

## CASE STUDY

School Improvement Unit  
Research Centre  
Case study 2

School improvement is a continuous and highly contextualised process, with every Queensland state school at different stages of their improvement journey. The School Improvement Unit produces case studies to showcase schools that are making significant gains in their journey, and identify factors that contributed to their success.



# Leading with curriculum at Manly State School

For the principal of Manly State School, the school's improvement journey is like turning the layers of a rubik's cube. Emphasising the interconnectedness of the nine domains of the *National School Improvement Tool*, he reflects: 'You can't do one without the other [and] you never just drop one and finish one.' At Manly, it all goes together, with particular attention given to one piece of the cube in order to lead the others. Systematic curriculum delivery is the school's explicit focus for improvement, with the school working across all domains to achieve the next lift in student outcomes.

## Background

### Aligning curriculum, pedagogy and capability building

Located close to Moreton Bay, Manly State School's history dates back to 1910. With a reputation for academic success, it has become a school of choice and is held in high regard in the local community.

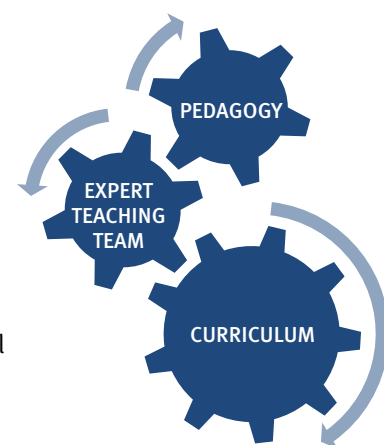
Manly State School is very proud of its teaching team. The teachers, the principal says, are 'the fabric' of the school. They are recognised in the community for caring for their students and for each other.

In recent years, Manly State School has placed a strong and continuous focus on the domains at the base of the [School Improvement Hierarchy](#). Seeking to build a strong culture and a clear understanding of the school, the leadership team reviewed the school's data. The principal also gathered anecdotal information through informal chats — walking the footpath before and after school and speaking with parents and members of the community to identify underlying perceptions of Manly State School. After speaking with members of the community, he tested

ideas with the rest of the leadership team. Staff identified 'three pluses and a wish' to share what they were proud of and where the school could head in the future.

**“ You need to acknowledge what's done well. You need to respect the past. ”** *Principal*

Drawing on this information, the school identified its next goals within the following domains: a systematic curriculum, a whole-school pedagogy and an expert teaching team. Since 2017, the school has made significant gains by aligning practices associated with these three domains of the School Improvement Hierarchy.



## Curriculum

**“We needed to pick one aspect to lead ... and then the other pieces will come after that.”**

Curriculum is the leading piece of work at Manly, with the school implementing a whole-school curriculum plan aligned with the Australian Curriculum. To deliver its curriculum systematically, the school has implemented consistent planning processes.

Focusing on English, Manly State School has developed a suite of curriculum planning documents, detailing what teachers are expected to teach.

The school’s curriculum resources are stored on EdStudio on the department’s Learning Place as a central repository for staff. EdStudio has become the ‘go to’ or ‘point of truth’ around ‘what is curriculum’ at Manly State School. As the repository is accessible at all times and from any device, teachers can plan their classes from home or at school. The whole-school curriculum and assessment plan can be found on EdStudio, and each term teachers can access year level overviews for each subject, work units, assessment tasks, exemplars and guides to making judgements for their year level. For English units, there are collections of spelling words and phonics to be covered each week. The school has also developed scope and sequences in English for each of the year levels to ensure consistency across the school. A data plan indicates the formative, summative and diagnostic assessment for each term.

The guides to making judgements are aligned with the achievement standards of the Australian Curriculum. From the outset, the school decided that they would be ‘locked in’ as an agreed standard. Teaching staff collaboratively developed A, B and C standard exemplars across the year levels for each English unit by collecting samples of students’ work. These exemplars include all of the



‘teachables’ —what teachers need to teach —identified through unit planning. All of the language features in the exemplars are highlighted so they are easy for teachers to use. Collectively, these resources and processes help teachers to deliver a consistent curriculum for all students. The school will continue to develop exemplars for other subjects.

**“Coming back to the rubik’s cube ... You can always have a deeper understanding, but we [have] got curriculum to a point now where we can plan curriculum and we can do it well.”** Principal

## Pedagogy

**“After curriculum, your very next move is the ‘how’ — You’ve got to continuously build collective expertise and practice in teacher pedagogy.”**

To ensure curriculum delivery is consistent, Manly State School has chosen explicit instruction as the agreed school-wide pedagogy for teaching and learning.

To enable teachers to collaboratively develop whole-school pedagogies, the school has established professional learning community (PLC) reference teams in literacy, humanities and social sciences (HASS) and bump it up walls. The groups use a cycle of inquiry to identify best practice in PLC areas. Individual members look in to different areas, bringing a research review back to the group to develop a recommendation together. In

this way, the recommendation is owned by the entire PLC team. PLC members trial recommended practices in their own classrooms with a view to extending them across the school. Once a proposal has been implemented for sufficient time, the group evaluates the impact of the trialled strategies. The school recently collected data to evaluate its practices in teaching vocabulary, selecting classes and pre- and post-testing vocabulary to measure impact.

The PLC reference teams give teachers an opportunity to share leadership and decision making regarding pedagogy. Teachers within each group can elect to lead particular PLC areas, including key learning areas identified in the [P–10 Literacy continuum](#): vocabulary, handwriting, phonics, comprehension, concepts about print, and oral language.

A number of instructional routines have been developed at Manly to support consistent teaching across the school. The literacy reference group has produced routines in the areas of handwriting, spelling,



comprehension and vocabulary, and there are plans to develop a series of instructional routines in mathematics.

As with the curriculum, EdStudio is a ‘one stop shop’ for storing the school’s expected pedagogies, with the school’s pedagogical framework, instructional routines, videos and other resources available for staff.

## An expert teaching team

**“In conjunction with our whole-school curriculum and pedagogy, we’re building an expert teaching team.”**

Manly State School made a deliberate decision that alongside its curriculum and pedagogy, it would continue to develop its expert teaching team.

In 2016, the school used its Investing for Success funds to release teachers from each year level for a day, and invited an external expert to work with them on the Australian Curriculum. Starting with English, they unpacked the achievement standards, key verbs and the guides to making judgements.

While the curriculum at Manly is led by one of the deputy principals, responsibility for implementation sits with a head of curriculum (HOC). Teachers continue to be released in year levels for half a day each term to collaboratively plan units of work with the HOC. This is an opportunity for staff to develop their skills in reviewing units of work and making adjustments to address student needs.

Staff meetings are also used to support and deepen staff knowledge and understanding of the Australian Curriculum. The meetings operate across a three-week cycle: year-level meetings, reference team meetings and



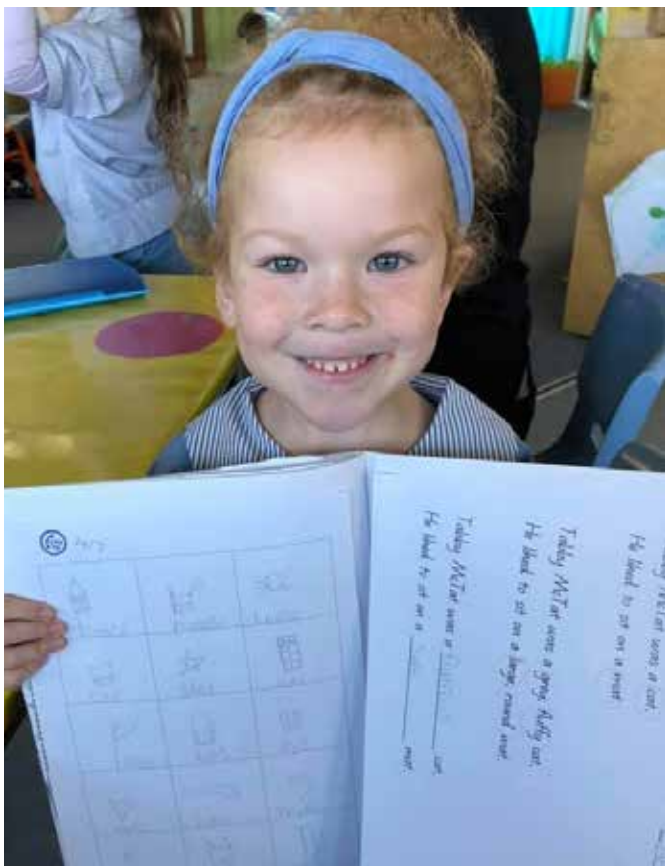
general staff meetings. At the reference team meetings, staff in the PLCs share findings and professional learning with the rest of the staff and seek feedback. The curriculum is also revisited on staff professional development days.



**“Everyone’s on the same page. We continue to make sure that everyone is clear on the achievement standards and content descriptions. We go through the guides to making judgements with all staff. We look at our student work samples and exemplars.”** Head of Curriculum

The school's instructional routines are shared with every teacher across all year levels through professional development, with teachers and the leadership team working together to discuss the opening, body and closing of a lesson, and how to check for understanding. The routines are revisited every staff professional development day. PLC leaders have also produced videos of classroom teachers delivering lessons as a model for other teaching staff.

Members of the leadership team conduct observations and walkthroughs each term to give teachers feedback on their practice. Observation checklists have been developed by staff as a group, resulting in shared ownership and a common language and vision. As the



principal says: ‘At Manly, we have set clear expectations and examples for explicit instruction and instructional routines.’ More recently, teachers have started to observe each other’s practice to further build their capability. This will continue into 2020.

In building its expert teaching team, the school draws upon a pedagogy coach who is available one day a week to work with teachers. Coaching is voluntary and provides an opportunity for teachers to seek guidance on their practice, particularly in explicit instruction. The principal meets with the coach every two weeks to keep informed about how pedagogy is progressing in the classroom. As the principal says, ‘in order to be aware of all the pieces of the cube, you need to be regularly checking in.’

## Outcomes

Manly State School is lining up the pieces of its rubik’s cube, with significant progress made in aligning curriculum, pedagogy and staff capability building.

For the principal, the overarching achievement at Manly is that students and staff enjoy coming to school: ‘There’s more laughter in the school. It’s a happy school.’ There has also been an increase in positive behaviour.

There has been an overall lift in student performance at the school over the past three years. This is reflected in the school’s A to E data, with the principal noting that most students are achieving a C or higher. Since 2016, the percentage of students achieving an A or a B has lifted in both English and mathematics. Students are starting to own their learning, using bump it up walls to self-assess and identify their next goals. The percentage of students in the upper two bands of NAPLAN has increased since 2017.

Staff at Manly are engaged and continuously building their capability, with some of them developing skills to move into leadership positions at other schools.

Manly State School has a strong school community. According to the 2019 School Opinion Survey, almost all parents (95 per cent) agreed that the school encourages them to participate in school activities.

**“To have everyone taking a consistent approach to curriculum planning and pedagogy across the year levels and across the school and talking the same language, that has a powerful impact.”** Head of Curriculum

## Success factors

- Clear alignment between curriculum, pedagogy and staff capability building
- A whole-school curriculum plan aligned with the Australian Curriculum
- Shared understanding among all staff of the school's expected pedagogies
- Easy access to comprehensive curriculum and teaching resources on EdStudio
- Continuous professional learning opportunities for staff to deepen understanding and share practice in curriculum planning, assessment and pedagogy
- A focus on collaborative professional learning and decision making

## Next steps

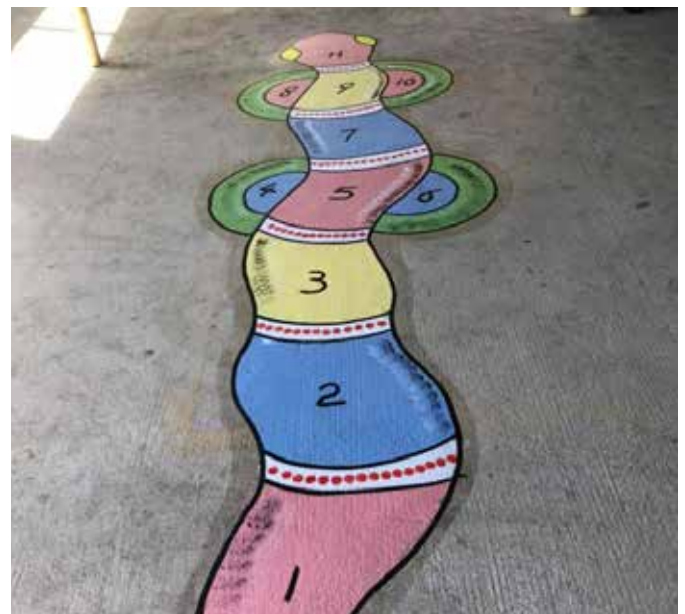
**“As an instructional leader, you’ve got to keep asking yourself ... what will give me the biggest lift in student outcomes?”**

Manly State School is constantly looking for ways to achieve another lift in school improvement. Continuing to lead curriculum, the school's next focus will be achieving consistency in curriculum and pedagogy in the area of writing, supported by professional learning.

The school will continue to use explicit instruction, including instructional routines, but will also introduce authentic learning — an inquiry-based approach — to explore writing. A model of authentic learning is currently being developed and will be led by the school's science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) teacher. Manly will also place greater focus on differentiation. Teachers will use a placemat developed in 2019 by one of the PLC teams.

To support its new focus within curriculum and pedagogy, Manly will further develop its expert teaching team by expanding coaching opportunities.

Like aligning the colours on a rubik's cube, curriculum, pedagogy and capability building are continually adjusted so all the pieces come together at Manly State School.



**“You can't just go 'I'm doing curriculum' ... the curriculum is our lead, but whilst we're developing our curriculum expertise, we're building our expert teaching team [and] pedagogical practice ... We're also collecting data and we're working on culture. So, you need to be working in all squares, but you need to be very clear as a leader of where your focus is at all times.”**

Principal

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