

Insights to inform school practice

School Improvement Unit
Research Centre
Insights paper 2
August 2019



Developing teaching expertise and building capability for student success

In Queensland, school reviews provide powerful insights into school practice and contribute to learnings across the system. Using the nine domains of the *National School Improvement Tool (NSIT)*, reviews help schools to identify opportunities and next steps to improve school and student outcomes.

After an explicit improvement agenda (see *Insights paper 1*), staff capability is the area most often identified for improvement in the 2019 school reviews.

This paper presents insights into teaching expertise and capability building based on an analysis of key improvement strategies from 184 reviews conducted in Queensland state schools in Semester 1, 2019.

Key findings from school reviews

After a review, each school receives a number of key improvement strategies or recommendations that suggest next steps in their improvement journey.

The majority of review schools (86 per cent) received key improvement strategies related to staff capability.

What makes an expert teaching team?

According to the NSIT, developing an expert teaching team involves 'a school-wide, shared responsibility for student learning and success, and the development of a culture of continuous professional improvement that includes classroom-based learning, mentoring and coaching arrangements'.

(ACER 2012, p. 10)



In almost 90 per cent of school review reports, staff capability development is a key improvement strategy.

School reviews in Semester 1 2019 – total 184

School types			
P-6	Secondary	P-9/10/12	Other*
137	29	12	6

Review types			
Full school	Priority support	Self-determined	Additional priority support
155	26	2	1

* Includes three special schools, a specific purpose school, a school of distance education and a TAFE

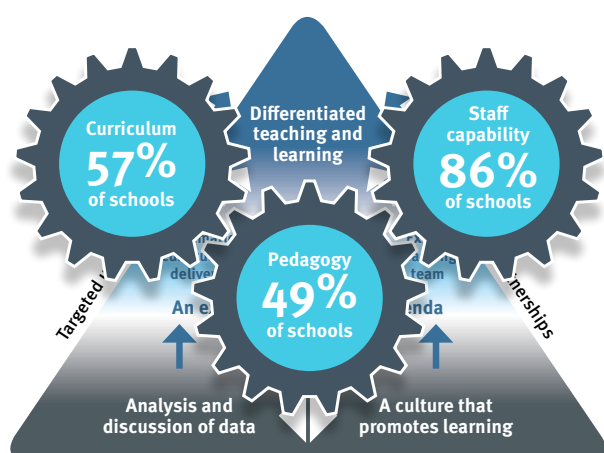
The engine room for school improvement: curriculum, pedagogy and an expert teaching team

Curriculum, pedagogy and an expert teaching team are the three 'powerhouse' domains of the NSIT. Positioned in the centre of the [School Improvement Hierarchy](#), they are key drivers of quality teaching and learning.

More than three-quarters of schools (77 per cent) received key recommendations in at least two of the three areas of curriculum, pedagogy and expert teaching team. The interrelationship between the three domains highlights the importance of precise, aligned and collaborative approaches to building teacher expertise in curriculum and pedagogy.

More than half the schools were advised to focus on aspects of curriculum, while nearly 50 per cent of schools received suggestions regarding pedagogical practice.

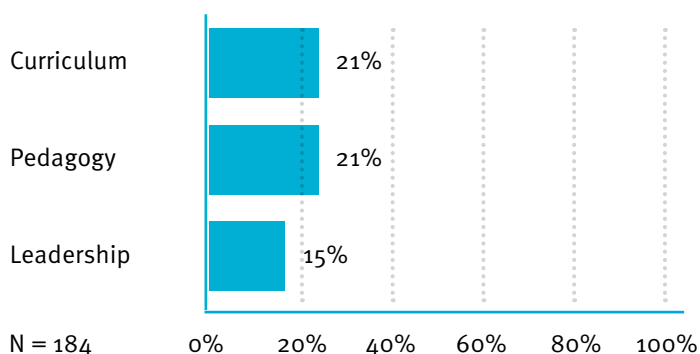
Figure 1: School Improvement Hierarchy



Areas for professional learning

In relation to staff capability, nearly half of schools (46 per cent) were advised to focus on knowledge and skills in curriculum, leadership or pedagogy.

Figure 2: Key improvement strategies on areas for professional learning, Semester 1, 2019

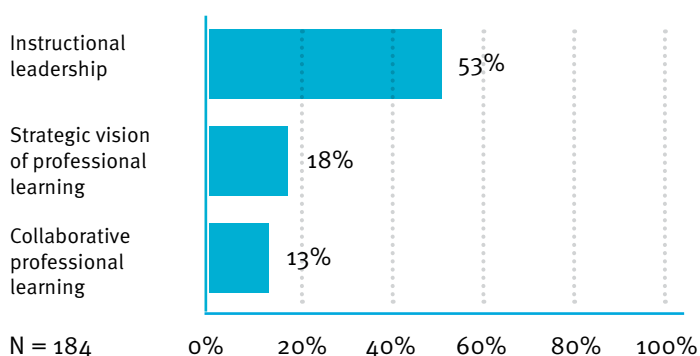


Recommendations about curriculum generally referred to developing teachers' knowledge and skills in unpacking the learning areas of the Australian Curriculum. Key improvement strategies on leadership skills included the ability to conduct structured walkthroughs in order to quality assure practice and effectively implement the school's explicit improvement agenda. Recommendations in pedagogy referred to building understanding of agreed teaching practices, differentiating for the full and diverse range of learners, and empowering students in their learning journeys.

How schools can build staff capability

The 2019 school reviews often made recommendations on how to build staff capability. These included strategies that schools can use to develop and align key pieces of teaching and learning. The main recommendations were about instructional leadership, a strategic vision of professional learning, and collaborative professional learning.

Figure 3: Key improvement strategies on developing staff capability, Semester 1, 2019



Instructional leadership

The most common recommendation (53 per cent) was about learning from colleagues to develop teaching and leadership skills. Schools were advised to use observation, feedback and coaching cycles to develop teaching expertise, and provide collegial networking, mentoring and personal coaching for school leaders. The practices were often part of a collegial engagement framework. Recommendations referred to:

- implementing consistent, whole-school teaching practices that support the delivery of the Australian Curriculum and the school's pedagogical framework
- monitoring and evaluating the implementation of classroom-embedded professional learning aligned with the explicit improvement agenda
- building distributed leadership, a culture of continuous professional improvement and a high-performing collegial team.

Strategic vision for professional learning

Nearly a fifth of schools (18 per cent) were advised to develop and implement plans or frameworks to build staff capability. The purpose of these documents is to outline a school's vision or approach to professional learning, and detail capability strategies that align the professional growth of staff and school improvement objectives.

Recommendations included:

- developing a differentiated range of professional learning opportunities that address the needs of individual staff and harness expertise within and beyond the school
- aligning whole-school collegial engagement policies to the explicit improvement agenda
- developing an annual professional learning plan that identifies capability-building activities for all staff, and aligns to the annual implementation plan and annual performance development plans.

Collaborative professional learning

A number of schools (13 per cent) received key improvement strategies on building staff capability through collaboration. Working in professional learning teams, co-planning, co-teaching and co-assessing were indicated as opportunities to develop a collegial culture of learning, and enhance teachers' knowledge of the Australian Curriculum and their understanding of whole-school expectations.

Recommendations included:

- strengthening the culture of collaboration and teamwork across cohorts of teachers
- promoting regular conversations within teaching teams that generate rigorous discussions on student performance
- participating in professional learning networks beyond the school to enable learning from a broad range of colleagues.



To generate discussion ...

- How does our school foster a culture of continuous professional improvement?
- What opportunities for differentiated support and professional learning are provided for all staff in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy?
- What collegial opportunities exist at our school to collectively share and build teaching expertise, including classroom-based learning, mentoring and coaching arrangements?
- What formal processes support professional learning aligned to individual, cohort/faculty and whole-school priorities?
- What opportunities support collaborative planning and professional learning with other schools and beyond?
- How does our school assess professional learning and maximise the impact of investment in staff capability to improve student outcomes?

Practical considerations for building capability and an expert teaching team

1. Fostering leaders of learning through strong and distributed instructional leadership

- School leaders act as instructional leaders and participate in professional learning activities, learning alongside teachers.
- The culture of promoting learning and sharing is fostered across the school, with the expertise of staff used to support the learning of colleagues.
- School leaders regularly monitor the implementation of teaching and learning processes in the school to ensure these strategies are embedded into every teacher's practice.
- A whole-school professional development plan is enacted and is closely aligned to the school's explicit improvement agenda and other curriculum priorities. This plan details a broad range of learning experiences for all staff, including opportunities to engage in coaching and mentoring, observation and feedback, online learning, working in collegial teams, training experiences and professional reading.
- All staff have annual performance development plans that are aligned to the school's priorities and identified areas of professional growth. These plans are rigorously actioned and regularly monitored.

2. Differentiated professional learning for all staff

- School leaders place a high priority on the ongoing professional learning of all staff, including a rigorous induction program.
- A school-wide, self-reflective culture is focused on improving classroom teaching and learning for the diverse range of students.
- Staff take personal responsibility for their own learning and regularly engage in school-based professional learning opportunities.
- Teaching staff, teacher aides and other paraprofessionals are considered and supported to be experts in the fields in which they work.
- Structured and differentiated professional learning opportunities for all teachers exist to maintain high levels of pedagogical knowledge and skill, including expert knowledge of evidence-based teaching strategies.

3. Intentional collaboration and authentic partnerships for learning

- Teachers and school leaders take personal and collective responsibility for improving student learning and wellbeing, working together and learning from each other's practices.
- Professional learning teams are valued as a vehicle for the sharing of knowledge relating to curriculum, teaching and learning.
- The sharing and showcasing of best practice are common.
- In team meetings, there is an emphasis on the joint analysis of student work and on teaching strategies for improving student learning.
- School leaders provide time and resourcing for teachers to collaboratively plan, deliver and review the effectiveness of lessons.
- Teachers and school leaders actively participate in professional networks that contribute to their classroom practice and to improving the learning of students.



School snapshot



Case study: differentiated capability building

A primary school in Brisbane is developing a comprehensive approach to capability development. Staff can access a range of professional learning activities and resources that are aligned to annual performance development plans and the improvement areas of reading, positive behaviour for learning and digital technology.

At the centre of the school's approach is a collaboratively developed, differentiated collegial engagement model.

The model is based on teachers' professional needs and has three levels that vary in focus and intensity. For each group of teachers in the various phases of the model, a plan has been developed outlining the level of support and the intended learning goals.

The 'universal' level (most general) involves staff participation in instructional walkthroughs, an inclusion team, collaborative planning, and professional learning on data literacy, inclusive practices and differentiation.

The 'targeted' (middle) level of the model involves informal observations and teacher interviews, as well as working with the school's data literacy coach to master the use of digital technologies as a differentiation tool.

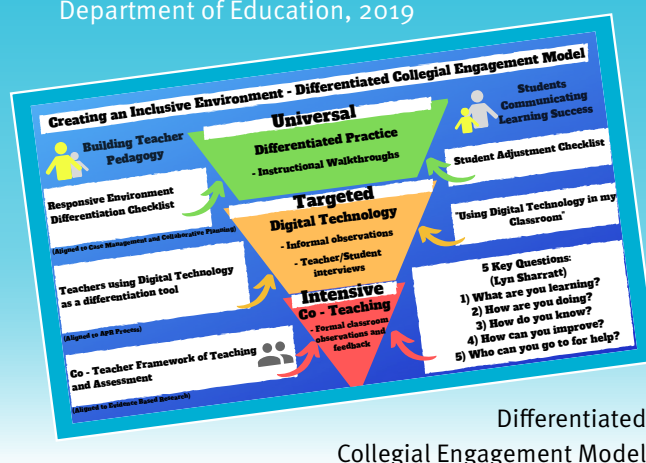
The 'intensive' level of the engagement model involves co-teaching and formal classroom observation and feedback. This includes mentoring teachers to plan and implement co-teaching learning cycles with a focus on embedded

differentiation strategies, and developing a commitment to collaboration and instructional coaching to improve pedagogical practices.

The program is building staff confidence and encouraging a willingness to explore new ideas and share recent discoveries from the classroom.

“How do we create a system in which every student is understood, engaged and successful at school, going on to live a life of choice, not a life of chance?”

Tony Cook, Director-General,
Department of Education, 2019



Differentiated Collegial Engagement Model



For further details, please email the School Improvement Unit at siumb@qed.qld.gov.au.

References and further reading

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) 2012, *National School Improvement Tool*, ACER, Melbourne.

Hargreaves, A & Fullan, M 2012, *Professional capital: transforming teaching in every school*, Teachers College Press, New York.

Hargreaves, A & O'Connor, M 2018, *Collaborative professionalism*, Corwin, Thousand Oaks (available to principals registered for the Leading Learning Collection. Email Inquiries.LIBRARY@qed.qld.gov.au to request access).

Harris, A 2001, 'Building the capacity for school improvement', *School Leadership & Management*, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 261–70.

Robinson, V 2017, 'Capabilities required for leading improvement: challenges for researchers and developers', *2009–2018 ACER Research Conferences*, viewed 22 July 2019, research.acer.edu.au/research_conference/RC2017/28august/2.

Timperley, H 2015, *Professional conversations and improvement-focused feedback: a review of the literature and the impact on practice and student outcomes*, prepared for the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), viewed 15 July 2019, www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/professional-conversations-literature-review-oct-2015.pdf?sfvrsn=fc2ec3c_0.

State Schools Performance

Resources

- [Assessment and Moderation Hub](#)
- [Curriculum into the Classroom](#)
- [Global schools through languages hub](#)
- [Literacy P–12](#)
- [Online coaching modules](#) — reading, writing, science, mathematics
- [P–12 Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework](#)
- [STEM hub for schools](#)
- [Teaching reading in Queensland state schools](#)

Engaging in cycles of inquiry as part of the [School Improvement Model](#) supports educators to identify school-based factors impacting on student achievement and address these through building collective capability.

Underpinning [inquiry](#) is capability building that is connected to student learning needs. Intentional and collaborative inquiry is supported by:

- [strategic conversations](#) that build school capacity to collaboratively determine, implement and evaluate improvement efforts
- [actionable playbooks](#), to focus conversations on specific improvement areas.

To understand the impact of capability-building activities as part of improved student outcomes, consider developing a [chain of evidence](#).

Evidence studies

Intentional collaboration

Improving mathematics outcomes through targeted and differentiated teaching: Nursery Road State Special School Cluster (2016) [summary](#) (588KB) [report](#) (1.4MB)

Stronger alignment

Does implementing Mastery of Learning in Mathematics increase student performance in A–C data? Kin Kora State School (2017) [summary](#) (422KB) [report](#) (1MB)

Greater precision

Targeted and effective pedagogy to improve junior secondary reading: Corinda State High School (2015) [summary](#) (510KB) [report](#) (953KB)



Professional learning

qeli.qld.edu.au/our-programs/

National School Improvement Tool training for principals, school leaders and peer reviewers

qeli.qld.edu.au/deep-learning-lab/

qeli.qld.edu.au/every-child-succeeding-by-design-qeli-conference/

Research spotlight: creating high-performing team cultures for collaboration

Visit qeli.qld.edu.au/creating-high-performing-team-cultures-for-collaboration/

- What drives collective efficacy?
- Workplace gossip or a 'confirmation expedition'?
- 13 questions used by Google to identify its very best leaders
- Team-building exercises: a better approach
- Two things great leaders do when they give feedback



Videos and podcasts

Listen to Andy Hargreaves unpack the key stages to developing authentic collaborative professionalism:

Part 1: The benefits of and the most effective ways to collaborate

www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BZCPnw8rGQ&feature=youtu.be

(1.38 minutes)

Part 2: Where to start

www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2L6c5FJFDI&feature=youtu.be

(1.56 minutes)

Part 3: The role of deliberate design

www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-D5UnfikYQ&feature=youtu.be

(2.08 minutes)

Part 4: The role leaders play

www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4bY_Nof8Ug&feature=youtu.be

(3.12 minutes)

Part 5: The phases of collaboration

www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrsLpiCcJZ4&feature=youtu.be

(2.26 minutes)



If you would like further information or have any questions or feedback, please email the School Improvement Unit at siumb@qed.qld.gov.au.

