

Insights to inform school practice

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School reviews in Queensland provide powerful insights into school practice. With every state school and centre reviewed by the Education Improvement Branch every four years, reviews are an opportunity to consider changes in practice over time and to identify areas for continuous improvement across the system.

Empowering learning through pedagogy

The way teachers engage and empower learners has a significant impact on student achievement. According to Hattie, quality teaching is one of the strongest influences on student learning. It is ‘what teachers know, do, and care about which is very powerful in this learning equation’ (Hattie 2003, p. 2).

Domain eight of the *National School Improvement Tool* is effective pedagogical practices. Located in the engine room of the [School Improvement Hierarchy](#), pedagogy refers to how the curriculum is taught. It encompasses the nature and purpose of effective learning, as well as interactions between teachers, students, the learning environment and learning tasks (Waring & Evans 2014).

This paper shares insights from reviews conducted in Queensland state schools and centres across Terms 1 to 3, 2021. It identifies steps schools can take to establish effective pedagogical practices. In particular, it focuses on having a whole-school approach to pedagogies and strengthening student empowerment. It also highlights the importance of professional learning and how it can be used as a lever to deliver effective pedagogical practices.

How does domain eight of the *National School Improvement Tool* describe effective use of pedagogy?

‘The school principal and other school leaders recognise that highly effective teaching is the key to improving student learning throughout the school. They take a strong leadership role, encouraging the use of research-based teaching practices in all classrooms to ensure that every student is engaged, challenged and learning successfully. All teachers understand and use effective teaching methods — including explicit instruction — to maximise student learning.’

ACER 2012, p. 16

Key findings from school reviews

School reviews in Terms 1, 2 and 3, 2021 (total: 253)

School types			
P–6	Secondary	P–9/10/12	Other*
176	42	20	15

* Comprises ten special schools, four outdoor and environmental education centres and one support unit.



Effective pedagogical practices



► A whole-school approach to pedagogies

Almost two thirds of schools received a recommendation about developing, embedding or reviewing their agreed signature practices.

Recommendations about developing or establishing agreed signature practices emphasised doing this collaboratively. Recommendations suggested:

- researching and implementing evidence-based pedagogical practices and teaching strategies
- aligning practices to support the delivery of the curriculum
- clearly communicating practices across the school
- consistently embedding agreed practices across the school.

The majority of schools received a recommendation to collaboratively review or quality assure their pedagogical practices. Strategies suggested doing this systematically to:

- provide clarity and alignment to whole-school expectations
- establish practices tailored to school context and diverse learning needs
- determine high-yield teaching strategies.

► Student empowerment

Review recommendations suggested embedding pedagogical practices that build student ownership and develop students who are empowered in their own learning. To do this, recommendations largely focused

on developing student understanding through visible learning approaches, including feedback and goal setting.

Improvement strategies that related to goal setting recommended implementing a consistent approach across the school. It was suggested goals be co-developed between student and teacher and aligned to the Australian Curriculum assessment tasks. It was also recommended that goals be used to identify the next steps for student learning.

Many schools received a recommendation about strengthening student feedback. It was suggested the feedback be timely and specific in relation to the curriculum and each individual student's progress and learning goals.

Some schools received specific considerations related to visible learning practices, such as learning walls. Recommendations suggested using visible learning to strengthen feedback and develop student capability in peer and self-feedback practices.

‘The aim is to make students active in the learning process—through actions by teachers and others—until students reach the stage where they become their own teachers, they can seek out optimal ways to learn new material and ideas, they can seek resources to help them in this learning, and when they can set appropriate and more challenging goals.’

Hattie 2009, p. 37

► Professional learning

Building staff capability was the most common recommendation received by schools in relation to pedagogy. These recommendations support the development of a whole-school approach to pedagogies and strategies to build student ownership and empowerment in their learning. Strategies also highlight the importance of providing regular opportunities for staff to build their skills and repertoire of effective pedagogical practices.

Recommendations suggested extending teachers' knowledge in digital pedagogies and further enhancing their capability to determine the most appropriate pedagogies for their school's context.

Improvement strategies suggested building staff capability to use goal setting, feedback and learning walls to develop assessment-literate learners.

The majority of recommendations referenced observation, feedback and coaching practices. Collaborative processes for classroom observation, feedback and coaching practices were identified to:

- provide opportunities for staff to engage in watching others work
- increase staff knowledge and support the implementation of signature pedagogies
- help build consistency and quality assure agreed practices across the school.

To generate discussion ...

- How does our school foster a school-wide approach to developing pedagogical practice?
- What opportunities are provided for individual and collaborative professional learning around contemporary research-based effective pedagogies?
- What powerful visible learning and feedback strategies are provided to maximise student achievement and growth?
- What explicit practices does our school implement to develop students' agency and empowerment in leading their own learning?
- What opportunities are there for all staff to receive regular quality feedback on classroom practice?



Practical considerations for effective pedagogical practices

Foster strong leadership and a whole-school approach to pedagogy

- Maintain a strong leadership focus and sustained commitment to excellence in quality teaching.
- Engage staff collaboratively to review and refine school-wide pedagogical approaches, including establishing any agreed signature practices.
- Consider research-based approaches matched for the school's unique context, draw on student learning and engagement data, and strengthen alignment with the school's explicit improvement priorities.
- Consider processes to quality assure the consistency of signature practices implemented across the school.
- Implement routine processes to monitor and evaluate the impact of professional learning and quality teaching to inform ongoing practices.

Empower learning through quality assessment and feedback

- Focus on high quality, regular and timely student feedback as a priority across all classrooms.
- Consider whole-school and classroom-based practices that make learning visible.
- Foster the development of assessment literacy for staff and students through high quality assessment, moderation, goal setting and feedback practices.
- Consider ways to build staff knowledge and teaching practice in evidence-based high-impact feedback methods.
- Embed explicit, inclusive and age-appropriate strategies to build students' understanding of the learning process and foster empowerment of their learning.

Cultivate a collaborative professional learning culture

- Foster a dynamic and collaborative professional learning culture across the school. Consider opportunities for staff to learn from one another, share classroom strategies and to watch others work.
- Invest in and implement strategies to build staff expertise in agreed signature pedagogies.
- Draw on staff expertise and collaboration to lead a rigorous approach to continuously building knowledge and skills in contemporary research-based effective pedagogies.
- Consider differentiated strategies to support individuals' experience from beginning through to mastery.
- Engage all staff and school leaders in collaboratively reviewing and further developing structured classroom coaching and feedback opportunities across the school.



School snapshot

Case study: Empowering students at Geham State School

At Geham State School, empowering students to become assessment literate learners has contributed significantly to the school's great success. Located 20 kilometres north of Toowoomba, Geham State School started this improvement journey in 2016, following a workshop with Lyn Sharratt. The school adopted Sharratt's *Putting faces on the data*, prompting a review of their existing pedagogies. Since then, Geham State School has worked hard to embed effective pedagogical practices that meet their school's context and student needs.

Student goal setting is a refined process at the school. Each term, learners develop multiple goals aligned to every unit of work. Using student data, individual goals are co-constructed between student and teacher and communicated to parents and carers. Each student has a Goal Getter card on their desk as a visual reminder of what they aim to achieve in English, maths and engagement. The cards enable visiting staff to quickly recognise students' goals during learning and are also used to outline the steps a student needs to take to achieve their goals. At the end of each term, students reflect on their goals and identify areas for further improvement.

Learning walls are thought of as the third teacher in the classroom. At the beginning of each term, teachers and teacher aides work with students to unpack the guides to making judgements. Learning walls are co-constructed around this process, and are used to outline the learning intention for each unit of work. Bump it up walls display the success criteria for each assessment task. All bump it up walls include exemplar work at the A, B and C levels. Students also use the wall to provide constructive feedback to each other in peer conferences. During these sessions, students share their work with one another, and give feedback based on the success criteria.

The use of feedback is well embedded in the school's signature pedagogy – explicit instruction. The principal highlights the importance of providing students with regular feedback at every stage of their learning. Across the school, feedback is timely, targeted, descriptive and aligned to the Australian Curriculum. To ensure consistency and shared understanding among staff, the

school has developed a teaching and learning handbook. The handbook outlines when and how teachers are expected to provide feedback for each unit of work, assessment task or reading group.

Teachers routinely track student progress and check for understanding. Throughout every unit of work, venn diagrams are used to identify whether learners have 'nailed it', are 'nearly there' or a bit 'wobbly'. The diagrams provide a visual easy-to-read indication of where each student is sitting in the teaching and learning cycle. Staff also use a combination of learning continuums, concept maps, mind maps or show me boards to identify student needs and adjust learning goals.

As a result of these practices, students from Prep to Year 6 at Geham State School are able to reflect on their learning and develop next steps for improvement. Students can confidently articulate their achievement level, and what they need to do to advance. Teachers and teacher aides know their students and are invested in every student's success.



For further details about this case study, email the Education Improvement Branch at eibmb@qed.qld.gov.au.

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State Schools Division

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Teach Like a Champion: Systems and Routines Program

This is a four-month, multi-phase program focusing on the techniques champion teachers use to design, install and maintain systems and routines that students can adopt with little to no teacher prompting.

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[Teach Like a Champion: Systems and Routines Program \(online\) \(qeli.qld.edu.au\)](http://qeli.qld.edu.au)

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