Insights to inform school practice

School Improvement Unit
Research Centre
Insights paper 4
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School reviews in Queensland provide powerful insights into school practice. With every state school and centre reviewed by the School Improvement Unit every four years, reviews are an opportunity to consider changes in practice over time and to identify areas for continuous improvement across the system.

Maximising our impact

In making student learning 'visible', John Hattie highlights the importance of knowing 'on a regular basis, the nature and magnitude of your impact' (Hattie 2012, vii). This involves using evidence to measure the effects of school practice on student outcomes and making adjustments for further improvement.

As part of Queensland's School Improvement Model, the 'review' phase of the inquiry cycle is about identifying and measuring impact to inform future planning. This phase does not necessarily mark the end of an inquiry cycle and questions about impact should not be asked only at this stage. The first steps to maximising impact are to develop a shared vision of what successful outcomes will look like, identifying the staff capability that supports this vision, and measures to monitor progress.

This paper presents the top five areas identified for improvement from the 360 school reviews conducted in 2019. The findings provide insights to inform school and system planning in 2020, including ways to understand the impact we have on student learning.

> " *My role, as a teacher, is to evaluate the effect I have on my students.* "
> (Hattie 2012, p. 19)

What does the *National School Improvement Tool* say?

'The ultimate goal of school improvement is to improve outcomes for students, including levels of achievement and wellbeing. For this reason, direct measures of student outcomes are essential to all school improvement efforts.'
(ACER 2012, p. 1)

Developed in collaboration with State Schools Performance and QELi

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School reviews in 2019 (total: 360)

School types			
P–6	Secondary	P–9/10/12	Other*
246	54	33	27

Review types		
Full school	Priority support	Self-determined
315	34	11

* Includes 13 special schools, eight outdoor and environmental education centres, two schools of distance education, one community school, one sport education centre, a specific purpose school and a TAFE.
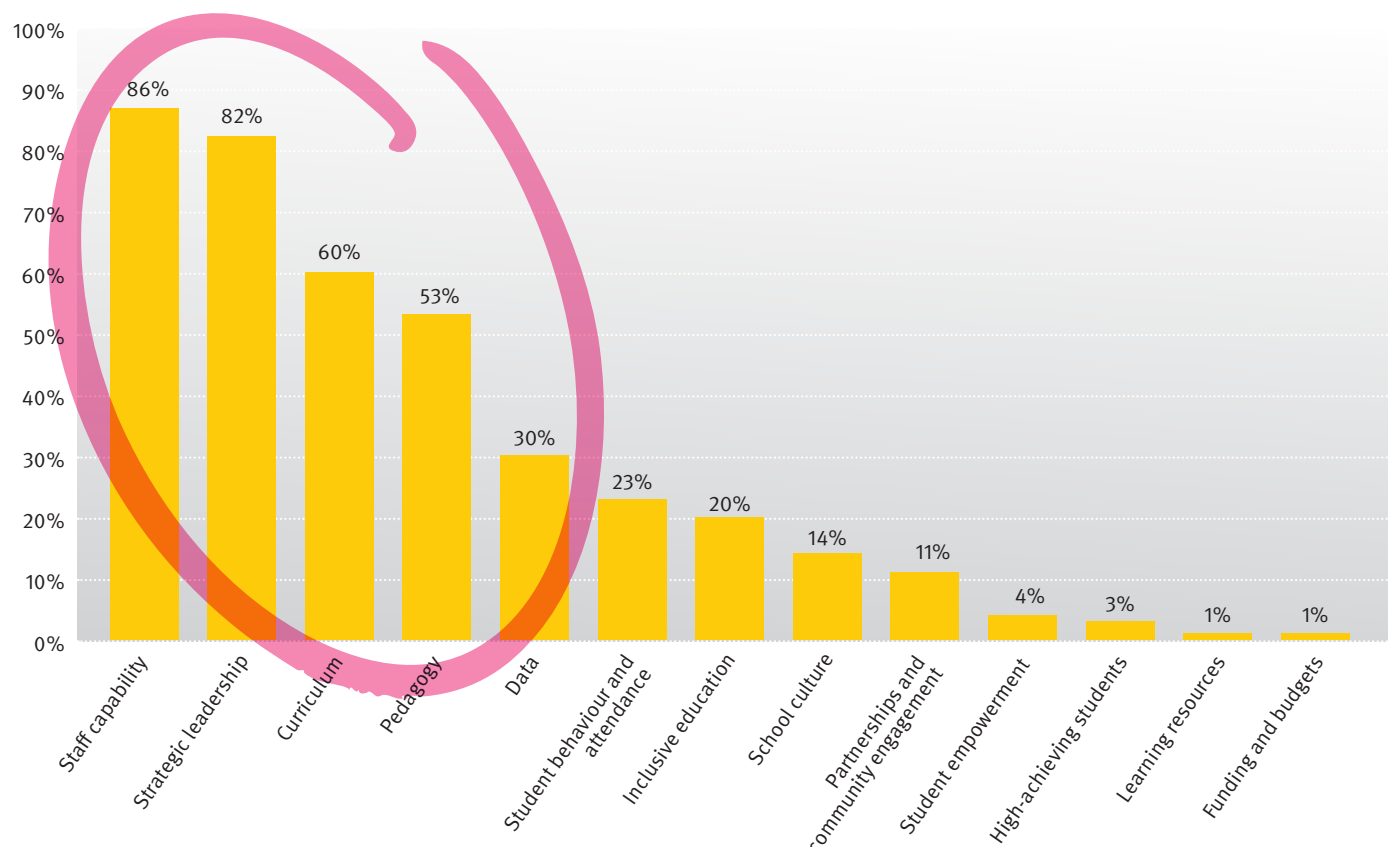
The top five recommendations in 2019

The top five key improvement strategies identified in the 2019 reviews related to the following themes:

- Staff capability (see Insights paper 2)
- Strategic leadership (see Insights paper 1)
- Curriculum
- Pedagogy (see Insights paper 3)
- Data.

These priority areas suggest next steps that schools can consider in 2020 to progress their improvement journeys.

Figure 1: Key areas recommended for improvement in 2019 — percentage of review schools

Note: N=357. Due to their unique format, three review reports were not included in the analysis.

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Unpacking the top five recommendations

Building staff capability

The top area for improvement in 2019 (86 per cent of schools) was building staff capability. A common improvement strategy was to provide staff with a differentiated range of professional learning opportunities, with a particular focus on collaborating with colleagues to share, quality assure and reflect on practice. The recommendations frequently referred to aligning professional learning with the school's improvement priorities. In particular, the next steps were to:

- develop, review or consolidate a whole-school collegial engagement framework or professional learning plan that includes regular opportunities for staff to participate in classroom-based learning, such as modelling, mentoring, and observation, coaching and feedback cycles

- provide further opportunities for staff to build their capability in:

  - delivering agreed whole-school pedagogies, and differentiating practice to cater for all learners, including high-achieving students

  - implementing all learning areas of the Australian Curriculum by focusing on the achievement standards and ensuring that the general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities are embedded in teaching and learning

  - analysing and using data to inform classroom practice, so that teachers can identify gaps in student learning, establish starting points and next steps for teaching, tailor their teaching to cater for individual learning needs, and monitor progress

- implement or enhance instructional leadership and peer instructional practices to develop shared understanding, and quality assure and align teaching practices.

Strategic leadership

A majority of review reports (82 per cent) made recommendations about strategic leadership. Most of these were about implementing the school's explicit improvement agenda (EIA). The most common improvement recommendations were about: refining the EIA, aligning roles and responsibilities, and monitoring its implementation. All three recommendations referred to mechanisms that enable staff to measure and evaluate their actions: establishing accountabilities, timelines, targets and checks. Suggestions regarding the monitoring of the EIA focused on evaluating teaching practice and student outcomes. The recommendations were to:

- collaboratively narrow and sharpen the EIA, including clear strategies, timelines, achievable targets and success checks that are communicated to all members of the school community

- align the roles and responsibilities of the leadership team and staff to ensure there are accountabilities in the actioning of the school's EIA

- develop, monitor and quality assure measures, targets and timelines for implementing strategies supporting the EIA to ensure consistency and effectiveness of practice, and improvement in student performance.

Curriculum

Nearly two thirds of review schools (60 per cent) received key improvement strategies about curriculum. Recommendations largely focused on collaborative planning, and quality assuring the delivery of the Australian Curriculum. The suggested priorities for schools were to:

- collaboratively develop, implement or refine a whole-school curriculum plan that aligns with the Australian Curriculum and includes locally relevant units

- enhance collaborative curriculum planning to build staff understanding and capability, ensuring curriculum units reflect the rigour and intent of all learning areas of the Australian Curriculum

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- quality assure, review and monitor the delivery of the Australian Curriculum, and associated assessment, to ensure the required content descriptions are taught and that students are assessed against the achievement standards

- develop, implement or review whole-school moderation to quality assure assessment and the allocation of achievement standards, and build consistency and confidence in teacher judgements.

Pedagogy

More than half (53 per cent) of the key improvement strategies focused on pedagogy. To build high-impact pedagogical practice, schools were advised to:

- collaboratively develop, review or refine their pedagogical framework to establish school-wide practices and expectations, ensuring alignment with the explicit improvement agenda, and including processes to quality assure its implementation

- develop a whole-school approach to differentiation, and build staff capability to engage, challenge and extend all students in their learning

- quality assure, monitor, review and refine pedagogical practices to ensure teachers have a shared understanding of the agreed approaches.

Data

Almost a third (30 per cent) of key improvement strategies related to the use of school data. These recommendations focused on data planning, discussion and analysis to inform teaching practice, such as identifying gaps in student learning, planning next steps for teaching, and monitoring progress towards student, class and school-wide targets. The most common recommendations were to:

- collaboratively develop, implement, communicate, review or refine a whole-school data plan that identifies: what data will be collected and why, who will collect it, when it will be collected, what tools will be used, where the data will be stored, and how it will be used

- provide regular opportunities for school leaders and teachers to collaboratively discuss and analyse whole-school and classroom data, enabling them to develop their data literacy

- build and promote a culture of self-evaluation, review and reflection on student data to generate strategies for continuous improvement and identify growth.

Three elements for maximising impact

Common to each of the top five improvement strategies are three key elements that support schools in maximising their impact on student learning:

- strategic school planning

- professional learning

- monitoring and quality assuring practice.

As the 2019 review reports show, maximising impact requires providing opportunities for staff to collaboratively plan, develop knowledge and skills, and measure and evaluate what occurs in the classroom. All three elements contribute to the core work of schools — improving student outcomes.

Three elements for maximising impact

Strategic school planning

Professional learning

Monitoring and quality assuring practice

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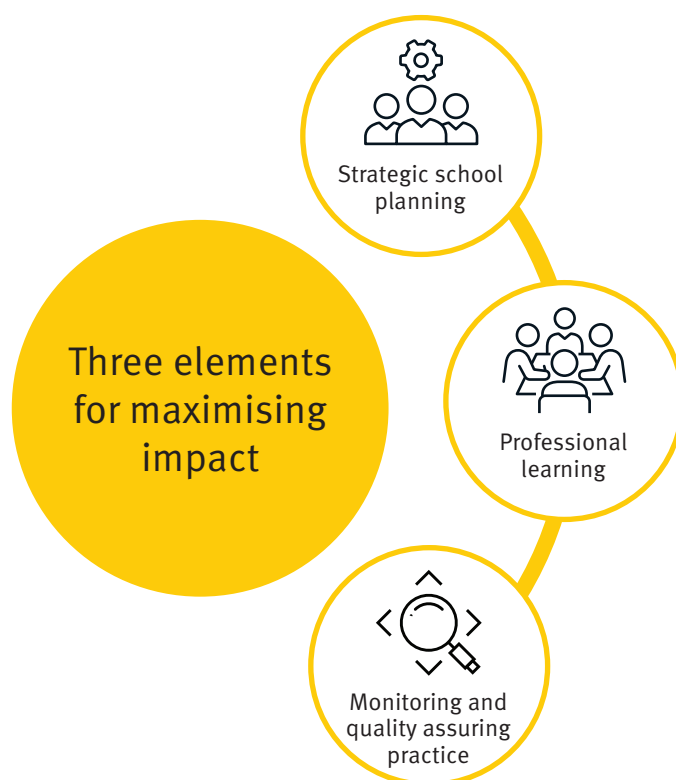
To generate discussion …

- How does our school communicate our vision for learning and build ownership of the explicit improvement agenda among school leaders, staff, students, parents and the community?
- What is our school's 'action plan' for improvement? How will we monitor our progress and maximise our impact on student outcomes?
- In what ways does our school cultivate collaborative cultures and support continuous professional learning?
- What opportunities for differentiated support and professional learning are provided for all staff, including classroom-based learning, mentoring and coaching arrangements?
- What support and quality assurance processes exist in our school to ensure practices are implemented consistently?
- How does our school build a data culture of 'discovery and action', using data to inform the starting points for learning, monitor progress, evaluate impact and inform next steps?

Practical considerations for maximising impact

Set a compelling strategic vision and plan the roadmap for school improvement

- Develop a strong evidence base for school planning, including a wide range of school and student data, research and practice.
- Ensure the school's action plan for improvement is precise, incorporating clear and measureable school-wide targets, accompanying actions and timelines, and targeted resources.
- Relentlessly communicate the vision for improvement among all members of the school community.
- Take a distributive leadership team approach, with dedicated roles and accountabilities aligned to the improvement agenda. Work together to inspire a collective effort towards change among leaders, teachers, parents and students.
- Regularly review progress towards targets, and evaluate initiatives and programs for their impact on student learning.

Cultivate a collaborative culture and enable continuous professional learning

- Foster a culture of collaboration and continuous professional improvement. Create opportunities for colleagues to work together and to learn from each other's practices.
- Develop a detailed professional learning plan, and associated budget, to provide opportunities for staff that support school and, where appropriate, system priorities.
- Provide differentiated professional development to build teaching expertise in key areas, such as curriculum and assessment, pedagogy, and in analysing student data.
- Promote a range of evidence-based teaching strategies, and provide opportunities for collegial sharing and structured classroom-based coaching, so that teachers and leaders can receive ongoing feedback on their practice.

Implement strategies to monitor and quality assure the impact on teaching and learning

- Build a data culture of 'discovery and action' across the school to inform the starting points for learning, enable monitoring of student progress and facilitate the evaluation of strategies and interventions.
- Provide opportunities for school leaders and teachers to collaboratively review achievement data and plan strategies for the continuous improvement of student outcomes.
- Dedicate time for teaching teams to unpack student and school data, celebrate progress, identify problems of practice, and to collaboratively plan next steps for teaching and learning.
- Provide regular and timely feedback to staff in order to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and make adjustments to practice.

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Case study: using data to maximise impact

A primary school in Brisbane has developed a multi-layered system to maximise their impact on student learning. The two principles of 'purpose' and 'leverage' underpin school practices for collecting the right data and acting on it.

Documented guiding frameworks, forums and time allocations for learning, and collegial and professional support are key elements of a system where data feeds into a culture of discovery and action across the school. Benchmarks, targets and practices are interwoven, reviewed and refined by a community of professionals who seek continuous improvement in student outcomes.

The school's data plan and 'Data input guide' support the consistent collection and recording of data. OneSchool enables data to be 'cut and diced' in a myriad of ways to identify cohort, individual and identified-group progress. A system of 'student notes' provides teachers with records of each child's context, and 'data mats' inform 'speed dating' data sessions to assist staff with student year-level transitions. Each term, there are dedicated data discussions and cycles of collaborative inquiry to examine student progress (see the 'Collaborative data inquiry' document on the next page for further details).

One of the deputy principals is the school's data leader, providing technological and analytical expertise. A dedicated team of teacher experts oversees data collection and analysis, continually reviewing how they use and respond to the information they gather. Professional learning communities, with representatives from year levels and specialist areas, provide forums for discussion, feedback and learning that showcase practice and the impact on student progress. This is where staff identify the 'glows and grows' — those practices that are working and those that need further work.

The school's explicit improvement agenda informs action research projects undertaken by staff. Teachers use student data to identify gaps and then investigate solutions through cycles of inquiry. This trial and error process means that staff can develop their expertise, and initiatives become signature school practices. Being 'teacher directed', the action research model is a powerful mechanism for staff engagement.

> "Everything we do here is based on the students. It's our one truth."

The school leadership team provides staff with professional, social and emotional support. Exercising emotional intelligence about the demands on teachers opens up lines of communication, increases staff enthusiasm for data conversations, and enhances data literacy. This creates an environment of trust, where data is seen as information about student progress, not cause for judgement.

✉ **For further details about this case study, email the School Improvement Unit at siumb@qed.qld.gov.au.**

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Collaborative Data Inquiry

Our aim is to systematically collect and use data to drive cycles of problem solving, planning, action and reflection to both improve our own collaborative practices and improve instruction that makes a difference in student learning.

Figure 1: School Improvement Hierarchy

Experts in

Diagnosis
understanding what each student brings to the lesson, their motivations and their willilingness to engage.

Interventions
having multiple interventions so that if one does not work with a student, the teacher changes to another.

Evaluation knowing
the skills of evaluating, having multiple methods and working collaboratively and debating with colleagues to agree on the magnitude of the effect needed for an intervention to be successful.

5.4 Interpret student data

Highly Accomplished
Work with colleagues to use data from internal and external student assessments for evaluating learning and teaching, identifying interventions and modifying teaching practice.

Term One - SFD
Data Mats
Speed Data

Term One SFD
Year level Data
Collaborative Inquiry

Term One
Week 2 & 3
Data Talks

Term 2
Week 10
Review Data Mats
Classroom Inquiry

Term 3
Whole School
Collaborative Inquiry
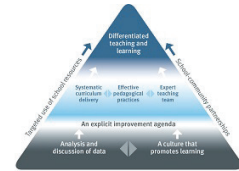NAPLAN

Term 4
Year Level
Collaborative Inquiry
A-E
Pat R/M/S

Unit Planning Reflections

- Units of Work
- Early Start
- Reading Levels
- Spelling Data
- Behaviour
- Attendance
- NAPLAN
- Sem A-E Data
- Brigance Data
- Pat - R/M/S

Collective Efficacy - Hattie, J (2018)

Collective Efficacy is strongly correlated with student achievement.

Mean Effect Size - 1.57

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References and further reading

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

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), *Evaluating impact: multiple measures and sources of data*, www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/feedback/aitsl-evaluating-impact.pdf?sfvrsn=c52dec3c_2.

Bernhardt, VL 1998, 'Multiple measures', *California Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (CASCD)*, nces.ed.gov/pubs2007/curriculum/pdf/multiple_measures.pdf.

Bernhardt, VL 2016, *Data, data everywhere: bringing all the data together for continuous school improvement*, 2nd edn, Routledge, Abingdon and New York.

Hattie, J 2012, *Visible learning for teachers: maximizing impact on learning*, Routledge, Abingdon and New York.

Masters, G 2016, *Monitoring student growth*, www.teachermagazine.com.au/columnists/geoff-masters/monitoring-student-growth.

State Schools — Performance

Resources

- Actionable playbook: building student success in Years 7 to 10 and Reflection tool
- Assessment and Moderation Hub
- Early Start: monitoring and tracking literacy and numeracy across Prep to Year 2
- Teach and monitor the literacy of the curriculum: P–10 Literacy continuum and Marker collection tool in OneSchool
- New Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) system
- P–12 curriculum, assessment and reporting framework
- School improvement planning guide

Capability development

- Online coaching modules – reading, writing, mathematics and science
- Teaching reading in Queensland state schools
- Teacher toolkit: a focus on teaching reading P–2

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Action research

- Jensen, B, Downing, P & Clark, A 2017, 'Preparing to lead: lessons in principal development from high-performing education systems', National Center on Education and the Economy, Washington DC, learningfirst.com/reports/preparing-to-lead/, pp. 47–8.
  - This report shows how four of the world's highest-performing systems in PISA tests — Ontario, Singapore, Shanghai and Hong Kong — have developed leadership training that uses deep knowledge of their individual system to prepare aspiring principals.
- To enhance your capability to engage with action research, register here: qeli.qld.edu.au/practitioner-research-program/

Finding and developing school leaders

- Dries, N & Pepermans, R 2012, 'How to identify leadership potential: development and testing of a consensus model', *Human Resource Management*, vol. 51, no. 3, pp. 361–85; see Figure 1, 'Two-dimensional model of the criteria considered by subject matter experts as essential to the identification of leadership potential'.
- To register for one of QELi's middle leader programs, visit: qeli.qld.edu.au/leadership-for-middle-leaders-program/
- QELi offers programs in resilience, wellbeing and social and emotional learning, including Springfox's Thriving Through Change and Challenge: qeli.qld.edu.au/thriving-through-change-and-challenge/

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