

School Improvement Tool

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The *School Improvement Tool* is the second iteration of the *National School Improvement Tool*, initially developed by Professor Geoff Masters of the Australian Council for Educational Research in partnership with the Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment.

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Introduction

Research shows 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 school-wide efforts to improve teaching practices.

The *School Improvement Tool* (SIT) identifies practices of highly effective schools, including schools that have undergone substantial improvement. The SIT is the second iteration of the *National School Improvement Tool* (NSIT). The NSIT was initially developed by Professor Geoff Masters of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) in partnership with the Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment. It was refined following a series of national consultations and subsequently endorsed by the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) in 2012. The NSIT has been made available to all Australian schools for use in school improvement planning and practice since 2013.

The NSIT has been used successfully in diverse contexts in Australia and internationally. Contemporary research supports the strong evidence underpinning the NSIT. The SIT, as the second iteration of the NSIT, incorporates contemporary global research and draws on a decade of application in the field. The SIT can be used in any school setting internationally.

The *School Improvement Tool* describes the practices of highly effective schools and school leaders. The SIT assists schools to review and reflect on their strategies to improve the quality of classroom teaching and learning. It supports school-wide conversations – including with families¹, school governing bodies, local communities, and students themselves – about aspects of current practice, areas for improvement, and evidence that progress is being made.

The SIT 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 SIT 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, engagement, 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 SIT provides evidence about a school's day-to-day work to complement, and possibly shed light on, measures of student outcomes.

The SIT consists of 9 inter-related 'domains'. Although it has been designed to enable a judgement in relation to each domain separately, experience suggests that the most effective way to use the SIT 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 agenda.

A key feature of the SIT 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 journey, to set goals and design strategies for improvement, and to monitor and demonstrate school improvement over time.

The SIT is part of ACER's suite of improvement tools. These tools support structured self-evaluation with a view to inform ongoing improvement at all levels of the education system. ACER offers a range of school and system improvement services using these tools.

¹ the term 'families' is used to capture parents, guardians, and caregivers.

Driving an explicit improvement agenda

The school leadership team and/or governing body have established and are driving an explicit, coherent, and context-appropriate school improvement agenda. The agenda reflects the school's vision, values and aspirations as well as the perspectives of students, families, teachers, and the wider community. It is grounded in evidence from research and analysis of school data, and expressed in terms of improvements in measurable student outcomes. Targets for improvement have been set with accompanying timelines and have been communicated to families, teachers, and students. High expectations for student learning progress, levels of engagement, and wellbeing underpin the school's approach to improvement.

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

- the school has developed and is implementing a coherent and context-appropriate school improvement agenda
- the governing body, principal, and school leaders are united, committed to, and explicit about, improving outcomes for all students
- the school has involved all stakeholders in planning for school improvement
- the school's improvement agenda is founded upon examination of data and trends in student outcomes over time, including for students with a range of different backgrounds, characteristics, interests, and needs
- 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
- staff communicate clearly that they expect all students to make excellent progress and have high expectations for students' cognitive, social, and behavioural engagement, and wellbeing
- the school has clearly articulated evidence-informed strategies for improving student learning, engagement, and wellbeing outcomes
- initiatives and programs are systematically evaluated for their effectiveness
- improvement goals and targets are monitored and the effectiveness of improvement strategies is systematically evaluated.

Outstanding

The school leadership team is driving an explicit and detailed school improvement agenda. The improvement agenda is sharp and narrow, and focuses the whole school's attention on improving student outcomes. Staff, students, families, and community partners are recognised as crucial contributors to the development and implementation of the improvement agenda. The improvement agenda reflects the school's vision for high-quality teaching and learning, and a relentless focus on continuously improving student outcomes. Improvement plans are based on systematic analyses of a range of relevant evidence, including student engagement and wellbeing. The school sets challenging, yet achievable, measurable improvement goals and targets with accompanying timelines that are rigorously actioned. A coherent set of tailored evidence-informed strategies is being systematically implemented and evaluated. The school can demonstrate sustained improvement over time. There is a strong and optimistic commitment by all staff and the wider community to the school improvement agenda and a clear belief that further improvement is possible. Staff take collective responsibility for changes in practice required to achieve school goals and targets.

High

School leaders have developed and documented an explicit agenda for improvement in consultation with staff, students, families, and community partners. This agenda, and the school's progress towards it, are communicated to relevant stakeholders. The school makes explicit its vision and high expectations for student success. The leadership team analyses school performance data over time and is aware of changes in contextual circumstances and trends in student outcomes. Goals and targets for improvement, derived from analysis of data trends, are clear and accompanied by timelines. Staff are eager to learn from research and from other schools that have significantly improved. Leaders have articulated individual and collective roles in implementing improvement strategies. Staff enact evidence-informed strategies to support the achievement of targets and there is evidence of their effectiveness over time. Processes are in place to monitor and evaluate the impact of improvement strategies using a range of data.

Medium

School leaders articulate a shared commitment to improvement and have identified priority areas in consultation with some stakeholders. The school has articulated a vision, values and aspirations, and a school improvement plan. Leaders are aware of how the school is performing through examination of key data sets. Goals and targets may be evident, but it is unclear how these were derived and how progress is being monitored. Strategies in the improvement plan may be unconnected and lack a rationale and/or evidence base. Improvement strategies are not systematically evaluated, and/or draw on a limited range of evidence. Staff are unclear about their roles and responsibilities in achieving school improvement goals and targets. There are no formal avenues for students to contribute to the strategic direction of the school. The wider school community is largely unaware of school priorities. The communication of performance data to the school community tends to be limited only to the information that the school is required to report.

Low

The school's plan for improving current levels of student achievement, engagement and/or wellbeing lacks specificity, and is not widely understood. School leaders appear to be primarily focused on day-to-day operational matters. The school may have a vision statement with associated values; however, these are not widely communicated and understood. There is little evidence that analyses of data inform strategic decision-making or the improvement plan. The effectiveness of initiatives is not systematically evaluated for impact. Expectations for school improvement are low and staff tend to 'explain' current achievement levels in terms of students' backgrounds or individual characteristics. There is limited engagement with external sources to identify relevant evidence-informed strategies for improvement.

Analysing and discussing data

A high priority is given to the school-wide analysis and discussion of a broad range of systematically collected quality data on student learning, engagement, and wellbeing outcomes. Data analyses consider overall school, cohort, and individual performance, comparisons with similar schools and contexts, and evidence of improvement and/or regression over time. Analysis and discussion of data inform improvement goals, targeted teaching and learning strategies, and progress monitoring across the school.

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

- the principal and school leaders promote the school-wide use of data to inform school-level decisions, interventions, and initiatives, and its use for ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and improvement
- the school has developed and is implementing a plan for the systematic collection and analysis of a range of data, including feedback from students and families, and student outcome data from quality standardised and classroom assessments
- a range of data is used to identify starting points for teaching and learning, evaluate student learning, engagement and wellbeing outcomes, monitor growth, and inform school improvement planning and progress
- all teaching staff have access to a broad range of student data and use it to analyse, discuss, and enhance individual and cohort progress
- arrangements are in place for the communication of school-wide data including to families and the wider school community
- opportunities for professional learning are provided to build staff skills in analysing and interpreting data
- school leaders regularly work with teams to review data and monitor the effectiveness of interventions and practices
- time is set aside for in-depth staff discussions of achievement, engagement, wellbeing data, and strategies for the continuous improvement of student outcomes
- there is a school-wide culture of continuous data-informed self-evaluation and reflection.

Outstanding

School leaders champion a school-wide culture of evidence-informed decision-making. Practices and processes at the whole-school, team, class, and individual staff level reflect a relentless focus on the purposeful use of data to improve practice. A systematic plan for the ongoing collection, analysis, and use of multiple sources of data across all levels of the school is being rigorously actioned. Well-integrated mechanisms enable centralisation of key data sets, routine data entry, access, and complex analyses. The collaborative use of data is deeply embedded as a school practice. All staff access and use data effectively and consistently to evaluate and enhance their impact. A high priority has been given to professional learning aimed at building individual and collective expertise in data analysis and use. A sophisticated understanding of data and how it is used to effect improvements in student learning is evident across the school. The school's strategies to engage students, families and the wider community reflect a clear commitment to regular use of stakeholder feedback. Students routinely engage in discussions with peers and staff to reflect on their learning using a range of data.

High

School leaders view timely access to reliable data as essential to their effective leadership of the school. There is a widely understood plan for the systematic, ongoing collection of data on student learning, engagement, and wellbeing, including for priority groups and individual students. This plan makes clear the full range of data to be collected, its purpose and how it is to be used. It includes data from standardised and quality classroom assessments and data gathered from students, families and the wider community using a range of strategies. Staff members have been assigned responsibility for implementing elements of the plan, analysing, displaying, discussing, using, and communicating data. Processes are in place to optimise a breadth of data collection and in-depth analysis over time. Staff access, collect, and use a broad range of data to monitor student progress and respond to student needs. Time has been prioritised for focused discussions of data at the whole-school, team, and individual staff level to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies. Leaders set clear expectations for how data should be used to inform effective teaching. Targeted strategies are in place and time is set aside to build teachers' knowledge and skills in data use. Students engage in data-informed discussions about their own learning.

Medium

School leaders pay attention to some data sets about student learning, engagement, and wellbeing, and identify areas in which the school is performing relatively poorly or well. There is a data plan in place that shows the range of data to be collected. However, the purpose and use of each data set is not explicit or widely understood across the school. Data analyses tend to be limited to high-level summaries of performance, which may be specific to priority groups of students. These summaries are communicated to the wider community as required and presented to staff. Infrastructure to support the collection, analysis, visualisation, and storage of data is in place. Systematic processes for data entry, centralisation of records, access, use and/or deep analyses are not evident. Teachers use some assessment data to establish where students are in their learning, but this tends to be at an individual or team level rather than a whole-school approach. There is some teacher collaboration in data use to target teaching to student needs. Opportunities to engage in professional learning to build skills in analysing and interpreting data are provided for some staff. Feedback is sought from stakeholders, including students; however, it is unclear how this information is systematically integrated into school improvement strategies.

Low

School leaders make little use of data as the basis for decision-making. Engagement with data tends to be infrequent and limited to accountability requirements. There is either no data plan or it is being implemented in a minimalist fashion. Leaders do not prioritise the use of available infrastructure to support data collection, access, discussions, and analyses. There are no explicit expectations in relation to staff use of data. Teachers do not systematically gather or analyse a range of quality data, and make little use of evidence to reflect on their teaching. School leaders rarely use data to work with staff to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of strategies. There are few planned opportunities for staff to be actively engaged in conversations with their colleagues about data or to engage in professional learning to build expertise in data analysis and use. Stakeholder involvement in data-informed discussions is limited. Leaders are unable to demonstrate how judgements of student performance and strategies for improvement are underpinned by analysis and discussion of data.

Promoting a culture of 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 families. Diversity is valued and celebrated. There is a strong collegial culture of mutual trust and support among teachers and school leaders, and families are treated as partners in their child's education. The school works to create a culture of continuous improvement for both staff and students. Staff build and maintain a safe, supportive, and orderly learning environment that promotes intellectual rigour.

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

- the culture in the school is reflective of a shared belief that all students will learn successfully and, together, school staff can make a difference to student outcomes
- school staff demonstrate an understanding of the importance of positive, caring, and trusting relationships to student success, and work to build mutually respectful relationships across the school community
- leaders have articulated and are implementing clear school-wide strategies to establish and maintain an orderly environment that supports and encourages learning
- interactions between staff, students, families, and the wider community are caring, respectful, and inclusive
- families are viewed as integral members of the school community and partners in student learning
- staff recognise and value students' varying individual characteristics and backgrounds, and work to implement practices responsive to their diverse needs
- student and staff wellbeing are high priorities in the school and processes are in place to provide both academic and non-academic support to address individual needs
- leaders promote a school-wide culture of learning, collective responsibility, and continuous improvement for both staff and students
- inquiry, creativity, and innovation are encouraged and the school works to create an attractive and stimulating environment that supports and encourages learning
- all students, staff, and families have a sense of belonging to the school community.

Outstanding

The principal and other leaders nurture a school-wide culture of quality learning and continuous improvement. The school ethos is built around high expectations and a commitment to excellence. All staff take collective responsibility for optimising student outcomes. There is a clear sense of optimism that every student will experience success. Collaboration drives continuous refinement in teaching and learning. Staff morale is consistently high. Teachers set high academic standards and place an unrelenting focus on quality learning. Learning environments are focused and vibrant. Instructional time is used effectively. Attendance rates are consistently high. High levels of trust and mutual respect are apparent across the entire school community. Families are valued as partners in student learning. Practices responsive to students' diverse needs are collaboratively planned, proactively implemented, and deeply embedded across the school community. Student voice is actively sought and acted upon and the school values and celebrates a wide range of students' successes. Evidence-informed, impactful strategies are rigorously implemented to optimise wellbeing. There is a happy, optimistic feel to the school and all school community members express a strong sense of belonging and pride.

High

The principal and school leaders promote a belief that staff collectively make a difference to student outcomes. Strategies are in place to support a school-wide shared responsibility for successful student learning. Staff collaborate in the pursuit of continuous improvements to teaching and learning. Staff morale is generally high. Evidence-informed strategies in support of an orderly learning environment are well known and actioned consistently. There is a strong focus on the creation of a culture in which all students are expected to learn successfully, in their own ways and at their own pace. Learning time is valued, attendance rates are high, and instructional environments are productive. Interactions between staff, students, families, and community members are consistently caring and respectful. The school values and celebrates the diverse backgrounds, strengths, and aspirations of its students and embeds practices responsive to student needs. A range of mechanisms is used to capture and action student voice. Families are welcomed as partners in their child's learning. Targeted strategies are in place to further strengthen students' and families' connections to the school. The school has proactively implemented school-wide, evidence-informed processes and structures to promote wellbeing.

Medium

The principal and school leaders have articulated explicit expectations in relation to creating and maintaining an orderly learning environment. Staff, students, and families are aware of these expectations and, in the main, agreed strategies are being implemented. Learning environments are mostly orderly with some interruptions to planned teaching time. A small minority of students have high rates of absenteeism. Some students appear to be minimally engaged in productive learning. Staff express optimism about the difference they can make to student outcomes. Staff morale is generally positive. Staff are open to working cooperatively to refine teaching and learning. Interactions between staff, students, families, and community members are generally caring and respectful. The school provides opportunities for families to participate in organised events, including scheduled time to meet with teachers about their child's learning. There are opportunities for recognition of students' successes and for students to have a voice. Staff recognise students' diverse backgrounds, interests and needs and are supported to implement responsive practices. Some processes and structures for supporting wellbeing across the school are in place.

Low

School-wide strategies to foster an orderly learning environment may not be evident or effectively implemented. A deliberate focus on continuous improvement in teaching and learning is not apparent. Staff often work in isolation from colleagues. They are not convinced that their efforts are making a difference to student outcomes. Morale is low and staff turnover is high. A significant proportion of students are disengaged, may not consistently attend school, and/or exhibit behaviours that are not conducive to a productive learning culture. Interruptions to planned teaching time are frequent. Staff spend a considerable amount of their time responding to behavioural problems. There are few strategies in place to actively strengthen home-school partnerships, including drawing upon families' in-depth knowledge of individual learners. Staff do not consistently recognise and cater to students' diverse backgrounds, interests and needs. Planned opportunities for students to have a voice in the school and/or have their successes acknowledged are infrequent. There is a limited sense of belonging to the school community. Strategies to support staff and/or student wellbeing are generally reactive, and/or lack an evidence base.

Targeting school resources

The school applies its resources (staff and school time, expertise, funds, facilities, materials) in a targeted manner to maximise outcomes for all students. It has school-wide policies, practices, and approaches 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 students.

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

- the school has processes in place to identify student needs and allocates financial, human, and physical resources accordingly
- decisions about resource allocations are informed by ongoing analyses of need using a range of quality data
- resources are prioritised towards evidence-informed strategies aimed at improving outcomes for students
- leaders make the best possible use of available staff expertise, experience, aspirations, and interests to meet the learning needs of all students
- resources are prioritised towards school-wide approaches for students requiring additional or specialist support
- resources are flexibly deployed and monitored to target identified needs
- staff and school time is used efficiently and effectively, and instructional time is prioritised
- available resources are allocated to ensure the physical environment, facilities, and technologies are used to maximise student learning.

Outstanding

School resources are strategically and equitably allocated to provide the conditions needed for sustainable school improvement. Systematic and ongoing data analyses are used to identify student needs, allocate resources, and monitor their impact. Creative school-wide solutions for addressing student needs are in place and there is evidence of positive impact. Strategic planning, rigorous monitoring, and flexible deployment ensures resources are used optimally. Staff time is used efficiently and effectively. Leaders preserve and privilege teaching and learning time. Targeted resourcing enables equitable access to learning for all students. Systematic early identification of students requiring additional support drives flexible resource allocations. The school can demonstrate how resource allocations have led to significant improvements in student outcomes. Resources have been committed over time to maintain and enhance the school's physical environment. Learning spaces are designed and used to support the school's vision for teaching and learning. Available technology is seamlessly and creatively integrated to support teaching and learning across the school.

High

Systematic analyses of student needs inform the allocation of resources. Priority is given to evidence-informed strategies to improve student outcomes. Roles, responsibilities, and expectations regarding the allocation of resources have been articulated and widely shared. The school monitors the impact of its resourcing including school and staff time. Monitoring informs decisions about the ongoing flexible deployment of resources. School-wide resourced approaches are in place to meet the needs of students who may require additional or specialist support. Strategies are evaluated for impact. The school's physical learning environment is maintained and enhanced to support equitable access and effective learning. There is a planned approach to the integration of available technology and its purposeful use across the school.

Medium

The school uses its resources to maintain the effective operation of the school although systematic analyses of student needs may not consistently drive resourcing decisions. Some strategies are in place to monitor the impact of resourcing allocations. Roles and responsibilities in relation to resource management are defined. Leaders plan staff and school time, although consistent monitoring and management may not be evident. Resources are targeted to provide additional or specialist support for identified students. Support interventions are primarily stand-alone initiatives. The school allocates resources to maintain its physical environment. Some learning spaces are used creatively to facilitate student learning. There are some articulated strategies for the use of available technology. Its targeted use varies across the school.

Low

There is lack of clarity/consistency in school processes, expectations, and responsibilities for identifying student needs and allocating resources accordingly. Decisions about how school resources are allocated are not driven by systematic analyses of student needs. Access to resources may not be equitable across the school. There is little strategic oversight as to how school and staff time is managed. Resourcing decisions concerning students requiring additional or specialist support tend to be reactive. Resources and staff expertise are not always directed to support students with the highest needs. The school's physical environment, facilities and available technologies are not utilised effectively and/or maintained in a way that enhances learning.

Building an expert teaching team

The school has found ways to build a school-wide, professional team of highly capable teachers. There is a strong focus on continuous professional learning for all staff and shared responsibility for students' progress in learning. Explicit processes are in place to encourage school-wide collaboration and effective networking with other schools and learning organisations, as well as leadership development opportunities for staff.

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

- the principal and school leadership team work to build a professional learning community characterised by ongoing collaboration and teamwork
- a school-wide plan for professional learning is in place and monitored for impact
- the plan aligns with school improvement priorities and individual staff needs
- school leaders place a high priority on attracting, retaining, and developing the best possible teachers
- teachers continuously work to develop deep understandings of how students learn within particular curriculum areas, including common misconceptions and effective interventions
- teachers in the school are experts in the fields in which they teach and eager to expand their disciplinary knowledge to learn how to improve their current teaching practices
- leaders expect all teachers to be reflective practitioners and be individually and collectively committed to the continuous improvement of teaching to enhance student learning
- the principal and school leaders lead and model professional learning and build networks with other schools and learning organisations
- mechanisms are in place to support internal leadership development
- school leaders ensure that ongoing opportunities are created for teachers to work together and to learn from each other's practices.

Outstanding

School leaders enact their commitment to a school-wide, self-reflective culture focused on continuously improving teaching practices. The school systematically implements a coherent professional learning plan which is tightly aligned to improvement priorities and monitored for impact. Leaders have worked strategically over time to attract, retain, and professionally grow their teaching team, addressing any identified gaps in expertise. All staff collaborate as part of a professional learning community and are deeply committed to the continuous refinement of practice, regardless of their level of experience. Collaboration time is prioritised and spent wisely. Teachers regularly spend time together planning for and assessing learning, engaging in collective professional inquiries as well as participating in and learning from peer observations, mentoring, and coaching opportunities. All teachers have an in-depth understanding of curriculum areas they teach, as well as typical student developmental pathways. They are eager to keep up-to-date with new developments in their fields, share expertise with others within and across schools and learning networks, and are supported to continue further study. Leaders prioritise staff involvement in planning for and leading professional learning. Opportunities for professional learning are differentiated according to individual staff aspirations, interests, and levels of experience and expertise. Leaders implement targeted strategies to nurture and develop staff leadership capabilities in authentic contexts, supported by opportunities for reflection.

High

School leaders see the development of a school-wide, professional team of highly capable staff as central to improving outcomes for all students. They regularly lead and model professional learning. There is a planned approach to professional learning, aligned with improvement priorities and the individual needs of teachers. Professional learning is evaluated for impact. Strategies are in place to attract, retain and develop staff with specific expertise and to address identified school needs. Leaders intentionally build a professional learning community. Teams meet regularly and purposefully to learn from each other. Mentoring, coaching, peer observation, and the purposeful building of professional networks are prioritised. Staff are engaged in collaborative reflections with their peers. Leaders encourage staff to pursue further study. Teachers regularly participate in tailored professional learning designed to expand their disciplinary knowledge and deepen understandings of how students learn. Leaders foster internal leadership development. Targeted strategies are in place to support capability building for staff undertaking leadership responsibilities.

Medium

There is a planned approach to professional learning. Staff are encouraged to work in teams and learn from each other. Leaders are supportive of staff networking with other schools and learning organisations. Staff regularly undertake professional learning activities. These are not necessarily aligned to school priorities and individual needs or monitored for impact. Leaders work to attract, retain, and develop staff suited to the school context. Recruitment strategies tend to address short-term needs. There are some opportunities for staff to lead professional learning and participate in peer observation, coaching and mentoring. Processes are in place to identify and address teacher professional learning needs specific to how students learn in curriculum areas as well as disciplinary knowledge. The school provides opportunities for staff with potential to take on leadership responsibilities. Leaders in acting roles are supported to build their capability.

Low

The school's approach to professional learning is not centrally coordinated, driven by strategic direction, or evaluated for impact. Stand-alone professional learning activities are undertaken by some teachers. There is little evidence that school leaders are proactive in the recruitment, retention, and development of staff. The development of a professional learning community with planned opportunities for regular teamwork, professional discussion and reflection does not appear to be a driving consideration of leaders. Leaders are rarely involved in leading and modelling professional learning. Staff may have some involvement in determining their professional learning foci, although this is primarily through personal reflections in isolation. Opportunities for staff to receive feedback on their practice via peer observations, mentoring, and coaching are incidental and predominantly initiated by individual teachers. Teachers may experience barriers to accessing tailored professional learning to deepen their understanding of how students learn in curriculum areas and/or expand their disciplinary knowledge. Staff tend to be given opportunities to undertake leadership responsibilities when a need arises.

Leading systematic curriculum implementation

The school has a coherent and comprehensive plan for implementation of the prescribed curriculum that ensures consistent teaching and learning expectations and a clear reference for monitoring and communicating learning progress over time. The plan embeds evidence-based teaching, learning, and assessment practices. It focuses on building students' disciplinary knowledge and skills, as well as broader capabilities and dispositions. It has been designed through consultation with the school community and is flexibly implemented to ensure responsiveness to individual student and contextual needs. The curriculum implementation plan is regularly evaluated and refined to maximise student outcomes.

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

- the school has an explicit, coherent, and sequenced whole-school plan for curriculum implementation that is widely shared with stakeholders
- school leaders and teachers understand and work within the school's shared curriculum expectations, participating in collaborative processes to ensure alignment between curriculum, teaching, learning, and assessment
- curriculum is developed in consultation with students, families, and the wider community to ensure flexibility, relevance, meaningful adaptation to local contexts, and responsiveness to students' learning needs, interests, and backgrounds
- the school's curriculum implementation plan focuses on building students' disciplinary knowledge and skills, as well as broader capabilities and dispositions
- assessment processes are aligned with the school's curriculum plan and designed to establish where students are in their learning and monitor learning progress over time
- strategies and processes are in place to provide students and their families with information about curriculum intentions, student achievement, and progress over time
- opportunities for professional learning are provided to build staff capability in curriculum implementation and review
- the school has processes in place to review and refine curriculum to maximise outcomes for all students.

Outstanding

The school has a coherent and comprehensive plan for implementing the prescribed curriculum that reflects the school's vision. There are structures and processes in place which enable continuity of learning across the years of schooling. Curriculum expectations are well understood by key stakeholders. Leaders and teachers plan collaboratively to ensure alignment between the school's curriculum implementation plan, teaching, learning, assessment, and reporting. Students' learning needs, interests, and aspirations are at the centre of curriculum implementation practices. Contextual needs are considered in consultation with students, families, and the wider community, driving responsive and flexible curriculum implementation. Planned learning experiences reflect a sustained emphasis on developing students' conceptual understandings and skills in transferring and applying disciplinary knowledge to meaningful contexts and problems. Assessment practices enable teachers to routinely draw on quality evidence of student learning and progress to optimise achievement of curriculum outcomes. School-wide processes are in place that support consistency in professional judgements. Teachers and school leaders regularly engage in rich discussions with students and their families about achievement and progress over time. School leaders work alongside teachers to coordinate and review curriculum implementation and professional learning to ensure alignment with evidence-informed practice and enhanced student outcomes.

High

The school's documented plan for implementing the prescribed curriculum reflects shared values about teaching, learning, and assessment. The plan is communicated widely to stakeholders. There are well-established structures and processes that support collaborative planning. School leaders play an active role in monitoring alignment of the curriculum across learning areas and continuity of learning across the years of schooling. Teachers regularly draw on their knowledge of individual students to ensure that learning experiences respond to students' starting points, learning needs, and backgrounds. Curriculum planning is regularly informed by consultation with key stakeholders to be flexible and responsive to contextual needs. Planned learning experiences prioritise the building of students' conceptual understandings and disciplinary skills, as well as capabilities and dispositions. Assessment practices reflect intended curriculum outcomes and are used to monitor and enhance student progress. Staff regularly communicate with students and their families about achievement and progress over time. Conversations focus on how families can actively support learning. Professional learning opportunities that support curriculum implementation and review are ongoing and accessible to all leaders and teachers. Leaders and teachers regularly review and refine curriculum implementation.

Medium

The school has a documented plan for implementing the prescribed curriculum. There are emerging structures and processes that support teachers to plan collaboratively and leaders to monitor curriculum alignment across learning areas, as well as the continuity of learning across the years of schooling. Teaching plans allow some flexibility for students and reference their starting points, learning needs, interests, and backgrounds. When localisation of curriculum occurs, it is generally not informed by consultation with students, families, and the wider community. Planned learning experiences focus predominantly on the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge, with some opportunity for application. Teachers regularly use assessment to make judgements against curriculum outcomes and monitor student progress. Formal and informal processes are used to communicate achievement to families and students with some guidance for families on actions they might take. Professional learning opportunities are provided to support curriculum implementation and review. Leaders encourage teachers to review and refine curriculum implementation.

Low

School leaders and teachers have limited familiarity with prescribed curriculum documents. Planning occurs at the level of the individual teacher and teaching team. Teaching plans lack flexibility and consideration of students' starting points, learning needs, interests, and backgrounds. Students, families, and the wider community have limited input into curriculum implementation planning. Planned learning experiences largely focus on coverage of specified content. Assessment is mainly used to make judgements about student achievement of curriculum intentions. Reporting of achievement is infrequent and comprises high-level summaries of performance with little guidance on how families might assist learning. Teachers have limited opportunities for professional learning to support curriculum implementation and review. Few processes are in place to review and refine curriculum implementation.

Differentiating teaching and learning

The school places a high priority on differentiated teaching and learning to ensure that students are learning successfully. Teaching practices across the school reflect the belief that all students can make excellent progress regardless of their starting points, if they are given appropriate learning opportunities and necessary support. Teachers closely monitor individual student progress and tailor classroom practices to best meet student needs. Targeted interventions are in place for students identified as requiring additional support.

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

- there is a school-wide shared understanding of, and commitment to, differentiated teaching and learning
- 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 given appropriate learning opportunities with the necessary support
- teachers use evidence from a range of assessments to establish where students are in their learning as a starting point for differentiating their teaching
- teachers design learning experiences that reflect students' learning needs, levels of readiness, interests, aspirations, and motivations to ensure that all students are appropriately engaged, challenged, and extended
- the perspectives of students, families, and relevant professionals inform adjustments to teaching, learning, and assessment to best meet student needs
- teachers continuously monitor individual student progress and adjust their teaching in response to evidence of student progress and feedback
- teachers encourage and assist students to monitor their own learning and to set goals for future learning
- targeted interventions are in place for students identified as requiring additional support.

Outstanding

There is a school-wide commitment to all students making excellent progress, irrespective of their starting points for learning. A shared vision for differentiated teaching and learning drives classroom practices. Creating accessible, engaging, and challenging learning experiences for all students is an embedded way of working in the school. Teachers proactively plan their teaching approaches based on in-depth and ongoing analyses of a range of evidence, including input from students, families, and professional staff. Assessment is accessible to all students and used effectively to monitor individual progress over time and to make adjustments in response to identified needs. Students continuously engage in cycles of goal setting, monitoring their progress and setting new and challenging goals. Rigorous and impactful strategies for supporting students that require targeted interventions are embedded. The perspectives of students, families, and relevant professional staff shape timely adjustments to best meet student needs.

High

Clear expectations and agreed ways of working to differentiate teaching and learning are evident. Staff act on the premise that for students to learn successfully, teachers must tailor learning to students' learning needs, interests, characteristics, and backgrounds. Evidence from a range of accessible assessment methods is used as a starting point for differentiation and to measure progress. Ongoing monitoring of individual student progress and student feedback informs adjustments to teaching. Teacher planning is responsive to students' varying needs. Student work reflects differentiated learning and assessment tasks where appropriate. Students regularly determine and/or co-construct individualised goals, reflect on progress towards these, and set new goals based on progress and success. Students who require additional support are systematically identified using a range of evidence. Staff regularly consult with specialists, families, and students to inform implementation of a range of evidence-informed adjustments and/or interventions.

Medium

School leaders articulate an expectation that teachers differentiate teaching and learning. Whole-school agreed ways of working have not been established. Staff recognise that students differ in many ways and seek to respond to their varying learning needs, interests, characteristics, and backgrounds. Teacher planning includes the use of some differentiated strategies to respond to observable learning needs. Some teachers use assessment data to establish where students are in their learning, monitor progress, and inform adjustments to teaching. Students are given opportunities to reflect on their own progress and aspirations, but do not routinely engage in personalised goal setting. Processes are in place to identify students who require additional support, and efforts are made to respond to their needs. Consultation with families about adjustments is predominantly limited to when required.

Low

There does not appear to be a school-wide shared vision or approach for differentiated teaching and learning. Information about students may not be readily provided, easily accessed, and/or utilised as starting points for differentiated teaching. Planned learning experiences are uniform, with little or no flexibility to respond to students' learning needs, interests, and backgrounds. Instructional approaches and learning experiences are mainly designed to cater for students performing at the minimum expected level. There tends to be an acceptance that some students will not be successful learners. Students are provided with some opportunities to choose topics for assessment tasks. Interventions for students requiring additional support are often devised by teachers without consultation, guidance, or assistance and are rarely evaluated for impact.

Implementing effective pedagogical practices

The 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 and establish and communicate clear expectations concerning the use of evidence-informed teaching practices in all classrooms. All teachers understand and use effective teaching strategies to ensure that every student is engaged, challenged, and learning successfully. Implementation of effective pedagogical practices is facilitated through purposeful collaboration. Leaders work alongside teachers to draw on a range of evidence to evaluate and continuously refine pedagogical practices to maximise their impact on student learning.

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

- the principal has clearly articulated their expectations for the school-wide use of effective, evidence-informed teaching strategies
- school leaders and teachers keep abreast of research on effective teaching practices
- school leaders and teachers purposefully collaborate in discussing, modelling, observing, and providing constructive feedback on teaching practice
- teachers use a range of evidence-informed teaching strategies, including:
 - setting high expectations for every student's progress and ambitious goals for improvement
 - supporting student understanding of learning goals and what it means to be successful
 - engaging in regular improvement-focused teacher–student and student–student feedback interactions
 - fostering students' beliefs in their own capabilities to learn successfully and their understanding of the relationship between effort and success
 - creating classroom and applied learning environments in which all students are engaged, challenged, feel safe to take risks, and are supported to learn
 - explicit and guided instruction
 - questioning to gauge and stimulate students' thinking
 - promoting deep learning by emphasising underlying principles, concepts, and big ideas
 - deliberately building on previous learning and assisting students to see the continuity in their learning over time
- school leaders and teachers draw on a range of evidence to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and make enhancements to practice.

Outstanding

The principal promotes a shared responsibility for continuously driving improvements in pedagogical practice throughout the school. School leaders and staff demonstrate a strong conviction that improved pedagogical practice is the key to improved student learning. School leaders and teachers are committed to identifying, understanding, and implementing effective teaching practices. Teaching strategies that have been demonstrated through research and practice to be highly effective are prioritised. There is an explicit expectation that all students are actively engaged, appropriately challenged, and prepared to take risks in their learning. Deep learning is enabled through a shared understanding of learning intentions and what quality looks like, progressively building students' conceptual understanding, effective questioning to gauge and stimulate student thinking, and feedback-informed dialogues. Leaders and teachers regularly engage in evidence-informed discussions about practice. Teachers routinely draw on feedback from students and colleagues to critically reflect on and continuously refine their practice. School leaders and staff collaboratively evaluate the impact of pedagogical practices on student learning, and share findings and recommendations across their networks.

High

The principal is committed to and communicates expectations regarding continuous improvement in teaching practices throughout the school. The principal and other school leaders have established an environment where staff regularly engage in modelling, observing, and providing constructive feedback on colleagues' pedagogical practices. High expectations for all students' learning and what students are expected to learn and be able to do are explicitly communicated across the school. Teachers foster deep learning by emphasising concepts, underlying principles, and big ideas. Instruction is differentiated and students are provided with timely opportunities for feedback to guide next steps and learning progress. Staff keep abreast of research on effective practices. Teachers regularly engage in collaborative reflection about the effectiveness of pedagogical practices.

Medium

The principal is explicit about their desire to see the use of effective pedagogical practices across the school but is less clear about the nature of these practices. Staff discussion of effective and evidenced-informed pedagogical practices is contained within teaching teams. Some leaders and colleagues observe and provide informal feedback on teaching practice. High expectations for students' progress in learning are not explicitly communicated across the school. Teachers identify learning goals when planning, although these are not routinely reflected in teaching or made clear to students. There is an over-reliance on certain pedagogical practices, with limited tailoring of pedagogical strategies to suit the student cohort. There is some use of feedback to guide teaching and learning. Staff and teams may consider the evidence base of different pedagogical strategies but do not collaboratively evaluate the effectiveness of selected strategies.

Low

The principal does not appear to have strong views on the characteristics of effective teaching or seek to improve pedagogical practices across the school. There is no obvious school-wide discussion or consideration of effective pedagogical practices. The principal and other school leaders spend little time modelling, observing, or providing feedback on teaching practice. Pedagogy is viewed largely as the responsibility of teachers. Teaching staff use pedagogical practices that are not necessarily evidence informed. There is a lack of clarity about what students are expected to know and be able to do, minimal explicit and guided instruction, limited aspirations for student progress, and little attention to individual learning needs. There is limited use of feedback or evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching strategies to guide teaching and learning.

Building school-community partnerships

The school actively seeks ways to build a strong connection with its local and wider community to enhance student learning, engagement, wellbeing, and opportunity. Partnerships with a range of stakeholders including education and training institutions, businesses, and community organisations are strategically established to address identified student needs. These arrangements provide access to experiences and/or physical or virtual support and resources not available within the school. Families are recognised as integral members of the school community and partners in their child's education. Partnerships are actively monitored to ensure they achieve intended outcomes and are embedded in the school's operation.

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

- the school builds physical and/or virtual partnerships with families, community stakeholders and organisations, local businesses, and service providers including allied health and social support to improve opportunities and outcomes for all students
- the school identifies community partners based on their potential to contribute to improved student learning, engagement and/or wellbeing
- the school and identified partner(s) are committed to the purpose and objectives of the partnership and collaborate to plan joint activities
- appropriate resources are committed to ensure the effectiveness and success of partnerships
- partners have clarity about roles and responsibilities and are involved in ongoing collaborative decision-making and regular evaluation of joint initiatives
- goals, progress, and achievements are systematically and regularly monitored and refined as required
- partnerships have become embedded in the culture of the school community and partner organisations.

Outstanding

The school strategically draws upon, as well as contributes to, the local and wider community. Staff work intentionally in close and trusted partnerships with families, institutions, businesses, and community organisations to enrich student learning experiences and outcomes. Partnerships are deliberately curated, goal-oriented, reciprocal and an integral part of the school's operation. Partnerships are driven by in-depth analyses of student needs. Careful consideration has been given to planning the details of partnership initiatives including clarifying roles and responsibilities and ensuring that there is ongoing and effective communication. All parties have committed resources to ensure the sustainability of initiatives. School-community partnerships are successfully implemented and there is clear evidence that they are having the intended impact. Robust evaluation of initiatives drives ongoing planning.

High

The school has established mutually beneficial partnerships with the local and wider community with the express purpose of improving outcomes for students. Families are considered as integral members of the school community. Partners have a high level of understanding of, and commitment to, the purpose of the partnership and its objectives. Roles and responsibilities have been clearly defined. There is evidence that partnerships are being implemented as intended. Staff collaborate effectively with partners to plan, implement, resource, and sustain partnership initiatives. Trust, respect, and reciprocity between parties enables partnership success. Regular monitoring and evaluation of progress towards goals inform future partnership plans and activities.

Medium

The school has local and wider community partnerships, but these tend to be initiated by individuals, driven by mutual convenience and/or limited to one-off events and initiatives rather than part of a coherent, jointly planned program. Individual staff seek and establish partnerships with families, community stakeholders and organisations to access resources that can enhance student outcomes. Some connections with local businesses and organisations are providing students with access to specific expertise and opportunities not available within the school. There is little evidence that partnership arrangements are regularly monitored and evaluated for impact.

Low

The school operates in relative isolation from its local and wider community. There is no evidence of strategically planned partnerships with other institutions or organisations. Contacts with families or community members, other education and training institutions, local businesses, and community organisations, when they occur, are limited to isolated events. There is little evidence that the school draws upon the available resources within the local or wider community to support student learning, engagement, and wellbeing. Individual staff members may have established connections with community organisations.

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