

# Insights to inform school practice

School and Region Reviews  
Insights paper  
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School reviews in Queensland provide powerful insights into school practice. With every state school and centre reviewed by the School and Region Reviews 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.

## Strategic leadership for continuous improvement

Strategic school leadership, fundamentally, is leading school improvement. It has a future orientation and systematically draws on the collective resources of the school community and the wider education system with the aim of improving teaching and learning. It 'is the core element of any leadership action in schools' (Carvalho et al. 2021, p. 2).

Strategic leadership encompasses how schools envision and plan their work, clearly articulate goals, implement actions and monitor the impact of school improvement. These practices are interwoven across the nine domains of the *National School Improvement Tool* (ACER 2012) and across the department's [School Improvement Hierarchy](#).

This paper shares insights on strategic leadership from reviews conducted in Queensland state schools and education centres across Term 4, 2021 and Semester 1, 2022. It unpacks an analysis of key improvement strategies provided to schools across domains of the *National School Improvement Tool*, including an explicit improvement agenda, targeted use of school resources



and analysis and discussion of data. Underpinned by a strong culture of trust and learning relationships, these elements provide powerful levers that schools can enact to lead continuous improvement in teaching and learning.

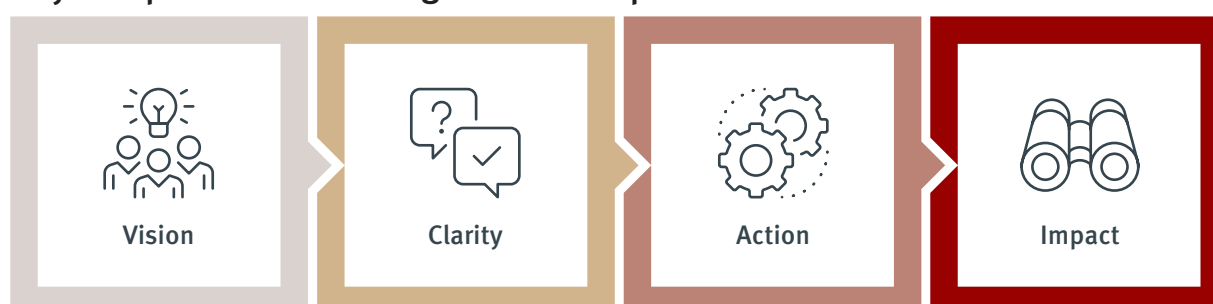
## School reviews in Term 4, 2021 and Semester 1, 2022 (total: 202)

School types					
P-6	Secondary	P-9/10/12	Special schools	Outdoor and environmental education centres	Support unit
151	33	8	4	5	1

## Key findings from school reviews

The majority of school review reports (84 per cent) contained key improvement recommendations about strategic leadership, specifically practices relating to vision, clarity, action and impact. Common to these recommendations is the effectiveness of building a collective orientation to school improvement. This includes the processes and objectives of planning collaboratively, developing shared understanding and commitment, as well as collectively implementing school priorities and evaluating progress.

## Key components of strategic leadership



### ► Vision

Over a third of schools received key improvement recommendations about vision. This included developing a school vision, strategic planning or refining the school's improvement agenda.

Some reviews recommended that schools develop a **vision for learning** or conduct visioning work to project the school's preferred future and inform strategic planning.

Review reports recommended that visioning work:

- be developed collaboratively across the school and wider community
- aim to establish a culture of shared commitment
- emphasise high expectations for student outcomes.

Reviews identified that the next step for some schools was to undertake a **strategic approach to school planning**. This entailed developing and aligning the school's new strategic and annual implementation plan; developing plans, targets, strategies and actions to realise school aspirations and respond to changing circumstances; or developing an approach to change management.

Recommendations from reviews identified that a strategic approach to school planning can be used to:

- provide clarity for future school improvement goals

- build trust and transparency, and engage staff through shared ownership of future direction
- clarify leadership and staff roles and responsibilities.

A large number of review reports identified the need for schools to refine their improvement agenda. This was largely about ensuring schools had a **sharp and narrow focus** on the priorities for improvement. Refining a school's improvement agenda was recommended to achieve staff understanding and commitment to a school's priorities.

In many cases, review recommendations focused on developing an **action plan** to collectively implement the school priorities.

### ► Clarity

Some recommendations relating to strategic leadership were about strengthening clarity, with a majority related to communicating school improvement agendas. The underlying objectives of communication recommendations were to build **shared staff understanding, commitment and ownership** in enacting strategic priorities. Recommendations were about clarifying:

- the various strategies and actions of the school improvement agenda
- roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of all staff
- school-wide targets and timelines for implementation.



## ► Action

Half of review reports contained recommendations related to the implementation aspects of strategic leadership. Some schools had recommendations about enacting or embedding their improvement agenda. Embedding an improvement agenda was often about sustaining a **deep focus** and action-orientation on the work.

Review report recommendations included strategies to **support and enable staff** to collectively implement school priorities. These mostly related to:

- investing in staff capability development
- workforce planning, especially in relation to staffing and leadership models aligned to school priorities
- clarifying roles and responsibilities to support key school improvement initiatives.

Review recommendations often emphasised the importance of **aligning actions** to the school's improvement agenda, including the school's leadership structure, school-wide professional learning and annual performance and development planning processes.

## ► Impact

A number of schools received recommendations relating to monitoring and quality assuring the impact of their school's improvement agenda and the impact of financial and human resource investments. These recommendations emphasised a focus on maximising student outcomes.

Many schools received recommendations in relation to developing and refining whole-school processes to **analyse data**. These highlighted **disaggregating and triangulating** a range of datasets to:

- inform current and future priorities
- respond to the needs of priority groups
- evaluate the progress of the school's improvement agenda.

Review recommendations about monitoring impact highlighted the importance of schools measuring their progress and resourcing against **precise and meaningful** student outcome **targets and success measures** that are **regularly monitored**.

*‘Principals leading with a strategic focus are deliberate about optimising relational, organisational and management thinking to effect and monitor change, in order to realise short and long term school goals.’*

— AITSL 2014, p. 24



## To generate discussion ...

- What collaborative processes occur to engage our students, staff and community members in shaping and connecting with the school's vision and ambitions for learning?
- What key artefacts outline our school's detailed plan of action for continuous improvement? Does the action plan align roles and resources to the improvement agenda?
- What opportunities are there for all staff to engage in differentiated professional learning in the school-wide improvement areas?
- How does our school maintain a deep focus on and sustain the momentum of the improvement priorities? How is this regularly communicated?
- What processes enable staff and leaders to monitor progress, measure impact, celebrate success and refine strategies for continuous improvement?

## Practical considerations for strategic school leadership

### Develop and communicate a shared vision for learning

- Engage students, staff and the community in collectively envisioning and planning the school's preferred future.
- Build a culture of trust and mutual learning as a foundation for school improvement — this means everyone understanding their role and involvement in contributing to the school's vision.
- Develop a strategic approach to school planning — plan for impact using an inquiry cycle approach.
- Ensure a sharp and narrow focus on the priorities for improvement.
- Reference and articulate the vision both formally and informally on a regular basis as part of conversations and interactions with staff, students and the broader community.

### Ensure a strong action orientation to implementing improvement

- Develop a detailed action plan, connected to the strategic plan, to guide annual implementation.
- Sustain a deep focus on the work — align meeting agendas with the improvement agenda to ensure conversations focus on the enactment of agreed priorities.
- Support and enable staff through differentiated professional learning opportunities to collectively implement school priorities.
- Use distributed leadership, with designated roles across the school, to guide implementation of key priorities.
- Ensure actions are embedded in practice and support long-term improvement objectives — change is more than a tick-the-box exercise.

### Make an impact by monitoring progress

- Refine and align whole-school processes to analyse data and monitor progress against improvement priorities.
- Take stock at key junctures to evaluate initiatives for impact against school determined and system measures.
- Maintain line of sight and quality assurance of whole-school implementation.
- Celebrate successes and improvements across the school — consider areas for ongoing refinement.
- Consider ways to sustain momentum and renewal for the next stage of continuous improvement.

## School snapshot

### Case study: Leading the teaching and learning at Pacific Pines State School

Strategic leadership is central to teaching and learning at Pacific Pines State School. By providing the space for strategic ideas, the school is able to drive its operational work. As a result, documentation, collaboration and culture are aligned, enabling teachers to bring their very best to the classroom.



To read the full case study, scan the QR image or go to:  
[schoolreviews.education.qld.gov.au/research](https://schoolreviews.education.qld.gov.au/research).





## References, further reading and resources

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