Insights to inform school practice

Education Improvement
Research Centre
Insights paper
September 2021

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.

Targeting resources for impact on student learning

Targeting resources to support student learning is integral to school improvement. By working collaboratively to identify student and staff needs and allocating their resources strategically, schools can maximise support for student learning and wellbeing.

The 'Targeted use of school resources' domain runs alongside the School Improvement Hierarchy. It is one of the key enablers that schools can leverage to build capacity and focus impact across other key domains of practice critical to school improvement.

This paper shares insights from school reviews conducted in Queensland state schools and centres in Semester 1 2021. It identifies the next steps schools can take to target their resources effectively. In particular, it highlights the importance of staff collaboration and transparency, strategic alignment and measures to evaluate impact. It also explores common areas where schools can further focus their resources.

The findings show how schools can use their resources to drive their improvement journeys and support the needs of all students.

How does domain four of the *National School Improvement Tool* describe the targeted use of resources?

'The school applies its resources (staff time, expertise, funds, facilities, materials) in a targeted manner to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of all students. It has school-wide policies, practices and programs in place to assist in identifying and addressing student needs. Flexible structures and processes enable the school to respond appropriately to the needs of individual learners.' ACER 2012, p. 8
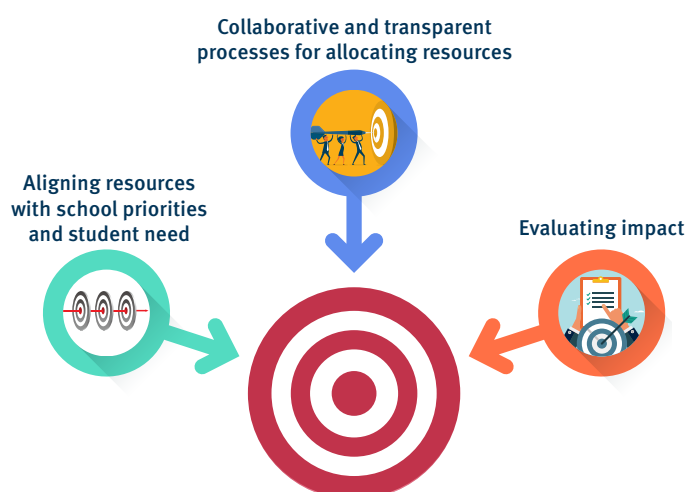
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Key findings from school reviews

School reviews in Semester 1, 2021 (total: 177)

School types			
P–6	Secondary	P–9/10/12	Other*
120	30	15	12

* Comprises nine special schools, two outdoor and environmental education centres and one support unit.

Strategies for targeting resources

Collaborative and transparent processes for allocating resources

Aligning resources with school priorities and student need

Evaluating impact

▶ Aligning resources with school priorities and student need

School review findings suggest that most schools are aligning their resources with their key priorities. A minority of schools were given recommendations about more closely aligning expenditure with their explicit improvement agenda, annual implementation plans, and whole-school priorities and targets.

▶ Collaborative and transparent processes for allocating resources

A quarter of schools received a recommendation about developing, strengthening or maintaining collaborative and transparent practices for allocating their resources. Most of these were about staff working together to identify and implement key priorities, as well as developing and strengthening transparent decision-making processes to review and allocate resources. Review recommendations highlighted the need for processes to be inclusive and clearly communicated to the school community.

▶ Evaluating impact

The most common review recommendations received by schools were to evaluate the investment and the impact of resource allocations on student learning outcomes. This involves systematically reviewing, monitoring and measuring the impact of investments to:

- support student learning and wellbeing, and maximise outcomes
- address school priorities, planned outcomes and the goals of the explicit improvement agenda
- support systematic curriculum delivery
- increase capacity and build staff capability in key areas.

Recommendations about evaluating impact emphasised the need for funding to target the needs of *all* students. The recommendations were to review processes to ensure the:

- timely access and expenditure of funds
- sustainability of investments
- effectiveness of dedicated programs and Investing for Success funding allocations.

A number of recommendations referred specifically to evaluating information and communications technology (ICT) resourcing.

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Focus areas for resourcing

These three key strategies for targeting resources can be applied to schools' particular focus areas. Across the review recommendations, human resources and infrastructure were identified as prominent areas where schools can allocate their resources.

Investing in staff capability

Improvement strategies about human resources recommended that schools target capability building and staffing allocations.

Investing in staff capability was a significant theme in review reports, reflecting previous findings that staff capability is a key area for improvement for Queensland state schools (see insights papers *Maximising our impact* and *Learning together to build teaching mastery*). Improvement strategies recommended schools provide opportunities and funding for professional development. The majority of recommendations focused on building staff confidence and capability in using digital technologies to:

- value-add to teaching and learning
- support the integration of digital literacies in curriculum units
- support the implementation of school programs and priorities.

Another key recommendation was for schools to use a workforce plan to help direct their resources towards current and future staffing needs. These considerations were about:
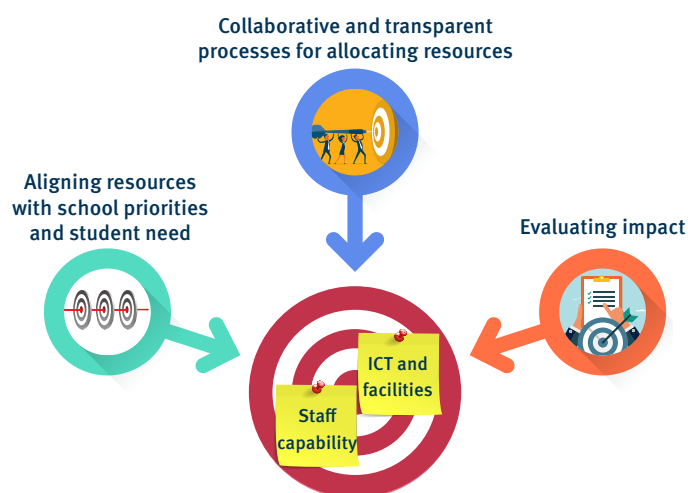
- staff recruitment and retention
- determining effective leadership structures
- sustaining staff skillsets
- succession planning.

Recommendations about staffing allocations mainly focused on aligning staff expertise with identified student needs.

Investing in ICT and facilities

Review reports also identified infrastructure as an area where schools can further target their resources. Recommendations were to:

- enhance or expand ICT and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) resources to enhance teaching and learning
- increase the use of technology as a routine classroom practice for staff and students
- plan for the enhancement of school facilities to meet students' physical and learning needs, and promote school pride.

Collaborative and transparent processes for allocating resources

Aligning resources with school priorities and student need

Evaluating impact

ICT and facilities

Staff capability

To generate discussion …

- How are investments strategically aligned to our school's explicit improvement agenda?
- What collaborative and transparent processes support the identification of needs and priorities for resource allocation in our school?
- How are resources targeted to enable the focus of every student succeeding?
- What different types of resources — staff time, expertise, funds, programs and initiatives — are deployed in an agile manner to maximise the learning and wellbeing of all students?
- How does our school monitor and evaluate the impact of resources on student outcomes?

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Practical considerations for targeting school resources

Strategically align resources to invest in the school's priorities

- Think long-term, act short-term. Align annual resourcing allocation and key investments to the strategic plan and vision for the school.
- Use a range of data to inform and prioritise resourcing decisions, including financial, human and physical resources.
- Target and align investments as a key enabler to support the school's explicit improvement agenda.
- Consider the range of different resources — staffing time and expertise, programs and initiatives, infrastructure, facilities and ICT — which can be targeted to build capacity in priority areas.
- Consider ways to deploy resources in a flexible or agile way so they are responsive to emerging needs across the school.

Strengthen collaborative and transparent processes for resource allocation

- Engage school leaders and staff across all areas in strategic resourcing and decision-making processes.
- Provide opportunities for staff to input into the resourcing needs to support the wide range of learners at the school, including innovative strategies, practices and areas of focus.
- Formalise and widely communicate the consistent processes for resource allocation.
- Meet regularly to monitor the timely and targeted deployment of resources.
- Strengthen governance processes to ensure the proper, efficient and effective use of resources to maximise impact on teaching and learning.

Monitor and evaluate the impact of investment on student outcomes

- Regularly monitor and evaluate resource allocations to ensure desired improvements in student learning outcomes are being realised.
- Involve key leaders and representatives across the school in reviewing key investments, initiatives and programs for impact.
- Consider targeted resourcing measures which support priority groups — including students with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, EAL/D students, out-of-home care students and students experiencing social disadvantage. Continuously refine processes in order to maximise their impact on student outcomes.
- Identify significant partnerships in the school and look at opportunities to leverage further benefits to improve student outcomes.

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School snapshot

Case study: Strategically targeting resources at Runcorn State school

At Runcorn State School, understanding the complete picture is the ticket to targeting resources effectively. Supported by the principal, the business manager strives to understand the *why* behind resource needs. To achieve this, the business manager is an active part of the leadership team, reviewing the evidence for resourcing and regularly evaluating impact. Targeting resources is about supporting the learning needs of all students.

With long-term experience within the leadership team, the business manager is familiar with the department's strategic plan, the school's annual improvement plan, and the school's daily operations and decision making. With a deeper understanding of the school's strategic vision, the business manager is well positioned to ensure that every aspect — human resources, professional development plans, teaching materials and facilities — is aligned to priority areas.

The business manager engages in strategic conversations about the budget, curriculum and pedagogy during leadership team meetings. Conversations about investment are further discussed and key messages communicated by the business manager with heads of department and in group meetings, such as with the Curriculum Leadership Group. Group members are provided with an update on expenditure, including where they are, why they are there, and where they are heading. The budget committee is chaired by the business manager. For complete transparency, a breakdown of finances is provided at each meeting. These documents are discussed by members with consideration of ongoing budget needs and requests. The business manager also meets with administration staff fortnightly to share budget updates.

Resourcing requests, with supporting documentation and evidence, are made by leaders and staff through a structured process. This is central to providing a detailed rationale for expenditure with staff and stakeholders. This year, the school introduced a therapy dog to support student wellbeing. This initiative was proposed by staff with well-documented research and a budget proposal for the budget committee to consider and validate the request.

The principal and business manager ensure that the expenditure and impact of resources are assessed regularly. The school measures the effect size of practices and programs every term using triangulated data, collected from regular data cycles. The results are assessed to ensure the school is targeting the right resources to maximise student learning. For example, the reading program was revised after benchmark data showed it was missing the mark. The assessment included a review of all materials and human resources involved in delivering the program. Based on the results and backed by hard data, a revised program was implemented, accompanied by professional development. Baseline and progress data are routinely monitored against intended impact to determine the effectiveness of resource allocation in supporting student improvement and success.

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

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References, further reading and resources

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Inclusive Leadership program

The Inclusive Leadership program is a nine-month, face-to-face program that focuses on strengthening the capabilities of middle leaders and deputy principals. The program provides a closer exploration of the knowledge, skills and confidence to lead and develop others for effective leadership of inclusive school communities.

Find out more here: Inclusive Leadership program (qeli.qld.edu.au)

Leadership for Middle Leaders program

The Leadership for Middle Leaders program is designed for middle leaders who are ready to take the next stretch in their leadership. Whether they aspire to a deputy principal position or are ready to further develop their skills, this program is suitable for any enthusiastic middle leader. Throughout the program, learning is consolidated through one-on-one coaching and highly professional and collegiate groups.

Find out more here: Leadership for Middle Leaders (qeli.qld.edu.au)

Leadership for Deputy Principals program

The Leadership for Deputy Principals program is designed for current deputy principals and those aspiring to principalship seeking to further develop their leadership knowledge, skills and confidence to effectively lead and develop others. The program draws on the latest evidence of visionary leadership and leading high-performing school teams to achieve improved student outcomes.

Find out more here: Leadership for Deputy Principals (qeli.qld.edu.au)

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