Queensland: A State Of Learning

Findings from the 2017 school reviews
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A State Of Learning
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Welcome to *Queensland: a state of learning* — the third annual report by the School Improvement Unit (SIU).

I am pleased to share with you the findings from this report, which is a comprehensive summary and analysis of the 295 school reviews completed by the SIU in 2017.

Since the reviews started in 2015, more than 1030 schools have benefited from the independent feedback provided through the review process. At the end of this year, all Queensland state schools and a number of our education centres will have been reviewed.

This is a significant milestone in Queensland school improvement.

The feedback I receive from school communities about the reviews is extremely positive. The reviews are valued highly and give everyone — students, staff, parents and other community members — the opportunity to have their say and support their local school.

School reviews are one component of the ongoing commitment that all state schools have to continual improvement. They complement major education reforms introduced over the past decade to improve teaching and learning in Queensland.

These include the introduction of the Prep Year in 2007, the move of Year 7 to high school in 2015, and the new Senior Assessment and Tertiary Entrance (SATE) system that is being introduced for Year 11 and 12 students from next year.

Thank you to everyone who has participated in a school review to date, whether as a reviewer or by giving feedback. You are not only helping to support your local school, but the improvement of all schools across the state.

*The Honourable Grace Grace MP*

*Minister for Education*
I welcome the findings contained in this year’s annual report by the School Improvement Unit (SIU).

The three levers identified in the SIU’s first report — data, planning and capability — are continuing to drive improvement in Queensland state schools. It is important that we celebrate this ongoing achievement and the hard work of all staff across our schools and education centres.

This year’s report explores the three levers further, with a particular focus on sharing the practices, processes and activities that are effective in schools across the state.

The report also takes a detailed look at the improvement journey of 78 schools that received additional support in 2016 and 2017 following a priority support review. The evidence shows that these schools, with the support of their region and the SIU, have made a number of positive changes that are resulting in more effective teaching and learning, and better student outcomes.

I encourage all schools to use the findings described in this report to guide their future improvement endeavours. We already have curious and capable students, qualified and committed staff, passionate and visionary leaders, and extremely supportive school communities. As this report concludes, we now need to move to greater collaboration, strategic focus and alignment in planning for school improvement, better alignment of professional learning with problems of practice and student learning needs, and more refined and balanced data processes to enable more effective use of school data in teaching.

I look forward to working with everyone to achieve these improvements.

Tony Cook
Director-General
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Executive summary

Highlights from the 2017 school reviews
The School Improvement Unit (SIU) annual reports share the growing knowledge and understanding of school improvement in Queensland state schools. Thanks to the inductive research approach, the findings presented in each report reflect the specific Queensland context, and can be used to guide further school improvement at different levels: school, regional and central office.

This report presents findings from 295 school reviews conducted by the SIU in 2017, as well as an analysis of 78 schools that were reviewed in the preceding year and completed a 12-month post-review support process in 2017.

Schools continue to develop as thriving places of learning and self-improvement. According to data from the reviews, Queensland state schools are embedding the three key levers for school improvement: data, planning and capability. As discussed in previous SIU annual reports (2016, 2017a), the three levers are most effective when jointly applied.

While the first two SIU annual reports focused on determining what schools need to achieve to become continually improving organisations that maximise student learning outcomes, this report explores how schools can use each of the three levers more effectively. It identifies practices and activities that can help schools to better use data, plan and build capability to enhance their capacity to learn and improve. In their journeys to maximise student outcomes, schools are encouraged to use State Schools Division's School Improvement Model (consisting of the School Improvement Hierarchy, Inquiry Cycle and Standards of Evidence).

The findings presented in this report reinforce the expectation that all schools, regardless of their current performance, should engage in a continuous, internally driven process of learning and improvement that involves identifying challenges of practice, developing strategies to address them, and measuring the effectiveness of those strategies.

**Achievements**

The evidence of effective school practices in Queensland state schools is growing. Achievements of the 2017 review schools are evident with respect to the three levers, and to teaching and learning practices.

**Data**

The use of data to inform decision making and practice was embraced by the 2017 review schools.

In most review schools, data were collected, analysed and used by school leaders to inform strategic planning and to monitor student achievement over time. Robust monitoring and reporting processes, and a refined, whole-school approach to the gathering, recording and interpretation of student data, were a feature in some schools.

Sharing and discussing data with staff were common in most review schools, and the use of data to inform instruction and programs, as well as individual learning goals and next steps for student learning, was often reported.

Data processes significantly improved in schools that completed the 12-month post-review support process. These schools refined their datasets, and built consistency and accuracy in data collection, with a balanced approach focusing more on formative assessment data. Data discussions in these schools were often supported by tools, such as data walls and student data books, which contributed to greater student ownership of their learning. Some of these schools noted considerable progress in developing a culture where everyone is assessment literate, owns the data of all students, and uses data to improve student learning.
Planning

Compared with previous years, there was a higher level of engagement in strategic planning for school improvement in 2017, reflecting more holistic thinking on the part of school leaders. While planning and implementing their explicit improvement agendas, principals often collaborated with the school community, and thoroughly analysed school data to determine priorities, targets, timelines, and key roles and responsibilities. All review schools shared their improvement agendas with staff, parents and the broader school community. It is evident that more schools engaged in collaborative cycles of inquiry to develop and refine school-wide improvement processes.

The focus on strategic management was particularly evident in schools that completed a 12-month post-review support process in 2017. These schools collaborated with their staff and communities to develop the school’s vision and goals, and to build a shared understanding of this vision across the school. Their efforts resulted in a clear direction for improvement that everyone could own. More specific achievements that contributed to successful direction setting included:

- a clear direction of improvement with a sharp and narrow focus, maintained over the 12-month post-review process
- a shared understanding and language of improvement, resulting from an effectively communicated improvement vision and clear expectations for each area of the action plan developed after a priority support review
- a clear division of key roles and responsibilities among school leaders to drive different aspects of the improvement agenda
- alignment between different elements of the improvement process, particularly between whole-school improvement targets and student learning goals; between professional learning plans and student learning needs; and between the use of school resources and improvement priorities.

Ensuring the alignment and shared understanding of the improvement agenda was crucial, and helped schools to maintain the link between their strategic vision and classroom practice, and to establish clear lines of sight between the organisational level and the individual teacher or student level. When alignment and a shared understanding were apparent, everyone at the school understood what strategic priorities and whole-school targets meant for them, which helped to build enthusiasm and commitment to proposed improvement strategies.
Capability

The 2017 review schools invested heavily in building the capabilities and expertise of staff. A range of professional learning, including collaborative opportunities, was provided to staff and was highly valued. Most of the schools that completed a 12-month post-review support process in 2017 invested heavily in staff capability, the creation of new positions and teams, and professional learning planning to support improvement priorities.

Expert teaching teams were developed through instructional leadership practices, observation and coaching models, and peer observation and feedback processes. For schools that completed a post-review support process, these practices were particularly helpful in developing staff capability and confidence. As a result, staff assumed greater responsibility for the planning of, and adjustments to, teaching.

The 2017 evidence demonstrates that collaborative opportunities, such as collegial curriculum planning and moderation, cluster meetings, reciprocal visits to other schools and collaborative data meetings, contributed significantly to the growing expertise and confidence of staff in review schools. Many schools established collaborative structures for professional learning as part of their 12-month post-review support process.

As a result of extensive investment in building staff capability, the professional capital of schools was enhanced. Schools, particularly those that completed a post-review support process, noted an increase in staff knowledge, understanding and skills in the Australian Curriculum and assessment, selected pedagogies, and use of data to inform the teaching and learning process. The ability of school leaders to lead improvement and act as instructional leaders also improved.

Increased professional collaboration and de-privatisation of teaching practice helped to build strong collegial cultures in many schools, with positive relationships between the school’s leadership team and staff, and high levels of trust.

Curriculum, pedagogy and learning support

The majority of 2017 review schools had implemented the Australian Curriculum to a significant extent. A growing understanding of the Australian Curriculum and maturity in its application were apparent, with more schools defining and unpacking curriculum expectations, as opposed to simply implementing Curriculum into the Classroom resources. Growing collaboration in curriculum planning was also evident. Assessment processes were generally aligned to the Australian Curriculum and enabled effective monitoring of school-wide student progress.

Whole-school pedagogical frameworks were developed by the majority of review schools. This was often done through collaboration and supported by a range of artefacts visible in classrooms across the school. In many schools, there was evidence of differentiation of teaching and case management for students who required support. Collaborative planning for differentiation, involvement of support staff and continuous monitoring of student learning were evident in many schools. Teaching staff worked together and used data to identify starting points for learning, establish next steps, adjust teaching and monitor progress over time. Data informed curriculum planning, differentiation and individual learning goals.
All 2017 review schools set high expectations for student attendance, behaviour and academic outcomes. Students were mostly provided with engaging and challenging experiences. The learning needs of high-performing students were well catered for in many schools. More and more schools had developed a practice of setting individual learning goals for students, aligned to whole-school targets that were reviewed regularly.

The wellbeing of students, particularly those with disability or other additional learning needs, was strongly supported in review schools. Most schools had developed strong inclusive cultures in response to the cultural diversity of their students, in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students with English as an additional language or dialect. Strong links with local communities and a range of organisations helped schools to better address the needs of all students.
Next steps

The three levers of school improvement are making a difference. They drive the improvement of teaching and learning practices, which ultimately leads to better student outcomes. They also support schools to successfully use the Inquiry Cycle and other components of the School Improvement Model.

Despite broad evidence of progress, there are some areas that need further improvement in some schools. Continuous work on enhancing improvement capacity, at individual and organisational levels, can help schools to sustain change and continue on their intended improvement trajectory.

All Queensland schools can learn from strategies and actions that have proven to be effective in different contexts across the state. This report provides many examples that can inspire schools to review and refine their existing practices, or develop new practices, that will enhance their capacity as learning organisations and positively affect student outcomes.

Data

The evidence of effective data use is apparent in many 2017 review schools. Some schools need to develop greater clarity and balance in their whole-school approach to collecting, analysing and sharing student data. Schools need to increase the use of data to examine the effectiveness of particular improvement initiatives. The use of data in teaching requires greater consistency in some schools. Data conversations, while common in most review schools, require greater rigour and depth to better inform next steps in student learning.

Planning

While many schools are making progress in this area, some aspects of planning need further attention. These include: collaboratively developing the explicit improvement agenda and school vision, improving transparency and clarity of decision making, establishing effective communication with stakeholders to support the strategic direction of the school, aligning individual student goals with whole-school improvement targets, and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of leaders.

In some schools, a greater focus on strategic processes and alignment of school-wide practices and systems is needed, with more attention given to developing a shared understanding of improvement across the school community. Teachers in particular need to be involved in collaborative discussions about problems of practice, improvement targets and improvement strategies, as this increases their commitment to and ownership of change. Greater engagement in collaborative cycles of inquiry can help schools effectively identify problems and develop solutions.

Ensuring that leadership is distributed is also an important area of work for many review schools. After all, it is associate leaders who often translate the improvement agenda and expectations to teachers and other staff, which is critical for the success of any organisational change.
Systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of specific initiatives, aligned to the explicit improvement agenda, needs to be developed in some schools. The ability to measure the effectiveness of implemented practices depends greatly on the precision in formulating improvement priorities and goals at the strategic planning stage. Along with specific, relevant and achievable targets, measures of success need to be developed to monitor outcomes effectively.

**Capability**

Despite professional learning opportunities being widely provided to school staff, staff capability was one of the most commonly identified areas for further improvement in the 2017 review schools. Some schools need to better align professional learning planning and opportunities with improvement priorities, identified problems of practice and corresponding student learning needs. More professional learning opportunities in areas such as differentiation, the Australian Curriculum and digital technologies can be provided to teachers and teacher aides in some schools. More collaboration, aimed at sharing professional knowledge, could occur across year levels.

To further enhance data literacy of teachers, data conversations — a regular practice in many review schools — need to better engage teachers in critical reflection on student data, the effectiveness of their teaching and any required adjustments to teaching.

Instructional leadership practices, apparent in many 2017 review schools, could be used more effectively to support teachers’ learning, and to develop their confidence and capacity to make judgements to change their teaching practice (school’s decisional capital).

**Summary**

Overall, in their future improvement efforts, schools need to focus on:

- establishing more refined and balanced data processes to enable more effective use of school data in teaching
- the importance of collaboration, strategic focus, alignment and monitoring in planning for school improvement
- linking staff capability building with problems of practice and student learning needs.

School improvement is everyone’s responsibility. Concerted and continuous effort, focusing on the three levers, and with the involvement of all stakeholders, will support further school improvement in Queensland state schools and better outcomes for students.
Introduction
1.1 Aims and focus

Queensland state schools provide quality education to more than 540,000 students around the state. The Department of Education’s (formerly the Department of Education and Training [DET]²) School Improvement Unit (SIU) is committed to supporting continuous improvement in all Queensland state schools and education centres. The SIU conducts school reviews that promote improvement and accountability, while also providing schools with support and building the capability of principals. In addition, the SIU trains school leaders in the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) (ACER 2012), case manages schools requiring additional support, undertakes research and shares effective practice across the system. The SIU has conducted 1030 school reviews from 2015 to 2017.

This annual report describes the school improvement practices of the 295 schools and education centres reviewed in 2017. School review teams undertook extensive fieldwork, including discussions with principals, teachers, students, parents and community members, in order to provide independent feedback on a school’s performance against the nine domains of the NSIT, and to suggest ways to further improve outcomes for students. These findings are captured in review reports, which are shared with the school community. They are used as a reference point by school leaders and staff and inform a school’s four-year strategic plan.

Review reports also provide the basis for the annual report. The findings from the analysis of review reports presented here are intended to inform schools, regions and the system of trends in school practice that are contributing to the ongoing improvement of Queensland state schools. This report references current departmental policies and programs, as well as Australian and international research and literature. For details of research methods used, see Appendix A. The report builds on the SIU’s 2015 and 2016 reports; together they contribute to the evolving understanding and knowledge of school improvement in Queensland state schools.

This chapter, Chapter 1, provides an introduction to the report. It examines the Queensland education context and state school system, as well as contemporary research regarding school improvement. It also outlines the SIU’s approach to school reviews and major activities of 2017.

Chapter 2 reports on the practices and performance of Queensland state schools in relation to three significant contributors to student learning: attendance, behaviour and school community satisfaction. Student learning outcomes, specifically in literacy, numeracy and Year 12 attainment, are also discussed. The achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are highlighted in terms of Closing the Gap education goals.

Chapter 3 examines the findings from the 2017 school reviews in terms of two significant determinants of school performance: school leadership and teaching. It also discusses practices supporting student learning at school. In addition, Chapter 3 includes references to specific practices within rural and remote schools, special schools and outdoor and environmental education centres (O&EECs).

Chapters 2 and 3 include illustrative case studies that outline emerging, potentially effective practices within Queensland state schools, as identified during school reviews.
Chapter 4 focuses on the journeys of 78 schools that completed the 12-month post-priority support review process in 2017. Using the action plan final reports produced by SIU case managers, this chapter highlights the improvement strategies and actions evident in this group of schools, the type of support they received and the outcomes of school improvement identified so far.

Chapter 5, the final chapter of the report, summarises the achievements of the 2017 review schools and the areas identified for further improvement. It explores how the areas of data, planning and capability can be further advanced, which is intended to inform the work of schools, regions and central office.

1.2 Queensland context

1.2.1 Role and main functions of the department

The Department of Education creates opportunities for Queenslanders through high-quality learning and skilling services. These services are focused on preparing Queenslanders with the knowledge, skills and confidence to successfully participate in the community and Queensland’s new economy (DET 2017b).

The department’s strategic objectives, as stated in its Strategic plan 2017–2021 (DET 2017a), were aligned to three priority areas:

- every child making a confident start
- every student succeeding
- every Queenslander preparing for the future.

The department provides services across the state. Its central office is located in Brisbane, with early childhood education and care, school education, and training and skills services integrated at a regional level. The regions are:

- Central Queensland
- Darling Downs South West
- Far North Queensland
- Metropolitan
- North Coast
- North Queensland
- South East.

This regional structure enables cohesive service delivery, and strengthens relationships to improve transitions between sectors for clients. Information regarding the location of Queensland state schools and regional offices is available online at: www.education.qld.gov.au/schools/maps/.
1.2.2 Queensland state schools

The Queensland Government provides state education in accordance with the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*. Every state school student must be provided with an educational program that is appropriate to his or her age, ability, aptitude and development.

Enrolments in Queensland state schools continue to increase (see Table 1.1 below). From 2013 to 2017, enrolments grew by 34,227 students (or 6.8 per cent). A total of 541,171 full-time students were enrolled in Queensland state schools as at August 2017.

In 2017, 333,818 students (61.7 per cent of total state school enrolments) were enrolled in primary year levels and 207,353 (38.3 per cent) were enrolled in secondary year levels. The half cohort of Prep Year students that was introduced in 2007 is presently in Year 10, resulting in smaller enrolment numbers displayed for this year level in 2017.

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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>506,944</td>
<td>515,501</td>
<td>522,345</td>
<td>531,590</td>
<td>541,171</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1: Enrolments in primary and secondary year levels, Queensland state schools, 2017

Source: August Collection, 2013–17

Notes:
- Full-time students only.
- From 2015, Year 7 became the first year of high school in Queensland.
- From 2015, students enrolled at state special schools are recorded against their age- or ability-appropriate year level as determined by their school.
- A half cohort of Prep Year students was introduced in 2007 to align with the shift in the compulsory school starting age from 2008. The first full Prep Year cohort commenced in 2008. The introduction of the universally available full-time Prep Year program replaced the part-time preschool program in Queensland.
The Queensland population is relatively decentralised, and this is reflected in the geographical distribution of Queensland’s 1238 state schools, with nearly 80 per cent of schools operating outside the Metropolitan region (see Figure 1.1 below).

![School count by region, 2017](2017 Annual Report)

Source: August Collection, 2017

1.3 School improvement

School improvement is a persistent challenge for researchers, practitioners and policy makers in the public education sector all over the world. Literature provides multiple conceptualisations of school improvement, most of which centre on student outcomes and school effectiveness. Research has identified many determinants of school improvement. These include student, home, school, teachers, teaching and curricula (Hattie 2009), leadership types (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe 2008), and leadership attributes such as age, ethnicity and qualifications (Bowers & White 2014). However, the causal relationship between these variables and student outcomes remains unclear.

*After decades of research, one thing is certain: there is no one recipe for school improvement; it is highly contextualised and no single approach to leadership will work to improve all schools.*

*(Day et al. 2009; Hallinger & Heck 2010)*

There are multiple pathways to success, and it is important to consider schools’ different starting points (Sammons et al. 2014) and their unique improvement trajectories (Bellei et al. 2016).
Education systems in different countries have exercised different degrees of ‘accountability pressure’ with mixed results, and the number of unintended consequences increasing with pressure (Altrichter & Kemethofer 2015). Within the Australian education system, state and territory governments have shifted their focus from accountability to school improvement over time. In some Australian states and territories, the NSIT (or a local variation) has been used to guide schools through the evaluation of their schooling practices (ACER 2012). This is consistent with the view that school improvement is best achieved by working on the practices in classrooms and schools, rather than on the student outcomes directly (Masters 2016, p. 2). In this approach, standards are used as policy levers to support system-wide improvement; however, the challenge is to sustain this change over time by building capacity within schools (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation 2014).

‘The biggest advances will be made only if Australia adopts a more “adaptive” school education system. Neither a top-down nor a bottom-up model of governance is desirable. Instead, schools need more support to ensure teachers know what works in the classroom, and how they can adapt their teaching methods to better meet the needs of students.’

(Sonnemann & Goss 2017, p. 3)

A school's capacity to change and improve depends on its ability to learn and act as a learning organisation, ‘in which people engage individually and collectively in continuous, challenging and purposeful consideration of their professional responsibilities, their beliefs, their skills, their motivations and their practices’ (Stoll 2009, p. 121). Building an internal capacity to learn implies the need for the school and its staff to be adaptive and open to change. ‘Adaptive reform uses data to link what is done (inputs) to what is learnt (outcomes) and systematically improve the learning process over time’ (Sonnemann & Goss 2017, p. 9).

Recent studies focusing on the learning capacity of schools suggest that schools with higher levels of academic performance developed distinct high-leverage structures and practices that improved their school-wide cultures of learning (Tichnor-Wagner, Harrison & Cohen-Vogel 2016). Knowledge retrieval, utilisation and sharing were identified as the predictive factors for individual learning capacity and organisation learning capacity in schools (Cheng 2012). To create a learning organisation, school leaders must focus on ‘... development instead of management, learning instead of quick solutions and be challenging instead of confirming’ (Liljenberg 2015, p. 152).
1.3.1 School improvement in Queensland state schools

In 2017, Queensland state schools started using the School Improvement Model to accelerate improvement and ensure that every student succeeds. The model includes:

- guidance on next steps using the School Improvement Hierarchy, which incorporates the nine domains of the NSIT
- the Inquiry Cycle process that supports teachers to plan, implement and evaluate the impact of teaching practices on student learning
- Standards of Evidence, developed by the department to support rigorous conversations about the impact of initiatives and teaching practices.

To continue improvement, school staff and leadership teams need to find out what is or is not working by asking each other:

- Where are our students in their learning?
- How do we know?
- What will we do to improve their learning?
- How will we know when they have got there?

An inquiry mindset is essential. Inquiry helps schools to remain open to new learning. Inquiry gives a voice to expert teaching teams, students and the school community. Inquiry makes sure schools ask the right questions, even if they begin with the wrong ones. It also helps schools to identify the additional support they need to move students forward in their learning.
1.3.2 School reviews in Queensland state schools

The SIU’s school reviews identify areas for improvement in schools and education centres, and whether they need additional support in order to improve student outcomes and build principal and staff capacity. The current approach to reviews for Queensland state schools commenced in 2015 and is detailed in the SIU’s *Improving student outcomes through school reviews: a toolkit for principals* (SIU 2018).

School reviews are a crucial part of the department’s school improvement agenda, with every state school, including independent public schools, special schools and O&EECs, being reviewed at least once every four years. The reviews complement the department’s four-year school planning, reviewing and reporting cycle, which schools use to reflect on and inform their practice and operations (see Figure 1.2 below).

![Figure 1.2: School planning, reviewing and reporting cycle](image-url)
The reviews are administered by the SIU, which reports directly to the Director-General, independent from the delivery arm of schools (State Schools Division). The SIU is led by an Assistant Director-General who oversees the operation of the SIU, its reviewers and support staff.

The SIU’s vision is to support continuous improvement in Queensland state schools and education centres. This is achieved through the following activities (SIU 2017b):

- reviewing each Queensland state school and education centre every four years to ensure public confidence in the state school system
- providing schools and education centres with quality and relevant review reports to guide their improvement
- working with regions to support schools and education centres for 12 months after a priority support review
- training principals and associate leaders in the use of the NSIT
- producing an annual report highlighting key findings and trends from reviews
- promoting and sharing effective practice through school improvement case studies and videos.

In 2017, 288 schools (just over 23 per cent of all Queensland state schools) were reviewed by the SIU or completed a self-determined review. The SIU also reviewed five of the 25 O&EECs, the Dalrymple Trade Training Centre and the Denise Kable Support Unit.

The 2017 review schools were representative of all Queensland state schools in terms of SIU school type (for details, see Appendix B) and departmental region. Figure 1.3 below compares the 2017 review schools with all Queensland state schools in terms of SIU school type, and demonstrates that the subset is largely representative, with any variation in proportion within 2.2 percentage points.

![Figure 1.3: Comparison of review schools and all Queensland state schools, by SIU school type, 2017](image)

Source: OneSchool, based on August 2017 collection.

Note: O&EECs, support units and associated units are not included.
Greater variation, however, is evident when comparing the regional distribution of the 2017 review sample with all Queensland state schools, as presented in Figure 1.4 (below). In 2017, schools in South East region were over-represented — just over six per cent more South East region schools were reviewed in 2017 than are in the Queensland state schools cohort overall. This variation is due to the nature of the pre-existing four-year school review timetable inherited by the SIU; however, it is unlikely to significantly affect the findings.

Figure 1.4: Comparison of review schools and all Queensland state schools, by region, 2017
Source: OneSchool, based on August 2017 collection.
Note: O&EECs, support units and associated units are not included.
**Review types**

The SIU starts the review process in Term 4 of the previous year with the analysis of headline indicator performance data for all Queensland state schools. Based on this analysis, schools in the fourth year of their school planning, reviewing and reporting cycle are designated for one of three review types. Other schools that would benefit from a review in the upcoming year may also be nominated.

**Headline indicators**

Headline indicators are a high-level snapshot of selected school datasets. They provide a common starting point for schools to further investigate other school-based data and evidence, monitor their performance and plan for improved student outcomes.

Headline indicators were developed in consultation with principals, regions and other stakeholders, and are presented in an easy-to-read format.

The department consults regularly with stakeholders about the headline indicators and their use. Currently, headline indicators focus on:

- attendance
- literacy and numeracy (National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN])
- English, mathematics and science (A to E)
- enrolment trends
- behaviour
- school community satisfaction
- Year 12 attainment and post-school destinations (where applicable).

Each indicator is shaded green, orange or red according to how well the school is tracking against set thresholds and, in the case of literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN), similar Queensland state schools. This allows the department to identify schools that are performing comparably to or better than similar schools, and those that may need additional support.

Contextual information, including the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students with disability, index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) value and financial information, is also presented.

Two reports are made available to principals, assistant regional directors (ARDs) and regional directors each year: an annual report (usually in April) and an updated interim report (usually in October). The SIU uses the updated interim headline indicators to help identify and designate schools for review for the following year.
Based on the discussions of SIU senior officers with regional directors and ARDs, schools are designated for one of three review types:

- full school review: the default review type for Queensland state schools
- priority support review: for schools identified as needing additional support
- self-determined review: for schools identified as having a trajectory of sustained improvement.

Full school reviews are conducted by a review team appointed by the SIU and comprising an internal reviewer, an external reviewer and a principal peer reviewer. Priority support reviews are conducted in the same manner as all other SIU reviews, except that principal peer reviewers are not included in the team and the SIU continues to monitor and check in with the school for 12 months after the review to ensure the school is receiving the support it needs and is addressing the recommendations from the review. For schools allocated a self-determined review, the principal is responsible for organising all elements, including the scope and focus of the review and reviewers. The SIU provides the school with a set amount of funding for the review. Schools can also ask the SIU to conduct the review.

Of the 295 reviews conducted in 2017, 226 were full school reviews, 57 were priority support reviews and 12 were self-determined reviews (six of which were undertaken by the SIU). For the distribution by review type and term, see Table 1.2 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review type</th>
<th>Term 1</th>
<th>Term 2</th>
<th>Term 3</th>
<th>Term 4</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full school</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority support</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-determined</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>59</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2: Number of school reviews, by review type and term, 2017
Note: Data include O&EECs, support units and associated units.
**SCHOOL REVIEWS AT A GLANCE**

295 schools and centres reviewed in 2017

**Review types**

- **226** Full school reviews
- **57** Priority support reviews
- **12** Self-determined reviews

**Reviews per term**

- **Term 1**: 59
- **Term 2**: 71
- **Term 3**: 107
- **Term 4**: 58

**Four-year review cycle**

Distribution of school reviews over the four-year cycle

- 369 reviewed in 2015
- 295 reviewed in 2017
- 366 reviewed in 2016
- 369 to be reviewed in 2018

**Reviews per geographic region**

- Far North Queensland: 21
- North Queensland: 21
- Central Queensland: 38
- Darling Downs: 58
- South West: 58
- North Coast: 51
- Metropolitan: 49
- South East: 57
Support for schools that had a priority support review

During 2017, the SIU continued to monitor schools following a priority support review. Senior reviewers and the Assistant Director-General undertook nearly 300 check-in visits during 2017 (see Table 1.3 below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>3-month</th>
<th>6-month</th>
<th>9-month</th>
<th>12-month</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>Visits proceeding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>from 2015 reviews</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits proceeding</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from 2016 reviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits proceeding</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from 2017 reviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.3: Number of check-in visits conducted by the SIU, 2017

In 2017, SIU support was finalised for the 78 schools that, with regional support, made sufficiently positive gains in relation to their action plan over 12 months. Improvements in these schools are described in Chapter 4.

Reviewers

The SIU draws on three types of reviewers for its review teams: internal, principal peers and external.

Internal reviewers are experienced state school principals seconded to the SIU to undertake school reviews. In 2017, 37 principals were engaged as internal reviewers. Another five principals were contracted as senior internal reviewers, taking a greater leadership role across the review program, quality assuring reviews and case managing schools that had priority support reviews.

All Queensland state school principals are invited to be trained in the NSIT and take up the professional development opportunity as peer reviewers. In 2017, 219 principals acted as principal peer reviewers.

External reviewers are trained and contracted from a pre-qualified panel. They have a range of educational leadership backgrounds and bring additional rigour and independence to the process. Thirty-four suppliers, offering more than 40 individual reviewers, were included on the pre-qualified panel in 2017.
Capability building

The SIU continues to provide professional learning opportunities for principals, and seeks to train all principals in the application of the NSIT and the review process. The training develops principals’ understanding of the review process and how the NSIT can be used to support school improvement. Principals who complete the training can nominate to be a principal peer reviewer. Acting as a principal peer reviewer is a valuable part of professional learning, offering principals the opportunity to collaboratively analyse another school’s context and practice.

In addition to training principals, the SIU also provides training in the NSIT to associate school leaders, such as deputy principals and heads of curriculum, and other school staff (at the principal’s discretion). Principal (two-day) and associate leader (one-day) training is conducted by senior members of the SIU who travel to regional locations. Table 1.4 below sets out the number of principals and associate leaders trained in each region in 2017.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Associate leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Queensland</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darling Downs South West</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Far North Queensland</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Coast</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Queensland</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>150</strong></td>
<td><strong>235</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.4: Number of principals and associate leaders trained by the SIU, by region, 2017

A range of other staff were also trained by the SIU in 2017:

- 29 teachers attended principal or associate leader training.
- 22 regional or central office staff attended principal or associate leader training.
- Six principals attended associate leader training, which provided them with insight into the NSIT, but does not qualify them to be principal peer reviewers.

In addition to providing formal training, senior officers of the SIU (in particular the Assistant Director-General) are invited regularly to speak at forums such as professional development days, professional association councils, regional or school cluster meetings, and to international delegations. In 2017, 27 presentations were made, including at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference in Canberra, and an international education conference in India.
Cross-sectoral, interjurisdictional and international liaison

The SIU continued to link with other educational jurisdictions in 2017, including other school sectors, other states and territories, and internationally. For example:

- The Assistant Director-General, SIU, met with the Director of School Support and Evaluation for the Council of International Schools (CIS) at its annual conference to consolidate and extend their cooperation in reviews for CIS-accredited schools.
- The department had the opportunity to share its school improvement journey at the Australasian Accountability Network meeting, held in November 2017 in Adelaide. Senior staff from the SIU and the Performance and Strategy branch presented to colleagues from other Australian states and territories, and New Zealand jurisdictions.
- The SIU collaborated with the Australian Council for Educational Research on its Education System School Improvement Tool.
- The SIU undertook co-review work with Sydney Catholic Schools and professional discussions with Brisbane Catholic Education.
- The SIU hosted and presented to visiting delegations from education departments from the Australian Capital Territory, Northern Territory, Tasmania and Western Australia.

At the request of DET International (now known as Department of Education International [DEi]), in November 2017, the SIU also conducted reviews of two offshore schools (both in China) licensed to provide the Australian/Queensland P–12 curriculum: Qingdao Guokai Middle School and Anji Shangshu Private Middle School.

Monitoring the work of the SIU

Since reviews started in 2015, the SIU has surveyed all principals following their school review. In 2017, the response rate to the feedback survey from principals was 85.4 per cent. Of the principals who responded, almost 95 per cent reported that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the various components of their school review.

In 2017, a survey was developed to seek information from principals after the post-priority support review process. The survey response rate was just over 50 per cent, and almost all respondents agreed that the process was supportive and collaborative. Some findings from this survey are discussed in Chapter 4.

As noted, senior internal reviewers monitor the review process by visiting schools while reviews are underway. Internal reviewers are provided with individual feedback on their work, while review chairs complete a short survey about the performance of external reviewers in line with contractual obligations. Both internal and external reviewers attend a small number of professional moderation sessions during the year in order to maintain contemporary, shared, valid and reliable standards.

In addition to this feedback, the SIU is supported by two stakeholder groups that meet each term. The SIU Stakeholder Advisory Group consists of senior executive-level staff from the principal associations, the Queensland Teachers’ Union, P&Cs Qld, branches of the State Schools Division, Queensland Education Leadership Institute (QELI) and a regional director. The SIU Working Group consists of senior officers from the branches of the State Schools Division, branches of the Policy, Performance and Planning Division, Human Resources, Queensland State School Resourcing, DEi, Internal Audit and an ARD. Both groups help to shape and support the strategic direction of the department’s school reviews program and associated communication, research and policy.
In addition to these consultative groups, each semester the SIU holds a feedback forum for principals who have experienced a school review, and another for ARDs. Feedback from these forums supports the continuous improvement of the operations, communication and research functions of the SIU. For more information on the SIU’s feedback and quality assurance processes, see Appendix C.

In 2017, the SIU developed a survey seeking principal feedback on the 2016 annual report. The survey was conducted in February 2018, with results indicating that the report increased knowledge and understanding of school practices and school improvement for more than 90 per cent of respondents, while more than 85 per cent of principals agreed that the report will inform improvement processes in their school. For a summary of survey results, see Appendix D.

This chapter described the SIU’s approach to school reviews. The chapter also examined the context in which these reviews were conducted, providing the background for the presentation of findings from the analysis of 2017 school reviews.

The following chapters focus on new insights to help schools in their continued improvement, based on the analysis of school review reports. Chapter 2 provides descriptions of school practices that contributed to key school performance areas (student attendance, behaviour, school community satisfaction, literacy, numeracy, Year 12 attainment and Closing the Gap), and related statistics.
02
Key performance areas for Queensland state schools
Proactive change requires decision making, and good decision making requires information. Parents, teachers and school leaders should know the students for whom they have direct responsibility. If school leaders and policy makers are to design high-quality schooling, they require the informational tools to set goals and target resources (MCEETYA 2008; Masters et al. 2008).

Effectiveness is a key concept in public policy and can be measured in terms of inputs, processes and outcomes (NEA 2013). As the ultimate purpose of school improvement is better educational outcomes for students, there is a natural tendency to focus on measures of student performance. However, as practices and processes lead to outcomes, these, too, are increasingly the subject of reporting and analysis (Jensen 2010; Masters 2012).

The department gathers and reports on a range of student outcome data. The data provide evidence of progress and change, and contribute to understanding the school improvement in Queensland state schools.

This chapter discusses the following key performance indicators for state schools:

- attendance
- behaviour
- school community satisfaction
- literacy achievement
- numeracy achievement
- Year 12 attainment
- Closing the Gap.

Attendance and behaviour are preconditions for successful student learning, while school community satisfaction reflects perceptions of the school staff, leadership, processes and learning environment. When these are in place, improvement of student performance in other areas such as literacy, numeracy or Year 12 attainment is more likely to result (Hay Group 2010; Henderson & Mapp 2002; OECD 2009).

The following sections explore these preconditions and outcomes, identify associated school practices apparent among the 2017 review schools, and report on related outcomes data for Queensland schools.
2.1 Attendance

Efforts to increase school attendance have seen a number of initiatives introduced over the last decade. The Every Day Counts program started in 2008 and emphasises: the importance of enrolment and daily attendance; strategies to monitor, communicate and improve attendance; the dangers of truancy; and the shared community responsibility for attendance (DET 2016d).

Queensland has participated in the Australian Government’s Remote School Attendance Strategy since its inception in 2014. The program involves remote schools with historically lower rates of student attendance employing attendance supervisors and attendance officers to work with local communities to break the cycle of student non-attendance (DP&C n.d.).

In 2017, the department implemented same-day reporting of unexplained student absence from school for all students. The policy requires schools to notify parents of an unexplained absence of their child as soon as possible on the day of the student’s absence, and undertake continued follow up.

Results of a 2015 survey of Queensland state school leaders about initiatives and strategies for increasing student attendance show that nearly all principals viewed monitoring attendance and improving attendance as very important for their school (96.2 and 93.6 per cent, respectively) (DET 2016e, p. 4). In the past, school-level evidence for Queensland demonstrated that school attendance and numeracy and literacy performance are linked: the lower the attendance rate, the lower the average test scores, as measured by the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) (DET 2013, p. 22; Simons et al. 2007, p. 19). Data for 2017 reveal a similar association for reading and numeracy across Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 (DoE 2018b).

2.1.1 Attendance practices in review schools

Student attendance was an important issue among the 2017 review schools. Schools had implemented a range of attendance-related practices, such as the regular collection of attendance data, the use of data walls to track attendance in each class, and daily and weekly analysis of the data. Following departmental requirements, attendance data was entered and stored in OneSchool. Many schools adopted other technologies to assist in monitoring attendance, for example, electronic roll marking being done with IDAttend.

Responsibility for monitoring attendance and communicating with parents was shared by school staff. Teachers, guidance officers, administration staff, youth engagement officers, liaison officers, year-level coordinators and deputy principals were engaged in working with students to improve attendance. Schools also employed dedicated attendance officers to work with parents, families, local organisations and the broader community to raise awareness and respond to truancy.
Communicating the importance of school attendance was a common practice among review schools. Many promoted whole-school attendance awareness by sharing attendance targets and expectations within the school community. An urban primary school in Metropolitan region referred to this as making it ‘everybody’s business’. Signage at the front of an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region informed the community that the attendance target was ‘95 per cent or better’. Schools used their Parents and Citizens’ Association (P&C), school newsletters, websites and social media to communicate the message, publicise goals and highlight achievements to parents and the community.

Communications with students occurred through assemblies and weekly class reports, where attendance data and progress towards goals were shared and achievements celebrated. Class attendance results were displayed in classrooms, on classroom doors, at the school front gate, on data walls and on school noticeboards.

Schools had follow-up processes for dealing with students whose absences were not explained. Review schools used same-day SMS text messaging and telephoning to investigate absences or notify parents. For example, in an urban primary school in North Coast region, automated text message alerts were sent to parents of students with unexplained absences and followed up with same-day phone calls. Follow ups at some schools extended to letters to parents or home visits by liaison officers and principals. More comprehensive approaches included case management of students — sometimes by a team of staff — as well as support to families.

Student attendance was closely linked to student engagement. Many schools sought to ensure all students were engaged in their learning to drive their attendance. An urban secondary school in Darling Downs South West region had an extensive network to support students in the curriculum and alternative pathways, employing the Clontarf Foundation program, a community education counsellor and an industry placement officer to ensure students remained engaged.

Reward programs for individuals and classes were common. At an urban primary school in North Coast region, classes competed for an ‘attendance cup’, which was awarded on parade each week. At a very large, urban secondary school in South East region, students with 95 per cent attendance rate entered ‘Club 95’ and attended lunch with the principal at the end of each term. A rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region used the Try for 5! program. A range of North Queensland Cowboys merchandise was given fortnightly to the class with the highest attendance rate.

There was limited evidence in the review reports of schools specifically measuring the effectiveness of attendance strategies.
Woorabinda State School

Lifting student attendance

Attendance is on the rise at Woorabinda State School, thanks to the combined efforts of teachers, parents, students and the community.

The school, located in Central Queensland region and with 100 per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, has adopted a number of strategies to increase student attendance.

Student attendance data are monitored at a school, class and individual student level, and in 2017, the school set an attendance target of 50 per cent of students obtaining an attendance rate of 95 per cent or higher. A same-day notification process is used to contact parents about unexplained student absences, and students with significant attendance issues are case managed. Student attendance is also promoted through school parades, newsletters and other forms of communication.

The school, which is part of the Australian Government’s Remote School Attendance Strategy, has engaged five attendance officers, who work closely with families to improve student attendance. A close partnership has also been established with the Cathy Freeman Foundation, using the Starting Block program to help reinforce the school’s improvement agenda of reading and attendance.

In addition, the school uses a classroom communication app to track and share student behaviour information with parents. Through the app, students are recognised and rewarded for good attendance and positive behaviours, such as participating in learning and wearing the correct uniform.

Attendance rates at Woorabinda State School have steadily improved, from 80.2 per cent in 2013 to 89.7 per cent in 2017. Elders, parents and other community members praise the school for its ongoing efforts to improve student learning and attendance.
### 2.1.2 Attendance measures

Absenteeism from school can have a significant impact on young people’s learning, social development and future prospects. On any given day, an average of 8.5 per cent of Queensland’s state school students are absent from school. This translates to almost 48,000 students. If this was reflective of each student — attending just 91 per cent of the time — this would equate to each child missing almost one full year of schooling from Prep to Year 10.

Table 2.1 below shows the proportion of students by attendance bands and sector. Most students attended school more than 85 per cent of the time. Consistent with the stable state-wide attendance rate, the proportion of low attendees (students with an attendance rate of less than 85 per cent) remained the same between 2016 and 2017 at 15.9 per cent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year level sector</th>
<th>&lt; 85%</th>
<th>85% – &lt; 90%</th>
<th>90% – &lt; 95%</th>
<th>95% – 100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary (Prep – Year 6)</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>50.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change from 2016*</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary (Years 7–12)</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change from 2016*</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All year levels</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total change from 2016*</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.1: Student attendance, by attendance rate range, 2016–17**

*Change measured in percentage points.

A similar story is apparent for primary and secondary school students. The vast majority of students at both levels attended more than 85 per cent of the time. Attendance in both sectors was also stable. The proportion of low attendees changed by less than one percentage point between 2016 and 2017.
2.2 Behaviour

The department places a high priority on providing a safe, supportive and disciplined environment for student learning. Schools should be places that respect the rights of all students to learn, teachers to teach and all to be safe (DET 2016f).

Although each state school in Queensland determines the behaviour management strategies and disciplinary consequences that apply to their school setting, all schools are guided by a consistent standard of behaviour that is inclusive of students, staff and parents, and recognises the close relationship between learning, achievement and behaviour (DET 2014b; DET 2016c; DET 2017h). Queensland state schools are required to document their approach with a Responsible behaviour plan for students, so that the shared expectations of positive student behaviour are known to everyone in the school community (DoE 2018e).

2.2.1 Behaviour practices in review schools

In most review schools, student behaviour was managed effectively with minimal interruptions to teaching. Staff, students and community members indicated that improved student behaviour was leading to increased levels of engagement and learning. During reviews, students displayed courtesy and respect, and were aware of school expectations regarding behaviour.

Complying with departmental expectations, all review schools had a Responsible behaviour plan for students in place. The plans described school-wide behaviour expectations and processes for managing student behaviour. The plans were under review in many schools. In some schools, a common understanding of school expectations, as articulated in the Responsible behaviour plan for students, was not yet developed.

More than half of review schools reported developing or implementing the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) approach. Some schools had not yet completed all stages of implementation, or they were reintroducing the program. Schools worked continuously to involve all staff in the development of a common and consistent language to promote appropriate behaviour. A range of professional learning opportunities was provided to staff to develop their skills in the implementation of PBL.

PBL schools had formulated school-wide behaviour expectations and core values, such as ‘Be safe, Be responsible, Be respectful’. Such expectations were unpacked as a matrix of positive behaviours. PBL coordinators, teams and committees were established to drive and monitor school strategies and initiatives. One of their key responsibilities was to gather and analyse behaviour data to inform a weekly school focus and the explicit teaching of these behaviours. At an urban primary school in North Queensland region, student data were collated every two weeks, five weeks and by term, and communicated through a PBL newsletter, staff meetings and the staff newsletter. In other schools, a weekly behaviour focus was communicated to the school community through social media, the newsletter and weekly parades, including a drama presentation by students.

Behaviour data informed interventions and school-wide positive behaviour awards, such as ‘Gotchas’. PBL schools also developed a range of artefacts that were displayed across the school to reinforce school expectations. A school PBL handbook for all staff was developed in a few schools.
Various behaviour-related programs had been implemented to help students develop resilience and social and emotional skills, and to clarify expectations for how students should behave and interact with each other. Some PBL schools accessed the regional behaviour support teacher to help identify and manage challenging behaviours.

Review schools not identified as PBL schools had similar practices in place. Behaviour expectations in these schools were clear, communicated during assemblies, and reinforced through artefacts such as behaviour charts, classroom mascots or common spaces. Disruptive behaviour was managed through a range of strategies, such as time out, in-class or buddy class support, or referral to specialist staff. A rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region had a responsible thinking room operating during lunchtime, in which staff guided students through a reflective process of making better choices regarding their behaviour. An urban primary school in North Coast region had a Breathe, Exit, Ask, Relax (BEAR) room for relaxation time. The BEAR plan was a whole-school framework implemented to develop student understanding of their emotions and self-regulation techniques to achieve a calm state. Other practices in non-PBL schools included: a whole-school positive behaviour reward system, a behaviour wall for students to track their progress and to celebrate success, and lessons to explicitly teach behaviour expectations. An urban primary school in Metropolitan region established a supportive school environment team. It was led by the community support teacher and included the school’s guidance officer, welfare worker and representative staff. The team met regularly to promote effective behaviour management and student and staff wellbeing.

Non-PBL schools also accessed external support through their region’s behaviour coaches and advisory visiting teacher services. Behaviour data were usually collected through OneSchool and discussed in staff meetings, with positive solutions being developed collaboratively. At an urban secondary school in South East region, the management of behaviour data and support was the role of the attendance officer and three student support leaders, in conjunction with the guidance officer, social worker and school nurse.

Data in non-PBL schools were used to inform intervention and case management for students requiring additional support such as placement in support programs. Programs included: a positive outcomes program, a steps2success program and a responsible thinking system. A few schools had adopted a restorative justice process as the cornerstone for the development of a school-wide positive culture for learning, with a trained facilitator to help students understand and accept the consequences of their actions.

Some of the 2017 review schools were using Essential Skills for Classroom Management (ESCM), which includes classroom profiling as a strategy to promote positive behaviour and maintain supportive learning environments. A number of schools were trialling this strategy or had identified it as a future step. Some schools used ESCM as the basis of their Responsible behaviour plan for students. Staff in some schools had accessed the ESCM training and participated in classroom profiling to identify areas for further consolidation. Staff acknowledged this training and viewed the ESCM as useful strategies for maintaining positive classroom behaviour.

While there were clear and consistently applied strategies to manage student behaviour in many schools (both PBL and non-PBL), some school reviews identified a lack of consistency in the application of rules and expectations across the school, which impacted on student compliance and staff confidence in managing behaviour. Further work needs to be undertaken in some schools to review behaviour management processes and ensure consistency of practice across the school.
A positive approach to behaviour

A focus on positive behaviour is creating a supportive learning environment at Dalby South State School.

The school introduced PBL in 2005 to promote the teaching and rewarding of good student behaviour.

To implement this model, clear expectations for positive student behaviour were developed through collaborative staff discussions, and embodied in the slogan: ‘To be a learner, I will be respectful, responsible and safe.’

These expectations inform teaching on positive behaviour. A weekly lesson on behaviour is announced on parade and explicitly taught in every classroom. Behaviour walls in classrooms reinforce this teaching, and relevant information is communicated to parents through the newsletter and social media.

The school’s comprehensive rewards system encourages positive student behaviour. Students are rewarded for appropriate behaviour inside or outside the classroom. Rewards are also given to students in recognition of effort, persistence and achievement.

To inform future decision making, student behaviour data are analysed regularly by the school’s PBL team and reported to the school community each term.

PBL has been embedded in the school’s culture, creating a positive mindset for managing student behaviour. Teachers are focused on rewarding positive behaviour and reteaching behaviours that need improvement, rather than penalising negative student behaviour.

Students, parents and staff are encouraged to work together to promote positive behaviour, and the school community has voiced its satisfaction with how behaviour is managed at the school through school opinion surveys.
2.2.2 Behaviour measures

Each August, the department conducts a census of all state schools, collecting details of school disciplinary absences (SDAs) that occurred during Semester 1. Data for incidents that occurred during Semester 2 are collected in February of the following year. The counts of SDAs are incident counts, and do not represent the number of students who receive SDAs, as a single student may receive more than one SDA.

A substantial majority of state school students behave appropriately every day and participate fully in learning to the best of their ability. The patterns of SDAs across the state school system consistently indicate that approximately seven per cent of Queensland’s state school students receive one or more SDAs during the school year. Approximately three per cent of state school students receive two or more SDAs.

Factors which may influence year-to-year variability at school level include:

- changed behaviour expectations
- changed principal view about giving SDAs or a change in principal
- changed behaviour of students
- fluctuations in enrolments (full-time enrolments for state schools increased by 1.8 per cent between 2016 and 2017 to 541,171).

As Table 2.2 shows, in 2017, 76,825 incidents were recorded, an increase of 4.6 per cent compared to 2016. While there has been an increase, it is important to note that, when principals determine that an SDA is required, they use a short suspension in preference to a more serious consequence. The increase was primarily in short suspensions (suspensions of one to 10 days), which comprised 92.7 per cent of all SDAs.

Reasons given for SDAs remain mostly unchanged from 2016 to 2017. Physical misconduct continued to be the main reason, followed by verbal or non-verbal misconduct.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of SDA</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>Change since 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>76,825</td>
<td>73,416</td>
<td>3409 (4.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDA type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspensions</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>73,946</td>
<td>70,649</td>
<td>3297 (4.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short suspensions</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>70,911</td>
<td>67,972</td>
<td>2939 (4.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long suspensions</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>3035</td>
<td>2677</td>
<td>358 (13.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exclusions</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>1615</td>
<td>1484</td>
<td>131 (8.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancellations</td>
<td>▼</td>
<td>1237</td>
<td>1275</td>
<td>-38 (-3.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charge suspensions</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19 (237.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDA reason</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absences</td>
<td>▼</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>931</td>
<td>-31 (-3.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical misconduct</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>28,572</td>
<td>26,869</td>
<td>1703 (6.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal or non-verbal misconduct</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>15,586</td>
<td>15,200</td>
<td>386 (2.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property misconduct</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>4571</td>
<td>24,179</td>
<td>392 (9.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of SDA</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Change since 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistently disruptive behaviour adversely affecting others</td>
<td>↓</td>
<td>6384</td>
<td>6535</td>
<td>-151 (-2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other conduct prejudicial to the good order and management of the school (including serious conduct)</td>
<td>↑</td>
<td>11,861</td>
<td>11,487</td>
<td>374 (3.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusal to participate in the program of instruction</td>
<td>↑</td>
<td>5808</td>
<td>5405</td>
<td>403 (7.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance misconduct involving tobacco and other legal substances</td>
<td>↑</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>1700</td>
<td>278 (16.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance misconduct involving an illicit substance</td>
<td>↑</td>
<td>1165</td>
<td>1110</td>
<td>55 (5.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2: SDA types and reasons, comparison of 2017 and 2016

The department supports principals to use a range of graduated disciplinary consequences to respond to behavioural issues by providing comprehensive training and step-by-step processes describing how to promote safe, supportive and disciplined learning environments.
2.3 School community satisfaction

It takes the whole school community — students, parents and carers, teachers, school leaders and other staff — to achieve improvements in student outcomes. School community satisfaction is a barometer of organisational health, and in Queensland state schools it is measured by the perceptions of different stakeholders in the school community. Stakeholders have differing influences on each other. What teachers do, for example, has a bearing on students’ school satisfaction and vice versa (Ervasti et al. 2011). While the broader life experiences of stakeholders can impact on school satisfaction (Huebner & McCullough 2010), it is otherwise the school — its practices, climate and culture — that has a bearing on school community satisfaction (Mulford 2003; Treputtharat & Tayiam 2014).

The engagement of a school community can positively impact on student learning, wellbeing and vocational opportunities (Lonsdale 2011). Relationships with businesses may raise a school's profile in the community, increase school revenue, and improve curriculum design and parents’ access to services (ACER 2011). More comprehensive forms of engagement occur through partnerships (DET 2015a). Parents and carers are especially important partners for a school.

The department supports state schools to develop partnerships through the Parent and Community Engagement Framework. The resource identifies what schools can do to strengthen learning outcomes for students through partnerships between principals, teachers, students, parents and the broader community. The framework outlines five key elements that can make a positive difference in students’ education (DoE 2018a, p. 5):

- effective communication between students, parents, communities and schools that is inclusive and involves information sharing and opportunities to learn from each other
- partnerships between parents, students and schools to promote student learning, wellbeing and high expectations for student success
- relationships between the school and wider community to strengthen the ability of schools and families to support student learning, wellbeing and developmental outcomes
- including parents, students and community members in school decision making
- respectful relationships between students, parents and the school community to enhance the promotion of student learning and wellbeing.

2.3.1 School community engagement practices in review schools

Review schools used the department’s Parent and Community Engagement Framework to structure their approach to school community engagement. They also developed community engagement plans to set out their community engagement objectives. Review schools engaged parents in their children’s learning in a variety of ways such as volunteering in classrooms, attending workshops and weekly school parades, and participating in barbecues and dinners that enhanced community spirit.

Schools connected and communicated with the wider school community through newsletters, email, SMS texting, school websites, apps, social media and school meetings. A remote primary school in Central Queensland region issued a weekly student communication and progress report, outlining each student’s performance against their learning goals, effort and behaviour, and updates on school curriculum and events.
An urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region had an annual showcase, which provided an opportunity to inform parents of the school’s priorities and expectations, and for parent participation in their child’s learning.

P&Cs strongly supported their school and student learning, and were frequently involved in fundraising and consulted about school matters. Their fundraising efforts drew attention to school issues, and forged networks beyond the school gate. Among review schools, P&Cs raised money through tuckshops, uniform stores, raffles, discos, annual fairs, trail bike rides, pig and yabby races, and movie nights. They also profited from catering for community events, such as morning teas, sports days, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day events, car rallies and annual picnic races. The P&C at a very large, urban secondary school in Darling Downs South West region was responsible for hiring out the school swimming pool, hall and grounds to various sporting, church and community organisations. Funds raised by school P&Cs were used for school camps, excursions, festivals, school equipment and direct financial assistance to students.

Review schools were often a hub of the local community. Functions and facilities on school grounds drew people in and fulfilled social needs not directly related to the academic outcomes of students. For example, a remote school in Central Queensland region hosted up to 80 mothers each year for Mother’s Day celebrations. Their end-of-year awards night celebrated student learning and talents, and was a highlight of the school and community calendar. Some schools had kindergartens or playgroups operating on their grounds. Schools also hosted athletics and swimming carnivals, book weeks, and days dedicated to grandparents, culture, friendship and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders. A rural primary school in Central Queensland region hosted cultural celebrations, Under 8s Week, a reading extravaganza, a school fete, a breakfast club and touch football games. A remote school in Central Queensland region had crazy hair and pyjama days, which were developed collaboratively by students and parents.

School community relationships were also expressed in terms of ‘giving back’ to the wider community. Students and staff from review schools participated in local street parades, Easter celebrations, Anzac Day and Remembrance Day commemorations, diversity activities, race days, Clean up Australia Day, local sporting clubs and annual agricultural festivals.

School review reports described the sense of pride, fondness, ownership and belonging that many stakeholders had about their schools. Stakeholders expressed satisfaction in the academic endeavours of the school, were confident to speak openly to teachers and school leaders, and attributed student wellbeing to the strong community culture that their school created.
A range of environmental activities are helping to grow school community satisfaction at Wonga Beach State School.

Over the past 10 years, a variety of gardening and outdoor initiatives have been introduced at the school to increase student and community engagement. The school partnered with a work-for-the-dole program, which saw unemployed people trained in horticulture visit the school to help revegetate the nearby wetlands and undertake other landscaping work.

The school’s community gardens and pond have become a source of pride within the local community, and earned national recognition when the ABC television show, Gardening Australia, visited and filmed a segment at the school. The school also has its own maze, with a rainforest corridor connecting it to nearby wetlands.

A key driver of school community satisfaction is the birdwatching program, run by a knowledgeable community member known as ‘Ron the Birdman’. The program involves small groups of students birdwatching around the school every Wednesday morning. Students look for birds, make records of their observations and create tally sheets to enable comparative studies over time. As well as increasing students’ knowledge of the environment, the program helps to develop students’ understanding of statistics and other mathematical concepts. It also forms part of the school’s behaviour management strategy, with places in the program offered as a reward for good or improved behaviour.

The school’s strong environmental programs and links with the community have become a reason why many families, even those from outside the catchment, say they are choosing to enrol in the school.
2.3.2 School community satisfaction measures

School community satisfaction is measured and reported using the School Opinion Survey (SOS). The annual suite of SOS (parent/caregiver, student, staff and principal) is designed to help Queensland state schools further understand what they are doing well. The information collected assists in highlighting areas of focus for school improvement that can inform planning processes.

In 2017, parents/caregivers, students and staff were asked their level of agreement against the measure ‘This is a good school’. The findings (see Table 2.3 below) are consistent with results from previous years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents/caregivers</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>93.9</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>93.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>92.0</td>
<td>91.4</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>88.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All staff (includes principals)</td>
<td>95.1</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>95.0</td>
<td>94.5</td>
<td>93.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3: Positive responses to the statement ‘This is a good school’ by respondent group, 2013–17
2.4 Literacy

Literacy is most commonly defined as the cognitive ability to read and write (UNESCO 2006). More specifically, it is about ‘how we use our language to speak and listen; read; write, spell and draw; tell stories; [and] watch and use electronic devices’ (DET 2017g). Literacy is therefore critical to further learning, problem solving and participating effectively in society.

Literacy has been the core business of modern public education policy (Freebody 2007) and remains a cornerstone of schooling (MCEETYA 2008). State schools have a specific objective of improving reading and writing for all students (DET 2017d) and maintaining a focus on literacy teaching and learning across all year levels (DET 2017f). Moving literacy forward P–12 (DET 2015b, p. 3) has six core messages for improving student academic achievement through literacy:

- focus on literacy within the curriculum
- teach the literacy demands of the curriculum
- understand quality literacy teaching
- monitor students’ literacy progress and target teaching
- provide regular feedback
- build a whole-school approach to improving literacy.

The P–10 Literacy Continuum provides a set of benchmarks to support teachers in monitoring students’ literacy development in the curriculum. Early Start is a suite of literacy and numeracy materials for Prep to Year 2. It provides purposeful data about literacy and numeracy progress to inform curriculum planning and resourcing decisions. It also supports effective differentiation for students in the early years of schooling.

2.4.1 Literacy practices in review schools

Schools were wholly implementing, selectively employing or trying out new high-yield strategies for the teaching of literacy. School review reports referred to a range of commercial, academic and departmental resources to help teachers deliver literacy-related curriculum. For example, at a rural primary school in Central Queensland region, teachers used a range of tools and approaches to support each student’s literacy development. Progressive Achievement Tests in Reading (PAT-R), PM Benchmarks, Prose Reading Observation, Behaviour and Evaluation of Comprehension (PROBE), Comprehensive Assessment of Reading Strategies (CARS) and Strategies to Achieve Reading Success (STARS), and the regional program Central Queensland Student Support System (CQ3S), were often used for literacy diagnosis. Ongoing formative assessment was used to inform teaching practice through a range of activities, involving phonemic awareness, sight words, shared reading and guided reading.

A focus on literacy was a common component of school improvement agendas, with both writing and reading having similar priority in school review reports. The focus on literacy was promoted in annual implementation plans, whole-school pedagogical frameworks and dedicated literacy plans. These documents detailed underpinning philosophies, teaching objectives, student expectations, feedback and monitoring processes, diagnostic assessment, resource planning and implementation. A number of schools exhibited a tailored approach to their guiding document, referring to their school’s ‘way’ of teaching literacy. Student literacy objectives were often linked to Australian Curriculum achievement standard and content, and relevant Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C) work units.
Different approaches to teaching were regularly coupled with promoting high expectations and intensive reading intervention support (including the use of speech pathologists) for selected students. Literacy was the subject of classroom displays and artefacts that guided student learning.

In a very small, rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region, staff worked with students individually and in small groups to build students' belief in their ability to learn successfully. A novel approach was seen at another very small, rural primary school in the same region, where students compiled and buried a time capsule of their history studies work. The capsule was to be removed at the end of the year to revisit their work and measure the progress they had attained. An urban primary school in North Coast region used a program where children read to a companion dog.

Schools monitored literacy results using levels of achievement (LOAs) and NAPLAN data to map student progress, target teaching, and direct resources and support. At a rural primary school in Central Queensland region, the leadership team provided additional non-contact time to support staff in data analysis, curriculum planning and student differentiation planning.

Review schools sought to develop staff capability in the teaching of literacy. Schools used observation and feedback, supported teachers to attend workshops to develop specific teaching skills, and employed specialist literacy consultants to provide professional learning for staff. The principal at a remote school in Central Queensland region was upskilling key school personnel, who then shared their new skills and knowledge with colleagues. An urban primary school in North Coast region had ‘care class’ and ‘circle time’ to address concepts, expectations and concerns about their approach to selected students’ literacy.
2.4.2 Literacy measures

NAPLAN assesses the literacy skills of students in reading, writing and language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in all state and non-state schools. The results for all Queensland school students are provided in Figures 2.1 to 2.4 below.

Reading

In 2017, Queensland Year 3 students achieved their highest ever results in reading, substantially above the baseline for national minimum standard (NMS) and mean scale score (MSS).

Figure 2.1 shows that Queensland students more closely reflected the national MSS after the first cohort of children to attend Prep was tested at Year 3 in 2011 and Year 5 in 2013.

![Figure 2.1: NAPLAN reading (MSS), Australia and Queensland, 2008–17](image)
A whole-school approach to reading

A consistent, whole-school approach to reading is helping to improve outcomes for students at Emerald North State School.

The school’s 2014–16 reading data showed students were not achieving desired results in NAPLAN, with some in Years 3 and 5 not meeting the NMS. In response, the school focused its improvement agenda on reading.

A whole-school approach to reading was developed using the Gradual Release of Responsibility model. Students are encouraged to set reading goals and monitor their own learning.

Teachers engage students in daily reading activities and reading rotations, providing small group instruction tailored to specific student needs. Explicit teaching of reading focuses on specific strategies each week across the school.

Targeted reading programs have also been introduced to engage pre-Prep and playgroup children who currently do not access any type of learning facility.

A teacher aide facilitates a structured intensive reading program, informed by diagnostic data, for Prep to Year 2.

The school has purchased up-to-date resources to support readers, including a literacy pack for Prep students.

The school’s reading agenda is further supported by a community partnership with a mining company that funds a reading enhancement program for schools in the Emerald/Capella state school cluster.

The focus on reading at Emerald North has resulted in improved NAPLAN results, with 100 per cent of Year 3 students achieving at or above the NMS in reading in 2017. In Year 5, 94.7 per cent of students achieved at or above the NMS. Prep students have also shown improvement in reading, and in number, sound and letter recognition.
Writing

In contrast to the other test strands, Queensland student performance has declined in writing since baseline. Year 9 students had improved results over the 2016 cohort, but, along with Year 7 results, remained statistically significantly below 2011 baseline.

![Figure 2.2: NAPLAN writing (MSS), Australia and Queensland, 2011–17](image)

Spelling

In spelling, across all year levels, Queensland students have improved their performance relative to the nation since baseline. Although the difference in performance in spelling between Queensland students and the national average was largest for Year 3, the greatest improvements for Queensland students have occurred in this year level.

![Figure 2.3: NAPLAN spelling (MSS), Australia and Queensland, 2008–17](image)
In grammar and punctuation in 2017, there were only small differences between results for Queensland and results for Australia across all year levels. The greatest improvements from baseline were in Years 3 and 5 (see Figure 2.4 below). Queensland and national Year 9 results dropped below 2015 levels in 2017.

Queensland Year 3 students performed well in grammar and punctuation, achieving results substantially above baseline in NMS and MSS.

Figure 2.4: NAPLAN grammar and punctuation (MSS), Australia and Queensland, 2008–17
2.5 Numeracy

While numeracy includes the use of mathematical reasoning, concepts, facts and procedures to describe, explain and predict quantitative phenomena, it is not confined to the abstract, academic context of a mathematics lesson (OECD 2013, p. 25). Numeracy has real-world application in the practical, day-to-day problem-solving needs of people (COAG 2008b).

Similar to literacy, numeracy is a central component of Australian schooling (MCEETYA 2008). Numeracy skills are strong predictors of Year 12 completion, labour force participation, employment, post-school training and earnings (COAG 2008b; Shomos 2010). The department is focused on raising numeracy outcomes (DET 2016a, p. 6) and is committed to ensuring that students have the opportunities to develop as problem solvers, critical thinkers and creative workers (DET 2016b). Schools can support the teaching of numeracy by using the Early Start suite of materials.

2.5.1 Numeracy practices in review schools

While somewhat overshadowed by literacy, there were clear efforts being made by review schools to improve student numeracy skills. Many schools nominated numeracy as a priority within their improvement agenda, budgeted to improve numeracy outcomes, established NAPLAN targets in numeracy, and stipulated improved student numeracy as a goal in their annual implementation plans. However, there were some schools still in the process of documenting their approach to teaching numeracy.

Mathematics subjects were aligned to the Australian Curriculum, with teachers using C2C units. A school’s emphasis on numeracy was at times part of a high-expectations culture. Schools used a range of programs, online tools and applications to teach and assess numeracy. A rural primary school in Central Queensland region adopted the YuMi Deadly Maths program. This program emphasises the cultural context of teaching and learning, and engages parents and the community in the process of schooling (QUT 2016). Some review schools offered numeracy programs and online courses dedicated to high-achieving students.

Data were a central resource for setting numeracy teaching objectives. While some schools reported limited staff data literacy and analysis, others actively used LOAs and NAPLAN data to monitor and evaluate student outcomes, guide curriculum delivery, and adjust teaching to address individual numeracy learning needs.

Staffing investments in numeracy were apparent in many review schools. Schools employed mathematics coaches, dedicated teacher aides and numeracy tutors. Teachers participated in collegial observational practices and were given release time to pursue further training in teaching mathematics. The principal at a rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region led collegial discussions with staff about effective practice teaching models and teaching strategies focused on specifically improving outcomes for students in numeracy.
2.5.2 Numeracy measures

NAPLAN assesses the numeracy of students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in all state and non-state schools. These results are set out in Figure 2.5 below.

![Graph showing NAPLAN numeracy (MSS), Australia and Queensland, 2008–17](image)

**Figure 2.5: NAPLAN numeracy (MSS), Australia and Queensland, 2008–17**

Since testing began, the performance in numeracy of Queensland Year 3 and 5 students increased at a greater rate than the performance of Australian students as a whole. Year 7 and 9 students progressed at roughly the same rate as the nation. Queensland numeracy results in 2017 were the highest recorded in all year levels.

The improvements in numeracy were also evident across the Prep cohorts in Year 3 since 2011. The performance of Year 5 students has been closer to the nation since 2013.
A focus on improving the teaching and learning of numeracy is adding up for students and staff at Winton State School.

In 2015, the school identified that about 15 per cent of students were not achieving as expected in mathematics. There was also a perception among teachers, students and parents that mathematics was a difficult subject to teach and learn. In order to change this perception and improve student outcomes, the school focused its improvement agenda on numeracy.

The school began by embedding the teaching of mathematics throughout the curriculum. This made everyone at the school feel part of the improvement. Class action plans were developed from data analysis, which focused on the identified areas for class and individual improvement. To engage students in deep learning tasks, mathematical concepts were applied to real-life situations and tailored to students’ interests and needs.

Investing for Success funding was used to engage an additional mathematics teacher, and professional development supported the improvement agenda. Through a partnership with a university and regional support, the school engaged experts to deepen teachers’ understanding about teaching mathematics.

As a result of the changes, the relationship of teachers, students and parents with mathematics improved, and the old assumptions were replaced with a strong ‘growth mindset’ and ‘can do’ attitude. Students are now more willing to resolve higher order tasks. Student performance in NAPLAN improved in 2017, with 100 per cent of students achieving at or above the NMS. In the 2017 School Opinion Survey, 100 per cent of teachers believed they now have the necessary skills to teach mathematics effectively, and 100 per cent of students believed that their mathematical skills are being developed.
2.6 Year 12 student attainment

Contemporary social and economic changes have profoundly shifted the relationship between education and the labour market. Youth unemployment, economic restructuring and the competitive pressures of globalisation necessitate a broader range of pathways to the world of work. The traditional linear transition from school into further education, training and employment of previous generations has been replaced by more complex trajectories (Cuervo & Wyn 2011; MCEETYA 2008). The uncertainty and risk of the labour market for school-leavers have seen an increased emphasis on completing Year 12 and providing a wider range of Year 12 qualifications. More young people are also completing post-school qualifications (NCVER 2014; Liu & Nguyen 2011).

‘Those with Year 12 have a greater likelihood of continuing with further study, particularly in higher education, as well as entering into the workforce. Year 12 attainment contributes to the development of a skilled workforce, and in turn, to ongoing economic development and improved living conditions.’

(ABS 2011)

In Queensland, students who complete Year 12 are issued with a senior education profile, which can contain the following elements (QCAA 2015):

- Senior Statement, which shows studies and results and is issued to all students who attend up until the final day of Year 12
- Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE), which is the senior school qualification
- Tertiary Entrance Statement, which shows an Overall Position (OP) used to rank students for admission to tertiary study
- Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA), which recognises the achievement of students who have an individualised learning program.

A wide range of learning can contribute towards the QCE including:

- senior school subjects
- vocational education and training (VET)
- school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SATs)
- university subjects undertaken while at school.

It is a departmental priority to ensure that every Queensland state school student has the opportunity to achieve QCE or QCIA qualifications by the end of Year 12. The State schools strategy 2017–2021 identifies the improvement of Year 12 certification rates as a key performance indicator (DET 2017d). The department is also committed to increasing the proportion of students with disability receiving a QCE (DET 2017e).
2.6.1 Year 12 attainment practices in review schools

Review schools provided an extensive range of pathways to Year 12 attainment. Schools developed transition programs to the labour market and post-Year 12 studies through OP, QCE, QCIA and VET qualifications, as well as SATs.

There was a strategic focus on Year 12 attainment in many review schools: committees were created, administrative responsibilities were delegated among staff, and student targets were established. Monitoring was prominent, with teachers often assigned to case manage students through their senior years. In some schools, data walls and specialist software were also used to monitor Year 12 students’ performance.

Pathways were also structured with the use of senior education and training plans, the Guideline for individual learning, and commercial products that supported students to gain skills and work experience.

Many schools took account of the local context when developing their certificate II and III courses. A remote school in Central Queensland region adapted offerings in its Year 11 and Year 12 VET program to the demands of the local hospitality industry. A combined school in Far North Queensland region offered certificate-level qualifications in business, horsemanship and early childhood.

Partnering with organisations external to the school was central to preparing students for work or tertiary education. Many review schools had partnerships with local businesses and business associations for the provision of student work experience. Schools also partnered with technical and further education (TAFE) institutes, registered training organisations (RTOs) and colleges to provide trade and occupational qualifications to students.

A number of review schools also had partnerships with universities. An urban secondary school in Darling Downs South West region had a long-term partnership with the local university in order to increase and improve student transition to tertiary education. The partnership included the university’s participation in the school’s parent information nights and careers program, and students attending university experience days. High-achieving students were also provided with an opportunity to take part in a program that gives access to university subjects while at school and automatic entry to university.

Many schools also participated in events to expose students to the possibilities of post-school life. An urban secondary school in North Queensland region was instrumental in a school–industry event to promote school-based apprenticeships and traineeships to all schools in the local area. An urban primary school in South East region started early with a specific program that exposed Year 6 students to life at the local university campus.

School review reports revealed that students with disability are increasingly being supported to undertake a QCE; this support included individual case management.
A collaborative data tracking and case management process is helping Kirwan State High School to achieve top results in QCE and QCIA attainment.

To support its nearly 350 Year 12 students, the school developed an innovative, research-based approach to using data to improve student learning. Collaborative case management is led by the school’s QCE team, which acts as a control hub, directing the resources of the school to support the individual needs of at-risk students. The team is led by a deputy principal, and includes guidance officers, heads of department, community education counsellors and other non-teaching staff. The careful tracking of student progress is coupled with targeted support and intervention.

The school developed a QCE data wall that acts as a single point of truth for monitoring student progress. Data from TraQCEr, OneSchool, VET certificate completion, teachers and parents is studied by the QCE team when placing and moving students on the data wall. The wall is personalised with student photos, and encourages student and parent interaction. The data walls are also used for collaborative subject team meetings.

Central to the school’s capacity to track student progress is the development of an innovative software program called ‘eTrack’, which was created on the school's InSchool platform, and links together different types of data to reduce the length of data cycles.

The new approach has helped to build staff capability in data use. By ‘putting faces on the data’ (Sharratt & Fullan 2012), the school better understands the unique story behind each student’s situation. As a result of this approach, 100 per cent of Year 12 students have graduated with a QCE or QCIA for the past three years.
2.6.2 Year 12 attainment measures

In 2017, Queensland state schools represented about 60 per cent of Queensland’s Year 12 enrolments, and more than 70 per cent of Queensland’s Indigenous Year 12 enrolments. Many 2017 Queensland state school outcomes were the highest since 2008:

- 98.1 per cent of Queensland state school students received either a QCE or QCIA, an increase of 0.3 percentage points since 2016
- 78.5 per cent of OP-eligible Queensland state school students obtained an OP1–15 or International Baccalaureate Diploma (IBD), an increase of 0.8 percentage points since 2016
- 64.7 per cent achieved a VET certificate level II or higher, an increase of 1.5 percentage points since 2016.

The percentage of students receiving an OP has consistently declined since 2008. At the same time, an increasingly larger proportion of students have completed Year 12 with VET certificate III or higher qualifications. This may indicate that school planning is increasingly tailored to optimise post-school pathways for individual students (see Figure 2.6 below).

![Figure 2.6: Comparison of Year 12 qualification mix, 2008–17](image)

*Excludes students who also received an OP or IBD

For state school students who applied to the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre in 2017, 96.6 per cent received an offer of a place within a tertiary course.

Involvement in the IBD program remained on an upward trend, with 301 students in the program in 2017 and 86.5 per cent of these receiving the qualification.
2.7 Closing the Gap

Queensland has been party to the National Indigenous Reform Agreement since late 2008. Negotiated by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), the agreement establishes an integrated intergovernmental reform strategy to reduce Indigenous disadvantage by ‘closing the gap’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in life expectancy, health, education and employment (ATNS 2016).

The two key schooling targets are (COAG 2008a, p. 8):

- to halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for Indigenous students in a decade
- to halve the gap for Indigenous students aged 20 to 24 in Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment rates by 2020.

COAG agreed to an additional target in May 2014 (Australian Government 2015, pp. 5, 11) to ‘close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance within five years (by the end of 2018)’.

The Queensland Government has maintained its commitment to ‘closing the gap’ in education; it is a specific performance goal in the State schools strategy 2017–2021 (DET 2017d). While further work is needed to deliver on the targets within the established timeframes, Queensland continues to work to address the disparities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and other students (Queensland Government 2017).

As the Advancing education plan outlines (DET 2016a, pp. 14, 16, 18, 22, 24), the department is:

- supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s access to their heritage by maintaining, learning or researching their traditional cultures and languages
- working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to complete Year 12 and successfully transition to further study or work
- employing specialist coaches in literacy or English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) to lift the reading outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- establishing an Indigenous-specific parent and community engagement strategy to promote active partnerships with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community
- identifying and mentoring emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders.
2.7.1 Closing the Gap practices in review schools

Review schools were making substantial efforts to ‘close the gap’. Many school staff, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander personnel, were deeply engaged in informal and formal roles in Indigenous schooling issues and maintained the prominence of an Indigenous focus in school practice.

Community advisors and liaison officers were central to fostering relationships between review schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Relationships with families were formalised in advisory committees and weekly or fortnightly meetings with parents. Similar engagement was apparent in partnerships with local groups and organisations. A number of review schools developed partnerships with local health services, day care providers, and Indigenous organisations to serve the cultural and material needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Some review schools employed Indigenous education officers to assist with managing behaviour, liaise with parents, and promote Indigenous culture as a part of the school’s curriculum, events and facilities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were employed as attendance officers, and also played a significant role within classrooms. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, teacher aides and parent volunteers worked in many review schools. Local Elders were frequently mentioned in school review reports as valued members of the school community who provided advice and contributed to teaching the curriculum.

A rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region had a team of five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attendance officers and an additional administrative support officer. Together, they established a highly structured process for tracking attendance, which included same-day contact with families and the recording of late arrivals. Other aspects of their attendance program included a school bus service, rewards scheme, home visits, and regular contact with classrooms and teachers (with the dual purpose of building relationships and developing a deeper knowledge of classroom activity to better inform parents and carers).

The Clontarf Foundation played a significant role in a number of review schools. Clontarf Academies cater for male Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Years 7 to 12, focusing on the values of respect, commitment, responsibility, resilience and effort. Schools also developed their own programs. A rural secondary school in Darling Downs South West region, for example, established a scheme to support
female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The programs included a diverse range of activities, which focused on students’ education, discipline, life skills, self-esteem and employment prospects.

Many review schools celebrated Indigenous culture. For more detail, see section 3.3.3.

Students were a driving force in many recognition and diversity activities. At a combined school in Metropolitan region, the student council convened a multicultural festival where Indigenous artefacts were incorporated in school facilities. An urban primary school in the same region had a student leadership team, with designated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation, whose members organised assembly and acted as role models to other students.

Review schools were active in accessing funding and programs to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and engagement. Examples included the Mob Kinectors program, Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience, Deadly Choices, Families as First Teachers, Bangarra Rekindling Program and specific attendance programs.

Engagement and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture were evident in curriculum content. For example, a rural primary school in Central Queensland region had a weekly language revival program where all students learned the local Indigenous language. An urban primary school in North Coast region had a bush tucker garden and a lunchtime Murri Club. Yarning circles and homework clubs were other examples of dedicated learning spaces used to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student learning.

Professional development in Indigenous culture was not widely evident among review schools. Positive examples included staff at a combined school in Metropolitan region attending yarning circles to develop and strengthen their understanding of Indigenous perspectives; and the building of the cultural competence of non-Indigenous staff at a rural primary school in Central Queensland region through an induction process at the beginning of each year. The desire for cultural awareness training to help support the strong cultural connections of the school was raised by some staff at an urban primary school in South East region.
A philosophy of high expectations in academic achievement, attendance and behaviour was apparent or developing in review schools with Indigenous enrolments. Principals played an important role in disseminating cultural messages and creating ambition in the minds of parents, staff and students, which were reinforced by academic targets and specific mechanisms for improvement. A remote school in Darling Downs South West region introduced targets for each year level, which were communicated to and行动ed by teachers. In order to improve student results, a rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region developed an observation and feedback culture.

Targeted interventions in numeracy and literacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were apparent in a number of review schools, and often related to learning English as an additional language. A rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region funded an EAL/D consultant to work with students.

Improving Year 12 outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was the focus of many review schools. The extensive suite of services at an urban secondary school in Darling Downs South West region saw 100 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male students graduating with a QCE in recent years. Similarly, an urban secondary school in North Queensland region had extensive QCE tracking, and student support ensured all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attained either a QCE or a QCIA.

2.7.2 Closing the Gap measures

The latest departmental reporting data show mixed progress for COAG’s education-related Closing the Gap targets.

NAPLAN

The target set by COAG of halving the gap in NMS for reading and numeracy by 2018 has been achieved in Queensland for Year 3 reading four times since 2013. Year 5 reading and Year 9 numeracy have also achieved this target in previous years, but these gaps have since widened.

The year-on-year results do not display a consistent narrowing of the gap for any test area, but rather a volatile pattern across all year levels. This is true not only for Queensland, but also for other jurisdictions.

In net terms, since baseline:

- the gap narrowed in all eight test areas included in the Closing the Gap targets
- Year 3 demonstrated the greatest narrowing of the gap overall, compared to other year levels
- the gap in Year 3 reading more than halved from 2008 to 2017 to 10.3 percentage points
- the gap in Year 7 writing widened by almost a third to 24.8 percentage points.
Year 12 outcomes

In 2017, many outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander state school students have continued to improve. In particular:

- 2104 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students completed Year 12, an increase of five per cent from 2003 students in 2016.
- 97.2 per cent achieved either a QCE or a QCIA, an increase of 0.1 percentage points. The gap in Queensland certification continued to be less than one percentage point (0.9).
- 63.9 per cent of OP-eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander state school students achieved an OP 1–15 or IBD, up 1.4 percentage points from 2016.

The Indigenous apparent retention rate for Years 10 to 12 improved slightly in 2017, up to 68.2 per cent, but remained significantly below the non-Indigenous rate of 84.3 per cent (16.1 percentage point gap).

Student attendance

Table 2.4 below shows that, in 2017, the attendance rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students decreased slightly by 0.2 percentage points to 84.8 per cent. The non-Indigenous attendance rate remained steady at 92.2 per cent.

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<tr>
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<td>84.4</td>
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</tbody>
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Table 2.4: Student attendance rates, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, Semester 1, 2013–17
Source: OneSchool.

This chapter has presented a range of data to examine key preconditions and outcomes for Queensland state schools. The practices related to these concepts, as evident in 2017 review schools, were described. Schools can use these findings to consider their own circumstances, goals and achievements. School contexts can differ significantly, so caution should be exercised in determining if any of the described practices and strategies are applicable. Case studies provide more contextualised data.

The next chapter focuses on school improvement practice across state schools in Queensland, in the context of school leadership, teaching and support for student learning. The data are again taken from the 2017 school review reports, and supported by case studies of promising practices uncovered in the review process.
03
School practices in 2017 review schools
‘School improvement is the process of changing school practices in ways that lead to better student outcomes’ (Masters 2016, p. 7). The aim of school reviews is to assist schools in this process by providing independent feedback on their daily practices and helping to determine the next steps in their improvement journey. The National School Improvement Tool used in the review process describes a range of effective school-wide practices known to positively influence student outcomes.

This chapter describes the practices of Queensland state schools reviewed in 2017, based on data collected and documented in school review reports. The first two sections present the practices related to leading a school, and those concerning teaching. According to research, both school leadership and teaching have a significant impact on student learning outcomes (Hattie 2003; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe 2008). Moreover, the two factors are interrelated, as the impact of leadership on student performance is achieved indirectly through teachers or by creating conditions that lead to greater consistency in levels of effectiveness among teachers (Ham & Kim 2015; Heck & Hallinger 2014). The third section of this chapter describes practices supporting student learning at school.

Leadership practices are described using the framework developed by Fullan (2014), which focuses on four key roles school leaders perform: managers, learning leaders, change agents and system players. School practices related to teaching are discussed using three areas of focus: teachers (who), curriculum (what) and pedagogy (how). The learning support section discusses how schools ensure positive learning environments, how they increase student engagement and responsibility for learning, and how they identify and address additional student needs.

Findings regarding school practices are illustrated by examples and more detailed case studies.
3.1 Leadership

Although there is agreement in the literature regarding the significant role school leaders play in improving student outcomes, how they influence student outcomes is not as clear. Some research suggests that a principal’s training and experiences are significantly related to school proficiency growth over time, dependent on school context (Bowers & White 2014). However, more recent research suggests that what matters is not so much the degree of principal professionalism and autonomy, but the extent to which they are able to exercise it (Dimmock & Tan 2016). Research also suggests that the relationship between leadership and student outcomes is mediated by educational practices and strategic changes in those practices (Heck & Hallinger 2010, p. 881). It would appear that the different environments and needs of schools require school leaders to develop context-specific skills and practices in order to maximise student outcomes.

Principals of Queensland state schools are supported through the Principals’ leadership agenda 2015 (DET 2015d). The agenda provides support for both foundation skills and deeper knowledge development, through induction programs for new principals (or principals new to their role, band or school), development guides, leadership development programs, learning circles and an online forum.

The following sections use Fullan’s (2014) framework to summarise four sets of leadership practices identified in review schools in 2017.

3.1.1 School leaders as managers

According to Fullan (2014), principals must, first of all, be managers. In most 2017 review schools, principals had a good understanding of student needs and demonstrated a commitment to improving teaching and learning to meet those needs. Teachers often commented that principals were supportive of effective teaching practice and the development of their capability, while many parents reported school leaders attended to any questions proactively and promptly. Staff and community members often identified a strong and united leadership team as being the key driver of school improvement. Principals in particular were seen as pivotal to ensuring community involvement in the school. Their professionalism and dedication were strongly valued by the community.

Depending on school size and context, the leadership team usually comprised the principal and one or more of the following positions: deputy principal, head of curriculum (HOC), heads of department (HODs), head of special education services (HOSES), master teacher and cohort team leaders. At an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region, the principal developed an extended leadership team that included a deputy principal, master teacher, HOSES, two support teachers literacy and numeracy (STLaNs), literacy coach, Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) coach, and information and communication technology (ICT) coach. At an urban primary school in Metropolitan region, the leadership team was restructured to include instructional coaches for pedagogical areas and digital technologies. At an urban primary school in North Queensland region, an instructional coach was employed to co-lead the school’s quality teaching and learning project.
The importance of defining roles and responsibilities that are linked to school improvement initiatives was acknowledged in many review schools, although the full diversity of leadership roles was not always well documented. Many schools had developed detailed roles and responsibility statements that were often aligned with the explicit improvement agenda and key priority areas. In some schools, a staff handbook or organisational chart outlined these responsibilities. At a remote school in Far North Queensland region, an organisational chart with roles and areas of responsibility was documented and shared through the school’s OnePortal team site, along with identification of key deliverables and timelines for each leader in driving the improvement agenda. However, reviews also identified some ambiguity regarding leadership roles, responsibilities and lines of referral. In many review schools, there was a need for the roles and responsibilities of leaders, as well as their success criteria, to be further clarified, documented and communicated across the school.

Reviews provided many examples of principals establishing a model of shared leadership to optimise the skills, talents and enthusiasm of other leaders and staff. One remote school in Darling Downs South West region established a shared leadership model that designated roles to each member of the leadership team and distributed leadership roles for teacher leaders. An urban primary school in Metropolitan region created strategic teams that included both teacher and leader representation. These teams supported the planning, implementation and review of school programs across four key areas (school improvement, student success and wellbeing, science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics [STEAM], and teaching and learning). At a rural secondary school in Far North Queensland region, school leaders applied systems leadership theory to identify staff suitable for the different instructional and organisational positions at the school.

Some review schools reported school leadership instability over several years, with a number of acting principals and deputy principals, resulting in frequent changes to the schools’ direction and expectations. Other issues included uncertainty regarding roles, responsibilities, accountabilities and communication within the school. In some instances, this had a detrimental impact on the development of school targets, initiatives and programs. Teachers’ ability to embed practices in curriculum, teaching and learning was also compromised, and a sense of ‘change fatigue’ negatively affected the school’s learning culture.

In a number of review schools, principals were new to the school and were only beginning to develop their knowledge and understanding of the school context.
Managing human resources

Review schools recognised the importance of attracting and retaining quality staff and developing staff capability to maximise outcomes for students. School leaders prioritised attracting high-performing teaching graduates and retaining highly capable teachers. This was reflected in the considerable time and energy invested by school leaders in recruitment.

Management of human and financial resources, and workforce planning to attract and retain quality teachers, presented a challenge for school leaders, parents and community members in some review schools. These schools were usually faced with high levels of student mobility, recent or significant growth in student enrolments, and high turnover of teaching staff. In some review schools, a high proportion of beginning teachers was an additional complexity.

Staffing difficulties were a particular concern for schools in rural or remote locations. The attraction and development of teachers in these schools presented an ongoing challenge. The rural and remote context of the school was also associated with higher turnover of staff. Despite their location, some schools managed to attract and retain a number of new and highly capable teachers.

Leaders identified that high turnover of teachers and other staffing challenges negatively impacted on the development of consistent teaching and learning practices in some review schools. The continuation of particular roles was often critical to the sustainability of curriculum and teaching improvement. Instability of human resources and frequency of staff transitions had negative consequences for the level of specialist teacher support available, teaching time, differentiated programs for students with additional learning needs, collegial relationships and the learning culture in some schools.

To address these challenges, school leaders worked with regional human resources staff on a range of solutions (for example, national advertising). Some principals also worked with other local schools to arrange creative solutions for staff vacancies. Many schools tried to attract and develop quality teachers through a cluster teacher model. Some schools worked with local universities to engage pre-service teachers who performed well during practicums. This was the case at an urban primary school in South East region, which recruited new staff by hosting pre-service teachers and offering short teaching contracts as new positions became available.

In some review schools, the leadership team focused strongly on maintaining high levels of staff wellbeing, but in a small number of schools, staff morale and interpersonal relationships were identified as an area of concern. In some schools, regional personnel helped to establish a staff wellbeing framework.

Support for staff wellbeing was a strong feature of a rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region. The health and wellbeing team met three times each term and staff participated in a variety of initiatives including yoga, healthy eating and boot camp after school. At an urban primary school in Metropolitan region, a social club met regularly to support staff wellbeing. Staff had an ‘accountabilabuddy’ who supported, acknowledged and celebrated important milestones and achievements.
Managing school budgets

In many review schools, the school budget was formulated by the principal with support from an administration officer or business manager. Principals were also responsible for finalising the draft budget and monitoring and reviewing the expenditure of school funds throughout the year. Some schools involved other members of the leadership team in this process to ensure appropriate allocations were provided to key programs and initiatives. At an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region, the school's budget was created through a collaborative process that included the principal, business manager, other school leaders and cost centre managers. The allocation of resources was informed by a number of school processes, including the explicit improvement agenda, Investing for Success (I4S) planning and allocation, information from student support services meetings, local consultative committee (LCC) meetings, the special education program and behaviour management feedback. At an urban secondary school in the same region, decisions were made by a budget committee consisting of a deputy principal, HOD, teacher and support staff representatives, along with the business manager and principal. A similar finance committee was established at an urban primary school in North Coast region, which also included community representatives. A number of schools received support from their regional finance hub.

The additional funding reported most frequently by review schools came from I4S. A number of review schools also operated a scheme to provide the majority of consumable resources needed by students throughout the year. Schools raised funds for special projects and resources through the acquisition of grants, such as the Smart School Subsidy Scheme. Significant funding was also provided by Parents and Citizens' Associations (P&Cs) and raised through local events or school facilities hire. One very large, urban secondary school in South East region had an international student program that generated significant revenue.

Review school budgets were based on historical data and aligned predominantly to systemic and school priorities. The use of I4S funding was generally aligned with the explicit improvement agenda in most schools.

The budget overview reports in most schools indicated that cost centres relating to curriculum, teaching and learning were tracking in accordance with the budget cycle. In a few schools, however, several cost centres were significantly underspent at the time of review.

Review schools invested heavily in building expert teaching teams, which included funding additional human resources and professional learning opportunities for staff. Many review schools employed additional staff such as a curriculum coach, PBL coach, data and differentiation teacher, external facilitator for reading and literacy improvement, or an administration officer to implement the school's attendance strategy. Many schools also invested in additional teachers or teacher aide support for their priority areas or specific programs and initiatives.

A significant number of schools allocated funds for professional development, including external development programs, in-school coaching and leadership development. This was often aimed at building staff capabilities in priority areas. Professional learning of staff was also supported by funding release time for teachers to engage in collaborative planning, collaborative data inquiry and other professional learning activities.
Another significant area of budget spending was teaching and learning programs and related resources. Increasing resources for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), literacy and numeracy, and digital technologies was often reported by review schools. An urban primary school in South East region, with the support of its P&C, invested in enhancing the school’s performing arts and instrumental music program, science education, digital technologies, and gardening program. Some funding supported high-achieving students or those needing additional support. Schools also used their funding to support activities such as school camps, sporting and cultural programs, or transportation.

In a number of review schools, the need for more collaborative, transparent approaches to developing the budget and allocating resources was identified. In these schools, staff were unaware of budgeting processes and did not contribute to budgeting decisions. The clarity and understanding of budgetary processes is an area for improvement in some review schools. In addition, systematic monitoring of the budget and the effectiveness of resource allocation in the delivery of student outcomes is yet to be implemented in some schools.

**Managing data processes**

Reliable data are one of the key sources of feedback on how teachers and leaders are performing. According to Sharratt and Fullan (2012, p. 162) ‘[i]f principals expect teachers to be using data for instruction, then they must provide the primary leadership’. This means emphasising the use of data to maximise student learning, ensuring there is an effective system for data collection and analysis across the school, and supporting school staff in developing data literacy.

In review schools, leaders acknowledged that school data collection and analysis need to provide the information to inform teaching practice and student learning. All schools reported collecting and analysing data and, in the majority of schools, data were used by school leaders to inform strategic planning and monitor student achievement over time. However, data analysis was not always well structured or consistent across the school.

At the time of review, approximately three-quarters of review schools had developed a whole-school data plan. The plan usually provided details of collected data and evidence of learning, dates, timelines, staff responsibilities, actions required and related accountabilities. In some schools, this plan was part of a more comprehensive assessment, reporting and differentiation framework. In many schools, the data plan clearly supported the explicit improvement agenda, and was linked to school priority areas through targets and benchmarks, often aligned with the region’s expectations for student achievement. Many schools closely monitored data for particular student groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students with disability, or focused on monitoring data in school priority areas.

Most review schools reported the systematic collection of a range of student outcome data, including diagnostic data and classroom assessments. The collection of these data was usually the responsibility of school leaders and teachers, or specialist school teams, for example, the PBL committee collecting behaviour data, or special needs team gathering social and emotional development data.
A range of measures and assessment tools was used in review schools to collect data on student achievement. These included, but were not limited to, National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), Early Start, Progressive Achievement Tests in Reading (PAT-R), Progressive Achievement Tests in Mathematics (PAT-M), PM Benchmarks and Prose Reading Observation, Behaviour and Evaluation of Comprehension (PROBE).

Occasionally, schools collected other data related to school improvement. For example, the leadership team at a combined school in Far North Queensland region undertook a pulse survey of staff several times a year to identify what was working well within the school. All staff were invited to identify issues that could be considered for school improvement.

While many review schools had developed robust monitoring and reporting processes, in some schools the implementation of measures was inconsistent and data were recorded and retained by teachers in a variety of formats. In these schools, the reviews identified the need to develop a whole-school approach to the gathering, recording and interpretation of student data.

Review schools stored collected data, including attendance, behaviour and achievement data, in OneSchool and in spreadsheets. Teachers routinely entered class data into OneSchool in line with the assessment schedule, and referred to their class dashboard to monitor student progress over time. Some schools also used regional programs, such as the Central Queensland Student Support System. A number of secondary schools used TrackEd software to monitor the progress of senior students. The OneSchool dashboard was used extensively in many schools to record data and monitor student progress. Almost all schools had adopted a whole-school, centralised approach to recording data.

In most review schools, data were shared with staff, students, parents and the community. Most often, data were displayed in classrooms or the staff room, presented by the principal at staff meetings, or conveyed to community members through P&C meetings and newsletters. At a remote school in Central Queensland region, school-wide datasets were summarised, displayed and communicated through classroom data walls, and a booklet was sent home each week to communicate student progress to parents. At an urban primary school in North Coast region, the leadership team allocated a special room for the display of year-level and whole-school reading data. Some schools also shared data with students, with level of achievement (LOA) ladders or trackers displayed in classrooms to provide visual reinforcement.

Data walls encouraging teachers and school leaders to analyse individual student progress were evident in more than one-third of review schools. Staff often commented that the data walls were central to professional discussions regarding student improvement. At a remote school in Central Queensland region, individual academic outcomes, attendance and behaviour data were collected, tracked and monitored on an ‘All Stars’ wall, and students were able to articulate why and how these data were collected.

A system for summarising, displaying and communicating student data to staff was in the early stages of development in a number of review schools. School leaders identified the need to broaden the sharing of data to include all students and curriculum areas.
Systematic, data-driven cycles of inquiry are helping to improve instruction at Kirwan State School.

The school introduced these cycles of inquiry in response to an identified lack of alignment between curriculum, teaching practices, assessment and data analysis. The cycles, facilitated by the leadership team, are conducted once a term, and involve teachers interrogating classroom data for evidence of effective teaching and learning. Teachers use data to reflect on their teaching practice, and to identify areas where they can better support student learning.

In addition to the cycles of inquiry, weekly short-term data cycle meetings are held. During these meetings, teachers work with a coach to identify and discuss links between their teaching practice and students’ work. The coaches support the teachers, helping them to monitor student achievement, reflect on their practice and plan for the following week. Teachers value the discussions, and can detail specific examples of how the conversations have resulted in more effective teaching practices and improved student outcomes.

Cycles of inquiry and focused conversations have significantly increased teachers’ knowledge of curriculum, and their confidence in using data to inform their teaching practice. They have also increased teachers’ understanding of the alignment between the school’s curriculum, classroom teaching and the assessment of student progress. The coaching model was fundamental to supporting the transfer of new knowledge to achieve more effective teaching approaches. Overall, this has led to increased expectations for student achievement across the school and improved student performance, with NAPLAN mean scale scores (MSS) for Year 5 steadily increasing in all areas since 2012.
School leaders analysed longitudinal datasets to understand current achievement levels and how they may have changed over time. Data analysis was, at times, informed by existing research. In some schools, analysis and discussion of data were clearly focused on improvement priorities. Significant time was committed at a rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region to collecting, interpreting and correlating data, particularly investigating the relationship between student attendance and student achievement. Attendance data were used to guide class programs and student groupings via staff meetings, case conferences and personal learning improvement plans. Another example of the effective use of data to track student progress was at an urban primary school in Metropolitan region, which introduced student progress meetings to improve students’ reading achievement using the percentage of students achieving results in the upper two bands (U2B) as a measure of success.

In almost all review schools, whole-school datasets were discussed and monitored by school leaders. Formal or informal data conversations at staff meetings were common. At a very large, urban secondary school in Metropolitan region, student achievement data were collected at routine intervals, and discussed and reflected on in ‘stop, think, reflect’ meetings. At an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region, teaching teams met with a member of the leadership team to discuss learning units and related student data.

In some schools, the analysis of data was the focus of regular meetings of school teams and professional learning communities (PLCs). For example, HODs worked with their teams to review achievement data relating to their respective subject areas.

Some schools developed additional practices to support data analysis and use. Examples included a data café established to facilitate discussions regarding student data, school-based templates developed to scaffold analysis and planning from data, and the use of a data coach to help aggregate datasets.

While most review schools were reported to be analysing data, in a number of schools the process of engaging teachers in more rigorous data conversations and analysis had only just begun. The triangulation of LOA data with standardised assessments such as NAPLAN was a developing practice in some schools. Further work is needed in many schools to formalise approaches to data analysis and to strengthen the culture of self-evaluation and reflection.

The use of data was a priority area in a number of review schools. The use of student data in teaching is described in section 3.2.3. School leaders most often used whole-school data to monitor achievement in key learning areas, inform whole-school strategic decision making to allocate resources, and develop programs and initiatives. At an urban primary school in South East region, data were viewed as a crucial component of the improvement agenda, and members of the leadership team used broad datasets to track cohort and individual student progress, and build a collective understanding of, and commitment to, improvement in priority areas.

Many review schools used data to identify and address the needs of students with disability, and to track progress of specific student groups, for example, high-achieving students, or Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) and Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA) progress. Behaviour data were often used to develop various components of the PBL program. At an urban primary school in North Coast region, the leadership team worked with the PBL team and used data to inform whole-school decision making, including changing school break times and lunchtime staff meeting routines.
The use of data to inform instruction, programs and resourcing required greater consistency in some schools. The use of student achievement data at the junior level to inform practices for senior students remains relatively untapped. Reviews also identified limited evidence of the use of data to monitor the effectiveness of specific improvement initiatives and strategies over time.

3.1.2 School leaders as lead learners

‘Learning leaders promote the development of all members of a school community and position leaders as the key drivers of learning-focused school improvement’ (Riley 2013, p. 3). This involves taking responsibility for attracting quality staff whose expertise forms a school’s professional capital, and the continuous development of this capital. Professional capital can take three forms: human, social and decisional (Hargreaves & Fullan 2012), as shown in Figure 3.1 below.

![Figure 3.1: Concept of professional capital](image)

While human capital refers to attracting and cultivating the knowledge and skills of school staff, social capital is about promoting interactions and relationships between people through collaboration and group work (Fullan 2014, pp. 74–5), and decisional capital is the ‘... resources of knowledge, intelligence and energy that are required to put human and social capital to effective use’ (Fullan 2014, p. 80).

These three forms of capital are interdependent and require collaboration.

‘Recent research found that the expansion of networks and partnerships involving collaborative inquiry interactions, within individual schools and across schools, results in increases in human, social and decisional capital, not only among teachers, but also among other stakeholders.’

(Chapman et al. 2016)
Professional learning management

A whole-school documented professional learning plan was a feature in more than half of review schools. The plan usually provided information on school priorities, required training, timelines and resource requirements. At an urban primary school in North Queensland region, a professional development plan outlined an area of learning for staff for each week of the year, and was linked to the school’s explicit improvement agenda. At a rural primary school from the same region, the plan specified the success criteria for teachers in the implementation of the explicit improvement agenda. Not all schools’ plans, however, were time-bound, personnel-specific or well linked to the school improvement agenda. Some schools were yet to fully develop a whole-school professional learning plan.

In many review schools, staff had an annual performance development plan (APDP) in place. These plans were often aligned with school priorities and managed by a member of the leadership team. At a rural primary school in Central Queensland region, leadership team members worked with their cohort teachers to create APDPs. At an urban primary school in North Coast region, APDPs were supplemented by a newly introduced positive psychology program, which included components of staff and colleague reflection and was aligned to the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) standards. In some schools, however, the APDPs were not connected to AITSL standards.

Many teachers identified the APDP process as a useful opportunity for them to determine their professional learning needs and goals, and to request a range of differentiated professional support. However, the extent to which these plans were perceived to build staff capacity and improve learning outcomes for students varied. In some review schools, APDPs were not yet developed, actioned or monitored for all staff.

Some review schools also had other documents to support the management of professional learning, for example, annual coaching and mentoring plans, and collegial engagement frameworks, which outlined the formal processes available to staff to receive support from colleagues and external sources.

Some leaders in review schools recognised the importance of developing a workforce succession plan to ensure the continuous availability of suitably qualified staff. Succession planning for school leaders and other key staff was rarely part of the professional learning agenda of review schools. At an urban primary school in North Coast region, succession planning to ensure the sustainability of school learning programs was achieved through a distributive leadership model.
**Human capital**

Human capital refers to the ‘human resource or personnel dimension of the quality of teachers in the school — their basic teaching talents’ (Fullan 2014, p. 70). The role of school leaders in building human capital is about acquiring talented, qualified staff, and developing their knowledge and skills by providing them with professional learning opportunities. In Australia, ‘... recognition of the power of performance and development and professional learning to drive advances in teacher practice and ultimately impact student outcomes, has never been greater’ (AITSL 2014a, p. 4).

Leaders in review schools were committed to improving the skills of staff, and staff were strongly focused on continual improvement of teaching and learning practices. The commitment of schools to building an expert teaching team was demonstrated by the deliberate targeting of I4S and other funding to develop teacher expertise. The provision of targeted professional learning opportunities often supported the explicit improvement agenda.

Professional learning was most often provided as:

- part of staff meetings, professional development days or other meetings such as curriculum planning sessions (as negotiated through LCCs)
- specific professional learning opportunities at local and regional venues
- coaching and mentoring programs, often engaging an external coach or specialist consultant
- online learning
- visiting other schools to access expertise in curriculum and pedagogy
- collaborative planning and moderation opportunities.

At an urban primary school in North Queensland region, a collaborative inquiry model was used to explore problems of practice and build capacity to address identified issues. At a very large, urban secondary school in South East region, a newly developed professional development routine of afternoon workshops, aligned to annual performance reviews, provided a differentiated approach to professional learning and was valued by teaching staff.

In many review schools, the areas targeted in professional learning opportunities were linked to the key teaching strategies, such as Explicit Instruction (EI), which often reflected a priority of the school's explicit improvement agenda. Schools focused on selected curriculum areas, effective use of technology, behaviour management and classroom profiling, or senior curriculum and pedagogy.

A number of schools invested in developing the leadership skills of staff. At a very large, urban secondary school in South East region, the leadership team engaged in self-development and professional learning through professional networks, peer engagement and professional reading. At a combined school in Metropolitan region, teachers were provided with opportunities to develop their leadership skills through an aspiring leaders program. Learning opportunities were also provided to school leaders to build their capacity in coaching and instructional leadership within the school. Regional personnel, such as the capabilities officer, provided intensive coaching for the early career principal at a remote school in Central Queensland region.
One of the areas of importance for review schools was curriculum. Professional learning in this area was focused on unpacking the Australian Curriculum and helping teachers with curriculum planning. Schools often engaged regional experts such as the principal education advisor – Australian Curriculum (PEA-AC) to deepen teachers’ understanding of curriculum content in priority areas.

As discussed, leaders in review schools considered collecting timely and reliable data as essential for improving learning outcomes for students. In many schools, there was a clear expectation that teachers analyse and use data to better understand their learners. However, to effectively use collected data to inform teaching, staff need to have an understanding of data, and skills to analyse data, develop accurate interpretations and confidently act on them. Overall, in review schools, teachers expressed varying degrees of data literacy.

Opportunities to improve data literacy were provided in many schools, and they usually included data conversations that supported teachers to use data to reflect and self-evaluate their practice. A proportion of staff meetings and professional development days was spent on analysing data and discussing the implications for classroom practice. In some instances, an external data coach was engaged, or the principal helped individual teachers with data analysis as a developmental activity.

In a small number of review schools, professional learning activities and opportunities to engage staff in more in-depth conversations regarding their pedagogical practices were not apparent. This was often due to the remote location of some schools, which limited opportunities to engage in local, quality professional learning and professional networks.

From 2018, the professional development and wellbeing of rural and remote teachers will be supported by Centres for Learning and Wellbeing in Darling Downs South West, North Queensland, Central Queensland and Far North Queensland regions (ALP 2017).

Teachers in some review schools sought more professional learning related to differentiation, especially in response to students with additional learning needs, and digital technologies. Members of the leadership team in a small number of schools also sought further professional learning to enable them to better fulfil their responsibilities.

### Induction and beginning teachers’ professional learning

In the majority of review schools, beginning teachers and new staff participated in an induction program. Beginning teachers were also provided with support through the department’s Mentoring Beginning Teachers program. This program included the appointment of a trained mentor and the development of an individual mentoring plan based on the teacher’s needs and goals and aligned to the AITSL standards. Participants met every week to share teaching ideas and discuss school policies. They were supported by feedback, observation and modelling provided by more experienced teachers or school leaders. At a remote school in Central Queensland region, the induction process for beginning teachers was led by the principal, lead teacher and a high-performing teacher, who provided observation, feedback and modelling opportunities. A very large, urban secondary school in North Coast region, with a significant number of first- and second-year teachers, developed two programs tailored to the needs of beginning and continuing teachers.

Beginning and new-to-the-school teachers in review schools also experienced informal support from colleagues to develop effective pedagogical practices. At a rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region, teachers new to the school received support from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to build their knowledge and understanding of the community.
Professional learning for beginning teachers often centred on curriculum planning, teaching strategies and other school practices, and contributed to the consistency of teaching across the school. In a few instances, induction related predominantly to mandatory professional learning and school operational matters.

A documented induction booklet was developed in some schools. At an urban primary school in Metropolitan region, the school’s edStudio site provided support and guidance for beginning and new teachers.

Most beginning and new teaching staff reported that they felt well supported through their school induction; however, in a few schools, systematic whole-school staff induction programs were yet to be developed or documented.

Teacher aides

In many review schools, teacher aides were provided with extensive opportunities for professional learning aligned with their work. They were included in professional development meetings and learned alongside teachers. An urban primary school in Metropolitan region supported teacher aides to gain their certificates III and IV in educational support to enhance their capability.

Many professional learning opportunities for teacher aides aligned to the school improvement agenda and priorities. For example, the principal at a rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region worked closely with teacher aides to build their skills and understanding to support the teaching of reading. At an urban primary school in North Coast region, teacher aides participated in professional learning with the deputy principal and team leader for curriculum and intervention to get support in the delivery of signature school practices.

In some instances, professional learning for teacher aides was aimed specifically at addressing the additional learning needs of students. At an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region, the speech–language pathologist trained teacher aides to deliver individual and group speech–language programs.

In some review schools, teacher aides reported they had little access to professional learning and would value more opportunities to enhance their capabilities. They expressed an interest in acquiring deeper knowledge to allow them to support the implementation of improvement priorities in the classroom.

Social capital

Unlike human capital, which resides within an individual, ‘[s]ocial capital spans individuals, existing as relationships or ties between individuals providing access to resources and leverage for change’ (Chapman et al. 2016, p. 180). Social relations and connections provide a venue for everyday conversations about teaching. Networks and relationships can be used when seeking professional advice, contributing to staff resilience (Hargreaves & Fullan 2012, p. 90). The role of school leaders is to create and support collaborative opportunities for knowledge sharing, both within and outside the school.
Goondiwindi State High School

STEAM team drives improvements in writing

Professional collaboration and a targeted approach to the teaching of writing are paying dividends at Goondiwindi State High School.

In 2015, the school identified that student writing needed to improve, particularly in Year 9. Writing became a key improvement priority for the school’s professional learning community, known as the STEAM team (Smart Teachers Enthusiastically Achieving More). The STEAM team meets fortnightly, led by the master teacher, and with the principal attending all meetings.

Following Kotter’s model of implementing change, the STEAM team identified areas for improvement, and introduced comprehensive processes to ensure a clear line of sight between data analysis, teaching strategies, coaching, review and feedback. The changes involved a cultural shift, with all teachers embracing the teaching of writing. The Year 8 teachers’ commitment to integrating literacy into their lesson plans soon expanded to include teachers from other year levels.

A series of resources was created to support the improvement agenda, including a STEAM writing guide and a system called the ‘Write Direction’, which provides clear steps for improvement.

Simultaneously, the STEAM team worked on enhancing the capability of teachers to effectively teach writing. Evidence-informed teaching strategies and resources were collaboratively developed, modelled and trialled. An edStudio was created where peer observations and feedback are recorded as a blog. This bank of teaching strategies is available to all staff.

The STEAM program has successfully improved student performance in writing (bucking the national downward trend in NAPLAN for Year 9 between 2015 and 2016), and established an exemplar expert teaching team that has been recognised nationally, including by two awards at the ACER Excellence in Professional Practice conference in 2017.
In most review schools, principals recognised the value of collaboration and ensured that opportunities were created for teachers to work together and learn from each other’s practices. A culture of teamwork and collaboration was often apparent, and staff valued the mutual support provided by colleagues.

Collaboration was embedded in many professional learning opportunities, such as coaching and mentoring (described in section 3.1.2 above). Collaboration was also an important aspect of schools’ instructional practices (both leader-led and those performed by peer teachers). These practices are described in more detail below (see decisional capital) and in section 3.2.1 (Feedback to teachers).

Other forms of professional learning collaboration commonly identified in review schools included:

- regular staff meetings that usually included a professional learning component, led by the principal and focused on a school improvement priority
- collegial professional discussions held during curriculum planning, assessment, moderation and reporting processes
- teams created to plan, analyse student data, discuss adjustments to teaching, share effective practice and identify opportunities to improve student learning
- PLCs and professional learning teams (PLTs) established to build a culture of collaboration
- collaboration between teachers and teacher aides to regularly reflect on their joint practice
- observation of more experienced colleagues in neighbouring schools
- professional learning collaboration within a cluster.
The reviews also identified schools’ unique approaches to collaboration. For example, an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region implemented a formal process of professional discussions with staff from each year level through a weekly morning tea meeting and a week of planning each term. The leadership team at an urban primary school in South East region discussed Fullan’s concept of ‘using the group to change the group’ as a driver for improving teaching practice and implementing change. At a combined school in Far North Queensland region, professional learning circles were emerging through monthly meetings, during which staff focused on a problem of practice.

The physical isolation of rural and remote schools often posed a challenge to sharing practices with other schools, and staff in these schools expressed a desire for further opportunities to learn through collaboration beyond the school.

At times, collaboration opportunities in review schools were limited to year-level groups. Some teachers expressed a desire to collaborate vertically to ensure consistent understanding and knowledge of curriculum, assessment, and teaching and learning strategies across year levels.

**Decisional capital**

Research reveals that the transference from professional learning to changed teaching practice is difficult to achieve (Cole 2012, p. 5), suggesting that there is room for schools to improve their decisional capital. Decisional capital refers to the individual or collective ‘capacity to choose well and make good decisions’ (Fullan 2014, p. 80). To be able to make good decisions, teachers and school leaders need the capability to make discretionary judgements, which is the essence of professionalism and decisional capital.

The development of decisional capital involves time, practice, feedback from peers and reflection (Hargreaves & Fullan 2012). Discussing decisions and rationale for judgements, observing other classroom teaching situations or teaching in the presence of peers provide opportunities to both practise decision-making skills and discuss these decisions (Chapman et al. 2016, p. 191).

School leaders can enhance decisional capital by enhancing human and social capital, and providing staff with decision-making opportunities followed by observation, feedback and reflection. This links to instructional leadership practices that involve leaders participating in teacher learning and development during classroom instruction. As research shows, ‘the closer educational leaders get to the core business of teaching and learning, the more likely they are to have a positive impact on students’ outcomes’ (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe 2008, p. 664).

Instructional leadership practices were evident in almost all review schools. These practices were often linked to the school’s explicit improvement agenda and aimed at supporting the implementation of new pedagogical approaches. In some schools, observation and feedback were seen by the leadership team as ways to ensure that pedagogical practices were effective and consistent across the school. In other schools, the primary purpose of instructional practices was to provide feedback to teachers on their practice. At an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region, the intent of instructional leadership practice was to seek feedback from students on their understanding of their learning journey. Student responses were provided to staff to prompt reflection on the clarity of messages to students. More rarely, instructional practices were used to monitor the effectiveness of improvement strategies.
Common instructional leadership practices in review schools were consistent with the Department of Education and Training and Queensland Teachers' Union joint statement on collegial engagement in classrooms (DET & QTU 2011), and included:

- classroom walkthroughs — in some schools, these were scheduled regularly in all classes, with a documented focus and written feedback offering suggestions for improvement
- modelled lessons, with elements of observation and feedback, and co-teaching, often conducted for new and early career teachers
- informal classroom visits, discussions and feedback to teaching staff by school leaders.

In some schools, instructional practices were embedded in coaching programs. The coaching cycle at an urban primary school in North Coast region included modelling of teaching strategies by coaches, co-teaching with the coach, and independent teaching observed by the coach. Each of these cycles was followed by coaching and feedback sessions.

Instructional practices were usually conducted by the principal or other school leaders, such as the HOC, HOD, master teacher or a regional coach. At a combined school in Central Queensland region, the master teacher modelled aspects of the school’s recently developed writing program for teachers. Each fortnight, teachers nominated a specific session in the school day to be observed and to receive feedback. At a very small, rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region, the principal used a ‘learning walks and talks’ approach to regularly provide informal feedback on teaching practices across the school. According to reviews, the depth and consistency of feedback to teachers from school leaders varied.

At times, instructional practices were developed and conducted within a cluster of schools. In one area of Central Queensland region, cluster principals undertook instructional rounds on a rotational basis to provide each other with timely and constructive feedback on identified teaching practices. Teachers in these schools were also involved in modelling and feedback processes with a cluster teacher.

According to data from review reports, the support of schools’ associate leaders in providing modelling, observation and feedback was particularly appreciated by teaching staff.

In some schools, despite the leadership team visiting classrooms frequently, a formal, systematic process for observation and feedback was not apparent. The roles of the leadership team in instructional leadership were not always clear, and staff willingness to invite colleagues and leaders into their classrooms to observe their teaching was still emerging in a small number of schools. Monitoring of the impact of these strategies was not strong. In most schools, however, teachers expressed a desire for leaders to be more visible in classrooms.
A new co-teaching strategy is enhancing staff decision making at Eagleby State School.

Over recent years, Eagleby has experienced a high turnover of teachers. In response, the school has developed an improvement agenda focused on building teacher capability.

The school's leadership team has engaged ‘co-teachers’ to work alongside and support teachers in the classroom. Co-teachers assist with planning and resources, and model the classroom practices expected at the school.

Teachers are also building their capability through professional conversations and interactions. Staff collaboratively plan, deliver and review the effectiveness of lessons; they also share or showcase best practice.

The school’s PLTs provide regular opportunities for teachers to evaluate their practices in a collegial environment. This includes developing ‘sequences of learning’ for particular teaching concepts by identifying the milestones each student needs to meet to reach the next level of learning. Teachers provide feedback to the PLT about what has worked well in their sequence, and what adjustments are needed to ensure successful student outcomes.

The leadership team actively participates in the school’s collaborative activities, and works with teachers to achieve identified goals. The principal and deputy principal visit every classroom several times a year to observe teaching practice and provide feedback to staff.

Teachers at Eagleby feel supported in their learning and value feedback on their classroom practice. They speak highly of the school’s co-teaching model, and how it has deepened their understanding of the curriculum and increased their confidence in changing classroom practices.
Practices developed by review schools to enhance decisional capital also included peer observation and feedback (discussed also in section 3.2.1, Feedback to teachers). Approximately one-third of 2017 review schools had implemented formal, systematic and consistent processes for peer observation and feedback, but in many schools, these were yet to be fully established. There was also a small number of schools that had a documented collegial engagement framework, but the observation and feedback support processes were not yet conducted systematically. Some review reports identified that developing a collegial engagement framework and implementing formal observation and feedback were negotiated and endorsed by the LCC.

Unlike leader-led instructional practices, which mostly focused on the priorities of the explicit improvement agenda and quality assuring the enactment of new pedagogies, peer observation and feedback were usually aimed at engendering a culture of continuous reflection, learning and improvement.

In some schools, these practices were part of a whole-school coaching framework; in others, they targeted specific groups such as first- or second-year teachers. An urban primary school in Metropolitan region developed a coaching framework that consisted of three tiers: collegial coaching (watching others work [WOW]) aligned to individual challenges of practice; instructional coaching (coach and teacher-directed) aligned to teacher needs and school priorities; and administrative coaching (walkthroughs and formal observations) as integral parts of the school’s pedagogical framework.

Peer observation and feedback were reported to aid the professional learning of staff and enhance their capabilities. These practices were expected to increase the level of interaction and promote collaboration and sharing of good practice among staff. Awareness of how peer observation and feedback can support implementation of the explicit improvement agenda was growing in most schools.

Another way in which schools sought to enhance their decisional capital was through professional data conversations. Such conversations were a regular practice in a number of review schools. Participation in data conversations helped staff to develop their capability and deepen their understanding of how students learn, thus building their confidence to make judgements and decisions. Data conversations were usually led by members of the leadership team. They involved data analysis and discussion, monitoring of individual student and whole-class progress, and discussion of possible adjustments to classroom activities. In some schools, teachers reported a significant variation in the structure and approach of these conversations.

Data conversations can drive pedagogical change at a classroom level by providing teachers with feedback on the effectiveness of their teaching. Some teachers, however, reported that this was not always the case. A culture of self-evaluation and reflection needs to be further developed in review schools to engage teachers and leaders in critical reflection on student data, and to increase their confidence to develop and implement strategies for improvement.
3.1.3 School leaders as change agents

School improvement often involves significant organisational change. For this change to be successfully implemented and sustainable, school leaders need to be effective change agents. Research underscores the role of the principal and school leadership team in leading the school toward a specific goal (Tubin 2015).

‘Leadership is all about organizational improvement; more specifically, it is about establishing agreed-upon and worthwhile directions for the organization in question, and doing whatever it takes to prod and support people to move in those directions.’

(Louis et al. 2010, pp. 9–10)

Successful change requires strategic thinking from school leaders, a mental attitude that considers all short-term decisions within the perspective of long-term objectives (Fidler 2002, p. 7). School leaders need skills to challenge current practices, ensure clear communication and trust, develop clear and focused plans to stimulate actions, support their team through change processes, express and act on a sense of urgency when needed, continuously improve themselves, and build partnerships that support change (Fullan 2014, pp. 129–34).

Review schools invested considerable time and effort in developing and implementing their explicit improvement agendas, which have resulted in more consistent school-wide practices in many schools. There was a high level of engagement in strategic planning and commitment to improving student outcomes in a majority of schools. The instances where an explicit improvement agenda was yet to be developed were rare; however, in a small number of schools, reviews identified a perception among staff that strategic direction and school-wide systems and processes were lacking. In these schools, a number of staff and school community members expressed concerns about the pace of change and the rationale for change.
Developing an explicit improvement agenda

Similar to the previous SIU annual reports, the most frequently identified priority in the explicit improvement agendas of the 2017 review schools was literacy. Within literacy, more schools than in previous years focused on the teaching of writing, while reading was often included as an area of continuing development for schools. Three other areas of strong focus in review schools were: numeracy, curriculum and its alignment with the Australian Curriculum, and teaching quality (specifically pedagogical practice). Some schools also concentrated on student attendance, behaviour and staff capabilities as pre-conditions for improving student outcomes. In some instances, the priorities of the explicit improvement agenda were unclear or inconsistent with those in the school’s annual implementation plan. In a small number of review schools, the range of school improvement priorities needed narrowing and sharpening.

In most review schools, formulating the explicit improvement agenda was based on a thorough analysis of school-wide data and, in some instances, informed by research. The principal of a combined school in Far North Queensland region researched contemporary, evidence-based best practice and models for educational change before developing the school’s strategic direction. A small number of schools reported using a collaborative inquiry cycle to develop and refine school-wide processes aligned with the explicit improvement agenda.

In many schools, the priorities were developed in consultation with staff and parents. In some schools, a collaborative strategic planning process involved the school council. At a rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region, a planning day towards the end of the year provided an opportunity for teachers to collaboratively analyse NAPLAN and other school-based data to determine the focus of the explicit improvement agenda for the following year.

Staff in a small number of schools expressed a desire for greater opportunities to engage in collaborative decision making about the school’s improvement agenda and strategic direction.

The establishment of clear, aspirational school targets in priority areas was evident in the explicit improvement agenda of many review schools. However, despite broad targets being set in terms of NAPLAN, explicit targets for individual students were yet to be fully developed in many schools.

Along with targets, school agendas usually detailed timelines, strategies and actions for improvement, and associated roles and responsibilities for school leaders and other staff. Many schools reviewed existing roles and responsibilities in order to align them to the priorities of the explicit improvement agenda. Some schools developed clear role statements for each staff member to help deliver the explicit improvement agenda. At an urban primary school in South East region, a school document was developed that listed topics managed by key personnel so that teachers knew who to contact about key operational and strategic matters. In some schools, however, reviews identified a lack of clarity regarding the role of school leaders in driving the explicit improvement agenda and shaping the future direction of the school.

The explicit improvement agenda is the responsibility of everyone at a school. Clear and measurable success criteria, along with explicit targets and assigned roles and responsibilities, need to be developed to track progress and measure student outcomes.
Sharing vision through the explicit improvement agenda

Explicit improvement agendas were communicated to staff, parents and the broader school community in all review schools. This was most often done through staff meetings, formal and informal parent meetings, newsletters, school websites, social media, parades, P&C meetings and community noticeboards. Improvement priorities and related expectations were reinforced through data conversations, weekly staff notices and information on data walls. Some schools also used school signage and posters. At a very large, urban secondary school in Metropolitan region, weekly staff memos from the principal and deputy principal informed teachers of strategies in the explicit improvement agenda and progress towards targets.

A number of review schools were yet to share all components of their explicit improvement agenda with staff and the school community. Knowledge of school priorities and targets was inconsistent among teaching staff in some schools. Staff sought greater clarity about the school’s strategic direction and a consistent language of improvement across all strategic documents. While students were able to identify some aspects of the explicit improvement agenda, parent understanding of school priorities was often limited. Further communication and clarification of the specific expectations of the explicit improvement agenda regarding teaching practice were needed in some schools.

Implementing the explicit improvement agenda

The reviews identified a wide range of strategies and actions that schools were implementing to address their improvement priorities. Most often, schools addressed improvement priorities by developing whole-school pedagogical approaches to reading, writing or mathematics, along with related artefacts. This was evident in the development and implementation of pedagogical frameworks, enhancement programs and targeted intervention. Some schools also focused on setting individual student goals and success criteria aligned with the newly introduced pedagogies. At a combined school in Darling Downs South West region, learning goals for reading were evident in many classrooms, particularly in the primary years, with individual reading goals posted on each student’s desk, on the classroom wall and in student notebooks. Progress in PM Benchmark testing was recorded in OneSchool, where it could be accessed by the master teacher for analysis. Student progress was acknowledged and celebrated at the class level.

In most instances, the priority areas of the explicit improvement agenda were supported by professional learning opportunities documented in school and individual professional learning plans. To enhance staff capabilities in driving the improvement agenda, schools implemented various professional learning programs, walkthroughs, WOW, and observation, feedback and coaching cycles. A combined school in Metropolitan region implemented a triad process in which teachers regularly discussed and identified intervention strategies for individuals and groups. At an urban primary school in North Queensland region, the principal established an instructional leadership team to focus on the priority areas. The team was responsible for leading PLTs and supporting teachers in classrooms through the school’s co-planning, co-teaching and co-reflecting methodology.
East Ayr State School

Improvement agenda reaches the classroom

A clear and strategic approach to improvement by the school leadership team is building a shared understanding and consistent practices at East Ayr State School.

In 2017, the school developed a sharp and narrow improvement agenda that focused on improving learning outcomes in English and early years reading achievement. The agenda was communicated to the school community and supported by the P&C. The leadership team established school-wide targets for A to E data, and used a collaborative inquiry process to determine the strategies to address the agenda.

A clearly articulated model for instructional leadership was implemented, with school leaders using modelling, coaching and mentoring to help teachers improve their teaching practice. With strategically assigned and clear roles and responsibilities, all school leaders are working in classrooms to support teachers in their daily curriculum and reading activities. Teachers and teacher aides are also supported with planned professional learning opportunities that are linked to the improvement agenda.

A data wall tracks student progress and helps staff to identify appropriate strategies for improvement. The systematically collected data are used to monitor progress towards school targets and evaluate strategies for effectiveness across all aspects of the agenda.

A clear line of sight, from the school leaders to teachers’ actions in the classroom, has been established for the implementation of the school’s improvement agenda. There is a shared understanding and a consistency of language for improvement priorities, targets and high-yield teaching strategies among teachers at the school. Teachers report how they monitor student learning, plan responses and engage students in modelled, guided, shared and independent reading and writing activities to bring about improvement in student achievement.
Review school budgets tended to support their improvement agenda priorities, and funds were most often expended on additional human resources, release time for teachers and professional learning to build staff capability. IAS funding supported the improvement focus in many schools, and was spent on professional learning, and human and physical resources.

To support the implementation of the explicit improvement agenda, some schools developed new partnerships and engaged with regional personnel. School P&Cs also supported the explicit improvement agenda by providing resources. The principal of a rural primary school in Central Queensland region focused on developing parents as partners in the teaching of reading. The principal provided workshops and resources for parents, including how to support their children’s reading at home.

A systematic process to monitor the progress and effectiveness of school-wide strategies aligned to the explicit improvement agenda was yet to be developed in many review schools. Schools that were engaged in some monitoring of the agenda used classroom walkthroughs, observation and feedback, data analysis and one-on-one conversations with teachers. At an urban primary school in South East region, the explicit improvement agenda was monitored through data triangulation meetings and year-level planning meetings. At a rural secondary school in Darling Downs South West region, a three-week cycle of staff, faculty and improvement meetings encouraged discussion and feedback on the agenda priority.
### 3.1.4 School leaders as system leaders

As Fullan (2014, p. 99) suggests, school leaders engage externally so as to support and strengthen the school internally. They reach out to supplement the resources that make schools work, to draw people, organisations and groups into the process of helping young people succeed at school (Berg, Melaville & Blank 2006, pp. 1–3). Being an effective school and system leader also involves engaging and working with families and the school community.

The reviews found significant evidence of schools proactively engaging with the local community and developing cooperative relationships with external parties that advanced the interests of schools. This is a vibrant space, with principals actively planning these relationships and striving to reinforce and maintain existing partnerships.

School partners included other schools and school clusters, P&Cs, parents and families, community organisations, early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, government agencies, businesses, cultural groups, tertiary education organisations, individual community members and groups, and other local organisations (see Figure 3.2 below).

#### Figure 3.2: Partnerships developed by review schools, 2017

Note: There are minor differences in the population of review schools used for different datasets. This is due to the outdoor and environmental education centres, support units or associated units not being included in departmental data, and a small number of self-determined reviews not being included in this analysis due to the different format of their review reports.
Partnerships with other educational institutions

Partnerships with other schools (often neighbouring feeder schools) were evident among review schools. The most common inter-school partnerships occurred between primary and secondary schools. Some shared resources, such as guidance officers, mentors and school facilities, while others organised music, sports and cultural events together. Year 6 primary school teachers often liaised with Year 7 secondary school teachers to link the curriculums between schools. Inter-school partnerships also focused on transition programs. These arrangements comprised term-based staggered programs of orientation and induction for parents and prospective students. Transition programs typically involved sharing student enrolment data, open days, parent meetings, information sessions and school visits.

Review schools also partnered with other schools as part of cluster arrangements. School clusters were usually directed towards collaboratively addressing issues related to student disengagement, staff professional learning, curriculum development, moderation, staff mentoring and coaching, and pedagogy design. School clusters also facilitated extracurricular activities through events such as reading competitions, sports carnivals and science days. A remote school in Central Queensland region was part of a cluster of nine small remote schools that supported each other with curriculum development, moderation of assessment tasks, analysis of student data, professional learning, principal-to-principal mentoring and teacher-to-teacher support. Principals and teachers participated in fortnightly cluster teleconferences and attended principal business meetings each term.

Many review schools had links with early childhood education and care services, which facilitated the transition of children to school through support and outreach programs for parents. These relationships smoothed the path from kindergarten to Prep, and operated as an arm of community engagement by initiating relationships with parents and reinforcing the school's position within the community.

Review schools developed comprehensive orientation packages for prospective parents and students, and organised parent interviews, orientation days and school information sessions. Regular liaison visits by Prep teachers and student leaders to read to the younger students were conducted in some schools. At an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region, staff visited local early childhood services with dress-up uniforms and scrapbook stories about life as a Prep student. School collaboration with early years services also extended to teachers observing kindergarten children and engaging in professional conversations about early years curriculum. Children from playgroups and kindergartens visited school classes, participated in play during lunch breaks, used school libraries, and attended assemblies, parades and other school events. Some of these partnerships were funded by specific community engagement budgets. Others were subsidised by third parties, such as local councils. Some teachers had dedicated responsibility for developing transition programs with early childhood education providers.

Review schools also partnered with tertiary education organisations, including universities and vocational education providers. Formal relationships existed or were being developed to serve the needs of both teachers and students and the tertiary institutions. Schools engaged universities to provide professional development on a range of topics, for example, contemporary and specialist curriculum, age-appropriate pedagogies, student feedback on writing, and reading programs to address diverse-learner competencies.
Undurba State School is working closely with local schools and ECECs to give students the best possible start to school.

The school introduced a number of initiatives in response to 2015 Australian Early Development Census data, which indicated local developmental vulnerabilities in the areas of health and wellbeing, social competence and communication. A part-time transitions teacher was engaged to develop and strengthen links with local ECECs and identify opportunities to support successful student transitions. Partnerships with a neighbouring kindergarten were strengthened, with kindy students regularly visiting the school library and attending school events, such as Under 8s Day, Book Week and Easter bonnet parade.

Throughout 2017, the school held early years’ forums with nearby Griffin State School and local ECECs. Collaboration between educators and teachers resulted in creating a ‘Readiness for Prep’ postcard, which promotes the important role of families in preparing children for school.

Last year, with the support of the school’s speech–language pathologist, a community education project was initiated with The University of Queensland. Final-year speech–language pathology students conducted workshops for Prep parents on how to build the phonemic awareness and vocabulary skills of children at home.

The school’s efforts have resulted in more effective communication and professional collaboration with families, other schools and ECECs. Most importantly, they have also had a positive impact on pre-Prep children’s readiness for school by increasing their knowledge about the school and the skills needed for successful transition to Prep. The feedback from staff and parents has been extremely positive, and it now informs a proactive Transition to Prep Forum agenda for 2018.
Schools were also able to support and make use of the training of pre-service teachers. By offering quality practicum experiences and mentoring for student teachers, schools were able to attract quality teaching staff. Universities also contributed to school leadership and professional capital in other ways, for example, by providing ‘critical friend’ feedback and advice on aspects of school policy and practice and giving access to specialist programs, student wellbeing services, coding and digital technologies, and university research. Review reports identified that schools were participants in a variety of research projects exploring education and schooling practices. Extension and early start university programs were also evident. These arrangements introduced secondary (and, less frequently, primary) students to a tertiary learning environment through mentoring, academic community networks and financial assistance aimed at nurturing educational ambitions and providing university experience prior to enrolment.

Review schools also partnered with vocational training organisations, including technical and further education (TAFE) institutes, registered training organisations, and agricultural, engineering and mining colleges. These organisations provided certificate-level qualifications, trade and technical training and entry-level qualifications to higher degrees. These partnerships enabled students to access school-based apprenticeships and tertiary-level training in areas such as horticulture, business, computer science and hospitality.

**Partnerships with local organisations**

Review schools partnered with a range of local organisations, including community organisations, local businesses and government entities, which provided funding, materials and expertise to a school’s operations. Some of these partners contributed by providing direct welfare-oriented services to students and families in the areas of health, wellbeing, English-language skills and transport. Schools partnered with sporting organisations to access equipment, playing fields and coaching. Progress associations and businesses were often the source of financial donations and sponsorships (e.g. for chaplains, breakfast clubs, behaviour programs, schoolbooks and camping programs). Businesses also donated school uniforms, building materials and technical expertise to schools, as well as providing work experience for students. Local councils provided schools with halls, library resources and grounds maintenance.

Partnerships linked staff and students with the wider community in a variety of ways. Schools participated in annual sporting fixtures, cultural celebrations, community presentations and local shows. Adjacent schools partnered with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority as ‘reef guardians’. This program involves students in the improvement of catchments, water quality, sustainability and reef health (GBRMPA 2018). Local Landcare groups supported environmental studies in a number of schools. A remote school in Central Queensland region developed links with the local show society, nursing home and Returned and Services League so that students in the music program had a wider audience for their performances. Other schools formed partnerships with local choirs and concert bands to further engage students.

Review schools effectively engaged members of the community to participate in the life of the school. Parents often volunteered their time to work in the classroom, help to staff tuckshops and breakfast clubs, and participate in gardening activities and school excursions. Many schools explicitly referred to parents as partners, and parents talked of their investment in the school (partnerships with parents and families are also described in section 2.3, School community satisfaction). Other volunteers included community members and past students involved in sports coaching, after-hours care, school and
grounds maintenance, library assistance and reading programs. A very large, urban secondary school in South East region had many regular volunteers involved in school activities throughout the year. A member of the community at an urban primary school in North Coast region was instrumental in designing new signage and celebratory postcards.

Review schools also partnered with local cultural groups. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders often played a significant part in school activities. They provided guidance and support through regular meetings, were involved in school operations, directed local cultural activities and contributed to student engagement in learning. Elders were prominent in organising National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) activities and embedding Indigenous perspectives in school practices. Some review schools formed partnerships with other cultural groups that provided cultural awareness and engagement.
Rural and remote schools

The schools reviewed in 2017 included 92 state schools in rural and remote locations (i.e. schools identified as remote, rural primary, very small, rural primary or rural secondary under the SIU school typology, see Appendix B).

Due to their geographic isolation, and often small size, rural and remote schools fostered a range of community partnerships. Businesses were notable partners in the provision of equipment, donations, facilities and specialist expertise. They also placed students in work experience, raised funds and hosted student achievement awards. P&Cs were instrumental in school project planning and fundraising, and parents and carers were involved in classroom and school upkeep.

Isolation contributed to the depth of social engagement at rural and remote schools. Principals and teachers had direct and close relationships with parents that were respectful, positive and inclusive. Review reports frequently referred to the satisfaction that parents and students had with the teaching and communication at their school. Overall, rural and remote school communities often displayed a strong sense of community ownership, belonging and pride.

Some partnerships helped with the delivery of locally relevant curriculum. Rural and remote schools typically referred to providing relevant local education experiences to students, using the expertise of the community to respond to the needs of students and contextualising English, mathematics, science, history and geography to the school’s local area. Schools engaged museums, historical associations and Indigenous organisations to tailor school curriculum in unique ways. At rural and remote secondary schools, local businesses and service providers tended to inform or support the curriculum in the senior years. Certificate II and III courses were provided in response to the needs of students as prospective entrants into the local labour market. For a rural secondary school in North Queensland region, an agribusiness contributed to industry-specific skills development in coding and robotics.

Rural and remote schools tended to align their teaching to the Australian Curriculum through the use of Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C) units. While some review reports revealed a need for more time to develop this alignment, inter-school partnerships were assisting in this process. School clusters, with the collaboration of regional staff, were drawing schools together in developing common Australian Curriculum-aligned practices, feedback processes and pedagogy. Rural and remote schools also drew frequently on each other to support school transitions. These partnerships mostly consisted of arrangements that smoothed the process for Year 6 students entering secondary and boarding schools, but also involved programs for pre-school students entering primary, and junior high students entering senior high schools to complete Years 11 and 12.

Overall, in 2017, rural and remote schools were strongly engaged in the local community. Their partnerships were deep and often numerous. While curriculum practices may need further refinement at some rural and remote schools, school clusters and regional offices were assisting in these endeavours.
Building teachers’ knowledge and understanding of the Australian Curriculum is helping to improve student learning at Pinnacle State School.

In 2017, the small, rural school narrowed its improvement agenda to ensure that its 12 students (spread across Prep to Year 6) were taught a curriculum appropriate for their age and learning level. The school used the School Improvement Hierarchy and a collaborative inquiry process to identify visible learning as an area for improvement. Improvement plans for reading and writing were collaboratively developed to support the agenda, and the school implemented a range of visible learning strategies, such as ‘know and do’ charts, to help students monitor their learning and set goals for improvement.

There is a strong focus on developing teacher capability through coaching, collaborative empowerment, sharing of practice and deep reflection among staff. I4S and other school funding is providing teachers with opportunities for collaborative curriculum planning and implementation. A cluster-school observation and feedback cycle has been established, and teachers and teacher aides have opportunities to observe each other’s practice.

The principal led the establishment of a community of practice with other cluster schools. Its work is focused on unpacking the Australian Curriculum and making learning visible by embedding the use of ‘learning journeys’ displays that clearly define student learning goals.

As a result of the changes, teachers demonstrate greater understanding of the Australian Curriculum, and employ more effective approaches to planning and assessing units of work. The school’s A to E data* have improved significantly, with C or higher in mathematics increasing from 73 per cent in 2014 to 100 per cent in 2017, and in English from 58 per cent in 2014 to 92 per cent in 2017.

*Student outcome data should be interpreted in view of small enrolment.
3.2 Teaching

‘High-performing systems around the world know that improving the effectiveness of teaching is the way to lift school performance. They seek to increase the quality — not the quantity — of teaching.’

(Jensen et al. 2014, p. 3)

This section discusses the practices of school teachers, focusing on the key components that contribute to the overall effectiveness of teaching: teachers and their knowledge and skills, curriculum and pedagogy.

3.2.1 Teachers

According to the Australian professional standards for teachers, teachers should have professional knowledge of the content they teach and how students learn. They should be able to plan for and implement effective teaching, create supportive learning environments, provide feedback and report on student learning, engage in professional learning, and interact with colleagues, parents and carers and the community (AITSL 2011, p. 3). What constitutes high-quality teaching has been explored extensively in literature, which emphasises the role of observable teaching and learning.

‘What is most important is that teaching is visible to the student, and that the learning is visible to the teacher. The more the student becomes the teacher and the more the teacher becomes the learner, then the more successful are the outcomes.’

(Hattie 2009, p. 25)

Teaching staff in review schools

Most review schools presented as a cohesive and enthusiastic team of professionals who were committed to student learning and wellbeing. At an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region, a statement on what it means to be a professional teacher was developed in 2017 following extensive consultation with staff. The statement described 10 professional attributes of a teacher and was displayed prominently around the school.

Many teachers were active within community organisations and provided services to the community in addition to their teaching commitments. Parents often reported that the professionalism and dedication of teachers were strongly valued within the community.
The dedicated and committed teachers at review schools shared responsibility for student learning and success with other professionals, including teacher aides. Classroom teachers were often supported by a STLaN or externally engaged coaches and instructors, such as literacy and numeracy coaches. Schools also employed specialist teachers, such as a languages other than English (LOTE) teacher. At an urban primary school in North Coast region, French was delivered by a specialist teacher, whose program was valued highly, achieving advanced language proficiency and winning external acclaim. Additional staff were deployed to support students with disability and additional learning needs in many schools, for example, an inclusion teacher, special education program (SEP) teacher, guidance officer, occupational therapist or speech–language pathologist.

Teacher aides were viewed as valuable members of the teaching team and, in many schools, they were included in staff meetings and decision making. They were often provided with ongoing professional development and guidance regarding their work by classroom teachers. Teacher aides were allocated in schools on a needs basis and timetabled in classrooms to make the best use of their skills. This was often aligned with the school's explicit improvement agenda priorities. Teacher aides were deployed to support differentiated teaching and interventions, for example, facilitating extension activities. Along with teachers, they also provided targeted support to students with additional learning needs. At an urban primary school in Metropolitan region, students with disability were supported by teacher aides who worked with small groups of students on phonemic awareness and vocabulary development. At a very large, urban secondary school in the same region, bilingual teacher aides led specialist programs for students with English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D), who comprised a significant proportion of the student body. In some review schools, teacher aides were deployed to enhance relationships with early childhood providers. Other roles included collecting school data, coordinating the student council, managing library resources and spaces, and working within a sports program of excellence. Teacher aides reported that they enjoyed working in schools and felt valued in their work, but some schools found it difficult to source suitably qualified teacher aides to fill positions.

Teachers in review schools welcomed parents as volunteers in classrooms. This was recognised as an important support for the teaching and learning process. In many schools, parents embraced this opportunity. Community volunteers and parents were visible in classrooms at an urban primary school in Metropolitan region, where they supported reading and curriculum activities, as well as swimming and the garden club.

In some review schools, teaching staff identified the need for more professional learning, particularly in relation to data literacy, and knowledge, understanding and use of the Australian Curriculum.

Feedback to teachers

Classroom observation and feedback is a prominent feature of high-performing education systems around the world (Jensen et al. 2014, p. 8).

‘Timely, frequent and improvement focused feedback supports teachers’ efforts to improve their practice, guides choices about professional learning, and informs reflection on and revision of performance and development goals.’

(AITSL 2014b, p. 7)
Developing a classroom observation and feedback culture is considered a central element of teaching quality in the *State schools strategy 2017–2021* (DET 2017d). ‘Classroom observations should be used as a collaborative process to recognise and assist teachers to reflect on their teaching practice’ (DET & QTU 2011). They should not focus on teaching but rather ‘... on the impact of teaching on students’ (Jensen et al. 2014, p. 22).

Peer observation and feedback practices (noted as a form of professional learning in section 3.1.2) were a significant source of feedback to teachers in review schools. In most review schools, teachers demonstrated a commitment to the improvement of teaching and an openness to critique by colleagues and school leaders. Teaching staff with experience of peer observation and feedback often reported that the practice was highly valued and that they wished to see it continued and expanded. Peer observation and feedback were considered effective mechanisms for improving the quality of teaching practice and positively impacting on student achievement.

The practice of peer observation and feedback usually included three phases, as illustrated at a rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region, where the first phase involved teachers agreeing on the area for feedback, followed by observation, written and verbal feedback, and, finally, teacher reflection and the establishment of actions in response.

In review schools, peer observation and feedback took various forms and names — WOW, collegial coaching program, collegial coaching triads, peer coaching, collaborative teacher reflection process or collegial mentoring models. One urban primary school in Metropolitan region initiated a program of collegial coaching in triads that allowed teachers to observe the teaching practices of colleagues in the school’s priority areas. Release time was provided for collegial coaching.

Despite different names, the core element of each of these approaches was teachers cooperatively observing one another’s practice and providing non-evaluative feedback on instruction. A few schools reported teachers participating in a formal cluster program where they visited other schools for the purposes of observation and feedback.

Observation and feedback processes were documented through protocols and templates (usually school-developed). Providing feedback was, at times, supported by the use of video technology to record teaching practice for review by colleagues. At an urban primary school in North Coast region, teachers videoed their teaching for review within collegial triads.

In addition to peer observation and feedback, the reviews identified a small number of schools using student surveys to provide feedback to teachers.

Another process identified in some review schools was classroom profiling. Classroom profiling was used to provide feedback to teachers as part of the Essential Skills in Classroom Management approach to managing student behaviour (see also section 2.2.1). In some schools, staff (peer teachers or school leaders) were trained as classroom profilers, while other schools accessed profilers from outside the school.
Quality feedback enhances teaching

A long-term commitment to collegial coaching, peer observation and quality feedback is paying off for teachers and students at Mackay Northern Beaches State High School.

The school supports continuous improvement of instruction in a variety of ways. A comprehensive program of classroom observations and feedback is in place, consisting of lesson observations by the leadership team and peer-to-peer observation. Teachers receive feedback both verbally and in writing, with an observation template used to ensure consistency across the school.

Teachers are also given opportunities to observe and consult with more experienced colleagues in neighbouring schools, particularly around the implementation of the senior syllabus. Best practice is shared at staff and curriculum meetings, and a formal school-wide mentoring program engages all staff in professional learning conversations. Teachers can also volunteer to obtain feedback through student surveys.

To respond to a relatively large percentage of new or beginning teachers, the school introduced an induction program in 2017. Each beginning teacher is supported by a teacher mentor, a curriculum mentor, a HOD mentor, and the principal or deputy principal. The program incorporates teacher observation and feedback.

In addition, collegial coaching rounds are conducted once a term, with written feedback provided. A 360 degree feedback tool is also used to gather information from students, teachers and parents.

The benefits from the observation and feedback initiatives are many. New and beginning teachers feel supported in their work, and other teachers continually enhance their expertise, learning from their colleagues. The enhanced culture of collegial sharing of practice and feedback has contributed to more consistent teaching across the school.
3.2.2 Curriculum

The P–12 curriculum, assessment and reporting framework (DoE 2018d) supports schools to deliver a world-class education and improve the progress and academic achievement of every student. It specifies requirements for curriculum provision, assessment and reporting to parents or carers. C2C resources support the implementation of the Australian Curriculum, and model curriculum and assessment materials.

Planning and implementation of curriculum

The majority of review schools had developed a curriculum plan for the whole school that explicitly defined curriculum and assessment expectations across key learning areas. The plan provided broad guidance to support individual and year-level curriculum plans. However, the extent to which it provided an explicit and coherent sequence for curriculum delivery — what and when teachers should teach and students should learn — varied across and within review schools. The curriculum plan was often shared with the community through the school newsletter, website, P&C meetings and parent information sessions.

More detailed and specific expectations were often addressed in other curriculum documentation. This included curriculum overviews for each learning area and year level, term and semester overviews, and weekly and daily plans. An annual overview of units was often developed by teachers at the beginning of each school year. At an urban primary school in South East region, the school's curriculum planning included ‘Understanding by Design’ and ‘Sequence of Learning’ documentation, and curriculum overviews contained explicit examples of what students should know, understand and do in their learning. Teachers at a very large, urban secondary school in the same region used a range of curriculum documents, including year-level work programs, an achievement standards map, four-year skills development maps, semester overviews, common unit plans and a common assessment template.

Some review schools developed a common planning template to guide curriculum planning and provide consistency of practice. The template was also used by school leaders to quality assure units of work.

Many schools identified the pivotal role the HOC played in monitoring the planning of curriculum to ensure alignment and consistency. In some schools, consideration was given to the vertical alignment of the curriculum to ensure continuity of students' learning through the school years.

In many review schools, curriculum ‘know and do’ charts, developed by teachers and students, informed students of what was required to improve their achievement. At an urban secondary school in North Queensland region, scaffolding devices called Unit Starters were developed for Year 7 and 8 students. They included ‘know and do’ elements, the academic vocabulary and the learning rubric that identified the unit goal.

A clear and structured school-wide planning process was evident in a number of review schools to help teachers develop curriculum units and maintain consistency across the school. This process included the identification of group and individual learning needs and the matching of content, processes and learning environment to the needs of all students within the class. Classroom teachers were often allocated curriculum release time to undertake this work. At an urban primary school in Metropolitan region, classroom teachers were given release time each term, and they spoke positively of the impact this had on their professional practice.
Mastering the curriculum

A model of specialised curriculum delivery is enhancing teaching and learning at Currumbin Valley State School.

In 2016, the school identified that some high-achieving students were not receiving sufficient support to extend their learning. Students achieving results in the U2B of NAPLAN were not showing the same rate of progress as students meeting the national minimum standards. Feedback from parents also indicated that many students were not being challenged enough.

Looking for ways to improve teaching quality and address the needs of high-achieving students, Currumbin Valley developed the Mastery Teaching model.

Under the model, middle and upper primary school teachers specialise in one or two subject areas, becoming a ‘master’ in their chosen fields, and develop programs in these specialist areas to deliver to students across the school.

The school’s classrooms became subject-specific learning spaces, and home room teachers facilitate daily communication between students, staff and parents.

This specialisation allows teachers to develop a deeper knowledge of their subject areas, which they use to make classroom learning more focused, rigorous and academically challenging for students. This helps to better address the learning needs of high-achieving students.

This new way of delivering the curriculum is promoting the deep learning of both teachers and students.

Feedback from students has been positive, with 97 per cent of Year 4 to Year 6 students preferring this type of curriculum delivery. Recent NAPLAN data are showing better results for most students than what was projected.

The Mastery Teaching model at Currumbin Valley is providing a strong foundation for future student success, and easing the transition to secondary education.
Although many review schools demonstrated a consistent approach to curriculum planning, this was not always well documented or was limited to identified priority learning areas. Allocations of time and staff to key learning areas were not yet fully established in some schools, and expectations regarding curriculum planning were not always clear to teachers. Processes for monitoring the enacted curriculum and evaluating the effectiveness of curriculum unit implementation were yet to be developed in some schools.

In most review schools, the leadership team placed a high priority on collaborative curriculum practices. Collaborative planning occurred with the support of the principal, HOC, literacy coach, HOSES and STLaN, which was appreciated by many teachers.

In most instances, teachers were released on a regular basis to collaboratively plan units of work within year-level cohorts. At a rural primary school in Central Queensland region, teachers with particular curriculum expertise worked in year-level teams to develop resources to support consistent practices. An urban primary school in Metropolitan region established a pod structure that enabled teachers to work in collegial teams to plan curriculum units, monitor implementation timelines and undertake moderation.

Collaboration across year levels was less common. At a very large, urban primary school in South East region, teachers planned across year-level cohorts during regular curriculum alignment days. These days were valued by staff, and were integral for curriculum planning, delivery, and horizontal and vertical alignment.

Collaborative curriculum practices were particularly important for beginning teachers and new staff. At a remote school in Central Queensland region, an experienced senior teacher worked with beginning and continuing staff to facilitate planning. Planning meetings focused on building teachers’ understanding of the curriculum for their year levels and assessment tasks.

The reviews also provided some evidence of cluster curriculum collaboration. At a remote school in Central Queensland region, a graduate teacher, who worked across a cluster of schools, planned units with the principal early in the year, followed by regular planning with teachers from across the cluster.

Overall, teachers reported that they greatly valued collaborative curriculum planning. Although regular formal opportunities for professional dialogue about planning and curriculum delivery were not yet provided in a number of review schools, teachers were informally discussing and sharing curriculum ideas and plans.

A majority of review schools had implemented the Australian Curriculum to a significant extent. Year-level curriculum overviews developed by schools often demonstrated the link between the unit content and the achievement standards and content descriptions of the Australian Curriculum. Many teachers also used C2C units of work or adapted C2C units to suit the learning needs of their students. In some schools, formal processes for cross-referencing these adaptations against the achievement standards and content descriptors of the Australian Curriculum were not developed. At an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region, teachers mapped curriculum units against the Australian Curriculum in English, and adapted units of work by modifying assessment tasks and guides to making judgements (GTMJs).

Within some schools, approaches to implementing the Australian Curriculum were inconsistent, with some year levels commencing the planning process from the content descriptions and achievement standards of the Australian Curriculum, while others used C2C units as their primary guide.
Full STEAM ahead

Science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) are driving improvement at Gumdale State School.

A few years ago, the school identified that it needed to improve teaching and learning, as a number of families were choosing to leave the school after Year 4 due to insufficient challenge.

The curriculum was not implemented consistently, with teachers trying to teach too much. Teachers were asked to narrow their focus; the curriculum was also reviewed and tightened to ensure greater alignment across the school.

STEAM was embraced as a whole-school focus, with the school providing students in Years 2 to 6 with a range of opportunities to engage with science, technology and engineering. The school partnered with CSIRO and established a dedicated science centre, staffed by specialist teachers who deliver high-quality science education programs across the school.

The school also engaged CODE Australia to train some teachers to set up a coding club. A coding camp is held over the school holidays, and lunchtime robotics and drone clubs were introduced for Years 5 and 6. The school also introduced a maker space for Years 1 and 2 students to create, make, tinker and explore.

In 2017, these activities culminated in a series of events and demonstrations to celebrate National Science Week. A range of STEAM activities and student achievements were showcased, and CSIRO staff conducted a virtual classroom forum with Australian space industry experts.

Students have embraced the changes, taking pride in their achievements and seeking opportunities to challenge themselves. The coding and robotics clubs are in high demand, and in 2017, Gumdale State School achieved its best ever NAPLAN results. Student retention and staff morale have also improved.
A few review schools accessed the regional PEA-AC, who helped them align the school curriculum to the Australian Curriculum.

In some schools, where teachers planned their curriculum units individually, reference to the Australian Curriculum varied. Some schools were yet to fully develop a whole-school quality assurance process to ensure vertical alignment of curriculum planning and the tracking of content descriptions in the Australian Curriculum for all learning areas.

Many review schools embedded the Australian Curriculum’s general capabilities and cross-curricular priorities. In some schools, particular attention was given to embedding Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum. Teachers at a rural primary school in Central Queensland region revisited their cultural awareness training regularly and included Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum.

A few schools’ curricula had a strong focus on sustainability. An urban primary school in North Coast region had two programs focused on the environment and sustainability, and a support teacher and four student ambassadors were leading environmental activities, such as nude food days, waste audits and compost bins. A rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region had an environmental centre that students accessed during lunch breaks, where they could increase their understanding of sustainability by growing vegetables, raising chickens and recycling.

**Local relevance of curriculum**

School reviews identified a range of approaches to ensure locally relevant curriculum content with a focus on engaging students, particularly in rural and remote communities. This was demonstrated by contextualising unit themes or adapting curriculum content to better suit the local context and resources. At an urban primary school in North Coast region, the curriculum was contextualised for student and community needs through the school’s food technology, camping and arts programs. The local history of timber milling and farming was a feature in one of the school history units. At an urban secondary school in Central Queensland region, geography classes made use of local beach and mangrove habitats and the local sugar mill.

Leaders and teachers in secondary schools recognised local community and market needs and developed locally relevant curriculum units to enhance student employment pathways. Agricultural subjects at a rural secondary school in Far North Queensland region equipped students with the knowledge and skills relevant to the local farming community. The school’s trade training centre provided opportunities for senior students to acquire skills in locally relevant industries. At an urban secondary school in North Queensland region, courses in aquaculture and aquatic skills, including scuba diving, provided students with the opportunity to gain experience in these local industries.

A number of schools used the knowledge of the local community to develop locally relevant units of work. For example, a combined school in Metropolitan region partnered with a local bus company to design mathematics programs, and the local aquatic centre to design business units. Some review schools provided opportunities for students to engage in the local community and beyond through regular excursions. Others used the local environment outside the school boundaries as a learning space.

In a number of review schools, processes to make the curriculum more responsive to local needs were yet to be developed, but discussions to improve student engagement through the development of locally contextualised curriculum units were underway.
Kawana Waters State College has leveraged its location in the heart of the Sunshine Coast health precinct to deliver locally relevant curriculum to improve the employability of its students and provide them with pathways into the health industry.

In 2017, the college opened a Health Education Unit. The unit is built around a simulated health ward with specialised medical equipment, providing students with a ‘real-life’ experience of working in a hospital. Combining hands-on experience in health care with digital technology such as 3D-printed anatomy models and interactive ICT applications, the unit is at the forefront of innovative and engaging education.

Courses offered by the school cover areas such as public health education, nursing, paramedics, physiotherapy, mental health and allied health. Students have the opportunity to learn from TAFE staff, trained professionals and educators, and guest lecturers and speakers.

As a result of a partnership between Kawana Waters and the University of the Sunshine Coast, completion of the ‘health pathway’ guarantees students direct entry into bachelor and associate degrees in health care at the university.

Having a feasible ‘health pathway’ is giving students a clear sense of direction and purpose, encouraging them to complete their courses successfully and gain employment.

Students are well placed to secure jobs, with health industries and professionals approaching the college to offer work opportunities to students who would be a good fit in their organisations.

School community satisfaction has increased. The Health Education Unit is recognised in the community for its innovative facilities and partnerships, which are helping to shape future professionals in the healthcare industry.
Outdoor and environmental education centres

There were five outdoor and environmental education centres (O&EECs) reviewed in 2017, covering five of the state’s seven education regions.

All O&EECs placed an emphasis on making the curriculum locally relevant, and using the history and natural features of the local environment. For example, one of the centres described its purpose as ‘connecting people and place’. O&EECs’ staff expertise included sustainability and Indigenous culture.

Infrastructure and facilities were positioned by O&EECs to incorporate external learning spaces and the physical environment. All reviewed centres expressed the ambition of catering for diverse student needs. They extended the physical reach of their facilities by partnering with local and federal government to lease and access adjacent properties. They also developed relationships with government agencies, cultural groups and businesses to provide expert teaching in environmental studies, cultural history and heritage, and sustainable agricultural practices.

O&EECs are expected to link their programs to the Australian Curriculum (DoE 2018c) and such links were identified in the 2017 review reports. O&EECs taught the sciences and humanities learning areas with a clear alignment to the Australian Curriculum, or were developing such alignment. They also sought to foster the general capabilities of critical and creative thinking. To these ends, O&EECs worked closely with local schools to ensure the appropriateness of curriculum and pedagogical strategies and activities. Staff from one O&EEC visited schools to brief teachers on the centre’s teaching methods, induction and planning. The O&EECs also focused on delivering professional development for teaching staff. All centres were evaluating their teaching and student outcomes.

The O&EECs reviewed in 2017 were analysing data to better understand the effectiveness of their teaching and student learning, with a view to informing future practices. Staff developed data walls, used data analysis software and held discussions to make sense of the evidence of learning collected at their sites.

The reviews identified O&EECs as engaging centres of learning. Significant efforts went into developing their pedagogies. There was a clear, strategic, evidence-based approach to improvement.
A story-based approach to outdoor and environmental education is delivering a unique, real-life learning experience to students visiting the Pullenvale Environmental Education Centre.

Over recent years, the centre’s staff — who are teacher experts in environmental education, educational drama, theatre craft and storytelling — have collaboratively developed their own narrative-inspired pedagogy based on the concept of storythreads. The storythreads are situated locally, and involve characters and events based on historical records. Students enter into the story through drama, role play and inquiry learning in a range of forest environments. Storythread pedagogy draws on Indigenous wisdom to connect students to stories of the land and to their local places.

Differentiated storythread programs are developed for different year levels. Each program has a ‘big idea’ and ‘learning goals’, with a real-life ‘blanket role’ that allows students to become immersed in an inquiry journey that maximises connected learning. Each storythread is linked to the Australian Curriculum and has relevant assessment built in.

Regular reflection occurs at staff meetings and in other contexts where programs are continuously reviewed. This process is sometimes referred to locally as ‘the Pullenvale niggle’, where staff respond to evidence and listen to each other’s concerns as they evaluate programs and improve practice.

This unique pedagogy is open to the voice of students, whose ideas and creativity are released during learning. It also helps to grow life-long learners, leaders and active citizens who respect self, others and place.

The pedagogy is highly valued by audiences beyond the centre, is shared through professional learning workshops for teachers, and can be applied in other settings.
Assessment and moderation

Most review schools had developed an assessment and reporting plan that outlined expectations for assessment across the school, including the use of a range of assessment instruments and the collection of evidence of student learning. In some schools, the assessment plans were shared with parents and the community through the school newsletter. Some schools had recently reviewed their assessment plans to reduce the number of assessments, make them more relevant to students and better align them with their explicit improvement agenda. This was the case at a special school in Metropolitan region, which collected a significant amount of information about student progress through assessment. The school reviewed its whole-school assessment plan and the revised expectations were considered by the LCC.

Assessment processes were aligned to the curriculum and designed to identify student learning needs and track progress. Well-structured assessment schedules and instruments enabled schools to effectively monitor school-wide student achievement. Assessment tools used in review schools were predominantly summative and diagnostic in nature. The school-wide use of formative assessment was less apparent. In a combined school in Metropolitan region, most teachers used formative assessment at the end of their lessons to inform planning and differentiation. At one special school, a number of tools were used for formative assessment, including C2C assessment tasks for students with disability, work samples, video data captured on tablets and learning walls in some classrooms.

The assessment tools most frequently identified in review schools were NAPLAN tests, PM Benchmarks, Pat-R, Pat-M, PROBE, sight words, Early Start, Words Their Way, First Steps in Mathematics and a range of regional diagnostics. In some schools, teachers undertook pre-testing to identify students’ current knowledge and skills and distance travelled over time, but evidence of the regular use of such pre- and post-testing was limited, and this practice was often inconsistent across a school. At an urban primary school in South East region, pre- and post-testing in complex texts was introduced in 2017, and directly linked to the targeted teaching program that supported differentiated practice in reading groups across the school.

Assessment processes in review schools generally aligned with the Australian Curriculum. Assessment tasks were drawn predominantly from C2C resources, with school-based assessment tasks being developed in some schools. Many teachers reported using GTMJs to determine LOAs. As part of collaborative curriculum planning, school leaders and teachers in many review schools unpacked the achievement standards, assessment items and GTMJs. To help teachers make consistent judgements for LOAs in mathematics, a rural primary school in Central Queensland region developed a mathematics semester profile that provided a GTMJ for student achievement in understanding, fluency, problem solving and reasoning.

In some schools, students reported the use of GTMJs, exemplars, ‘know and do’ tables and criteria matrices to increase their understanding of the specific demands of assessment tasks and to improve the quality of their work. In some schools, reviews identified the need for more consistency and clarity regarding choice of assessment instruments, and strategies to address knowledge gaps.
Moderation protocols and practices in review schools were acknowledged as an essential part of the curriculum, assessment and reporting process. In some schools, moderation occurred informally, when teachers met to plan curriculum or share resources; in other schools, it was conducted through formal timetabled meetings, usually once per term, or as part of the school’s PLC. At an urban primary school in Metropolitan region, moderation was undertaken regularly to help teachers determine the focus of the next three-week cycle. A remote school in Central Queensland region developed comprehensive rubrics and work samples for high achievement and ‘C’ level work. The rubrics, together with the exemplars, provided a sound basis for moderation at the school. At an urban primary school in North Queensland region, teachers of year-level cohorts worked with their learning coach, HOC, deputy principal and an external critical friend to moderate student work and reflect on current practice. Moderation was undertaken in class cohorts and, once a term, an inquiry cycle was used to maintain consistency of practice.

Moderation was mostly conducted within year levels, more rarely across year levels. Vertical moderation of writing was a feature at an urban primary school in South East region. Teachers used the NAPLAN marking guide to rate de-identified writing on demand samples from across the school. This was seen as a challenging and beneficial activity, promoting consistency and understanding of the expected standard.

Teachers in many review schools also had an opportunity to network with teachers from other schools through cluster moderation. These relationships were of particular value to small schools that needed to support one another with curriculum implementation, moderation and professional learning.

Although there were many examples of ad hoc and informal moderation in review schools, systematic whole-school internal moderation practices in all learning areas were often yet to be established. Some schools were also yet to undertake inter-school moderation of student work.

Rigour in moderation varied according to teacher experience and expertise, and there was a need in some review schools to build teacher capacity to better understand the required standards and to quality assure assessment tasks. Many review schools needed to further refine moderation processes to build consistency in teacher judgement.
Extracurricular activities

School reviews collected significant evidence of extracurricular programs and activities that catered for a diverse range of student interests and needs.

The extracurricular activities most commonly reported by review schools were:

- sporting and cultural programs, such as a dance school, Mandarin lessons, Little Athletics program, athletics carnival and netball clinic
- enrichment programs, such as IMPACT and Booster programs delivered via school of distance education
- school camps and excursions, for example, students from a very small, rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region had the opportunity to visit Far North Queensland, Sunshine Coast and Canberra
- music and arts activities, such as choir, band and instrumental music programs. An urban primary school in North Coast region performed a large production of *The Lion King* with two casts due to the high demand for performances
- school clubs, such as coding and robotics club, chess club and photography club
- school competitions, for example, robo cup, readers’ cup and talent competitions
- school and community events and festivals.

Extracurricular activities were often developed for high-performing students. Aerospace studies and an astronomy and astrophysics program successfully extended high-achieving students at a rural secondary school in Far North Queensland region, while Opti-MINDS and a science club provided students at an urban primary school in North Queensland region with opportunities for creative exploration and innovation. Extracurricular activities also enhanced general capabilities of the Australian Curriculum, such as critical and creative thinking, ICT capability, intercultural understanding and social awareness. At a rural primary school in Central Queensland region, an annual culture day enabled students to engage in traditional Indigenous activities, including basket weaving, damper cooking, and spear and boomerang throwing. At a remote school in the same region, an ‘Adopt-a-Spot’ initiative created an opportunity for students to give back to the community, with students meeting on weekends at a local park or facility to clean up the area. Student citizenship was promoted at a rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region through student participation in community events, including an Anzac Day parade, art displays at the local art gallery, and a Lollipop Day for the Lady Cilento Children’s Hospital.

The extracurricular activities were also seen to benefit student wellbeing and promote school values. At a remote school in Central Queensland region, a ‘lunchtime activities, relaxation and fun’ (LARF) program provided students with a range of cultural, sporting and relaxation activities during lunch breaks.
Marsden State High School

Space, the new frontier

A once-in-a-lifetime trip to NASA headquarters in Houston, Texas, is helping to expand opportunities for students at Marsden State High School.

In 2016, the school embarked on its first NASA study tour. Attended by 20 Year 10 and 11 students, the trip saw students spend a week learning at the Lyndon B Johnson Space Centre, accompanied by a deputy principal, mathematics HOD and a teacher aide. The tour was made possible thanks to the fundraising efforts and support of parents and the local community, including a local university.

As part of the tour, students participated in a challenging five-day program at the Space Centre University, in which they had to develop and launch their own rocket to Mars. Combining classroom theory with a range of cognitive and hands-on activities, the program simulated astronaut training and real-world NASA experiences.

Students conducted experiments, and worked with NASA staff to develop creative solutions to a series of problems and tasks. They also got a behind-the-scenes tour of the space centre, complete with a dive session in the world’s largest underwater training facility. The program culminated with a graduation ceremony and brunch with an astronaut.

The program helped to develop the confidence, citizenship behaviours and leadership qualities of the students involved, many of whom have gone on to earn leadership positions within the school. It also had a positive impact on the school’s curriculum, with increased student interest in mathematics and science.

Although originally planned to be offered every two years, the school is now considering organising the tour every year due to the significant demand.
3.2.3 Pedagogy

While curriculum describes what is taught, pedagogy describes how the curriculum is taught.

‘Pedagogy encompasses big ideas about the nature and purpose of effective learning (the philosophy of pedagogy), as well as the classroom practices, interactions and environments that realise these broad ideas (the pedagogical strategies and tactics).’

(DET 2014a, p. 5)

Every school in Queensland is required to collaboratively develop a pedagogical framework that details procedures, practices and strategies for teaching, differentiating, monitoring, assessing and moderating (DET 2015c). This helps to ensure consistency of teaching practice across the school. Some schools develop signature pedagogies that become part of the school language and culture (Shulman 2005).

Pedagogical framework and its implementation

The importance of developing a whole-school pedagogical framework that documents school-wide expectations for instructional practices was recognised by leaders in review schools. In the majority of review schools, evidence was found of whole-school frameworks that articulated expectations for pedagogical practices to be used by all staff. Schools often adopted their own way of delivering the pedagogical framework, which was supported by symbols, models and a range of artefacts visible in classrooms across the school. The pedagogical framework of a remote school in Central Queensland region featured a windmill that illustrated key elements of the plan on each of its blades.

Some review reports emphasised the collaborative development of pedagogical frameworks. At an urban primary school in North Queensland region, the pedagogical framework was developed collaboratively by staff with the support of an external consultancy. At a combined school in Metropolitan region, leaders worked collaboratively with teaching staff to develop a whole-school pedagogical framework.

Two of the reported pedagogical approaches, El and Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR), were used by more than half of review schools. Other approaches, such as Dimensions of Teaching and Learning and Art and Science of Teaching, were present in about one-third of schools. Apart from the key overarching pedagogical approach, teachers in review schools used a range of other programs and strategies to support each student’s development in key learning areas, particularly those linked to the explicit improvement agenda.
‘[EI] refers to teacher-centred instruction that is focused on clear behavioural and cognitive goals and outcomes. These in turn are made “explicit” or transparent to learners.’

(Luke 2014, p. 1)

‘The critical stage of the [GRR] model is the “guided practice”, the stage in which the teacher gradually releases task responsibility to students.’

(Pearson & Gallagher 1983, p. 338)

The implementation of the pedagogical framework in review schools was supported by the school leadership team. In most schools, the principal communicated clear expectations, and monitored and supported the use of effective teaching strategies throughout the school. At an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region, school leaders helped staff to unpack the framework and provided a placemat to encourage and guide discussion.

Some schools developed comprehensive handbooks that unpacked the key elements of the whole-school pedagogy. At a rural secondary school in Far North Queensland region, a handbook outlined the various modules of explicit direct instruction and provided a valuable resource for teachers. At a rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region, the school’s explicit teaching of reading handbook outlined a continuum for the teaching of reading based on the PM Benchmark levels. Although teaching and learning handbooks were seen as an important step towards developing a shared understanding and consistency of teaching practices across a school, their use to guide, establish and clarify expected practice varied. Some teachers identified the need to further clarify the pedagogical models described in handbooks.

Despite most schools establishing whole-school pedagogical frameworks, the apparent influence of the current pedagogical framework on day-to-day teaching practice varied. Leaders in some review schools recognised the need to collaboratively determine the high-yield teaching strategies to be used consistently in all classrooms.
Differentiation of teaching

Queensland state schools are encouraged to develop a whole-school approach to differentiation, providing a continuum of support, with increasingly focused and personalised teaching and intervention through the following three layers (DET 2017c):

- differentiated and explicit teaching for all students
- focused teaching for identified students
- intensive teaching for a small number of students.

Whole-school differentiation usually involves data-based, collaborative planning and documentation of differentiation, involvement of support staff where appropriate, and continuous monitoring of student learning. Designing classroom activities to meet student learning needs, levels of readiness and interests can ensure that all students are engaged, challenged and extended appropriately.

Differentiation was a significant practice in the majority of 2017 review schools. Multi-age, small school settings in particular were able to ensure that teaching was highly differentiated for students.

Teachers in review schools differentiated their practice by adjusting the teaching content, process and learning environment. Commonly used strategies included: ability grouping, flexible curriculum delivery, individualised or one-on-one teaching instruction and rotational activities. In some review schools, modifications to the learning environment, including individual, small-group and whole-class instruction, were used to address the different needs of students. Homework was also used to provide some differentiated learning opportunities.

Many review schools developed and documented a case management process for identifying and referring students who required support. At a very small, rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region, formalised case management of students for writing identified student needs and resulted in the development of a whole-school program to develop students’ editing skills. Case management provided opportunities for staff to collaboratively analyse student data and to plan intervention, including extension of learning experiences for high-achieving students.

Case management processes often informed the development of individual curriculum plans (ICPs) or intervention programs. In many review schools, ICPs were developed for students working on curriculum programs significantly above or, more often, below their current year level. ICPs were prepared in consultation with parents, teachers and relevant support staff.

Intervention programs often used one-on-one or small group support implemented by teaching staff, teacher aides, a STLaN or a speech–language pathologist. A range of early intervention programs were provided to help students in their literacy development, including the reading link program, daily rapid reading and targeted online programs. In some review schools, tailored programs and interventions were only emerging practices.
The implementation of differentiation practices varied across review schools. The development of a data culture was seen as a foundation for school-wide differentiation in many schools. Most schools used student data to identify student needs. Teachers used literacy and numeracy data and their observations of students to plan learning experiences. Pre- and post-testing was often conducted to identify prior knowledge and provide evidence of the impact of differentiated approaches to learning. At a combined school in Far North Queensland region, staff were supported by an external coach to develop strategies to cater for students at different stages in their learning, and to undertake pre- and post-testing. In some review schools, data-informed differentiation was only emerging.

Review schools used a variety of tools to support the planning and documentation of differentiation practices. At an urban secondary school in Central Queensland region, a whole-school unit plan template supported teachers in identifying differentiation actions under the headings of support, understanding all students and extension. At a remote school in the same region, differentiation was part of class action plans for English, mathematics and science, which were developed by teachers to contextualise units to specific needs. Other schools used tools such as a differentiation planner, differentiation placemats and a differentiation dashboard. An urban secondary school in South East region identified the preparation of differentiation action plans (DAPs) as an important whole-school strategy. HODs quality assured the DAPs each term, and teachers offered support in differentiation strategies. Teachers used a differentiation matrix and the DAP to document the process for all students.

Collaboration was a feature of differentiation practice in many review schools. Staff worked together to identify where students were at in their learning, and used this information to adjust their teaching. Teachers were often supported by a coach and teacher aides.

Differentiation practices in some review schools also concerned high-achieving students. These practices included extension activities during lessons, extension classes, targeted extension interventions and developing ICPs for advanced learners.

Overall, school reviews identified significant variation in how schools and teachers catered for individual student needs. A consistent whole-school approach to planning and implementation of differentiated teaching was yet to be fully established in many schools.
Use of data in teaching

School reviews provided significant evidence of the use of data in the teaching and learning process. The vast majority of review schools used data to understand where students were at in their learning, to identify starting points for learning and to monitor progress over time. However, the level of engagement in such use of data varied and, at times, was not consistent within a school. Staff at a remote school in Central Queensland region undertook five-weekly data captures that identified current knowledge and skill, and informed adjustments to teaching sequences. Teachers used a range of diagnostic assessment data, and student records were often displayed on data walls to enable tracking of student learning over time. A combined school in Metropolitan region developed a reading analysis class overview for early years classes. Teachers found these overviews valuable for tracking their class performance against expected benchmarks in reading and for identifying areas for improvement.

In many review schools, leaders helped teachers to understand individual learners and to use a range of diagnostic and achievement data to track their learning progress. At a rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region, case conferences involving the class teacher, HOC and principal were conducted at the five-week mark of each term. Reading and attendance data discussed at these meetings were used to guide class programs, student groupings and personal learning improvement plans. The monitoring and tracking of student progress was particularly important across Years 11 and 12, where it informed the case management of QCE attainment.

Most review schools used data to plan curriculum delivery and inform differentiation and intervention practice. A very large, urban primary school in North Coast region used a range of datasets, including pre- and post-test assessments and classroom observations, to inform the entry and exit of students into targeted interventions and enhancements, as well as class groupings for reading, spelling, writing and mathematics. A data café was established by master teachers at an urban secondary school in Metropolitan region as an opportunity for leaders and teachers to discuss data and collaboratively plan differentiation strategies.

Many review schools used data to construct individual learning goals for students, provide them with feedback and establish the next steps in learning. This helped to promote greater student ownership of learning.

A small number of schools encouraged a culture of self-evaluation by supporting teaching staff to use data to reflect on the effectiveness of their own teaching practice. Some review schools were still working on establishing protocols and explicit expectations about how data should be used to inform teaching. As noted in review reports, the quality of data interrogation to inform teaching reflected the variation in individual teachers’ data literacy levels. At times, the ability of teachers to understand and use student data was only developing.
Student Performance Improvement Meetings (SPIMs) are helping to improve teaching and learning at Burpengary Meadows State School.

Looking for an effective method to improve classroom teaching and learning, Burpengary Meadows introduced a new monitoring system, where the school’s leadership team can gain insight into student learning, and provide teachers with feedback to help improve their teaching and outcomes in the classroom.

The SPIM process is aligned with the school’s key improvement priority of writing.

To further this agenda, teachers nominate a group of students in Semester 1 who show potential to make significant gains in writing. They also provide the school’s leadership team with diagnostic data on student learning outcomes.

The school leadership team meets with the nominated students twice a year to discuss their learning and to collect a range of data, including student work samples, the pedagogical strategies used by teachers, and the support and feedback they received.

Feedback from around 160 students a year is later documented and shared with teachers. The school leadership team also provides staff with suggestions for effective teaching practices.

SPIMs have established a cycle of feedback on teaching and learning at Burpengary Meadows, and helped to ensure consistency in teaching practice across classrooms. The SPIM process demonstrates how an authentic implementation of collegial engagement can help to identify enhancements to the teaching and learning process.

Teachers value the feedback they receive from students and leaders, which is used to continually improve their teaching practice. The process is also empowering students by encouraging them to reflect on their learning in the classroom.
3.3 Learning support

In addition to curriculum, pedagogy and differentiated classroom learning, schools need to develop a range of other practices to support the learning of students and address the additional needs that may affect student learning. This section discusses how review schools ensured positive environments for learning, increased engagement of their students in learning, and how they identified and addressed additional needs of different student groups, including those educationally disadvantaged and those high achieving.

3.3.1 Learning environments

Teaching and learning are influenced by the environment in which they take place. The learning environment includes physical elements such as school facilities and resources, as well as the values and norms that constitute school culture. A positive physical environment and culture support the everyday practice of teachers and help to ensure student learning is effective.

Learning facilities

Most review schools presented as attractive learning environments for students. Classrooms were inviting and stimulating learning spaces with displays of student work. In most schools, the P&C contributed significantly to upgrades of the physical environment.

Many schools used their physical environment and available facilities effectively to maximise student learning. The library at a rural primary school in Central Queensland region was well resourced, and was open before school and at lunchtime for student and staff use. A very large, urban secondary school in Darling Downs South West region had a sports complex, centre for culture and languages, performing arts centre and construction trade training centre, which were well used to support student learning. The trade training centre provided real-world experiences for students, including the design and construction of outdoor furniture for use in the school grounds. Other local facilities such as a swimming pool were used to enhance the school’s physical education program.

Schools often made use of their natural environment as a learning space or to promote school values, traditions and culture. At a very small, rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region, the school grounds featured trees with plaques bearing students’ names and their date of graduation. An urban primary school in South East region allocated part of the school grounds as an arbour for endangered tree species.

The reviews also provided examples of schools using their facilities to serve the needs of the local community. At a combined school in Metropolitan region, purpose-built centres, including a sports centre and restaurant, were accessed by the wider community on a daily basis. An urban primary school in North Coast region had a large and well-equipped school hall, which was used by sporting and church groups and for the annual regional robo cup competition.

In some schools, reviews identified the need to develop a facilities plan to ensure the school’s facilities meet school and community expectations.
Hidden gems in school gardens and natural surroundings support student learning and engagement at Bunker’s Hill State School.

The school encourages a wide range of creative gardening ideas, including timber chairs used as pot plant holders, tyres painted in Aboriginal patterns and used as garden beds, a large tree decorated with students’ artwork, and ‘buddy benches’ to promote friendship and empathy between students. Students grow their own vegetables, and have created a section of the garden inspired by the novel *The forest of silence*.

To help the school create an Indigenous stories garden, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander from the local prison created paintings that were installed to engage students while they played outdoors.

The school intends to feature the Indigenous stories garden in a Year 1 unit for students to learn about traditional stories. Plans are also in place to use the Indigenous paintings in classrooms to inspire students’ own artwork.

Natural surroundings enhance student learning and engagement outside of the classroom, with local wildlife regularly visiting the school gardens, including bearded dragons which have laid their eggs there. Once a year, school staff and student leaders climb nearby Bunker’s Hill to celebrate student achievements.

The creation and maintenance of the gardens has strengthened a sense of pride among the school community, and garnered recognition from the wider community. Bunker’s Hill has won a range of competitions, including Best Country School Garden for the Toowoomba Carnival of Flowers in 2016.

The sharing of traditional Aboriginal stories has also enhanced the values promoted by the school: learning, community, respect, honesty and courage.
Learning resources

Review schools used a range of learning resources to support the teaching process and provide engaging learning experiences for students. Examples included C2C resources, commercial products and a variety of distance education resources. Students often accessed learning experiences in literacy and numeracy through online programs such as Mathletics, Reading Eggs, StudyLadders or IMPACT.

Classroom learning walls (distinct from data walls) were developed by teachers in some schools, displaying the assessment task, GTMJ and assessment exemplars for students. In many schools, processes were established for teachers to request additional classroom resources. Library resources also added value to the teaching process.

As part of a focus on embedding digital pedagogies, review schools used ICTs widely to maximise student learning. A range of digital devices for student and staff use was available in most schools, including interactive whiteboards, laptops and tablets. At an urban primary school in South East region, robots had been purchased so students could engage in learning with digital technologies. At a combined school in North Coast region, the use of collaborative virtual platforms supported the integration of digital pedagogies in some learning areas.

Many schools had a ‘bring your own device’ program, or planned to introduce one. Students in some schools used the computer lab to access literacy, numeracy or LOTE programs online. A virtual classroom was developed at a very small, rural primary school in Central Queensland region to support students to use digital technologies to access teaching and learning materials.

A few schools had developed an edStudio to help plan learning experiences for their students and access resources aligned to the school’s programs. OneNote was also used to store resources to support the implementation of curriculum.

In some review schools, the use of digital devices varied across the school. Connectivity challenges occasionally impacted on student engagement, particularly in remote locations. Teachers often indicated that reliable access to ICTs could enhance opportunities for higher order thinking activities. A whole-school plan for the integration of ICTs within teaching and learning across the school was yet to be developed in some review schools.
School culture

A priority for Queensland state schools is to build and maintain positive and strong collegial cultures where relationships between staff, students and parents are based on mutual trust, support and respect, and all parties are treated as partners in the teaching and learning process (ACER 2012, p. 6). The 2017 review schools developed cultures promoting high expectations and a commitment to academic excellence, as well as trust, involvement and a sense of belonging within the school community.

A strong belief that all students can learn successfully and high expectations for student attendance, engagement and outcomes were evident in the vast majority of review schools. At an urban primary school in South East region, teachers spoke of a ‘no excuse’ mentality with regards to student progress and achievement. The introduction of the growth mindset philosophy at the school, together with a program rewarding students who met expectations, has had a positive impact on student attitudes and motivation. Reviewers reported an energy from students and staff and a genuine excitement about learning at the school.

Review schools communicated and reinforced high expectations in many different ways. In most schools, ambitious A to E targets were established to improve classroom performance, but at times, these targets needed to be clarified with school staff. At an urban primary school in North Coast region, teachers were using ‘how we do business’ frameworks to build an understanding of what high expectations look like for student progress in reading, mathematics and writing. At a very small, rural primary school in North Queensland region, explicit discussions of GTMJs, goals and learning intentions led students to understand what was required to improve. This approach was reflected in the school handbook and charter of expectations.

High expectations for teaching and learning were often visible in bookwork policy, standards for consistent display of materials in classrooms and school uniform policy. High expectations were communicated regularly to the school community through weekly parade notices, the school website, school signage and newsletters, and were consistently reinforced by the leadership team and other staff through their interactions with the school community. In some schools, data walls were used to communicate high expectations for teachers and students, particularly in regard to priority areas. In some instances, consistent expectations for student achievement levels were yet to be established or shared with the school community.

Student perceptions regarding the level of challenge in their learning may provide an indication of the presence of high expectations. Students in many review schools indicated that they were adequately challenged by their academic work and classroom activities. In a number of schools, however, some students sought further challenge, and teachers identified the need to provide tailored learning experiences for students.
Building a joyous school culture

A positive approach to student learning, inclusion and wellbeing is making a difference at Milpera State High School.

The school provides an intensive English language preparation and settlement program for newly arrived students from migrant or refugee backgrounds. To support the learning of students from more than 30 different countries and cultures, the school worked with the region’s executive principal and identified Joyous Classrooms as the strategy for positive youth development.

According to research, students learn better in joyous environments where they feel safe, secure and accepted, and where teachers have high expectations. Routines, clear instructions, and a sense of hope, belonging and connection to others all help to build a positive environment for students.

Joyous Classrooms involves all staff at Milpera working together to create classrooms where positive relationships can be built, and in which greater learning occurs. Through the school’s coaching and mentoring program, teachers develop and share joyous pedagogical and gratitude activities with each other. Consistency in the way staff speak to students is encouraged through professional development workshops. The school also established a Home of Expressive Arts and Learning (HEAL) centre, where art and music therapists help students overcome difficulties through painting, drawing, sand play and singing.

The Joyous Classrooms program has improved teachers’ understanding of factors contributing to a positive classroom culture. Student attendance is high (more than 95 per cent), and students show higher levels of happiness and engagement in learning. They also demonstrate stronger empathy, emotional regulation skills, and a sense of belonging and connection to others.
In most review schools, there was an identified commitment to positive and caring relationships, and a sense of pride was demonstrated by all members of the school community. Parents felt welcome at the school and confident to speak to teachers and school leaders regarding their child or school issues. Parents were encouraged to attend school events, assemblies and celebrations. Staff demonstrated a strong sense of ownership and pride in their school. They articulated the importance of building positive teacher–student relationships in order to motivate students to learn and to improve student learning outcomes. Students recognised the support from staff and the close connections they formed with the school community. At a rural primary school in Central Queensland region, Year 5 and 6 students designed advertisements to encourage visitors to the school. At a very small, rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region, students were proud of the handmade pencils provided by community members to support behaviour management practices. Students, staff and community members openly commented: ‘We have the best school in the state.’

Teachers in review schools put considerable effort into providing engaging experiences for students and making their school an attractive place. An urban primary school in North Queensland region developed a program to create a positive, engaging and supportive culture in the first three to five days of school so the rest of the year could run as smoothly as possible.

The smaller size of some schools allowed for a more personalised approach to teaching and learning, and more family-like relationships between staff, students and parents. This was highly valued by members of the school community.

Parents and the broader community were informed about key matters and involved in school life in many ways, including:

- school newsletters, noticeboards and signage
- school website and social media sites
- text messages and email
- a comprehensive guide or handbook for families new to the school
- parent–teacher information sessions aimed at sharing learning and classroom expectations
- formal reporting processes, such as parent–teacher interviews and report cards
- weekly classroom reports issued by some teachers
- school-specific ICT applications.

At a remote school in Central Queensland region, a ‘keeping in touch’ booklet was sent home weekly with each student to provide regular feedback to parents on their child’s learning, behaviour and attendance goals, and to provide ideas on how parents could assist their child at home. Parents spoke highly of the level and responsiveness of communication received from staff and school leaders regarding their child’s learning and wellbeing.

In many schools, parents were also involved in establishing individual learning goals and curriculum plans for students. Some schools identified the need for greater parental involvement in classrooms and learning so that parents and carers could become genuine partners in their child’s education.
3.3.2 Student engagement

The way teachers engage, empower and challenge students has a significant impact on how students learn.

‘... 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)

Review schools encouraged student belief in their own ability to learn and achieve through feedback to students, the development of individual student learning goals and other empowering practices.

Feedback to students

Appropriately implemented practices such as feedback to students can quickly and effectively enhance student outcomes (AITSL n.d.). In most review schools, this practice was developing, and students were provided with some verbal and written feedback from their teachers. At a very small, rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region, teachers provided students with regular and timely feedback during guided reading and writing activities. At a very small, rural primary school in Central Queensland region, teachers collected a range of individual work samples and reflected on these with students to analyse achievement, provide feedback and celebrate progress.

In secondary schools, data walls and tracking documents were often used to facilitate conversations between students and teachers. At an urban secondary school in North Queensland region, regular feedback and suggestions for action were documented in a student learning journal. At a combined school in Metropolitan region, a template was used to guide discussions with a teacher in relation to each student’s reading results, culminating in the development of SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely) goals. Students discussed this opportunity with enthusiasm and valued the feedback from their teacher.

The manner in which feedback was provided to students varied across schools. In most instances, the feedback was focused on the effort made, rather than on what students could do to raise their achievement level. Individualised suggestions for the next steps for learning were not yet evident in many schools. Developing a shared understanding of the purpose of feedback and an effective whole-school approach to providing student feedback was an area identified for improvement in some review schools.

A small number of review schools promoted a culture of self-evaluation and reflection, with students challenged to review their own learning, understand the demands of assessment tasks and identify learning needs. At a very large, urban secondary school in South East region, students were provided with their A to E performance data and the opportunity to reflect on their outcomes and suggest improvement strategies.
Wilsonton State High School

The Bike Build Program is helping to re-engage at-risk students at Wilsonton State High School.

Introduced four years ago, the program is a partnership between the school, local police and the council. Police and the council donated bicycles to the school that had been abandoned or stolen. Small groups of students then worked together to build and fix the bicycles.

The program began with 12 Year 9 students who had a number of behaviour incident referrals. The initiative was seen as an opportunity to re-engage them in learning.

The students worked with a youth support coordinator in an informal learning space, with formal elements of the curriculum (mainly mathematics and science) incorporated into the program. Once the bikes were restored to good working condition, they were donated to younger students in need.

The program has had a significant impact on the students involved. It gave them the chance to experience success, boost their self-esteem, build their confidence, and develop their fine motor skills and financial literacy. Students saw teachers and other school staff cared about them, and, as a result, their attendance and behaviour improved.

The success of the program in 2016 saw it expand to another nine schools in 2017. Parents and the community strongly support the program, with many families offering to donate their old bikes.
Individual learning goals

Encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning was also achieved by setting and monitoring individual learning goals. In some review schools, individual goals were set and reviewed for students each term. In others, individual student goal setting was an emerging practice. Some teachers established group rather than individual learning goals. An urban primary school in North Coast region introduced individual learning goals, which were displayed on data walls and student-friendly criteria sheets. Teachers used a variety of methods to determine student readiness to move on to their next learning goal.

Most often it was teachers who set learning goals for students. For example, at a rural primary school in North Coast region, the STLaN, in consultation with the teacher, developed an individual learning goal plan for each student, supported by a toolkit of resources. In a small number of review schools, this process was performed by students themselves or by students and teachers working in collaboration. Students were encouraged to set goals aligned with the Australian Curriculum at the start of each term and reflect on their attainment at the end of each term. Where such self-reflection was evident, students were better able to discuss their learning and identify what they needed to do to achieve their goals.

Teaching staff used student achievement data to construct individual learning goals. A few schools reported using the department's literacy continuum to identify individual learning goals. At times, individual goals were clearly linked to the school's explicit improvement agenda.

Student learning goals were often visible in classroom artefacts and on noticeboards. They were also collated in class data walls, student diaries and workbooks. At an urban secondary school in Metropolitan region, a student personal learning plan was used to develop individual learning goals and to help students reflect on their progress. The plan was incorporated into the student diary and reviewed each term under their teacher's guidance.

In some review schools, the use and sharing of individual learning goals were not yet consistent practices.

Student empowerment

Student engagement and responsibility for learning were also enhanced in review schools by including them in school decision making. At a rural primary school in Central Queensland region, students in Years 4 to 6 were asked to rate school programs and initiatives and to share ideas to enhance their learning. At a very small, rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region, students contributed to the review of the Responsible behaviour plan for students and were consulted on appropriate strategies to foster positive relationships within the school.

Many review schools encouraged students to aspire to leadership roles. Student leadership programs were established in many schools, with student leaders identified in relation to whole-school leadership positions as well as environmental, sporting and cultural pursuits. An urban primary school in Metropolitan region offered students in Years 5 and 6 school leadership opportunities in a bridge builders program. Students undertook two days of training before actively supporting other students in the playground, classrooms and public areas. A culture of student leadership was also evident at an urban primary school in Far North Queensland region, where student leaders helped younger students with their class work.
A reinvigorated approach to the teaching of reading is helping to empower students at Woodridge State School.

In 2011, the school identified that some students in the upper year levels were not engaged enough in reading. Observations and interviews with students and teachers revealed that the issue was not limited to reading only, but that the communication between teachers and students during lessons did not encourage ‘student voice’.

In response, the school partnered with a university to conduct action research into student engagement in reading. More engaging reading strategies were adopted, including reading for enjoyment, targeted reading and reciprocal reading. The school also invested in books that were used in reading groups, allowing students to choose the books they wanted to read.

To improve communication, the school introduced visible thinking routines in all key learning areas. These routines made students’ thinking and learning more visible to themselves and others, making areas for improvement more apparent.

Students were involved in school strategy and planning, and a council program aimed at reducing litter in the local area. They also visited a local aged care facility to read to residents.

In partnership with the Global Learning Centre, Woodridge students participate in Global Citizenship Education, where they acquire knowledge of local and global issues, develop attitudes such as empathy, solidarity and respect for differences, and enhance their willingness to act responsibly.

Woodridge students are now taking more responsibility for their learning and are not afraid to voice their opinion. Their voice and citizenship attitudes impressed everyone at the 2017 Global Citizenship Student Forum, where students from local schools contributed to the vision for traffic and transport in Logan.
3.3.3 Addressing additional student needs

All students have the ability to learn, and should be provided with the means to demonstrate progress in their learning (DET 2017c). ‘Inclusive practice describes any and all efforts made by a school and its community to make students and their parents feel welcome’ (Shaddock, Giarchelli & Smith 2007, p. 4).

Queensland state schools cater for the diverse needs of students, including those who require additional or specialised support. Student learning and academic achievement can be affected by their health, emotional and social needs, cultural background, disability or other special conditions, as well as their natural talents and abilities to learn. This section discusses the practices developed by review schools to support the wellbeing of all students, and the additional needs of particular student groups such as students with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and EAL/D students, and high-achieving students.

Student wellbeing

Staff in all review schools placed a high priority on addressing the wellbeing needs of all students. This is reflected in the school mantra of a rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region: ‘Every decision we make and every action we take will be for the benefit of the child as a whole: socially, emotionally and academically.’ The most frequently reported strategies implemented by review schools to address student wellbeing were:

- deployment of additional human resources, usually a guidance officer, behaviour support teacher, advisory visiting teacher or a teacher aide
- creation of wellbeing teams and committees, for example, the student support team and wellbeing group at a very large, urban secondary school in Metropolitan region, which included guidance officers, the chaplain, a youth health nurse, a youth support coordinator and year-level coordinators
- collection and use of student wellbeing data
- establishment of individual support plans to provide social and emotional support for identified students
- strategic use of partnerships with community organisations to access intellectual, physical and other resources not available within the school
- implementation of wellbeing programs such as You Can Do It, pride wall and KidsMatter.

As part of the KidsMatter framework at an urban primary school in South East region, emotion walls were established in every classroom so that teachers could monitor students’ emotional literacy. This was complemented by the explicit teaching of five core emotions. The bucket filling program and philosophy was introduced by a small number of schools to enable students to further build their emotional intelligence and resilience. A whole-school wellbeing program developed at an urban secondary school in Metropolitan region included one lesson per week with a wellbeing teacher targeting interpersonal skills, goal setting, career pathways, resilience and social development. Many review schools had a chaplaincy program that included breakfast clubs and support to address student welfare needs.
Students of all ages are being given a second chance to succeed at the Kingston Learning College.

The alternative learning centre is a sub-campus of Kingston State College. Located on site, the college gives at-risk and disengaged students the opportunity to re-engage with learning and to progress into further study or work.

Between 150 and 180 students attend the college at any one time, with approximately 400 students enrolled each year. Students aged from 15 to over 50 attend the college for a variety of reasons, including:

- returning to school after an extended absence
- re-engaging in learning after a previous negative schooling experience
- balancing family commitments and study.

The college’s motto is ‘Where second chances lead to success’.

With more than half of students reporting some mental health issues, staff use a range of strategies to develop the resilience of students and increase their engagement in schooling. Specific initiatives include an art therapy club, young mothers group, chill-out room and the ‘kickback café’.

The individuality of students is respected and embraced.

The college is achieving some great results, with around 90 per cent of students improving their academic performance from their previous school setting. QCE attainment has more than doubled since 2016. Student attendance has also improved, from an average of 70 per cent in their previous setting to 85 per cent, and more than 80 per cent of graduates are in work or undertaking further study.

Note: All demographics refer to Kingston State College.
A small number of review schools also reported that they provided free breakfasts or lunches to students, and health services such as speech–language pathology and occupational therapy. At a rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region, a school-funded dining hall provided breakfasts and a healthy meal at first break at no cost to families.

Although all review schools highlighted student wellbeing as a key priority, a documented whole-school wellbeing framework or role statement for a responsible staff member to guide daily practice was yet to be developed in some schools.

**Students with disability and students with additional learning needs**

Review schools used a range of approaches to support the learning of students with disability and students with additional learning needs. This included:

- creating teams and committees to help identify students with additional learning needs, manage the referral process and organise additional support
- deploying additional human resources to support the learning of students with disability, for example, teacher aides, inclusion teachers, SEP teachers or HOSES
- developing documentation outlining the process for targeted support for students with additional learning needs
- collecting and using data to identify the additional learning needs of students — some review schools explicitly tracked academic achievement data for students with disability in comparison to year-level cohorts
- developing and using individual learning plans for students who required adjustments to access learning, collaboratively developed by guidance officers, HOSES, special education teachers and class teachers in partnership with parents
- forming partnerships with cluster schools to better support students with additional learning needs.

A small number of review schools explicitly supported students with autism. Strategies included accessing the region's autism coach, who helped staff to understand autism, operated a support group for parents, and created learning partnerships with Autism Queensland. One urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region had an Autism Ambassadors program, which included classroom teachers with an interest in developing a deeper understanding of autism.

Despite the wide range of strategies developed by review schools to address the additional learning needs of students, the reviews identified some areas for improvement. Whole-school inclusive practices for students with disability were yet to be developed or fully implemented in some schools. A few schools recognised the need to develop a more inclusive model of support, including co-teaching, and to document processes for the identification of student needs and teaching adjustments. Some staff had a limited understanding of students' additional learning needs and strategies to engage such students, and would benefit from training and support in the development of ICPs and specialised behaviour management strategies.
Special schools

There were nine special schools reviewed in 2017, located in five of the seven education regions.

A practice that was well established in special schools was differentiation of teaching. Students had ICPs that were developed in consultation with parents and caregivers. These plans were broadly informed by an overarching philosophy of high expectations for all students. They articulated the learning goals and how the additional needs of each student would be addressed. Teaching strategies were tailored to the different starting points of students and the different rates of student progress.

Differentiation was supported by data analysis and professional learning. Special schools closely monitored the achievement of students, which informed the review of student ICPs. Data conversations were part of regular school practice and data walls were used by some schools to display learning goals. Data conversations also provided feedback on teaching practices. While special schools provided professional development for teachers, some staff expressed the desire for more professional learning opportunities.

Special schools ensured alignment with the Australian Curriculum through the use of C2C units, including those for students with disability. These were chosen from the year level most appropriate to the skills and progress of each student. To support curriculum implementation, special schools engaged speech–language pathologists and teacher aides (educational interpreters – Auslan). They also used various augmentative and alternative communication tools, such as pragmatic organisation dynamic display (PODD) communication books, picture exchange communication systems and related touchpad applications.

Students in Years 11 and 12 had senior education and training plans, and Planning Alternative Pathways with Hope tools were used to build meaningful plans for students post-school. To this end, special schools partnered with local businesses to arrange work experience placements and school-based apprenticeships. At one special school, such partnerships resulted in ongoing employment for students following their completion of Year 12. Special schools typically had students working towards a QCIA, and some partnered with the Special Education and Training Alliance to provide certificate I and II level training.

In some instances, special schools arranged for secondary students from nearby schools to complete community service work experience in their classrooms. Universities accessed special schools for the placement of pre-service teachers and therapists, and TAFE students completed a practical component of their physical education certificate courses at special schools.

Overall, the 2017 reviews highlighted the importance of differentiated teaching, parental engagement, professional learning and partnerships in maximising student outcomes in special schools.
Getting the ‘big stuff’ right

Focusing on the ‘big stuff’ is building a shared understanding of school improvement at Woody Point Special School.

For the past few years, the school’s improvement agenda has been narrowed to focus on three core priorities: data literacy, community and pedagogy. The priorities, which were developed collaboratively by staff following an analysis of student performance data, were labelled the ‘big stuff’ in order to highlight their importance to the school community. The priorities form a core part of all teaching and learning activities, and are used to guide staff meetings and professional development activities.

To help address the priorities, clear roles and responsibilities were developed for each member of the school leadership team. A comprehensive communication strategy was also undertaken to ensure the priorities and roles were understood by everyone at the school. ‘Big stuff’ posters unpacking each priority were developed and displayed around the school. School leaders also posted related videos to social media.

Teachers at Woody Point Special School speak highly of the support provided by school leaders in implementing the explicit improvement agenda, particularly around the effective use of data and the exploration of pedagogical strategies to enhance student learning. Staff now have a common language and understanding of the next steps of improvement, and are strongly committed to the continual improvement of teaching and learning at the school.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and EAL/D students

In addition to students with disability, commonly identified and supported groups in review schools included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and EAL/D students. Most review schools had developed strong inclusive cultures in response to the cultural diversity of their students, and provided a wide range of curriculum offerings. This was the case in a very large, urban secondary school in Darling Downs South West region that catered for the academic, cultural and wellbeing needs and interests of students from some 40 countries. An urban primary school in Metropolitan region, with more than half its students requiring EAL/D support and 10 per cent of students identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, conducted a multicultural week community event that celebrated culture, national dress, food and the arts from a variety of countries and cultures. This event was designed to promote better understanding of different cultures and was seen as a highlight of the school calendar.

To better address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, schools referenced Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum, conducted school-wide celebrations, including Harmony Day and NAIDOC activities, created murals to celebrate local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, involved local Elders in the everyday operations of the school, and deployed additional human resources, such as Indigenous liaison officers. At a rural primary school in Central Queensland region, the recreational sport program and lunchtime activities included Indigenous games. At a rural secondary school in Darling Downs South West region, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were supported by a Clontarf Academy (male students) and Mirri Dreamers (female students). These programs included a diverse range of activities related to education, discipline, life skills, self-esteem and employment prospects in addition to the Australian Curriculum.

A common practice in schools with high EAL/D enrolments was early intervention. Schools provided students with oral language and early literacy development support, which was usually planned by a support teacher, such as a STLaN, and delivered by teachers and teacher aides. At an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region, oral language and speech–language pathology support was provided, including one-on-one support and small group instruction for the significant proportion of students who presented with speech issues or had an EAL/D background. An urban primary school in South East region provided a targeted language-based education program for students new to Australia, particularly refugees.

Students from different cultural backgrounds received assistance from an EAL/D teacher and trained teacher aides, or through specialist programs led by qualified teachers. An urban primary school in North Coast region won a Showcase Award for Excellence for its EAL/D program. Some schools developed international student programs that supported cultural diversity. Many review schools were committed to building the cultural competence of staff, although this was still developing in some schools.

High-achieving students

Review schools reported a range of ways to identify and cater for the learning needs of high-performing students. At a very large, urban secondary school in South East region, the HOD for teaching and learning took a lead role in identifying and allocating students to extension or intensive programs. At an urban primary school in the same region, a gifted student identification profile was used by teachers to identify participants for enrichment programs. In some schools, however, such identification processes were yet to be developed.
‘Triple E’ promotes excellence

Each person is special, and everyone is good at something at Holland Park High.

To address feedback from parents and students that high-achieving students were not being adequately challenged, the school developed the Triple E (Excellence, Enrichment and Extension) program.

The program focuses on extending the learning of students in junior secondary. Based on their learning results, students may be eligible for one or more Triple E classes in English, mathematics and science. Eligibility is reviewed each semester, and this flexibility is a significant feature of E class formation. The program also involves the arts through a music masterclass in Years 7 and 8, and physical activity through selections for the school’s volleyball development squad.

Excellence is recognised across all aspects of school life. Students are encouraged to produce their best effort always. The school teaches students how to learn effectively, take risks and build on existing knowledge and skills. Students engage in goal setting, creative thinking and reflection in all personal and academic endeavours.

The Triple E program and school ethos have created a climate where ‘it’s cool to do well in school’. Teachers report an enhanced culture of high expectations and aspirations from students. The program provides academic challenges for high-achieving students, and opportunities for all students to shine in some aspect of the school’s academic, sporting, cultural and community life.

Student feedback reveals they attribute their academic success in part to their E classes, and the 2017 NAPLAN data (MSS and U2B) show improvement in many learning areas. Holland Park High students are active participants in Creative Generation, and highly regarded at national volleyball level.
The range of strategies and initiatives aimed at extending the learning of high-achieving students included:

- academic excellence programs (e.g. programs delivered through distance education). As part of an academic extension program, students at a very large, urban secondary school in Darling Downs South West region had the opportunity to participate in Australian Council for Educational Research high-achieving selection tests and academic competitions, accelerate through senior school subjects while in Year 10 and undertake university subjects in Year 12
- physical education, the arts, dance and sporting excellence programs
- tertiary education events such as university immersion days, university camps or early university entry
- extracurricular activities, for example, cluster programs, STEM projects, problem-solving sessions, coding club, robotics boot camps and leadership activities. An urban primary school in Metropolitan region organised enhancement days and super Saturdays that provided further challenge across the curriculum
- deployment of human resources. A small number of schools established a gifted education mentor position. At a very large, urban secondary school in Metropolitan region, volunteer staff acted as academic mentors to support high-achieving students.

Creating opportunities to extend learning for high-achieving students was a priority in the explicit improvement agenda of a small number of schools. To address this priority, a very large, urban primary school in North Coast region focused on developing a school-wide overview that outlined roles, programs and the relationship between high achievement and best teaching practice, staff training and the school’s pedagogical framework. As a result, two tiers for actions were defined: stand-alone programs providing intensive talent and interest-based activities, and classroom-centred, high-quality teaching practices. The school prioritised these programs and targeted interventions for high-achieving students in the school budget, and developed datasets to help identify program participants. School leaders worked with regional personnel to build complex tasks within mathematics assessments to challenge high-achieving students. The STLaN role was expanded to include enhancing learning for high-achieving students. A spelling champion and gifted and talented teacher were also designated.

In some review schools, whole-school, comprehensive and planned provision of individualised support for high-achieving students was not evident. In such schools, catering to the needs of advanced learners was the responsibility of individual teachers who devised their own extension activities for students within units of work. Some teachers from review schools reported that they lacked the expertise to identify engagement strategies to further motivate high-achieving students. As a result, the evidence shows that high-achieving students in some review schools were not yet being engaged, challenged or extended sufficiently.
This chapter summarised findings from school reviews, focusing on the key roles of school leaders, teaching practices and school support for student learning, such as ensuring positive learning environments, student engagement and addressing additional student needs. It identified the most common practices in Queensland state schools, and areas for further improvement. It has also highlighted the achievements and areas for development of rural and remote schools, O&EECs and special schools.

The following chapter presents the findings from an analysis of schools that exited the post-review support process in 2017.
04
School improvement following a priority support review
Although commonly attributed to school leaders, responsibility for school improvement is shared across an education system. To achieve greater improvement across all schools, engagement and cooperation are needed at the school and community level, the district (or regional) level and the state or national level (Fullan 2007, pp. 235–6).

‘Only small-scale, non-lasting improvement can occur if the system is not helping.’

(Fullan 2007, p. 235)

In the Queensland state school context, regional offices play a significant role in supporting schools on their improvement journeys. Regional assistance is particularly important for schools identified as needing additional support. These schools receive a priority support review and are monitored closely by the School Improvement Unit (SIU) for 12 months after their review (for more information about the process, see section 1.3.2). The progress of these schools is captured in action plan final reports, which are provided to each school after their 12-month check-in visit and review. The action plan final reports, produced by senior reviewers case managing the schools, summarise school improvement actions, regional support and outcomes evident at this stage.

This chapter reports on data from schools that completed a 12-month post-review support process in 2017. Qualitative data collected at the final 12-month visit, and included in the action plan final reports, were analysed inductively to derive key themes (an approach similar to the analysis undertaken in 2016, see Appendix A for details). These themes are reported in this chapter, along with the estimated proportion of schools in which the relevant theme was identified. Despite potential methodological limitations, the evidence collected is significant, and the findings from the analysis demonstrate the improvement that has occurred in Queensland state schools that received a priority support review.
4.1 Improvement strategies and actions

The findings presented in the following sections are based on the analysis of data from the action plan final reports of 78 schools that exited the 12-month support process in 2017 (referred to as cohort schools).

The schools represented all SIU school types, apart from rural secondary and special schools, and were located in all regions (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2 below). The largest subgroups were urban primary schools and schools located in Metropolitan region, which corresponds with the characteristics of Queensland state schools at a state-wide level.

![Figure 4.1: Cohort schools by SIU school type, 2017](image)

The index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) of cohort schools varied between 791 and 1088, with most schools (approximately 60 per cent) sitting within a 900 to 1000 range.

When interpreting aggregated data presented in this chapter, it is important to consider that each school operated in its own context and identified issues of a specific nature and varying level of sophistication during their post-review process. This variety is reflected in schools’ action plans, which outline the key improvement strategies schools pursued following their priority support review.
During the 12 months after a priority support review, cohort schools implemented a range of strategies and actions. The key areas to which these actions related were revealed by an analysis of the action plan final reports (see Figure 4.3 below).

Each school tended to implement strategies and actions that addressed more than one area. Five areas were targeted by more than three-quarters of cohort schools: human resources (99 per cent), data processes (91 per cent), pedagogical practices (88 per cent), strategic management (82 per cent) and curriculum and assessment (76 per cent). All of these areas featured in the 2016 SIU annual report findings except for strategic management, which has been identified as a new theme and significant area of cohort schools’ focus in 2017.

The areas derived inductively from data align with the nine domains of the School Improvement Hierarchy (see Figure 4.4 below), with strategic management actions focused mostly on the explicit improvement agenda.
The following sections unpack cohort schools’ strategies and actions in the identified areas.

### 4.1.1 Strategies and actions in strategic management

Strategic management was identified as a significant area of focus in the 2017 data. The theme embraces a range of strategies and actions related to specifying the school’s vision, goals and direction, developing policies and plans to achieve these goals, and allocating resources to implement these plans. It encompasses the strategies and actions of cohort schools that reflected holistic systems thinking and action on the part of school leaders.

‘Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static “snapshots”... [It is] a shift of mind from seeing people as helpless reactors to seeing them as active participants in shaping their reality, from reacting to the present to creating the future ... systems thinking is the cornerstone of how learning organisations think about their world.’

(Senge 1990, pp. 68–9)
School actions identified in this area included:

- collaboratively developing a clear vision and mission statements
- applying the School Improvement Model to guide whole-school improvement
- using data and research to inform the improvement journey
- collaboratively determining targets, timelines and key actions for the explicit improvement agenda, including benchmarks and targets for student achievement
- developing and communicating more specific action plans to support the implementation of school-wide initiatives aligned to the explicit improvement agenda
- developing whole-school policies and frameworks such as an attendance policy or a wellbeing framework
- establishing clear expectations for school practices
- securing and strategically managing resources to support the explicit improvement agenda and the direction of the school
- reviewing the improvement strategies and reflecting on required classroom practices
- monitoring the implementation of the explicit improvement agenda to measure the school’s progress against the action plan and the effectiveness of improvement strategies.
A number of schools recognised the importance of collaboratively developing a vision and a shared understanding of school improvement within the school community. Learning walls were created in the administration area of an urban secondary school in North Queensland region to inform staff about the vision for the school and the work being undertaken in 2017. Surveys of staff and parents helped an urban primary school in Metropolitan region to understand what improvements were needed. The principal also developed a parent-friendly version of the strategic plan to inform parents of school priorities, strategies and actions.

In order to promote their vision, expectations, improvement priorities and targets, almost one-third of cohort schools developed related artefacts and activities. These included postcards and flyers, signage, learning walls, celebrations and rewards systems.

Many schools used the Inquiry Cycle to structure their improvement process. In consultation with teachers and teacher aides, the principal of a very small, rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region mapped the required elements of the action plan against the Inquiry Cycle model of scan and assess–prioritise–develop and plan–act–review. Using coded colours for each step, flow charts were collaboratively developed for the establishment of student learning goals, and observation and feedback cycles. This method helped to identify stages for determining progress and supported developing consistency in student learning goals.

Many schools monitored their improvement, but in most instances, this was related to tracking the progress of implementation, rather than measuring the impact or effectiveness of implemented practices. At a very small, rural primary school in Central Queensland region, improvement plans for writing were monitored regularly and updated twice a term to match the five-week assessment cycles. The overviews were shared with staff, who assisted in the monitoring process. School leaders at an urban primary school in South East region monitored the classroom implementation of Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) practices via a walkthrough process. More examples of monitoring are discussed in Chapter 5.

4.1.2 Strategies and actions in human resources

The human resources area identified in strategies and actions of cohort schools refers to schools acquiring new staff, developing staff capability, and deploying staff to support the improvement agenda.

‘The key to a capacity building approach lies in developing a common knowledge and skill base across all leaders and educators in the system, focusing on a few goals, and sustaining an intense effort over multiple years ... Capacity building impacts the organisation because it develops the culture; accelerates the speed of change; fosters sustainability; and reinforces the strategy as people become involved in deeper learning, reflection, and problem solving across the organisation.’

(Fullan & Quinn 2016, pp. 57–8)
It is clear that cohort schools recognised the importance of developing an expert teaching team. Different aspects of human resources were targeted in strategies and actions of the vast majority of schools (99 per cent). Most of the implemented changes involved providing professional learning opportunities for staff, followed by the creation of new positions and teams, changes to professional learning management practices, and the clarification of staff roles and responsibilities (see Figure 4.5 below).

![Figure 4.5: Areas related to human resources addressed by cohort schools](image)

Professional learning
- New staff and teams
- Professional learning management
- Roles and responsibilities

Percentage of schools (N=78)
- Professional learning: 97%
- New staff and teams: 49%
- Professional learning management: 38%
- Roles and responsibilities: 17%

Professional learning opportunities were often aligned with newly implemented pedagogical strategies for reading and writing. Other areas of professional learning included, but were not limited to, the analysis and use of data, understanding of the Australian Curriculum, curriculum planning and implementation, and the use of Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C) digital planning tools and Essential Skills for Classroom Management. An urban primary school in South East region developed an edStudio that included videos and readings for teachers to supplement the modelling of consistent reading practices by school leaders in classrooms.

A range of collaborative structures for professional learning was also established (or re-established) for staff in cohort schools as a result of their post-review support process. Examples included:

- professional learning communities and teams (PLCs, PLTs)
- collaborative curriculum planning meetings
- cluster meetings and reciprocal visits to cluster schools
- staff meetings, juncture meetings and focus improvement group meetings
- reading roundtables, whereby evidence of student learning is collaboratively interrogated
- use of a school-based digital platform as a means of sharing information on curriculum ideas, observations and practice.

An urban primary school in Metropolitan region made a deliberate effort through class organisation to build a collaborative team culture with year-level teams. A junior team and a senior team provided opportunities for collegial effort and professional sharing. In addition, all teachers were members of either the curriculum or PBL committees.

The final reports also identified many examples of strategies and actions that involved observation of practice and provision of feedback, and were established in line with the department and the Queensland Teachers' Union joint statement on collegial engagement in classrooms (DET & QTU 2011). Observation and feedback processes, watching others work, learning walks and walkthroughs were often developed to support consistent implementation of new pedagogical approaches. To build an expert teaching team, schools also implemented classroom profiling and data conversations with teachers, conducted by school leaders.
Some schools also focused on developing leaders’ capacity, for example, through the Queensland Educational Leadership Institute executive leaders’ program, or professional development in instructional leadership.

To support improvement priorities, some schools employed new staff and created new teams. School attendance officers (acquired through the Australian Government’s Remote Area Attendance Strategy), teacher aides, leadership positions (head of curriculum [HOC], deputy principal), support teachers – literacy and numeracy were appointed, and special committees (such as a special needs advisory committee, local consultative committee or curriculum committee) were established to help schools address problems of practice.

To build an expert teaching team, some schools needed to first improve their professional learning management processes. This included documenting a whole-school professional learning plan (including success criteria), implementing an annual performance development plan (APDP) process, and creating a framework for coaching or observation and feedback. An urban primary school in South East region developed an audit tool to determine the developmental needs of teachers and establish benchmarks for teachers’ understanding of the teaching of reading.

A number of schools focused on collaboratively developing or refining the roles and responsibilities of school staff and leaders. This often included expanding the leadership team, and documenting role statements and the organisational structure.

4.1.3 Strategies and actions in other areas

A range of other strategies and actions was evident in final reports. These related to data processes, pedagogical practices, curriculum delivery, and partnerships and community engagement.

Data processes

More than 90 per cent of cohort schools implemented changes to data processes following their priority support review. Some schools needed to review, develop or document a data collection plan and schedule, and they often adopted new data collection tools. Schools refined datasets, and built consistency and accuracy in the taking of running records, with a more balanced analysis of data from diagnostic, formative and summative testing. At an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region, data were used to track individual student progress across formative and diagnostic assessments. Teachers collaboratively designed formative assessments, based on classroom units of work, which were supported by the regional diagnostic testing linked to C2C resource units. Teachers at an urban primary school in South East region were assisted to map the learning of students in their classroom to better understand students’ levels of achievement in reading. The triangulation of formative and summative datasets helped them to move away from making judgements based solely on PM Benchmark and Prose Reading Observation, Behaviour and Evaluation of Comprehension (PROBE) reading data.
The increased use of data to inform teaching and learning — individual student goals, differentiation and case management in particular — was identified in some cohort schools. At a very large, urban secondary school in Metropolitan region, pre- and post-testing with a literacy focus were implemented across the school to provide valuable data regarding relative gain. Formative assessments were used across the curriculum, with reading data shared at leadership meetings and at a faculty level to inform analysis, strategy and review towards improved practice. A targeted approach to moving students’ Ds to Cs and Cs to Bs was implemented at the school.

Regular data discussions (often aligned with the explicit improvement agenda) had started in many schools, supported by the development of a whole-school data wall. At a combined school in Darling Downs South West region, the school data wall provided a visual display of student reading progression, and generated professional discussion on effective teaching strategies. The HOC-led discussions with teachers focused on teaching strategies to be deployed during the term, with five ‘marker’ students in each year level.

**Pedagogical practices**

Most schools, particularly those aiming to improve literacy, implemented actions that changed their pedagogical practices (88 per cent of all cohort schools). A range of actions was identified, most often focused on:

- collaboratively developing or documenting the school’s pedagogical framework
- reviewing or developing the whole-school pedagogical strategy
- developing and communicating learning goals for the class and individual students, aligned with school targets.

The principal and staff at a remote school in Darling Downs South West region co-constructed the school’s writing framework, which was evidence-based and aligned to the school’s pedagogical framework. It identified the school’s writing vision and beliefs, and key instructional approaches and resources. The framework was quality assured by the regional Curriculum, Pedagogy and Learning (CPL) team, and was shared with the school’s Parents and Citizens’ Association and through newsletters and parent–teacher meetings.

All students at a very small, rural primary school in Central Queensland region collaboratively developed writing goals that were linked to the literacy continuum and revised every five weeks. These goals informed the focus of one-to-one support provided by the teaching team, and were displayed on each student’s desk for easy referral.
Curriculum and assessment

In more than three-quarters of cohort schools (76 per cent), activity in the area of curriculum focused on curriculum planning and the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. Schools developed and refined their curriculum assessment and reporting plans and other documents, such as a whole-school template for unit planning. Establishing collaborative curriculum planning cycles, including backward mapping to the Australian Curriculum achievement standards, and documenting school-wide processes to implement the Australian Curriculum, were significant activities in many schools.

At an urban primary school in Far North Queensland region, staff deconstructed and reconstructed the reading program as a collaborative, whole-school activity to increase understanding of the expectations regarding the teaching of reading at the school. At an urban primary school in Metropolitan region, the principal worked with teaching staff to ensure that C2C units were backward mapped to the Australian Curriculum. Teachers completed a shared, digitally documented tracking tool to record any adjustments or omissions to content descriptions, which was revisited in later planning to ensure the coverage of the entire curriculum.

Some schools focused on improving assessment and moderation practices. Teachers at an urban primary school in Metropolitan region collaborated on the development of assessment tasks. Curriculum planning days were followed by half-day check-ins to refine the assessment task. A quality assurance process, led by the HOC, was implemented to map assessment tasks to the requirements of the Australian Curriculum. Teachers’ feedback on the quality of each unit was sought, and modifications were noted for future reference. At an urban primary school in North Coast region, moderation opportunities were implemented twice during the semester in conjunction with a number of other small schools in the district. The group used an edStudio to provide support documents and exemplars for the moderation of student work.

Partnerships and community engagement

More than 40 per cent of cohort schools implemented strategies and actions related to school partnerships and parent engagement. Schools established a range of strategic partnerships with community organisations and education institutions. Some schools developed and published a parent and community engagement framework, and engaged parents and the community in the improvement agenda. To support parent engagement, a remote school in Darling Downs South West region organised a Mother’s Day event where a student and parent writing activity occurred. One combined school in North Coast region offered parent workshops on how to support students in their reading.

A range of communication tools was developed to enhance partnerships with community. These included:

- a website and social media page to share school events, celebrations and updates on the explicit improvement agenda
- regular updates to parents on the improvement agenda, and strategies used by students, at assemblies and through school newsletters
- a communication book to enhance the opportunities for parents to receive feedback on their child’s progress.
4.2 Regional support

The support that cohort schools received from regional offices was significant, and consistent with the underlying philosophy of priority support reviews. Principals received individual, ongoing support from their assistant regional director (ARD) or lead principal. This was often complemented by support from other personnel, such as a principal professional coach, principal professional colleague, small schools principal coach or principal advisor – organisational transformation. Schools were also supported by regional education advisors and teams, for example, a CPL team, regional wellbeing team, regional school operations team or regional improvement team. More specialised support came from regional coaches such as the principal education advisor – Australian Curriculum (PEA-AC), PBL coach, data coach or autism coach. Schools were also given access to other specialists, such as a languages champion or regional international expert. Some schools were supported by regional or cluster personnel, such as a principal education officer – student services, guidance officer – intensive behaviour services, cluster business manager, district relief teacher or advisory teacher.

Almost all cohort schools received regional support in strategic management and human resources, while nearly two-thirds were supported to develop partnerships and community engagement, and curriculum. Support was also provided to schools to develop their data-related and pedagogical practices (see Figure 4.6 below).

![Figure 4.6: Areas of regional support received by cohort schools](image)
Each school tended to receive regional support in more than one area. The areas supported by regions corresponded with the domains of the School Improvement Hierarchy (see Figure 4.7 below).

![Figure 4.7: Domains of School Improvement Hierarchy supported by regions](image)

Note: The percentages represent the proportion of schools (N = 78).

### 4.2.1 Regional support in strategic management

Regional support in strategic management, evident across all cohort schools, focused mostly on developing and monitoring the implementation of the explicit improvement agenda. Regions most often assisted schools to analyse headline indicator data and the school data profile, determine the priority focus, establish targets and implement the four-year strategic plan, explicit improvement agenda and action plan, and review key school planning documents to ensure consistency across the school.

Some schools received help to establish timelines for work to be completed and for implementation to commence. Such support was sometimes reinforced by discussions about the line of sight from school leaders to classrooms and students. At an urban secondary school in Central Queensland region, regional staff visited classrooms with the principal to review teachers’ understanding of the school’s improvement priorities. In some schools, regular discussions with school leaders and teachers about the implementation and progress of the ongoing improvement agenda were also noted. At an urban primary school in South East region, regional staff conducted conversations with students regarding the traction gained in the implementation of the whole-school reading framework, with feedback provided to the leadership team.

Some cohort schools also received support to unpack the School Improvement Hierarchy or the Inquiry Cycle, and investigate ways to use these models in relation to the action plan and beyond.
Other examples of regional support in strategic management included:

- providing information, coaching and support regarding state-wide and regional priorities for 2017
- discussing with regional portfolio managers the needs of the school in relation to its key improvement priorities
- providing guidance and advice regarding the school budget and the strategic and targeted use of resources
- unpacking the school review and quadrennial school review process
- discussing the National School Improvement Tool and high-yield strategies
- developing leadership structures and processes.

4.2.2 Regional support in human resources

The second most frequent area of regional support, identified in most cohort schools, involved different aspects of human resources. Within this area, support in professional learning to enhance staff capability was reported most often (see Figure 4.8 below).

![Figure 4.8: Regional support in human resources received by cohort schools](chart)

This support included assistance in providing professional learning opportunities in areas such as the implementation and documentation of the Australian Curriculum, curriculum planning, assessment and reporting processes, pedagogical practices (for example, Explicit Instruction, age-appropriate pedagogies, modelled reading, vocabulary and sentence structure), managing student behaviour, and data and moderation processes.

A significant portion of professional learning was provided to leaders of cohort schools. Personal coaching and mentoring was aimed at helping school leaders to develop and implement the strategic direction of the school. Other regional support in the professional learning of leaders often focused on increasing knowledge and skills in instructional leadership, establishing a culture of observation and feedback, building high-performing teams, and understanding school data and the implications of Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) on the school students with disability process.
Regions also assisted cohort schools with collaborative structures for professional learning. Examples included:

- establishing a PLC
- brokering collegial connections for members of the leadership team
- incorporating the school into a community of practice focusing on reading
- involving school leaders in case management with a neighbouring school.

Regions supported the development of positive collegial cultures in cohort schools, based on de-privatising practice and a willingness to share, observe and seek feedback on teaching and learning. In some schools, they provided observation and feedback for the leadership team, teachers and teacher aides regarding the implementation of pedagogical practices, the Australian Curriculum or moderation processes. They helped schools to design an observation sheet, implement learning walks, and model, coach and provide feedback to teachers. A very large, urban secondary school in South East region received observation and feedback from the region on the school’s line of sight through conversations with heads of department (HODs) and classroom visits for teachers.

Another aspect of human resources supported by regions was staff retention and acquisition, for example, appointment of a new principal, acquisition of a master teacher, provision of a local relieving teacher, and retention of a head of special education services (HOSES). An urban primary school in South East region was assisted with the introduction of curriculum leaders, including a pedagogical coach, HOC, deputy principal and HOSES.

Regions also worked with schools to review and define the roles of staff, develop communication protocols, and establish a culture of accountability and responsibility.

In some schools, regional support focused on specific aspects of professional learning management, for example, assistance with the review of annual performance review processes and their alignment to the school’s improvement agenda, or assisting the principal with the development of staff APDPs, aligned with school goals and personal needs.
4.2.3 Regional support in partnerships and community engagement

Nearly two-thirds of cohort schools received regional support to develop partnerships and networks, or to engage parents and the community. Schools were supported to establish links with like-schools, to strengthen best practice and critical friend networks, and to better manage relationships within the school and wider community.

As part of a small school principal curriculum support project initiated by the ARD, the principal of an urban primary school in North Coast region was supported, through the provision of teacher relief scheme days, to observe and discuss curriculum planning and alignment to the Australian Curriculum within the local cluster. A rural primary school in North Queensland region was involved in a collaborative inquiry with all cluster schools, sponsored by the region. Partnerships within a region were encouraged through regional learning fairs, with schools highlighting effective high-yield practices. Other examples of how regions promoted partnerships included:

- strengthening links between schools and local early childhood education services
- assisting in maintaining and sourcing outdoor and environmental education centre (O&EEC) networks
- helping to arrange inter-school visits for staff and school leaders.

Some schools were also given advice and feedback on building community engagement and strategies to better manage relationships within the school and wider community. For example, regions engaged the support of an external consultant, who assisted with parental concerns, and supported community engagement activities such as Early Years events.
4.2.4 Regional support in curriculum and assessment

Regional support in the area of curriculum (received by nearly two-thirds of cohort schools) focused on the following activities:

- developing a whole-school curriculum and assessment plan
- unpacking and documenting the Australian Curriculum and C2C
- adapting and aligning assessment to ensure coverage of achievement standards and content descriptions
- supporting collaborative curriculum planning for units of work, including multi-age units and individual curriculum plans
- developing classroom ‘know and do’ charts
- strengthening moderation processes, including opportunities to moderate outside the school.

At a rural primary school in Darling Downs South West region, a regional CPL team supported the school’s curriculum team to develop a whole-school literacy program that was consistent with the Australian Curriculum. An urban primary school in Central Queensland region was supported by the region through the provision of information and communication technology (ICT) and 21st century learning, and development of a digital technology curriculum.

4.2.5 Other regional support

Nearly one-half of cohort schools (45 per cent) were supported by regions to improve their data processes. Support was provided for data collection and tracking, data analysis and triangulation processes, and the use of tools and systems such as a region’s specific student support system and OneSchool’s NAPLAN reports. Some schools received guidance on the establishment and use of the school data wall and related case management processes.

Almost one-third of cohort schools were supported by regions in pedagogical practices. Regions helped to identify effective teaching strategies and quality assure whole-school pedagogical frameworks. They helped to establish case management processes and goal setting for individual students.

Regions also assisted a significant number of cohort schools with:

- student wellbeing — most often through regional support for early childhood education centre to school transitions, and an educational support funding program for children in out-of-home care
- corporate services, including finance and budget advice, refurbishment of facilities and regional ICT advice.
Responses to the SIU’s survey of principals on the post-priority support review process in 2017 (discussed earlier in section 1.3.2) provided examples of how regions contributed to the process:

‘It helped all staff to understand what the region can offer the school and what the improvement process is about, and how we can work together to improve outcomes for all students and the school community.’

‘It was a non-threatening, supportive process. The way the lead principal was able to support this was significant. Matching regional expertise with the actions required for our improvement journey meant a process of just-in-time learning took place for the whole leadership team.’

‘The opportunity to work closely with my ARD gave both of us a greater understanding of the school, its strengths and areas for improvement. It also gave us some common language and priorities to base our long-term planning around.’

‘It gave me a clearer understanding of the various types of support that the region can offer. It also made the region more aware of what support we required.’

‘Support from the region has been really good in recent years. The sustained improvement in the years that led up to the review was made possible by ARDs who understood the challenges of low-SES school improvement. They trusted and supported us in developing a culture of informed optimism and a momentum of steadily improving student achievement.’
Improvement outcomes

School improvement is not an isolated activity, but rather ‘... a systematic way of generating change and development within the school’ (Harris 2002, p. 5). The focus is on changing daily practices in schools in order to improve student performance over time. Therefore, a range of achievements and improvements can be expected before any impact on student learning can be identified.

The work of cohort schools to improve their daily practices and the support they received from regional offices need to be acknowledged, as these efforts have already led to many positive outcomes. The outcomes described in the action plan final reports and analysed for the purposes of this report can be linked to a number of thematic areas (see Figure 4.9 below).

These themes validate those obtained from the 2016 data analysis (SIU 2017a, p. 208), suggesting a consistent logic of school improvement. A clearly established improvement direction increases the chances of gathering positive responses to implemented changes, which contribute to enhancing positive school culture and staff morale. In such a favourable environment, a school’s professional capital grows and is used to improve leadership and teaching practices, which may, over time, positively affect student engagement, learning and performance. As Figure 4.9 above shows, evidence related to each area was found in the majority of cohort schools.

Figure 4.9: Improvement outcomes in cohort schools
4.3.1 Direction setting

More than 90 per cent of cohort schools set a clear direction for improvement. There were four elements that contributed to this achievement:

- clear vision of improvement with a sharp and narrow focus, maintained over the 12 months post review — often informed by an analysis of student achievement data, some schools successfully refined and clarified their improvement agendas, while others maintained their sharp and narrow focus

- effectively communicated improvement vision and expectations, including a shared understanding and language of improvement — in most cohort schools, teachers were aware of the specific improvement agenda with year-level targets, and were able to discuss their role in its implementation. Clear lines of sight and expectations were developed in each area of the action plan. Teachers commented on the greater clarity of expectations, and the strong sense of direction that permeated the work of the school

- clear division of key roles and responsibilities of school leaders, including individualised success criteria for leaders, aligned with improvement priorities — in many cohort schools, leaders embraced their instructional leadership role, and leadership teams were united in their approach to supporting teachers and monitoring the implementation of the explicit improvement agenda. At the same time, school leaders were clear about their roles in driving different aspects of the improvement agenda

- alignment between different elements of the change process — most often schools aligned professional learning practices (such as coaching, observation and feedback) with the improvement priorities and newly implemented pedagogies. Other examples included the alignment of improvement targets with individual student learning goals, student outcomes data with professional learning plans and opportunities for staff, Investing for Success funding with improvement priorities, and the work of all faculties and the executive team.

An additional aspect of direction setting was the higher level of accountability and transparency identified in many cohort schools. Classroom teachers and teacher aides were able to demonstrate how the decision-making processes of the school occurred, and what the responsibilities of team members were.

The findings from the action plan final reports are supported by the results from the survey of principals whose schools exited the post-priority support review process in 2017. The survey findings show that the majority of cohort schools found the post-review support process helped to determine their school improvement focus, develop a shared understanding about school improvement, clarify the roles and responsibilities of school leaders, and identify the next steps for the school (see Figure 4.10 below).
The post-review support process helped my school to:

- develop a common language and shared expectations about our improvement priorities: 88%
- determine the focus of improvement: 85%
- identify our next steps for school improvement: 85%
- clarify the roles and responsibilities of leaders: 82%

Figure 4.10: Responses related to direction setting, 2017 principal survey
Note: The percentages represent the aggregated positive responses (N = 33).

In addition, almost 80 per cent of principals believed the post-review process helped their school to improve decision making.

### 4.3.2 Responses to change

Overall, school staff and community responses to the implemented improvement agendas were very positive (91 per cent of schools). In a majority of schools, there was evidence of staff openness, commitment and ownership of change. School leaders reported that staff had engaged in school improvement processes and activities, and teachers acknowledged the clear and specific direction of improvement. School leaders in many schools demonstrated a strong commitment to seeking out best practice and learning from other schools.

In most cohort schools, staff enthusiasm and satisfaction with the implemented changes were evident. Teachers often articulated that they valued the improvement process and wanted to see the work continue. They were optimistic that further improvements were possible, and appreciated the work of the leadership team in ensuring the consistent implementation of quality practices across the school.

In addition, the findings from the principal survey demonstrated that the majority of principals (88 per cent) believed that the post-review support process helped their school to engage staff in school improvement, and 61 per cent considered the process helpful in engaging parents and the school community.
4.3.3 School culture

Some evidence of improvement in school culture was found in 85 per cent of cohort schools. A positive tone in the school and improved staff morale were identified in many schools. Teachers in a number of schools commented that their schools had undergone a cultural change. Positive relationships between the school's leadership team and staff, along with high levels of trust, were apparent across the school community. This often resulted in a growing sense of pride within the school.

Staff in a majority of cohort schools indicated that they felt supported in the improvement process, and were receiving appropriate professional learning linked to school priorities. They identified the work of the leadership team in supporting them as critical, and articulated the need for this work to continue in order to sustain the current momentum of change. Teachers also reported that the support provided through the observation and feedback process was invaluable.

Associate leaders, such as HODs, also indicated that they felt well supported in their school improvement work. And finally, some principals articulated that the 12-month support process had reinforced their existing vision for the school and associated implementation methods.

In many cohort schools, the final check-in visit and review identified evidence of a culture focused on learning and collegiality. De-privatised classrooms, professional discussions of teaching practices, and a focus on learning were apparent in these schools. This culture was characterised by a strong collaborative ethos, self-reflection, motivation to learn, and a commitment to continue pedagogical improvement.

The findings from the principal survey support these claims. They show the various ways in which the post-review support process helped the majority of schools to improve staff morale, communication and collegiality and trust (see Figure 4.11 below).

The post-review process helped my school to:

- increase the collegiality and trust among staff: 79%
- improve communication between school leaders and staff: 76%
- improve staff morale: 58%

**Figure 4.11: Responses related to school culture, 2017 principal survey**

Note: The percentages represent the aggregated positive responses (N = 33).

As a result of intensive work on school assessment and data processes, a number of cohort schools noted considerable progress in developing a data culture and assessment culture, where everyone owns every student’s data across the school, and where teachers and students are becoming data and assessment literate, capable of discussing relevant datasets and achievement standards to inform the next steps for teaching and learning.
4.3.4 Professional capital

According to data in the action plan final reports, more than 80 per cent of cohort schools developed their professional capital, consisting of human, social and decisional capital. Extensive investment in building staff capability had enhanced human capital, that is, staff knowledge, understanding and skills (60 per cent of cohort schools). Evidence was often identified for a deeper understanding of the requirements of the Australian Curriculum. Many teachers reported they were now able to identify achievement standards from which they could backward map. Their understanding of assessment had improved, and they were able to make quality judgements regarding student progress. Evidence collected indicated teachers in many cohort schools had gained a better understanding of the purpose of collecting and analysing student data, and of using the data to inform their teaching. The teaching skills of some staff also improved, particularly in the school’s selected pedagogies. School leaders’ expertise to guide and lead the improvement agenda of the school, and their capacity as instructional leaders, was also boosted.

There was some indication in more than a quarter of cohort schools that the social capital — that is, professional relationships and networks of school leaders and staff — had grown. This was evident in the high levels of collaboration, collegial discussion and sharing of effective teaching practices in some schools. The collaboration of school leaders had also increased during the 12-month post-review support process. Understandings gained from the professional learning experiences of staff were shared with others to build a greater repertoire of effective teaching strategies. There was an acknowledgement that the collaborative nature of school processes provided a solid basis for vertical alignment across all year levels.

Decisional capital, according to the evidence in the action plan final reports, had grown in about one-third of cohort schools. Teaching staff often indicated that they felt more confident to use data to track the progress of students and modify their teaching accordingly. Teachers had assumed greater responsibility for planning, and for unpacking the Australian Curriculum. They had stronger rationale for differentiating their teaching approaches for each student in the school. There was an acknowledgement from staff that observation and feedback processes had helped to develop their confidence and competence, and a shift to deeper learning. Staff commented positively on the pace with which change proceeded, which allowed individuals enough time to develop the necessary confidence and skills.

According to data from the principal survey, the majority of principals agreed that the post-review support process facilitated staff collaboration within and beyond the school, and enhanced the capacity of school leaders to lead school improvement (see Figure 4.12 below).
The post-review process helped my school to:

- Increase capacity of school leaders to lead school improvement: 85%
- Improve staff collaboration: 79%
- Foster partnerships and networks outside of school: 58%

![Figure 4.12: Responses related to professional capital, 2017 principal survey](image)

Note: The percentages represent the aggregated positive responses (N = 33).

The action plan final reports from cohort schools indicated that growth in staff knowledge, skills and confidence increased demand for professional learning, particularly in understanding guides to making judgements and data literacy.

### 4.3.5 School practices

Positive changes to school practices were evident in almost all cohort schools (96 per cent). In most of these schools, there were indications of increased consistency of processes and established routines, which benefited students by promoting positive transitions and classroom learning. At an urban primary school in North Coast region, teachers articulated a consistent whole-school approach to the teaching of reading across classrooms. All students had individual reading goals, which were set each term. The similarity of expectations in each classroom enabled students to move from year-to-year with ease. The use of common meta-language and artefacts supported this seamless transition.

As a result of their school review, a majority of cohort schools implemented new practices, for example observation and feedback, edStudio, a communication book for students, case management, student goal setting and PLTs. At an urban primary school in South East region, making learning more visible for students was an emerging practice that was linked to effective learning research.

The findings from the principal survey support these results: 88 per cent of respondents believed the post-review support process helped their school to improve the consistency of school practices, while 82 per cent agreed that it assisted in developing and implementing new practices.

According to data from the action plan final reports, some evidence in more than a majority of cohort schools indicated that the changes in practices sparked by their school review translated to the individual teacher and classroom level. Teachers engaged with data in a more purposeful way to inform their teaching programs and strategies, including differentiation, and to make improvements to daily teaching practices. They were able to demonstrate how newly implemented practices related to curriculum, assessment and pedagogy positively impacted on their teaching. Teaching was more focused, and differentiation was apparent and effective.
Teachers reflected more regularly and deeply on classroom activities and the effectiveness of teaching strategies. They provided examples of how analysing data allowed them to uncover learning issues. Overall, improved and proactive teaching approaches and documented processes of the school positively impacted on student learning.

4.3.6 Improvements in student learning

As a result of all school improvement efforts, positive changes were apparent in student learning in 78 per cent of cohort schools. First of all, in almost a quarter of cohort schools, there was some evidence of improved student attendance or behaviour. Teachers and students spoke positively regarding the changes in student behaviour over the past 12 months, and credited much of this change to the school's continued focus on PBL. Playgrounds were more settled during break times and classrooms were calmer and more orderly. Students were able to articulate how they applied new rules to regulate their own behaviour.

Secondly, significant positive changes were noted with regard to students' ownership of their learning (in more than half of cohort schools). Many students were able to identify where they were in their learning journey, what their goals were and what they needed to work on in the future. Some students were able to articulate how they used success criteria to inform their learning and the strategies they would use to achieve their learning goals. At an urban primary school in Central Queensland region, students reported that learning walls created across the school helped their understanding of assessment tasks and the steps required to improve their work.

Finally, early improvements in student literacy and numeracy were identified in 40 per cent of cohort schools (evidence based on observations of student daily activities and class-based assessment tasks). Some teachers provided evidence of improved student outcomes linked to the new pedagogical framework, strategies and programs. At an urban primary school in Central Queensland region, leaders and teachers noted that student confidence and engagement in mathematics had improved, resulting in increased risk taking and persistence in completing mathematical tasks. Another urban primary school in South East region pointed to a reduction in the number of students requiring additional support compared to a similar period in 2016.

In summary, cohort schools have implemented significant changes in practices, which have positively impacted on their improvement journey. Clear links between school strategies and actions, regional support and improvement outcomes can be identified. Strategies and actions in the area of strategic management and data processes, strongly supported by regions, resulted in better direction setting and a clear vision for improvement. Along with regional support aimed at enhancing partnerships and community engagement, these strategies helped to build staff commitment and enthusiasm, and a positive culture of reflection and learning in which further improvement can occur. Strategies and actions related to building staff capability enhanced schools’ professional capital by increasing staff knowledge, skills and confidence to make improvements to whole-school pedagogical and curriculum practices. This resulted in more effective and consistent practices at the classroom level, and improved student learning.
The summary of described outcomes in cohort schools, which builds on the figure presented in the 2016 annual report (SIU 2017a), is presented in Figure 4.13 below.

![Figure 4.13: School improvement in cohort schools](image-url)
Overall, according to the 2017 principal survey, 94 per cent of principals found the post-review process supportive. Example responses included:

‘It brought consistency into how we do a myriad of things.’

‘It helps to demonstrate that you can do “more and more of less and less”. It supports the notion that it’s okay for schools and teams not to have to do all things at all times.’

‘Happiness and enthusiasm. Teachers were enabled to understand the work they do has value and is working!’

‘One of the biggest impacts for us was a mind shift by some staff about what we were doing in the school and the processes by which we were achieving that. It created opportunities for us to face the challenges associated with this head-on, and create a more collaborative workforce within the school. It also afforded me, as principal, the opportunity to reflect on how I run the school and deal with staff. This was valuable for me …’
Chapter 4 presented the summary of findings from the action plan final reports of schools that completed the 12-month post-review support process in 2017. These schools implemented a range of strategies and actions that have already resulted in positive outcomes. Clear and shared direction of improvement, strong commitment of staff to implemented changes, positive culture and support throughout the improvement process, and enhanced professional capital are some of the key achievements identified in these schools. These improvements contributed to greater consistency of day-to-day school practices, and positively affected student learning.

The final chapter, Chapter 5, brings together the findings from cohort schools and the findings made for all 2017 review schools (presented in Chapters 2 and 3), to further extend the knowledge of improvement in Queensland state schools.
05
Next steps
At the end of 2017, 1030 Queensland state schools had been reviewed by the School Improvement Unit (SIU), with the findings summarised each year in the annual report. The 2015 SIU Annual Report (SIU 2016) identified three key levers for school improvement: planning, capacity, and data. The 2016 SIU Annual Report (SIU 2017a) explored the three levers in more depth and provided their extended interpretation within schools, using a theory of a learning organisation. Both reports emphasised the importance of setting the direction for schools in their improvement journeys by exploring what schools need to achieve in order to become continually improving organisations that maximise student outcomes. To effectively use data, schools need to undertake consistent and balanced data collection, collaboratively analyse data, and encourage a culture of exploration and risk taking; when planning, they need to be collaborative and develop a shared understanding of the improvement vision; to build staff capability, schools need to engage in continuous professional learning, collaboration and learning-focused leadership.

The first section of this chapter uses the three levers as a structure to summarise the achievements of the 2017 review schools, and the areas identified for further improvement. Building on these findings, the subsequent sections focus on how schools can more effectively use each of the three levers to maximise school improvement. The practices, processes and activities discussed can enhance schools’ use of data, planning and capability, and their organisational capacity to learn and improve. These findings are intended to inspire schools in their improvement journeys and inform the work of regions and central office.

The practices and examples presented in this chapter were identified predominantly from the final reports of schools that completed the post-priority support review process in 2017. These schools worked intensively over 12 months, in cooperation with their regional office and the SIU. The evidence from these schools demonstrates what works in school improvement, and how it works in different contexts. Engaging with knowledge and research findings from the Queensland context has the potential to empower school leaders and teachers and inform their practice. At the same time, ‘while research evidence can suggest possible courses for action, these will need to be evaluated [by schools] on a case by case basis’ (Godfrey 2017, p. 442). Such top-down, research-informed guidance, balanced by local decision making, can contribute to the development of an adaptive education system (Goss 2017, p. 3).
5.1 Achievements to date and areas for improvement

The leadership and teaching practices described in Chapter 3 show that continual school improvement is well embedded in the 2017 review schools, and many schools are using the three school improvement levers effectively (see Figure 5.1 below).

![Figure 5.1: Three levers of school improvement](image)

**Data**

The 2017 review schools made significant use of data to inform decision making and practice. All review schools reported collecting and analysing data and, in almost all schools, data were used by school leaders to inform strategic planning and to monitor student achievement over time.

Many review schools had developed robust monitoring and reporting processes. Data conversations were common, as were systems for displaying and communicating student data to staff (such as data walls). Teachers in many review schools used data effectively to inform instruction and programs.
Planning

The 2017 reviews provided significant evidence of schools planning the implementation of an explicit improvement agenda. Principals in most schools had a good understanding of student needs, and displayed a high level of engagement in strategic planning for school improvement. Compared to previous years, a greater number of review schools engaged in an inquiry cycle to understand their problems of practice and to develop and refine school-wide processes.

In most schools, the explicit improvement agenda was developed in consultation with the school community and based on a thorough analysis of school-wide data. Broad school targets were defined, and key roles and responsibilities were aligned to improvement priorities. All review schools communicated their explicit improvement agendas to staff, parents and the broader school community.

To support the implementation of the explicit improvement agenda, many schools provided staff with professional learning opportunities, developed new partnerships and collaborated with regional personnel. Implementation was generally monitored using classroom walkthroughs, observation and feedback processes, and data tracking.

Capability

Review schools invested heavily in the continuous capability building of their staff. The professionalism, commitment and dedication of staff and leaders were strongly valued within the school community. School leaders invested considerable time, energy and resources in recruiting capable teachers and building expert teaching teams.

A range of professional learning opportunities was provided to staff in review schools. A number of schools invested in developing the leadership skills of staff. Many schools developed their teachers’ data skills through data conversations, staff meetings focused on analysing data, or the use of data coaches.

In most review schools, opportunities for professional knowledge sharing were provided to staff and were highly valued.

Instructional leadership practices were evident in most review schools and often linked to the school’s explicit improvement agenda. They were mostly focused on monitoring the implementation of improvement strategies and ensuring the consistency of pedagogical practices across the school. The assistance of associate leaders in providing modelling, observation and feedback was common and highly valued by teaching staff.
In many review schools, building an expert teaching team was supported by peer observation and feedback processes. The awareness of how these processes can align with the explicit improvement agenda (to support its implementation) was growing in most schools.

**Achievements in curriculum, pedagogy and learning support**

A majority of 2017 review schools had implemented the Australian Curriculum to a significant extent. Many review schools explicitly defined and unpacked Australian Curriculum expectations and demonstrated a consistent and collaborative approach to curriculum planning. Assessment processes were mostly aligned to the Australian Curriculum, and well-structured assessment schedules enabled schools to effectively monitor school-wide student achievement and progress. Formal and informal moderation practices (including cluster moderation) were common in many review schools.

A majority of 2017 review schools had developed whole-school frameworks that articulated expectations for pedagogical practices to be adopted by all staff. Pedagogical frameworks were often developed collaboratively and supported by a range of artefacts visible in classrooms across the school. Most review schools reported that their teaching practice was informed by data. Teachers used data to identify starting points for learning, establish next steps and monitor progress over time. Data also informed curriculum planning, differentiation and individual learning goals.

Differentiation was a significant practice within schools. Staff worked together to identify where students were at in their learning, and adjusted their teaching accordingly. Teachers differentiated their practice by adjusting the teaching content and process, and the learning environment. Collaborative planning for differentiation, involvement of support staff and continuous monitoring of student learning were visible in schools. Many review schools also developed and documented a case management process for identifying and referring students who required support. This process helped to inform intervention programs implemented by teachers, teacher aides or specialist staff.

Similar to previous years, a feature of the 2017 review schools was a strong belief that all students can learn successfully. High expectations were set in schools for student attendance, engagement and outcomes, and teachers provided engaging experiences for students and made their school an attractive place. Students in many review schools reported that they were sufficiently challenged, and schools used a range of ways to cater for the learning needs of high-performing students. Setting individual learning goals for students, aligned to whole-school targets and regularly reviewed, is a growing practice in review schools.

Student wellbeing was a priority in review schools that supported a range of student needs, including students with disability or additional learning needs. Most review schools had developed strong inclusive cultures in response to the cultural diversity of their students, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students with English as an additional language or dialect. Schools developed strong links with local communities, and partnered with a range of organisations, to better address the needs of all students.
Areas for further improvement

While there has been great investment and progress across the three levers, which has led to better and more consistent school practices, there is still work to be done. An analysis of the key improvement strategies, recommended in 2017 review reports, identified the following areas for improvement (see Figure 5.2 below).

![Bar chart showing areas for improvement with percentages]

**Figure 5.2: Key areas recommended for improvement in review reports, 2017**

Note: There are minor differences in the population of review schools used for different datasets. This is due to outdoor and environmental education centres, support units or associated units not being included in departmental data, and to a small number of self-determined reviews not being included in this analysis due to the different format of their review reports.

The top four areas recommended for improvement were the same as those identified in the analysis of 2016 review reports, although they were ranked slightly differently. In comparison with 2016, more review schools were recommended to improve their strategic management (76 per cent vs 63 per cent in 2016), and fewer schools were advised to improve data processes (29 per cent vs 39 per cent in 2016).

The most commonly identified area for further improvement in 2017 was staff capability (86 per cent of review schools), which included different aspects of professional learning. Some schools needed to improve their whole-school professional learning planning processes, and better align them with improvement priorities and identified student learning needs. Teachers in some review schools sought more professional learning related to the Australian Curriculum, digital technologies and differentiation, especially in response to students with additional learning needs. Some teacher aides also expressed the need to acquire deeper knowledge to better support the implementation of improvement priorities. An area identified for continuous improvement was teacher data literacy. Professional learning opportunities to address this area were limited in some schools. Further improvement in the data literacy of staff in review schools is needed to engage them in critical reflection on student data, and to inform adjustments in teaching practice.
In many schools, professional collaboration opportunities were present, but they tended to engage staff within year levels, with limited vertical collaboration across year levels. In some review schools, teachers felt leaders could be more visible in classrooms, taking a clearly defined and learning-focused role. To have greater impact on the quality of teaching, instructional leadership could focus more on teachers’ learning, to build their confidence and capacity to make decisions to change their teaching practice (a school’s decisional capital).

The second most common area for improvement was strategic management (76 per cent of schools). Most recommendations in this area related to aspects of the explicit improvement agenda, with others referring to collaboratively developing the school’s mission or vision statements, improving transparency and clarity of decision making, and establishing effective communication between stakeholders to support the strategic direction of the school.

In some schools, there was an identified need for more collaborative decision making regarding the school’s improvement agenda and strategic direction, greater clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of leaders, and the development of individual student achievement targets. Knowledge of school priorities and targets was, at times, inconsistent within the school community, and further clarification of the specific implications of the explicit improvement agenda for different staff was required. In a small number of schools, particularly those where leadership instability was an issue, there was a perception among staff that a strategic direction and school-wide systems and processes were lacking. The systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of school-wide programs, aligned to the explicit improvement agenda, was yet to be developed in many review schools.

Improvement strategies related to curriculum, pedagogy and differentiation were also identified in a significant number of review schools (67 per cent, 60 per cent and 11 per cent respectively). Most improvement strategies recommended in the area of curriculum concerned collaboratively developing or reviewing a whole-school curriculum plan, developing processes to ensure the intended curriculum is enacted within the classroom, and developing and documenting moderation practices within and beyond the school.

In the area of pedagogy, schools were most often recommended to review their pedagogical framework to ensure that it reflected agreed teaching practices, was considered in curriculum planning, and was consistently implemented in all classrooms. Some schools needed to implement and monitor the new pedagogical framework.

To ensure differentiation is a feature of every teacher’s planning and practice, suggestions were also made for a number of schools to develop individualised student learning programs, and a whole-school policy and guidelines for planning and documenting differentiation.

Data processes were identified for improvement in less than one-third of 2017 review schools. A clear and balanced whole-school approach to the gathering, recording and interpretation of student data was still to be developed in some schools. The rigour and depth of data conversations varied, and they were not always focused on providing teachers with feedback on their teaching. The use of data to examine the effectiveness of particular improvement initiatives was limited. Overall, in some schools, data processes required greater consistency.
Figure 5.3 below shows how areas identified for further improvement can be mapped to the domains of the National School Improvement Tool, as presented in the School Improvement Hierarchy.

Despite the broad evidence of review schools using the three levers, the reviews still frequently identified that two of the levers — planning and capability — could be used more effectively in many schools.

**Thorough, collaborative planning for the development and implementation of an explicit improvement agenda needs to be accompanied by continuous efforts to enhance staff capability, in alignment with improvement priorities. Data should inform the planning and implementation of school improvement actions, the professional development of school staff, and key teaching and learning practices at a school.**

While Queensland state schools are progressing in many areas, sustaining change depends heavily on the school’s organisational capacity to learn. Schools need to see their improvement journey as a learning process, in which they take charge and lead their own learning.
The 2016 SIU Annual Report (SIU 2017a) offered a further conceptualisation of the three levers of school improvement, using key features of a school's organisational capacity to learn and self-improve (see Figure 5.4 below).

**Figure 5.4: Three improvement levers and the dimensions of a learning organisation**

This model explains what aspects of data, planning and capability are particularly important in cultivating school improvement. The levers alone are not the ultimate goal of school improvement. Rather, they are driving forces that enable schools to improve practices related to curriculum and pedagogy, which can ultimately lead to improvements in student outcomes.

*By working on the three levers (and corresponding dimensions of a learning organisation), the school enhances its internal capacity to learn and improve.*

Capacity to learn and improve means that the school is capable of collaborative planning and building a shared vision and goals (using data to develop plans and inform improvement of teaching practice), and that school staff are capable of continuous learning, and are provided an opportunity to do so, aligned with changing student needs.
Building a school’s capacity to learn and improve is critical, but to succeed and sustain success in their improvement journey, schools need to engage in continuous self-reflection (and in change resulting from this reflection). To effectively support school improvement, the work of schools needs to be guided by the three levers, in conjunction with State Schools Division’s School Improvement Model, consisting of the School Improvement Hierarchy, Inquiry Cycle and Standards of Evidence.

The Inquiry Cycle provides an overarching framework for planning and implementing school improvement. It can (and should) be continually used at different levels within a school: whole-school level, year level, classroom level and individual student level. As part of the cycle, school leaders and teachers review and assess the existing situation in relation to student outcomes; they define student learning needs, and corresponding problems of practice; they prioritise these needs and formulate and implement an action plan to address them. When reviewing student outcomes and identifying the underlying problems of practice, schools may use the School Improvement Hierarchy, which provides a framework for scanning and assessing different school domains.

Engaging the three levers of improvement supports successful completion of each inquiry cycle. At the same time, engaging in cycles of inquiry enhances the school’s internal capacity to improve and effectively use the three levers. The effects of using the Inquiry Cycle and the three levers are reciprocal.

The following sections explore the how of school improvement. Examples of strategies and actions related to each lever are described, along with the evidence of their positive influence on school staff and organisational aspects of improvement. The evidence of improvements in student outcomes, based on National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data, is also provided, but it needs to be interpreted with caution. Due to different starting points, complexity and the limited time schools had to initiate improvement processes before the most recent NAPLAN data were collected (May 2017), in some instances, the improvements in student outcomes will become evident in time. It should also be noted that while the practices related to the three levers are influential, there are many determinants of student performance.

Describing the how of school improvement is challenged by the highly contextualised nature of school improvement and the absence of ‘one size fits all’ solutions. Schools need to consider their own context and where they are at in their school improvement journey when determining the applicability of these practices.
5.2 Data

The 2016 SIU Annual Report (SIU 2017a) identified the key aspects of data processes to support school improvement (see Figure 5.5 below). These themes represent areas for further development for some 2017 review schools.

![Figure 5.5: Key aspects of effective data use in school improvement](image)

To use data more effectively, schools need to ensure that they use consistent and transparent processes for collecting data, as well as collaborative, in-depth discussions and analyses of data, supported by the continuous enhancement of the data literacy of school leaders and staff.
Data collection, analysis and use in school improvement

One of the priorities of Durong South State School was to develop a deeper understanding of data by teaching staff to better inform differentiated teaching practices.

The range of diagnostic and formative or summative testing used at the school was reviewed by the principal and the support teacher literacy and numeracy (STLaN). This led to the selection of a more targeted diagnostic testing regime, which was included in the school’s 2017 assessment framework. The schedule of assessments, collaboratively developed during staff meetings, provides clear direction for teachers of all learning areas, which ensures that complete student progress data were collected.

The school introduced a data wall, which has evolved to become a mobile display used in a variety of meetings. The data wall facilitates structured data conversations at fortnightly staff meetings, focused on evaluating the progress of each student in the school, and linked to the school’s explicit improvement agenda.

Data books for each year level were designed in consultation with staff and parents to enable tracking of learning progress. The books contain English, mathematics and behaviour data, and reflect the five-week data cycles of the school. Students monitor their own data on a regular basis and take the books home so their parents can view their progress. Parents are also provided with strategies to assist their children in learning.

Student outcome data are used to rearrange ability groups in reading as required. The school’s approach to data is informed by academic research.

Impact at staff and organisational levels

Improved data collection and analysis have positively affected the data literacy of staff. Data discussions have informed teaching practice and had a positive impact on student learning. There are now clear links between student outcome data and modified teaching approaches that better support individual learners.

Student outcomes*

Most recent student achievement data in 2016–17, as measured by NAPLAN, show:

- an increase in the proportion of NAPLAN students who achieved at or above the national minimum standard (NMS) in Year 3 in spelling — the proportion reached 100 per cent
- an increase in the average NAPLAN mean scale score (MSS) of all students who sat the test in Year 3 in writing, spelling, and grammar and punctuation
- an increase in the proportion of NAPLAN students achieving upper two bands (U2B) in Year 3 in spelling, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy — in spelling as well as grammar and punctuation, the school moved from statistically below the nation to statistically similar to the nation.

*Student outcome data should be interpreted in view of small enrolment (19) and small NAPLAN participation (3).

In a number of schools, improvements to data processes resulted in the development of a data culture, where everyone owns every student’s data across the school.
Developing a data culture

At Rocklea State School, ‘data days’ occur every five weeks, with teachers and teacher aides involved in the collection of data, including PM Benchmarks and Prose Reading Observation, Behaviour and Evaluation of Comprehension (PROBE). These activities are followed by reflective discussions at data days and at staff meetings. Staff meetings also include a case management approach to discuss students who are not progressing. Next steps for teaching and learning are determined, based on data.

A school data wall is a starting point for ongoing reflective conversations about student achievement. Regional reading targets are used to track students. Teachers identify students who are on track to achieve their reading goals, and they analyse reasons for those falling behind.

The school also established data recording systems that include student folios. These folios are available for students, staff and parents, and provide comprehensive information and assessment of student learning.

Impact at staff and organisational levels

A data culture is emerging at the school and it is driving reflective practice to improve pedagogy and student outcomes. Classroom teachers and teacher aides are committed to collecting, analysing and reflecting on data, and they demonstrate knowledge of individual student progress against the five-week data cycle that informs targets and individual student goals.

Student outcomes

Most recent student achievement data in 2016–17, as measured by NAPLAN, show:

- an increase in the average NAPLAN MSS of all students who sat the test in all areas in Year 3 and Year 5 — in most areas of Year 3, the school moved from ‘close to’ to ‘above’ in comparison with similar schools nationally
- an increase in the proportion of NAPLAN students achieving U2B in Year 3 in all areas
- an increase in the proportion of NAPLAN students achieving U2B in Year 5 in reading, spelling, and grammar and punctuation — in these three areas, the school moved from statistically below the nation to statistically similar to the nation.

*Student outcome data should be interpreted in view of small enrolment (44).

For teaching and learning to be effectively informed by data, staff need to decide to change their teaching. This can be supported by practices that enhance a school’s decisional capital, but it also requires a culture in which staff feel free to change, experiment and innovate in their practice. In learning schools, staff are supported and recognised for challenging conventional ways of thinking and for taking risks while they adjust their pedagogical approaches to address student learning needs.
5.3 Planning

The key aspects of planning for school improvement are summarised in Figure 5.6 below.

Collaboration and involvement of all school staff in planning and decision making may enhance staff commitment and ownership of improvement strategies. Teachers in particular need to be partners in the collaborative process of identifying challenges of practice and developing solutions.
Collaboration

**Charters Towers School of Distance Education** developed a clear and consistent strategic planning process that has built stronger commitment to the delivery and monitoring of improvement plans.

A cycle of collaborative inquiry was implemented at the school to provide structure to the annual strategic planning process. The process follows the department’s Inquiry Cycle and outlines the roles of the senior management team and each sector team. Collaborative discussion of whole-school and team datasets promotes the exploration of problems of practice. Staff have the opportunity to contribute to the school’s strategic direction at team and whole-school levels. Teams develop plans for improvement initiatives, which are presented to senior leaders for consideration (e.g. to ensure alignment with the broader improvement agenda).

The school council was re-established and is now viewed as the peak body for endorsing the outcomes of strategic decision-making processes. Members of the school council are representative of the school community, provide a broader external perspective, and support leaders to implement the improvement agenda. A community consultation process, focusing on school improvement, has been conducted at a range of locations to enhance engagement with the school’s diverse community.

Whole-school progress towards improvement goals is reviewed regularly by school leaders, in consultation with sector teams. Progress towards annual goals is shared at whole-staff and team meetings for further discussion and adjustment.

**Impact at staff and organisational levels**

These collaborative processes have clarified the school’s direction and expectations, and provided opportunities for staff to contribute to school decisions that impact on their work and learning outcomes. Teachers are aware of, and contribute to, key planning processes, and have a clearer understanding of the expectations of the improvement agenda. They identify the links between strategic and operational plans and classroom work, and indicate increasing levels of team and individual ownership of improvement strategies. Ongoing community consultation is an important element of broader medium and longer term strategic planning.

**Student outcomes**

Most recent student achievement data in 2016–17\(^1\), as measured by NAPLAN, show the following improvements:

- an increase in the proportion of NAPLAN students who achieved at or above the NMS in Year 5 and Year 9 in all areas of literacy and numeracy — the proportion of students either increased to 100 per cent or was maintained at that level
- an increase in the average NAPLAN MSS of all students who sat the test in Year 5 and Year 9 in all areas of literacy and numeracy — in four areas, this moved the school from the substantially below/below category to the above/substantially above category in comparison with the nation. In one area in Year 9, the school moved from ‘close to’ to ‘substantially above’
- an increase in the proportion of NAPLAN students achieving U2B in Year 5 and Year 9 in almost all areas of literacy and numeracy — in three areas, the school moved from statistically below the nation to statistically similar to the nation.
Other examples of collaborative school improvement planning, identified in final reports, included:

- surveying staff and parents, which assisted an urban primary school in Metropolitan region to understand their needs
- conducting a series of staff forums, led by the principal and expert colleagues, which helped an outdoor and environmental education centre to collaboratively develop a clear vision and mission statement
- using the Inquiry Cycle, which helped individual teachers at an urban primary school in South East region to address problems of practice and inform whole-school improvement.

A sharp and narrow vision of improvement, with clear priorities and targets, is essential and should be maintained over time in order for change to consolidate and affect all relevant areas.

**Clear priorities and specific targets**

At Woodford State School, the collaborative development of clear, compelling and aspirational targets and timelines that inform the work of teachers is helping to build a culture of high expectations for student achievement.

The school’s Teaching Quality and Successful Learners Framework was developed to drive strategic planning focused on reading. Whole-school targets, class targets and individual student reading targets were established. School targets are shared broadly across the school community and communicated to parents through the newsletter.

Time is set aside for collegial professional discussions regarding whole-school and class targets, and teacher–student discussions of individual student targets. Data are shared internally at data presentations each term, where examples of students reaching their targets are shared and celebrated.

**Impact at staff and organisational levels**

All staff are engaging with the reading agenda and are able to articulate the agreed targets and strategies. Students are aware of their individual goals and take greater ownership of their learning, reading outcomes and subject achievement.

The whole-school, clear and narrow focus on improving student reading has enhanced the alignment between the various parts of the school. Informal professional discussions in staffrooms are promoted and have been sharpened by the clear vision for improvement.

**Student outcomes**

Most recent student achievement data in 2016–17, as measured by NAPLAN, show an increase in the average NAPLAN MSS of all students who sat the test in Year 3 and Year 5 in reading, with the Year 5 increase moving the school from the ‘below’ to the ‘close to’ category in comparison with similar schools nationally.
Another example of collaboration that led to clearly defined targets comes from an urban secondary school in Metropolitan region, where an extensive process was undertaken to redefine the school's vision: ‘Inspiring individual excellence’. A critical friend was engaged in 2017 to support the establishment of the school's direction for the next four years. Along with this vision, the school used a head of department (HOD) day to establish whole-school targets for improving student outcomes. Faculty targets were then developed through a review of student achievement. Finally, based on data, teachers in core subjects developed targets and strategies for class groups and individual students.

The clearly defined roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of leaders and key staff, aligned with the improvement agenda, make the implementation of plans more structured and effective, and make it easier for staff to seek support when needed.

Key leadership roles

At Mitchelton State High School, the school leaders have led an extensive process to redefine their work, along with the school’s vision.

The principal used professional learning to support the development of a united and aligned team. Members of the leadership team participated in a 360 degree feedback process to identify individual strengths and areas for further development. This work was viewed as a valuable opportunity to redirect the leadership focus. On an externally facilitated two-day retreat, the roles and responsibilities of the leadership team were determined.

Impact at staff and organisational levels

The leadership team, made up of new roles, is functioning well and shares a clear sense of direction. The focus of its work has shifted from managing to teaching and learning (instructional leadership). Leaders feel more accountable in their designated roles. This is a crucial step towards aligning the work of all faculties and building a more strategic focus within the school. Teachers report improved clarity regarding the roles and accountabilities of the leadership team.

Student outcomes

Most recent student achievement data in 2016–17, as measured by NAPLAN, show the following improvements:

- an increase in the proportion of NAPLAN students who achieved at or above the NMS in Year 7 in spelling and numeracy, and in Year 9 in numeracy
- an increase in the average NAPLAN MSS of all students who sat the test in Year 7 and Year 9 in spelling, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy, as well as in Year 9 in reading — in Year 9 in reading and numeracy, the school moved from the ‘below’ to the ‘close to’ category in comparison with similar schools nationally
- an increase in the proportion of NAPLAN students achieving U2B in Year 7 in reading, spelling and numeracy, and in Year 9 in spelling, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy — in Year 9 spelling and numeracy, the school moved from statistically below the nation to statistically similar to the nation
- an increase in Year 7 to Year 9 relative gain (average relative gain of all assessed NAPLAN students) in 2015–17 in numeracy.
Clarifying roles and responsibilities is crucial at the beginning of the improvement process, but it is also important to ensure the roles and responsibilities remain clear throughout the improvement journey. The leadership team at an urban primary school in Darling Downs South West region held weekly leadership team alignment meetings to systematically review improvement progress, and ensure roles, responsibilities and accountabilities were understood by all.

A clear improvement vision, with aligned roles and responsibilities, needs to be effectively communicated to the school community in order to build a shared understanding of what school improvement means for different staff. This relies on the effectiveness of communication channels which, in learning organisations, allow for the reciprocal dissemination of ideas. This also determines the extent to which staff take ownership of change, and the consistency of the implemented strategies across the school.

Building a shared understanding

At Flagstone State School, a shared understanding of the improvement agenda contributes to the progress towards meeting targets for the school’s priority of writing. The master teacher developed action plans, which narrowed the focus of class teachers to two key skills for a 10-week period.

The key to progressing this agenda was building a shared understanding among teachers of what success in writing looks like. The document, All-purpose criteria: key indicators for writing, was developed as a guide to making informed judgements about student learning, and to help teachers align writing to the expectations outlined in the Australian Curriculum.

A common understanding has also been enhanced by the master teacher’s use of a Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) approach to support teachers in developing effective pedagogical practices in writing. This work included co-planning, demonstrations, coaching, mentoring, and resourcing support.

Impact at staff and organisational levels

Teachers across the school have developed a shared understanding of success indicators and improvement in writing, and teaching practice across the school is now more consistent. Students identify writing as an important feature of their daily learning.

Student outcomes

Most recent student achievement data in 2016–17, as measured by NAPLAN, show improvement in the proportion of NAPLAN students who achieved at or above the NMS in Year 5 in writing. There was also an increase in Year 3 to Year 5 relative gain in 2015–17 in writing. As the school was in a relatively early stage of its 12-month support process when these NAPLAN data were collected, it is expected that more improvements in writing data are yet to occur.
In other schools, actions aimed at developing a shared understanding included:

- creating learning walls in the administration area of an urban secondary school in North Queensland region to promote the vision for the school and the work being undertaken in 2017
- issuing a weekly memo to staff at a very large, urban secondary school in South East region to remind them of agreed expectations for classroom observations, planning routines and assessment development, and to offer support for their work in the classroom
- gathering feedback on teachers’ understanding of improvement processes at an urban secondary school in Metropolitan region, which was used by leaders to determine what further support was required.

Throughout their improvement journeys, schools need to regularly check on their progress. Schools can develop different ways of monitoring the effectiveness of the implemented strategies, depending on their improvement priorities and the context in which they operate.

Many schools monitored the effectiveness of improvement initiatives through observation and feedback provided by school leaders — this was often the key instrument to ensure the consistency of implemented practices. At a remote school in Far North Queensland region, principal walkthroughs included seeking student feedback on the teaching of mathematics. Conversations with students were developing to help the principal gauge the shift in student attitudes towards mathematics. At an urban primary school in North Coast region, school leaders developed a Reading — Line of Sight process to determine the effectiveness of the implementation of the reading action plan, and to inform the next steps for continued improvement. In another example, a student writing satisfaction survey was distributed to students at a remote school in Darling Downs South West region.

In some schools, data were used widely to monitor student achievement, but this monitoring was not always linked to specific initiatives and programs in order to evaluate their success. The reading framework at an urban primary school in Metropolitan region articulated the role of monitoring and assessment of reading data to track program effectiveness. A collaborative inquiry model helped to construct student progress in reading and establish guiding questions to be used for reflection on data during data conversations. Classroom teachers and teacher aides critically discussed data and student progress against the five-week data cycle that informed targets and individual goals.
5.4 Capability

In schools that are learning organisations, all staff engage in continuous professional learning that is linked to student learning needs. The key components of staff capability for school improvement are presented in Figure 5.7 below.

![Staff capability diagram]

**Figure 5.7: Key aspects of staff capability in school improvement**

As noted in Chapter 3, the three forms of professional capital (human, social and decisional) are interdependent. As a first step to enhancing human capital, all staff need to be fully engaged in identifying the priorities for their own professional learning, in line with the improvement agenda. To support the improvement priority of reading, an urban primary school in South East region developed an audit tool to determine the developmental needs of teachers, and to establish benchmarks for teachers’ understanding of the teaching of reading. This provided the basis for the school’s coaching model.

At another urban primary school in the same region, anecdotal and diagnostic data captured during daily reading activities (as part of a two-week data cycle) helped to identify areas for development, leading to modelled lessons for teaching staff. The principal and STLaN used data from classroom activities to inform the agenda for the fortnightly staff meetings, during which they modelled teaching examples. The school’s coaching practice evolved towards a peer-centred model, whereby the peer identifies areas for professional improvement.
Professional learning aligned to the improvement agenda

The focus of Coorparoo Secondary College's action plan was to develop and implement a school-wide pedagogical framework.

Professional learning to support this implementation was provided over a period of time, including professional development days, and was reinforced in faculty meetings on an ongoing basis.

Teachers are engaging in the annual performance development plan (APDP) process, aligned with the Australian professional standards for teachers. Implementation of the pedagogical framework underpins teachers' goal setting within the APDP process.

The school has also developed an induction process for classroom teachers, of which the pedagogical framework is a key component. The program aims to ensure that all newly appointed teachers are informed about the school's expectations for teaching and learning.

The school's trio coaching model is a vehicle for supporting teachers in the implementation of the agreed pedagogical practices. Each trio involves a teacher, a HOD and a member of the school's leadership team. Teachers identify a specific pedagogical strategy as the focus of the lesson observation and feedback process.

Impact at staff and organisational levels

The professional learning opportunities provided to teachers effectively support the implementation of the improvement agenda by facilitating the sharing of good practice across the school. Beginning teachers in particular are very satisfied and believe that the support provided by their colleagues and members of the leadership team is setting them up for successful classroom experiences.

Student outcomes

Most recent student achievement data for 2016–17, as measured by NAPLAN, show the following improvements:

- an increase in the average NAPLAN MSS of all students who sat the test in Year 7 and Year 9 in all strands — for all strands in Year 7, the school moved from the ‘below’ to the ‘close to’ category in comparison with similar schools nationally
- an increase in the proportion of NAPLAN students achieving U2B in Year 7 and Year 9 in all areas — in Year 7 writing and numeracy, the school moved from the ‘below’ to the ‘close to’ category in comparison with the nation
- an increase in relative gain in Year 5 to Year 7 in 2015–17 in reading and writing
- an increase in relative gain in Year 7 to Year 9 in 2015–17 in reading and numeracy.

Learning organisations allocate time and other resources for collaborative working and learning, and create teams to better solve problems. They work with parents and the community, and with peers in other schools. This contributes to a growing number of professional networks and relationships that constitute a school's social capital.

In the 2017 reviews, a range of school practices were identified that involved a high degree of professional collaboration among staff, and therefore have the potential to enhance a school's social capital. These included, but were not limited to, professional learning teams, collaborative curriculum planning, moderation, collegial data discussions, and observation and feedback processes.
A school’s professional capital can also be enhanced by engaging in collaborative opportunities outside a school. At an urban primary school in Metropolitan region, classroom teachers were supported to undertake structured visits to other cluster schools to increase their knowledge and experience a range of new classroom reading activities. A visiting head of curriculum (HOC) developed a lesson observation record for the cluster schools to guide teachers in gathering information on observed practices. Teachers recorded their observations under three main headings: ‘what I saw’, ‘what I heard’ and ‘what I wonder’, which provided the basis for follow-up professional discussions.

School leaders play an important role in enhancing decisional capital. They are responsible for modelling professional learning and acting as instructional leaders, and are directly involved in planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching. They also create collaborative structures and processes to encourage peer observation and feedback. Instructional practices (both peer and those led by leaders), as well as professional data conversations and other collaborative activities, contribute to developing teachers’ confidence in improving their teaching.
Human and decisional capital

School leaders at Blair State School have constructed an instructional leadership model, focusing on the School Improvement Hierarchy, to guide school improvement. A regular classroom observation and feedback process builds teachers’ confidence and enhances staff capability in the teaching of guided reading and targeted reading comprehension strategies. Using an agreed template, written feedback is provided on the teaching of reading and teacher–student interactions.

Responsibility for the observation and feedback process is shared by school leaders. Information gathered through this process informs whole-school professional development, the support for individual teachers and the targeted purchasing of resources.

Teachers are provided with a range of professional learning opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of the Australian Curriculum, with a focus on English. School leaders participate actively in these opportunities as part of the continued professional learning for staff. In addition, teachers are engaged in professional learning in guided reading through a program of differentiated in-class support from the HOC and regional principal education advisor — Australian Curriculum. A GRR model is also used to build teacher data literacy in year-level teams. A five-week data cycle, initially led by school leaders, is changing to a model whereby teachers take a more active role. The STLaN participates in data discussions and supports classroom teachers to identify effective strategies to help students continue to improve.

Impact at staff and organisational levels

Continuous professional learning and instructional leadership have contributed to the development of a school-wide culture of self-reflection, and built the confidence and capability of teachers. They see current collaborative opportunities and the sharing of practice in the teaching of reading as instrumental in building their knowledge and understanding of the Australian Curriculum.

Student outcomes

Most recent student achievement data in 2016–17, as measured by NAPLAN, show:

- an increase in the proportion of NAPLAN students who achieved at or above the NMS in Year 5 in reading
- an increase in the average NAPLAN MSS of all students who sat the test in Year 5 in reading
- an increase in the proportion of NAPLAN students achieving U2B in Year 5 in reading — the school moved up one category (from ‘below’ to ‘close to’) in comparison with the nation
- an increase in Year 3 to Year 5 relative gain in 2015–17 in reading.
Leaders in review schools focused on instructional practices in order to promote a deprivatised culture and enhance the school’s expert teaching team. At a very large, urban secondary school in Metropolitan region, a comprehensive coaching plan with two strands was developed. The first strand, peer coaching, provided observation and feedback opportunities for all teachers, while the second strand followed the master coach approach, whereby identified staff received training in the Growth Coaching model. Master coaches facilitated deep learning conversations to build individual expertise, particularly for beginning teachers, teachers new to the school, and second- and third-year teachers.

At an urban secondary school in North Coast region, school leaders provided teachers with written feedback from their observation of a reading lesson each term, and release time was given to teachers to discuss the feedback after the lesson. School leaders moderated the written feedback to ensure their messages were consistent. Trends identified from the collated feedback were reported to the teaching team, and informed future coaching and differentiated professional learning activities.
5.5 The role of leaders in school improvement

There are several dimensions of principal leadership that help to sustain school success over an extended period: setting clear and appropriate direction, acting as instructional leaders determined to make a difference, reaching out to the community, and focusing on professional development and building teacher leadership (Garza et al. 2014). Building teacher leadership requires an empowering leadership style, which has also been found to enhance teachers’ exploration and innovative work behaviour (Gkorezis 2016).

Distributing leadership is important due to the role principals and associate leaders play as ‘sense-makers’. While principals are required to translate reform demands into school practices, associate leaders translate improvement agendas and expectations to teachers and other school staff. They help individuals to understand what they are expected to do and why, which is critical to the success of any organisational change.

‘Sense-making in school leadership is about giving a meaning to unclear experiences while dealing with ambiguity ... Seeking to address this complexity, they [leaders] shift from management by command and control to management by collaboration and teamwork.’

(Ganon-Shilon & Schechter 2016, p. 5)

Sense-making is a key leadership skill that helps school leaders to better understand what is happening in their environments, and to better support teachers’ sense-making when implementing new initiatives (Brezicha, Bergmark & Mitra 2015). During this process, both leaders and teachers learn how to interpret change and develop the capacity to sustain school change (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter 2016).

Sense-making is a shared, collaborative process that draws on professional capital and requires a culture based on collegial relationships and mutual trust. Trust between leaders and staff is determined by leaders’ ability to acknowledge their own mistakes and communicate their own vulnerability (Meyer, Le Fevre & Robinson 2017). This notion of vulnerability is crucial, considering that school improvement is a continuous process of learning from both positive and negative experiences.
5.6 Further research

The findings presented in the SIU annual reports provide fertile ground for developing further research.

The key school improvement themes identified in 2015 and 2016 were validated using the 2017 data, which may provide the basis for the development of a tool to monitor the effectiveness of improvement strategies in Queensland state schools. Operationalisation of themes and development of measures could be done in collaboration with reviewers and school staff. Such a tool, or its elements, could also be used by schools themselves to track improvement progress between reviews.

It is important to recognise and acknowledge that school improvement may be understood differently by different individuals: school leaders, teachers, corporate and regional staff, and parents. Exploring different organisational narratives of school improvement, and the role of school leadership in facilitating organisational sense-making and building a shared understanding of school improvement, is a potential research topic to pursue in the future.

A school leader’s ability to create and successfully lead a learning organisation can be determined by many individual, organisational and systemic factors. Exploring the enablers and barriers to leaders’ actions in school improvement would help us to better understand school improvement from leaders’ perspectives, and determine how Queensland state school leaders could be further supported in this process by regions and central office.

Finally, it is suggested that collaboration within schools merits further research. While it has been established that collaboration is beneficial and provides the basis for a learning organisation, knowledge of the scale of collaboration, its types, forms and impact on school improvement in Queensland state schools, is limited.
Appendix A  Research methods

The 2017 School Improvement Unit (SIU) annual report is based on an analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. Three types of quantitative data were used:

1. measures of student outcomes and preconditions for learning, specifically: system measures of school attendance, behaviour, school community satisfaction, literacy, numeracy, Year 12 attainment and Closing the Gap. These data and related interpretation, provided by the department’s Performance Monitoring and Reporting team, informed the analysis in Chapter 2. Some student outcomes data were also used in Chapter 5
2. school counts (found in Chapters 3, 4 and 5), which reflect the proportion of schools in which a given theme was identified, based on qualitative data from school reports. Only indicative inferences can be drawn from these data
3. demographic data describing case study schools, including: enrolment, teacher count, year levels and the school’s index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA).

Most of the qualitative data used in this report to describe school practices in Queensland state schools were extracted from 2017 school review reports and action plan final reports. The school case studies, used to illustrate themes discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, were based on data collected through semi-structured interviews (during school visits or via phone or email), which were validated by participants.

The population of review schools used for each of these datasets may vary slightly due to:

- the outdoor and environmental education centres, support units or associated units not being included in departmental school data
- a small number of self-determined reviews that were not included in school counts due to the different format of their review reports.

Review reports were the key source of data. Each report is usually between 6000 and 7000 words in length, and combines system and school-level data with the results of fieldwork conducted by a review team. The reports include information from documentation, observations, and discussions with school leaders, staff, parents, students and other school community members. Both methodological triangulation (variety of methods to gather data) and investigator triangulation (multiple investigators within a review team) were used to ensure the validity of the data gathered.

Data from school review reports were collated and analysed using software for qualitative research (NVivo 10). Coding — the initial stage of data analysis — involved the close examination of each clause, sentence or paragraph in the review reports in order to identify the most appropriate concept to describe the meaning within the datum. In this way, the data were fractured into usable units of information. The codes were assigned that best represented each piece of information (Bryant & Charmaz 2010; Creswell 2003). The coding was quality assured through continual periodic review and rigorous discussion of discrepancies by the research team.
The coding framework (see levels 1 and 2 in Table A.1 below) was created using both inductive and deductive approaches. Firstly, the Level 1 codes of leadership, teaching, learning, learning environments and partnerships were adopted from the salient literature on school improvement. These topics reflect the key priority areas identified by Masters (2012, pp. 27–8) as being common in school improvement frameworks across Australia. Secondly, sub-level codes (up to four levels) were developed inductively from school review report data. The sub-level framework evolved as coding progressed. Clear definitions for codes, once established, were continually refined to help quality assure the coding process. The key improvement strategies formulated for schools by SIU review teams were coded separately to allow quantification and to better inform suggestions for further improvement for all review schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>The explicit improvement agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leading people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School funding and budgets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>High-achieving students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High expectations of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning environments</td>
<td>Infrastructure and facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships</td>
<td>Businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early childhood education centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual community members/groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P&amp;Cs and school councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents and families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tertiary organisations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A.1: Level 1 and 2 codes for review reports, 2017
A separate coding framework was developed inductively for the analysis of action plan final reports (see Table A.2 below). These reports, averaging 2500 words in length, were produced by case managers after the 12 months of support that follow a priority support review.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improvement strategies and actions</td>
<td>Curriculum and assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partnerships and community engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategic management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional support</td>
<td>Corporate services support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum and assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partnerships and community engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategic management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement outcomes</td>
<td>Direction setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional capital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responses to change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A.2: Level 1 and 2 codes for action plan final reports, 2017
Coded data were further analysed to identify common themes and patterns that could be associated with specific school practices. The reliability of findings was ensured by researchers independently analysing different datasets to check if the findings could be replicated consistently.

The data are subject to a number of limitations. The data in review reports were not collected primarily for the purpose of research using standardised, structured interview protocols. Also, the data used in this report are only a snapshot of school practices identified at a single point in time within the year (different for each school depending on their review dates). These data do not reflect the full spectrum of phenomena related to school improvement. As schools are complex and dynamic organisations, the validity of some early findings may decrease over time, and the comparisons between schools (even those representing similar contexts) may not be meaningful. Finally, due to the large volume of data collected and the complexity of schools and contexts, this report provides mostly high-level insights. The need for more in-depth, contextualised analysis has been partially addressed by showcasing selected school practices as case studies and examples throughout the report.

Despite these limitations, the review reports and final reports provide rich evidence of current school practice, which can be used to inform the policy and practice of the department’s central and regional offices, support continuous improvement and learning in Queensland schools, and inspire school leaders and teachers to innovate and excel.
# Appendix B  School Improvement Unit school types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban primary</td>
<td>Any primary school in North Coast, Metropolitan, South East regions, plus Darling Downs South West, Central Queensland, North Queensland, Far North Queensland regions if Education Queensland zone is metro or provincial, but excluding those with 1000 or more student enrolments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very large, urban primary</td>
<td>Any primary school with 1000 or more student enrolments in North Coast, Metropolitan, South East regions, plus Darling Downs South West, Central Queensland, North Queensland, Far North Queensland regions if Education Queensland zone is metro or provincial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural primary</td>
<td>Any primary school in Darling Downs South West, Central Queensland, North Queensland, Far North Queensland regions, except where Education Queensland zone is metro or provincial, but excluding schools with 50 or fewer students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very small, rural primary</td>
<td>Any primary school with 50 or fewer students, in Darling Downs South West, Central Queensland, North Queensland, Far North Queensland regions, except where Education Queensland zone is metro or provincial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban secondary</td>
<td>Any secondary school in North Coast, Metropolitan, South East regions, plus Darling Downs South West, Central Queensland, North Queensland, Far North Queensland regions if Education Queensland zone is metro or provincial, but excluding those with 1000 or more student enrolments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very large, urban secondary</td>
<td>Any secondary school with 1000 or more student enrolments in North Coast, Metropolitan, South East regions, plus Darling Downs South West, Central Queensland, North Queensland, Far North Queensland regions if Education Queensland zone is metro or provincial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural secondary</td>
<td>Any secondary school in Darling Downs South West, Central Queensland, North Queensland, Far North Queensland regions, except where Education Queensland zone is metro or provincial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>Any combined primary/secondary school, except when remote, plus schools of distance education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>Any school, except special schools and outdoor and environmental education centres, defined as remote under Education Queensland zones definition, regardless of sector or student enrolment number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special</td>
<td>Any special school, regardless of location or student enrolment number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor and environmental education centres</td>
<td>Any outdoor and environmental education centre, regardless of location or student enrolment number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific purpose</td>
<td>Schools for students with specific needs and include schools catering to students in hospital, schools offering behavioural support programs to primary students and schools catering to students in mental health facilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix C  School Improvement Unit feedback and quality assurance processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback mechanism</th>
<th>Audience targeted</th>
<th>SIU actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School reviewer observation and feedback</td>
<td>School reviewers</td>
<td>Senior reviewers regularly visit review teams at schools to monitor the review process. Regular feedback is provided to individual reviewers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewer moderation</td>
<td>Internal reviewers</td>
<td>Internal reviewers attend moderation sessions twice a term to discuss their work and to reinforce shared standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External reviewers</td>
<td>External reviewers must attend one moderation session each semester to meet contractual requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys on external reviewer performance</td>
<td>External reviewers</td>
<td>After a review, the review chair completes a short survey about the external reviewer they have worked with in order to track their performance in line with contractual obligations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School review exit survey</td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>All principals are sent a survey after their school review. Neutral, dissatisfied and very dissatisfied responses are followed up with a phone call to the principal by a senior reviewer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-priority support review process survey</td>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>In 2017, a survey was developed to seek feedback from principals after the post-priority support review case management process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback mechanism</td>
<td>Audience targeted</td>
<td>SIU actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quarterly stakeholder meetings</td>
<td>External stakeholders (includes representatives from the Queensland Teachers’ Union, principal associations and P&amp;Cs Qld)</td>
<td>Meeting minutes distributed to senior reviewers, SIU Director and Assistant Director-General for consideration and action (if required).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal stakeholders (members from departmental divisions and a regional representative)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback forums (once a semester)</td>
<td>Principals and assistant regional directors</td>
<td>Feedback distributed to senior reviewers, SIU Director and Assistant Director-General for consideration and action (if required).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National School Improvement Tool training surveys</td>
<td>Principals and associate leaders who attend training</td>
<td>Feedback provided at the beginning of training helps to guide the staff facilitating the session. Post-session feedback is recorded and shared with the SIU Director and Assistant Director-General for consideration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual report survey</td>
<td>Sample group of principals</td>
<td>Feedback shared with SIU staff and stakeholders for consideration in planning future annual reports.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toolkit for principals survey</td>
<td>Sample group of principals</td>
<td>A survey on the first edition of the toolkit was distributed in 2017. Feedback was incorporated into the 2018 edition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D  School Improvement Unit 2016 annual report survey

In February 2018, the School Improvement Unit conducted a survey seeking feedback from principals on the 2016 annual report.

The survey was developed and managed using the Verint Web Survey System, an online survey tool available to all departmental staff. It comprised seven questions on the value and use of the report. Participation was voluntary and all data were collected in a manner to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of respondents.

The survey was distributed to a sample comprising all principals in North Queensland region (111 principals) and Metropolitan region (256 principals), a total of 367 potential respondents. Invitations to participate in the survey were emailed to North Queensland region principals on 12 February and Metropolitan region principals on 13 February 2018.

One hundred and three responses were received by the 23 February 2018 closing date, constituting a response rate of 28 per cent. Of these, 16 were incomplete or the respondent indicated that they had not read any of the report.

The responses were collated to produce the summary data below. The numbers provided refer to the number of responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Did you receive a hard copy of the School Improvement Unit’s 2016 annual report?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>97.9 (94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2.1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How would you prefer to receive your copy of the next annual report?</td>
<td>Hard copy</td>
<td>44.8 (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Both hard copy and electronic copy</td>
<td>34.4 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Electronic copy</td>
<td>20.8 (20)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table D.1: Responses to Question 1

As Table D.1 indicates, almost every principal in the sample received a hard copy of the annual report.

Table D.2 shows that the largest proportion of principals (nearly 45 per cent) preferred to receive a hard copy, and just over one-third liked both the hard copy and electronic copy. One-fifth of principals preferred only an electronic copy.
3. Who have you shared the report (or parts of the report) with? (select one or more)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Associate leaders</td>
<td>66.7 (64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching staff</td>
<td>36.5 (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not shared the report</td>
<td>18.8 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (all = school council or P&amp;C)</td>
<td>7.3 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other staff</td>
<td>6.3 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>6.3 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broader school community</td>
<td>2.1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>0.0 (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table D.3: Responses to Question 3

As Table D.3 indicates, a majority of principals shared the report with their associate leaders. One-third also shared the report with teaching staff. A small number of principals shared the report with other staff, parents and the broader school community (including school councils and P&Cs). None of the principals had shared the report with students, and nearly one-fifth of principals had not shared the report at all.

4. Which parts of the report have you read to date?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive summary</td>
<td>55.2 (53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of the report</td>
<td>35.4 (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>30.2 (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td>9.4 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>8.3 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the report</td>
<td>7.3 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
<td>4.2 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>2.1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
<td>1.0 (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table D.4: Responses to Question 4

Table D.4 shows that more than one-third of principals had read the report in full, while over half had read the executive summary, and nearly one-third had read the case studies. A small proportion of principals had confined their reading to single chapters (less than one-tenth). A similar proportion had not read any of the report.
5. Please rate the following aspects of the report:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The report is easy to read and understand.</td>
<td>42.4 (36)</td>
<td>52.9 (45)</td>
<td>4.7 (4)</td>
<td>0.0 (0)</td>
<td>0.0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The report increased my knowledge of practices enacted by Queensland state schools.</td>
<td>36.5 (31)</td>
<td>54.1 (46)</td>
<td>8.2 (7)</td>
<td>1.2 (1)</td>
<td>0.0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The report will inform my leadership practice.</td>
<td>30.2 (26)</td>
<td>52.3 (45)</td>
<td>15.1 (13)</td>
<td>1.2 (1)</td>
<td>1.2 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The report increased my understanding of school improvement.</td>
<td>27.6 (24)</td>
<td>59.8 (52)</td>
<td>10.3 (9)</td>
<td>1.1 (1)</td>
<td>1.1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The report will inform school improvement practice at my school.</td>
<td>27.1 (23)</td>
<td>58.8 (50)</td>
<td>11.8 (10)</td>
<td>1.2 (1)</td>
<td>1.2 (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table D.5: Responses to Question 5

As Table D.5 indicates, the vast majority of principals (more than 95 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that the report was easy to read and understand. As indicated by more than 90 per cent of respondents, the report increased their knowledge and understanding of school practices and school improvement, and more than 80 per cent of principals said they will use the report to inform their leadership practice. Finally, more than 85 per cent of principals were positive that the report would inform improvement practice in their school.

6. Which parts of the report were particularly useful?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive summary</td>
<td>70.1 (61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>40.2 (35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3 (school improvement practices across Queensland state schools evident from school reviews)</td>
<td>33.3 (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2 (performance indicators of Queensland state schools and associated practices)</td>
<td>23.0 (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5 (next steps for schools, regions and the Queensland system)</td>
<td>23.0 (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4 (improvement journeys of schools that received post-review support)</td>
<td>18.4 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1 (introduction to school improvement and school reviews in Queensland)</td>
<td>10.3 (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table D.6: Responses to Question 6
Consistent with the findings in Table D.5, Table D.6 indicates that a majority of principals found the executive summary particularly useful, and two-fifths found the case studies particularly useful. One-third nominated Chapter 3, which focused on school improvement practices, approximately one-fifth said that Chapter 2, Chapter 5 and Chapter 4 were particularly useful, and one-tenth nominated Chapter 1 in the same light.

### 7. How could the report be improved? (Summary of open-ended responses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Ns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not need improving</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs to be shorter/condensed</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide digital copy only</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List schools in cohort/compare against last cohort</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not release late in school year</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table D.7: Responses to Question 7

Table D.7 reports the results of an open-ended question that asked principals how the report could be improved. While only a small number of principals provided a response, the largest proportion said that the report did not need improving. A small number of comments related to the presentation of the report, including its size, format and the timing of its release. Suggestions included listing the cohort of schools covered in the report, and a comparison with the cohort from the previous year. A sample of comments follows:

‘Upon reflection I feel we will gain greatest benefit if we examine selections of the report as a book study project.’

‘Condensed in length.’

‘It needs to be more timely … the latest it should be published [is] by the end of semester 1 the following year. This may require additional resourcing and beginning the work to put together earlier …’

‘I particularly found Chapter 4 useful. Overall though, the whole document is most useful. I am proud to be a principal within a system that produces this level of documentation about the work of Qld state schools …’

‘Found it was most informative in all areas. Guided our school towards our own review.’

‘In the table of contents, provide a list of schools featured, category, page reference — allows for browsing that is sector specific or topic specific.’
### List of acronyms and initialisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACARA</td>
<td>Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AITSL</td>
<td>Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APDP</td>
<td>annual performance development plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARD</td>
<td>assistant regional director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CARS</td>
<td>Comprehensive Assessment of Reading Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2C</td>
<td>Curriculum into the Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIS</td>
<td>Council of International Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPL</td>
<td>Curriculum, Pedagogy and Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CQ3S</td>
<td>Central Queensland Student Support System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAP</td>
<td>differentiation action plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DET</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAL/D</td>
<td>English as an additional language or dialect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECEC</td>
<td>early childhood education and care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EI</td>
<td>Explicit Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESCM</td>
<td>Essential Skills for Classroom Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRR</td>
<td>Gradual Release of Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTMJ</td>
<td>guide to making judgements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOC</td>
<td>head of curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOD</td>
<td>head of department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOSES</td>
<td>head of special education services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBD</td>
<td>International Baccalaureate Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I4S</td>
<td>Investing for Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICP</td>
<td>individual curriculum plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>information and communication technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICSEA</td>
<td>index of community socio-educational advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LCC</td>
<td>local consultative committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOA</td>
<td>level of achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOTE</td>
<td>languages other than English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSS</td>
<td>mean scale score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAIDOC</td>
<td>National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPLAN</td>
<td>National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMS</td>
<td>national minimum standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSIT</td>
<td><em>National School Improvement Tool</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Endnotes

Executive summary

1. While this order is used throughout the report for consistency, the levers are intended to be used in conjunction, not in a particular sequence.

01 Introduction

2. Following machinery of government changes announced on 12 December 2017, the department was renamed the Department of Education. As part of the changes, the department added the Office of Industrial Relations, while Training and Skills (excluding international education) became part of the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (Public Service Commission 2017).

02 Key performance areas for Queensland state schools

3. PBL is an example of an evidence-based, whole-school approach to developing a safe and supportive learning environment.

4. From 2017, the SOS contained elements of the Working for Queensland Survey on employee experiences (DET 2017i).

03 School practices in 2017 review schools

5. The department does not endorse or recommend any of the third party products or services referred to within the report. Any references to third party products or services are for general information purposes only, and do not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by the department. Individuals or entities should seek appropriate independent professional advice prior to relying on, or entering into, any commitment based on the information published in this report.

04 School improvement following a priority support review

6. Please note: the reported percentages may not capture the full scale of improvements due to the nature of the review process, and the fact that data were not collected primarily for research purposes using a standardised tool. Action plan final reports are a distillation of the key observations, and do not discuss all aspects of school improvement. For these reasons, the quantitative findings do not indicate reliable differences in the magnitude and significance of the described strategies and actions, regional support or outcomes.

7. Consistent with previous caveats, estimated proportions of schools need to be interpreted with caution, as they only represent those schools where the presence of particular outcomes was noted in the final report, and, due to the nature of reviews and subsequent research, these statistics may not capture the actual scale of described phenomena.

8. In reality, there are more links and interdependencies between different key themes identified from the data; consequently, the findings reported in this section do not explain the full complexity of school improvement. However, they indicate areas where certain outcomes at different stages of the change process could be expected, and where the effectiveness of school improvement could be monitored.
Next steps

9. The term ‘capacity’ was used in the SIU’s first annual report (SIU 2016), but in order to promote terminology consistent with State Schools Division, ‘capability’ is used when referring to the skills or abilities of people. ‘Capacity’ will still be used when referring to a school as an organisation.

10. Strategic management was defined in section 4.1.1. It reflects holistic systems thinking and action on the part of school leaders, and embraces strategies and actions related to specifying the school’s vision, goals and direction; developing policies and plans to achieve these goals; and allocating resources to implement these plans.

11. These, and similar data used in this chapter, are the preliminary data from school data profiles (release date: 17 November 2017).
References

ABS—see Australian Bureau of Statistics.

ACER—see Australian Council for Educational Research.


AITSL—see Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership.

ALP—see Australian Labor Party.


ATNS—see Agreements, Treaties and Negotiated Settlements.


COAG—see Council of Australian Governments.

Cole, P 2012, Linking effective professional learning with effective teaching, Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, Melbourne and Canberra.


DET—see Department of Education and Training.

DET & QTU—see Department of Education and Training & Queensland Teachers’ Union


DoE—see Department of Education.

DP&C—see Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.


Fullan, M & Quinn, J 2016, Coherence: the right drivers in action for schools, districts, and systems, Ontario Principals’ Council, Toronto; Corwin, Thousand Oaks.


GBRMPA—see Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.


Hay Group 2010, Creating a high performing school: what the research says on how our best performing schools come out on top, Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, Melbourne, viewed 19 December 2017, <docs.acara.edu.au/resources/Creating_a_high_performing_school.pdf>.


Liljenberg, M 2015, ‘Distributing leadership to establish developing and learning school organisations in the Swedish context’, *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 152–70.


MCEETYA—see Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs.


NCVER—see National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

NEA—see National Education Association.

OECD—see Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.


QCAA—see Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority.


QUT—see Queensland University of Technology.


SIU—see School Improvement Unit.


UNESCO—see United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Publication and contact details

Queensland: a state of learning
School Improvement Unit 2017 annual report

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The authors would like to acknowledge the contribution to this publication of staff in the School Improvement Unit, Performance Monitoring and Reporting, State Schools Division, Strategic Policy and Intergovernmental Relations, and Community Engagement and Partnerships. We thank the hundreds of school communities across the state that welcomed our review teams and case managers into their schools in 2017, and continue to strive to be learning organisations that maximise student outcomes.

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