of schools had stable leadership teams, some experienced significant turnover — the principal of one remote school in Central Queensland region was the sixth appointee in the past four years.

A number of review schools established a model of shared leadership, with leaders driving the implementation of school priorities, programs and initiatives. The leadership team usually consisted of the principal, deputy principals, head of special education services (HOSES), head of curriculum (HOC), master teacher and literacy coaches. In some schools, year-level coordinators were also included.

At an urban primary school in Central Queensland region, each of the leaders — locally known as phase leaders — supervised two year levels. Leaders modelled professional learning in the school and worked across a number of operational groups, including the leadership team, school improvement team, curriculum team and Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) team. Some teachers were also given leadership roles within these teams. Teachers reported high levels of satisfaction with these teams and the regular presence of phase leaders in their classrooms.

The roles and responsibilities of leadership team members in review schools were usually clearly defined, documented and communicated. Staff often demonstrated a good understanding of how these roles supported their work in the classroom. Some schools, however, needed to provide greater clarity regarding leadership roles.

In many review schools, leadership teams were highly visible across their school. Staff often reported that their leaders were easy to access for support and included them in decision making.

Some principals were well-informed by recent research and encouraged the use of research-based teaching practices in classrooms. Many school leaders were active in building networks with education professionals outside their school.

Managing human resources

Principals recognised the importance of attracting and retaining the best possible staff to meet the needs of students and the community. Many also acknowledged that having a planned approach to recruiting, training and supporting staff contributed to consistent teaching across the school.

Due to rapid growth in student enrolments, a small number of review schools experienced significant staff turnover in their teaching teams, or a shortage of suitable staff. This posed challenges for embedding consistent pedagogical practices across the school, and for the effective implementation of key improvement initiatives.

As part of their approach to managing human resources, some schools accepted pre-service teachers from local universities. These placements were an opportunity for schools to identify potential staff with particular skills that may be required in the future.

A small number of review schools were encouraged to develop a workforce plan in order to support current and future staffing needs, ensure effective curriculum delivery and sustain the school’s strategic direction.

Staff wellbeing was a key priority for many review schools, and was usually associated with a collegial school culture and positive staff morale. One special school in North Coast region had a professional learning community (PLC) focused on wellbeing, and used pulse surveys to monitor staff wellbeing. A combined school in the same region had a staff wellbeing committee, which developed an action plan based on the department’s wellbeing framework. A range of social activities were organised for staff in review schools, such as yoga, a walking club and a fitness club.

Managing school budgets

In most review schools, the principal and business manager (BM) developed the school’s budget at the end of each year. Budget priorities were determined after considering emerging priorities, historical data and recurring costs. Discretionary funds were allocated to align with school and system priorities. In some schools, the school’s budget was developed in consultation with staff.

Principals usually worked with BMs to regularly review budget expenditure, and to manage adjustments, resource allocations and purchasing requirements.

Investing for Success funds were a significant part of school budgets, and were spent in alignment with the school improvement agenda. These funds were used for additional human resources, staff professional learning, support services such as speech pathology,
information and communication technology (ICT), and literacy and numeracy resources. The funds were also often used to release teachers to participate in coaching and feedback, professional collaboration, data analysis and planning meetings.

Parents and Citizens’ Associations (P&Cs) supported schools by providing funds to improve the school environment. This was done through fundraising activities, profits from the school canteen and uniform shop, and other ventures. These funds were often used for specific resources and enhancements, such as programs for high-achieving students, ‘bring your own device’ programs, extracurricular activities and events, playgroups, learning resources and air conditioning.

Managing data processes

The principals of review schools regarded reliable and timely student data as essential for informing the strategic direction of the school and the improvement of student learning outcomes.

Many schools had developed a whole-school plan for the systematic collection of student achievement data. These plans identified timelines for data collection and the specific assessment tools that teachers use in their classrooms. A small number of schools had reviewed (or identified the need to review) their processes for collecting data in order to refine the assessment plan and ensure more purposeful collection of data.

Collected data were usually monitored by the leadership team, teaching staff or specialist school teams. Some schools used the literacy continuum to provide benchmarks and to monitor students’ literacy development.

Some teachers reviewed and monitored student data using the class dashboard facility in OneSchool, but in many schools this was still an emerging practice and its functionality was yet to be fully used for planning. A very small, rural primary school in Central Queensland region developed comprehensive student ‘improvement agenda’ folios, with examples of completed diagnostic assessment tasks, results and completed curriculum assessments. At an urban primary school in North Queensland region, student achievement meetings and cohort analysis meetings provided a forum for student learning outcomes to be discussed and monitored. TrackEd and TraQCEr — specialist software for monitoring student progress — were used in some secondary schools.

Data in review schools were shared and discussed during staff and curriculum meetings. Some schools shared data with their school community through assemblies, special awards parades, newsletters, P&C meetings and social media. Positive trends in data were celebrated in newsletters and staff notices. At a very small, rural primary school in Far North Queensland region, ‘data snapshots’ were developed to give parents information about their child’s learning goals and progress in reading, spelling, writing and attendance.

Many review schools created data walls to encourage collegial conversations about student achievement. This may have assisted schools in prioritising next steps in school improvement. A small number of schools were yet to develop a system for summarising, displaying and communicating student data to staff, parents and students.

School data were regularly analysed by school leadership teams, who were aware of trends in student achievement levels. Data were also analysed during staff meetings, within school teams and PLCs, and during individual data conversations with classroom teachers. At a rural primary school in Far North Queensland region, data conversations regarding reading (the school’s improvement priority) took place with the deputy principal and master teacher every term. Based on data from reading assessments, discussions focused on the progress of individual students and how they could be supported to progress to the next level.

In a number of schools, staff conversations about student achievement levels occurred informally, and a whole-school process for data discussions was yet to be developed.

Systemic data were often used by review schools to inform school-level decisions, the school’s explicit improvement agenda and the targeted use of resources. Problems of practice were identified through a cycle of inquiry that included an analysis of school performance data. Diagnostic, formative and summative data were used to generate whole-school strategies to improve student learning outcomes.

In some schools, the analysis of data to inform school-level decisions and adjustments to teaching practice was an area for development. Similarly, the use of data to review the effectiveness of programs and their impact on student learning was yet to be embedded in many schools.
2.1.2 School leaders as lead learners

As a lead learner, the principal’s role is to build the capability of teachers to ‘improve their teaching, while learning alongside them about what works and what doesn’t’ (Fullan 2014, p. 55). According to Fullan, this requires building a collaborative professional learning culture. The principal shares the leading of all instructional learning with other team members and visibly participates in continuous learning to move the school forward.

Professional learning management

Most review schools had developed a whole-school professional learning plan. These plans included opportunities for staff to participate in professional learning aligned to the school improvement agenda and to systemic, regional and cluster initiatives. The plan was usually developed with associated budget allocations.

In a small number of schools, there was limited evidence of alignment between the professional learning plan and the school’s priorities, or the plan was yet to be developed and shared with staff.

In many schools, teaching staff had current annual performance development plans (APDPs). These plans were usually aligned with the school’s improvement agenda, although in some instances, they were not yet linked to the whole-school professional learning plan. The extent to which these plans were actioned during the year varied.

To support the building of expert teaching teams, some schools linked APDPs to the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership standards. In a number of schools, APDPs were yet to be developed and implemented, particularly for teacher aides and non-teaching staff.

Teaching staff often valued the annual performance review process as a tool for improving their teaching. Staff were clear and confident about their APDP goals and the actions being undertaken to achieve these goals. At a remote school in Central Queensland region, staff learning goals were documented and displayed in the staff work area to motivate staff and encourage team building.

In many schools, teachers and teacher aides spoke highly of the APDP process. Occasionally, principals indicated that the process needed to be reviewed to ensure a more authentic approach was used, with staff developing more meaningful plans for their professional learning.

In some schools, staff indicated varying degrees of engagement with the APDP process.

Professional learning

The development of staff into a coherent and expert teaching team was considered pivotal for improving student learning outcomes in review schools.

Building the capability of staff included regular professional learning sessions at staff meetings, professional learning days, classroom-based learning, mentoring and coaching, and participation at workshops, conferences and learning lounges. Several schools engaged education consultants to provide professional learning. Regional programs and learning hubs assisted schools to deliver targeted professional learning. Central office teams also provided support and resources to build the capability of school and regional personnel.

Many professional learning activities were part of school clusters or delivered in collaboration with local schools.

In some review schools, the leadership team kept abreast of research on effective teaching practices. At a rural secondary school in Central Queensland region, a book club was established to develop teachers’ knowledge of the research behind the initiatives being implemented.

Professional support was also provided through the development of whole-school resources. For example, an urban primary school in Metropolitan region developed an electronic whole-school reading document to help staff use a newly implemented reading placement.

Professional learning opportunities in review schools were often linked to the explicit improvement agenda, which helped to develop the capability of teaching staff to plan and implement programs, and to build their understanding of effective teaching practices in priority areas.

In some schools, teachers were encouraged to undertake additional roles and responsibilities to develop their leadership capability. An urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region established a ‘leadership pipeline’, a process that gave teachers opportunities to lead and to model leadership across the school.

One of the areas of staff capability identified as vital for school improvement was data literacy. School leaders often acknowledged that teachers’ data skills were an area for development. In many cases, teachers’ ability to understand and use data to inform classroom programs and their teaching practice varied across the school. In a number of schools, these skills were only emerging. Staff usually developed their skills in analysing and interpreting data through data discussions with school leaders, during staff meetings and at staff professional learning days. A few schools drew upon the expertise of regional staff to upskill teachers in the use of data. At a very large, urban primary school in Metropolitan region, teachers participated in data conversations with an assigned school leader, where they discussed samples of student work and unpacked class and individual student data. These discussions informed planning for differentiated teaching and learning.

Some review schools had yet to provide professional learning opportunities that targeted data skills. School leaders acknowledged the need to provide staff with time for data conversations.

Another significant area of professional learning was the Australian Curriculum. Staff understanding of the Australian Curriculum varied in some review schools. Professional learning in curriculum planning and development was often provided through PLCs, staff meetings, planning days or targeted sessions facilitated by the HOC or support teacher literacy and numeracy (STLaN). At times, regional curriculum officers were also engaged to build staff knowledge and skills in delivering the curriculum. Collaborative planning of curriculum and joint moderation of student work samples were undertaken to enhance teachers’ understanding, confidence and consistency in making judgements. In addition, teaching staff in some secondary schools were involved in Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority programs, preparing for the introduction of the new Queensland Certificate of Education and Senior Assessment and Tertiary Entrance system, and the implementation of the new senior syllabuses in 2019.
Other areas where professional learning opportunities were provided to staff included: the use of ICT in teaching and learning, age-appropriate pedagogies, cultural competence (e.g. to support the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students), PBL, and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

In addition, review schools identified a need to build or enhance staff capability in several areas. These included:

- differentiation of teaching to meet the needs of all learners, including high-achieving students
- the use of digital technology to support teaching and learning
- understanding the cultural backgrounds of students, and the engagement strategies to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- inclusive classroom practices, particularly to address the needs of students with disability, including the development and implementation of individual curriculum plans (ICPs).

Some teachers also expressed a desire to continue to enhance their knowledge, skills and pedagogy in STEM. Staff capability in pedagogical practices implemented as part of the school’s improvement agenda was an area for development in some review schools.

Professional learning of new and beginning teachers

Many review schools had developed an induction program for new staff. Typically, this program provided new teachers with detailed documentation regarding school policies, procedures and practices, mandatory training and the school’s explicit improvement agenda. Staff usually felt well supported through this program, but some schools identified the need for a more systematic and structured approach to induction that was better tailored to teachers’ needs. A few schools had developed a staff handbook to support induction. A very small, rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region had a rigorous induction program that included observation and feedback on teaching practice. At a remote school in Far North Queensland region, where approximately 50 per cent of the student population is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, the induction program focused on the local Indigenous culture, and new staff were introduced to the school’s pedagogical model centred on Indigenous learning.

A number of schools were yet to develop and implement a formal, comprehensive induction program to support new staff.

In some schools, beginning teachers were supported through the Mentoring Beginning Teachers program, which helped them to assimilate into the school, understand expectations for curriculum and pedagogy, and build professional expertise. This program was valued highly by beginning teachers.

Professional learning of teacher aides

Teacher aides were viewed as valued partners in the education process. In most review schools, teacher aides had APDPs. They were also included in professional learning opportunities aligned to the school’s needs and current explicit improvement agenda. At a very small, rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region, a teacher aide (along with the principal) attended regional professional learning on age-appropriate pedagogies in response to the high percentage of students enrolled at the school between Prep and Year 3. At an urban primary school in South East region, teacher aides accessed professional learning in Levelled Literacy Intervention, and had regular observation and feedback sessions with the special education program (SEP) teacher.

Some teacher aides reported that they needed to develop their skills further and would welcome more opportunities to engage in team discussions.
Every teacher takes responsibility for becoming a better teacher at Edge Hill State School. The whole-school approach to building staff capability is based on the belief that teachers have expertise and responsibility for their own learning. The focus is on collaboration — doing things with teachers, not to them. The leadership team has developed a strong culture of collegiality and learning, with PLCs focused on school priorities and exploring evidence-based practices.

Over the last two years, the PLCs have evolved into the Practitioner Research Program, in which teachers develop a research project. They are supported by external researchers, and the projects are compiled and published in a school journal to share the knowledge. Coaching and mentoring are delivered through the Polishing Our Practice model. All teachers are profiled during Term 1 each year, followed by classroom observations by trained school-based profilers, and reflection and feedback sessions. For the remainder of the year, teachers participate in classroom observations, visiting their peers and inviting others to observe one of their lessons.

The Learning Lounge Series is a school practice that enables teachers to attend additional professional learning activities after school, on topics aligned to school priorities. This complements the induction program available at the start of the year.

The school’s approach to professional learning is proactive and focuses on teachers’ needs, rather than looking only at available opportunities. As a result, teachers at Edge Hill State School are engaged, excited and empowered. They are proud of their research program and the positive impact it is having on their teaching practice. Staff morale and retention have also improved.

* Throughout this report, ‘verified disability’ means verified through an Education Adjustment Program.
Creating a culture of professional support

As an independent public school, Cairns State Special School sought to create a place of professional collaboration where people would support each other.

With a staff of team players motivated to make a difference, the school established PLTs to sustain professional engagement and learning, which could then translate into effective teaching.

Each PLT focuses on a school priority, is led by a member of the school leadership team, and uses an inquiry cycle to evaluate practice and discuss student achievement. Team Logs are completed by PLT members for all students in a nominated focus area. Evidence of each student’s current capabilities is shared to collaboratively analyse future goals, teaching strategies, resources and evidence. Further data are shared at a review of the Team Log to close the feedback loop.

The work of the PLTs is linked to the school’s annual implementation plan and each staff member’s APDP. Team goals and performance are reviewed each term and celebrated. Staff are able to influence the school’s decision-making processes, solving teaching and operational issues. Expertise is shared through informal professional learning sessions, a blended coaching approach and instructional rounds.

The PLTs have become an intrinsic element of the school, and staff value being part of a professional approach to teaching. The PLTs build uniformity of purpose, a common direction and staff capability that reflects on student capability. English results have improved across all year levels, and teachers estimate that students are achieving 90 per cent of their ICP goals. According to the 2018 School Opinion Survey results, all staff agree they work as a team at the school.

STAR teams play in an evidence-based sandpit

Every teacher is a researcher at Nundah State School. In 2017, after embracing a Curiosity and Powerful Learning philosophy, the school needed a bottom-up model of working that would enable collaborative inquiry and build staff capabilities in their areas of interest.

Strategic Action Research (STAR) teams were established to investigate innovations in assessment for learning, inquiry models, collaborative practices and higher order questioning. This process has enabled staff to engage actively in areas of their professional interest.

Teaching staff select at least one team for the year, sometimes moving across teams. The teams investigate pedagogical practices that enhance student learning through an inquiry cycle. Each team develops whole-of-team inquiry questions, and personal or pair ‘passion projects’. They read, research, attend professional learning and play in an evidence-based sandpit. They review professional practices, trial strategies and share learnings with colleagues. Teachers implement new ideas and strategies after colleagues have tested them and shown that they work. The learning gains momentum across the school and is self-sustaining.

Teachers report that they highly value the STAR initiative, which has built a powerful professional learning community at the school. STAR teams have contributed significantly to developing staff capabilities and evidence-based, whole-school practices. The culture of sharing is now a school feature, with teachers learning from one another, gaining confidence and implementing ideas with support from colleagues. Embedding this culture of growth and learning among staff provides the basis for growing self-aware, intrinsically motivated, active and inquisitive student learners.

Since 2017, School Opinion Survey data indicate an increased confidence in teachers’ knowledge and application of evidence-based teaching practices.
Instructional leadership practices

Most review schools recognised the importance of providing strong instructional leadership. School leaders supported teaching and learning, and the capability development of staff, by having a strong presence in classrooms.

Most commonly, school leaders engaged in walkthroughs (or learning walks), observing lessons and giving feedback to teachers, modelling instruction, and providing coaching and mentoring. At an urban primary school in Central Queensland region, observations were conducted twice a term as part of the school’s learning walks and talks, and written feedback was provided to teachers using the Glow, Grow, Know and Show framework.

In some review schools, observation, feedback and walkthrough processes were informal or yet to be developed. At times, walkthroughs were predominantly focused on the quality assurance of implemented pedagogical practices, and were viewed by teachers as a compliance exercise rather than an opportunity for development.

2.1.3 School leaders as change agents

Change agency is about school leaders’ ability to ‘find their way (and the way of those with whom they work) in change’ (Fullan 2014, p. 124). According to Kirtman (2013, cited in Fullan 2014, p. 128), a change agent:

- challenges the status quo
- builds trust through clear communication and expectations
- creates a commonly owned plan for success
- focuses on team over self
- has a sense of urgency for sustainable results
- commits to continuous improvement for self
- builds external networks and partnerships.

In review schools, school leaders acted as change agents by developing, sharing and implementing an explicit improvement agenda.

Faced with staff shortages and limited release time, Mirani State High School sought to address problems of practice by empowering its teachers to drive school improvement. The school established School Working Improvement Groups (SWIGs) enabling teachers to research and develop classroom practices together to maximise student outcomes.

The SWIGs meet fortnightly and include representatives from each faculty. Each group appoints a chair, who is given additional responsibilities. These responsibilities contribute to their leadership development. Each SWIG is developed in response to a particular problem of practice, whether in regard to a system initiative or an issue identified by heads of department.

Each SWIG develops an action plan and budget, which are negotiated with the leadership team. The problems of practice are researched, experts are invited to assist, and solutions are trialled. SWIG members enact their plans within faculties and share the outcomes with the leadership team each year. The practices developed by the SWIGs are moderated through instructional rounds. Observations are made by colleagues rather than supervisors, and teachers use these to reflect on their classroom practice.

The SWIGs create a feedback loop that produces buy-in from teachers. As a result, staff have ownership of the direction of the school, and morale has improved. Most total agreement items in the School Opinion Survey for teaching staff increased from the previous year. Teaching practices developed by the SWIGs have also resulted in improved student outcomes in reading and writing. A to E data indicate the proportion of students with C or above has increased for most of the recorded year levels. There is also a general trend of improvement in the national minimum standard in junior years across most strands.
Developing an explicit improvement agenda

In many review schools, the explicit improvement agenda was underpinned by the school’s annual implementation plan, and linked to other strategic documents such as the school’s strategic plan and the department’s strategic plan.

The majority of schools had sharp and narrow improvement agendas, with one to three priorities identified for further focus. The level of precision in the priorities varied among schools. While most schools highlighted general areas for improvement, such as writing or the quality of teaching, some schools were more specific. For example, the agenda of a remote school in Central Queensland region focused on vocabulary through reading from Year 7 to Year 12, and vocabulary through spelling from Prep to Year 10.

In the majority of review schools, explicit improvement agendas were informed by analysis of a range of datasets, including formative and diagnostic data, and data from the school data profile and School Opinion Survey (SOS).

Staff and leaders in many schools collaborated to determine priorities and strategies for school improvement. The explicit improvement agenda was often developed in consultation with the school council, the P&C and parents. This approach was well received by school staff.

In some schools, leaders focused on ensuring a shared understanding of the improvement agenda across the school. At an urban primary school in Central Queensland region, the leadership team used a range of reflection, feedback and survey processes to identify staff perceptions, beliefs and capabilities aligned to the school’s priority areas.

When developing their explicit improvement agendas, some schools engaged in a cycle of inquiry as part of the department’s School Improvement Model. An urban primary school in South East region used an inquiry approach to support the collaborative development of the school’s direction. Staff were trialling initiatives related to pedagogical practice and curriculum, and improvement actions were reviewed each term.

Most schools listed literacy as their improvement priority. A focus on reading was mentioned more often than writing. Numeracy was nominated as a priority area by about one-third of schools. Many schools prioritised the implementation of curriculum. This included developing a whole-school curriculum plan, embedding the Australian Curriculum, aligning curriculum to the pedagogical framework, or focusing on specific areas of the curriculum (e.g. ICT and STEM).

Several schools prioritised building a positive culture for learning, usually referring to embedding PBL practices across the school community and, less often, addressing issues of student attendance.

Other improvement priorities listed in school improvement agendas included: implementing effective pedagogical practices (often focused on embedding Hattie’s ‘visible learning’); developing an expert teaching team; extending students in the upper two bands; improving teaching quality, differentiated teaching and learning; and addressing the Closing the Gap strategy. Improving student and staff wellbeing was also the focus for a number of schools.

A majority of school improvement agendas included clearly defined school-wide targets, timelines, and officers responsible for the identified areas of improvement. Targets were usually articulated in terms of student performance in National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and levels of achievement.

In many schools, the roles and responsibilities of the leadership team and key staff were clearly defined and aligned with improvement priorities. This was important for supporting staff in the consistent implementation of improvement strategies. In a number of schools, however, staff did not have a full understanding of the specific roles of school leaders in driving the explicit improvement agenda. There were also varying levels of clarity regarding the responsibilities of each staff member in advancing the improvement agenda. Overall, many schools needed to further refine the roles and responsibilities of the leadership team, and support all staff to better align individual actions with the explicit improvement agenda.

Sharing vision through the explicit improvement agenda

Review schools used a number of channels to share their explicit improvement agendas with staff and the community, including:

- the school newsletter
- staff meetings
- classroom posters
- school parades and assemblies
- the school’s website and social media
- school signage
- P&C and school council meetings
- displays on community information boards and in the windows of local businesses.

Key messages related to school improvement priorities were reinforced through student award systems and formal communication with families and carers. A very small, rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region worked with the local newspaper to share information about its programs and major priorities with the broader community.

The efforts made by review schools to disseminate their explicit improvement agendas resulted in high levels of awareness across most school communities. Staff and some parents could identify all or most of the school priority areas, and were supportive of the school’s direction. In some instances, however, staff understanding of each of the improvement strategies and their impact on student learning was not always clear or was still developing. In a number of schools, the timelines and milestones for the implementation of the improvement agenda were not widely known by staff. Some teachers reported varying levels of knowledge of school targets for measuring the success of programs they were implementing in their classrooms.
Implementing the explicit improvement agenda

In many review schools, teaching staff were committed to implementing the explicit improvement agenda in their classrooms. Improvement strategies often involved reviewing existing programs, systems or pedagogies, or implementing new ones. Many schools planned to establish whole-school, evidence-based pedagogical approaches and frameworks. A clear focus on achieving consistency of practices across the school was evident.

Schools generally allocated human and financial resources in alignment with the priority areas. Enhancing staff capability was a common strategy to support school improvement. In some schools, there was clear alignment between the school’s APPD process, staff professional learning plans and the school’s improvement agenda.

Monitoring processes were established in some review schools to track achievement against the established improvement targets. Progress towards targets was recorded and shared (e.g. by using a data wall). At a rural secondary school in Central Queensland region, monitoring occurred through the regular collection and analysis of data, observations, walkthroughs, and instructional rounds with teachers and school leaders. A combined school from the same region measured and monitored the wellbeing of students (identified as its priority area) through the use of youth resilience surveys.

Many schools were yet to develop ways to systematically monitor the implementation and effectiveness of improvement initiatives and programs.

2.1.4 School leaders as system players

As well as working internally to drive school improvement, principals need to be ‘system players’ who engage with other schools and the wider system (Fullan 2014, p. 97). This involves building external networks and partnerships to increase learning within the school and contribute to ‘the betterment of the system’ (Fullan 2014, p. 99). By developing partnerships, the 2018 review schools were able to access and organise a wide range of human, material and financial resources to address student needs and enhance their learning.

Partnerships with other educational institutions

School clusters were a common mechanism for review schools to build partnerships with other educational institutions. Clusters brought together early childhood centres, primary schools and secondary schools in various combinations. These partnerships facilitated moderation, curriculum alignment and collegial networking between teachers and school leaders. The professional knowledge shared within clusters was often related to pedagogy, behaviour management, data analysis, the co-construction of curriculum plans and the management of student transitions.

In addition to clusters, schools partnered with each other to share facilities, specialist programs and staff. Review reports referred to schools sharing laboratory space, facilities and equipment. Some schools also had links with a local environmental education centre, where facilities were used for orienteering, science classes, environmental education and camps. Other schools worked together to provide intervention and support for identified students. Partnerships between schools were also used for extracurricular activities, such as languages, music, swimming, school camps, athletics carnivals and Under 8s celebrations.

High schools partnered with primary schools frequently. Some of these arrangements involved extension programs for students from Years 4 to 6 to access secondary curriculum. More commonly, secondary–primary school partnerships supported student transitions. Primary school teachers shared information with secondary schools on the social, emotional and academic needs of students. Secondary teachers visited feeder primary schools to introduce students to Year 7, and to share subject information and enrolment procedures with parents. In some cases, secondary students participated in these visits to talk about their school’s curriculum. Transition programs between secondary and primary schools also involved orientation days, musical performances, discos, book fairs, combined school camps, school overnight stays, curriculum enrichment days and scholarships. Other transition programs connected state schools with Catholic and independent schools.

Many review schools had partnerships with schools overseas. These relationships involved study tours, exchange student stays and live streaming lessons. Schools also partnered with schools of distance education to provide online courses.

Partnerships between early childhood education and care providers and primary schools were common. They usually focused on supporting the transition of children to primary school. This often involved school visits by kindergarten and playgroup children (and their parents), and visits by teachers, teacher aides and school leaders to feeder kindergartens. The more comprehensive transition programs involved close working relationships between the early childhood education and care provider and primary school staff. Review schools used a combination of practices to support children’s transition, including transition statements, disability support services, open days and information sessions. Schools also organised picnics, sports carnivals, book readings, Under 8s celebrations, library and class visits, arts activities, and school tours to introduce children to their new environment.

Educational partnerships extended to universities, registered training organisations (RTOs) and technical and further education (TAFE) centres. Schools typically used their partnerships with universities to access the expertise of pre-service teachers. Teachers-in-training could complete practicums and internships at schools, providing a potential pool of high-quality candidates for future employment. Other university partnerships included tertiary destination programs and research relationships. The tertiary destination programs involved STEM studies, critical thinking, and university-level extension. Research-based relationships provided support in STEM, student reading, resilience, as well as coaching and feedback for teachers. Secondary schools partnered with RTOs and TAFEs to provide certificate-level courses and school-based traineeships and apprenticeships. These programs covered areas as varied as manufacturing, construction, engineering, tourism, hospitality, automotive electrical, health support, volunteering, horticulture and aviation.
Sunshine Beach State High School is using global citizenship and languages to bring the world to its students. The school sought to add cultural diversity to its long list of qualities. In addition to the advantages of its beach-side and bush location, it has created opportunities for local students to seek out and appreciate the rest of the world.

What began with a teacher exchange and short-stay program with the Italian city of Bologna in 1994 has expanded to include reciprocal student and teacher exchange programs with schools in Italy and China, study tours with schools in Japan, and teacher participation in international travel and professional learning. The school has also developed an Italian immersion program with the University of the Sunshine Coast, and facilitates Italian language teaching in three feeder primary schools.

The school uses online technology to link classes and students in real time. To engage in educational projects with their peers in countries around the world, students use International Education and Resource Network collaboration tools for reading, writing and research. These tools are linked to the New Pedagogies for Deep Learning partnerships platform and the Australian Curriculum’s cross-curricular priority of sustainability. The school has also worked with schools in New Zealand, the Middle East, South Asia and East Asia, leading the Drastic Plastic project to raise awareness of the environmental impact of single-use plastics.

The school’s focus on global citizenship has seen a continued growth in the number of students studying Italian. The proportion of students receiving A level results in Italian was greater than in other learning areas from Year 7 to Year 11 in 2018. Surveys of students, teachers and parents indicate that the school’s approach to global education has increased understanding of other cultures. Students demonstrate an inclusive attitude and are accepting and appreciative of cultural difference.
2.2 Teaching

While strong leadership is a key component for school-wide improvement, quality teaching has an even greater impact on student outcomes. This section describes teaching practices identified in the 2018 review schools by considering teaching staff, curriculum and pedagogy.

2.2.1 Teachers

Leaders in review schools recognised that highly effective teaching was key to improving student learning. In addition to classroom teachers, a variety of specialist teaching positions were identified in schools, catering for drama, music, dance, visual arts, languages, media studies, health and physical education, digital technologies and home economics. Students were supported by STLAnS, teachers of languages and SEP teachers.

Many schools were clear about the roles and responsibilities of teaching staff, and demonstrated collegiality in their approach to teaching. Specialist programs were usually delivered through fractional appointments (often shared between schools as a part of cluster arrangements), or online through distance education.

Teachers in review schools demonstrated ‘professional energy’ and a high level of commitment to student learning outcomes and their own continuous learning. The expertise, confidence and determination of teachers were visible, celebrated and appreciated by parents.

Teachers were described as compassionate, respectful and dedicated. They held a strong belief that all students were able to learn and succeed. Reports often noted their ‘hard work’ and referred to them ‘going the extra mile’ and not giving up on their students. Teachers were proud of their efforts, but heavy workloads sometimes strained their work–life balance.

Teacher aide support

Teacher aides were a valued, skilled and versatile human resource in review schools. They were considered partners in the teaching process and were involved in decision making that affected their work. Review reports often referred to the collegial esteem in which teacher aides were held. Reports also highlighted the integral role teacher aides played in maintaining conducive classroom learning environments.

Teacher aides worked with teachers in dedicated classes and across classes as required. They assisted with multi-age classes, literacy blocks and general classroom activities. Teacher aides usually provided differentiated support to small groups and individual students, including those with additional learning needs. They were responsible for assisting students with disability and students with English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D).

Teacher aides ran playgroups, breakfast clubs and library activities, and helped to liaise with parents and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. They also provided support with information technology, data collection and newsletters.

Peer instructional practices

Most review reports referred to the presence of peer instructional practices, including observation and feedback, buddy systems, observational triads and classroom profiling. In some cases, these activities were conducted as part of cluster arrangements. Peer instructional practices supported the implementation, quality and consistency of pedagogies. Schools provided teacher release time for observation, developed protocols and templates for observation and feedback, matched teacher experts with learners, and organised pre- and post-lesson meetings to embed learnings. Some schools used audiovisual equipment to record teaching practices for sharing and self-reflection.

Peer instructional practices were valued by school staff and often associated with a culture of mutual trust and collegiality. Many teachers were comfortable with the transparency of their classrooms and teaching, willing to share with others what they do.

In some schools, however, peer instruction processes were informal and undertaken on an ad hoc basis. In a number of schools, peer instructional practices were yet to be developed or were only emerging. Some teachers reported that they would like to see these practices implemented at their school.

2.2.2 Curriculum

The department encourages systematic curriculum delivery, and schools are required to ‘develop and maintain a whole school curriculum, assessment and reporting plan with three levels of planning: provision of whole curriculum; year or band plans for each learning area and/or subject; and unit plans’ (DoE 2019a, p. 2). Curriculum planning aims to establish ‘a clear and shared understanding of the intentions for learning and achievement at whole school, year and unit levels’ (QCAA, n.d.). It supports student learning by aligning required knowledge, skills and understandings with school programs.

Whole-school curriculum plan

Many review schools had whole-school curriculum, assessment and reporting frameworks and plans. These plans provided an overview of the intended curriculum for priority subjects, and templates for recording decisions. Curriculum planning documents mapped the explicit and sequenced implementation of curriculum across the years of schooling. They identified what students needed to know and do to be successful within units of work. Some schools based their curriculum plans on Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C) unit plans. At an urban primary school in Central Queensland region, teachers developed their own unit planning templates, modifying C2C materials to suit their students’ needs. The quality of unit-level curriculum plans was inconsistent at times.

In some schools, whole-school curriculum plans were still a work in progress. Review reports identified that schools were developing detailed and sequenced plans for curriculum delivery, and mapping the vertical alignment of the curriculum. In some cases, ancillary documents were also in development. Local clusters, regional officers and school HOCs supported the development of curriculum plans.
Collaborative curriculum planning

In many review schools, curriculum planning was a collaborative activity. Collaboration occurred formally and informally. Formal collaborative curriculum planning was usually scheduled each term. Teachers were typically allocated release time, with one day or a half day dedicated to activities. Year-level meetings were held regularly. In some cases, collaborative curriculum planning occurred at the cluster level.

Collaborative curriculum planning was led by heads of teaching and learning, deputy principals – curriculum, heads of department – curriculum, master teachers and HOCs. In some cases, it also involved SEP teachers, STLaNs, HOSs and EAL/D teachers.

In a number of schools, collaborative curriculum practices were confined to informal discussions among colleagues. These were referred to as ‘daily’ or ‘ongoing’ occurrences and were typically led by HOCs, master teachers or lead teachers. Heads of department also had open-door policies for teachers to ‘chat’ about curriculum.

Collaborative curriculum planning tended to overlap with moderation, data sharing, and capability building in the Australian Curriculum, but its main focus was to develop clarity and consensus on the substance of curriculum content to be delivered. At an urban secondary school in Metropolitan region, a system of collaborative curriculum planning was established, where teachers used the school’s curriculum plan as a reference point against which flexible delivery was designed, student learning was reported, and assessment tasks, unit plans, schedules and criteria sheets were developed.

Collaborative curriculum planning was valued by teaching staff. Review reports often noted teachers’ high satisfaction with these practices. In some cases, teaching staff reported that they would appreciate more time for collaborative curriculum planning. In a small number of schools, collaborative planning processes were yet to be developed.
The Australian Curriculum

The alignment of curriculum content with the Australian Curriculum varied across review schools. Most often, schools used C2C units and assessment tasks as a guide for implementation, backward mapping the Australian Curriculum to classroom lessons (identifying the expected learning intentions and teaching sequence). Some schools documented their use of the Australian Curriculum in curriculum plans and frameworks. More thorough approaches demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the Australian Curriculum, with schools elaborating on content descriptions, achievement standards, cross-curriculum priorities and general capabilities.

In some schools, the Australian Curriculum was a prominent feature of curriculum planning. Teachers collaboratively unpacked the Australian Curriculum and developed alignment planners, unit plans, assessment tasks and marking guides to ensure consistency across year levels. Teachers understood the expectations of the Australian Curriculum and collectively developed lesson sequences and ‘know and do’ tables for each unit.

In a number of schools, some aspects of delivering or monitoring the Australian Curriculum were not yet implemented.

Miami State School

Miami State School has established a systematic approach to the delivery of the Australian Curriculum. The school has reprioritised its use of human resources, and developed expertise in applying the content descriptions and achievement standards of the Australian Curriculum.

Five heads of learning (HOLs) were appointed to support teaching staff. Each HDL works with one or two year levels, providing teachers with a focused analysis of the Australian Curriculum content descriptions and the guide to making judgements.

Moderation is conducted consistently across each term, focusing on writing and mathematics tasks. At meetings with their HOL, teachers discuss the consistency of curriculum delivery and how the content descriptions differ across year levels. Teachers lead these meetings, nominating particular issues to address.

The special education teachers and the teacher of Deaf/hearing impaired students provide advice on adjusting the Australian Curriculum for students achieving below their year level. These specialist staff also participate in planning sessions with teachers to provide input on the curriculum and resources. Teaching staff use OneSchool to document planning and practices.

While Miami State School started with an emphasis on the English and mathematics areas of the Australian Curriculum, the program has expanded to include science. Thanks to the above strategies, there is greater continuity and stability in school practices. There is teacher ownership, autonomy and self-efficacy with the Australian Curriculum. Number testing and literacy results show that the focus on curriculum is having a positive impact on student learning. Cluster moderation has also validated the effectiveness of the school’s approach.

Miami State School has seen a growth in the percentage of students achieving a C or better in English in most year levels since 2017. According to the 2018 School Opinion Survey, teachers’ confidence in their knowledge of the Australian Curriculum has grown.
Locally relevant curriculum

When planning and implementing curriculum, some schools focused on reflecting the local context. Locally relevant curriculum tended to link to the cross-curriculum priorities and learning areas of the Australian Curriculum, such as science (by including local environmental resources), and sports, humanities and the arts (by connecting with local cultural events, organisations and community members).

Anzac Day commemorations were frequently used to access local history. A number of schools had developed strategies to embed Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders contributed to lessons on Indigenous heritage. Schools also offered ocean and forest environmental science studies, agricultural programs, sports science and recreation studies, and languages including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language studies that were relevant to the local community.

An urban secondary school in Metropolitan region had a comprehensive program that involved field trips to examine local landforms, prevocational mathematics that focused on real-world problems, and opportunities for engineering and construction students to work alongside local tradespeople. A rural secondary school in Central Queensland region had a visual arts program, including an artist-in-residence who supported student photography and oil painting.

Assessment and moderation

Review schools used a range of research-based assessment, using diagnostic tools to monitor individual student progress and school-wide achievement. These tools were used to identify where individual students were at in their learning, diagnose gaps in knowledge, and map year-level and school-wide progress.

Review reports referred to a number of assessment tools, including: NAPLAN, Early Start, PM Benchmarks, PROBE, PAT-M, PAT-R, PAT-S, PAT-Vocab and PAT-Comprehension. Review schools also used regionally developed tools and their own school-based practices for assessment.

Teachers commonly used marking guides for assessment. Some schools ensured that students were familiar with the success criteria of the marking guide, and provided exemplars of student work to clarify assessment expectations.

It was common for schools to align assessment processes to the Australian Curriculum. Schools used C2C assessment tasks and associated marking guides aligned to units of work.

Some schools had formalised plans, handbooks and schedules for assessment. These documents specified the range of assessment types (diagnostic, formative, summative) that were aligned to the Australian Curriculum achievement standards. These documents also prescribed timelines, expectations, benchmarks and performance targets for the completion of assessment.

To ensure consistency of judgement against assessment standards, many review schools undertook moderation. Moderation activities involved cross-marking written assessments, and providing staff with an opportunity to quality assure and validate teachers’ judgements. Moderation focused predominantly on English and mathematics. A special school in North Coast region used internal moderation to build consistency in student ICP goal assessment.

A significant number of schools were involved in external, inter-school or cluster moderation, either with a neighbouring school or a group of schools in the local area. At times, this moderation was organised within a community of practice, typically led by school principals or HOCs. It was common for schools to use both internal and external moderation.

External moderation usually occurred once a semester, although some schools engaged in cross-school moderation once a term or once a year. Most internal moderation occurred each term; in some cases it was conducted each semester.

Moderation was typically conducted within year levels. More rarely, schools also undertook cross-year-level moderation.

In a number of schools, moderation was informal, conducted on an ad hoc or needs basis, or only emerging. In some instances, moderation was seen as a capability-building activity, aimed at enhancing teachers’ confidence in making professional judgements.

Extracurricular activities

Review schools offered a range of extracurricular activities for students. These activities were aimed at extending students, improving their engagement and enhancing student wellbeing. They were held before and after school and during lunch breaks, and were administered by school staff and outside agencies.

Common extracurricular activities included:

- clubs for gardening, coding, robotics, cooking, livestock management, photography and Lego
- competitions in reading, mathematics, drones and robotics
- academies of excellence in sport, dance and drama
- sport activities, including rugby league, netball and football, sports days and carnivals
- music activities such as orchestras, bands and choirs, and musicals
- cultural excursions, parades and celebrations
- camping, cadets and road trips
- public speaking, leadership and life skills

Various ‘signature’ and ‘extension’ programs were aimed at improving student engagement, with curriculum specialisations in sports, arts, languages, mathematics, technology, and health and physical education. In some schools, the Clontarf Academies program encouraged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys to complete their education by providing them with counselling, leadership camps, sports trips, career support and teacher aide support. Some schools in North Queensland region were involved in the Tournament of Drones, which promoted equal participation for girls in problem solving, teamwork and analytical thinking.
2.2.3 Pedagogy

Pedagogical framework and its implementation

The department requires every school to implement a research-based pedagogical framework that is collaboratively developed with the school community. This requirement acknowledges the importance of quality teaching and research-validated pedagogy in improving student performance and developing successful learners.

Most review schools had research-based pedagogical frameworks, outlining expected teaching practices. These frameworks promoted consistent classroom practice and guided decisions about teaching and learning. Some schools acknowledged that they needed to review their pedagogical frameworks to better reflect expected teaching practices or to meet the needs of the students.

Collaboratively developing a pedagogical framework with staff and community members is important for delivering consistent and effective teaching and learning practices. Many schools used a collaborative approach to develop, implement or review their pedagogical framework. Teachers at a very large, urban primary school in Metropolitan region valued the opportunity to participate in the drafting of their school’s pedagogical framework, indicating that they found the process empowering.

According to their pedagogical frameworks, review schools used evidence-based pedagogical approaches and differentiated and scaffolded strategies to guide teaching and learning. The most widely used approaches included Explicit Instruction, Gradual Release of Responsibility, Dimensions of Teaching and Learning, and the Art and Science of Teaching. Many schools had also implemented age-appropriate pedagogies to shape teaching and learning in the early years. Teachers were using a range of effective strategies within their classrooms, which were supported by various artefacts aligned to the school’s pedagogical framework.

Leadership teams supported teachers to implement their school’s pedagogical framework. Principals used walkthroughs, observation and feedback to help ensure the framework was implemented consistently across the school.

In some schools, teachers’ knowledge and understanding of the pedagogical framework (and the expectations it outlined) varied, indicating a need for further professional learning.

A new evidence-based approach to literacy means all teachers at Pittsworth State High now want to teach in junior secondary.

In 2017, the school’s agenda focused on improving literacy in junior secondary — a potential success driver for all other curriculum areas.

The school’s pedagogy team investigated research-based models and, based on Hattie’s concept of visible learning, developed a whole-school approach to literacy consisting of the 3Reads model and PEEL paragraphing. These strategies allow teachers to engage and challenge the range of learners. While first and second reads provide structured support for literacy and curriculum learning, the third read promotes higher order thinking and group work.

Teaching staff were given time to implement new strategies in their classrooms, and were supported by the school’s master teacher, who co-developed and co-delivered 3Reads with them. She also provided training, modelling, observations and feedback on new practices.

In 2018, after the new strategies had proved to be successful, junior secondary focused on differentiation in writing. Teachers planned and worked collaboratively to learn about their students, and to develop their profiles on the Literacy Continuum for writing to identify individual differentiation plans.

Literacy at the school is no longer taught in a standalone block. It is embedded within all curriculum areas. The school’s new strategies have resulted in increased student engagement and improved learning outcomes. The 2018 NAPLAN results demonstrated significant improvement in national minimum standard in Years 7 and 9, as well as mean scale score and upper two bands in Year 9, placing the school above the nation in these indicators.

Following the success of the literacy agenda, the school has started another evidence-based approach to improve numeracy outcomes.
Differentiated teaching

Addressing the learning needs of individual students is a significant part of the department’s vision of every student succeeding. Differentiated teaching enables schools to address the diverse learning needs of students across the full range of abilities. To ensure that every student has the support they need to access and participate in the curriculum, schools identify differentiated teaching and learning in all levels of curriculum planning.

Review schools used a number of differentiation strategies including: ability grouping, flexible curriculum delivery and adjusted programming. Individualised, one-on-one or small-group instruction was also used to address the diverse needs of students.

Some schools had developed a case management process, with teachers collaboratively discussing the learning needs of identified students and planning differentiated learning to support them. Regular case management meetings were held, where staff discussed individual student performance and developed strategies to support continued improvement. At an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region, the HOC met with cohort teachers as part of five-week data cycles focused on reading. Teachers were asked to select a student who was ‘coasting’. The group mapped where each student was positioned and identified the next steps for learning. The progress of these students was followed up in the next five-week cycle. Many schools had also established processes for referring students to additional support services.

In addition to whole-school approaches to differentiation, some schools delivered targeted or intensive teaching to individual students or small groups. A small number of schools used a Response to Intervention model, with a tiered system of increasing levels of support. The support ranged from classroom adjustments to focused group intervention and intensive individual support plans.

ICPs were widely used across review schools for students who were identified as working below or above year-level expectations. ICPs were established in consultation with classroom teachers, parents/caregivers and specialist staff. These plans were reviewed regularly to ensure that reasonable adjustments were made to meet student needs.

In many schools, differentiation was a collaborative practice. Staff worked together to identify where students were at in their learning, and used this information to adjust their teaching. Classroom teachers were supported by school leaders and support staff, including STLAs, HOSES and teacher aides.

Differentiation in review schools usually involved data-based planning and documentation, and continuous monitoring of student learning. Differentiation planners, placemats and maps were used by some schools to identify the full range of learners. Teachers used these resources to design learning experiences that were accessible, engaging and challenging for students. At an urban primary school in Metropolitan region, differentiation maps were designed for teachers to use when planning the teaching of reading and English. These artefacts set clear expectations: that teachers would use data to inform student learning, and that their teaching plans would include differentiated learning experiences for students.

Overall, review schools placed a high priority on identifying and addressing the learning needs of all students. There was widespread recognition among staff that, while students were progressing at different rates, all students were able to learn successfully if given appropriate learning opportunities and support. However, while most schools were using differentiated strategies to support student learning, a number of them had yet to establish a consistent, whole-school approach to differentiation. In some schools, differentiation focused mostly on supporting students with additional learning needs; extending high-achieving students needed further development. Teachers’ confidence in identifying and responding to individual learning needs varied within and across some schools.
Differentiated teaching is promoted by the leadership team at Palm Beach State School to ensure that every student in every classroom is engaged in learning.

Students are supported in their learning through a range of explicit and differentiated instructional strategies including: unpacking of learning intentions and assessment tasks, conferencing and feedback following a summative assessment, reciprocal teaching, clarification of a concept or task during a lesson, and Journey Groups. Journey Groups were introduced in 2016 for guided reading and number skills, with students placed in groups across year levels, based on diagnostic data. This process enables students to work in personalised curriculum contexts, with high levels of differentiated instruction and feedback.

Journey Group lessons are prioritised and timetabled three times per week. The groups are led by a classroom teacher, a learning support teacher and a special education teacher, and further supported by additional teachers or teacher aides.

The groups are fluid and allow students to move from one group to a higher or lower level group, based on their achievement data, which is analysed every five weeks. This process enables students to work in personalised curriculum contexts, with high levels of differentiated instruction and feedback.

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This approach has developed a high level of ownership for student achievement by all students and staff. It has increased the engagement of students, who move between classes with greater independence and enjoy being exposed to different teaching styles.

Teachers and school leaders attribute improved student outcomes to the effectiveness of Journey Groups. The 2018 NAPLAN results showed above average improvement in Year 3 reading compared to schools with similar students.

Use of data in teaching

There was significant evidence of schools using data to inform teaching and learning practices. In some cases, the use of data was not consistently implemented across the school or it was only emerging. In many schools, however, teachers were using data to:

- identify where students were at with their learning
- set student learning goals
- monitor the progress of individual students
- use differentiation strategies to respond to individual learning needs
- develop next steps for teaching and learning.

To identify starting points for teaching, many schools used data to understand where students were at in their learning. Teachers used class profiles, dashboards and screening to inform their students’ progress and gaps in their learning. A very large, urban primary school in North Coast region used screening for all students in Prep to identify student learning needs.

In many schools, data were used to monitor student progress and set student learning goals. The monitoring of student progress was sometimes guided by regular data cycles, the use of data walls, or data conversations with school leaders and colleagues. Teachers at an urban primary school in South East region used proficiency scales in writing and numeracy to determine and track individual student progress towards an ‘essential’ standard. These data were used to place students into groups for the following two weeks to ‘reteach, consolidate and enrich’ their learning based on their achievement levels.

Data were also used to inform differentiation and intervention practices. In some schools, teachers were balancing their use of diagnostic, formative and summative assessment data to inform teaching and learning. At an urban primary school in North Coast region, teachers used a range of data sources (including diagnostic data, anecdotal information, curriculum assessment data and teacher observations) to plan differentiated learning experiences. An urban primary school in Metropolitan region established reading groups by using differentiation maps that contained diagnostic data to inform teaching and learning. The maps were developed each term, teachers were able to monitor progress over the duration of the term and adjust their teaching accordingly.

Data often stimulated discussion and helped teachers to identify effective teaching strategies for the youngest students. At an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region, for example, teachers were exploring the use of Early Start data and age-appropriate pedagogies to strengthen data-informed pedagogy in Prep.

Some schools were also using data to reflect on their teaching practice and evaluate the effectiveness of programs and strategies.
Deebing Heights State School was starting from scratch. Opening in 2016 with 100 students and five classroom teachers, staff had to quickly get to know their students to meet their needs. The school’s leadership initiated a systematic approach to reviewing student performance data called ‘Data today is instruction tomorrow’. Students new to the school are assessed to identify their starting points. Teachers conduct pre-testing at the start of each curriculum unit, and then post-testing at their conclusion to determine student achievement and growth.

Teachers collaboratively design assessment tasks and plan activities to enable students to acquire the skills needed to complete the tasks. Two weeks in to each curriculum unit, staff collectively evaluate progress towards learning goals, and provide additional support to students who require it. This approach is overlaid with regular diagnostic checks for reading against the literacy continuum. Data are analysed and displayed on a data wall, and then reviewed collaboratively to inform student case management, teaching practices and further planning.

To ensure alignment and consistency of curriculum delivery, staff members are coached by the support teacher – teaching and learning. The principal and deputy principal have regular conversations with teachers around their students’ data. Teaching staff collaboratively reflect on these practices to evaluate the impact of teaching. Teachers are able to share their successes and identify the distance students have travelled between pre- and post-tests.

The assessment process clarifies where students are at, enabling teachers to vary and differentiate practices to extend and support students. Since 2016, the percentage of students achieving a C or better in English, mathematics and science has grown or remained high for most year levels. School Opinion Survey data in 2018 showed that 100 per cent of teaching staff were confident using student assessment data to improve student achievement.

### 2.3 Learning support

This section considers how schools create effective learning environments, engage students in their learning and address the additional learning needs of students.

#### 2.3.1 Learning environments

A positive school culture and a stimulating and engaging learning environment support effective teaching and learning. The learning environment encompasses the tangible elements of the school, as well as the values, norms and ethos that support student learning.

**Infrastructure and facilities**

Most review schools had attractive and stimulating physical environments that provided a welcoming learning space for students and families. There was a clear focus on creating learning environments in which students were engaged, challenged and supported. Grounds, gardens and play areas were generally well maintained and classroom spaces were well organised. In some cases, staff, students and parents helped to maintain the visual appeal of the school and physical environment. Many schools demonstrated pride in their learning facilities.

Schools effectively used their physical spaces and technology to optimise student learning. A range of facilities were used to enhance learning environments. These included: indoor and outdoor learning spaces, adventure playgrounds or play spaces, libraries, sports fields, swimming pools, gardens and multipurpose halls.

A few schools reported that their library was well used by students and staff during lesson times, and sometimes during lunch breaks and before and after school. School facilities, such as school halls or ovals, were often used by community groups or hired out to the wider community.

A few schools indicated that they planned to enhance their physical environment in order to promote a positive culture for learning. Plans included: refurbishing general teaching areas, replacing air conditioners, providing additional rooms and a dedicated performing arts space, and developing a tennis court precinct. An urban secondary school in Far North Queensland region planned to convert an old hall into a welfare hub.
Learning grows outside the classroom

Classrooms are no longer the only places for learning at Bajool State School. Based on a strong belief in age-appropriate pedagogies and experiential learning, Bajool State School uses its physical environment and available facilities to create flexible and unique learning spaces. The adoption of age-appropriate pedagogies was a trigger for the school leadership team to create spaces for learning outside of the traditional classroom.

The school’s Harvest Garden is the focal point, where students and parents gather before and after school. Student learning is scheduled in the garden at least once a week and encompasses all learning areas. Students co-create this space, with recent work focusing on creating art and music opportunities in the garden.

The garden is central to the school’s Harvest to Plate program, which is used to bring learning into the real world. The program supports the school’s focus on sustainability, with the school recycling team promoting a ‘no plastic’ policy.

Bajool students’ inquiry learning takes place in the Play Hub, which has a puppet theatre, and Spare Parts Pit that holds cardboard boxes, PVC parts and simple tools for children to build, measure or paint. Whether it is a geometry lesson or a pretend shopping activity, these spaces allow students to apply concepts and test ideas in a real-world setting.

Teachers are excited about teaching in these unique learning spaces, while students are engaged and creative, and developing resilience and ownership of their learning. This has resulted in strong improvements in student outcomes. As evidenced by the 2018 NAPLAN data, most areas noted improvement above the nation, with 100 per cent of students in U2B in many areas.

According to the 2018 School Opinion Survey, 100 per cent of staff, students and parents would recommend this school to others.

Learning resources

A broad range of learning resources were used in review schools to enhance student learning.

The use of classroom learning walls and ‘know and do’ tables was apparent in many schools. Some of these schools co-constructed these resources with students to help them monitor their progress and understand their learning needs. Teachers at a remote school in North Queensland region reported that the ‘know and do’ tables provided valuable guidance about learning intentions and success criteria. Similarly, students reported that the tables provided clarity regarding what they were expected to learn.

Access to digital devices and tools supports implementation of the Australian Curriculum, particularly in the area of digital technologies and developing the ICT capability of students. Digital technology was available in most review schools and was used to enhance student learning. The range of digital devices included: computer labs, laptops, tablets, robotics equipment, interactive mobile panels and interactive whiteboards.

The use of digital technology to support student learning varied within and across schools. ‘Bring your own device’ programs were either available in schools or were about to be implemented to increase student access to digital technologies. In a number of schools, students were able to enrich their learning by using drones and robots.

Some review schools reported challenges with internet connectivity and access to reliable digital devices.

School culture

Schools can enhance a positive learning environment by creating a culture of high expectations, and building positive relationships between staff, families and the wider community.

Many review schools maintained high expectations for student attendance, behaviour, engagement and learning. Schools also focused on developing positive and respectful relationships within and outside the school.

In most review schools, staff, students and community members expressed a strong sense of belonging and pride in their school. Schools presented a welcoming environment, where teachers and school leaders were considered to be friendly and approachable. Parents, families and community members were regarded as an integral part of the school community. Parents were welcomed into classrooms and could discuss the progress and welfare of their children with teachers. A strong sense of staff and community pride was evident at an urban primary school in Metropolitan region. The school was highly regarded in the community for its rich history and heritage, and for its positive tone, high standards, effective teaching team and positive student behaviour.
Schools used a range of communication channels to keep parents and the broader community informed about school life and student learning. These included:

- information booklets or start-up packs for new families
- school newsletters, websites and events calendars
- P&C and school council meetings
- digital communication tools, including IDAttend, SMS, email, social media and QParents
- parent–teacher information sessions
- formal reporting processes, such as parent–teacher interviews and report cards
- class newsletters and weekly reports emailed by some teachers
- open days with student work on display.

Whole-school events, such as athletics carnivals and Under 8s Day, gave staff the opportunity to interact with a larger number of parents (including those who were usually unable to visit the school or classrooms). Schools valued their relationships with parents and the community.

A culture of high expectations for student attendance, behaviour and learning was evident in most review schools. High expectations were promoted by setting ambitious targets for all students. Some schools acknowledged the importance of conveying high expectations to students and supporting them to understand the correlation between effort and success.

Teachers endeavoured to provide learning experiences that were accessible, engaging and challenging. Students frequently expressed the belief that teachers were supportive of their learning. Some students reported high levels of satisfaction with the level of challenge provided. Some of these students felt supported by their teachers ‘to learn, keep trying and to have a go’. At times, students sought further opportunities to extend themselves in their learning.

High expectations were also enhanced through the school’s focus on critical and creative thinking. Some schools were developing a culture of innovation and inquiry whereby creative exploration and independent learning were valued and promoted. Many schools were yet to increase their focus on higher order thinking skills.

Faced with increasing numbers of school disciplinary absences and challenges in managing student behaviour, Kingaroy State High undertook a journey to create a positive culture for learning.

The existing PBL Tier I system was revised and updated, and behaviour expectations displayed around the school. This was followed by building Tier II systems for student support in 2018.

The school’s approach to change focused on knowledge, support and promotion. All teachers received professional development in classroom management, while teacher aides attended PBL sessions. Behaviour data was widely shared with staff through a Weekly Welfare Wrap Up, and used to inform behaviour practices.

Explicit teaching of behavioural expectations occurs on assembly and during classes. The school created a culture of ‘catching students doing the right thing’, where appropriate behaviours are acknowledged and rewarded. Positive behaviour and attendance are reinforced through a motivation system, which recognises students for improvement and effort.

To promote positivity throughout the school, themed weeks are held every term. Students share positive messages with another staff member. Positivity is also spread by the school’s MindMatters team, which arranges staff breakfasts, baked goods for staffrooms and the delivery of positive messages in pigeonholes.

The focus on positivity has resulted in improved staff and student engagement, and increased consistency in the use of PBL. Attendance and behaviour have improved, as well as school community perceptions of how student behaviour is managed at the school. But most importantly, every day, students are learning the power of how one little message can make a big difference in someone’s life.
2.3.2 Student engagement

The department is committed to ‘inspiring and challenging students to be engaged and active participants in their learning’ (DoE 2018d, p. 3). Review schools recognised the importance of providing a learning environment in which students are engaged, challenged and learning successfully. They encouraged students to take responsibility for their learning by setting learning goals and providing feedback and empowering opportunities.

Student learning goals

Many review schools were setting individual learning goals to engage students in the learning process and to provide guidance for further learning. Schools were using learning goals and timely, purposeful feedback to drive improvement in individual performance.

Student learning goals were sometimes displayed in classrooms for students to observe, deconstruct and discuss. This included artefacts on desks, noticeboards or within workbooks. Students were working towards specific learning goals, often in relation to reading or writing. Some schools were using the literacy continuum to develop goals for students. While many students were able to articulate their learning goals, they were less clear about how to progress to achieve these goals.

Individual student learning goals were often established by teachers. The collaborative development of these goals was a developing practice in many schools. At an urban primary school in North Coast region, high-achieving students expressed appreciation for teachers’ support in developing goals. Students commented that they had opportunities to develop and personalise their writing goals, based on what they considered to be their strengths and areas for improvement.

The precision used in setting individual goals and success criteria (and their effectiveness in ensuring student understanding) varied across schools. In some instances, goals were specific and measurable.

Feedback to students

Providing students with consistent and timely feedback helps them to monitor their progress towards learning goals. Feedback can also help students to determine the next steps they need to take to make progress. Most review schools provided feedback to students on their effort, participation, achievement or success. However, this feedback varied in type, quality and frequency.

Some schools provided extensive feedback, outlining the actions students needed to take to improve their learning. At a very large, urban secondary school in Metropolitan region, student profiles and folios were retained in all subjects to provide feedback to every student and to give them an opportunity to reflect on their performance. However, many schools were yet to develop a systematic, whole-school approach to providing student feedback.

Students described a range of ways in which teachers provided them with feedback on their learning. This included:

- feedback before, during and after assessment
- informal and formal feedback on assessment tasks and workbooks
- verbal, written, face-to-face and online platforms
- performance ladders and ‘bump it up’ walls
- student–teacher conferencing
- the “two stars and a wish” approach.

As part of feedback to students, their achievements were acknowledged and celebrated at assemblies, presentation nights and school reward days. At an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region, a ‘reading wall of fame’ was developed to acknowledge students who achieved milestones in their home reading. These achievements were prominently displayed so that they could be recognised by the school community.

Students valued the feedback they received from teachers, noting that it helped them to improve and identify next steps for learning.

Student empowerment

A positive culture, promoting student belief in their ability to learn, was apparent in many review schools. A culture of risk taking and challenge was developing among teachers and students.

Various strategies were employed by schools to motivate students to learn and to take greater ownership of their learning. A questioning process was used by some schools to encourage students to reflect on their learning and develop their capability for self-evaluation. Connecting new material to past learning also supported students, helping them to recognise the continuity in their learning over time. Some schools focused on deepening students’ understanding of the relationship between effort and success.

Schools also empowered students by providing them with opportunities to be actively involved in leadership programs and activities. At a rural secondary school in Darling Downs South West region, students were undertaking leadership roles such as school captains, house captains, junior secondary leaders, committee leaders and student council representatives. Student leaders understood the processes for contributing to and shaping the school. They appreciated the avenues available to them to have a voice in the school.
Booyal Central State School identified that attendance and engagement were problems among some of its students. The students had drive and enthusiasm, and school leaders recognised that these attributes could be harnessed through a different approach to teaching the curriculum.

The principal drew on her previous business experience, and brought together mathematics, oral language, writing and technology in an applied focus on students developing business ideas and confidence.

Each year, Year 4 to 6 students participate in the Booyal Bunyip Entrepreneurial Program. The program challenges students to identify an issue or problem and to respond creatively as a group, as well as to work on an individual or small group business of their own. The entrepreneurial work is explicitly linked to student learning, with frequent reminders about the relevance of the tasks, especially in relation to mathematics and literacy. Students spend up to 90 minutes of class time a week on their projects, with many putting in additional time during their breaks. Profits from commercial projects are used to pay off seed funding, with the rest going to charity.

Students’ philanthropic endeavours have raised more than $50,000 for drought relief through the creation of a comical DVD, and there are plans to promote awareness of other important issues, such as koala conservation and flood and drought relief in rural Queensland.

As a result of the program, students have developed entrepreneurial skills, they have greater self-confidence and self-belief, and they encourage each other. Student attendance has also improved, with a drop in the proportion of students with attendance of less than 85 per cent in 2018 compared to 2017.

Booyal Central State School

An entrepreneurial approach to learning

2.3.3 Inclusive education

Addressing additional learning needs of students is part of the department’s commitment to inclusive education.

Effective processes were established in many review schools to cater for students requiring additional or specialist support. Developing or improving an inclusive model of education was a priority for a number of schools. Some school improvement agendas gave consideration to particular student groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disability, students suffering trauma or high-performing students.

Some schools had committed to an ethos of inclusion to support the learning and social and emotional wellbeing of every student.

Student wellbeing

In many review schools, wellbeing was regarded as an important factor for successful student learning. A number of strategies and programs were implemented to support student welfare and develop their socio-emotional skills. Interactions between staff, students and parents were caring, polite and inclusive. Students often reported they were engaged and supported, and felt safe to take risks with their learning.

Schools employed a number of staff to support student learning and wellbeing. These included: guidance officers, youth support coordinators, community education counsellors and community liaison officers.

Some schools had established (or were developing) a whole-school wellbeing framework. This framework outlined inclusive and supportive practices and systems, reinforced the school vision and guided the work of the wellbeing team.

Schools usually had teams and committees dedicated to student welfare and support. These teams coordinated the implementation of the wellbeing framework and the processes for referring students to various support services. The student wellbeing team at an urban secondary school in Metropolitan region included the deputy principals, three student wellbeing leaders and the guidance officer. The wellbeing leaders were responsible for developing age-appropriate wellbeing lessons, timetabled for 70 minutes each week in every year level. The wellbeing program was monitored through student surveys and regular walkthroughs and observations by wellbeing team leaders.

Wellbeing teams often worked closely with external agencies, including Queensland Health and the Child and Youth Mental Health Service. Schools also established a range of wellbeing-related partnerships through programs such as BUSHkids and Adopt-a-Cop. The school’s chaplain usually implemented a number of social programs and provided individual support to students and families. An urban primary school in North Queensland region had established a partnership with a supermarket, and received grocery items for the breakfast club and food hampers to support families.

A number of schools collected student wellbeing data to inform case management and the allocation of resources. At an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region, the implementation of the engagement, wellbeing and transition agenda was informed by a range of wellbeing data, collected through the PBL program, SOS, staff pulse surveys, and Australian Council for Educational Research student social, emotional and wellbeing surveys.
Wellbeing programs were mostly aimed at developing students’ socio-emotional skills, including their resilience, self-confidence, self-esteem, teamwork and communication skills. Some programs helped students to develop organisational, personal and study skills, or nutrition awareness. Other student wellbeing initiatives included: breakfast programs, lunchtime play, morning physical activities, working with the KidsMatter framework, and school service dogs.

A very large, urban secondary school in North Coast region placed a high priority on student and staff wellbeing after it identified a sense of disconnection in the community. To enhance positivity and a sense of belonging, the school underwent a restructure. This involved: renaming and expanding school houses, and introducing house leaders and teachers, an awards program, and an annual house competition. This restructure was widely regarded as a significant and positive way to improve school culture.

Students with disability and students with additional learning needs

Most students with a verified disability were included in mainstream classes. Within classrooms, students with disability were supported through differentiation and intervention strategies. A small number of students with complex needs participated in specific programs tailored to their particular educational requirements. Some students were also withdrawn from classes at various times of the day for structured lessons with support staff. In a small number of schools, students with very high learning needs received most of their education in specifically designed units or centres.

The use of ICPs for students with disability was a common practice in review schools. The plans were developed by the classroom teacher in consultation with parents, HOCs, HOSSES, STLaNs and SEP teachers. Teachers were responsible for implementing, monitoring, assessing and reporting on all aspects of student ICPs. The consistency of the ICP process often varied within schools, particularly in regard to the identification, development and application of support programs.

Students on ICPs and other students with additional learning needs were supported through personalised learning plans or individual support plans. These plans set student goals for developing literacy, numeracy, social/communication and fine motor skills. The provision of support was documented on OneSchool.

Most schools tracked the academic achievement data of students with disability. Many secondary schools also monitored Queensland Certificate of Education or Queensland Certificate of Individual Attainment data for these students. Data were often used to support the development, implementation and monitoring of ICPs and personalised learning programs for identified students.

In some schools, the collected data informed case management processes. These processes were usually conducted by a student support team or committee that met on a regular basis to discuss the specific needs of identified students, and to determine the type of support needed (e.g. support from outside agencies or referrals for specialised support). These teams usually consisted of a school leader (often HOSES), specialist teachers, the guidance officer and other support staff. Other staff that provided support for students with disability included: SEP teachers, STLaNs, speech–language pathologists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists. Some schools allocated additional teacher aides to support the learning of students with high needs.

Speech–language pathologists and guidance officers were usually accessed on a needs basis. The speech–language pathologists developed individual and targeted intervention programs for students with disability (which were implemented by teacher aides), or they worked individually with a small number of students with language development needs. Guidance officers supported teachers in implementing individualised programs for students with disability, and developing strategies to meet individual needs, particularly for behaviour and student wellbeing. They also provided advice on policy and legislative requirements.

In some schools, specialist support staff were timetabled to work alongside classroom teachers and support the learning of identified students. To promote an inclusive learning culture, a rural primary school in Central Queensland region allocated inclusion teachers to different faculties. These teachers became the ‘go-to person’ for advice about adjusting, modifying and developing resources and assessment items for students needing additional learning support. At an urban primary school in North Coast region, co-planning was common across most year levels, with classroom teachers providing input into the learning adjustments for students with disability. The process of co-planning and co-teaching was replicated in a small number of review schools, with teachers and SEP staff working together to support diverse student needs. In most schools, however, this practice was yet to be developed.

A number of schools also had transition programs and support practices for students with disability in regard to school disciplinary absences, attendance and related part-time programs.

Some schools were yet to develop or document a formalised referral process for students with additional needs. The explicit tracking of academic achievement data for students with disability (in comparison with their year-level cohorts) was also not apparent in a number of schools. A few schools needed to develop an inclusion model for students with disability, and to build staff and community understanding of inclusive pedagogical practices.
Kenmore State High School

From ‘your kids, my kids’ to ‘our kids’

To better differentiate and support diverse learners, Kenmore State High School introduced co-teaching.

The school has more than 200 students who require additional learning support. Despite having all students in regular classrooms and being supported by teaching and learning support (TALS) teachers, some class teachers did not fully understand their students’ abilities, and had limited ownership of the teaching adjustments prepared for these students. To address this issue, a new research-based instruction arrangement — co-teaching — was introduced by the school’s deputy principal – special education, in collaboration with teachers.

Co-teaching is a partnership in which two teachers deliver curriculum to a diverse group of students within one classroom environment. Teachers co-plan, co-instruct and co-assess by making joint decisions and sharing responsibility and accountability for the learning of all students in the classroom.

The trial of the new model started in Semester 2, 2018. Information evenings were organised for teaching staff, and a master manual was developed for all participating teachers. Team composition, compatibility and schedules were planned to ensure effective instruction. Seven volunteer teachers were paired with the TALS teachers, and supported with professional learning. Time was allocated for co-planning to support implementation.

This new model of co-teaching has enhanced access to the Australian Curriculum for all students, and is improving the confidence and social skills of students, and their sense of belonging in class. For teachers, it has increased their sense of efficacy and confidence in differentiating and supporting diverse learners. It has also provided unique opportunities for professional growth.

Based on the results of the first appraisal, the school is considering expanding co-teaching across more faculties in 2019.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and EAL/D students

Review schools valued the various cultural backgrounds of their students. They responded to the language and cultural needs of the community through curriculum provisions and whole-school initiatives. To recognise cultural diversity, senior students at a combined school in Central Queensland region worked with an artist to co-design a 2018 senior shirt that acknowledged the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander influence at the school. A number of schools offered international programs that contributed to their multicultural ethos.

EAL/D students often included those identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and, in review schools, they were supported through differentiation and targeted intervention. EAL/D student support usually consisted of a withdrawal model and some in-class support. EAL/D programs were offered in some schools by an EAL/D teacher, with associated teacher aide support. At a very large, urban secondary school in Far North Queensland region, where students represented 70 different cultural groups, the EAL/D and Refugee Language Unit supported students with high language needs, using a withdrawal model for individual and small group instruction. At an urban primary school in North Queensland region, the Intensive Language Centre provided pathways for students to move to mainstream classes.

Other support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and EAL/D students included:

- tracking and analysing attendance and academic achievement data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in comparison with their peers
- gathering data through bandscaling processes to identify students requiring additional support with English language development
- the employment or deployment of human resources, such as guidance officers, STLAnS, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander liaison officers, community education counsellors, EAL/D teachers and Indigenous EAL/D advisors and teacher aides
- programs, activities and cultural events that promoted cultural diversity (e.g. junior Rangers program or yarning circles)
- changes to the learning environment (e.g. establishing a yarning circle on the school grounds)
- practices aimed at involvement of parents and the local community.

At a rural primary school in Far North Queensland region, the guidance officer worked with families to connect them with outside agencies that could support their needs. Agencies included the Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Clinic, hospital services, Hearing Australia and Anglicare.

In some schools, an explicit whole-school response to Indigenous education perspectives and learning needs was not yet apparent. Processes to identify, monitor and provide targeted support for EAL/D students were also needed in a number of schools.
Strengthening relationships for learning

Relationships are the key to everything at Mossman State School. Over the last few years, the school has sought and achieved sustained improvements in attendance, engagement, behaviour and learning outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The key to improvement was acknowledging that students’ families may have felt disengaged and invisible, which resulted in them not sending their children to school. The school focused on building connections with the entire Mossman community, based on mutually beneficial, trusting relationships and the notion of reciprocity. A vehicle for deepening trust and enhancing relationships was the development of the Indigenous Language revival program (Kuku Yalanji), which is aligned to the Australian Curriculum. The program was implemented after an 18-month community consultation process, during which members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community shared their stories and had their voices heard. This was followed by the establishment of a Language Advisory Group.

Other ways in which the school connected with the community included a Daily Reading Club, weekly assemblies, regular school–home communication and Good News awards. The front office was rebranded as a place of positive interactions, with school staff easily accessible, readily available and highly engaged.

Enhanced relationships resulted in increased parent and community involvement, and permission from the Aboriginal community to teach their language at the school. Students were speaking highly of the school, which changed parents’ views and contributed to sustained increases in student attendance and engagement. Student outcomes, as measured by NAPLAN, have improved significantly, and are now above those of similar Queensland state schools in most learning areas.

The school is privileged to be part of the local community and to play a key role in sustaining local Aboriginal language and identity.

High-achieving students

An ongoing focus in many review schools was on providing opportunities to challenge and extend high-achieving students.

Teachers engaged, challenged and extended high-achieving students by differentiating classroom activities, but this was often inconsistent across a school. In some schools, extension through targeted intervention occurred and, occasionally, ICPs were used for students requiring more challenging learning. Groups of high-achieving students were sometimes identified for withdrawal from the classroom for extension work, often supported by a STLaN.

Extension classes were established for high-achieving students in a few instances. At an urban primary school in South East region, ‘XL’ classes for high-performing students were a feature of a local school cluster initiative.

A small number of schools engaged a gifted education mentor to develop enrichment opportunities for high-performing students. A very large, urban primary school in North Coast region had an enrichment and extension mentor to support high-achieving or gifted students. The mentor reviewed all student results each term and considered a range of criteria to assess eligibility for an extension and enrichment program. The mentor and class teacher co-created an extension and enrichment plan for identified students.

A range of extension initiatives were often offered as extracurricular activities. These included:

- levelled literacy extension
- IMPACT programs
- STEM excellence programs and projects
- Academies of Excellence programs for academic and sporting pursuits
- excellence programs in the arts, robotics and media
- student clubs and groups (e.g. coding clubs and technology groups)
- competitions (e.g. debating, public speaking and Maths Olympiads)
- extension programs in local secondary schools for high-performing and aspirational upper year level students from primary schools.

An urban primary school in Central Queensland region established an Honours program to provide extension learning for high-achieving students. The program was offered yearly to students from Years 2 to 6 who were nominated by classroom teachers after meeting specific academic achievement levels. Students in the program completed set academic tasks in their own time during each semester.

In a small number of schools, high-achieving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were extended through the Solid Pathways program. At an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region, a group of Aboriginal students participated in Dynamic Deadlies, an online cultural enhancement program.

Some schools were yet to develop a strong focus on the needs of high-performing students. Some teachers identified an ongoing challenge in designing and delivering programs to meet the needs of these students.
This chapter has summarised findings from the school reviews conducted in 2018. It examined practices in relation to leadership, teaching and learning support, and identified areas for further improvement.

The final chapter, Chapter 3, discusses the progress made by Queensland state schools during the SIU’s first four-year review cycle, and identifies the next steps for 2019.
School improvement in 2015–18 and future direction
3.1 School improvement and system learning

One of the three priorities identified in the recent Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools is to ‘cultivate an adaptive, innovative and continuously improving education system’ (DE&T 2018, p. xi). School improvement is a complex and highly contextualised phenomenon. Each school is faced with a ‘unique set of challenges’ created by the ‘… context (e.g., student composition, school size, school level), … the location (i.e., current status) and (the) trajectory (i.e., stable, declining, improving) of the school on its “journey” of school improvement’ (Hallinger & Heck 2011, p. 22).

Research suggests that ‘there is a developmental sequence in school improvement narratives that needs certain building blocks to be in place before further progress can be made’ (Hopkins et al. 2014, p. 273). Analysis of data from Queensland state schools that exited the post-review support process between 2016 and 2018 resulted in similar findings. These findings, described in the SIU’s previous annual reports (SIU 2017, pp. 208–17; SIU 2018, pp. 158–65), reflect a logical sequence of school improvement (see Figure 3.1 below).

As shown in the above model, the first building block in each school improvement journey is a clearly established direction. A collaboratively established, shared understanding of the precisely defined focus of improvement, with clear roles and responsibilities of leaders, is critical for the successful implementation of change as is providing timely and aligned professional learning for staff. As a result, staff knowledge, skills, professional networks and confidence improve, which can translate into further positive changes in daily teaching and learning practices. In the longer term, this should positively affect student engagement, learning and performance.

This logic of school improvement, identified through SIU research, focuses on the journeys of individual schools. However, schools are part of an education system, within which they engage with other schools, organisations and external agencies, and respond to government policies. Whatever happens at the system level impacts on individual schools. Similarly, the improvement activities of individual schools have a collective influence on the system and help to drive system improvement. Such improvement occurs through the sharing of best practice within formal and informal school networks. As Hopkins and colleagues (2014, p. 273) note, ‘system transformation depends on excellent practice being developed, shared, demonstrated and adopted across and between schools’.

A dimension of each school’s learning is ‘learning with and from the external environment and larger learning system’, which can occur through: external collaboration, engagement with parents and communities, learning-focused partnerships, networks, and responses to challenges from the environment (Kools & Stoll 2016, p. 54). This system learning is critical for the effectiveness of school improvement initiatives. As individual schools progress on their improvement trajectories, it is inevitable that the education system will learn and grow as well. As Fullan (2014, p. 104) explains:

‘Large-scale success will occur only when system members begin to act from a shared, coherent mind-set. The only way to develop a shared mind-set is through purposeful and continuous interaction and learning over a period of time.’

Therefore, successful school improvement requires all levels of the system — state, regions and schools — to work together and learn from one another.

Each year, SIU researchers identify leadership and teaching practices implemented by Queensland state schools. Now that the first four-year school review cycle has been completed, some system-level achievements can also be identified. These achievements reflect learning within the system; they are the result of schools (and individuals working in schools) collaborating with one another, developing partnerships, engaging with research, and constantly exchanging and applying new knowledge to their practice.

The department plays a significant role in the system’s learning. Through its work with state schools, professional development opportunities, and tools developed over the last four years (such as the School Improvement Model), the department encourages and participates in knowledge creation and exchange at the system level. The SIU, through its school reviews, training and research, also makes a significant contribution to the system’s learning. School reviews are an important part of the learning journey of each school. They provide a ‘spark’ for a collaborative process of inquiry and reflection on the status quo, followed by improvement planning and implementation, and an assessment of outcomes. SIU reviewers share their knowledge by providing feedback to schools during reviews. They are also constantly acquiring new knowledge as each school and review provides new insights and lessons. By sharing this expanding knowledge of
school improvement, school reviewers have a significant influence on the system’s learning and growth.

There are many opportunities for the Queensland education system to learn and grow, and this chapter aims to provide an overview of findings from data collected from:

- review reports of all Queensland state schools and centres reviewed by the SIU from 2015 to 2018
- action plan final reports of schools that received a priority support review and exited the post-review support process between 2016 and 2018.

This chapter aims to identify where system-level progress is evident. As discussed in Chapter 1, the SIU reviews about a quarter of Queensland state schools and centres each year.

Any comparisons between or across years should be made with caution as different cohorts of schools and centres were reviewed each year. Despite this limitation, improvement at the whole-system level is notable and has been summarised in Figure 3.2 below.

![Figure 3.2: School improvement at the system level, 2015–18](image)

The following sections discuss each dimension of the system’s improvement between 2015 and 2018 in more detail. The discussion shares lessons that have been identified through an analysis of review reports, final action plan reports and reviewers’ observations from the field.

### 3.2 Planning is the only first step in establishing the direction of school improvement

Planning is only the first step in establishing the direction of school improvement. Planning, identified as one of the three key levers of school improvement in the SIU’s 2015 annual report (SIU 2016), refers to the development of a clear, focused and specific improvement plan that guides all school improvement activities. Planning is an essential step in each school’s improvement journey, but it is only a small part of what can be considered more broadly as direction setting. Direction-setting practices, as a key leadership function, aim to ‘develop shared understandings about the organization and its activities and goals that provide a compelling sense of purpose’ (Sun & Leithwood 2015, p. 501). The SIU’s 2017 annual report (SIU 2018, p. 159) identified the following components that contribute to direction setting:

- clear vision of improvement with a sharp and narrow focus
- effectively communicated improvement vision and expectations, including a shared understanding and language of improvement
- clear division of key roles and responsibilities of school leaders
- alignment between different elements of the change process.

While planning can guide the implementation of a school’s expected practices, effective direction setting can help ensure the new or changed practices are implemented consistently across the school and sustained over time. Recent research demonstrates the significant positive effects of direction-setting practices on teachers’ empowerment, sense of efficacy and organisational citizenship behaviour (Sun & Leithwood 2015, p. 516).

Most of the schools reviewed between 2015 and 2018 applied a planned approach to school improvement; this was reflected in the development of explicit improvement agendas. According to the recommendations received by schools in the first year of the review cycle, many schools needed to address some basic aspects of school improvement planning, such as:

- developing a clear improvement agenda with priorities, targets and a documented implementation plan
- refining the explicit improvement agenda to provide a narrow and sharp focus (reducing the number of priorities)
- developing a communication strategy for the school improvement agenda to be shared within and beyond the school.

This focus has evolved over the four years. In 2018, a smaller percentage of schools received recommendations about developing, narrowing and communicating their improvement agendas, and a greater proportion of schools were advised to focus on higher order aspects of direction setting, such as working with teachers to unpack the explicit improvement agenda (what it looks like in their classroom) or working with stakeholders to review and re-establish the school’s vision. Also, more schools received recommendations to align their resources and processes with improvement priorities, and to monitor the implementation of the explicit improvement agenda and evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives aligned to this agenda. This suggests that many schools...
have moved on from planning to addressing other, more advanced aspects of strategic leadership and direction setting.

Towards the end of the first four-year review cycle, most schools reviewed had a sharp and narrow improvement agenda, informed by evidence, and a set of clear improvement priorities linked to student outcomes. Increasingly, schools explicitly defined targets and timelines for the improvement of student outcomes, as well as performance measures to help monitor progress.

In addition, ‘strategic leadership’ was identified as one of the top five areas of improvement activity among schools that exited the post-priority support review process between 2016 and 2018. The evidence from these schools showed that significant progress has been made in relation to direction setting, with school leaders and communities engaging in the development of the school’s vision, goals and direction; developing policies and plans to achieve these goals; and allocating resources to implement these plans.

**Building a shared understanding is necessary for staff commitment**

A shared understanding of the school vision and improvement agenda influences the extent to which staff take ownership of change. The vision of a school leader needs to be translated into a shared vision that will ‘bind people together around a common identity and sense of destiny ... [so they might] excel and learn not because they are told to, but because they want to’ (Senge 1990, p. 9).

Building a shared understanding of the vision and improvement agenda is critical, and it should involve staff, students, parents and the broader school community. When a vision is collaboratively developed, rather than imposed, ‘people ... are more likely to persist with their efforts when they confront difficulties’, because the vision is based on shared beliefs (Schlechty 2009, in Kools & Stoll, 2016, p. 36).

Schools reviewed between 2015 and 2018 have matured in their approach to planning, with a greater focus on collaboratively developing their improvement agendas. Each year since 2015, more review schools were identified as engaging in a collaborative cycle of inquiry to identify their problems of practice and improvement priorities, and how they could best be addressed. In many schools, the explicit Improvement agenda was developed in consultation with the school community. There was also an increased use of the School Improvement Hierarchy and the domains of the NSIT to reflect on the school’s status quo, identify areas for improvement and develop improvement strategies. The School Improvement Hierarchy and the NSIT provided a framework and language to help build a shared understanding within the school community. For many schools, this contributed to a clear line of sight from the school’s improvement agenda to the classroom.

An increasing number of schools effectively communicated their improvement agendas. As a result, agendas were widely known by staff, parents, students and other members of the school community. School communities demonstrated a strong commitment to school improvement, and members of the broader community supported the improvement vision.

**School improvement is a continuous process**

‘While school improvement is outcomes-oriented, it is a process: a journey with many subtleties that even the richest of case studies can’t capture’ (Stoll 2009, p. 116). As well as being a continuous process, school improvement is highly contextualised. The success of school improvement depends on the context in which a school operates and the unique characteristics of the school. No one solution will work well for all schools and, as a result, schools often follow different and unique improvement trajectories (Belie et al. 2016).

Acknowledging these characteristics of school improvement is critical for its success.

Over the past four years of school reviews, the understanding of school improvement as a continuous and highly contextualised process has grown in the Queensland education system. This has been evident in the approach of school leaders, more of whom are focusing on building the internal capacity of their schools to improve (e.g. by creating PLCs, promoting collaboration and engaging in collaborative inquiry cycles). In many schools reviewed between 2015 and 2018, teaching staff demonstrated high levels of commitment to the continuous improvement of their teaching practice, and to the professional development of their capabilities.

This change is also evident in the increase of informal self-assessments being initiated by schools in the years between school reviews. The SIU offers support (such as tools, advice and suggestions of peer reviewers) for these collaborative reflection opportunities.

**3.3 From managers to change agents**

**School improvement involves change and change needs an agent**

School improvement is a comprehensive process that involves organisational change. The challenge of school improvement is that it needs to be collective and coherent, with the system’s “interdependent parts ... connected in ways that enable the relevant output” (Robinson et al. 2017, pp. 2–3). School leaders play a critical role in the school improvement process as change agents who move “people and organizations forward under very difficult circumstances” (Fullan 2014, p. 123). As Harris (2001, p. 262) explains:

> "The function of a change agent is to prepare and organise the school for change, to identify where teachers need support and to keep the focus of activity on improved student achievement."

The evidence from school reviews conducted between 2015 and 2018 shows that many school leaders were effective change agents. Principals had a good understanding of student needs, and displayed high levels of engagement in strategic planning for school improvement. They engaged staff in school improvement and made evidence-informed decisions. They focused on ensuring the consistency of implemented improvement strategies and new whole-school practices, and supported staff throughout the change process. The implementation of improvement strategies was usually monitored using classroom walkthroughs, observation and feedback, and data tracking.
Similarly, evidence from schools that exited the post-priority support review process in the same period shows that school leaders effectively engaged school communities in the school improvement journey. Among staff, there were positive responses to change, an enthusiasm and satisfaction with the implemented changes, and a strong belief that further improvements were possible.

**School improvement cannot be done solely by the principal**

Principals play a critical role in school improvement, but it is also important that they empower teachers to take on leadership roles in implementing improvement agendas. As Hallinger (2011, p. 138) found in his review of 40 years of leadership research: ‘[w]hen used well, shared leadership is a powerful tool for expanding the school’s capacity to achieve its vision and create its own desired future’.

Research discussed by Heck and Hallinger (2010, p. 871) suggests that:

‘... the impact of distributed leadership in schools is achieved through improved communication of mission and goals, better alignment of resources and structures to support students, more active engaged professional learning among staff, and the ability to maintain a focus on innovations in teaching and learning by those responsible for implementation.’

Over the last four years, there has been greater acknowledgement in review schools of the need for distributive leadership models. Review report data show that, each year, a larger proportion of schools implemented shared or distributed leadership models and created leadership opportunities for teachers. A shared leadership model was often established to drive the improvement agenda and implement specific programs and initiatives aimed at pedagogical practice. Such a model included specific roles for each member of the leadership team, and distributed leadership roles for teacher leaders. Teaching staff were actively encouraged to take on leadership roles beyond their classroom, often as year-level representatives, and they provided valued input into all school decision-making processes. In a growing number of schools, leadership teams demonstrated their capacity to draw together a cross-section of staff to facilitate the achievement of the school’s vision.

The distributed leadership model benefited schools by providing more effective communication and guidance for school improvement and strategic direction and, as a result, greater consistency of practices implemented across the school.

3.4 From collecting data to data-informed practice

**Everything starts from data — what we know and how we know**

‘The starting point in the development of a school improvement plan is to develop a good understanding of the current situation. This involves developing a good understanding of current student outcomes as well as a good understanding of current school practices.’

(Masters 2016, p. 7)

Such understanding can be developed by analysing relevant data. Data was identified in the SIU’s 2015 annual report (SIU 2016) as one of the three levers to accelerate school improvement. Effective use of data requires school staff to be data literate, and the establishment of effective school processes for collecting, sharing, analysing and using data. However, it is easier to collect data than to use it to inform practice. The latter needs time allocated for collaboration, discussion and reflection by both teaching staff and school leaders.

In the years between 2015 and 2018, schools were actively engaging in data collection, analysis and use. Data processes were consistently among the top five areas of improvement activity in schools that exited the post-review support process. The practice of school improvement in Queensland state schools has become more data-informed, with school improvement agendas based on the analysis of student achievement data. There has also been an increase in the use of data to inform teaching and learning, for example, in differentiation, case management of students and the setting of individual student learning goals.

While schools reviewed in 2015 were often asked to develop whole-school data plans, link school datasets to the improvement agenda, and embed data collection and analysis across the school, in 2018 the recommendations focused more on reviewing current data plans, deepening data analysis, and building a culture of self-evaluation and reflection to enable meaningful discussions of data, and to monitor progress over time.

**Less data, more information**

As sources of data in schools are so plentiful, there is always a risk of schools becoming data rich and information poor. More important than the amount of data being collected is the consistent and balanced collection of data and its use to inform school decision making and teaching practice.

Between 2015 and 2018, review schools collected and monitored a significant amount and variety of data on student achievement at whole-school, year and classroom levels. Over time, data collection in schools showed greater consistency, greater clarity regarding what data were used (and by whom, when and why), and more balance in terms of using different forms of assessment. Schools moved their focus from collecting large and numerous datasets to collecting data that inform teaching and school decision making.
Year on year, more schools developed consistent practices of collaborative discussion and analysis of data. There was significant progress in making use of data to inform the explicit improvement agenda, strategic planning and decision making, and in teachers using data and other evidence of student learning to inform programs and instruction.

3.5 From allocation to alignment of resources

Schools are expected to use their resources ‘in a targeted manner to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of all students’ (ACER 2012, p. 8). Staff, funds and facilities should be allocated by considering the identified needs of students and the school’s improvement priorities. Aligning resources with school priorities can effectively support and advance school improvement.

Over the four-year school review cycle, the use of resources by schools has become more targeted. To support the implementation of the explicit improvement agenda, schools allocated funds through the school budget and deployed additional human resources where appropriate. A greater number of schools each year provided their staff with professional learning opportunities and developed partnerships in line with their improvement priorities.

Such alignment was evident in the schools that exited the post-review support process between 2016 and 2018. Aligning professional learning, the roles and responsibilities of leaders and key staff, and the use of human resources with improvement priorities was particularly critical for the successful implementation of school improvement agendas.

3.6 From professional development to professional learning

Staff knowledge and skills are not all that matter

In addition to staff knowledge and skills (human capital), professional capital also consists of social and decisional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan 2012). All three components are equally important when it comes to professional learning and support for school improvement. In addition to staff knowledge and skills, what matters are professional relationships and networks developed by staff through collaboration within and beyond the school (social capital). What matters even more is the ability of staff to make judgements, often by drawing on their experiences and those of their colleagues (decisional capital). Therefore, professional learning needs to be understood as an interactive, social process that can occur everywhere. Learning is facilitated by collaboration, social interaction and a culture of sharing and collegiality. Collaborative structures, such as PLCs, professional learning teams and professional networks, create a culture where learning is encouraged and occurs continuously.

From 2015 to 2018, review schools recognised the importance of continuous investment in their human resources and providing professional support for staff during the improvement journey. In most schools, leaders and teaching staff were viewed by parents as highly capable, professional and committed to improving student learning outcomes. In many schools, teachers and teacher aides accessed various professional learning opportunities, including training, coaching and mentoring arrangements. Professional learning was also among the top five areas of improvement activity in schools that exited the post-priority support review process.

Professional collaboration and learning communities were evident within review schools and as part of cluster arrangements across the system. These collaborative learning structures contributed to system learning by enabling knowledge sharing and moderation activities that strengthen professional standards and the quality of practices across schools.

Over the past four years, more and more schools have developed collegial engagement processes, with school leaders and teaching staff involved in collaborative observation and feedback. These practices were critical in enhancing professional capital and improving the quality of teaching within review schools.

Overall, there has been a growth across the system in the importance and acknowledgement of a culture of sharing, learning and collegiality as a critical success factor in implementing improvement strategies.

Schools that exited the post-priority support review process between 2016 and 2018 significantly enhanced their professional capital. Staff increased their knowledge and skills in data literacy, pedagogies and the Australian Curriculum. School leaders enhanced their capabilities as instructional leaders and change agents. Professional relationships and networks of school leaders and staff in these schools also expanded, and many staff achieved greater levels of confidence, particularly in the understanding and use of data.
School leaders focused on learning

School improvement requires continuous learning; school leaders therefore need to acknowledge their role as lead learners in their schools and beyond. Learning-focused leaders model professional learning and provide opportunities for co-learning and the flexible exchange of roles between leader and teachers (Johnston & Caldwell 2001, p. 102). Learning-focused leaders also engage in instructional leadership, which focuses on providing ‘... support and evaluation of teaching through regular classroom visits and the provision of formative and summative feedback to teachers’ (Robinson 2007a, p. 8).

In most schools reviewed between 2015 and 2018, school leaders acted as instructional leaders by modelling effective teaching practices, conducting walkthroughs, and engaging staff in observation and feedback. This activity was, at times, followed by coaching. Such instructional leadership practices were often linked to the school’s explicit improvement agenda.

3.7 From changing practices to changing culture

Changing ways of working requires change in ways of thinking

Positive school culture and staff morale are essential for school improvement, but they can be taken for granted. Changes related to school improvement may not always draw positive responses from all staff, and at times, may reveal underlying issues with school culture. School leaders play a key role in creating a strong, unified school culture. It is important for them to identify and acknowledge the existing ways of thinking (those of their staff, as well as their own), and challenge them before attempting to implement changes to school practices (ways of working). Without challenging and working on the mental models that exist in school communities, the implementation of school improvement initiatives may result in compliance rather than genuine commitment by staff.

The school reviews from 2015 to 2018 provided extensive evidence of schools changing their ways of working, including developing whole-school approaches to better address student learning needs. Although school reviews do not explore the process of change in depth, other SIU research conducted in 2018 identified the pre-existing values and mental models of school leaders and teachers as significant determinants of success in school improvement. These models often needed to be challenged and changed to make space for new ways of thinking that provide the basis for new ways of working.

3.8 Future direction for school improvement in Queensland

Evidence from research and literature has shown school improvement to be a very complex phenomenon, attesting to the challenges school leaders face during their improvement endeavours. At the same time, data from Queensland state school reviews over the last four years have shown that successful school improvement comes down to the simultaneous, coordinated and timely application of three levers: planning, data and capability. By focusing on these three levers over the past four years, many Queensland state schools have made significant progress in their school improvement journeys.

These three levers are reflected in three domains of the NSIT: an explicit improvement agenda, analysis and discussion of data, and an expert teaching team. An analysis of key improvement strategies (recommendations) received by schools reviewed in 2018 demonstrates that three areas related to these domains (strategic leadership, staff capability and data processes) are among the top five areas recommended for improvement (see Figure 3.3 below), along with curriculum and pedagogy.

Figure 3.3: Key areas recommended for improvement in review reports, 2018

*Data do not include one new school and some self-determined review schools due to the different format of the reports.

Despite significant progress already made in the system within these domains, they remain the focus of future work for Queensland state schools. What has changed since 2015, however, is the type and focus of work identified for improvement.
Below, we unpack the five most frequent suggestions for improvement from the 2018 review reports.

**Strategic leadership and explicit improvement agenda**

Key improvement strategies that included recommendations related to strategic leadership and explicit improvement agenda were received by 77 per cent of schools. The key improvement strategies related only to the explicit improvement agenda were provided to around 70 per cent of review schools. The most common three aspects of further focus in this area are:

- refining or unpacking the explicit improvement agenda
- monitoring and evaluating the explicit improvement agenda
- bringing more alignment between the explicit improvement agenda and other school processes or the use of resources.

Refining a school improvement agenda requires schools to bring greater precision to the process of planning school improvement, including:

- explicitly defining clear targets, timelines, responsibilities and success criteria
- clarifying the expectations and accountabilities of all staff in supporting students to achieve the desired outcomes
- working with teachers to define the agreed non-negotiable practices relating to the explicit improvement agenda, and unpacking what they look like in their classroom
- developing a deep understanding of the agreed changes.

This is to be achieved through the collaboration of school leaders with the school community.

Schools can also benefit by placing a greater focus on regularly monitoring progress towards established targets and measuring the effectiveness of programs and initiatives aligned to priority areas. Finally, more work will need to be done to ensure the alignment between:

- the current explicit improvement agenda and other strategic documents, such as the annual implementation plan
- instructional practices (including modelling, coaching, observation and feedback) and the school’s explicit improvement agenda
- improvement priorities and professional learning opportunities offered to staff
- performance management processes and the school’s explicit improvement agenda
- the school’s pedagogical framework and the priorities defined in the explicit improvement agenda.

Focusing on alignment will help drive school improvement and ensure the consistency of implemented practices across the school.

**Staff capability**

Further work in the area of staff capability will require building or enhancing a culture of collaborative planning and professional learning. First, this includes improving some aspects of managing human resources and professional learning, in particular:

- bringing more precision in defining and communicating staff roles and responsibilities, and aligning them with school priorities
- collaboratively developing and implementing a whole-school professional learning plan
- achieving greater alignment of whole-school professional learning plans and staff annual performance development plans with the school’s explicit improvement agenda.

Secondly, there is a need to better align learning opportunities offered to staff with improvement priorities and identified student learning needs. Continuous professional learning to enhance data literacy is needed to engage teachers in critical reflection on student achievement data, and to ensure that staff have the skills, tools and support to further inform differentiation and goal setting for students. Schools also need to continue to develop the instructional leadership capability of their leaders, and deepen teachers’ knowledge of the Australian Curriculum and key school pedagogies.

Finally, more intentional collaboration may enhance the professional learning of school staff. This can be achieved by:

- implementing consistent, whole-school instructional leadership practices, and providing all teachers with the opportunity to be involved in peer observation and feedback, in order to build staff capability and confidence to make decisions about the improvement of teaching practice
- developing collaborative learning structures, such as PLCs
- developing networks and professional relationships beyond the school to share and enhance staff expertise.

Collaboration should not be regarded as a professional learning activity, but rather as a way of working. While professional collaboration ‘delineates how people work together in a profession’, collaborative professionalism means collective work ‘is embedded in the culture and life of the school’ (Hargreaves & O’Connor 2018, pp. 4–5).
Data processes
A greater focus on enhancing the data interrogation and conversations in which school leaders and teachers participate will require:

- providing additional time for teachers and school leaders to collaboratively discuss school-based achievement data
- building more rigour and precision into data discussions
- making data conversations systematic, formal and consistent across the school
- building a culture of self-evaluation and reflection.

Data discussions need to align with current school improvement priorities. Enhancing collaborative data conversations is essential to further improve the use of data to generate strategies for continuous improvement of student outcomes, monitor progress over time, and inform teaching and case management.

Pedagogy
Ensuring that agreed pedagogical approaches are implemented consistently across all classrooms means that school leaders and teachers will collaborate in:

- developing or refining whole-school pedagogical practices that align with the explicit improvement agenda
- reviewing and refining a whole-school pedagogical framework that reflects agreed teaching practices
- aligning the pedagogical framework with the school's curriculum and improvement agenda
- developing a shared understanding of the school's pedagogical framework and clarifying expectations for its implementation in the classroom
- supporting the implementation of pedagogy through a whole-school model of observation, coaching and feedback
- developing processes to monitor and quality assure the effective implementation of the school's pedagogy.

Curriculum
Further work to ensure that enacted curriculum programs and assessment maintain strong alignment with the Australian Curriculum will require greater focus on:

- incorporating the Australian Curriculum general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities into the whole-school curriculum planning process
- developing and adapting curriculum units that are locally contextualised and cover Australian Curriculum content descriptions and achievement standards
- strengthening the alignment of assessment tasks with the Australian Curriculum.

It is also necessary to develop and consistently implement quality assurance processes to ensure that the intent and rigour of the Australian Curriculum are enacted in every classroom. Some schools may need to review or develop a whole-school curriculum plan, aligned with the Australian Curriculum, that precisely describes what and when teachers should teach and students should learn across all learning areas and years of schooling.

Greater emphasis is needed on collaborative curriculum planning practices to enhance the consistent and rigorous implementation of the Australian Curriculum across a school. Strengthening collaborative processes, including moderation, will also help to build consistency and confidence in teacher judgement regarding levels of achievement and the Australian Curriculum achievement standards.

Finally, greater precision in unpacking learning intentions and success criteria aligned with curriculum units will help to support students to become assessment literate learners.

To summarise, schools need to continue to focus on the areas of strategic leadership and explicit improvement agenda, staff capability, and data processes in order to provide a solid foundation for the key school practices related to pedagogy and curriculum. After achieving consistent implementation of pedagogy and curriculum, schools can further move to collaboratively developing or refining a whole-school approach to differentiation.

Across each of the discussed areas, greater collaboration, precision and alignment will contribute to further improvements in student learning in Queensland state schools.
Appendix A  Research methods

The 2018 SIU annual report uses both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data used include:

- system data, such as school counts, student enrolment and state school performance indicators
- OneSchool data regarding characteristics of review schools
- SIU data regarding school reviews, training activities and performance
- demographic data describing case study schools, including: enrolment, teacher numbers, year levels and the school’s index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA)
- SOS and NAPLAN data in some case studies
- school counts based on review report data, which reflect the proportion of schools in which a given theme was identified.

Most of the qualitative data describing practices in Queensland state schools were extracted from 2018 school review reports. The school case studies, used to illustrate themes discussed in Chapter 2, were based on data collected through semi-structured interviews (conducted during school visits or via phone) or by email, and augmented by relevant documentation.

The population of review schools used for different datasets throughout the report may vary slightly due to:

- O&EECs, support units or associated units not being included in departmental school data
- a small number of self-determined reviews not being included in the analysis due to the different format of their review reports.

Each review report is usually between 6000 and 7000 words in length, and combines system- and school-level data and the results of fieldwork conducted by a review team. The reports include information from documentation, observations and interviews with school leaders, staff, parents, students and other school community members. Both methodological triangulation (variety of methods to gather data) and investigator triangulation (multiple investigators within a review team) were used to ensure the validity of the data gathered.

Data from school review reports were collated and analysed using software for qualitative research (NVivo 12). Coding — the initial stage of data analysis — involved the close examination of each clause, sentence or paragraph in the review reports, in order to identify the most appropriate concept to describe the meaning within the datum. In this way, the data were fractured into usable units of information. The code assigned was that which best represented each piece of information (Bryant & Charmaz 2010; Creswell 2003). The coding was quality assured through periodic review and rigorous discussion of discrepancies by the SIU research team.

The coding framework (see levels 1 and 2 in Table A.1 below) was created using both inductive and deductive approaches. Firstly, the level-one codes of leadership, teaching, learning, learning environments and partnerships were drawn deductively from the salient literature on school improvement. These topics reflect the structure developed by Masters (2012, pp. 27–28), which informs the NSIT and is used as the basis for school reviews. Secondly, sub-level codes (up to four levels) were developed inductively from school review reports data. The sub-level framework evolved as coding progressed. Clear definitions for codes, once established, were continually refined to help quality assure the coding process. The key improvement strategies formulated for schools by the SIU review teams were coded separately to allow quantification to better inform suggestions for further improvement for all review schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Key improvement strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The explicit improvement agenda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading people</td>
<td>School funding and budgets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>High expectations of students</td>
<td>Additional support – students with special needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student empowerment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning resources</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Infrastructure and facilities</td>
<td>Learning resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School culture</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Businesses</td>
<td>Community organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural groups</td>
<td>Early childhood education centres</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government agencies</td>
<td>Individual community members/groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P&amp;C’s and school councils</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and families</td>
<td>Other organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary organisations</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table A.1: Level 1 and 2 codes for review reports, 2018
The data are subject to a number of limitations. The data in review reports were not collected primarily for the purpose of the annual report, using standardised, structured interview protocols. Also, the data used in this report are only a snapshot of school practices identified at a single point in time within the year (different for each school depending on their review dates). These data cannot reflect the full spectrum of phenomena related to school improvement. As schools are complex and dynamic organisations, the validity of some early findings may decrease over time, and the comparisons between schools (even those representing similar contexts) may not be meaningful. Finally, due to the large volume of data collected and the complexity of schools and contexts, this report provides mostly high-level insights. The need for more in-depth, contextualised analysis has been partially addressed by showcasing selected school practices as case studies.

Despite these limitations, review reports provide rich evidence of current school practice, which can be used to inform the policy and practice of the department’s central and regional offices, and support continuous improvement and learning in Queensland schools.

Appendix B  School Improvement Unit school types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban primary</td>
<td>Any primary school in North Coast, Metropolitan, South East regions, plus Darling Downs South West, Central Queensland, North Queensland, Far North Queensland regions if Education Queensland zone is metro or provincial, but excluding those with 1000 or more student enrolments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very large, urban primary</td>
<td>Any primary school with 1000 or more student enrolments in North Coast, Metropolitan, South East regions, plus Darling Downs South West, Central Queensland, North Queensland, Far North Queensland regions if Education Queensland zone is metro or provincial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural primary</td>
<td>Any primary school in Darling Downs South West, Central Queensland, North Queensland, Far North Queensland regions, except where Education Queensland zone is metro or provincial, but excluding schools with 50 or fewer students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very small, rural primary</td>
<td>Any primary school with 50 or fewer students, in Darling Downs South West, Central Queensland, North Queensland, Far North Queensland regions, except where Education Queensland zone is metro or provincial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban secondary</td>
<td>Any secondary school in North Coast, Metropolitan, South East regions, plus Darling Downs South West, Central Queensland, North Queensland, Far North Queensland regions if Education Queensland zone is metro or provincial, but excluding those with 1000 or more student enrolments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very large, urban secondary</td>
<td>Any secondary school with 1000 or more student enrolments in North Coast, Metropolitan, South East regions, plus Darling Downs South West, Central Queensland, North Queensland, Far North Queensland regions if Education Queensland zone is metro or provincial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural secondary</td>
<td>Any secondary school in Darling Downs South West, Central Queensland, North Queensland, Far North Queensland regions, except where Education Queensland zone is metro or provincial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>Any combined primary/secondary school, except when remote, plus schools of distance education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>Any school, except special schools and outdoor and environmental education centres, defined as remote under Education Queensland zones definition, regardless of sector or student enrolment number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special</td>
<td>Any special school, regardless of location or student enrolment number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor and environmental education centres</td>
<td>Any outdoor and environmental education centre, regardless of location or student enrolment number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific purpose</td>
<td>Schools for students with specific needs and include schools catering to students in hospital, schools offering behavioural support programs to primary students and schools catering to students in mental health facilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References

ACER—see Australian Council for Educational Research.

AISNSW—see Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales.


DET—see Department of Education and Training.

DoE—see Department of Education.


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QCAA—see Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority.


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SIU—see School Improvement Unit.


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