01
School improvement and reviews in Queensland state schools
1.1 Aims and focus of the annual report

This report provides an overview of school improvement practice in Queensland state schools, using a new source of information — the School Improvement Unit’s (SIU) 2015 school review reports. These 369 school review reports draw on more than 10,000 interviews with principals, teachers, students, parents and community members — equivalent to the population of Gladstone. While primarily drafted to assist individual schools to improve student outcomes, school review reports also provide qualitative information about one-quarter of Queensland’s state schools. This information complements the school performance data information collected by the department (see Figure 1.1).

Chapter 1, the introduction to this report, examines what school accountability and improvement look like internationally and their impact on public policy in Australia. It considers Queensland’s particular context, the state school system and school reform journey, the new school review model and the school reviews undertaken in 2015.

Chapter 2 considers how Queensland state schools perform in relation to major student learning preconditions and outcome measures, and what school practices are associated with those measures. The areas of focus are:

- student achievement in literacy and numeracy, as measured by the National Assessment Program — Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)
- Year 12 attainment, as measured by the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) and other certification levels.

Significant contributors to school performance, including attendance, behaviour and school community satisfaction, are also examined. This information is considered against the backdrop of school practice as gathered from the 2015 review schools, with an additional focus on practice in those schools that are improving in this area. A range of case studies is provided to demonstrate emerging, potentially effective practice within an authentic school context.

Chapter 3 examines the 2015 school review data in terms of areas of school practice which are commonly identified across school improvement frameworks (Masters 2012), specifically: leadership, learning, teaching, learning environments and partnerships. These elements are also highlighted further by case studies of emerging practice.

Chapter 4 views the 2015 school review data through the lens of ‘typical’ schools. While it is recognised that every school is unique, this part of the analysis accentuates those school types which may not be apparent in other findings owing to the numerical dominance of urban primary schools. This chapter emphasises the school improvement approaches of combined, remote and very small, rural primary schools. Special schools and outdoor and environmental education centres (OEECs) that have specific functions within the state school system are also described in terms of their approach to school improvement.

Chapter 5, the final chapter of the report, considers the implications of this analysis for schools, regions and the system as a whole.

1.2 School accountability and improvement

A consistent theme in the international education literature over the past few decades is accountability (for example, see Faubert 2009; Masters 2012; Mulford et al. 2008; O’Day 2002). Schools are experiencing increasing pressure to improve, and be accountable for, educational outcomes within the challenging context of an increasingly complex educational environment (see Figure 1.2). In addition to enhancing outcomes, there is recognition that school performance and improvement frameworks have a critical role in relation to accountability, reporting and transparency. Large sections of the community and many key stakeholders now expect summative information on the performance of schools and education systems to be provided as a matter of routine. Schools and systems also need the formative information to assist in planning, designing interventions, and developing responsive programs.

Figure 1.2: School accountability is a topical issue within mainstream media worldwide
Accountability is promoted by the conducting and reporting of standardised tests in specific curriculum areas undertaken by students at selected points of schooling (Lamb et al. 2004). While it is generally recognised that student and school performance, as measured by such tests, can provide consistent approaches to analysing student outcomes, some critics argue that the increased emphasis on educational accountability alone fails to acknowledge and account for the complexities of education (Cochran-Smith 2003; Mulford et al. 2008; O’Day 2002; O’Neill 2013).

International benchmarking

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) assesses the extent to which 15-year-old students have acquired ‘the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in society’ (Australian Council for Educational Research [ACER] 2016). The PISA assessment is undertaken every three years, testing a sample of students from a representative sample of schools across the areas of reading, mathematics and science.

In 2000, in the first PISA assessment, Australia ranked fourth for reading, sixth for mathematics and seventh for science against 32 participating countries and partner economies. Australia’s performance in PISA declined between 2000 and 2012 (the most recent assessment), both in ranking and in absolute terms. Since the initial year, the number of countries and partner economies participating increased. When compared to only those countries and partner economies which participated in both 2000 and 2012, Australia declined in rank by five positions in reading (from fourth to ninth) and was outperformed by a further five newly participating countries. In both mathematics and science, Australia declined three rank positions (from sixth to ninth in mathematics and from seventh to tenth in science). Australia was also outperformed by an additional eight newly participating countries/economies in mathematics, and by a further seven newly participating countries/economies in science.

Other influential international surveys include the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). In 2011, TIMSS and PIRLS surveys occurred concurrently and Australia participated in PIRLS for the first time.

TIMSS measures mathematics and science achievement among Year 4 and Year 8 students and is administered every four years. The 2011 assessment provides the latest available results. Australia’s results show that for Year 8 mathematics and science, and Year 4 science, the performance of Australian students was stable between 1995 and 2011 — that is, it neither improved nor declined. In contrast, during this same period, countries and districts such as Singapore, Hong Kong and Chinese Taipei dramatically improved their performance, while others, such as South Korea and the United States of America (USA), showed steady improvements.

PIRLS tests the reading levels of Year 4 students. The 2011 results indicate that around one-quarter of Australian students did not meet the benchmark for an intermediate standard of proficiency. This result was similar to New Zealand, but lower than other English-speaking countries (for example, Canada and the USA) and lower than the Asian participants (for example, Hong Kong, Singapore and Chinese Taipei).

The value of this focus on accountability and moves for greater intensification has been variously contested. For example, significant reforms to public education in the United Kingdom (UK) since 1988 have included an emphasis on national curriculum, local management of schools, greater choice and diversity among schools. This policy approach was augmented in 1997 with increased funding and improved outcomes, especially in literacy. However, this has not resulted in an improved position in international rankings, and the gap between high- and low-performing schools continues to be of concern. In the USA, student outcomes have also slipped in terms of the international rankings, despite significant education spending (Caldwell & Harris 2008, pp. 29–30) and a greater focus on accountability, for example, No Child Left Behind.

Over the last decade, a number of influential studies comparing different educational systems utilising different policy levers have been published (for example, Jensen 2012; McKinsey 2007). Some of these have been criticised for failing to deal adequately with legitimate concerns regarding applying theories, ideas, policies and practices emanating from one societal culture and attempting to transpose them into others, without due consideration for the different cultural, political and economic contexts (Dimmock & Walker 2000).

The focus on efficiency, management and a desire to become internationally competitive has also been criticised for reducing education into commodifiable parts by identifying single or groups of practices for use as drivers of market-based school reform (see one of the largest studies of primary and secondary classrooms undertaken in Australia by Hayes et al. 2006).

This increased focus on school accountability can be found in most countries. It has seen the development of state-sponsored accountability and improvement agencies or programs which assess the extent to which schools are achieving the system’s objectives, and support schools on their school improvement journey (Altirichter & Kemethofer 2015).

Considering the range of school evaluation schemes operating in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, Faubert (2009) provides a useful framework that differentiates between these schemes by considering:

- their purpose and scope, and users of the results
- agencies with responsibility, other actors involved in conception and implementation, the qualification and training of external evaluators
- the reference standards and aspects for assessment, evaluation instruments, methodology and procedures
- use of the evaluation results for accountability or improvement, and development of competencies to use results effectively.

The approaches of state agencies range from those of strict control, inspection and external regulation (such as by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills [Ofsted] in the UK) to self-evaluation and internal regulation (such as in New Zealand). In practice, most education systems engage, or are developing, methods that involve some degree of external school review in conjunction with internal self-review for monitoring and improving student outcomes (such as in McNamara & O’Hara 2005). See appendix B, Study tour 2016, for a comparison of some of these jurisdictions.
1.2.1 Australian public policy response

In Australia in 1999, education ministers signed the Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century, which included the use of key national performance measures to monitor progress towards the achievement of the national goals. This necessitated the establishment of a national assessment program to collect, analyse and report nationally comparable data on student achievement. NAPLAN was launched in 2008 and every year in May since then, students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 from all state and non-state schools across Australia have participated in national standardised testing of reading, language conventions, writing and numeracy. The results have then been made publicly available at school level on the MySchool website.

NAPLAN reporting

NAPLAN measures how students are performing against national standards. It provides students, parents, teachers, schools and school systems with information about the literacy and numeracy achievements of students.

NAPLAN performance is reported using three different measures:

- proportion of students at or above the National Minimum Standard (NMS). Students who meet or are above the NMS are considered to have demonstrated the basic elements of literacy and numeracy for their year level
- proportion of students in the upper two bands (U2B). Results for any one year are reported using a six-band scale. This measure reports the proportion of children in the top two bands
- Mean Scale Score (MSS), which reflects the average score of all students for a test area in each year level.

NAPLAN participation

In 2015, participation rates across jurisdictions varied by no more than 5.5 per cent, with the exception of the Northern Territory, where the participation rate was much lower than other states and territories.

Queensland had the highest rate of participation when testing began in 2008. However, overall participation rates have consistently declined since then. In 2015, Queensland’s participation rates are among the lowest of all jurisdictions. On average, Queensland participation rates ranked fifth for Year 3, sixth for Year 5, and seventh for Years 7 and 9.

In 2015, Queensland and South Australia were the only jurisdictions to show a decline in participation of greater than two per cent in 20 test areas since 2008.

The decline in participation rates in Queensland has generally been driven by an increase in withdrawn students. In 2015, Queensland withdrawal rates were the highest of all jurisdictions in Years 5, 7 and 9, and second highest in Year 3.

NAPLAN was also used to support the focus on rigorous and comprehensive assessment of student progress in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Council of Australian Governments 2008). The declaration, signed by all federal, state and territory education ministers, established nationally consistent future directions and aspirations for Australian schools. Its two overarching goals are:

**Goal 1**: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence.

**Goal 2**: All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

The (then) Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs developed a four-year plan (2009–12) to support the goals of the Melbourne Declaration. As part of the plan, the federal government initiated the National Education Agreement (NEA) which set out:

- Australia’s shared objective and outcomes for schooling
- a broad outline of the outputs performed in schooling
- roles and responsibilities of each level of government
- performance indicators and performance benchmarks, with reporting mechanisms specified in the agreement
- policy and reform directions to achieve progress towards the objectives.

The NEA between the Commonwealth and the states and territories includes performance reporting requirements to which a number of Closing the Gap goals have been added. In 2013, the Australian Government sought to override the NEA with the National Education Reform Agreement (NERA) (incorporating the National Plan for School Improvement), which was developed during the ‘Gonski’ funding negotiations. However, not all states and territories agreed to sign up to the NERA. Australian Government funding arrangements for schooling are legislated in the Australian Education Act 2013.

Such educational reforms have tended to take a more general or holistic approach to school performance and improvement. In addition to student outcome measures, such as NAPLAN and school practice measures, more qualitative aspects of classrooms are also emphasised. It is acknowledged that aspects, such as quality leadership and teaching, establishing and maintaining high expectations, and increasingly challenging curriculum offerings can be difficult to specify, quantify and measure. When considering the kinds of elements that should be the focus of school performance and improvement efforts, and therefore included in improvement and accountability frameworks, systems have examined the characteristics of schools that are performing well and demonstrating continuous improvement, within a range of contexts (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation 2015; Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2009; Masters 2012).
1.3 Queensland context

1.3.1 Role and main functions of the Department of Education and Training

The Department of Education and Training (DET) is committed to ensuring Queenslanders have the education and skills they need to contribute to the economic and social development of Queensland by delivering world-class education and training services.

On 16 February 2015, the Honourable Kate Jones MP was sworn in as Minister for Education and Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Small Business and the Commonwealth Games, and the Honourable Yvette D’Ath MP was sworn in as Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for Training and Skills.

The department’s service structure, as at 30 June 2015, was:

- **Early childhood education and care**: providing children with access to quality early childhood education and care through establishing and funding kindergarten, integrated early years services, parent and family support programs, and regulating, approving and quality assessing early years services.

- **School education**: delivering Prep to Year 12 in Queensland state schools to prepare children and young people for successful transitions into further education and training, regulation of home education and administering funding to Queensland non-state schools.

- **Training and skills**: improving the skills profile of Queensland through targeting funding for delivery of vocational education and training (VET) that leads directly to employment. Providing information, advice and support to VET providers, employers, students, apprentices and trainees.

**DET priorities**

According to the DET Annual Report 2014–15, during 2014–15, the following major policy initiatives of the government guided the work of the department:

- **Extra Teachers**: to employ up to an additional 2500 teachers in Queensland state schools over three years to keep pace with enrolment growth, assign specialist teachers to secondary schools, relieve pressure on teachers and principals, and put downward pressure on primary class sizes. This commitment includes the allocation of 875 additional teachers over three years from 2016, above those required for enrolment growth.

- **Supporting Students**: to allocate an additional 45 full-time equivalents (FTEs) over three years from 2016, to ensure that every state high school with more than 500 secondary students has access to a full-time guidance officer (or equivalent).

- **Letting Teachers Teach**: including a new teacher classification system to transform the teaching profession in Queensland.

- **Restoring Respect to the Teaching Profession**: to ensure our teachers are well respected within the community.

- **Rescuing TAFE**: a three-year commitment to increase investment in TAFE Queensland and restore TAFE Queensland’s status as the state’s premier public provider of VET.
1.3.2 Queensland state schools

The Queensland Government provides state education in accordance with the Education (General Purposes) Act 2006. Enrolments in Queensland state schools continue to increase. From 2011 to 2015, there was an overall growth in enrolments of 6.7 per cent. A total of 522,345 full-time students were enrolled in Queensland state schools as at August 2015.

In 2015, 320,627 full-time students (61.4 per cent of state school enrolments) were enrolled in primary year levels, and 201,718 (38.6 per cent) were enrolled in secondary year levels (see Table 1.1). Of these, 280 students in Prep and 4176 students in Years 1 to 12 were provided services through special schools.

### Table 1.1: Enrolments in primary and secondary year levels, Queensland state schools, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparatory</td>
<td>43,711</td>
<td>45,689</td>
<td>46,882</td>
<td>47,191</td>
<td>48,070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>42,121</td>
<td>44,441</td>
<td>46,094</td>
<td>47,012</td>
<td>47,499</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>40,707</td>
<td>42,567</td>
<td>44,825</td>
<td>46,404</td>
<td>47,561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>39,300</td>
<td>41,252</td>
<td>43,012</td>
<td>44,962</td>
<td>46,933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>26,257</td>
<td>39,632</td>
<td>41,581</td>
<td>43,112</td>
<td>45,384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>39,795</td>
<td>26,409</td>
<td>39,601</td>
<td>41,410</td>
<td>43,259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 6</td>
<td>41,269</td>
<td>39,912</td>
<td>26,377</td>
<td>39,435</td>
<td>41,921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 7 Primary</td>
<td>40,253</td>
<td>41,123</td>
<td>39,516</td>
<td>26,327</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Primary</td>
<td>313,413</td>
<td>321,025</td>
<td>327,888</td>
<td>335,853</td>
<td>320,627</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 7 Secondary</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>35,883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 8</td>
<td>36,248</td>
<td>36,322</td>
<td>37,069</td>
<td>36,072</td>
<td>24,835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9</td>
<td>36,434</td>
<td>36,681</td>
<td>36,654</td>
<td>37,291</td>
<td>36,559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>37,353</td>
<td>37,070</td>
<td>37,443</td>
<td>37,447</td>
<td>38,377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>34,174</td>
<td>34,159</td>
<td>34,594</td>
<td>34,874</td>
<td>35,313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>28,367</td>
<td>29,048</td>
<td>29,392</td>
<td>29,883</td>
<td>30,751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Secondary</td>
<td>172,576</td>
<td>173,280</td>
<td>175,152</td>
<td>175,567</td>
<td>201,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special</td>
<td>3,529</td>
<td>3,708</td>
<td>3,904</td>
<td>4,081</td>
<td>Unavailable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>489,518</td>
<td>498,013</td>
<td>506,944</td>
<td>515,501</td>
<td>522,345</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: August collection 2011–15

Maps of the seven integrated service delivery regions, showing the location of state schools, regional offices and TAFE campuses, can be found at [www.education.qld.gov.au/schools/maps](http://www.education.qld.gov.au/schools/maps).
The geographical location of Queensland state schools reflects the relatively decentralised nature of the Queensland population. In other states and territories the average proportion of the population living outside of the capital city is around 30 per cent. In Queensland in 2011, 52 per cent of the population lived outside of Brisbane (Queensland Health 2014). As at January 2015, school numbers included 1234 Queensland state schools and 26 OEECs.

As the department with legislative responsibility for schooling, DET facilitates many opportunities for the three Queensland schooling sectors (state, Catholic and independent) to work together to ensure that Queensland students are engaged in learning, achieving and successfully transitioning to further education, training and work.

As the provider of schooling to the majority of the Queensland population, DET has a significant responsibility to support school improvement in state schools, both in terms of equity (access to education) and excellence (education performance).

Queensland NAPLAN results

In 2015, all Queensland students recorded some of their highest results since NAPLAN testing began. Overall, nine out of 10 students achieved at or above NMS across all year levels and test areas with the exception of writing in Years 7 and 9, and grammar and punctuation in Year 9.

Queensland areas of improvement

The improvements since testing began are:

- **NMS** — improvement in 18 of the 20 test areas
- **U2B** — improvement in 16 of the 20 test areas
- **MSS** — improvement in 16 of the 20 test areas.

The greatest improvements from 2014 were in:

- **NMS** — Year 5 writing (3.2 percentage points increase)
- **U2B** — Year 3 writing (8.5 percentage points increase)
- **MSS** — Year 3 writing (15.4 scale score point increase).

The greatest declines from 2014 were in:

- **NMS** — Year 9 writing (1.7 percentage points decline)
- **U2B** — Year 3 spelling (4.1 percentage points decline)
- **MSS** — Year 9 writing (6.2 scale score point decline).

In 2015, Queensland students recorded some of their highest results since NAPLAN testing began.
1.3.3 School improvement in Queensland state schools

Ensuring that every student can succeed is the moral imperative that underpins continuous improvement and innovation in Queensland state schools. Teachers and school leaders are increasingly building their professional capital and targeting their effective teaching practices based on what students need to learn next, consistent with a whole-school approach to improvement (Timperley 2015). Principals are increasingly unifying the school community, using dynamic change processes, around an agreed sharp and narrow explicit improvement agenda based on research and evidence-informed decision making (Collins & Coleman 2016; Hargreaves & Fullan 2012).

Better collaborative decision making is a feature of Queensland state schools’ improvement success to date. Since 2008, data and information about student learning have become more accessible and extensive. Emerging data literacy at all levels of the system is beginning to transform into a better understanding of evidence of the learning impact of initiatives and teaching practices. In parallel, research into effective teaching strategies is being synthesised to better communicate what works best in a particular context, by researchers such as Professor John Hattie, and presented in clear and user-friendly resources, such as the Australian Teaching and Learning Toolkit (Collins & Coleman 2016). Concurrently, the approach to school improvement has evolved to be more autonomous, while remaining connected to schools across the system and supported by regional and central office teams. All levels of the system are focused on applying research and evidence to school and system improvement and innovation.

Statewide support for school improvement and innovation is focused on building research and evidence-informed decision-making capability, as well as a common language to discuss improvement initiatives within and across schools. A common language and conversation starter for considering the next steps in a school improvement path is the School Improvement Hierarchy (see Figure 1.3). Based on the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) (ACER 2012), the hierarchy provides a logical and cyclical approach to whole-school improvement that is proving to be a catalyst for deeper conversations about problems of practice and the merits of solutions.

To further support capability development in prioritising problems of practice and selecting solutions, Standards of Evidence, with levelled dimensions about attributable design, measurable impact, scaling potential and cost considerations, are increasingly being used statewide. The standards are a decision-making conversation tool that provides clarity about the relevance of evidence for determining the merits of initiatives (see Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4: Standards of Evidence

The School Improvement Hierarchy and the Standards of Evidence are preconditions for sharing, scaling and sustaining promising innovations and proven practices. With insight from SIU reviews, external research, internal data sources and reports, and school-based monitoring and evaluation of teaching strategies, Queensland state schools are strengthening evidence-informed approaches to school improvement and innovation. Purposeful data collection and use of inquiry cycles investigating and solving problems of practice, generating evidence and action, is a growing way of working that, in the future, can be shared via the proposed Evidence Hub (see Figure 1.5). The collective will share knowledge generated in schools, maximising learning progress for all students (Collins & Coleman 2016).
The increasing cohesiveness of the school improvement agenda across Queensland state schools is captured in the Every student succeeding – State Schools Strategy 2016–2020. The strategy is based on research around the most effective drivers of school improvement, and is guiding innovation and change at all levels of the system (Fullan 2016). In addition, it is clearly linked to the DET Strategic Plan 2015–20 and Advancing Education: An action plan for education in Queensland which acknowledge the contributions of teachers, school leaders and principals in leading the school improvement and innovation agenda. Across the state, everyone is focused on what matters most to Queensland students as tomorrow’s leaders and citizens.

DET’s SIU assists in the achievement of the State Schools Strategy, particularly in relation to school performance. The SIU’s school review process is integral to ongoing collaborative inquiry and a welcomed part of the school improvement journey.

1.3.4 A new approach to school reviews in Queensland state schools

School reviews, as undertaken by the SIU, are a very recent evolutionary stage in the journey of reform and improvement. The reviews commenced in 2015 as a key renewal initiative to address the twin aspects of school accountability and school autonomy, but with a very strong philosophical commitment to providing schools with support and building the capacity of principals. The primary function is that of school improvement through collective responsibility.

Previously, Queensland state schools received teaching and learning audits undertaken by seconded principals who were trained to step into the role of auditor. The audits were administered by (then) Education Queensland. This process generally involved one auditor visiting a school for a number of days (dependent on the number of enrolled students), and conducting an audit of the school’s teaching and learning processes. In the case of larger primary and secondary schools, two to three auditors may have been required. The teaching and learning audits were essential to the refocusing of schools and the system on teaching and learning as the core business of schools.

The teaching and learning audits were built on a foundation of school support and collegiality. Only current serving principals were eligible to apply for the position of auditor. The auditors were administered by (then) Education Queensland. This process generally involved one auditor visiting a school for a number of days (dependent on the number of enrolled students), and conducting an audit of the school’s teaching and learning processes. In the case of larger primary and secondary schools, two to three auditors may have been required. The teaching and learning audits were essential to the refocusing of schools and the system on teaching and learning as the core business of schools.

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A teaching and learning auditor examined the school’s teaching and learning processes and procedures against the eight domains of the TaLSIF. The auditor then provided schools with a report which detailed a series of recommendations, affirmations and commendations. Auditors were also required to rate the school against each domain as low, medium, high or outstanding. Each of these ratings provided schools with a measure of where they were at that time, and what specific actions they might take to enhance outcomes for students. These ratings were not intended as a judgment about the school, the leadership team, teachers or the community, but rather as an indicator of potential for improving student outcomes.

DET suspended the teaching and learning audits in early 2012 after school results were published in the media and concerns were raised by the Queensland Teachers’ Union (QTU). Consequently the following changes were made to the audit process:

- There was a move away from the specific rating of each domain. Instead, more nuanced findings were made with key phrases, sentences or paragraphs from across different levels of achievement being highlighted.
- The previous practice of centralising the collection of reports by the department ceased.

These two key changes provided a mechanism by which the QTU and Education Queensland were able to agree to resume the teaching and learning audits in mid-2012. The audits continued until the end of the 2014 school year. In 2014, the teaching and learning audits were undertaken together with discipline audits, which focused on the school’s responsible behaviour plans, and the processes and practices schools had engaged to ensure they were disciplined places of learning.

Later that year, as part of its continued renewal agenda, DET established an internal working group to develop a new approach to school reviews. Members were drawn from across central office, and included regional representation. In order to develop a model tailored to the Queensland state school context, the working group investigated contemporary education research, the experience of other jurisdictions, and lessons drawn from the teaching and learning audits.

Over the course of deliberations, it was agreed that the following elements would characterise the new reviews:

- formative evaluation of and for school improvement
- supportive, not punitive assessment, with schools to be protected from misleading league-tabling
- differentiated, so that schools receive the developmental review they need
- diagnostic, rather than prescriptive, with follow-up left largely to those with local knowledge (schools and regions)
- consistent application of the NSIT as the framework for the review
- beneficial to the system by building the capacity of principals through peer training and review opportunities, and the ability to analyse the findings of all review reports, including identifying and sharing good or exemplary practice.

The teaching and learning audit process used the Teaching and Learning School Improvement Framework (TaLSIF) as its basis. This ‘guide to making judgments’ provided the framework for the teaching and learning audits, and for Queensland state schools, across the five years of the audits, providing a common language and set of understandings in relation to school improvement.
In mid-2014, the DET Executive Management Board approved the establishment of the SIU. The unit would report directly to the Director-General and be an independent monitor of state school performance, separate from the delivery arm of schools (State Schools Division), and subject to recurrent funding.

The SIU is led by an executive director who oversees a team of internal reviewers and support staff (for more detail on staffing, see ‘Staff and training’ below), calling on the expertise of peer principal reviewers and external reviewers (contractors) as required.

Under the new arrangements, all state schools, including independent public schools, special schools and OEECs, are reviewed by the SIU at least once every four years. The majority of schools receive a review in the final year of their four-year school planning, reviewing and reporting cycle. This is consistent with the teaching and learning audit program. However, a number of review types are now available, rather than a standardised or ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach.

School review types

In October and November each year, the SIU conducts a desktop audit of the headline indicators of all state schools to establish which schools are due for a review, and the type of review those schools would most benefit from, in the upcoming year.

Headline indicators

The headline indicators are a snapshot of a school’s performance data. They provide a common starting point for conversations about how best to support school performance and improvement.

The indicators were developed in consultation with principals, regions and other stakeholders. The headline indicators use centrally stored datasets that are already used by schools to monitor their performance.

The indicators provide a framework for Queensland state schools to monitor their performance and to plan for improved student outcomes. A range of school performance data is included, offering a consistent language about data within schools and between principals, assistant regional directors and other key personnel. Some indicators also allow schools to track their performance against similar Queensland state schools.

The SIU uses the headline indicators to help identify and designate schools for review purposes.

The preliminary results of this process are discussed at formal face-to-face meetings with regional directors, assistant regional directors (ARDs) and principal supervisors so that broader contextual issues may be considered. As part of this process, school support needs are considered and schools that require greater levels of support outside of the four-year cycle are also identified. The SIU consults with the Director-General or his/her delegate for independent public schools. The process is known as the Annual Performance Assessment.

School reviews are tailored to meet a school’s individual needs and context, with the number of reviewers and the length of their visit to the school reflecting the school’s complexities (including enrolment level). The three review types are:

- priority support
- full school
- self-determined.

Priority support reviews are undertaken in schools identified as needing extra support based on data trends and contextual factors. These are not failing schools — rather DET acknowledges that their complexities are such that they warrant the system’s support as a priority. Priority support reviews are undertaken by two of the SIU’s internal reviewers (one of whom has been designated as chair), and an external reviewer from the SIU’s prequalified panel.

The majority of schools receive a full school review: an acknowledgement that they are performing but with potential for improvement. Full school reviews are chaired by an internal reviewer. Other review team members include a principal peer reviewer (who has been trained by the SIU and leaves their school for the duration of the review) and an external reviewer from the SIU’s prequalified panel.

Those schools that have both a record of high performance and a trajectory of improvement are able to conduct a self-determined review. They are given the autonomy, and a financial contribution equivalent to the estimated average cost of a full school review, to organise the kind of review which will be most useful to them. They can engage reviewers from outside the state school system, in accordance with government procurement processes, or they can use the SIU (which was the option selected by more than one-third of the schools with a self-determined review in 2015).

School review process

The NSIT provides the framework for the SIU’s reviews. The NSIT is similar to the TaLSIF developed and used in Queensland (2010–14), but with the inclusion of an additional domain — school–community partnerships. The nine domains of the NSIT reflect the teaching and learning strategies consistently found in schools and acknowledged as successful by school leaders (Masters 2014). For an overview of the NSIT, see appendix C.

Prior to visiting the review school, the review team examines the school’s data profile, headline indicators, school website and OneSchool, and contacts the ARD or principal supervisor. In addition, the school provides copies of key documents, such as their current four-year strategic plan, professional learning plan and any school-based datasets, to the review chair. Principals develop a proposed schedule of interviews and other information-gathering opportunities in preparation for the review team’s visit. Principals also inform the school community about the upcoming review and the opportunities for involvement. This information is usually circulated through the school newsletter and social media.
On their first day in the school, the review team meets with the principal or school leadership team to set out the review agenda and to learn from them about the school. The review team members then individually interview teachers, other staff, parents, students and other members of the school community. Interviews provide respondents with an opportunity to give feedback on the school against the nine domains of the NSIT, with reviewers using a conversational style of questioning. In order to establish a broad understanding of the school and its practices, reviewers may also attend school assemblies and staff meetings, and visit teachers in their classrooms (by prior arrangement).

Review team members come together regularly during the review to discuss and to seek convergence in their findings, ensuring they have a broadly based and agreed picture of school practice, and that all lines of inquiry and any inconsistencies have been followed up.

The SIU school reviews do not apply the performance levels (outstanding, high, medium, low) associated with the NSIT domains. Instead, using the SIU template, a text-rich report is produced by the team during its school visit. A summary of these findings and improvement strategies is shared with the principal/school leadership team and usually the ARD/principal supervisor at the exit interview on the final day of the review. By mutual agreement, this is often followed by a staff briefing.

School review reports

The review chair is responsible for finalising the review report which considers the school’s practice and performance against the nine domains, and identifies areas for improvement. The review report also includes standard statistical information and an executive summary of key findings and key improvement strategies.

Before being sent to the school, the review report is quality assured by the SIU. A small team of seconded teachers/school leaders working in the SIU ensures that the level of detail and the tone of the report are constructive and consistent with SIU standards. The SIU aims to send schools their report within two weeks of the reviewers exiting the school. After receiving their final review reports, schools are asked to publish the executive summary on their website where it can be read by their school community. In the case of self-determined reviews, the school provides the SIU with a copy of the review report so it can be analysed, along with all other review reports, to enable system learning.

Post-school review

At the conclusion of a review the SIU provides the school with detailed information on the areas that could be addressed — the ‘diagnosis’. School leaders, in cooperation with their ARD or principal supervisor, then decide how they will address particular issues — the ‘prescription’. For schools which have a full school or self-determined review, their response to particular implementation strategies may form part of their next four-year strategic plan, with actions dealt with and progress monitored in each annual implementation plan.

Following priority support reviews, schools work with their ARD or principal supervisor on an action plan which specifies how they will address key elements of the review report’s improvement strategies (see appendix E). ARDs and principal supervisors continue to monitor and support the school after a review has been completed, providing resources as necessary. The SIU also has a formal monitoring role, with a senior reviewer assigned to case manage the school for 12 months after the review. The case manager consults with the principal at three- and six-month (and generally nine-month) intervals. The case manager revisits the school 12 months after the review to ensure that the school, supported by the region, is on a trajectory of improvement and is addressing the improvement strategies detailed in the review report. This process of ongoing monitoring and assistance for a priority support review school has been a significant departure from the previous teaching and learning audit model.

Under the review process, the role and responsibilities of the ARD or principal supervisor are clear. Previously under the teaching and learning audits, school supervisors were not involved in the audit process at any stage, nor were they provided directly with copies of school audit reports. The unintended consequence of this approach was that the school supervisor was kept at arm’s length. This had the potential to discourage an important source of school support from developing a better informed position around how best to work with the school and the principal to improve outcomes for the students.

One of the key foundations of the audit process was that the audits and consequent reports were not to be used by the regional office or school supervisor as a performance management tool. The intent of the audit was to examine school performance, not principal performance, and as such could not be used as part of a performance conversation or to manage the unsatisfactory performance of a principal. This principle has been maintained.
In addition to the active support role played by DET regional staff, the State Schools Division provides support for school improvement and innovation that builds teaching and leadership capabilities, and elaboration and success for every student across the state. A range of evidence-based resources is available to schools to support them in developing a sharp and narrow improvement agenda based on the purposeful collection and application of student learning data, greater role clarity and learning-focused leadership. Resources include:

- the School Improvement Hierarchy Reflection Tool, which provides fine-grained leadership guidance for considering the next steps in a school improvement plan based on day-to-day practices
- Curriculum into the Classroom resources, which continue to support improvements in teaching quality as a set of example planning resources to help teachers implement the Australian Curriculum
- Standards of Evidence, which support the development of data literacy for better conversations and decisions about what works, for whom and under what conditions.

An Evidence Hub brings together examples of what improving Queensland state schools, leaders and teachers do, and what to look for as evidence of continuous improvement.

Staff and training

The SIU executive director is supported by a small number of senior internal reviewers who collectively bring experience and expertise which span the breadth of school types. In 2015, the executive team was augmented by an executive principal who is employed as a critical friend, providing additional guidance and support to the unit, particularly around secondary schools.

Unlike many other school review or inspectorial systems, the SIU does not have a permanent staff of reviewers. Rather, the Queensland school review model is built on the secondment of current substantive principals for periods of time, ranging from a number of weeks to up to 12 months. Principals are able to join the SIU through a continuing applicant pool, with the size of the pool depending on the review load, which varies across the school year. This secondment also provides them with professional growth opportunities.

The SIU contributes to considerable capacity building within the system through the provision of training to principals, as peer or internal reviewers and, since late 2015, training for other members of school leadership teams, such as deputies and heads of curriculum, referred to as associate administrators. The majority of this training occurs in the regions with members of the SIU training staff over a number of days. The SIU is funded to provide training to all principals over time, with approximately half of the cohort trained each year for the first two years. Following this, training for new principals and refresher training are made available to ensure that all principals know and understand the review process and the NSTI, and are able to participate in a school review.

Each term trained principals are notified of review opportunities for which they may nominate their participation. Participating in a review of another school is a professional learning opportunity that allows principals to examine all aspects of another school, encouraging them to reflect on their own leadership and practice. This review experience also provides principals with the opportunity to work with experienced principals from across the state, and the external reviewers who bring additional skill sets to the review.

One of the limiting factors of the teaching and learning audit model was that the deep knowledge in relation to the TaLSIF and to what school improvement looked like in schools across Queensland was restricted to those principals who had the opportunity to be engaged as auditors. Across the five years of the teaching and learning audits, only 83 principals were trained and engaged as auditors. Of this original number, approximately one-third have since left DET’s employment, predominantly through retirement. Another third are no longer principals but have been promoted to senior roles within DET (in 2015, four of DET’s seven regional directors and two of States Schools Division’s assistant directors-general were former auditors). The final third have returned to principal roles within the Queensland state school system.

Owing to the restricted nature of the audits, there was no systematic training and development of all principals in relation to the TaLSIF, and how it could be used by individual principals and school communities as a lens to critically analyse their teaching and learning practices and processes. The development of principal knowledge in relation to the TaLSIF occurred mainly in pockets and depended on individual initiative rather than whole-of-system action. It should be acknowledged that significant work was undertaken by lead auditors and other key personnel across the five years of the audits with groups/clusters of principals, and many former auditors worked closely with their colleagues to establish deeper knowledge and understandings. However, this occurred more in isolation rather than as part of a larger or concerted capability agenda.

Prequalified panel of external reviewers

Another feature that differentiates the SIU school reviews from the audits is the inclusion of external reviewers within review teams. Working together with internal reviewers and peer principals, the external reviewers contribute additional rigour and expertise to the school review process.

In line with DET procurement policy, a prequalified panel of external reviewers has been established following open tender processes held in November 2014, February 2015 and October 2015. As part of the specifications, external reviewers are required to undertake specific SIU training in order to be accredited and included on the prequalified panel of external reviewers. In addition, in order to maintain their accreditation, external reviewers on the prequalified panel are required to attend two one-day training, moderation and performance assessment sessions per year.

The SIU schedules reviews across the state over the school year and asks appropriate external reviewers to bid for these opportunities. Reviewers on this panel are also available to undertake self-determined reviews by arrangement with individual school principals.

Reviewers are generally retired principals or senior executives from the Queensland state or non-state school sector or another state, or education consultants/academics from private business, government or university backgrounds.
Monitoring and reviewing the performance of the SIU

The establishment of the SIU and its school review program has been supported by an external stakeholder reference group (members include representatives from the QTU, principal associations and P&Cs Qld, and senior executives from the State Schools Division), and an internal working group (members from DET divisions and regional representatives). These groups, which are brought together once a term, provide a forum for sharing information, testing ideas and solving problems. In addition, each semester, separate discussions are held with a sample of principals and ARDs to ensure that the SIU is aware of and able to address any issues or feedback in a timely fashion.

Other stakeholder feedback is sought regularly to inform and improve the operation of the SIU and its reviews. After each review, the principal is emailed a short evaluation survey which asks them to rate their satisfaction with the following aspects of the review:

- communication
- opportunity to engage
- the conduct of the reviewers
- usefulness of the review to the school.

The responses are collated by the SIU operations area and any urgent issues are immediately referred to the executive director. De-identified feedback is shared with internal reviewers to assist them in their professional learning. From 2016, feedback will also be provided to external reviewers as part of the contract management process.

The SIU actively communicates with different audiences in order to share news updates and provide a communication channel for any feedback. Regular newsletters are provided to deputy directors-general, regions and principals. Each term, an interim report of trends evident in school review reports is shared with those stakeholders.

This annual report is the culmination of that iterative set of analyses. It provides a picture of the activities underway in the 369 Queensland state schools reviewed in 2015. In future years, the SIU will be able to build on this sample and the insight it offers into the performance and improvement of Queensland state schools.

1.4 School reviews 2015

As at January 2015, when the SIU commenced school review work, there were 1234 Queensland state schools, plus an additional 26 OEECs — a total of 1260 schools and centres within the SIU scope. Following the SIU’s annual performance assessment, including discussions with the regions, 369 schools were reviewed in 2015. This total included 367 schools determined by their four-yearly review cycle or identified as requiring additional support as a priority, and two additional emergent9 reviews requested during the year.

Figures 1.6 and 1.7 compare the 2015 review schools as a group, to all Queensland state schools in terms of SIU school type and region.

As Figure 1.6 indicates, the 2015 review schools were reasonably representative of all Queensland state schools in terms of SIU school type (for details, see appendix A, SIU school types). When compared with the whole cohort, the 2015 review schools included a greater proportion of urban primary schools (by four per cent) and a smaller proportion of remote schools (by four per cent), with all other types the same or within one or two percentage points of the proportion found in all Queensland state schools. Owing to their uniqueness, OEECs are not included in this overall comparison. Eight of the 26 OEECs were reviewed in 2015, representing just over one-quarter of OEECs.

When 2015 review schools and all Queensland state schools are analysed in terms of their regional location (see Figure 1.7), a greater level of variation is noted. However, it is considered unlikely to distort the findings to any significant extent, particularly as the variation is limited to regions within the south-east corner of Queensland. Of the 1234 Queensland state schools, 630 were located in the Metropolitan, North Coast and South East regions.
1.4.2 School review reports

The quality assurance of school review reports is a detailed process of checking for internal consistency, correct use of terminology and a constructive tone, and general editing. The size of school review reports varies, but on average a primary school report is approximately 5000 words, and a secondary school report is 6000 words.

The SIU aims to provide final review reports to schools within two weeks of the end of their review. Table 1.3 sets out the number of reviews and average turnaround times in 2015.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term 1</th>
<th>Term 2</th>
<th>Term 3</th>
<th>Term 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of reports</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of days</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.3: Number of school review reports and average number of days to edit, by term, 2015

As Table 1.3 shows, turnaround times in 2015 were longer than anticipated. With increased experience, more efficient work processes and increased staffing, particularly in peak periods, the SIU expects to reach its key performance indicator target (14-day turnaround) in 2016.

1.4.3 Post-school review

As the school review program only commenced in 2015, the process of checking in with schools after their priority support review has become a more substantial part of the work of the SIU’s senior reviewers. The 100 priority support reviews undertaken in schools in 2015 will continue to be followed up, culminating in the 12-month revisit to the school in 2016. The data, including trends from post-school reviews from 2015, will be made available in the 2016 Annual Report.

1.4.4 Staff and training

The staffing of the SIU has increased over the year as the work has increased and evolved. From an original establishment of nine FTEs, the SIU currently has a staff of 11 FTEs. In addition to the executive principal and senior reviewers, 33 principals were seconded to the SIU as internal reviewers during 2015, with their periods of engagement varying from a few weeks to the entire school year.

In addition to the reviews undertaken in 2015, the SIU built significant principal capacity within the Queensland state school system. A total of 594 principals attended two days of either internal or peer principal reviewer training in 2015. These training sessions were held in centres across all DET regions. Of those trained peer reviewers, 183 principals then acted as reviewers in at least one school review.

Owing to demand in the field, associate administrator training for other school leaders, such as deputy principals and heads of curriculum, was developed and piloted in late 2015. Fifty-eight staff attended training sessions in Darling Downs South West and Metropolitan regions. Further sessions are being provided across the state in 2016. Approximately 40 regional and central office staff also attended review training in 2015 in order to gain a detailed understanding of the review process.
1.4.5 Prequalified panel of external reviewers

As at 31 December 2015, there were 26 suppliers offering 44 individuals as external reviewers. An additional 20 external reviewers became qualified to join the panel following training in early 2016.

1.4.6 Monitoring and reviewing the performance of the SIU

Stakeholder feedback is sought regularly to inform and improve the operation of the SIU and the reviews. In 2015, the response rate to the feedback request was 78 per cent. Of the principals who responded, approximately 94 per cent were either satisfied or very satisfied with their school review. For a more detailed breakdown of responses, see results in Table 1.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>% satisfied or very satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication about the review process</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to engage in the review process</td>
<td>96.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct of the reviewers during the review process</td>
<td>93.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usefulness of the review to the school</td>
<td>95.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.4: Principal responses to school review exit survey, 2015

1.4.7 Study tour

At the request of the Director-General, an international study tour was conducted by the executive director and executive principal of the SIU. See itinerary in Table 1.5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Meeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31 January</td>
<td>Dubai, United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>Queensland Trade Commission, Australian International School, Sharjah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 February</td>
<td>London, UK</td>
<td>Ofsted, Trade &amp; Investment Queensland, Agent General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 February</td>
<td>London, UK</td>
<td>Shadow monitoring inspection of a primary school in special measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 February</td>
<td>Edinburgh, UK</td>
<td>Education Scotland, President of the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 February</td>
<td>Amsterdam, Netherlands</td>
<td>Council of International Schools, Ministry of Education Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 February</td>
<td>Krakow, Poland</td>
<td>Ministry of Education Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 February</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>National Institute of Education, Singapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 February</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Schools Division, Singapore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.5: Study tour itinerary

The purpose of the study tour was to analyse each jurisdiction’s school inspection system, based on meetings and practical experience, in order to identify potential areas for improvement in the SIU’s review process. There was a particular focus on the mechanics of the review process:

- identification of schools for inspection/review
- what school performance data is considered within this process
- differentiation of the inspection process (types of inspection/reviews)
- follow-up regarding the impact of the inspection/review by the inspection agency.

A report of the study tour is provided as appendix B.
Schools are complex and dynamic institutions. The analysis contained within this report provides high-level insights, using new data and different units of analysis, to maximise its utility to schools, the regions and central office. However, the data are subject to a range of limitations, including:

- The NSIT provides the framework around which the school reviews were undertaken, and the review reports were constructed by the review team. However, the SIU chose not to apply the performance levels recommended within the NSIT, which could readily be converted to a score as on ‘league tables’.
- The data in school review reports have been collected, interpreted and presented for the purpose of identifying potentially effective practices and areas for improvement for each individual school community, in the first instance, not for the purpose of this report. The text-rich reports are secondary interpretive data, bound by the review format, and representing a point in time.
- The review teams are not provided with standardised interview schedules (lists of standard questions and prompts which have been tested through piloting), which researchers tend to use to promote reliability and validity of data collection. However, the reviewers are trained regarding reliability of judgements around the NSIT.
- The review reports are secondary sources, the result of teamwork with oversight provided by the review chair. They are also subject to a quality assurance process undertaken by the SIU. This process brings additional consistency, validity and reliability to the school review reports, but introduces an additional level of interpretation.
- Analysing the data in terms of student outcome measures and school practice measures means that issues of intensity and linkages between various practices are less visible. Illuminative school case studies help to provide a more rounded picture.

An unintended consequence of the decision to move away from the centralisation of the teaching and learning audit reports in 2011 was that DET regions and central office were unable to use the reports to inform policy and practice. Under the new school review process, these reports are again able to be analysed by DET to provide additional evidence as to improved practice for schools, regions and DET central office. This report, along with interim reports produced by the SIU, are products of the system analysis.

1.5 Mixed mode methods

In order to produce the SIU annual report, centrally held quantitative data regarding all Queensland state schools was combined with qualitative data taken from the 2015 school review reports. These reports themselves combine system data holdings about a school and the interpreted results of field work (interviews and discussions with school leaders, staff, parents, students and other school community members) undertaken by a review team and presented in a standardised review report format.

As the review reports are, on average, more than 5500 words in length, software for qualitative research (NVivo 10) was used to manage and analyse the data, and to identify major themes and undertake queries, while also ensuring the rigour and efficiency of the data analysis process. A combination of inductive and deductive coding was used, and further detail of the coding framework is provided at appendix D.

The analysis presented in chapter 2 uses DET’s major student outcome performance measures, including system data and interpretation provided by DET’s Performance Monitoring and Reporting (PMR) branch. Additional system data provided by PMR suggested potential lines of investigation within the school review report data. A systematic (but not rigid) process, detailed in each section depending on the data, was used to identify those review schools where relative gain over a number of years was apparent in the area. While this does not infer causality or transferability outside of the school’s unique circumstances at that point in time, it provided a way to reduce the breadth of data around each of these performance areas and allowed the data to be examined in greater depth.
This chapter has provided the background for the findings from the analysis of the 2015 school review reports. Following a brief examination of the global school accountability and improvement movement and the Australian public policy response, the complexities of the Queensland context were considered. The program of school reviews, which emphasises collective responsibility and support, was implemented in Queensland state schools from 2015. Approximately one-quarter of state schools were reviewed, with the type of review determined by a systematic assessment of the school’s progress on the improvement journey which takes account of its particular context. The new approach to school reviews, which applies the NSIT, has been embraced by school communities around the state.

The following chapters will detail the immediate outcomes of this work, the school review reports, which have been analysed to provide new insights to assist schools in their improvement, and to also inform the work of regional and central offices. In combination with statistical information where appropriate, these data are presented in a range of different ways — considering the preconditions and outcomes of learning, the school practices commonly associated with school improvement, and school type. Informed by the preceding analysis, the final chapter suggests the three pieces of work that, if undertaken judiciously and by more schools, may bring the next lift in student achievement in Queensland state schools. The first part of the analysis, considering the preconditions and outcomes of successful student learning, is presented in chapter 2.