National School Improvement Tool

ACER

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Contents

Foreword

Research is revealing the powerful impact that school leadership teams can have in improving the quality of teaching and learning. Effective leaders create cultures of high expectations, provide clarity about what teachers are to teach and students are to learn, establish strong professional learning communities and lead ongoing efforts to improve teaching practices.

The *National School Improvement Tool* was endorsed by the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) at its meeting on 7 December 2012 and has been made available to all Australian schools for use in their school improvement planning from 2013.

The *National School Improvement Tool* brings together findings from international research into the practices of highly effective schools and school leaders. The *Tool* assists schools to review and reflect on their efforts to improve the quality of classroom teaching and learning. It supports school-wide conversations – including with parents and families, school governing bodies, local communities and students themselves – about aspects of current practice, areas for improvement and evidence that progress is being made.

The *Tool* does not describe everything that effective schools do, but focuses on those practices that are most directly related to school-wide improvements, and thus outcomes for students. In this sense, the *Tool* can be thought of as a core element of more comprehensive school improvement programs, frameworks and initiatives.

The ultimate goal of school improvement is to improve outcomes for students, including levels of achievement and wellbeing. For this reason, direct measures of student outcomes are essential to all school improvement efforts. However, 'school improvement' fundamentally means improving what a school does. The *Tool* provides evidence about a school's day-to-day work to complement, and possibly shed light on, measures of student outcomes.

The *Tool* consists of nine inter-related 'domains'. Although the *Tool* has been designed to enable a judgement in relation to each domain separately, experience suggests that the most effective way to use the *Tool* is to make observations and gather evidence broadly about a school's practices before focusing on individual domains. Schools may then decide to give priority to particular domains in their improvement efforts.

A key feature of the *Tool* is the set of performance levels, 'Low', 'Medium', 'High' and 'Outstanding'. These levels enable schools to make judgements about where they are on their improvement journeys, to set goals and design strategies for improvement, and to monitor and demonstrate school improvement over time.

Further information about the *Tool* and its use is provided in this booklet.

1 An explicit improvement agenda

The school leadership team and/or governing body have established and are driving a strong improvement agenda for the school, grounded in evidence from research and practice and expressed in terms of improvements in measurable student outcomes. Explicit and clear school-wide targets for improvement have been set and communicated to parents and families, teachers and students, with accompanying timelines.

The assessment of this domain includes consideration of the extent to which:

- the governing body, school principal and other school leaders are united, committed to and explicit about their core objective – to improve learning outcomes for all students in the school;

- the school has made an effort to understand current student achievement levels, and how achievement levels have changed over time, including for students in social inclusion priority groups, students at risk of disengaging or who have disengaged from schooling, and students facing disadvantage, including students with a disability, those from non-English speaking backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, those from low-SES backgrounds and regional and remote areas;

- explicit targets for improvement in student achievement levels have been set and communicated to parents, staff and the wider school community;

- school staff are united in their commitment to improve the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school and to address obstacles to school-wide improvement;

- the school communicates clearly that it expects all students to learn successfully and has high expectations for student attendance, engagement and outcomes;

- the school has clearly articulated strategies for improving levels of student achievement and wellbeing; and

- progress towards targets is monitored and initiatives and programs are systematically evaluated for their effectiveness in producing desired improvements in student learning and performance.

Outstanding

The school leadership group, including, where appropriate, the governing council, has developed and is driving an explicit and detailed local school improvement agenda. This agenda is expressed in terms of specific improvements sought in student performances, is aligned with national and/or system-wide improvement priorities and includes clear targets with accompanying timelines which are rigorously actioned.

The school improvement agenda has been effective in focusing, and to some extent narrowing and sharpening, the whole school's attention on core learning priorities.

There is a strong and optimistic commitment by all staff to the school improvement strategy and a clear belief that further improvement is possible. Teachers take responsibility for changes in practice required to achieve school targets and are using data on a regular basis to monitor the effectiveness of their own efforts to meet those targets.

High

The school has developed an agenda for improvement in partnership with parents and the community and school leaders can describe the improvements they wish to see in student behaviours and outcomes. This agenda is communicated in staff meetings, school newsletters, parent-teacher meetings and on the school website using a variety of formats to suit local needs.

The leadership team has analysed school performance data over a number of years and is aware of trends in student achievement levels. Targets for improvement are clear and accompanied by timelines.

The school leadership team is clearly committed to finding ways to improve on current student outcomes. This is reflected in an eagerness to learn from research evidence, international experience and from other schools that have achieved significant improvements.

There is evidence of a school-wide commitment to every student's success and staff of the school tell stories of significant student improvement.

Medium

The principal and other school leaders articulate a shared commitment to improvement, but limited attention has been given to specifying detail or to developing a school-wide approach (eg, plans for improvement may lack coherence, be short term or without a whole-school focus). Plans for improvement do not appear to have been clearly communicated, widely implemented or to have impacted significantly on teachers' day-to-day work. Targets for improvement are not specific (eg, not accompanied by timelines).

The school's focus on data is driven more by external requirements (eg, NAPLAN, My School) than by an internal desire for good information to guide school decision making and to monitor progress.

Although there is an expressed commitment to improvement, this is not reflected in a high level of enthusiasm for personal change on the part of staff. The communication of performance data to the school community tends to be sporadic and/or is limited only to information that the school is required to report.

Low

There is no obvious plan for improving on current achievement levels. School leaders appear to be more focused on day-to-day operational matters than on analysing and understanding school data, setting targets for whole-school improvement or communicating an improvement agenda to the school community.

Minimal attention is paid to data and there is very limited communication of school results or of intentions for improvement to parents, families and the wider school community.

Expectations for significant school improvement are low and staff tend to 'explain' current achievement levels in terms of students' socioeconomic backgrounds and/or geographical location. There is little evidence that the staff of the school have a shared commitment to improving outcomes for every student, and this appears to be contributing to a culture of underperformance. There is little evidence that the school is looking to external sources to identify evidence-based strategies for improvement.

2 Analysis and discussion of data

A high priority is given to the school-wide analysis and discussion of systematically collected data on student outcomes, including academic, attendance and behavioural outcomes, and student wellbeing. Data analyses consider overall school performance as well as the performances of students from identified priority groups; evidence of improvement/regression over time; performances in comparison with similar schools; and, in the case of data from standardised tests, measures of growth across the years of school.

The assessment of this domain includes consideration of the extent to which:

- the school has developed and is implementing a plan for the systematic collection of a range of student outcome data including both test data and quality classroom assessments;

- the school has identified and can demonstrate that it is using tests and other assessment tools to monitor school-wide achievement and progress in areas of national focus such as literacy, numeracy, science, cross-curricular skills and attributes, and levels of student resilience, wellbeing, and social and emotional development;

- the school uses data to identify starting points for improvement and to monitor progress over time;

- arrangements have been put in place for the collection and analysis of school-wide data and for summarising, displaying and communicating data, including to parents and the school community;

- all teaching staff have access to a broad range of student achievement and wellbeing data and use it to analyse, study and display individual and cohort progress;

- professional development is provided to build staff skills in analysing and interpreting data;

- school leaders, as part of their responsibilities, regularly work with their teams to review achievement data relating to their areas;

- time is set aside for in-depth staff discussions of achievement data and of strategies for the continuous improvement of student outcomes;

- the school includes in its data gathering input and feedback from students and parents;

- the school systematically monitors other performance data, including data relating to student attendance, school disciplinary absences and other behavioural data, school completion, student destinations and stakeholder perceptions and engagement;

- data are used in building a culture of self-evaluation and reflection across the school; and

- the school uses data to inform school-level decisions, interventions and initiatives.

Outstanding

The principal and other school leaders clearly articulate their belief that reliable data on student outcomes are crucial to the school's improvement agenda. The school has established and is implementing a systematic plan for the collection, analysis and use of a range of student achievement and wellbeing data. Test data in areas such as literacy, numeracy and science are key elements of this plan.

Data are used throughout the school to identify gaps in student learning, to monitor improvement over time and to monitor growth across the years of school. A high priority has been given to professional development aimed at building teachers' and leaders' data literacy skills. Staff conversations and language reflect a sophisticated understanding of student assessment and data concepts (eg, value-added; growth; improvement; statistical significance).

Teachers are given test data for their classes electronically and are provided with, and use, software to analyse, display and communicate data on individual and class performances and progress, including comparisons of pre- and post-test results. Teachers routinely use objective data on student achievement as evidence of successful teaching.

High

There is evidence that the principal and other school leaders view reliable and timely student data as essential to their effective leadership of the school. There is a documented school plan and timetable for the annual collection of data on student achievement and wellbeing.

One or more members of staff have been assigned responsibility for implementing the annual plan, analysing the full range of school data, and summarising, displaying and communicating student outcome data for the school. The school has ensured that appropriate software is available and that at least these assigned staff have been trained to undertake data analyses.

Time is set aside (eg, on pupil free days and in staff meetings) for the discussion of data and the implications of data for school policies and classroom practices. These discussions occur at whole-school and team levels. The school can illustrate through case studies, meeting minutes and project plans how data have been used to identify priorities, take action and monitor progress.

Medium

School leaders pay close attention to data provided to them about the performance of the school (eg, NAPLAN results; Year 12 results) and identify areas in which the school is performing relatively poorly or well.

Tests (eg, commercially available reading tests) may be used by some teachers, but generally are not used as part of a whole-school assessment strategy.

An ad hoc approach exists to building staff skills in the analysis, interpretation and use of classroom data.

Software may be used for the analysis of school results, including the performances of priority groups, but analyses generally do not extend to studies of improvement or growth.

School data are presented to staff in meetings, but presentations tend to be 'for information' rather than a trigger for in-depth discussions of teaching practices and school processes. Information about the school's performance is communicated to the school community, but may lack explanation or analysis. There is limited engagement with parents and families around school data.

Low

There is very little evidence of school leaders' practical use of school-wide student outcome data. There is either no annual data collection plan for the school or the plan is being implemented in a minimalist fashion. The school makes little or no use of tests beyond those that the school is required to use.

Teachers do not systematically analyse test and other data for their classes and teachers make little use of data to reflect on their teaching. The school is unable to demonstrate how data have been used in meetings or with parents to analyse and discuss current achievement levels and strategies for improvement.

3 A culture that promotes learning

The school is driven by a deep belief that every student is capable of successful learning. A high priority is given to building and maintaining positive and caring relationships between staff, students and parents. There is a strong collegial culture of mutual trust and support among teachers and school leaders and parents are treated as partners in the promotion of student learning and wellbeing. The school works to maintain a learning environment that is safe, respectful, tolerant, inclusive and that promotes intellectual rigour.

The assessment of this domain includes consideration of the extent to which:

- the school promotes and maintains an environment reflective of its high expectations that all students will learn successfully;

- the staff of the school demonstrate an understanding of the importance of positive and caring relationships to successful learning, and work to build mutually respectful relationships across the school community;

- interactions between staff, students, parents and families are caring, polite and inclusive;

- the school views parents and families as integral members of the school community and partners in student learning;

- the school places a high priority on student and staff wellbeing and has processes in place to provide both academic and non-academic support to address individual needs;

- the school appreciates and values students' varying cultural backgrounds and works to build the cultural competence of school staff;

- the school has clear strategies to promote appropriate behaviour - including agreed responses and consequences for inappropriate student behaviour - and the school provides sufficient support for teachers to implement these policies;

- the school works to create an attractive and stimulating physical environment that supports and encourages learning;

- the school promotes a culture of inquiry and innovation, where creative exploration and independent learning are valued; and

- all students and staff have an obvious sense of belonging, all parents are welcomed and all staff, students and parents speak highly of the school.

Outstanding

The school ethos is built around high expectations and a commitment to excellence. There is an expectation that every student will learn and achieve positive outcomes. Classrooms are calm but busy and interruptions to teaching time are kept to a minimum. There are no obvious behavioural problems, very high rates of school attendance and engagement, and staff morale is sustained at a high level. There is a happy, optimistic feel to the school.

High levels of trust are apparent across the school community. Interactions are focused on the learning and wellbeing of students and on continually improving the school's ability to meet the needs of all students. Parents and families are valued as partners in student learning, and parents, school leaders and teachers work together in mutually supportive ways. There is a strong sense of belonging and pride in the school.

A strong collegial culture has been established. Teachers have an overt and shared commitment to the improvement of teaching and an openness to critique by colleagues. This is reflected in the fact that teachers regularly invite leaders and colleagues to visit their classrooms to observe their teaching.

High

The 'tone' of the school reflects a school-wide commitment to purposeful, successful learning. There are very few obvious behavioural, attendance or engagement problems and behaviour management takes up very little, if any, time of school leaders and classroom teachers.

There is a strong focus on quality learning and on the creation of a culture in which all students are expected to learn successfully, in their own ways and at their own pace. Individual talents are valued. Class 'busy work' is kept to a minimum, and an attempt is made to ensure that all students are engaged in challenging, meaningful learning.

Respectful and caring relationships are reflected in the ways in which staff, students and parents interact and in the language they use in both formal and informal settings.

Parents and families are encouraged to take a genuine and close interest in the work of the school and are welcomed as partners in their children's learning. There are agreed guidelines on such matters as greeting visitors, taking messages, and responding to queries promptly and respectfully.

Staff morale is generally high.

Medium

Classrooms are generally orderly, although some are more so than others. Non-attendance is an issue for a small minority of students. However, many other students appear to be minimally engaged in productive learning activities.

The school effectively implements its policies, for example, by ensuring that disruptive behaviour, bullying and harassment are dealt with promptly. The school has clear expectations for how students should behave and interact with one another, and in the main, relationships are caring and respectful. Some staff time is taken up dealing with behaviour problems.

Most parents take an obvious interest in their children's learning. Engagement is primarily through regularly scheduled parent-teacher interviews.

Staff morale is satisfactory.

Low

Behavioural problems, disengagement and non-attendance are issues for a significant proportion of students. In a number of classrooms students are clearly not engaged in productive learning activities.

The school may have policies and agreed procedures relating to student behaviour but these appear to have had little impact in practice. Much of the time of school leaders and teachers is taken up dealing with inappropriate behaviour. Interactions between parents, staff and students are not always productive and respectful. Staff tend not to value or engage parents as partners in student learning.

Some teachers appear to work in isolation from colleagues. Staff morale is low and staff turnover is high.

4 Targeted use of school resources

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

The assessment of this domain includes consideration of the extent to which:

- the school has processes to identify and respond to student needs through the allocation of staff and resources;

- staff are deployed in ways that best address the learning needs of all students in the school and that make best use of available staff expertise and interests;

- there are school-wide programs and approaches for students requiring additional or specialist support;

- in its use of discretionary school funds, the school gives priority to initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for students;

- flexible curriculum delivery arrangements have been established to enable staff to better address the needs of individual learners;

- the school effectively uses its physical environment and available facilities to maximise student learning; and

- the school budget aligns local and system priorities.

Outstanding

The principal and other school leaders have given a very high priority to understanding and addressing the learning needs of all students in the school. This is reflected in the implementation of systematic strategies for identifying student needs and the development of creative school-wide solutions for addressing those needs.

A school-wide process has been established for identifying specific student learning needs. This process includes systematic testing to establish learning gaps and special needs. School records of individual student needs, achievements and progress are maintained centrally and shared across year levels.

A range of initiatives (eg, across-class and across-grade groupings for literacy and numeracy; the sharing of specialist teachers with neighbouring schools, if they exist) is being implemented to make more effective use of available resources to enhance teaching and learning. The school deploys staff in ways that make best use of their expertise (eg, specialist reading/science teachers).

High

The principal and other school leaders have introduced programs and strategies to identify and address the needs of students in the school and are sourcing and applying available resources to meet those needs.

The school has developed processes (eg, systematic testing and assessment) for identifying student learning needs, although there may not always be good school records of student achievement and progress.

Programs to meet individual learning needs (eg, programs for gifted students, students with learning difficulties, students for whom English is a second language, Indigenous students, refugees) are prioritised, where possible, in the school budget.

Physical spaces and technology are used effectively to maximise student learning. Learning spaces are organised for whole group work, small group work and individual work.

Medium

The school uses its human and physical resources to address the needs of students, although this may not be preceded by a systematic analysis of those needs.

Specialist diagnostic testing is organised for a small number of students with special needs, but teachers do not routinely administer tests to better understand specific learning difficulties (eg, problems in learning to read) or individual learning needs (eg, LBOTE, gifted).

There are very few school-wide programs or policies designed to address the learning needs of particular student groups (eg, gifted students, students with disabilities, students for whom English is a second language). School leaders encourage teachers to address individual learning needs in classrooms, but there are very few agreed school-wide strategies for doing this.

Physical learning spaces are used creatively and technology is accessible to the majority of staff and students.

Low

The improvement of student outcomes does not appear to be the driving consideration in the allocation of school resources (eg, the use of discretionary school funds).

There is very little, if any, systematic testing of students to identify individual learning needs.

The school does not always make best use of available staff expertise.

School leaders have developed very few, if any, school-wide policies or programs to address individual needs, which are left to classroom teachers.

School learning spaces tend to be used traditionally, with limited flexibility to support different kinds of learners and learning.

5 An expert teaching team

The school has found ways to build a school-wide, professional team of highly able teachers, including teachers who take an active leadership role beyond the classroom. Strong procedures are in place to encourage a school-wide, shared responsibility for student learning and success, and to encourage the development of a culture of continuous professional improvement that includes classroom-based learning, mentoring and coaching arrangements.

The assessment of this domain includes consideration of the extent to which:

- the school places a priority on attracting, retaining and developing the best possible teachers;

- the leadership team has strategies in place to assist teachers to continue to develop and share deep understandings of how students learn subjects/content, including pre-requisite skills and knowledge, common student misunderstandings and errors, learning difficulties and effective interventions;

- teachers in the school are experts in the fields in which they teach, have high levels of confidence in teaching in those fields and are eager to expand their subject knowledge to learn how to improve on their current teaching practices;

- the school expects all teachers to be highly committed to the continuous improvement of their own teaching and to be focused on the development of knowledge and skills required to improve student learning;

- the principal and other school leaders lead and model professional learning in the school;

- the principal and other school leaders build networked school relationships that support leadership development, including principal-principal mentoring relationships;

- school leaders ensure that opportunities are created for teachers to work together and to learn from each other's practices, including through online professional communities;

- the school works to ensure the continuity of a culture of collaboration and teamwork over time across cohorts of teachers;

- the school uses agreed formal processes to manage unsatisfactory performance; and

- the school has in place a professional learning plan and associated budget to support local and, where appropriate, system priorities.

Outstanding

The teaching staff of the school are experts in the fields in which they teach and have very high levels of pedagogical knowledge and skill, including expert knowledge of evidence-based teaching strategies.

Teachers and school leaders take personal and collective responsibility for improving student learning and wellbeing, working together and learning from each other's practices. The sharing and showcasing of best practice are common. In team meetings there is an emphasis on the joint analysis of student work and on teaching strategies for improving student learning. Teachers collaboratively plan, deliver and review the effectiveness of lessons.

School leaders place a very high priority on the ongoing professional learning of all staff and on the development of a school-wide, self-reflective culture focused on improving classroom teaching.

School leaders participate in professional learning activities, learning alongside teachers, and the school supports teachers to continue formal study and celebrates professional success.

High

There is evidence that the principal and other school leaders see the development of staff into an expert and coherent school-wide teaching team as central to improving outcomes for all students.

There is a documented professional learning plan and the school has arrangements in place for mentoring and coaching. Teachers visit each other's classrooms and welcome opportunities to have principals and other school leaders observe and discuss their work with them.

Attention is paid to strengths and weaknesses in the school-wide team, with strategies in place to recruit staff with particular expertise, to train staff to address particular needs, and to support staff who find it difficult to commit to the school's improvement agenda.

The school provides opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles outside the classroom.

Medium

The school undertakes professional learning activities, although these may not always focus on the development of knowledge and skills required to improve student learning and there may not be a coherent, documented learning plan.

The principal and leadership team are seen as supportive of, but not generally involved in, the day-to-day practice and learning of teachers.

Teachers are open to constructive feedback and provide feedback to colleagues, although there may not be formal mentoring or coaching arrangements in place.

The school is implementing a formal process for conducting professional discussions with staff.

The school's professional learning agenda is made explicit to staff at induction, and in staff handbooks.

Where it is necessary to manage unsatisfactory staff performance, this is done professionally and effectively, and in accordance with agreed guidelines.

Low

The development of a professional school-wide team does not appear to be a driving consideration of the principal or other school leaders (eg, no reference is made to the National Professional Standards for Teachers, there are no mentoring arrangements in place, teachers work largely in isolation from one another 'behind closed doors').

There is little evidence that school leaders are proactive in the recruitment and retention of staff.

There is little sense of a whole-school coordinated approach to professional learning and a low priority is given to enhancing staff performance.

6 Systematic curriculum delivery

The school has a coherent, sequenced plan for curriculum delivery that ensures consistent teaching and learning expectations and a clear reference for monitoring learning across the year levels. The plan, within which evidence-based teaching practices are embedded, and to which assessment and reporting procedures are aligned, has been developed with reference to the Australian Curriculum or other approved curriculum and refined collaboratively to provide a shared vision for curriculum practice. This plan is shared with parents and families.

The assessment of this domain includes consideration of the extent to which:

- the school has an explicit, coherent, sequenced plan for curriculum delivery across the years of school which makes clear what (and when) teachers should teach and students should learn;

- the plan for curriculum delivery is shared with parents, families and the wider community and feedback is sought on ways to make the school curriculum responsive to local needs;

- staff of the school are familiar with and work within the school's shared curriculum expectations;

- the curriculum is used as a basis for ongoing staff discussions about the best ways to maximise student learning and wellbeing;

- school leaders focus attention and energy on priority curriculum areas and on ensuring that all students are proficient in the basics, as well as on the appropriate key learning areas in Years 10-12;

- the school curriculum includes a strong focus on the development of cross-curricular skills and attributes such as literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology capability, critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, ethical behaviour and intercultural understanding.;

- a priority is given to constructing learning experiences that are accessible, engaging and challenging for all students, including those with particular needs;

- the school places a priority on making the curriculum locally relevant and adopts a strengths-based approach to recognising, valuing and building on students' existing knowledge and skills;

- assessment processes are aligned with the curriculum and are designed to clarify learning intentions, establish where individual students are in their learning, diagnose details of student learning (eg, gaps in knowledge and understanding), and to monitor learning progress across the years of school;

- reporting processes are aligned with the curriculum and designed to provide parents, families and students themselves with information about the achievement of curriculum intentions and progress over time; and

- professional development is provided to build staff skills in curriculum planning and development.

Outstanding

The school has a clearly documented whole-school plan for curriculum delivery. This plan is aligned with the Australian or other approved curriculum and, where appropriate, system curriculum documents. The plan makes explicit what (and when) teachers should teach and students should learn. The curriculum delivery plan is being implemented throughout the school and is shared with parents and the wider community.

A strong alignment has been achieved between the overall curriculum delivery plan, term and unit plans, classroom teaching and the regular assessment of student progress in relation to curriculum expectations.

Considerable attention has been given to ensuring 'vertical' alignment of the curriculum so that there is continuity and progression of learning across the years of school, with teaching in each year building on to and extending learning in previous years. General capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities are understood, valued and used as active learning streams for all students.

A high priority in curriculum planning is given to the progressive development of students' deep understandings of concepts, principles and big ideas within learning areas, as well as to the ongoing development of cross-curricular skills and attributes, including teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving, and the evaluation of information and evidence.

The school places a priority on making the curriculum locally relevant and accessible to all students and values and builds on to students' existing knowledge and varying backgrounds.

High

The school's curriculum delivery plan identifies curriculum, teaching and learning priorities and requirements. The curriculum delivery plan reflects a shared vision (by the school's governing body, principal, school leadership team, and teachers) for the school, and provides a context for delivering the curriculum as detailed in the Australian or other approved curriculum and, where relevant, system curriculum documents.

The school curriculum plan and curriculum delivery (including the time allocated to particular learning) balance requirements to address all learning areas, to give priority to English, mathematics and science, and to embed the fundamental skills of literacy, numeracy and higher order thinking in all school subjects.

The school leadership team ensures that the enacted curriculum remains a focus for discussion among, and collaboration between, teachers and that the curriculum plan is the reference against which flexible delivery is designed, assessment tasks are developed and student learning is reported. Curriculum delivery is designed to meet the needs of the range of students within each year level as well as those with disabilities and other particular needs.

Medium

The school has a documented plan for curriculum delivery that includes year level and term plans, but the progression of learning from year to year is not always obvious and the relationship between the pieces of the plan (the year, term and unit plans) would benefit from further clarification.

School leaders talk about embedding fundamental cross-curricular skills such as literacy, numeracy and higher order thinking within all subjects, but there is little evidence that school-wide strategies are in place to drive a consistent approach. Literacy tends to be seen as the responsibility of English teachers and numeracy, the responsibility of mathematics teachers.

Discussions about curriculum delivery tend to be sporadic and reactive with a year level focus rather than being driven by a leadership team with a whole-school approach.

Low

School leaders and teachers have limited familiarity with national or system-wide curriculum documents.

The school may have a documented plan for curriculum delivery but there is little evidence that the whole-school plan drives the lesson plans of individual teachers.

The enacted school curriculum is not seen as a central concern of all teachers (eg, it is not a regular topic of conversation, a focus for assessment design or a framework against which student learning is reported).

7 Differentiated teaching and learning

The school places a high priority on ensuring that, in their day-to-day teaching, classroom teachers identify and address the learning needs of individual students, including high-achieving students. Teachers are encouraged and supported to monitor closely the progress of individuals, identify learning difficulties and tailor classroom activities to levels of readiness and need.

The assessment of this domain includes consideration of the extent to which:

- teaching practices across the school reflect the belief that, although students are at different stages in their learning and may be progressing at different rates, all students are capable of learning successfully if motivated and given appropriate learning opportunities and necessary support;

- teachers work at understanding where students are in their learning – including their current knowledge, skills, learning difficulties and misunderstandings – to identify starting points for teaching;

- teachers work to ensure that all students – including high-achieving students – are appropriately engaged, challenged and extended by designing classroom activities to meet students' learning needs, levels of readiness, interests, aspirations and motivations;

- teachers consult with parents and with students themselves to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to meet the needs of students with disabilities, including through the development of individual learning plans;

- teachers closely monitor the progress of individual students and continually adjust their teaching in response to the progress that individuals are making;

- teachers encourage and assist students to monitor their own learning and to set goals for future learning;

- communication with parents and families provides information about where students are in their learning, what progress they have made over time, and what they might do to support their children's further learning; and

- tailored, early and sustained interventions are in place for students identified as requiring additional support, including students returning to school after a period of absence/disengagement.

Outstanding

The school leadership team actively promotes the use of differentiated teaching as a strategy for ensuring that every student is engaged and learning successfully. It is recognised throughout the school that some students require significant adjustments to their learning programs (eg, accelerated programs, special support) if they are to be optimally engaged and challenged, and individual learning plans have been developed for those students requiring them. Differentiation is a priority of the school and a feature of every teacher's practice.

Regular data on the achievements, progress, strengths and weaknesses of individual students are used in all classrooms to make judgements about individual needs, to identify appropriate starting points for teaching and to personalise teaching and learning activities. Reports to parents and carers include details of how learning opportunities have been tailored to individual needs and of the progress individuals have made.

High

School leaders explicitly encourage teachers to tailor their teaching to student needs and readiness. This includes the systematic use of assessment instruments (standardised assessment tasks and teacher developed assessment tools) to establish where individuals are in their learning and to identify skill gaps and misunderstandings. Teachers also are encouraged to respond to differences in cultural knowledge and experiences and to cater for individual differences by offering multiple means of representation, engagement and expression.

Planning shows how the different needs of students are addressed, and how multiple opportunities to learn are provided, including multiple pathways for transition to external studies (eg, apprenticeships) for students in Years 10-12. Students' workbooks also illustrate differentiated tasks and feedback.

Reports to parents show progress over time and include suggestions for ways in which parents can support their children's learning.

Medium

School leaders are committed to success for all, but do not drive a strong classroom agenda to assess and identify individual learning needs or to differentiate teaching according to students' needs.

Some use is made of assessment instruments to identify individual strengths and weaknesses and starting points for teaching, but this appears to be at the initiative of individual teachers rather than a school-wide expectation.

Some use is made of differentiated teaching (eg, differentiated reading groups in the early primary years), but in most classes teachers teach the same curriculum to all students with similar levels of individual support.

Regular assessments of student learning are undertaken, but these often are summative and disconnected (eg, relating to different topics) rather than exploring long-term progress in students' knowledge, skills and understandings over time.

Reports to parents generally do not show progress or provide guidance to parents on actions they might take.

Low

School leaders do not place a high priority on teachers identifying and addressing individual learning needs, but are more focused on ensuring that all teachers are teaching the core year level curriculum.

Little or no classroom use is made of assessment instruments to establish starting points for teaching. Assessments tend to be used only to establish summatively how much of the taught content students have learnt.

Teachers tend to teach to the middle of the class, with the expectation that some students will not master the content, and finding ways to occupy more able students who finish work early.

Reports to parents tend to be summative reports of how students have performed, with little guidance on what parents might do to assist in their children's learning.

8 Effective pedagogical practices

The school principal and other school leaders recognise that highly effective teaching is the key to improving student learning throughout the school. They take a strong leadership role, encouraging the use of research-based teaching practices in all classrooms to ensure that every student is engaged, challenged and learning successfully. All teachers understand and use effective teaching methods – including explicit instruction – to maximise student learning.

The assessment of this domain includes consideration of the extent to which:

- the school leadership team keeps abreast of research on effective teaching practices;

- the school leadership team establishes and communicates clear expectations concerning the use of effective teaching strategies throughout the school;

- school leaders, including the principal, spend time working with teachers, providing feedback on teaching and, where appropriate, modelling effective teaching strategies;

- school leaders actively promote a range of evidence-based teaching strategies, including;

  - creating classroom and applied learning environments in which all students are engaged, challenged, feel safe to take risks and are supported to learn

  - connecting new material to past learning and assisting students to see the continuity in their learning over time

  - demonstrating explicitly what students are to do, discussing this with students, and then questioning and checking that learning is occurring

  - promoting deep learning by emphasising underlying principles, concepts and big ideas that are developed over time

  - setting high expectations for every student's progress and ambitious targets for improving classroom performances

  - working to build students' beliefs in their own capacities to learn successfully and their understanding of the relationship between effort and success

  - providing regular and timely feedback to students in forms that make clear what actions individuals can take to make further learning progress

  - routinely evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and using these evaluations to make adjustments to practice; and

- school leaders provide teachers with ongoing detailed feedback on their classroom practices.

Outstanding

The principal and other school leaders have accepted personal responsibility for driving improvements in teaching throughout the school. They demonstrate a strong conviction that improved teaching is the key to improved student learning and have clear and well-known positions on the kinds of teaching that they wish to see occurring.

All teachers and leaders are committed to identifying, understanding and implementing better teaching methods, and a high priority is given to evidence-based teaching strategies (strategies that have been demonstrated through research and practice to be highly effective).

School leaders spend time working with teachers to improve their teaching practices, including modelling, evaluating and providing feedback on classroom teaching.

High

School leaders are committed to continuous improvement in teaching practices throughout the school and expect team leaders and teachers to identify ways of doing this, although the principal and other senior leaders may not themselves have clear positions on the kinds of teaching they wish to see occurring across the school or be 'hands on' in driving improved teaching practices.

There is a particular focus on improved teaching methods in reading, writing, mathematics and science, and professional learning activities are focused on building teachers' understandings of highly effective teaching strategies in these areas.

Clarity about what students are expected to learn and be able to do, high expectations of every student's learning, explicit teaching of skills and content, individualised attention as required, and timely feedback to guide student action are key elements of the school's push for improved teaching and learning.

Medium

School leaders are explicit about their desire to see effective teaching occurring throughout the school, but are less clear about what this might look like. They do not appear to be driving a strong agenda to improve and/or enhance teaching practices across the school, except perhaps indirectly through a focus on school results and targets. School leaders take a close interest in the school's literacy and numeracy results, but generally do not engage in discussions with staff about effective teaching strategies.

Discussions of specific teaching practices are rare and generally occur only in the context of concerns about a teacher's performance.

There is some clarity about what students are expected to learn, but a lack of balance in teaching methods (eg, over-reliance on whole-group teaching or very little explicit teaching).

Low

School leaders do not appear to have strong views on the characteristics of highly effective teaching. There is little evidence that they are driving an agenda to change or enhance teaching practices across the school.

The principal and other school leaders spend very little time on issues related to teaching. Questions of pedagogy appear to be viewed solely as the responsibility of teachers. There is little obvious school-wide discussion or consideration of highly effective teaching methods.

There may be a lack of explicitness about what students are expected to know and be able to do as a result of classroom activities, very little explicit teaching, limited attention to individual learning needs, or low expectations on the part of teachers that all students in the room will master the content of lessons. Classroom activities frequently have the appearance of 'busy work'.

9 School-community partnerships

The school actively seeks ways to enhance student learning and wellbeing by partnering with parents and families, other education and training institutions, local businesses and community organisations. Parents and families are recognised as integral members of the school community and partners in their children's education. Partnerships are strategically established to address identified student needs and operate by providing access to experiences, support and intellectual and/or physical resources not available within the school. All partners are committed to the common purposes and goals of partnership activities. Procedures are in place to ensure effective communications and to monitor and evaluate the intended impacts of the school's partnerships.

The assessment of this domain includes consideration of the extent to which:

- the school builds partnerships with parents, families, local businesses and community organisations (including allied health, family support, counselling and rehabilitation services) to improve opportunities and outcomes for students;

- the school identifies potential community partners on the basis of their capacity to contribute to improved student achievement and/or wellbeing;

- identified partners are involved in collaborative planning and are committed to the purposes and objectives of the partnership;

- the senior leadership teams in the partner organisations are involved, committed and play a role in achieving staff commitment and participation within their organisations;

- there is clarity around partner roles and responsibilities;

- major partnership decisions are made collaboratively and partnership activities are designed to make best use of partners' expertise;

- goals, progress and achievements are systematically and regularly monitored and refined as required;

- adequate resources are committed to ensure the effectiveness and success of partnerships;

- the school collects evidence to evaluate whether partnerships are having their intended impact in improving outcomes for students; and

- the school's partnerships are sustainable and have become an accepted part of the culture of the school community and partner organisations.

Outstanding

The school leadership team makes deliberate and strategic use of partnerships with families, local businesses and community organisations to access intellectual, physical and/or other resources not available within the school for the purposes of improving student outcomes. There is a range of currently operating partnerships, each carefully planned and designed to enhance student outcomes (for example, to broaden student knowledge, build new skills, develop more positive attitudes, increase engagement levels, create applied learning opportunities for students, or facilitate successful transitions to work or further education or training).

Each partnership has been established in response to an identified need. Considerable effort has been put into understanding students' needs, identifying appropriate partners to address those needs, planning the details of partnership programs and clarifying partner roles and responsibilities.

Careful consideration has been given to the benefits of the partnership to each participating partner. Explicit processes are in place to ensure ongoing and effective communication – sometimes across networks of partners – and there are documented plans for monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of each partnership.

The school's partnerships are being successfully implemented and appear to be adequately resourced and sustainable. There is clear evidence that partnerships are having their intended impact.

High

The school has established one or more partnerships with families, local businesses and/or community organisations with the express purpose of improving outcomes for students. Partnerships have generally been initiated by the senior leadership team and have their support.

Each partnership brings staff and students of the school together with external partners such as families, other education or training institutions, local businesses and/or community organisations. All partners have a high level of understanding of, and commitment to, the purposes of the partnership and clear objectives have been set, expressed in terms of improved outcomes for students.

Attention has been given to communication and to the sharing of experiences within the partnership; however, there may be no formal plan for reviewing the partnership's outcomes and effectiveness.

There is evidence that the school's partnerships are being implemented as intended. However, there may be limited evidence of improved student outcomes as a result of partnership activities – possibly because there has been insufficient time for them to demonstrate an effect.

Medium

The school has external 'partnerships', but rather than being built around a coherent, jointly planned program of activities to improve outcomes for students, these 'partnerships' tend to be mutually convenient arrangements (eg, exchanges of expertise or the sharing of facilities between institutions or organisations). Such 'partnerships' often are established by individual members of staff and have limited whole-school support or engagement.

The student needs that partnerships are designed to address may not be made explicit and, rather than being carefully planned, individual partnerships tend to be opportunistic in nature. Communications between partners are largely unplanned and infrequent.

No plans exist to systematically review the effectiveness of partnerships, which typically are very dependent on the efforts of a small number of individuals and so have limited sustainability.

Low

There is no evidence of planned, deliberate partnerships with other institutions or organisations. Contacts with families, other education and training institutions, local businesses and community organisations, when they occur, are limited to isolated events. Although references may be made to 'partnerships', these partnerships are not based on collaboratively planned programs of activities with clear goals, roles and responsibilities.