

Continuous Improvement Models  
that focus on teaching and learning



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Independent  
Schools of SA

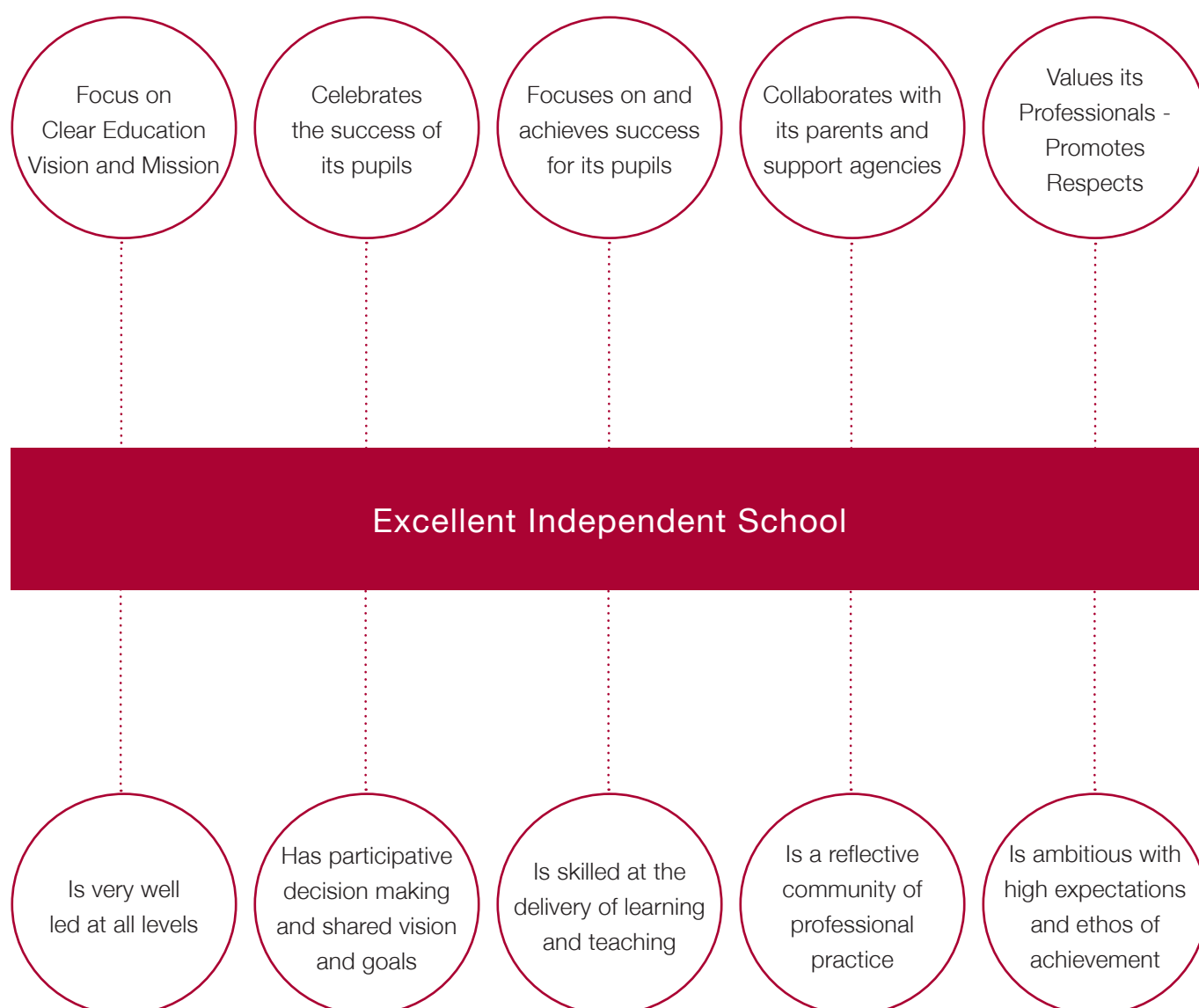
## | Acknowledgements |

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## | An Excellent Independent School |

*How does your school rate?*

“ A Quality Framework Helps to Clarify and Achieve the Goals; ”



*(Ian Gamble, 2011)*

## | Overview |

This Paper describes four school review models that form part of a continuous improvement approach. Each of the four models has a strong focus on enhanced teaching and learning. Each model is described in some detail and includes a précis and comment on its relevance or application to schools in the Independent sector, particularly for AISSA's non-systemic schools.

Model 1 | External Review - *Communities Making a Difference* review facilitated by Quality Insight Consulting Pty Ltd and led by Dr Neville Highett.

Model 2 | Reflective/Capacity Building - *IDEAS* program provided by University of Southern Queensland and led by Professor Frank Crowther.

Model 3 | Action Research - *Productive Schools Productive Teaching* program (AISSA).

Model 4 | Self Review and Evaluation – *ACT School Improvement Framework*.

The AISSA will conduct a workshop to provide further information on the models described in this paper and on opportunities that will be available for schools to participate in a number of different school review programs in 2012 and beyond.

## | Introduction |

The concept of continuous improvement in teaching and learning underpins the AISSA's programs and initiatives outlined in the *Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership SA Implementation Plan*. AISSA's objective is to provide opportunities for all schools to enhance their performance, achievement and student engagement through a process methodology controlled by each school that focuses on enhanced teaching and learning. This approach recognises that change only occurs when there is whole school endorsement of and commitment to a change process that is placed within its own local context and ethos.

The AISSA committed to develop an organisational school review strategy which would incorporate a continuous improvement approach to teaching and learning and would assist school leaders to obtain a sufficient understanding of the options, implementation issues and potential outcomes of a range of models so that they were in a position to make decisions about continuous improvement programs and activities that were appropriate for their schools.

It was not intended that the AISSA would promote one school review model only, but rather would provide information on a range of models for its member schools.

This paper outlines four different school review models that adopt a continuous improvement approach. Each model has a strong focus on the quality of teaching and learning and includes a brief comment on its relevance and application to Independent schools and systems.

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*All the school review models described in this paper have a specific focus on teaching and learning to improve the educational outcomes of all students and not on the regulation, compliance, registration, or accreditation of schools.*

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### What is continuous improvement?

Continuous improvement, as an approach to enhancing school performance, is relevant to all schools. For example, the ACT School Improvement Framework (2011) starts with the premise that it is building on excellence. It also argues that rather than being content to accept high achievement, excellent schools 'ask questions about student outcomes and about school practices that are impacting on the achievement levels.'

Whilst, the concept of continuous improvement was, and in some instances still is, associated with 'underperforming' schools, many Independent schools are now interested in strategies that will move their school's educational outcomes from 'good' to 'excellent' and that these outcomes will be achieved by all students within a continuous improvement framework.

In the 80s and 90s there was a significant focus on 'effective schools' to ensure that they were delivering a consistent quality of education. The need to ascertain that schools were 'effective' was linked to an increased need for public accountability and regulation rather than a focus on the improvement of teaching and learning to maximise the

achievements of all students. However, it is now becoming more closely associated with education through the strengthened focus on school improvement and is relevant to all schools as an approach to continually enhancing performance.

Various terms are used to describe continuous improvement in an educational context. These include school improvement, school renewal, whole school renewal, school reform, etc. Spinks and Caldwell (2008) use the term 'transformation' in the context of school improvement and state that a school

*....has been transformed if there has been significant, systematic and sustained change that secures success for all its students.*

Currently, the AISSA is supporting a number of schools to participate in school reviews as part of a school improvement process that focuses on enhanced teaching and learning. Seven schools are undertaking external school reviews as part of the *Communities Making a Difference* National Partnership. Another group of schools has participated in the *AISSA Productive Schools Productive Teaching* program in 2010 and 2011. In Semester two, 2011 some further schools will commence the IDEAS school improvement program.

To ensure a connected and coherent approach across the sector the concept of 'continuous improvement' is now included in many of AISSA's ongoing professional learning programs. These programs and associated activities are either directly funded through the AISSA budget or through other external programs that are administered and managed by the AISSA. These include the Targeted Programs, the Australian Government Quality Teacher Program, the Smarter Schools National Partnerships and the AISSA Centre of Excellence.

## | Why is a continuous improvement culture relevant for all schools? |

### “ Why the Increased Concern for School Improvement? ”



- **Internationally** | Education is increasingly high profile
- **Entitlement** | Students are entitled to high quality education
- **Changing society** | speed of change/technology
- **Economic** | competitiveness
- **Expenditure** | Higher spend on this key public service
- **Value for money** | what return for the expenditure?

A strengthened focus on continuous improvement is relevant to all schools because they are now operating in significantly changing contexts that reflect shifting global attitudes and community expectations in relation to the outcomes of education.

Gamble (2011), in recognising these changes outlined the above factors as major reasons for the increased concern for, and interest in, school improvement.

In addition, the OECD (2010) research has found that learning is most powerful when it is learner-centred; structured and well designed; profoundly personalised; inclusive and social. The considerable body of research now available indicates that the major features of 21st Century learning include but are not limited to the following:

- Learning is student centred and shared within the learning community
- Learning is personalised and flexible to engage all students – the system fits the individual rather than the individual fitting the system
- Real life experiences and real life learning forms the basis of educational experience for all students
- Teachers have wider pedagogical skills with an increased focus on using technology
- Multiple learning pathways are pursued simultaneously by some students in more than one school or institution ie flexible curriculum and delivery, and diversity of choices

- Strong, positive leadership
- Increased focus on skills, values and attitudes for 21<sup>st</sup> C living

In the Independent school sector, community expectations of schools have also changed over recent years. These changes can be attributed to a number of factors including the greater expectations of parents; increased emphasis on student achievement and educational outcomes particularly in early and primary years; levels of student literacy and numeracy in the middle and senior years; a stronger focus on retention and completion of senior secondary qualifications; increased use of technology; acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary for post schooling options; increases in the school leaving age resulting in students being required to stay in school longer; increased public accountability; and greater diversity in the parent and student body.

Bywaters & Hudson (2010) found that:

“

*Schools now operate in a culture of relentless expectations. They serve a new generation of highly skilled consumers of services; legally and socially savvy parents and students who are living and communicating in a virtual and social world that is totally out of the experience of most educators.*

”

In response to these changes, many Independent schools are now looking to continuous improvement models where processes and strategies are put in place to not only improve the outcomes of underperformance but to move ‘good’ or ‘cruising’ schools to ‘excellent’ schools.

Fullan (2001) refers to “cruising schools” as those where achievement may have more to do with the socioeconomic status of the school population rather than the quality of teaching delivered by the school. He asserts that

*in cruising schools average results could be improved significantly, since effectively they (schools) are often marking time rather than striving to prepare their students for the changing world into which they are heading”.*

Fullan’s observation may be an indication of the students’ lack of engagement rather than their inability to achieve at high levels.

Indeed, some researchers in the UK have moved the focus of continuous improvement from ‘achievement’ to ‘engagement’. For example, two initiatives undertaken by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation together with the UK Innovation Unit are exploring how personalised learning and teaching strategies can impact on whole school improvement through enhanced student engagement.

The reason for this research was a recognition by some key educators and other organisations that the standards-led school improvement models currently in place in the UK were unlikely to lead to any more significant improvements in performance and a further acknowledgement that the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner learns best when the focus is on ‘vibrant engagement’ not simply ‘achievement’. This does not mean that schools should not have a strong focus on school improvement. Rather it recognises that schools that already have high levels of achievement and performance against local or national performance indicators should ensure that they are catering not only for the “visibly disengaged” but

also for the “disengaged achievers” who may be performing well academically, are not behaviour problems, but do not reach their full potential or move on to higher or further education.

This approach requires a renewed focus on what is meant by “pedagogy” in the context of a 21st Century learner. The studies undertaken by the UK Innovation Unit (2008) have redefined “pedagogy” as learning which is deep (reflective, metacognitive, and beyond course requirements); authentic (real-world contexts and meaningful to students); and motivational (task/goal oriented, and inspires students to further learning).

This means that there must be a greater understanding of what happens in the teaching and learning process in classrooms and in other places, and a deeper understanding of how students engage with their learning to ultimately achieve success. The four models described in this paper have a particular focus on the quality of teaching and learning in the school.

The OECD (August 2011) report on Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education in Australia included a chapter on school evaluation and identified some strengths and challenges currently present in education jurisdictions across Australia. The Report noted that some schools are now evaluating their performance as part of a school improvement strategy rather than just for compliance purposes. The report also identified some future policy development priorities in the area of school evaluation, including a stronger alignment between school self-evaluation and school external performance reviews; and ensuring a focus on the quality of teaching and learning in both internal and external school reviews.

## | What are the challenges associated with continuous improvement? |

Whether a school is engaged in a school review process to assess how it is performing against local or national performance indicators, or whether the school is moving from 'good' to 'excellent', feedback from Independent schools involved in continuous improvement initiatives indicates that even the most straightforward goals for school improvement, innovation and/or change can be fraught with obstacles of tradition, surprised or resistant staff, excessive "busyness" of the daily operations of the school, or simply the old problem of tradition and habit.

For example, Bywaters & Hudson (2010) found that many schools wanting to implement change were often hindered by the complexity of working with embedded attitudes and structures, and the work habits of staff within a strong cultural and traditional code exemplified by the attitude of "this is the way we do things around here!"

They also found that

*..... to make strong school improvement and reform, school leaders need an understanding of the interconnectedness of sound human resource management policies, quality curriculum frameworks, best practice pedagogical agreements about how teaching is to be done in the school, expert supervision and high expectations of teaching, authentic and skilled assessment of learning of all students and a commitment to quality school improvement based on data.*

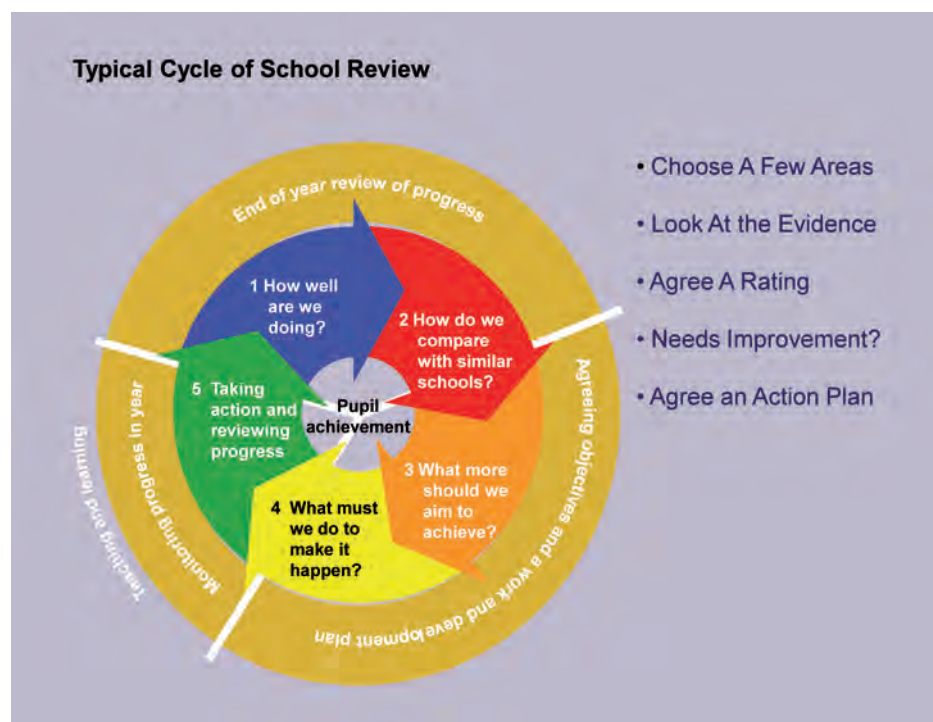
Until all those processes are embedded into the culture and professional practice of all staff, strong change management and school improvement can be a difficult and vexed process that often gets abandoned or overwhelmed before the goals are achieved.

In summary, a focus on continuous improvement is relevant to all schools as an approach to continually enhancing school performance.

Further it also means that school leaders need to be aware that any change related to school improvement and innovation can represent an ambitious and challenging proposition for all involved.

Finally, whatever continuous improvement model or process is adopted it must be seen as a long term commitment that is built in to the culture of the school and integrated into the day to day work of all school personnel - otherwise it will be seen as a 'bolt on' that is not relevant to the day-to-day work of teachers and learners.

## | School Review Models and Frameworks |



(Ian Gamble, 2011)

School review models can vary from wholly internal self-assessment models to wholly external reviews, whilst others focus on self assessment and reflection with an external validation process included.

Fundamentally, the different school review models all address the following questions:

- Where do we want our school to go?
- How are we going to get there?
- How will we know how well we are travelling?
- Is everybody travelling in the same direction?

School readiness is an important factor in the timing of school reviews whether internal, external or a combination of both. Whatever model is adopted the responsibility for

overall implementation and monitoring must reside at the school level thus encouraging school ownership of the process.

Hopkins (1995, p13) in undertaking a review of the processes in the New South Wales Department of School Education found that:

*The perceived effectiveness /internal conditions of the school was a reasonable predictor of the level of impact of the review. Put another way the more ready the school was for a review the more the school got out of it. The poorer the organisational condition of the school the less impact the review had. Below a certain level of effectiveness the review had no impact at all*

Given this finding, careful consideration of the type of school review model to be adopted and its timing is warranted. If it is to be successful, the right pre-conditions must be in place prior to commencement of the review.

Many school review models include specific frameworks that guide schools through the improvement process and help to clarify and achieve goals.

Many of the frameworks focus on self-assessment (or reflection on practice) and have an accompanying Rating Scale or Self-Assessment Matrix. The Scale or Matrix is based on the domains or elements of each School Improvement Framework and usually has a four or five-step continuum. This continuum is used to assist the school in assessing its level of development, its progress and setting of new goals.

Examples of such frameworks include the Scottish Journey to Excellence Framework; the ACT School Improvement Framework; Sydney Catholic Schools *Towards 2010* School Review and Improvement Framework; and the Victorian School Accountability and Improvement Framework.

The ACT Framework has five levels achievement whereas the Sydney Catholic Schools Framework has seven levels.

Sources of these frameworks are listed at the end of this Paper.

## | Model 1 - External School Review Model |

*This is an external school review model conducted by an expert team. It is highly collaborative and involves interaction with students, parents, staff, leadership, Board /Council and the wider school community.*

*A School Report is prepared with recommendations from which the school prepares a 2-3 year School Improvement Plan. The Review is completed in approximately 5 days (depending on size of school).*

*A School Reference Group works with the external review team. The model provides external endorsement of the school's strengths and achievements.*

*The cost of the external review is approximately \$20,000. National Partnership funds were allocated for 7 schools through the Communities Making a Difference National Partnership to participate in an external review.*

*This model is suitable for systemic and non-systemic schools.*

This external school review model has been used by the AISSA for seven schools participating in the *Communities Making a Difference (CMaD)* National Partnership. The model is based on the work initially done by the Education Review Unit in SA but then further developed by the Quality Assurance Unit in the NSW Department of Education.

The current team led by Dr Neville Highett may be available to work with schools wishing to undertake an external review similar to that described in this paper. There may also be other external education experts able to undertake similar reviews.

In the current model, a School Review Leader together with a School Review Team undertakes the review over a few days to a week. All team members are external to the school and the size of the team is dependent on student enrolments and staff numbers.

Initially, the School Review Leader meets with the Principal to discuss the nature of the review including logistical arrangements and the performance data that will be provided to the School Review Team.

Prior to the first visit a range of school performance data is analysed and is used to identify questions or areas to be addressed during the review.

In summary, school performance data could include all or some of the following:

- School strategic plan
- School self-evaluation
- Parent, Staff and Student Surveys
- NGSRB School Report
- NAPLAN data
- Any standardised test data
- Other assessment data
- SACE completion and achievement
- VET data
- Teacher judgements
- Student Destination Data
- Attendance, suspension, behaviour incidents, staff profiles, professional learning activities, newsletters, annual reports, etc
- Curriculum documentation
- Timetable
- My School website
- School website
- Other school policies and procedures

During the initial meeting with the Principal to prepare for the review, an opportunity is given to the school to identify additional focus areas. For example, the school might have been working on the development of an agreed approach to the teaching of science. Hence, during the review this issue would be explored to gauge progress and the degree of coherence across the school. However, every review will have a strong focus on the quality of teaching and learning.

The School Review would normally focus on all or some of the following areas:

- Strengths of the School
- School leadership
- Teaching and learning
- Curriculum
- Assessment
- Professional Learning
- Performance Management and Appraisal

- Students
- Parents
- Staff
- Governance
- Communication
- Decision Making

The initial planning meeting will also discuss operational matters as:

- The school's mission, vision and priorities for development.
- Notification of the review to the school community, including an invitation for the community to participate.
- The schedule for discussion with students, parents and staff, the School Reference Group and an appropriate time and location for the meeting where the findings of the review will be outlined.
- A location for team members that ensures confidentiality when they are meeting with respondents.
- A place for the School Reference Group to meet each night.
- Arrangements to introduce School Review Team members to the staff on the first day.

In every review the School Review Team members explore with students, staff members and parent/ caregivers the following general areas:

- The strengths of the school
- The communication strategies used by the school
- The decision making processes and the engagement of students, parents and staff in the process
- Teaching and learning outcomes and the reporting of student progress
- Satisfaction levels with the operation of the school
- Suggestions for improvement in the overall performance of the school

With students, the following issues are also explored

- How do they get feedback about their learning
- What are their learning strengths and why
- What do teachers do that assists with their learning
- What capabilities do good teachers have

With staff members, the following matters are also explored

- What are the teaching and learning expectations in the school
- What feedback do they receive about their work and performance
- What professional learning opportunities exist
- The management and staff participation in school improvement strategies

## Communicating with Parents

Prior to the actual review information is provided to the school community and parents and caregivers are invited to participate.

A random sample of families is specifically invited to meet with individual team members for a one on one discussion. The sample size varies from 25%-10% of families depending on school size. Those who are not chosen are given the opportunity to attend an open parent meeting on one evening during the review. If more than 5 parents attend they are split into small groups. Small group methodology is used in this meeting to ensure all have the opportunity for input.

The parent meeting is scheduled into an appropriate venue in the school depending on numbers.

## School Reference Group

The principal is encouraged to form a small School Reference Group which typically consists of the Principal, a senior staff member, two staff members (one teacher and one non-teacher), a Board/Council member and a parent. At the end of each day, the School Review Team meets with the Principal and the School Reference Group to debrief on the day's activities and to discuss progress. During the review they assist with the analysis of the findings. Given that they hear all of the data being debriefed they have a very good understanding of the emerging issues and readily come to see what recommendations need to be made. They also assist during the debriefing process as they can move among the teachers explaining the findings and the strength of the evidence about each issue.

The School Reference Group plays a critical role once the review is over. The members have a very thorough understanding of the data and hence can provide valuable leadership and input during the development of an implementation strategy and school improvement plan, especially when deciding on the priority order for addressing the various recommendations.

## Communication with Staff/Board/students

The meeting for all staff, senior students and Board/ Council members prior to the departure of the review team is a critical facet of the review. The visual impact of seeing the data, the ability for individuals to read all of the statements, seeing their own input and checking how their perceptions mesh with the thoughts of others, and seeing the degree of congruence between parent, student and staff input creates the momentum to address the review findings.

During the meeting, time is provided for all present to read the findings displayed. Following this a summary of the data is presented and the areas where recommendations will be

made are identified. This is to ensure that there will be no surprises when the final report is received at the school.

Once the School Review Team leader has drafted the report an opportunity is provided for the Principal to respond to it. This process is used to tighten the recommendations so as to assist the Principal with the implementation processes that will be put in place to achieve the required outcomes.

### Final Report and Recommendations

The final School Report focuses on the strengths as well as weaknesses of the school. It recognises school achievements and comments on the 'value add' to students. It provides a set of Recommendations based on the findings of the Review.

The preliminary School Review Report is shared firstly with the School Reference Group and then at the open meeting where the data, findings and recommendations are presented to the school community.

The final report is received back at the school within one month of the review and is provided to the Principal and School Board/Council. It is a public report and most schools make multiple copies available in the resource centre for parents to borrow. Many schools place the report on their intranet for staff and students to access.

## Example of a School Review Schedule

The School Review Team meets with randomly selected parents, Board members, Pastors, all teachers, some non-teaching staff and some students from each class R-11, and with all Year 12 students (depending on the cohort size) and the senior student leaders.

Ideally meetings with staff members are for 45 minutes or for the duration of a lesson, while parent discussions take about 35 minutes. Student discussions take from 20 minutes to a full lesson and this is dictated by the year level of the students. Each team member needs one vacant slot per day to catch up on notes and to examine data tabled.

The School Review Team is provided with a small interview area somewhere in the school to meet with each interviewee.

On the schedule shown below for a small to medium size school, parent interviews continue from 5pm – 6 pm as many parents cannot make it during work time. Parents can participate via a telephone call if they cannot come to the school. Many working parents prefer this.

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
8.45 - 9.05	Staff Devotions			
9.00 - 10.45	Meet Principal for briefing of school context	Interviews	Interviews	Interviews
9.30 - 10.45		Interviews	Interviews	Interviews
11.05 - 11.55	Interviews	Interviews	Interviews	Prepare for staff meeting
11.55 - 12.45	Interviews	Interviews	Interviews	Prepare for staff meeting
1.35 - 2.20	Interviews	Interviews	Interviews	Prepare for staff meeting
2.20 - 3.10	Interviews	Interviews	Interviews	Prepare for staff meeting
3.30 - 4.45	Meet with School Reference Group	Meet with School Reference Group	Meet with School Reference Group	Review Report Meeting
5.00 - 6.00pm	Parent Interviews			
Open Mtg				Parent Meeting

## School Improvement Plan

After the school receives the Final Report it will consider the Recommendations and will make decisions on which of the recommendations it will adopt in the short and longer term. A school improvement plan will then be developed. In the CMaD model each school received some additional expert support to assist in the development of the School Improvement Plan.

The Plan should extend over 2-3 years and should include an indicative budget and identify persons responsible for the initiatives that will lead to the desired improvement.

The following elements should be considered when developing a school improvement plan.

- Clearly stated and aspirational vision and values, developed by, and shared with, children and young people, parents and those with whom the school works in partnership
- A small number of improvement priorities, informed by facts, intelligence or research and expressed as outcomes for learners
- Outcomes which focus on learning and achievement, are based on evidence and data, and are observable and if possible, measurable
- Clearly identified responsibilities for implementation linked to named individuals and/or teams
- Clear timescales extending to more than one school session, as necessary and with milestones and deadlines
- Measures of success which include performance data, quality indicators and stakeholders' views.

Individual action plans may also need to be developed for specific projects and/or teams to break down projects into more specific actions which need to be undertaken by the identified individuals or groups. These are working documents and may feature at stage, department or faculty level or for individual priorities. Some of these may already exist in the school.

Outcomes should be recorded and expressed as outcomes for students rather than the completion of documentation. These action plans can be revised annually or more frequently as appropriate to circumstances.

The planning process goes from the high strategic level – the improvement plan itself – all the way to the professional learning plans for individual staff.

## | Sample School Improvement Plan (excerpt Journey to Excellence, UK) |

Area for Improvement	Goals ( <u>what</u> is the school trying to achieve?)	Targets ( <u>how</u> will the school <u>measure</u> achievement of it's goals; <u>must</u> be measurable)	Improvement Strategies ( <u>actions</u> to achieve its goals and targets)	Budget Source / \$	Timelines 2011 - 2015
Curriculum	<p><i>Literacy/Numeracy</i></p> <p>Develop and document an integrated whole school literacy and numeracy program based on a systematic collection and analysis of all available data</p> <p>Improve literacy and numeracy levels of all students</p>	<p>All students are reaching individual targets in school-based tests.</p> <p>All students are achieving at or above their chronological age in school-based tests.</p> <p>All students are achieving above benchmark in NAPLAN testing.</p> <p>Increased number of students in higher achieving bands.</p>	<p>Coordinators and teachers to work collaboratively</p> <p>Document curriculum scope and sequence</p> <p>Develop systematic data collection</p> <p>Establish knowledge of effective literacy and numeracy pedagogy by ensuring that staff access and take part in professional learning</p> <p>Work on developing parent engagement with literacy focussing on Reception.</p>	LNSLN grant	2011

## Advantages of External School Review

An external team brings skilled practitioners who have worked in a wide range of contexts and can also provide confidentiality to all respondents thus giving them the freedom to express their opinions freely.

Wyatt (1996, p9) quotes Simons and Hargreaves and states that the

“

*Research literature on school self evaluation indicates that it has proved to be ineffective. Hargreaves found that schools tend to write long accounts of what they had been doing which were heavily descriptive and heavily defensive. Teachers were not good at analysing what they were doing. The school self-examinations were really weak at examining what went on in classrooms. They were very weak at examining pupil performance. The final weakness was that schools were not very good at applying the evaluation results to forward planning.*

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As such an external review is designed to assist schools to:

- clarify purposes and future directions
- collect quality information that can be used in planning; and
- publically report their achievements.

Further, the external review model can also provide:

- objectivity while at the same time being sensitive to local circumstances
- external endorsement of school strengths and achievements
- a sense of confidence in the wider community as the reviewers are independent.

## | Model 2 - Capacity Building Model |

*The IDEAS program is a whole school capacity building model with external support provided by University of Southern Queensland. It provides schools with tools and processes which are aimed at deepening school wide pedagogy through a parallel leadership model.*

*It is undertaken over two – three years and combines cluster workshops with individual school visits from University consultants. Each school in the cluster forms a School Management Team to work with the University consultants.*

*Participation in the IDEAS program is \$20,000 over 2-3 years. Through National partnership funding the AISSA is supporting a number of schools to participate in this program.*

*This model is suitable for systemic and non-systemic schools.*

IDEAS is a capacity-building model that provides tools and processes that enable each school to build its own individual preferred future based on a vision that has been developed from a shared purpose and the work of teachers in a school-wide approach to pedagogy.

In the IDEAS program school-wide pedagogy is an agreed set of high priority pedagogical principles that reflect the distinctive qualities of the school community and that have been developed by the professional community of the school.

It has been developed by the Leadership Research Institute (LRI) of the University of Southern Queensland from 1997-2004. The IDEAS Project has been implemented in five Australian States and overseas, but not previously in South Australia.

The acronym IDEAS represents the component phases of the model as follows:

Initiating	How will we manage the process? Who will facilitate the process? Who will record our history of the journey?
Discovering	What are we doing that is most successful? What is not working as well as we would like it to?
Envisioning	What do we hope our school will look like in the future? What is our conceptualisation of school-wide pedagogy?
Actioning	How will we create a tripartite action plan? How will we work towards the alignment of key school elements and processes?
Sustaining	What progress have we made towards school-wide pedagogy? What school practices are succeeding and how can we expand them?

The IDEAS Program is underpinned by the following Principles:

1. Teachers are the key
2. Professional learning is the key to professional revitalisation
3. Success breeds success
4. Alignment of school processes is a collective school responsibility
5. No Blame

The IDEAS process commences with each school undertaking the Diagnostic Inventory of School Alignment (DISA). This tool provides schools with information on which to base judgements about areas for school improvement. It comprises three online surveys customised for each of staff, parents and students. After completion of the survey the results are analysed by the USQ IDEAS qualified staff and the results are presented to the school.

In IDEAS the Principal nurtures parallel leadership across the school by:

- Communicating a clear strategic intent
- Incorporating the aspirations and views of others
- Posing difficult-to-answer questions
- Making space for individual innovation
- Knowing when to step back
- Creating opportunities from perceived difficulties
- Building upon achievements to create a culture of success

## School Commitment to Model

The Program is undertaken over two - three years and usually involves a cluster of schools. Each School forms an IDEAS School Management Team. The role of the team members is to:

- Develop the IDEAS program processes and understandings and share with all school staff
- Deliver school-based workshops developed through assistance from USQ and school visits
- Record and track the IDEAS project in the school
- Encourage all staff and maintain IDEAS program momentum
- Promote the principles of the IDEAS program
- Allow 'space and voice' for other school community members to be part of the process
- Promote a mutual relationship with the Principal
- Be prepared for the challenges and challengers
- Promote open membership of the School Improvement Team
- Model leaders as learners

Schools participating in IDEAS need to meet the following criteria:

- Time commitment of 2-3 years
- Accept responsibility for own school revitalisation with external support and facilitation
- Acceptance of the principle of parallel leadership
- Time allowance for facilitation of School Management Team activities
- Contribute \$20,000 over three years to participate in the program.

A sector/system IDEAS co-ordinator is also provided to assist in coordination and administration, and Project Staff from University of Southern Queensland provide cluster workshops and individual school visits to each school.

A comprehensive resource – *the IDEAS Facilitation Folder* – is also provided to each school. This includes material on the Research-base Framework (RBF); leadership; the IDEAS process; workshop exercises and activities; folio records for participants; diagnostic inventories; data analysis spreadsheets and support readings with supplementary materials.

## | Model 3 - Action Research Model |

*This model entitled Productive Schools Productive Teaching focuses on a school-based school improvement project using action research methodologies. It combines expert input via attendance at workshops and seminars delivered by local and overseas education experts together with in-school visits from an external education consultant.*

*A school-based team designs a specific and focussed school improvement project based on recent school performance data that is linked to teaching and learning. The program extends over one semester.*

*AISSA funded this program at no cost to schools other than release time for school-based team members. Schools could adapt this model to an in-school program only or could engage the services of an external education expert to provide the additional expertise and guidance to ensure successful project outcomes.*

*The model is suitable for systemic and non-systemic schools.*

This very different program was commissioned by the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia in 2010. The program was offered to school leaders as part of its Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership initiative and was developed in response to a request to design professional learning programs around the contemporary leadership agenda for Independent Schools as well as the growing awareness that market share and school development into the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century required leadership and management of a much different order.

In the past decade, the context for schooling and the social values and standards attached to the provision of educational services has so radically altered, that Principals are attempting to redefine the role of schools in the community and the ways in which they are funded,

managed and accounted for. Much of this contextual change is mirrored throughout the developed world and is driving many of the national initiatives that include quality teaching; professional standards for teachers; curriculum reform and national assessment; improving school productivity and performance; and increased accountability obligations.

Given these changes, this Program was designed to address some of these changes by asking key questions - what are the challenges for College Boards and the Principals of Independent schools? What is the new agenda for school leaders, and how will this play out on a daily basis in the schools, with staff, students and their parents? What will the Principal consistently and relentlessly be focusing on in order to demonstrate that the school is providing a rich and effective teaching program; quality pastoral care and

extra curricula activities; and at the end of the day, success for all students regardless of ability, interest or capacity.

The *Productive Schools Productive Teaching Program* enabled leadership teams to develop:

1. The capacity to build a big picture around the curriculum and pedagogies of the school.
2. A policy framework and set of teaching agreements within which to work.
3. A data rich climate on which to make informed decisions about learning based on mandated policies and the associated professional development tools and strategies.
4. A strategic, classroom focused leadership approach connected to teachers' daily work.
5. A professional review process that supported quality teaching.
6. The capacity to skilfully manage accountability processes and to utilise internal and external assessment data to monitor and improve the overall productivity and performance of the school.

The key components of the Program were professional learning workshops; an in-school project; development of a school-based team; and provision of some in-school support.

## Professional learning

Four workshops provided theoretical and professional input on school improvement that focussed on teaching and learning and were structured to enable sufficient time for school teams to design their own 'in school' projects. Participants had the opportunity to work closely with internationally recognised educators including Professor Steve Dinham, Research Director Teaching, Learning and Leadership, ACER and Professorial Fellow, University of Melbourne; and Alma Harris Pro-Director (Leadership), Institute of Education, London; and Chair in Educational Leadership, London Centre for Leadership in Learning, UK.

Much of the input to the program came from leadership practitioners themselves, interspersed with the overseas, interstate and local experts. The content of the program presentations challenged the participants and enabled them to identify a small action research project that would develop their leadership capacity using the principles of the program.

## School-based Project

The schools were asked to develop a small and focused school-based project using data to identify whole school, specific team and individual professional learning needs. This was because the primary purpose of the school-based project was to establish and trial a process for change and model a planned approach to school improvement with a focus on teaching and learning. Some schools were challenged by having to select a manageable focus for the school-based project. Identifying a strategic focus and implementing it effectively also proved a challenge for some. In fact, for some schools the focus selected was too challenging and leaders felt they were ill equipped to embark on what proved to be in some cases, very sensitive territory.

## School-based teams

School-based teams were formed to design the school improvement project.

The school-based teams were required to use data in order to develop a strategic leadership approach to whole school improvement, underpinned by policy redevelopment, staff briefing and adoption strategies and most importantly, the associated professional learning required to improve standards and performance in the focus teaching and learning area.

## In School support

School visits from the external consultants were a critical aspect of the program as they provided a forum for sustained professional dialogue where identified needs could be further examined. They also provided an opportunity for 'between workshop' reflection and review, classroom application and collegial sharing. This was important for the establishment of strong professional learning teams to encourage ongoing and sustained collective endeavour rather than isolated individual efforts.

In order to assist in sharpening the focus, participants were encouraged to consistently consider the following questions:

*What is your data telling you about teaching and learning in your school by whole school, class by class, year level by year level and individual students' achievement and what clues is that giving you about the improvements you want to make?*

*What are your targets? (These have to be assessable/measurable)*

*What has to be done in terms of change of practice to see the new results?*

*What needs to be different in the school or college policy?*

*How will you embed this new policy?*

*What will teachers do differently?*

*What will year levels/teaching teams do differently?*

*What will students at each year level do differently?*

*What interventions will be necessary for students exhibiting low achievement standards?*

*What will the leadership strategy be for teams?*

*How long is your project going to be for?*

*How will you report to the whole staff about the improvements in teaching and learning over that time?*

*How does this link to the overall school improvement program that you have on the campus and indeed, across the whole college?*

*How can you keep this simple and achievable with leadership that gets results across the school?*

Each school provided a case study as a final report of its project.

## School Commitment

Program participants attended four one-day seminars.

In addition each school received one school visit from the external consultant. The project team members were released on both of these occasions.

This Program was offered to schools at no cost through funding provided by the Australian Government's Improving teacher Quality National Partnership. However, participating schools provided funds to release staff to attend the four workshops and for the school visits by the external consultant. Some schools also allocated additional time to specific staff members who were working on the in-school project, whilst other schools utilised staff meetings and/or faculty time to the project.

## Key Program Outcomes

The AISSA evaluated the Program on its conclusion in 2010 through discussions with the school teams and other formal and informal feedback.

The propositions used in the design of the *Productive Schools Productive Teaching Program* were very useful in drawing participants into a level of leadership that demanded a meta-cognitive approach to school effectiveness, particularly within the Independent sector which, until recently, worked in relative comfort in relation to enrolment, client base and loyalty.

The complexity of schools as systems and the diversity of staff capacity and 'buy in' to improvement was perhaps the biggest understanding the project generated. Having a broad appreciation of systems theory could assist school leaders to understand that schools are places of constant renewal and improvement and that these elements are never entirely controllable

A significant outcome was the realisation that it was much easier to work with staff when there was a compelling case for change based on sound inquiry and evidence about the area of concern. When staff could see the problem clearly, understand the elements of the issue and where they personally could make alterations, changes and improvements, then buy-in was easy.

The leadership team's responsibility for accountability of the school's performance and its obligation to engage with the school improvement agenda was well understood as a result of the school-based projects. School leaders recognised that their core work included involvement in a whole of school improvement strategy not just specific leadership and management for their particular discipline or team. There was a strong agreement that they had to work on policies and procedures to ensure the overall effectiveness and performance of the school as a whole.

For many participants the program highlighted the need for accurate policy documents that could provide a firm foundation for future change.

The school-based action research project incorporated into the Program and the requirement of participants to document their efforts in a short case study meant the process was as much an intellectual and strategic one as much as a series of practical leadership interventions.

Finally, it became apparent that to make strong school improvement and reform, school leaders need an understanding of the interconnectedness of sound human resource management policies, quality curriculum frameworks, best practice pedagogical agreements about how teaching is to be done in the school, expert supervision and high expectations of teaching, authentic and skilled assessment of learning of all students and a commitment to quality school improvement based on data.

Until all those processes are embedded into the culture and professional practice of all staff, strong change management and school improvement can be a difficult and vexed process that often gets abandoned or overwhelmed before the goals are achieved.

## | Model 4 - Self Assessment and Review Model |

*The ACT School Improvement Framework is a three year reflective school review model that involves ongoing self-assessment, evidence informed practice and strategic planning. It is a systemic model with all schools in the ACT being required to participate. It includes an external, centrally administered validation process during the final year. The review focuses on four domains of learning.*

*Schools establish a School Improvement Committee. During the review process schools receive external support provided by the ACT Department of Education and Training.*

*This is a systemic model that could be adapted as an internal self assessment review model for individual schools.*

*In Semester Two 2011 the AISSA will offer a 2-semester program based on this model to schools. It will incorporate a self-review and assessment process linked to strategic planning, school leadership and peer review.*

The ACT School Improvement Strategy has been designed to provide schools with the tools to achieve excellence in teaching and learning and high levels of student achievement through engagement in a continuous improvement process of ongoing self-assessment, evidence informed practice and strategic planning.

**The School Improvement Strategy is underpinned by the following Core Principles:**

Every principal is the instructional leader in his/her school.

Every student will be taught by highly effective teachers.

Improving teacher capacity is the most effective way to improve student performance. Our strategy of choice is in-class support through coaching.

Every teacher and school leader deserves purposeful and regular feedback through high quality performance and development processes.

There is strength in collaboration. As a team we will take responsibility for each other's work.

Everyone matters. We will do whatever it takes to ensure every young person can learn and thrive in our schools.

*The ACT School Improvement Framework for achieving high standards in student learning, innovation and best practice in ACT government schools is the evaluative component of the ACT School Improvement Strategy.*

“

*In their desire for school excellence, schools focus their energy and desire for innovation into the classroom ensuring that school improvement strategies impact directly on learning and achievement – the essence of teachers’ business.*

”

The ACT Framework starts from a premise that it is building on excellence. While it is seen to act as a ‘quality assurance’ mechanism for the ACT government this is not its prime purpose. Significantly, the language of the ACT Framework locates the responsibility for overall implementation and monitoring at the school level thereby implicitly encouraging school ownership of the process.

In turn the community is seen to have an increasing expectation of schooling outcomes, leading to the need for further improvement. A key element to the framework is the assumption that successful schools include processes for ongoing monitoring.

The Framework involves a three year cycle of school review through a continuous improvement process. Student learning is seen to be supported in excellent and high performing schools ‘through best practice across a range of elements within the four domains of schooling’:

- Learning and Teaching
- Student Environment
- Leadership and Management and
- Community Involvement.

It is a model which is (publicly) positioned to build on what is already seen as high-quality practice. The ACT Department of Education and Training argues that rather than being content to accept high achievement, excellent schools

‘ask questions about student outcomes and about school practices that are impacting on the achievement levels.’

For example

- ‘Have we established explicit, high standards for learning?’
- What are our agreed parameters for determining high standards?
- What factors are affecting student achievement?
- Does the level of achievement meet with community expectations?
- What classroom pedagogical practices are clearly resulting in high student achievement?’

## Key components of the school improvement cycle

The key components of the school improvement cycle sit alongside an action research and planning continuum.

The action-oriented continuum is the core component of reflective practice and a feature of improvement models promoting school review, school effectiveness and school development.

The Framework is implemented over a three-year cycle with the following actions undertaken in each year:

Year One	Year Two	Year Three
System surveys Annual self assessment Planning Implementation Reporting	Annual self assessment Implementing Monitoring Planning Reporting	Annual self assessment Planning Monitoring Reviewing Reporting External validation

## Implementation

The implementation process places ownership of the framework within the school. The key elements are as follows:

- 'Schools establish a School Improvement Committee to oversee the school improvement process.
- Schools assess their performance across any or all four domains.
- School boards produce a plan that describes the school's strategic intentions and evaluation measures based on the assessment of performance across the domains.
- School boards monitor and review school performance and report on it to the chief executive, parents of students at the school, and staff.

- An external panel validates judgements about school performance and school planning processes in the third year of the cycle and also makes recommendations for the next three year cycle.'

The use of quality information is seen to be a key factor to the Framework. In determining what data is to be collected and the judgements made about the data, consideration is given to 'a clear, shared understanding of what the school expects students to achieve and the practices that are most likely to facilitate high achievement'.

The Framework identifies a range of potential data sources including national assessments, teacher judgements, annual reports and student self assessment.

Most of the processes and strategies within the three year cycle are mainly managed within each school. However, there are some externally set reporting timelines that schools must meet.

## The School Improvement Plan

An annual self assessment is undertaken by the school in each year of the cycle. The annual self assessment is undertaken in 'order to identify priorities for their school plan'. The Framework provides a range of tools to assist in this process including the Tool for Self Assessment of School Domains, the Curriculum Self Assessment Tool and the system surveys.

The school plan is informed by:

- 'data collected through the annual self assessment;
- understanding of the agreed learning outcomes for students of the school;
- contextual factors including school and community demographics;
- system priorities;
- sound understanding of where students are at based on valid and reliable student achievement information that has been collected by the school;
- initiatives and issues that arise from monitoring the current plan; and
- changing community expectations.'

The plan notes that '[S]chool improvement is a continuous process and, in the main, the scheduling of school improvement processes is at the discretion of the school. However, there are particular requirements that must be adhered to (e.g. the administration and timing of the system surveys). The system surveys and the external validation are administered centrally.'

The key components of the school improvement cycle are:

### *System Surveys*

- annual self-assessment against the four domains of school improvement
- annual conduct of satisfaction surveys and other school-based surveys, as necessary
- ongoing collection and analysis of student performance data

### *Planning*

- development of a four-year strategic school plan and an annual operational plan
- annual review and update of the school plan, as necessary, and development of an operational plan

### *Reporting*

- regular reporting to the school board on key achievements
- ongoing discussions with staff on progress towards achieving performance measures and targets
- annual reporting against the school plan within the annual school board report

### *Validating*

- preparation of summative presentation for external validation panel briefing
- incorporation of external validation recommendations into planning processes.

### *Annual Self-assessment*

A self-assessment matrix has been developed to help schools identify areas requiring a stronger focus, priorities for improvement and baseline data against which they can report progress.

In using the matrix schools ask the following questions:

- How are we going?
- What are we doing well?
- What do we need to improve?
- How will we measure our improvement?

### *External Validation*

During the third year of the school improvement cycle schools take part in an external validation. An independent panel is presented with the achievements of the school through its school plan and details of how it has achieved continuous improvement across all four domains of the School Improvement Framework. Evidence gathered through the four year review cycle and described in the annual school reports provide the bulk of the evidence for the external validation.

An external validation report is prepared which includes commendations and recommendations to assist the school in future planning for the next cycle of continuous improvement.

External validation panel members are trained to conduct the process. The external validation is a form of peer review and therefore relies on members being broadly representative of the ACT school system. Generally, panels include a principal, two school leaders and a community representative. The validation process takes place over three days. An external lead validator is appointed to oversee the external validation process across all participating schools.

Schools are advised at least six months prior to the external validation meeting. The school is also notified of the

membership of the validation panel prior to the process commencing.

### *External Validation Report*

Following the evaluation, the validation panel prepares a report which contains a brief analysis of each domain for school improvement and commendations and recommendations for future school planning purposes. This report is a public document and is provided to the school board and reported on through the annual school board report.

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