

Briefings

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From the Executive Director

Hopefully, a final word on “Gonski”

My local state school’s fence is plastered with green signs telling me that *“Gonski is making a difference right here”*. Naturally I am curious about the evidence to support such a statement.

I go online to look at the school’s NAPLAN data for the period 2013, 2014 and 2015, the latter two years being under the “Gonski” funding model. The school generally performs around or slightly below the state averages for Years 3 and 5 and there is no immediately apparent pattern of improvement over the three years.

In fairness, we know NAPLAN is not the only indicator of student outcomes, so perhaps “Gonski” is making a difference in some other area like student wellbeing or attendance. I look at the school’s published Annual Reports which indicate student attendance rates have actually declined during the period 2012 to 2014. If “Gonski” is making a difference for this school, I wish someone would give us the evidence.

Curiously, whilst the school received additional federal funding of \$860 per student in 2014 (the first year of Gonski) compared to 2013, this was off-set by a reduction in state funding of \$1,683 per student, meaning the school actually received less government funding overall.

The point is the *“I give a Gonski”* crusade must surely go down as one of the best marketing campaigns in recent times.

Conveniently ignored in the case of Queensland schools is the fact that the State Government is not a signatory to the “Gonski” model. Why let this fact get in the way of telling us that “Gonski” is making a difference in Queensland schools?

Federal Education Minister Senator Simon Birmingham must feel somewhat aggrieved to be the target of the *“I give a Gonski”* campaign given the Australian Government doesn’t actually own or operate a single school nor does it provide the majority of funds for state schools.

State and territory governments are in fact responsible for providing 85 percent of the funding for state schools. I often wonder why state and territory governments aren’t the target of the “Gonski” campaign.

The mystique and rhetoric generated by “Gonski” is quite extraordinary. “Gonski” is held up as the panacea for a myriad of issues. Schools struggling with ICT; “Gonski” will solve that. Students with disability; “Gonski” is the answer. It is presented as a new development in needs-based funding when in fact Australia has had needs-based funding for schools for decades.

Gonski is held up as a national system that funds all schools on the same basis regardless of their sector. Nothing can be further from the truth.

Hopefully, a final word on “Gonski”

Three years ago, on 26 June, the Australian Education Bill 2013 was passed by parliament enshrining the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) or “Gonski” funding model in legislation. However, the model only applies directly to the more than 900 non-systemic independent schools in Australia. State and Catholic schools are funded by the Australian Government on a systemic basis with the approved authority determining the actual funding for individual schools.

The “Gonski” model is lauded as being simple, fair and transparent, yet it fails on all these measures. It is complex and at the current time there are over 20 separate and different funding arrangements across states, territories and sectors, most of which are little understood let alone well known.

Conveniently ignored is the fact that David Gonski’s recommendations on school funding, resulting from his comprehensive review undertaken in 2012, were seriously compromised through the political process to reform the way schools are funded. Mr Gonski never made a recommendation that no school would be worse off as a result of changes to funding arrangements, nor did he envisage a funding model that would not be implemented in all states and territories.

What the new SRS funding model implemented from 2014 has done is deliver a significant amount of additional Commonwealth funding to schools (even for those states that did not sign up as they negotiated individual deals with the incoming Coalition Government). This continues a long-term trend with figures showing that between 1987/88 and 2011/12 education funding in Australia has increased by 100 percent in real terms despite just an 18 percent increase in enrolments over the same period.

The recent Federal Budget shows that under the Coalition, Commonwealth schools funding will increase from \$16 billion in 2016 to over \$20 billion in 2020. If the Australian Labor Party (ALP) wins the election, add another \$3 billion to these figures.

Despite these significant funding increases, our international rankings in terms of educational outcomes have fallen provoking much worthwhile commentary as to whether simply spending more on schooling will actually reverse our declining educational outcomes.

The incoming Federal Government should as a matter of urgency commission an independent review of the “Gonski” funding model. Three key questions should be the focus of the review.

Firstly, where has the additional funding gone? It should be relatively easy to establish which schools have received additional funding as a result of the SRS model and to verify whether the additional funding has been equitably distributed. I suspect there would be some surprises here, particularly if we look at similar schools in different states and territories. We should also establish that state and territory governments have not just substituted additional Commonwealth funding for their own schools funding.

Secondly, having established where the funding has gone on a school-by-school basis, what has the additional funding been used for? Has it been used to increase support for students with special needs, for teacher professional development or probably more likely to support a further reduction in class sizes. If the latter is the case, it would be of some concern.

As recently reported in the *Australian Financial Review*, the reduction in class sizes since the 1960s and 70s has driven federal and state funding on schools to increase by 25 percent to \$50 billion. Increasing student numbers by two per class would free up \$1.5 billion per annum, funding which perhaps could be better utilised on students with special needs.

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Data source: Annual Economic Significance of Independent Schools to Queensland by AEC Group
Authorised by: D. Robertson, Executive Director, Independent Schools Queensland, 96 Warren Street, Spring Hill
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During the federal election campaign Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) has been promoting the independent schooling sector and the contribution it makes drawing on evidence-based data from Economic Significance of Independent Schools to the Queensland Economy by AEC Group. The ISQ example advertisement (above) is from a series of adverts published across regional and suburban newspapers covering 25 of the 30 federal electorates. Each advertisement includes localised participation rate data.

Thirdly, having established what the additional funding has been used for, what has worked best in terms of improving student outcomes? We should be able to build a list of actions or initiatives that have the strongest influence on achieving better outcomes for students. Again, there might be some surprises here. I suspect that the outcomes might shift the debate from investing in measures such as smaller class sizes to focusing on teacher quality, attracting the brightest and best to the teaching profession and supporting more autonomous school decision-making in collaboration with parents and the community.

The outcomes of this review should be used to inform the future allocation and use of the additional funding for schooling which has been promised by both major parties in the current election campaign.

Simply providing more money for schools, based on past experience, is not going to impact on our flatlining educational outcomes. The additional funding should be targeted to where there is robust evidence that it actually makes a difference.

If the ALP takes government on 2 July, Bill Shorten has promised to deliver “Gonski” in full and on time. If the Coalition is returned, it is clear they will implement a new federal funding model from 2018.

Either way, “I give a Gonski” becomes irrelevant and hopefully we can move on from what has become a tiresome and rhetoric-based campaign filled with empty slogans to a more evidence-based policy debate about schooling.



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Building Leadership Culture in Schools

Aristotle said “We are what we repeatedly do”. Culture is consistent, observable patterns of behaviour in organisations.

“A school’s culture consists of the customs, rituals, and stories that are evident and valued throughout the whole school. An effective school culture is one in which the customs and values foster success for all; and where clear boundaries are set, known, and agreed to by everyone.” (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2016)

Both these statements describe key elements of an effective leadership culture in schools. Firstly, the statements acknowledge that leadership practices are part of the observable, repeatable patterns that shape the experiences of all members of a school community.

Secondly, effective school leadership balances a vision for growth and success with a shared understanding of accountability and responsibility.

Leadership is practiced at every level of a school. From the boardroom to the classroom, individuals exercise their own leadership identity and approach their contribution to the organisation through that lens.

In a time where important changes like delivering NAPLAN online and reforming senior assessment are occurring, the school’s leadership culture will directly influence the way every member of the community responds. The way leadership is understood will influence

how every member of a school community continues to contribute to a professional environment focused on quality teaching and learning while managing a period of significant structural change.

For schools to achieve and sustain improvement a deliberate consideration of the leadership culture will enable individuals, groups and teams to operate with more intention and impact.

This paper explores the ways schools might strengthen their leadership culture to reinforce the values and norms that support a high quality professional environment and how school leadership is understood and enacted by every member of the organisation. This understanding is key to ensuring an optimal educational experience for every student.

“Tone from the top” – A board’s role in setting leadership culture

A school board, council or other governing authority can seem a long way from the core business of teaching and learning. However, a school’s leadership culture is directly influenced by the behaviours and actions of school directors or governing bodies.

“Culture has to start in the boardroom, this sets a standard that the rest of the company can see” (Corporate Citizenship Newsletter, 2006).

The way directors approach strategy, manage risk and work as a unified collective with and through the principal to ensure a school’s value sends powerful messages about what is important and what matters most to the rest of the organisation.

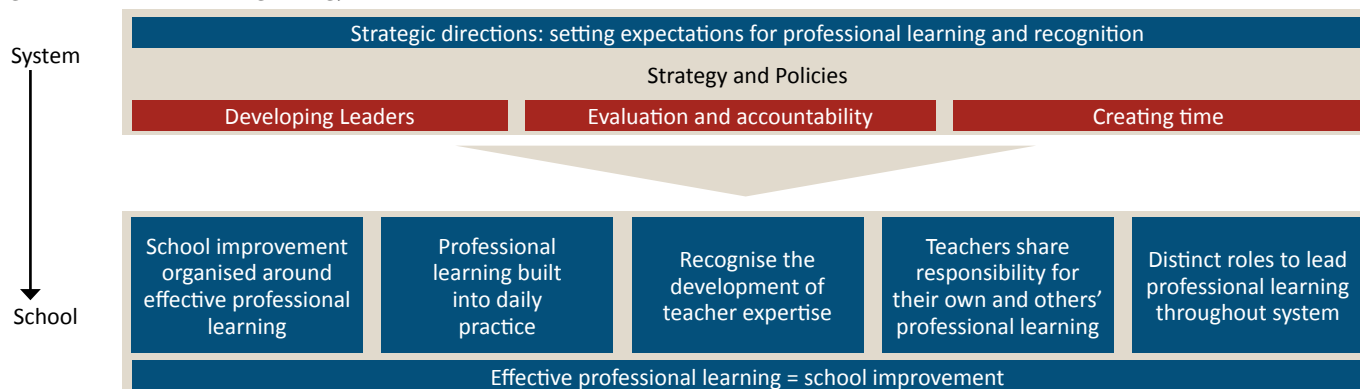
The professional relationships between school board directors and the CEO/principal can be a model for professional relationships throughout the school but especially between executive and senior leaders.

Boards send strong messages about behavioural norms through the approach they take to supporting school leaders to plan for change and growth. Murden (2012) states that “a strong, productive relationship between the CEO and the Chair of the Board will support improved corporate performance”.

Slaughter (1993) suggests that boards can make “strategy with short term horizons, rooted in a business-as-usual paradigm and based upon a set of western industrial assumptions”; or work as leaders interested in sustainability “long term thinking, taking responsibility for the choices made today for the future, including the responsibility of stewardship, challenging cultural assumptions and giving choice to those marginalised by change”.

The leadership that boards show in supporting the core business of teaching and learning establishes the expectations that drive the implementation

Figure 1: Professional Learning Strategy



(Source: Jensen et al. 2016 p. 12)

and evaluation of quality teaching and learning.

A board’s leadership culture will be evidenced by the way the principal is entrusted and held accountable for the leadership of teaching and learning. Jensen, Sonnemann, Roberts-Hull & Hunter (2016) researched high performing education systems and discovered that the most effective governors are those who set strategic reforms aimed at “building professional learning into daily practice”, supporting educators to build their professional identity as learning leaders; and generating a culture in which teachers and leaders share responsibility for their own and others’ professional learning.

According to Jensen et al. (2016), governance structures in high-performing systems ensure that school leaders are:

- developing other future leaders
- establishing evaluation and accountability systems (at all levels of the school); and are
- providing support/resource time for middle leaders and teachers to focus on quality teaching.

This governance strategy for the professional development of leaders and teachers in high-performing systems is outlined in *Figure 1*.

Leaders developing leaders – the culture “work” for principals

The most insightful measure of strategic leaders is the calibre of the next generation of leaders that follow in his/her footsteps and develop under his/her watchful eye. A truly strategic leader may be measured by the calibre of his/her protégés.

Lorigan, G. (2016).

High-performing schools require school leaders to focus explicitly on building the leadership strengths and capabilities of others. A leader whose own identity and practice is grounded in the development of others will encourage collaboration, open and robust professional conversation, mentoring, and encourage a focus on quality and performance. These behaviours are central to embedding a culture of continuous improvement. In high-performing schools, new

professional learning leaders are developed at the school and system level (Jensen et.al 2016).

A key professional practice in the [Australian Standard for Principals \(2012\)](#) is *Developing Self and Others*. The leadership profiles that elaborate on the Standard indicate that experienced and effective principals demonstrate this domain by:

- creating challenging roles, responsibilities and opportunities for senior leaders that leverage and grow their talents
- building and sustaining a coaching and mentoring culture at all levels in the school and have a system of peer review and feedback in place
- mentoring other principals to support their growth and development and help them to address issues
- seeking opportunities for professional growth through engaging in state, national and global educational developments (AITSL, 2012).

Building Leadership Culture in Schools

It is important to recognise that among school-related factors, there is evidence that school leadership has an impact on student outcomes. This in-school impact may be second only to the influence of teachers in the classroom (Hattie, 2003; Leithwood, 1992). This is a reason for schools to be reflective and proactive about their approach to leadership development.

There are two theories of leadership that research has suggested has significant impact on professional culture and ultimately outcomes for students.

Instructional and transformational leadership have been widely researched, but it is how school leaders enact these leadership theories that influences the leadership culture of the whole school. Both models would have the school leader focus on:

- creating a shared sense of purpose in the school
- developing a climate of high expectations and a school culture focused on innovation and improvement of teaching and learning
- shaping the reward structure of the school to reflect the school's mission as well as goals set for staff and students
- organising and providing a wide range of activities aimed at intellectual stimulation and the continuous development of staff
- being a visible presence in the school, modelling the desired values of the school's culture (Hallinger, 2007).

Balyer (2012) asserts that “transformational leadership has three basic functions. First, transformational leaders sincerely serve the needs of others, empower them, and inspire followers to achieve great success. Secondly, they charismatically lead, set a vision, instil trust, confidence and pride in working with them. Finally, with the intellectual stimulation they offer grow followers of the same calibre as the leader.”

Robinson (2011) argues that “transformational leadership has weak (<.2 ES) indirect effects on student outcomes. While it has moderate effects on teacher attitudes and perceptions of the school climate and organisation, these effects do not, on the whole, flow through to students”. The first meta-analysis Robinson completed indicated that the average effect of instructional leadership on student outcomes was three to four times that of transformational leadership.

The Centre for Educational Leadership (2015) states that instructional leadership must reside with a team of leaders of which the principal serves as the “leader of leaders”. They define instructional leadership as:

- learning-focused
- learning for both students and adults; and
- learning which is measured by improvement in instruction and in the quality of student learning.

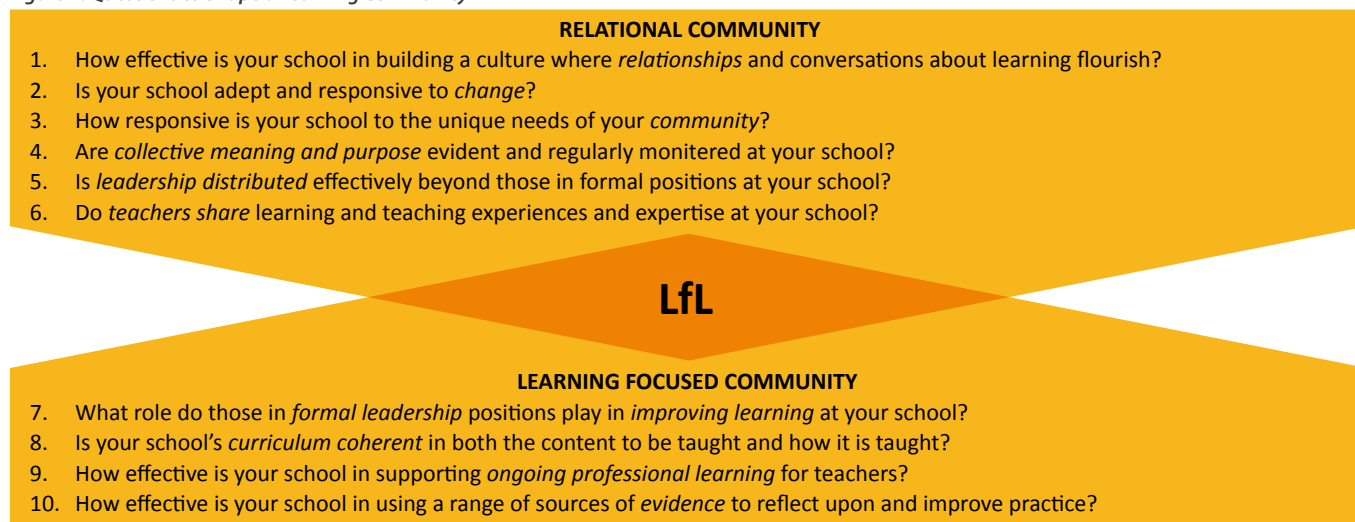
There is some debate about what behaviours and actions of instructional and transformational leaders are most effective, however actively supporting coaching and mentoring, a willingness to model pedagogical learning and establish benchmark expectations for collaborative behaviour are key to effective instructional leadership (Timperley 2011, Robinson 2011, Marsh et al. 2013).

Instructional and transformational leaders and their senior delegates, cultivate a “Leadership for Learning (LFL)” approach. LFL describes a culture where “whole school communities actively engage in purposeful interactions that nurture relationships focused on improving learning” (Marsh et al. 2013).

The questions underpinning the LFL model may be helpful for school leaders who are seeking to assess the qualities of their professional community (see *Figure 2*).

Timperley (2015) states “if leaders wish to make a difference, there is no more powerful approach to leading teaching and learning than through creating a culture of genuine curiosity about what is happening for learners and a systematic process to engage in deep inquiry in ways that create agency to make the difference”.

Figure 2: Questions to Shape a Learning Community



(Source: Marsh et al. 2013)

Leading from the middle

While principals and their senior leadership teams have a significant influence on school effectiveness, they cannot achieve outcomes and meet expectations alone. Middle leaders and their teaching or pastoral teams are key to delivering the vision and improvement initiatives determined by the board with the principal.

Middle leaders drive school effectiveness, “ensuring that quality teaching and learning is happening at the grassroots level of the school” (Carter, 2015). The work of middle leaders is to promote learning in ways that impact positively on teaching and learning. “Leading teaching and learning means using a variety of strategies to engage all the professionals in ways that benefit students and achieve the strategic goals of the school” (Timperley, 2015).

According to Grootenboer, Edwards-Groves & Ronnerman (2015) the practices of middle leaders have three defining characteristics:

1. **Positionally:** Middle leaders are structurally and relationally situated “between” the senior management of the school and the teaching staff. They are not in a peculiar space of their own, but rather are practising members of both groups.
2. **Philosophically:** Middle leaders orient to praxis in practising their leadership alongside their peers. In this sense they work alongside and in collaboration with their colleagues to do the wise and prudent thing to respond to their own circumstances and needs.
3. **Practically:** Middle leadership is a practice and is understood and developed as a practice. To this end, the focus is on the sayings, doings and relatings of leading rather than the characteristics and qualities of middle leaders (p. 524).

Understanding the nature and value of middle leadership enables professional development of middle leaders to be targeted and clear.

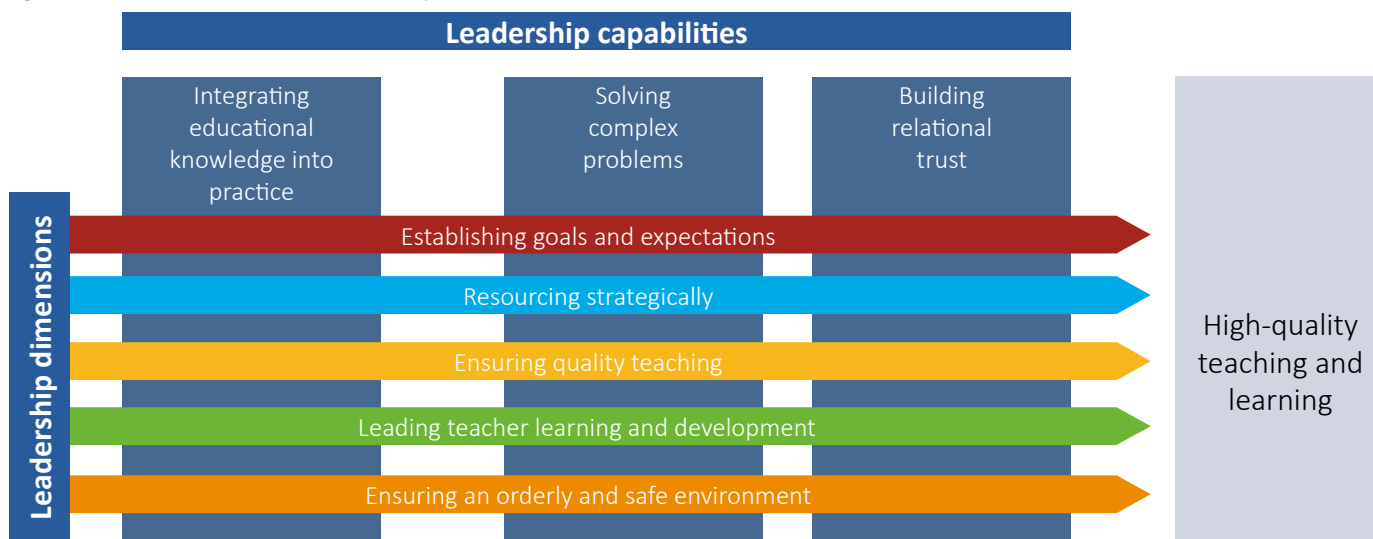
Odhiambo (2014) suggests that there are areas worth focusing on when strengthening middle leadership teams. They are:

- developing an intrinsic understanding of educational leadership
- leading strategically with a focus on improvement and innovation
- developing the self as a leader
- team leadership and developing others.

Middle leaders are influenced strongly by the organisational culture, structure and expectations of senior leaders (Gurr & Drysdale, 2013) and have an increasing responsibility for developing staff through instructional leadership that is linked to organisation strategy and shaped by student data (Millward & Timperley, 2010).

Building Leadership Culture in Schools

Figure 3: Five Dimensions of Effective Leadership



(Source: <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/60169/60170>)

Figure 3 summarises effective leadership practice as described in the Leadership Best Evidence Synthesis by Robinson (2011). This framework can be applied to middle leaders. It provides a structure for professional reflection and can assist middle leaders to determine areas for team and personal development and growth.

Middle leaders can ask themselves how they achieve the leadership dimensions and which of the leadership capabilities do they use as they work to achieve their goals.

Teacher leadership

Whilst Carter (2015) states that “principals have the responsibility of driving and working towards improving schools” it is teachers that have the “responsibility of implementing initiatives to enact this vision”. Teachers have the greatest in-school influence on student achievement. Their leadership in classrooms will directly impact the outcomes of every student they teach.

Teacher leaders serve in two fundamental types of roles: formal and informal. Formal teacher leaders fill such roles as department chair, master teacher, or instructional coach. Informal teacher leaders, in contrast, emerge organically from the teacher ranks. Instead of being selected, they take the initiative to address a problem or institute a new program. They have no positional authority; their influence stems from the respect they command from their colleagues through their expertise and practice.

A leadership culture in a school has matured when most teachers can identify their approach to leadership and they understand the scope of their leadership influence and responsibility. It is also clear that a teacher has embedded leadership culture when they actively support their peers and work with curiosity and commitment to continue to reflect, inquire and learn in order to do the best for every child. They demonstrate

dedication to their teaching, support for their peers and engage with families/carers to improve student outcomes.

Teachers who see themselves as leaders, or at least see “leader as a possible self”, are more likely to seek out opportunities to exhibit leadership as well as further develop their leadership capabilities (Ashford & DeRue 2012).

Whilst “teacher leaders can be enabled (or restrained) by culture and structures” they can also actively contribute to strengthening and moving existing cultures forward as they go about their work (O’Rourke & Burrows, 2013).

Whilst all teachers can, and do engage in leadership, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers has tried to describe all the possible characteristics of a teacher who embodies the obligation and capacity of a true leading teacher. The Standards state that a teacher demonstrating the Lead career stage is:

Recognised and respected by colleagues, parents/carers and community members as exemplary teachers. They have demonstrated consistent and innovative teaching practice over time. Inside and outside the school they initiate and lead activities that focus on improving educational opportunities for all students. They establish inclusive learning environments, meeting the needs of students from different linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. They continue to seek ways to improve their own practice and to share their experience with colleagues.

They are skilled in mentoring teachers and pre-service teachers, using activities that develop knowledge, practice and professional engagement in others. They promote creative, innovative thinking among colleagues.

They apply skills and in-depth knowledge and understanding to deliver effective lessons and learning opportunities and share this information with colleagues and pre-service teachers. They describe the relationship between highly effective teaching and learning in ways that inspire colleagues to improve their own professional practice.

They lead processes to improve student performance by evaluating and revising programs, analysing student assessment data and taking account of feedback from parents/carers. This is combined with a synthesis of current research on effective teaching and learning.

They represent the school and the teaching profession in the community. They are professional, ethical and respected individuals within and outside the school.

Teachers willing to invest deeply in growing their professional expertise and actively lead the development of peers are invaluable assets to a school.

Developing and supporting teachers who understand their ability and professional responsibility to share, improve and innovate their practice is the responsibility and challenge for every level of school leadership.

Summary

This discussion has raised the idea that schools should consider how they are explicitly addressing their leadership culture at every level because school leadership directly and indirectly impacts on student outcomes.

It highlights the importance of strategic professional learning that is focused on the development of future leaders who understand and are driven to work collaboratively to meet the needs of all learners.

ISQ will continue to support the development of leadership through key programs:

- [Self-Improving schools](#)
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- [Great Teachers in Independent Schools – Mentoring, Strategy and Middle Leadership](#)
- [Research in Schools and Coaching Partnerships](#)

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Leadership culture from the boardroom to the classroom matters. The leadership behaviour and attributes demonstrated by board members, principals, middle leaders and teachers set the culture of a school. The willingness and ability of leaders to enable the growth of others is key to being a high-performing school.



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