



Report of the Program
Evaluation of

Individual Learning plans

March 2012

After all the flowers
had dried up and the
last leaf had fallen,
one little seed began
to crack and open.



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Executive summary

Program Evaluation: *Individual Learning Plans*

The NSW Department of Education and Communities¹ (DEC) commissioned the Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau to conduct a program evaluation of *Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)*, one of several initiatives being funded under the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN).

The Terms of Reference for the program evaluation of *Individual Learning Plans* required that the evaluation:

- assess the effectiveness of the program
- assess the extent to which the program achieves its goals in an efficient manner and where applicable, addresses the mandatory reform elements of the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy, which are:
 - effective and evidence-based teaching of literacy and numeracy
 - strong school leadership and whole-school engagement with literacy and numeracy
 - monitoring student and school literacy and numeracy performance to identify where support is needed
- assess the extent to which the program has improved the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students
- investigate the most effective ways for schools to be supported to participate in the evaluation and for the reforms to be incorporated into school practice.

Given the short timeframe for completion, it was determined that evaluation should focus on achievement in reading only.

Seven National Partnership schools have chosen to implement *ILPs* as their intervention targeting individual students. Most of these schools have a high proportion of Aboriginal students.

Individual Learning Plans

The development of an *Individual Learning Plan (ILP)* provides targeted intervention focussing on a student's individual strengths and areas for development in order to raise the literacy achievement of at-risk students.

Teachers plan, monitor, manage and evaluate student achievement to identify specific learning needs and appropriate teaching and learning intervention strategies. Ongoing monitoring of student progress provides data to track learning and inform decision-making regarding content, learning strategies employed, allocation of time for instruction and practice, and the environment in which the intervention is conducted.

Individualising instruction promotes a team approach and collaborative effort involving class teachers, resource staff, and parents all working together to help the student.

ILPs were intended to provide students with access to appropriate intervention strategies to strengthen their achievement in reading by:

- building on and extending students' reading skills
- identifying and planning strategies to overcome barriers to learning
- setting realistic targets for the next stage of learning
- identifying teaching and learning support to help students achieve their reading targets and learning goals, while
- taking account of students' cultural, social and academic considerations.

¹ On 3 April 2011, the NSW Government changed the name of the *Department of Education and Training* to the *Department of Education and Communities*. In this document, a reference to the Department of Education and Training is to be construed as a reference to the *Department of Education and Communities*.

The development of an *ILP* may be indicated for students experiencing difficulties in reading or numeracy as a result of a language background other than English, a learning difficulty, limited opportunities in schooling, or living with a disability.

The Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education (AECG & DET, 2004) examined the specific learning requirements of Aboriginal students and identified the need for *Personalised Learning Plans* developed through consultation with the student, teacher and parent or carer (Recommendation 28). An *Individual Learning Plan* for Aboriginal students should align to the *Personalised Learning Plan* process, but should not override it.

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation methodology comprised the following components:

- knowledge review: a review of program documentation relating to *ILPs*
- interviews with program developers in each school
- online survey of staff in all NSW NPLN schools that selected *ILPs*
- visits to three of the seven schools that implemented *ILPs*, to conduct interviews and focus groups with school principals, school leaders, teachers, students, parents and community members
- analysis of school documentation including school Numeracy Plans and Annual School Report
- analysis of National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN) assessment data.

The methodology was developed in consultation with, and approved by the NPLN Program Evaluation Reference Group (PERG).

Key Findings

There was a consistent view across all schools that *ILPs* have improved reading outcomes for all or most students. Very few respondents said that no students improved. In the majority of schools, *ILPs* were not the sole literacy intervention. It is acknowledged that it is difficult to attribute any improvement solely to any *ILP* intervention.

Other major findings relate to the implementation of the program, impacts on teacher work practices and on the school as a whole, and issues of sustainability. These are detailed in the following sections.

Implementation of *Individual Learning Plans*

Each of the seven schools implemented a literacy program as their whole-class intervention and as a consequence, the *ILPs* were literacy-based.

Many schools had been implementing *ILPs* prior to the NPLN. Generally teachers had prior experience in the development and implementation of individually-designed student interventions. Schools undertook needs-based analysis to determine the structure of and target groups for the program.

Schools worked closely with their school education directors and regional consultants to determine best approaches. Due to the unique needs of each set of students, the plans developed were widely varied in approach.

The most obvious variations were evident in:

- model for providing targeted activities for identified students
- selection, qualification and management of tutors or personnel working with individual students
- provision of training to tutors and others involved in the implementation of *ILPs*.

Implementation models

Intervention was required to address the specific learning needs of students experiencing difficulty in reading and should be evidence-based, data driven, systematic and intensive. Intervention approaches did not necessarily require one-to-one instruction.

Table E1 sets out a summary of school models for *ILPs*, showing commonalities and variations in key aspects of the programs.

Table E1: Summary of *Individual Learning Plans* implementation models

Organisational model	Year level	Tutors/teachers	Professional learning
Targeted <i>withdrawal</i> of a small number of at-risk students	Years 3 to 6	Qualified teachers, mostly retired	Specific program training provided by region
<i>In-class intervention</i> and <i>withdrawal</i> of individual students	Years 3 to 6	Class teachers and support teachers	Training in use of the school-based rubric; specific program training as required
<i>Withdrawal</i> of several groups of students, over time	Years 3 to 6	Community volunteers	Minimal training provided
<i>In-class</i> work in groups with common needs	Kindergarten to Year 6	Class teachers and support teachers	School-based training in aspects of quality literacy teaching

Tutors

Many schools utilised existing support staff or parent or community volunteers for program delivery. Schools had the discretion to use funds to employ external tutors if that better suited the needs of their school and their students. Often these were qualified teachers, many of whom were retired.

In all models, *ILPs* were developed by teachers in consultation with specialists.

Professional Learning

There are no requirements for formalised training of staff delivering *ILPs*. It was up to schools to decide how teachers, support staff and tutors would be trained and by whom. As shown in Table E1, several schools relied on school-based professional learning.

Where further training was required, schools sought advice from their regional NPLN Program Facilitator or Literacy Consultant. As a consequence, costs associated with further training were varied and dependent upon each school's need.

Effects for students

In both data sets (NAPLAN and NPLN assessments), slightly higher reading score gains were achieved than for students across most other NPLN literacy focus schools. A range of limitations on the reliability and validity of results observed in these data sets have been outlined in this report; these should be considered when drawing conclusions from the results discussed.

Principals, school leaders, teachers, students and parents were generally positive about the impact of *ILPs* on student reading outcomes, as well as on other components of literacy and other key learning areas (KLA).

Improvements for students were also observed in other areas such as:

- enjoyment in reading
- improvements in reading fluency
- improved social skills and behaviour
- transfer of skills learnt to other KLAs
- enhanced attitudes to homework.

A high number of students in schools that used a withdrawal approach commented that they felt they were missing out on learning activities both in literacy and other KLAs. A small degree of stigmatisation was reported by students, also aggravated by withdrawal from class. Some teachers were equally dissatisfied with students withdrawn from class, and it was necessary to negotiate and plan with *ILP* tutors to ensure minimal disruption.

Students were able to identify improvements in their reading. Parents commented on the increase in their child's reading confidence and enjoyment, as well as improvements in general engagement with school.

Outcomes for Aboriginal students

Aboriginal students responded positively to *ILPs* with most suggesting they had made improvements in their reading.

The majority of teachers surveyed indicated improvements for Aboriginal students in general literacy outcomes and in reading and comprehension skills. NAPLAN data indicates that gain scores for Aboriginal students involved in *ILPs* were slightly higher than those for non-Aboriginal students. NPLN assessment data indicates that the gain scores for Aboriginal students were similar to those for non-Aboriginal students.

Analysis of comments from teachers at schools visited indicates that *ILPs* are as effective for Aboriginal students as for non-Aboriginal students.

Teacher perspectives

Responsibility for delivery of *ILPs* was frequently shared between class teachers and support staff and parent volunteers. There was a strong sense of collaboration between teachers and support officers in planning and assessing student programs. Approximately half of survey respondents commented that they plan with other school and community members to ensure the best outcomes for their students.

In those schools where withdrawal programs are used, there was a greater sense of autonomy for planning and delivery amongst the specialist tutors.

Positive aspects that teachers and other support personnel highlighted include:

- goals and activities chosen for *ILPs* are related specifically to students' background and learning needs
- assessments used with *ILPs* provided evidence of where support is needed
- tracking and monitoring individual students allowed them to intervene when needed.
- evidence for intervention and improvement in skills was now based on quality data rather than on incidental observation only.

All respondents said staff in their school are able to support them in the development of *ILPs*.

School staff consistently reported positive effects on their teaching practice as a result of training and implementing *ILPs*. Generally teachers commented that they:

- had become more reflective regarding their teaching practice
- feel more confident in the use of data to identify student learning needs and inform planning
- focus more on specific literacy skill sets.

A small number of teachers disagreed, suggesting they had not been influenced by the implementation of *ILPs*.

Impacts on schools

The introduction of *ILPs* as a school literacy focus is seen to have had a positive influence on schools, not only in terms of student outcomes but also in terms of improving school culture.

The key impacts identified by principals were:

- teachers being more active participants in the learning process
- better use of data and accountability
- greater professional dialogue among staff
- greater consistency with teaching strategies for the individual students across the school
- greater involvement by parents and the community in educational outcomes and school planning.

Factors leading to success

A number of factors were identified as contributing to the overall success of *ILPs*. These include:

- the quality and consistency of *ILP* tutors and support staff
- strong school leadership and commitment to literacy improvement
- the availability of funding to allow in-school coordinators and mentors appropriate relief to maintain professional learning and support
- regular monitoring of student progress using quality school-based assessments and SMART data (NSW DET, 2010)
- minimising disruption to general class participation for students.

Sustainability

A number of schools indicated that *Individual Learning Plans* are a very intensive method of teaching, with best results occurring when undertaken on a one-to-one basis. As a result they may well be difficult to sustain on a long-term basis.

Overall sustainability of *ILPs* in NPLN schools will rely upon:

- ongoing commitment and support from the school principal and leadership team
- embedding new practices for teachers, particularly in ongoing data analysis, collaborative planning, and unit development
- ensuring mentors are available within the school for future training and professional development.

The majority of school staff were insistent that they would like to see the continuation of *ILPs* for their at-risk students. Funding to allow for teacher relief to develop *ILPs*, for purchase of resources and for employment of the extra staff required, was seen as the major impediment to sustainability.

Part 1 Introduction

This evaluation report is presented in two parts:

- Part 1 provides the background to the *Individual Learning Plan* evaluation, and to the design of *Individual Learning Plans* implemented in the schools visited as part of the evaluation.
- Part 2 details the findings and conclusions of the evaluation.

1 Evaluating *Individual Learning Plans*

Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) is one of four literacy and numeracy programs evaluated by the Department's Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau, under the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN).

1.1 Policy context

The NPLN aims to bring about sustainable improvements in the reading and numeracy achievement of students in NSW schools. 'Closing the Gap' for Aboriginal students and improving outcomes for individual students experiencing difficulty in literacy, are specific program targets.

The partnership is operating over the four year period from 2009 to 2012, to facilitate and reward literacy and numeracy models or approaches that support teachers and clearly demonstrate evidence of accelerating improvement in student learning achievement.

The focus is on development of:

- effective, evidence-based teaching
- strong leadership and whole-school engagement in literacy and numeracy
- effective use of student performance information to identify where support is needed.

Schools in all three education sectors in NSW (government, independent and Catholic) were identified for participation, using a range of criteria, including:

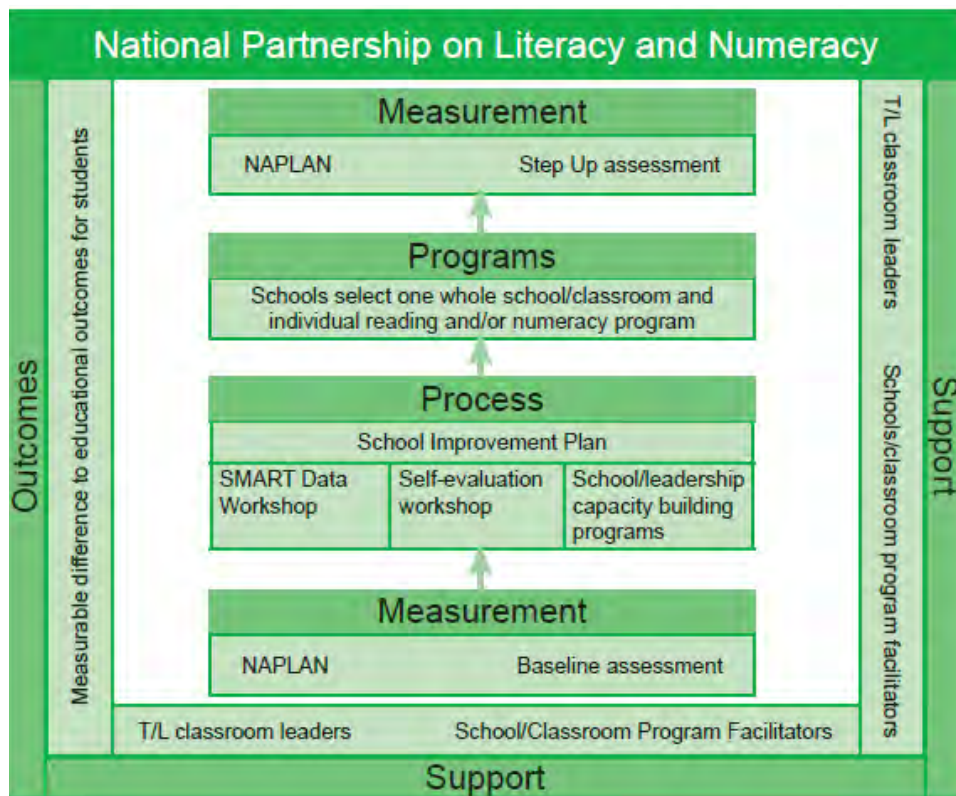
- the 2008 National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data: schools where the percentage of all students in Years 3 and 5 at or below minimum standard is above the state percentage in reading and numeracy
- the school's suitability and readiness to participate in the NPLN, as advised by regional and diocesan offices
- the school's student background characteristics including: enrolment numbers; student language background; student enrolment data, for instance, proportion of refugee students or a large proportion of Aboriginal students; and the degree of disadvantage of the schools or group of schools.

Participating schools were allocated funding, tied to the reform priorities, to review and refine their school improvement plan. Schools were expected to use their funding to:

- undertake a self-evaluation on reading or numeracy
- involve the school leadership team in a leadership capacity-building program
- implement an intervention program targeting individual students in Years 3 to 6 who are experiencing difficulty in reading or numeracy
- implement an intervention program at a whole-class level in Years 3 to 6
- focus on improving teaching and learning in Years 3 to 6, by having teachers participate in a sustained professional learning program on reading or numeracy.

Each school was required to complete professional learning in the use of SMART data and school leadership capacity building as part of the NPLN. Teachers were expected to complete the online *Data Analysis Skills Assessment (DASA)* to gauge their own development of skills in analysing data and using results to inform practice.

Figure 1.1: National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy implementation model (NSW Government, 2009a)



Within the context of the school improvement plan the funding could also be used to:

- support staff to participate in a local Aboriginal cultural awareness program
- provide release for collaborative programming, resource development, shared reflection and team teaching
- work with school *ILP* tutors or teaching and learning leaders
- purchase equipment or resources essential to the implementation of the professional learning program, or
- employ teacher aides where they are essential to the implementation of an intervention.

A total of 147 schools in NSW participated in a range of programs offered under the NPLN. Some of these programs have been developed internally by NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC), others by the Catholic education sector, and others by external developers. Each program targets literacy or numeracy, taking either an individual student or a whole-class approach, and has been included on the basis of a sound evidence base that supports its potential to achieve the intended improvements.

Literacy programs were selected that take a balanced approach to teaching literacy and include a range of strategies to develop students' phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (NSW Government, 2009b).

1.2 Individual Learning Plans

The use of *ILPs* was nominated within the NPLN Agreement as one of the programs to be evaluated by the Program Evaluation Unit of the Department's Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau (SEPEB).

There are seven public schools in NSW implementing *ILPs* as the individual intervention through the NPLN. Of these, three schools participated in the qualitative field visit component of the evaluation.

Each of the seven schools had a focus on literacy through the NPLN, and as a consequence the *ILPs* are all literacy-based. Each school has taken a different approach to developing learning plans for their students.

No Catholic Education Commission schools chose to develop *ILPs* as their individual intervention.

A description of the how the *ILPs* were designed and implemented is provided in Section 2.

1.3 Evaluating the literacy and numeracy programs

The NPLN Cross-sectoral Working Group determined that eight of the available programs would be formally evaluated. It was agreed that only programs with seven or more participating schools would be involved in the evaluation.

The following criteria were used to determine whether each program evaluation would be conducted within the DEC or by an external evaluator:

- The four literacy and numeracy programs developed by organisations outside education systems were evaluated by the Department's Student Evaluation and Program Evaluation Bureau (SEPEB).
- Literacy and numeracy programs developed within education systems (three programs) were evaluated by an external evaluator, Urbis Pty Ltd.
- *MultiLit* was evaluated by Urbis Pty Ltd.

Independent sector schools are not involved in the NPLN program evaluations.

The purpose of the program evaluations is to assess the effectiveness of the selected literacy and numeracy programs, as defined in the Terms of Reference, below.

1.4 Terms of Reference of the evaluation

The Terms of Reference for the program evaluation of *Individual Learning Plans* required that the evaluation:

- assess the effectiveness of the program
- assess the extent to which the program achieves its goals in an efficient manner and where applicable, addresses the mandatory reform elements of the NPLN, which are:
 - effective and evidence-based teaching of literacy and numeracy
 - strong school leadership and whole-school engagement with literacy and numeracy
 - monitoring student and school literacy and numeracy performance to identify where support is needed
- assess the extent to which the program has improved the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students
- investigate the most effective ways for schools to be supported to participate in the evaluation and for the reforms to be incorporated into school practice.

Given the short time frame for completion of the suite of evaluations, the Cross-sectoral Working Group determined that each literacy program evaluation should focus on reading, rather than trying to assess the full range of literacy activities and outcomes.

Throughout the evaluation reference was made, by both teachers and students, to aspects of literacy learning beyond reading. These have been included in the evaluation findings, as appropriate.

1.5 Methodology

The *Individual Learning Plan* evaluation employed a mixed-method design drawing on both quantitative and qualitative components, as described in the following sections.

The evaluation was undertaken during the second year of implementation of *ILPs* as part of the NPLN program intervention. At this early stage in the program, the most credible data comes from the experiences of participants and results of in-school assessment of student achievement. Qualitative methods were employed as they allow greater depth of enquiry, placing value on the accounts of teachers, school executive members, students and parent representatives.

The NPLN Program Evaluation Reference Group (PERG) was established to provide advice and guidance to the evaluation team. The evaluation methodology was approved by the PERG and each of the interview and observation schedules was developed in consultation with the expert members of the PERG.

1.5.1 Qualitative component

The qualitative component of the evaluation comprised:

- a review of program documentation for *ILPs* in each school
- interviews with the Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate (AETD) and the Disability Programs Directorate
- visits to three of the seven schools implementing *ILPs* .

Background document review

Prior to the commencement of the evaluation, SEPEB team members undertook a thorough review of literature regarding *ILPs*, to better inform their understanding of the philosophy and approaches taken by schools.

There is much literature associated with the use of *ILPs* for students with particular needs. Schools were expected to do their own research in developing the structure and processes for implementing *ILPs*.

NPLN officers developed a basic template for teachers to use, if desired. The guidelines allowed flexibility in the organisation of tutoring sessions, allowing small group as well as one-to-one approaches (NSW Government, 2009c, p.9).

Interviews with Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate (AETD) and Disability Programs Directorate

Interviews with officers from AETD were seen as necessary to ensure appropriate analysis of *ILPs* especially as they may be incorporated within mandatory Personalised Learning Plans for Aboriginal students. Due to the high number of students with special needs working with *ILPs*, it was seen as beneficial to interview officers from the Disability Programs Directorate to understand the specific nature of individualised interventions.

School visits

The evaluation team engaged in a purposive selection of schools for fieldwork. A random selection of schools was not possible given the multiple literacy and numeracy programs in use across NSW, the small numbers of schools in some program cohorts, and the other commitments of participating schools.

Schools to be visited were selected to provide a range of implementation contexts, in terms of:

- the size and location of schools, ensuring demographic diversity within the sample
- characteristics of the student population, including the proportion of Aboriginal students, and students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- the mix of NPLN programs undertaken in each school
- schools' engagement with other initiatives under the National Smarter Schools Partnership including the National Partnership for Low SES Schools, to avoid logistical difficulties for the school.

Every attempt was made to ensure that selected schools were not involved in multiple other learning initiatives or funded programs.

In most cases, two members of the evaluation team visited each school for one day. Each visit included:

- an interview with the principal and relevant school leaders
- classroom observation of local program implementation, to allow students to meet evaluators prior to participating in the focus group
- focus groups with students
- group interviews with teaching staff
- group interviews with the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) and parents group representatives (where available)
- document review including the school plan and the school literacy plan.

Table 1.1 provides a summary of sources of qualitative data collected across the three schools visited.

Table 1.1: Summary of participation in school interviews

Methods	No of interviews	No of participants	Aboriginal representation
Principal/ school leader interviews	3	6	
Classroom observations	3	n/a	in 2 out of 3 observations
Student focus groups	3	18	in 2 out of 3 interviews
Teacher interviews	4	18	
Parent and community interviews	3	14	in 2 out of 3 interviews

The inclusion of Aboriginal parents and local community members was seen as an important part of the qualitative data gathering. Schools and local AECGs were contacted well ahead of time, and provided with information flyers regarding the evaluation, for distribution to members of their community.

Coincidentally, one of the schools implementing *ILPs* was visited as part of a separate evaluation of a whole-class literacy program. While not the focus of the visit, the principal and teachers were very keen to provide information about how they were managing their *ILPs*. This information has been included in the description of *ILP* models in Section 2.3.2.

Data recording and analysis

All interviews and focus group sessions were recorded using both audio recording and note taking. Field notes and recordings were consolidated into a single record of interview, which was quality reviewed before analysis commenced.

Systematic coding commenced with an initial set of categories generated from the Terms of Reference and the background document review. Original categories were soon expanded and refined based on common issues and themes emerging from participants' responses. Counter-examples were sought, with recognition given to dissenting opinions, particularly from within teacher group interviews.

The narrative responses to the teacher survey were included in the consolidated data set for each program. In the case of *ILPs*, this coded data amounted to 892 individual thematic records. It is this material that has been used to provide the majority of the qualitative evidence of the evaluation.

1.5.2 Quantitative component

The quantitative component of the evaluation included an online survey for teachers, and analysis of the available student assessment data provided by the Department's Educational Measurement and School Accountability Directorate (EMSAD).

Teacher online survey

An online survey was made available to teaching staff in all seven schools, to capture teachers' experiences and views on the effectiveness of *ILPs*.

The online survey was completed by a total of 36 school staff from the seven schools implementing *ILPs*. Full results of the online survey are attached at Appendix 3.

The charts and graphs used throughout this report present responses to the teacher survey.

NAPLAN and NPLN assessment data

An essential component of an evaluation of a literacy program is consideration of the affected students' quantitative results in broadscale testing, against common standards.

While broadscale testing can deliver useful information about the effects of a student's whole-school experience on test performance, it is a more complex matter to attempt to link one intervention which is part of that experience, to test performances. This section of the report considers such test data and how it was used in the evaluation.

A data model developed by EMSAD provided the quantitative analysis for the program evaluations. This data model included NAPLAN and NPLN assessment data.

For NAPLAN assessments which occur only for Years 3 and 5 in primary school, a pre-NPLN benchmark was established using results for students in Year 3 in 2008 and 2009, for comparison with results of the same classes in Year 5 in 2010 and 2011, as shown in Table 1.2. Individual students cannot be identified and a significant turn-over of students in some schools makes comparisons between students uncertain.

Table 1.2: Student performance assessment data sets

NAPLAN results		NPLN assessment results			
	Cohort 1	Cohort 2			
2008	Year 3				
2009		Year 3	April, 2009	Year 2	Year 3
2010	Year 5		August, 2010	Year 3	Year 4
2011		Year 5	August, 2011	Year 4	Year 5

The preliminary NAPLAN data sets provided by EMSAD are provided as:

- test means and standard deviations
- gains in mean scores from Year 3 to Year 5
- percentages below, at and above National Minimum Standards.

The results are provided as aggregated for all NPLN program schools and also separated by NPLN program and by various cohort groups of students, as shown in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3: Aggregate data sets

Data set	Program comparison groups	Student comparison groups
NAPLAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program schools (aggregated data for all NPLN schools implementing a given literacy or numeracy program) • All NPLN schools (literacy/numeracy) • All NSW 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All students • Boys • Girls • Aboriginal • Non-Aboriginal • LBOTE • Non-LBOTE
NPLN assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program schools (aggregated data for all NPLN schools implementing a given literacy or numeracy program) • All NPLN schools (literacy/numeracy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All students • Boys • Girls • Aboriginal • Non-Aboriginal • LBOTE • Non-LBOTE

ESL data are not provided, due to a change in the use of that cohort group in the NAPLAN test data in recent years.

The key analysis in the use of the NAPLAN data is the effect size measure. Effect size is an indication of the meaning attached to a difference between the mean of a sample and the mean of the population from which the sample is drawn. Numerically it is the difference between the sample mean and the population mean, expressed as a proportion of the standard deviation for the population. It describes the effect of being in a program school on student performance.

In this analysis the population is 'all the students in the state' in most cases. In some cases it is the students in schools in a NPLN program group, as will be evident in the tables and text throughout the report. In most cases, the sample is 'all NPLN program schools' but it may be a cohort only, such as the boys or the Aboriginal students only.

An effect size of zero to 0.2 or -0.2 indicates that the means are virtually the same and as such, the measure of performance is the same for sample and population. An effect size greater than 0.2 or less than -0.2 indicates that the mean of the sample is different from the population mean and the performance is different.

Positive effect sizes indicate a sample performance above the population performance, while negative effect sizes indicate that the performance of the sample is below the population performance. An effect size greater than 0.5 or less than -0.5, in other words a difference of half a standard deviation or more, indicates that the mean of the sample is very different from the population mean and the sample performance is well above or well below the population.

1.5.3 Limitations of the methodology

The major limitation in the design of this program evaluation comes from the short period of time between the commencement of the interventions in late 2009, and the points of data collection, both quantitative and qualitative, to mid-2011.

The NAPLAN data can only be viewed as a preliminary, incomplete set because of the program timeframe. For Cohort 1 (Table 1.2) the period of program implementation prior to the May 2010 NAPLAN testing in Year 5, allows an effect time of, at most, one full term of the program intervention.

EMSAD has advised that further caution should be exercised in interpreting the results of NAPLAN and NPLN assessments. A number of limitations impact on the validity of findings from the analysis including:

- the variation in the focus of tests each year
- considerable student mobility
- small sample sizes for some comparison groups
- the impact of other literacy and numeracy initiatives operating in NPLN schools
- the use of these same programs in other NSW schools (not funded under the NPLN)
- the lack of a comparable control group against which to benchmark results for NPLN schools.

The NPLN tests are adequate for whole-cohort assessment but are too brief to use for diagnostic assessment of individual students. As the NPLN tests are half the length of the Basic Skills Tests (BST) on which they are based, they cannot be used to compare with statewide performance on the former BST.

As NAPLAN and the NPLN tests are presented on different scales the results of these two assessments cannot be compared.

The use of qualitative methods, as well as performance measures or surveys, provides a balancing effect, allowing the experiences of teachers, students and parents to be presented for interpretation by others. Qualitative methods do not seek to identify a simple consensus or give extra weight to frequent comments or repeated evidence of similar experiences. It is the 'atypical' that also provides insight into the educational situation, especially if events are experienced differently in different contexts, or by a variety of participants.

While this may suggest a limitation in the ability to provide general conclusions, what it does offer is recognition of the diversity of experiences within and between school situations.

1.5.4 Attribution

Finally, concurrent with the implementation of *ILPs (ILPs)* for those individual students in greatest need of support, each school was required to implement a whole-class literacy program. In several cases elements of existing literacy programs were incorporated into *ILPs* (e.g. *MultiLit*, *Accelerated Literacy*, *Guided Reading*).

A challenge exists in attributing effectiveness to any one program or intervention, and in isolating that effect from other influences in classrooms and schools.

1.6 Presentation of the evaluation findings

Section 2 provides an overview of the variety of *Individual Learning Plans* as they were developed and implemented in each of the schools visited.

The evaluation findings are presented in Part 2 of this report, in the following sections:

Section 3: Implementing *Individual Learning Plans*

Section 4: Effects for students

Section 5: Teacher and tutor perspectives

Section 6: Impact in schools

Section 7: Summary of findings and conclusions.

The interview and observation schedules and the teacher and tutor survey results are included in three appendices.

2 Individual Learning Plans in detail

This section provides an overview of the various methods schools employed to create individual literacy plans for their students. The evaluation team has primarily drawn from fieldwork components of the evaluation, with follow up research as required. Interviews with the Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate (AETD) and the Disability Programs Directorate have also provided useful insights.

2.1 Aim

While class-based teaching is often based on the premise that all students should receive equal attention, experience common curriculum offerings and be evaluated using common methods, an *Individual Learning Plan (ILP)* presumes that the needs of individual students are different, and must be addressed differently.

Individual Learning Plans are a direct and targeted intervention for individual students, taking the form of a specific program or set of strategies that takes into consideration the student's strengths and areas for development.

An *ILP* sets individual goals, outlines research-based interventions to attain goals, sets a timeline, and finally, outlines the assessment process. The plan also identifies the person responsible for facilitating the plan with the student.

2.2 Individual Learning Plans in the NPLN context

Individual Learning Plans can be adopted as a pedagogical approach for all students, or may be indicated for students experiencing difficulties as a result of a language background other than English, a learning difficulty, limited opportunities in schooling, living with a disability, or any combination of these.

Under the auspices of the NPLN, *ILPs* are specifically intended to address the learning needs of students who are most at risk of performing at or below the National Benchmarks in literacy or numeracy.

The NPLN provided schools with the opportunity to develop and implement *ILPs* as an alternative to the other programs on offer. Schools could elect to build on current intervention approaches to strengthen their capacity to improve student achievement in reading or develop new plans that better targeted the needs of selected students.

Schools needed to negotiate with and seek approval for this decision from the school education director, diocesan director or sector contact.

ILPs are intended to be an integral part of teaching and learning. They should be individually developed to enable each student access to appropriate intervention strategies to strengthen their achievement in reading. The plans should articulate how strategies and activities will:

- build on and extend students' reading skills
- identify and plan for overcoming barriers to learning
- set realistic targets for the next stage of learning
- identify teaching and learning support to help students achieve their reading (or numeracy) targets and learning goals
- be inclusive of students' cultural, social and academic considerations.

Each intervention is required to address the specific learning needs of students experiencing difficulty in reading, and should be evidence-based, data-driven, systematic and intensive. Intervention approaches were not necessarily required to provide one-to-one instruction.

It was expected that parents or carers should be consulted in the development of the *ILP* for each student. Clear information should be provided regarding the student's current level of performance, expected activities, and the assistance that can be given at home.

2.3 Design and implementation of *Individual Learning Plans*

There were seven government schools that chose *ILPs* as their individual program intervention. These schools identified that the developed packages offered by the NPLN would not be as effective as their own school-based programs. Each of these seven schools focused on literacy as their domain of activity.

Each school determined the design of the *ILP* based on their own research and local needs. NPLN provided a template as an example to schools which could be used as required. The template is attached at Appendix 1.

2.3.1 Common Features of *Individual Learning Plans* in NPLN schools

Across the seven schools, a number of common features emerged as their plans were developed and implemented. In each case the school's plans:

- targeted development of skills in reading
- used formal assessment of students to identify areas of greatest need
- identified specific teaching and learning strategies for the individual or group, to address the targeted outcomes
- included ongoing monitoring of student progress; promoting decisions based on the data collected along with informed teacher judgement
- were responsive to student monitoring, enabling necessary adjustments to content, teaching strategies, targeted outcomes, time allocation for instruction and practice, and even the teaching and learning environment
- promoted formative feedback to the student and parent or carer regarding learning progress.

2.3.2 Models of implementation

The range of implementation models observed in each setting included:

- targeted *withdrawal* of a small number of at-risk students, for the duration of the partnership, as identified through NAPLAN and NPLN assessments from Years 3 to 6
- targeted *in-class intervention with limited withdrawal* of students, using a school-designed rubric, in Years 3 to 6
- targeted *withdrawal* of successive sets of students for limited periods of time, addressing common skill needs. Over the period of the partnership program several sets of students participated, in sequence
- *In-class* work in groups with common needs, based on a whole-school, Kindergarten to Year 6 approach, identifying needs of the total school population as well as each individual student.

Table 2.1 sets out a summary of school models for *ILPs*, showing commonalities and variations in key aspects of the programs.

Implementation of each of the different models necessarily required differing approaches to engaging and training tutors, and execution of the plans within the school, as detailed below.

Table 2.1: Summary of Individual Learning Plan implementation models

Organisational model	Year level	Tutors/teachers	Professional learning
Targeted <i>withdrawal</i> of a small number of at-risk students	Years 3 to 6	Qualified teachers, mostly retired	Specific program training provided by Region
<i>In-class intervention</i> and <i>withdrawal</i> of individual students	Years 3 to 6	Class teachers and support teachers	Training in use of the school-based rubric; specific program training as required
<i>Withdrawal</i> of several groups of students, over time	Years 3 to 6	Community volunteers	Minimal training provided
<i>In-class work</i> in groups with common needs	Kindergarten to Year 6	Class teachers and support teachers	School-based training in aspects of quality literacy teaching

Tutors

Many schools utilised existing support staff or parent or community volunteers for program delivery. Schools had the discretion to use funds to employ external tutors if that better suited the needs of their school and their students. Often these were qualified teachers, many of whom were retired.

In all models, *ILPs* were developed by teachers in consultation with specialists.

Professional Learning

There are no requirements for formalised training of staff delivering *ILPs*. It was up to schools to decide how teachers, support staff and tutors would be trained and by whom. Several schools relied on school-based professional learning.

Where further training was required, schools sought advice from their regional NPLN Program Facilitator and Literacy Consultant. As a consequence, costs associated with specific program training were varied and dependent upon each school's need.

Resources

As would be expected, each school needed to provide the learning resources associated with the plans they developed. There were no commonalities between schools in the provision of resources.

Monitoring student progress

Schools were able to choose their own methods of assessing students involved in.

2.4 School models of implementation

The three schools visited implemented very different models of individualised interventions, as detailed in the following sections.

2.4.1 School 1

Located in a large coastal town, School 1 has a significant transient population. The school is affected by poor attendance rates and in recent years has noted an increasing number of students arriving at the school with poor speech patterns or pronunciation. The student population comprises 46% Aboriginal students and 10% Language Background Other than English (LBOTE). The school receives funding support under the Priority Action Schools (PAS) initiative.

Individual student withdrawal

For students in Years 3 to 6, School 1 decided to adopt a model of individual student withdrawal from class to receive one-to-one intensive instruction. Half an hour of tuition is allocated per student, per day for four days each week. Teachers indicated that the one-to-one model is effective, *“giving total focus on the individual student’s needs.”*

ILPs were developed for 29 students in Stages 2 and 3, of whom eight were Aboriginal, and all of whom were identified as falling well below the National Benchmark in Year 3. This cohort of students received one-to-one instruction during periodic blocks of time over the two years of the program’s implementation. If one of the selected students left the school, another was identified to take their place. The individualised intervention was targeted at a specific group of students from Years 3 to 5 in line with NAPLAN testing.

Program choice

In identifying the best approach in implementing *ILPs*, the school sought advice from district consultants to assist in determining a program that would suit their needs, as explained by the principal:

“Hubbard Street was selected through District Office, they thought that was the program that would benefit the kids the most.”

Hubbard Street was produced by the Newcastle Special Education Support Centre. It is designed as a volunteer tutor program to develop skills in reading, writing, talking and listening in an individual program arrangement. The program is appropriate for children with a reading age of 6.5 to 7.5. The program is structured as follows:

- the content is divided into five sequences of instruction
- each sequence is made up of five units of work. Each unit takes approximately a week to complete
- the first four units are teaching units, while the fifth is a revision unit
- daily sessions are 20 – 30 minutes long.

It is not necessary to use the whole program. Teachers can select elements of the program which suit the outcomes they desire and the timeframe they have available. The principal stated that the *Hubbard Street* program is suitable for all school stages.

Hubbard Street benchmarking assessments were administered prior to commencing the program, to establish entry point data from which to gauge student progress.

Students moved through three levels of instruction, as follows:

- *Hubbard Street* sequences until the maximum level
- an intensive levelled reading program, until reaching level 30
- individually tailored sets of activities.

As one tutor commented:

“Hubbard Street is a good place to start with the kids, all the units are there, everything is done and you just take out what unit you need and put it into the kids’ books.”

Hubbard Street can no longer be purchased as the Newcastle centre has closed, but permission to photocopy the programs has been given.

During the period on NPLN implementation, the school decided to create a 'Boys Group' intervention to address specific concerns with boys from Years 3 to 5. While not part of the NPLN, the program catered for boys with behaviour, learning and engagement issues. They worked as a group for two days per week: half a day with class teachers, and afternoons working on levelled reading activities. According to the principal, their skill levels across the board have increased. The Boys Group was seen as an alternative to the *ILP* program for some students.

In one notable case, a student had struggled working with a tutor on his *ILP*, with no success. He had extreme difficulty engaging with the tutors and a number of previous interventions had produced an equal lack of success. As a consequence of placing this student in the Boys Group, the principal indicated that the student is now engaged, doing his work and having success. Sometimes individual interventions need to be extremely flexible and responsive to student needs.

Tutor experience and training

To facilitate the individual programs, recently retired teachers were hired as tutors. The principal explained:

“... one of our tutors is a retired AP from one of our local schools, and she has been coordinating the program. We have 3 of the 4 tutors we had last year, and we brought in another tutor this year who has fitted in very well. We were very fortunate that there was a high calibre of personnel available.”

The tutors were trained in *Hubbard Street* at their local district office. Follow-up program interventions were designed by the tutors and supported by the student's class teacher.

Timetabling

In employing five tutors who worked with a total of five or six students each, there was a necessity to timetable some student intervention sessions before school and during lunch times.

Space also proved to be an issue with individual withdrawal. Teachers and tutors were aware that the targeted students were easily distracted and providing an appropriate space was essential. One tutor commented, *“with four of us for four days a week at half hour slots, working areas can be hard to find.”*

2.4.2 School 2

School 2 is located in an outer Sydney suburb, experiencing 35% unemployment and 30% transient population. The student population comprises 42% Language Background Other than English (LBOTE), and 7% Aboriginal students. The school has generated a large number of 'specific needs programs' to cater for and support this clientele. This school receives funding support from the Priority Schools Program (PSP).

Program choice

The school devised a reading rubric that makes explicit to students and teachers the specific skills needed to become a proficient reader. The reading rubric enables teachers to identify the needs of all students, not just those falling behind National Benchmark.

Each *Individual Learning Plan* is based on the reading rubric and is designed to align with SMART assessments. They are reviewed regularly with teachers increasing their use of data to make informed decisions of how to continue, utilising strategies provided by SMART 2 (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2010).

Teachers commented that the use of the reading rubric helped highlight teacher professional needs as well as needs of students.

In-class group and withdrawal interventions

School 2 targeted students in Years 3 to 6, who were falling below National Benchmark, to work in group interventions within whole-class settings. A matrix assessment related to the reading rubric was designed to identify student reading needs. Student self-assessment of reading is also part of the design of the *Individual Learning Plan*.

Where student assessment indicates further support is needed beyond the group in-class intervention, targeted students are withdrawn to work on specific literacy skills strategies, using a program such as *MultiLit*.

Tutor experience and training

The school made provision for an in-school National Partnership Coordinator who was provided with release time to plan, program and train staff in the use of the reading rubric. Teachers and school learning support officers (SLSO), were also given training in various literacy programs such as *Accelerated Literacy*, *MultiLit*, *Reading Recovery* and *Supporting Children with Autism*.

Resources

The school has a number of staff with expertise in developing *ILPs* for students; including a teacher of mild intellectual disabilities (IM), Reading Recovery teacher, Support Teacher Learning Assistance (STLA), teacher of English as a Second Language (ESL), and an Early School Support Program (ESSP) teacher. In addition, four Aboriginal staff members provided support in the development of Aboriginal *Personal Learning Plans* and literacy-based *ILPs*.

Resources and strategies incorporated in the development of *ILPs* are drawn from existing programs such as *MultiLit*, *Reading Recovery*, and *Accelerated Literacy*.

The effectiveness of this approach to implementing *ILPs* was expressed by one teacher as follows:

“The ILPs are a really powerful tool in narrowing down exactly what skills the kids need to focus on, especially when paired with the fantastic rubric that [the co-ordinator] has developed. Letting the kids have ownership over their goals and what they want to do helps them to understand that they share the responsibility for their learning. In relation to using them in the classroom, it is challenging in school like ours in that we have a dozen or so kids in each class who have been identified as needing an ILP, and lots more who still need to review the skills, so often the most effective lessons are whole-class, then follow up with kids who still don’t get it over the next few days. The ILPs are an effective planning tool, and as we are all becoming more familiar with teaching strategies that meet the indicators, will become highly effective in implementing interventions that address the specific areas of need of our kids.”

2.4.3 School 3

School 3 is located in suburban Sydney. In 2010, 98% of students came from Language Backgrounds other than English (LBOTE). The school prides itself on providing an inclusive and tolerant environment that caters to the varied needs of its students. As noted in their 2010 Annual School Report:

“We work carefully with the parents, external agencies and other areas of the DET for the successful inclusion of students with disabilities, in mainstream classes.”

To further support the school's learning programs, School 3 receives substantial additional funding through programs such as the Priority Schools Program (PSP), Successful Language Learners (SLL), Refugee Project and School Learning Support Coordinator (SLSC) initiatives.

Program choice

The executive at School 3 decided that the approach that would best suit their school was a whole-school/ whole-class/ group/ individualised program intervention to meet the needs of the student population.

On examination of SMART data, a considerable number of students at School 3 were identified as needing significant support in literacy. The students' needs were hugely varied, suggesting a single program intervention may not suit all cases. The widespread level of need led to the decision to combine the NPLN resources and work with *ILPs* across the school, as both the whole-school and individualised intervention. With support from the Regional Office, the school was able to obtain permission to develop a school-based *ILP* approach which would address and support the unique situation of the school.

During literacy sessions students work in similar-needs groups with their classroom teacher, school learning support officer, another qualified teacher or paraprofessional. One teacher described the operation as follows:

*“In my safety net class, I have a reading group with a group *ILP* (lowest NAPLAN scores), and the needs identified are catered for in the reading group. There is a support teacher who works in the classroom for two hours a morning and the reading groups work on a rotation.”*

As a consequence students learn together and are not subject to identified skills labelling.

The explicit teaching strategies developed for each student are shared with all staff, including the librarian, the support teacher and the community languages teacher. They are modified on a periodic basis. The *Individual Learning Plan* is regularly monitored and reviewed, and progresses with the student from year to year.

This whole-school model, according to the principal, allowed for greater consistency and sustainability.

In-class group intervention

School 3 chose to target students in all years, Kindergarten to Year 6, to work within the classroom setting. Based on previous experience the school considered that withdrawal of students is not effective. Literacy improvement was seen as a whole-school responsibility, which worked best when tackled within a class environment.

Teachers worked together to identify individual student needs and organised groupings within each class. Groups of students were identified who needed support with similar literacy skills, so “*group Individual Learning Plans*” were developed, where appropriate. During 2010 *ILPs* were provided for 193 students; those with vision, high support, behaviour, literacy and ESL needs. In 2011, there were 181 *ILPs* implemented for students.

Assistance was provided for class teachers with additional paraprofessionals and school learning support officers who were trained along with the teaching staff.

In their implementation of *ILPs*, an additional three classes were introduced to cater for students with shared, specific learning needs:

- **Safety net class:** students selected according to academic need, based on internal and external data. Class sizes are reduced. Extra staff are allocated to provide greater amounts of support.
- **Reception class:** students selected based on ESL needs, usually those with little or no English. Class sizes are reduced. Greater level of support is provided through extra staff allocation in the timetable.
- **Enrichment class:** students selected according to academic needs, based on internal and external data. Class activities are designed to challenge students' thinking and provide rich learning tasks that are multi-age appropriate.

Implementing *ILPs* for nearly 200 students across the school from Kindergarten to Year 6, as well as for specific-needs classes requires time for planning and programming as well as the provision of additional support staff.

Tutor and teacher experience and training

Prior to the NPLN, there were already nine students working from *ILPs*: two vision students, five high support students and two students with identified behaviour needs. Some teachers had experience in developing *ILPs*.

The focus of the *Individual Learning Plan* development was described as “guided reading within the context of a quality literacy program”. Extensive professional learning was undertaken in 2010. Workshops were conducted for whole staff, stage groups, year groups, support staff, individuals and literacy mentors in the areas of literacy centres, setting up guided reading lessons, guided reading, programming, writing, and linking reading and writing.

The workshops were also designed to address the mandatory reform elements of the NPLN, including using evidence-based teaching, developing leadership capacity and promoting high levels of engagement with literacy.

Attention was given to the pedagogy of literacy and how best practice occurs through the cycle of modelled, shared, guided and independent teaching and learning activities.

Resources

Resources were purchased that aligned with all aspects of the professional development to ensure best practices were supported. As a major component of their NPLN expenditure School 3 invested in listening posts for each classroom. A teacher explained:

“Listening posts have been a great idea to use in classrooms. [Students] hear modelled reading and vocab.”

The school has established a literacy centre where resources can be easily accessed by teachers.

School-based *ILPs* and resources are kept on the school server so that all staff have easy access to them.

2.5 Program support

As a core feature of the NPLN program schools were supported by regional NPLN Facilitators, who provided assistance with implementing the NPLN program interventions.

2.6 Previous evaluations

The information package provided for schools (NSW Government, 2009a) contained no evidence base for those schools wishing to implement *ILPs* as their literacy intervention for individual students.

Schools were encouraged to ‘draw on a range of programs’ (NSW Government, 2009c p. 8) to design the *ILPs* for their students.

Part 2 Evaluation findings

Part 2 presents the findings of the program evaluation, organised in terms of priority areas identified in the Terms of Reference of the evaluation, and in response to issues that emerged through the data collection.

3 Implementing *Individual Learning Plans*

Section 2 provided an overview of the range of *Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)* implemented in the schools visited during the evaluation. This section sets out the major implementation influences that made a difference to schools' experiences of *ILPs* in practice.

Key findings:

- Each school developed a locally designed *Individual Learning Plan* program to suit the needs of the school, and the specific needs of the targeted students.
- Student involvement in development of *ILPs* led to a greater sense of responsibility and better learning.
- Implementation costs were high where schools employed extra staff to deliver the program by withdrawing students, or to support teachers in the classroom.

3.1 Planning and development

Of the seven schools involved in implementing *ILPs* as their individualised intervention, six chose *Accelerated Literacy* as their whole-class intervention. Interviews with principals indicated that the choice of *ILPs* was based on the need to ensure compatibility of programs with *Accelerated Literacy*.

3.1.1 Reflecting local beliefs and needs

In designing school-based models of delivery of *ILPs*, principals indicated decisions were based on a number of factors, reflecting differences in their educational learning theory, previous experiences with individual interventions and the skills of teachers. Each school's approach was determined by the following motivations:

School 1:

- belief that one-to-one instruction provides enhanced focus on a student's needs
- prior knowledge of *ILPs*, or *ILPs* already being implemented in the school
- the only other program choice was MultiLit and this was seen to be incompatible with *Accelerated Literacy* as a whole-class program choice

School 2:

- prior knowledge of *ILPs*, or *ILPs* already being implemented in the school
- intention to introduce pedagogical change to promote greater focus on individual needs of all students.

School 3:

- school-based assessments identified students in need of interventions prior to Year 3
- belief that withdrawal practices were ineffective
- an intention to introduce pedagogical change to promote greater focus on individual student needs.

Schools worked closely with their school education directors and regional consultants to determine the best approach for their school.

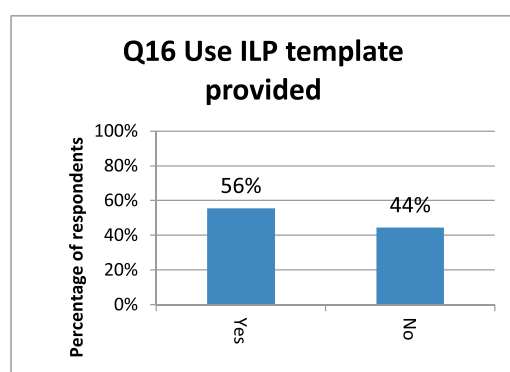
Prior to National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy, several of the seven schools had implemented a version of *ILPs*, although to a much lesser extent. Some individual teachers had some prior experience in the development and implementation of individually designed student interventions. Schools undertook a needs-based analysis to determine students to be involved and the structure of the program.

Most schools implemented the *ILPs* in Stages 2 and 3 in line with the NPLN focus. One school chose to implement the *ILPs* within classes across the whole school as both their individual student and whole-class program. This school received additional district and regional support for choosing *ILPs* as their only program intervention.

3.1.2 Use of the *Individual Learning Plan* template

The teacher survey showed that 56% of respondents used the NPLN planning template to structure and plan individual interventions (Figure 3.1). In the three schools visited, the template was being used as provided, or used with slight modification.

Figure 3.1: Use of NPLN *Individual Learning Plan* template



All schools developed learning plans which targeted specific students and involved input from teachers and paraprofessionals where needed. Some schools involved students and parents in the process. Where there were Aboriginal students in the school, staff indicated that all *ILPs* were aligned with students' *Personalised Learning Plans*.

3.2 *Individual Learning Plans* in practice

The seven schools that chose *ILPs* as their individual intervention each developed models based on locally-identified needs. This section details findings related to how common requirements were met and how the *ILPs* worked in practice.

3.2.1 Providing the individual support for students

As indicated in Section 2, each school designed its own model of *ILPs*, providing one-to-one instruction either within the class setting or by withdrawing students. In at least one case, a combination of both methods was used.

In schools that adopted a withdrawal-from-class approach, instruction was provided by:

- tutors employed to work with individual students
- school-based support staff, e.g. School Learning Support Officers (SLSO), Aboriginal Education Officers (AEO) or paraprofessionals
- parent or community volunteers.

Employing additional tutors, as occurred at School 1, was acknowledged to be costly, but the results were judged to be worth the investment, especially as the tutors were all highly qualified, retired teachers. Permanent teaching staff saw this as a major factor in achieving success:

“As a teacher, I believe the program success is due to the fact the tutors were qualified teachers who were committed to the job. If it was staffed by volunteers it would fold quickly as the levels of commitment, skills and professionalism would not be there.”

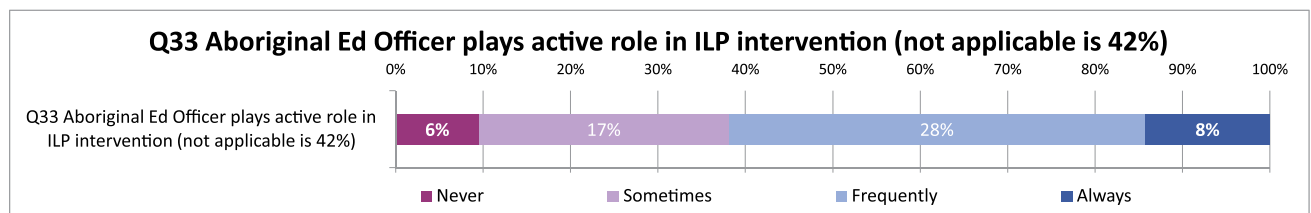
“[The qualified teacher/tutors] have the experience to know how to plan and know when to stop and go back if needed, which is different to having an aide or a parent who might be able to work with Hubbard Street but can’t make those judgments.”

In other cases, both at visited schools and as reported in the survey, volunteers provided the one-to-one support for students, keeping costs to a minimum. However, some teachers commented that volunteers were not always available and the students missed out on the organised intervention. Teachers did acknowledge the benefit of using parent volunteers to engage the school community, which contributed to success of the interventions.

Schools that focused on in-class interventions utilised existing teaching and support staff, working with students on specific skills aligned with class activities. Those providing the individual instruction included class teachers and learning support staff, as occurred in School 2 and School 3.

Aboriginal Education Officers (AEO) played an active role in the *ILP* intervention at schools where there was an AEO position. Two out of five respondents did not have an AEO in their school. Of those who did, more than half said the AEO always or frequently played an important role in the *ILP* intervention program, as shown in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2: Role of Aboriginal Education Officer in *ILP* intervention



3.2.2 Withdrawing students for their *Individual Learning Plans*

While a withdrawal approach was favoured in some schools, it presented issues for both students and class teachers, particularly related to scheduling.

In School 1 withdrawal sessions were scheduled during class time, before school and after school. Several students reported some dissatisfaction with each of these options: they disliked missing lunchtime or before-school time with their friends; and they expressed disappointment at missing other lessons, especially in KLAs such as creative arts. Teachers were concerned when students regularly missed the same lessons.

Adhering to a schedule was difficult in itself. At times *ILP* sessions were not always at the scheduled time or in the same place as usual, as described by one tutor:

“We have designated areas to work with the kids, but it may not be the same all week. I use the library or the STLA’s room or I can use somewhere else.”

The lack of routine for students and the added disruption to class teachers' planning was a problem in some cases. A few teachers commented that they needed to be extremely flexible, when tutors expected to withdraw students at non-scheduled times.

Often students reported a degree of stigmatisation associated with being withdrawn from class.

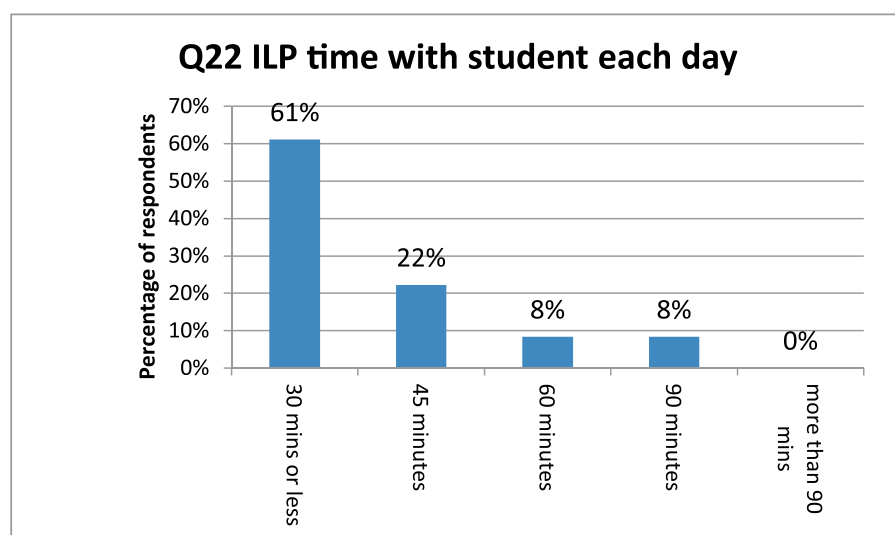
3.2.3 Time allocation

Due to the unique nature of *Individual Learning Plan* design in each school, variations existed in terms of time allocated to, and associated costs of professional learning, as well as budget allocation for resources.

Time spent on the delivery of *ILPs* varied between schools according to the model implemented. As demonstrated in Figure 3.3, most schedules indicated that organised sessions were approximately half an hour in length, whether for withdrawal from class or in-class intervention. Some schools appear to have organised at least two sessions a week for *ILP* intervention. Many schools incorporated *ILPs* into each morning's literacy session.

Often the organisation of *ILP* intervention was timetabled according to availability of tutors.

Figure 3.3: Time spent on *Individual Learning Plans* per day



Some teachers commented that there was often a lack of 'routine' for student withdrawal as tutors maintained a degree of flexibility in timetables to cater for absenteeism or variations to school routine. Some teachers commented that it was difficult having students withdrawn from class and it was necessary to negotiate and plan with *ILP* tutors to ensure minimal disruption.

One school chose regional consultants to work with them on reading and literacy on professional learning days. Another school chose to utilise the community and parent volunteers to work one-to-one with their students. Time and cost of training depended upon which program was chosen, what professional development opportunities were available, and the personnel used to work with the students. Local needs, therefore determined time, cost and resources required.

3.2.4 Resources

Schools use a mixture of resources as part of *ILPs*. Survey results show that 89% of respondents use resources for students that have been developed by staff within the school (Figure 3.4), while Figure 3.5 shows that 78% of survey respondents use a combination of externally developed resources including elements of *MultiLit* (Macquarie University, 2011), *Jolly Phonics* (Lloyd, 1992), *Focus on Reading 3-6* (CLIC, 2010a), *Accelerated Literacy* (NALP, 2007, 2009), *Reading Recovery* (CLIC, 2010b), and *Hubbard Street* (Newcastle Education Support Centre, nd).

Figure 3.4: Use of resources developed in school

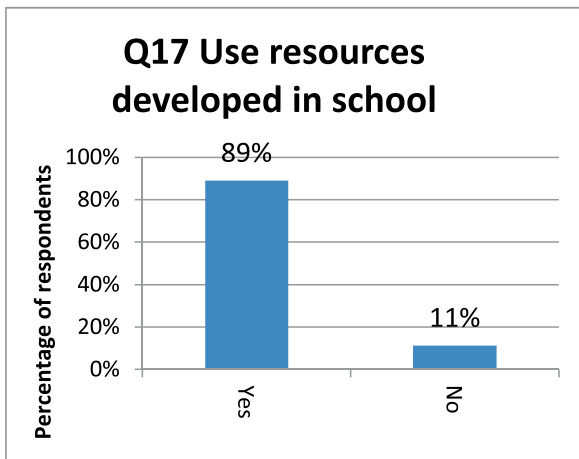


Figure 3.5: Use of externally developed resources

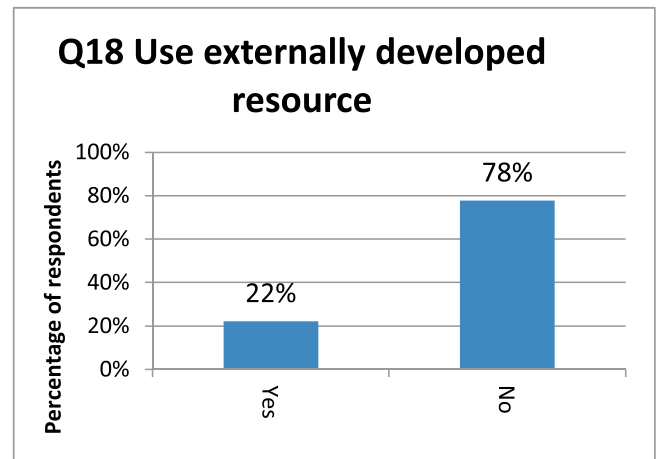
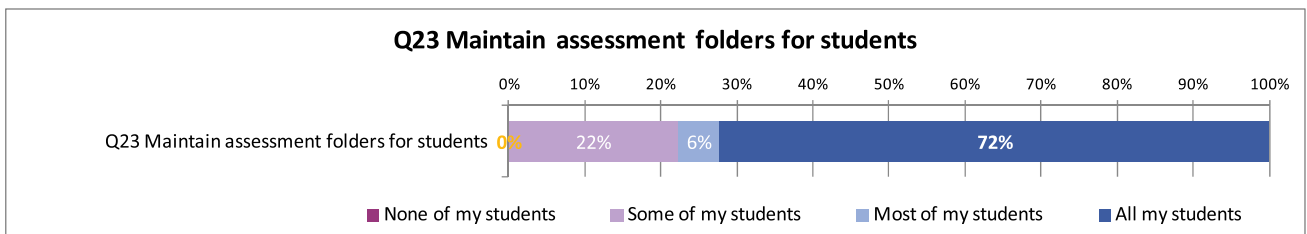


Figure 3.6 indicates that most survey respondents indicated they use the recommended student assessment folders, with almost three quarters using the folders for all students.

Figure 3.6: Maintaining student assessment folders



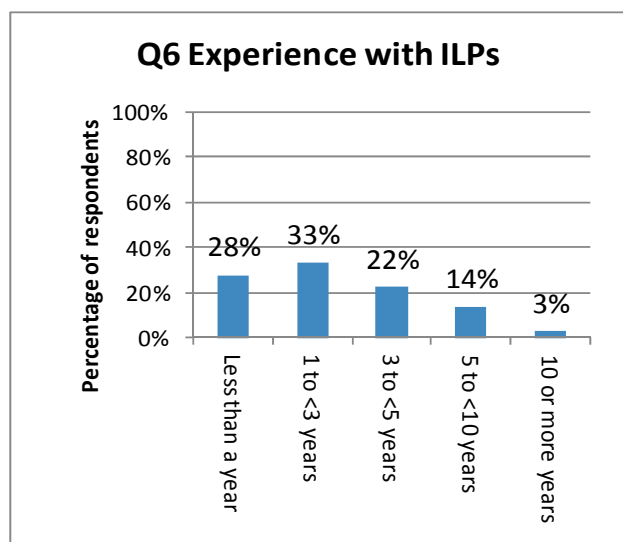
3.3 Professional learning

Despite the intention of the NPLN to support all schools in implementing their chosen programs, very little support was provided by regions for schools implementing *ILPs*.

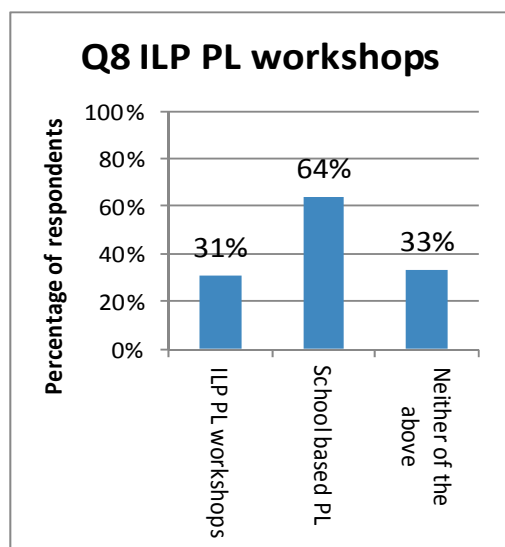
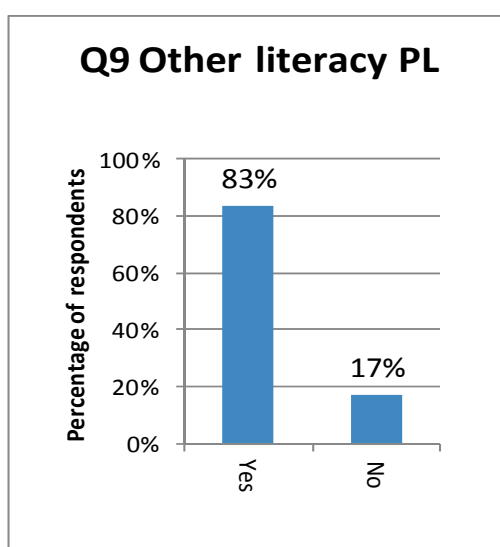
The majority of survey respondents (51%) had less than three years experience working with *ILPs* at the time of the survey in September 2011, as shown in Figure 3.7.

This suggests that most teachers or staff delivering the program gained the necessary training in the development and delivery of *ILPs* during the period of the NPLN funding. Some teachers received no specific training in developing or implementing *ILPs*.

Variations in the amount and focus of professional learning were seen across the seven schools, as indicated through the survey results and during interviews. At one school, the principal commented that there was no need for any additional training as the strategies used were those already commonly implemented within the school. At another school, a teacher noted that they spent considerable time learning how to implement *ILPs* in a classroom setting. One experienced teacher noted that even after ten years' experience: *"We needed to learn about Individual Learning Plans."*

Figure 3.7: Teacher experience with *Individual Learning Plans*

The response to this identified need was varied. As shown in Figure 3.8, nearly one-third of survey respondents participated in *ILP* intervention workshops. Two thirds participated in school-based professional learning focussed on *ILPs*. One-third of respondents had neither *ILP* workshops nor school-based professional learning.

Figure 3.8: *ILP* professional learning**Figure 3.9: Other literacy professional learning**

As shown in Figure 3.9, most teachers reported having received training in literacy programs associated with the intervention, such as Jolly Phonics, Reading Recovery or Hubbard Street, or that of another NPLN program. One school trained six teachers in Accelerated Literacy and ten teachers in MultiLit to assist in the development of their *ILPs*. In some schools training was provided for school support staff, or for those specifically brought in under contract to implement the intervention.

Where further training was required, schools sought advice from their region's Program Facilitator and Literacy Consultant. As a consequence, costs associated with training were varied. As noted by one teacher:

“We did training in reading and literacy – consultants came to our school for our professional development days very regularly.”

Overall, in most cases, teachers identified that the professional learning resulted in improved classroom practices, greater professional dialogue and explicit teaching in all aspects of literacy, particularly reading skills.

4 Effects for students

In determining the effectiveness of *Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)*, the impacts on students figure prominently, both in terms of learning achievement and associated attitudes to reading.

With teachers' primary focus on assessing achievement of syllabus outcomes, a range of strategies is used to gather information about the performance of their students, including school- and class-developed assessments, teacher observations and students' self-assessments. National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and other external measures form just one part of overall student assessment.

Findings in this section are drawn from analysis of the NAPLAN and NPLN assessments, responses to the teacher survey and most importantly, information reported through interviews with students, parents and teachers.

Key findings:

- Four out of five teacher and tutor respondents in the online survey reported that most or all students using *Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)* have demonstrated improved reading and comprehension skills.
- In external assessments, gains in mean reading scores were observed for all student cohorts at schools implementing *ILPs*.
- Principals, school staff and parents reported improvements for students in other areas such as:
 - enjoyment in reading
 - improvement in reading fluency
 - transfer of reading skills to other Key Learning Areas
 - improved social skills and behaviour, and in some cases improved school attendance
 - better attitudes to homework.

Evidence from all data sources indicates that student learning outcomes have been observed to improve. This is more strongly evident in teachers', parents' and students' impressions of effective learning than in broad scale testing measures.

4.1 External performance measures

To fulfil NPLN expectations, schools were required to regularly administer and analyse the NPLN assessments, in addition to the annual NAPLAN tests.

In both data sets, NAPLAN and NPLN assessments, gains in mean reading scores were observed for all student cohorts at schools implementing *ILPs*.

4.1.1 National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)

The NAPLAN data is presented in the four tables below for Year 3 in 2008 and 2009, and Year 5 in 2010 and 2011.

The reading results in Table 4.1, are for the 2008 Year 3 cohort in the schools implementing *ILPs*. In 2008, for schools in the *ILP* program, the effect size of -0.47 when compared with the state mean for the 'all students' cohort shows a general performance below state, with the *ILP* mean about half a standard deviation below the whole-state mean. Aboriginal students have the best cohort performance compared with the state Aboriginal student cohort, at -0.16, which is similar to state performance.

Table 4.1: NAPLAN reading, 2008 Year 3 Individual Learning Plan cohort

2008 Y3 <i>ILP</i> Cohort	Cohort no.	Cohort %	<i>ILP</i> Mean	State mean	<i>ILP</i> effect size
All Students	443	100%	372.6	412.1	-0.47
Boys	232	52%	371.7	405.0	-0.38
Girls	211	48%	373.5	419.5	-0.56
Aboriginal	28	6%	335.4	348.6	-0.16
Non-Aboriginal	415	94%	375.8	414.7	-0.46
LBOTE	151	34%	361.3	414.0	-0.64
Non-LBOTE	292	66%	379.5	412.3	-0.38

This difference in results for Aboriginal students was present in all the Year groups, as seen in the three tables below. The proportion of Aboriginal students in the *ILP* sample schools for 2008 Year 3, at 6%, was half as much again as that for Aboriginal students in the state as a whole, at 4%. For the other three cohorts shown in the three tables below, the proportion of Aboriginal students in *ILP* schools was around double the state proportion.

The LBOTE students have the lowest cohort performance, at effect size -0.64.

Table 4.2: NAPLAN reading, 2009 Year 3 Individual Learning Plan cohort

2009 Y3 <i>ILP</i> Cohort	Cohort no.	Cohort %	<i>ILP</i> Mean	State mean	<i>ILP</i> effect size
All Students	468	100%	382.1	423.7	-0.45
Boys	240	51%	372.1	414.7	-0.46
Girls	228	49%	392.7	433.1	-0.46
Aboriginal	39	8%	328.0	357.3	-0.36
Non-Aboriginal	429	92%	387.1	426.2	-0.43
LBOTE	172	37%	380.2	422.9	-0.47
Non-LBOTE	296	63%	383.3	423.1	-0.43

Results for the 2009 Year 3 cohort were similar to those of the 2008 Year 3 cohort but there was less difference between the cohorts' performances.

Table 4.3: NAPLAN reading, 2010 Year 5 Individual Learning Plan cohort

2010 Y5 <i>ILP</i> Cohort	Cohort no.	Cohort %	<i>ILP</i> Mean	State mean	<i>ILP</i> effect size
All Students	447	100%	459.7	496.9	-0.45
Boys	233	52%	457.9	490.2	-0.39
Girls	214	48%	461.6	503.8	-0.52
Aboriginal	35	8%	421.7	435.4	-0.18
Non-Aboriginal	412	92%	463.2	499.2	-0.44
LBOTE	165	37%	447.7	496.5	-0.59
Non-LBOTE	282	63%	466.7	496.6	-0.36

The results for the 2010 Year 5 cohort show an improvement since Year 3 (2008) in reading performance for all cohorts. The effect sizes are very similar to those for 2008 for all the cohorts and show that the *ILP* schools improved their performances by about the same amount as the whole of the state.

Table 4.4: NAPLAN reading, 2011 Year 5 Individual Learning Plan cohort

2011 Y5 <i>ILP</i> Cohort	Cohort no.	Cohort %	<i>ILP</i> Mean	State mean	<i>ILP</i> effect size
All Students	459	100%	467.0	496.1	-0.35
Boys	224	49%	458.3	489.3	-0.37
Girls	235	51%	475.2	503.1	-0.34
Aboriginal	41	9%	422.3	435.4	-0.17
Non-Aboriginal	418	91%	471.4	498.5	-0.33
LBOTE	166	35%	465.8	492.1	-0.32
Non-LBOTE	293	64%	467.9	497.2	-0.35

The results for the 2011 Year 5 cohort show an improvement since Year 3 (2009) in reading performance for all cohorts. The effect sizes are more positive than their Year 3 effect sizes for all cohorts, indicating a greater improvement than for the whole of the state, with the exception that Aboriginal students in those schools improved their performance by about the same as the whole of the state in 2011.

Comparison to National Minimum Standards

The comparison of mean percentages of students who performed below, at or above National Minimum Standards (NMS) is shown in the table below. The cohorts listed are students in *ILP* schools and the NPLN program schools as a group and the state as a whole, for the 2010 and 2011 Year 5 cohorts. The numbers are the change in percentages at each level, between Year 3 and Year 5 NAPLAN.

Table 4.5: NAPLAN reading comparison to National Minimum Standard

Comparison to National Minimum Standard (NMS)						
Year cohort:	Change in % below NMS		Change in % at NMS		Change in % above NMS	
	2008-2010	2009-2011	2008-2010	2009-2011	2008-2010	2009-2011
<i>ILP</i> schools	6.9	6.9	-2.9	-1.4	-4.0	-5.4
NPLN schools	5.6	7.6	-1.6	1.4	-4.0	-9.0
State	3.1	4.1	1.0	1.8	-4.0	-5.9

It is clear that the percentages below NMS are similar or increase in Year 5 for all three cohorts, in both years. The percentages above NMS decrease in Year 5 for all three cohorts, in both years. The shift in percentage at NMS varies by a small amount only. This is a general picture of worsening performance in comparison to NMS. It applies to *ILP* schools, the NPLN schools as a whole, and the state as a whole. The change in *ILP* schools was similar to the state as a whole.

However the somewhat arbitrary nature of the way NMS is defined as performance at Band 2 in the NAPLAN test, limits the utility of the comparison due, amongst other factors, to the small proportion of students who achieve in Bands 1 and 2 of the NAPLAN test. No firm evidence can be drawn from this data, about the effectiveness of the *ILP* program.

Trends between Year 3 and Year 5

Table 4.6. shows *ILP* gain scores and differences in effect size (ES), between Year 3 and Year 5, aggregated over all schools participating in the NPLN program.

The gain scores between Year 3 and Year 5 indicate higher performance in reading in Year 5 for both cohorts. The gain scores for Aboriginal students in the 2009-2011 cohort were a little higher than for the other groups. The effect size measure, which is the more standardised measure, shows for the 2008-2010 cohort a similar performance to the statewide change in reading performance, but for the 2009-2011 cohort a noticeable increase in performance.

Table 4.6: NAPLAN gain scores and differences in effect size (ES) from Year 3 to Year 5

Individual Learning Plans	Gain score		Difference in ES	
	2008-2010	2009-2011	2008-2010	2009-2011
All Students	87.1	84.8	0.02	0.10
Boys	86.2	86.2	0.00	0.08
Girls	88.1	82.5	0.04	0.12
Aboriginal	86.2	94.2	-0.02	0.19
Non-Aboriginal	87.4	84.3	0.03	0.10
LBOTE	87.1	84.6	0.02	0.08
Non-LBOTE	86.4	85.6	0.05	0.15

This information may support a proposition that for the students in *ILP* schools in 2011, reading improved slightly compared to the whole-state improvement. However, the comparability of the measures when many students are at the low end of the test score scale is problematic and the evidence is qualified in many other respects to do with program implementation at the student level.

Further data gathering in subsequent years, including attention to measures of program implementation relating that to NAPLAN scores at the student level, would provide stronger evidence for effectiveness.

4.1.2 NPLN Assessment

In NPLN assessments, gains in mean reading scores were observed for all student cohorts at *Individual Learning Plan* schools.

NPLN assessment data also indicates that the gain scores for Aboriginal students on *ILPs*, at 9.5, were similar to those of non-Aboriginal students, at 9.0. The difference between these numbers most likely sits well within the measurement error for these tests and is not meaningful.

The NPLN baseline assessment is developed from the Basic Skills Test, and was first administered at the beginning of the *Individual Learning Plan* implementation (pre-test 2009, Years 2, 3 and 4). It was administered again in August 2010 (midway test, Years 3, 4 and 5), and a final test was administered in August 2011 (end, Years 4, 5 and 6).

As detailed in Section 1.5.2, EMSAD has noted a number of limitations to using this data for evaluation of the literacy and numeracy programs, particularly in terms of the length of the tests and the degree of student mobility.

For both NAPLAN and NPLN assessments, comparisons across different groupings of schools (i.e. *Individual Learning Plan* schools, NPLN literacy focus schools, all state schools) should be interpreted with caution due to limitations with attribution and consistency. For NPLN schools implementing a particular literacy intervention, the literacy outcomes will be influenced by how well different schools implement the program, and whether the school has concurrently implemented other programs targeting literacy.

Likewise, whilst comparison with the state as a whole (for NAPLAN data) provides a reference point for interpretation of NPLN program results, the state is not a valid control group due to the broad range of literacy programs used in schools across the state, including in some cases, the same programs as those funded through the NPLN.

Given these limitations, EMSAD has advised that considerable caution should be taken in the interpretation of these data sets.

4.2 Local assessments by staff, students and parent community

Principals, school leaders, teachers, students and parents were generally positive about the impact of *ILPs* on student reading outcomes, as well as achievements in other aspects of literacy and in other key learning areas (KLAs). All students interviewed identified improvement in their reading skills since beginning their *ILPs*.

Throughout the interviews, tutors and teachers frequently quoted the results of formal assessments undertaken at the school. The use of *ILPs* relied on more regular monitoring than may have occurred otherwise.

It is difficult to attribute success in student outcomes to the introduction of *ILPs* alone.

Of the seven *ILP* schools, six also implemented a whole-class literacy intervention. Only one school employed *ILPs* as its only intervention. Even in this school, a range of influences may have contributed to improving student outcomes: change of teacher or tutor, other literacy programs introduced in the school, or other local changes, such as new buildings and increased use of ICT. As one assistant principal noted:

“It is difficult to know what has had the major impact, as AL and ILPs run parallel.”

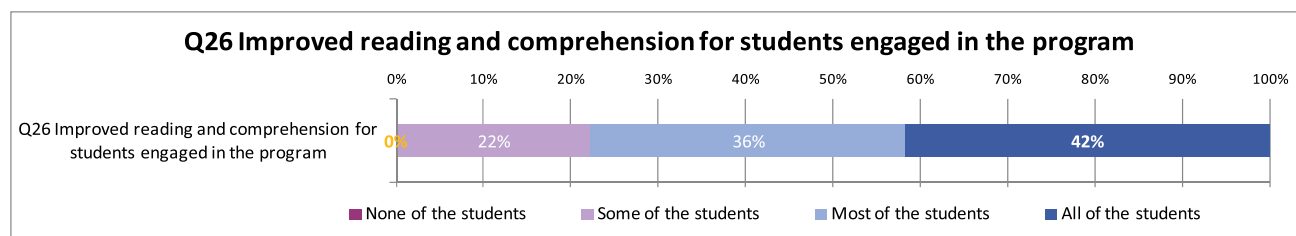
4.2.1 Reading outcomes for students

Drawing from all stakeholders' responses, the areas identified as showing reading improvement for students include:

- comprehension
- fluency and expression
- self-correction
- engagement and persistence in reading texts.

As shown in Figure 4.1, four out of five respondents to the online survey reported that *ILPs* have improved reading and comprehension skills for most or all students. The other respondents said some of the students improved their skills. No respondents said that no students improved.

Figure 4.1: Reading and comprehension improvement



Survey comments also indicated that *ILPs* had a positive impact on student reading skills, demonstrated by teacher comments such as:

“The kids now understand how to do comprehension, how to summarise information, how to highlight key words... Which is what they've learnt through the ILPs.”

“A couple of students would just read it, but now they will stop if they make a mistake, if it sounds wrong, and go back and correct themselves.”

Other comments indicated that *ILPs* allow for teaching and learning activities to be more streamlined and focused, to meet the individual needs of the students.

Some teachers and tutors stated that for a learning plan to be effective, the students need to be involved in the development process, building ownership and responsibility for their learning. One teacher concluded that because her students had been involved in the development of their learning plan goals, they had taken responsibility for their learning, as suggested:

“Letting the kids have ownership over their goals and what they want to do helps them to understand that they share the responsibility for their learning.”

Using school-based assessments, both teachers and tutors identified increased use of self-correction strategies and improved fluency and expression as major outcomes for their students, often resulting from the modelling they provided. Teachers quoted explicit measures of improvement, such as:

“This student has gone from 49 words per minute to over 106 from October 2009 to March 2011. [Another] student from 48 to 126. There are some really impressive results for these kids.”

Comprehension skills also improved. Teachers and tutors indicated that *ILPs* provided them with an opportunity to explore skills in depth, to encourage reasoned responses and to support students individually. One tutor suggested that comprehension skills had improved with her students because of the trust developed between student and tutor in the one-to-one literacy sessions.

A number of parents also identified the relationship with the tutor as the reason for improvement in reading skills:

“There has been a massive increase this year in her reading. The tutor this year has been great. She says it’s the best part of her day. The tutor has made all the difference.”

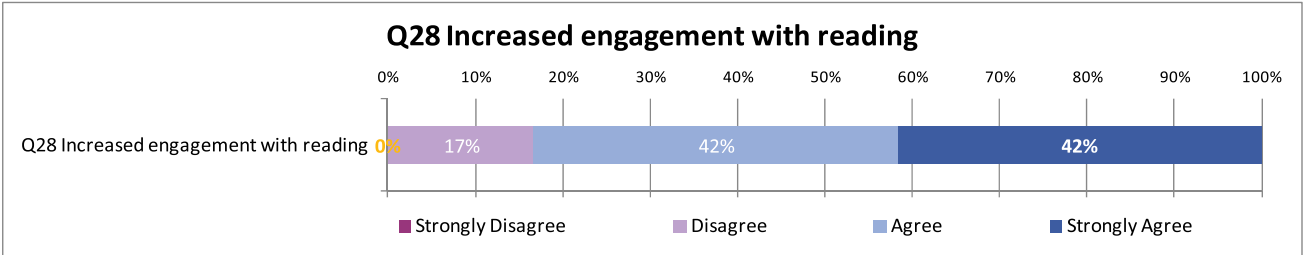
In both interviews and survey responses teachers indicated that improved skills in reading and engagement with reading aligned strongly with increased confidence. One teacher interviewed stated:

“I’ve noticed that when I’m benchmarking him, his confidence and comprehension have improved.”

Improvements in reading and comprehension and engagement with reading were observed by the majority of teachers and tutors regardless of the model of implementation.

As can be seen in Figure 4.2, most respondents in the online survey said *ILPs* have increased engagement with reading for most or all students. A small proportion said engagement has increased for some students while no respondents said engagement has increased for no students.

Figure 4.2: Increased engagement with reading



The majority of parents interviewed were extremely positive in their observations of improved reading skills for their children, and were able to clearly articulate changes, such as:

“She takes a breath now rather than reading at 100 miles an hour; she looks at the punctuation, and shouts out if the character does.”

“My child in Year 4 did the Premier’s Reading Challenge. This increased my child’s interest in reading - they keep wanting to go to the library.”

A number of parents indicated their children were required to read out loud to them at home as part of their homework:

“My child brings a different home reader home every night – not weekly like the old days.”

“She read a book in the holidays and that was a big achievement.”

Several parents commented that the intervention had improved skills to such an extent that they wanted their children to spend more time with the individual tutors, as expressed by one parent:

“I wish they had the tutor every day, ‘cause if it’s only twice a week and they have made this sort of improvement already, if they had it five times a week it would be so much better.”

One parent felt so strongly about the improvements in his son's reading skills that he took the day off work so he could attend the parent interview. He noted particularly that his son's improvements in reading in English had assisted with reading improvements in his home language:

"We've seen a massive improvement. He's learning two languages (Turkish at Saturday School)... Improvement in reading in English is helping him read in Turkish."

All students interviewed confidently identified their improved reading:

"I can read better since the start of the year since I have gone up with my reading levels."

"At the beginning of the year I needed a lot of help; now I don't need help."

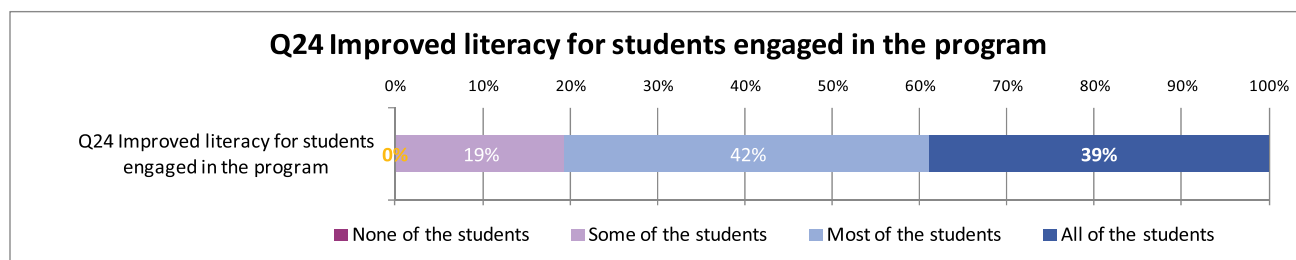
"I can read bigger/longer words now, not baby words."

Improvements in self-esteem and general confidence at school are attributed to reading improvements such as these.

4.2.2 Other literacy outcomes for students

As shown in Figure 4.3, four out of five respondents in the online survey said *ILPs* have improved general literacy outcomes for all or most students engaged with *ILPs*. No respondents said that no students improved.

Figure 4.3: Overall improvement in literacy



Survey respondents attributed the enhancement of all aspects of literacy for their students, to features of the *ILPs*, including:

- precise targeting of intervention strategies to the needs of individuals
- teacher or tutor modelling of reading skills and strategies
- strong rapport built between students and tutor.

One experienced teacher noted that:

"Individual support and targeted skills, in my experience, has led to increased results for students in literacy."

The aim of the *Individual Learning Plan* in the NPLN context was to improve students' skills in the area of reading. Whilst other areas of literacy have improved according to teachers and tutors, staff were reluctant to attribute specific improvements in spelling, grammar and writing to the *ILPs*.

A small number of parents commented on improvements in punctuation, their child's ability to use adjectives appropriately, and general improvements in language skills.

"My daughter had problems with her language skills. The school has always put her on a program and I see the improvement from the help she's been given."

One parent commented upon improvements in writing.

A small number of students were able to state that the *Individual Learning Plan* had assisted them with their spelling skills.

Another group of students were adamant that they had learned much more from engagement in *Accelerated Literacy* lessons than from the individualised intervention.

“You learn more about literacy in Accelerated Literacy classes.”

4.3 Outcomes for Aboriginal students

The evaluation specifically interrogated results for Aboriginal students. Issues around cultural identity emerged from the data.

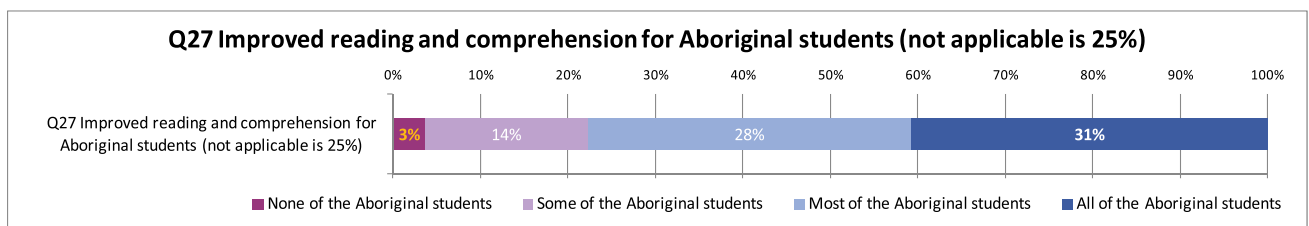
4.3.1 Improved student outcomes

The gain scores for Aboriginal students in the 2009-2011 NAPLAN cohort were a little higher than for the other groups, as outlined in Section 4.1.1.

In the NPLN assessments, gain scores for Aboriginal students were similar to those of non-Aboriginal students as outlined in Section 4.1.2.

The majority of teachers and *ILP* tutors indicated that the *Individual Learning Plan* intervention had made a positive difference in reading gains for their Aboriginal students, as shown in Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4: Improved reading and comprehension for Aboriginal students



One school with a high percentage of Aboriginal students reported in their *School Self-evaluation NPLN Final Report* that Aboriginal students demonstrated significant improvement in:

- literacy skills including displaying more phrased fluent reading
- phonemic knowledge and word recognition
- strategic processing on continuous text
- predicting themes within a text passage
- answering using complex sentences and
- understanding and answering inferential questions.

As schools were better able to identify specific areas of improvement, they realised the value of school self-evaluation. Analysis of school-based data undertaken by one Highly Accomplished Teacher clearly indicated improvements in reading skill levels for Aboriginal students. Not only did the data demonstrate substantial gains in reading levels, but indicated that these improvements were higher than for those of the non-Aboriginal students on *ILPs*.

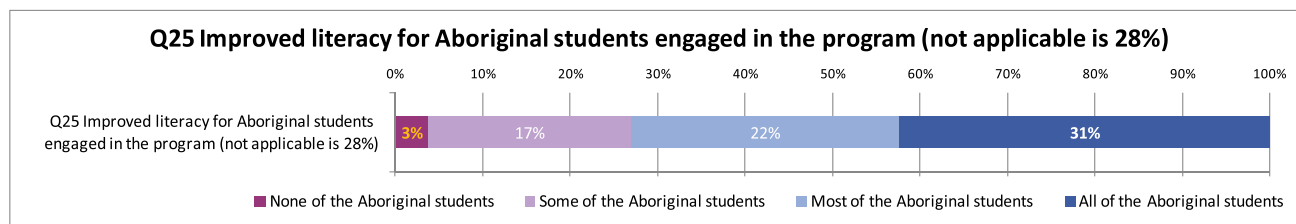
“[showing data] the average improvement for our ATSI students was 10.7 reading levels. That’s a huge improvement for those kids. Higher than the average improvement for other ATSI students in the school... One [Aboriginal student] went from level seven to level 23.”

The principal of this school commented:

“Number crunching shows improvement around ten reading levels [for Aboriginal students], for non-Aboriginal [students] it was about six reading levels.”

Figure 4.5 shows survey response rates to questions regarding overall literacy improvements for Aboriginal students. Of the 72% of respondents whose classes include Aboriginal students, 53% noted improvements for most or all of their students.

Figure 4.5: Improved literacy for Aboriginal students

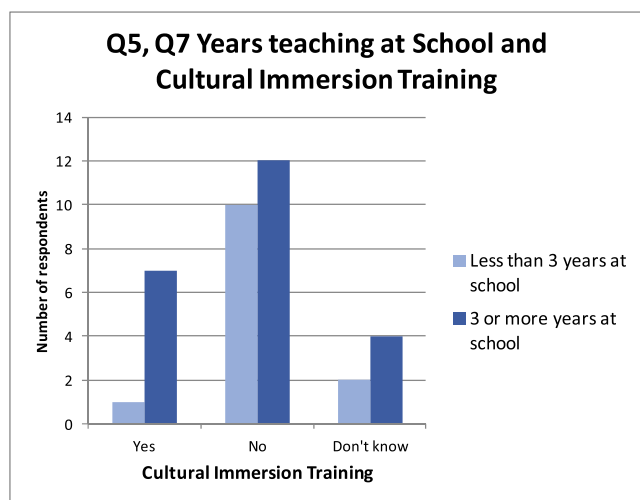


4.3.2 Cultural identity

A sense of cultural identity, and the active recognition and validation of Indigenous cultures by schools, is critical to student wellbeing and success at school. There are strong links between wellbeing and learning outcomes. In order to promote cultural identity, NSW introduced a specific cultural immersion initiative for the NPLN.

According to the survey results, 13 teachers were new to their schools during the period of NPLN implementation. As such, it is expected that results would indicate an equivalent number who were involved in cultural immersion training. However, as can be seen in Figure 4.6, only one of the 13 confirmed that they had undertaken immersion training. Of the 23 teachers who had been at their school three or more years, only seven had undertaken the training. It can be concluded that not all teachers or tutors devising literacy plans for their students had completed the recommended training.

Figure 4.6: Time at current school and cultural immersion training



Teachers indicated, however, that Aboriginal students' *Individual Learning Plans* for reading were aligned to their *Personalised Learning Plans*, which have been specifically developed to engage Aboriginal students in schooling.

4.4 Student engagement

Principals, school staff and parents all reported observed improvements for students in other areas such as:

- enjoyment in reading
- improved social skills and behaviour
- transferring skills learnt to other KLAs
- better attitude to homework.

The *ILP*s, according to staff and parents, assist students with increasing motivation and participation as well as building confidence and risk taking with their learning. Teachers commented that students' sense of self-worth had increased to the point where they felt able to keep up with the higher achieving students in their class.

4.4.1 Confidence and risk taking

As students became aware of their improving skills, they were more willing to contribute to class activities. Teachers and tutors recognised that by providing an environment that is encouraging rather than threatening, students were more likely to take extra risks with their learning.

Following the evaluators' observation of an *ILP* session in operation in School 1, the tutor commented on the students' increased confidence during the session:

"[Student] would not have had the confidence to do that lesson in front of you [evaluators] when we first started, and she had a go at everything there today... particularly with two people there she didn't know."

Many parents commented on the increase in their child's reading confidence and enjoyment, as well as improved attitudes to and engagement with school in general. The change in self-esteem for one student made a significant difference according to his teacher:

"He has gone from being a really sad boy, to a really happy boy and more confident, and his mother is satisfied that everything is being done and she's happy."

4.4.2 Social skills and behaviour

Of particular importance to principals was the improvement in social skills and behaviour of students generally, as a result of working on their *Individual Learning Plan*. A number of principals and school leaders commented on the fact that students were coping better and being more cooperative. One tutor noted that students had frequently made excuses not to take part in class activities, but as their skills increased so did their willingness to work together and engage in the activities.

A number of teachers particularly noticed improvements in social interactions between students, and the effect that this had upon classroom and school culture. One teacher commented:

"[Student] had severe interaction issues; it was scary; but now she is a much nicer person to get along with and mum is absolutely thrilled in the changes. Her sense of self worth has changed and that has an effect on the kids that have to sit with her or work with her in class."

4.4.3 Participation and motivation

Many teachers and tutors commented on increased focus and determination amongst students. It was commonly reported that students were *"excited about literacy sessions"* and *"complain if we miss them for some reason."* One student said that he thought his *Individual Learning Plan* sessions were *"really, really, really cool."*

Generally staff observed that the individualised intervention approaches provided students with a sense of support which motivated them to participate more in general class activities.

One student reflected on the assistance he was receiving now with his *ILP* as compared with the previous school he had attended:

"[The school] didn't help. If I didn't do the work then they'd go on with the others and forget about me. Here we get help every step of the way."

Many students indicated they really enjoyed participating in their literacy sessions, particularly those students who worked in groups. They particularly liked learning from each other.

4.4.4 Withdrawal from class

Where students were withdrawn from class for one-to-one tutoring, the overall opinion of teachers and tutors was that the total focus on the individual was the determining factor in improvement of skills.

“It’s the fact the tutors spend the whole time with the children; it’s child centred; its one-on-one and we do nothing else.”

The close relationship with tutors was seen to significantly contribute to students’ learning gains. A number of teachers, tutors and parents indicated that where students worked with someone other than their class teacher, it was the relationship between tutor and student which was the major factor in outcomes achieved.

Where a relationship of trust was developed, it was observed that students knew they could trust the learning process, had confidence to rely on their tutor to take risks, and would *“do almost anything”* for their tutor’s positive feedback. In this one-to-one withdrawal context, one tutor reflected:

“[The students] need to build that one-on-one and then they do it, they have a go. I say ‘who’s going to know if you get it wrong? Look around - it’s just me and I’m not telling anybody’.”

Some parents indicated that a change in tutor often meant a change in their child’s attitude and an improvement in skills gained:

“[My son] has made a huge improvement this year in reading with a different tutor.”

“[The tutor] that [my daughter] has this year in an ex-teacher, and she ‘gets it’ this year.”

Withdrawal lessons with tutors presented both benefits and costs for students. A large number of students commented that they felt they were missing out on other learning activities and were being stigmatised, to a degree. For these students, withdrawal led to:

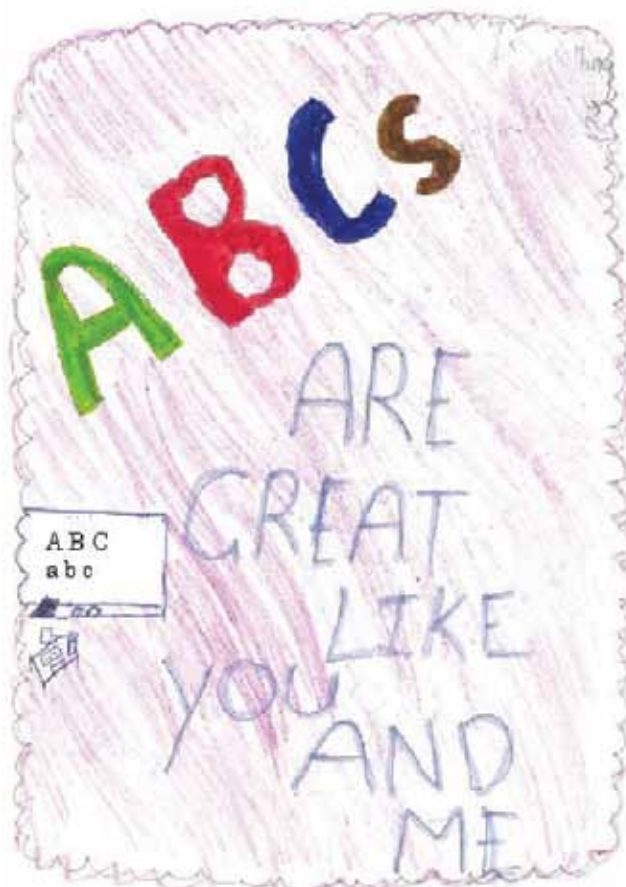
- isolation
- labelling
- missed learning opportunities, either in missing out of class literacy lessons, or lessons in other KLAs
- and perceived differences in length of school day and breaks.

One student advised that because of teasing from her peers, she would prefer to stay in class rather than be withdrawn:

“I don’t like it ‘cause kids tease you if you can’t read properly.”

One parent commented that her son complains about having to do his *ILP* during lunchtime, when he would otherwise be with his friends.

The parent understood that this was the only possible time available; nevertheless she was concerned that he felt alienated from his peer group.



5 Teacher and tutor perspectives

Section 4 presented teachers' and tutors' insights into how well *Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)* contributed to students' achievements. In this section the focus is on teachers' experiences in delivering the program, making it work in their particular classes and school settings, and the effects it had on their own practice.

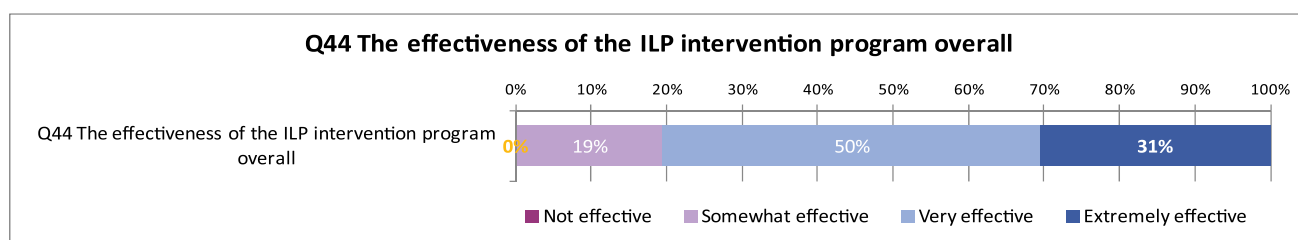
Key findings:

- Most respondents said *ILPs* have improved the way they teach literacy. A small proportion disagreed.
- All respondents said that assessments for *ILPs* provide evidence of where support is needed. Most respondents use student assessment folders, with three-quarters using the folders for all students.
- Teachers commented that tracking and monitoring individual students allowed them to intervene when needed. Evidence for intervention needs and improvement in skills was now based on quality data rather than on observation alone.
- All respondents said goals and activities chosen for *ILPs* are related specifically to students' background and learning needs.
- Where teacher coordinators were appointed, they played an important role in supporting teachers and tutors.
- All respondents said staff in their school are able to support them in the development of *ILPs*.

5.1 Teachers' overall views on *Individual Learning Plans*

The majority of teachers and *ILP* tutors perceived that *ILPs* are an effective intervention for those students experiencing difficulties with reading. As shown in Figure 5.1, four out of five survey respondents said the program overall is effective or extremely effective, while the remainder said it is somewhat effective.

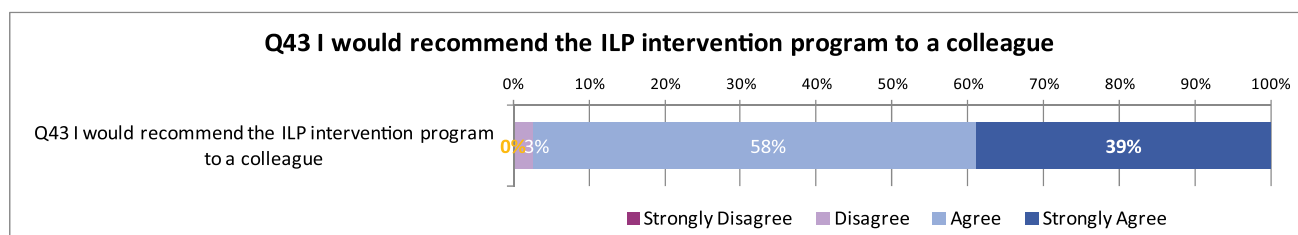
Figure 5.1: Effectiveness of *Individual Learning Plans*



Across the schools visited during the evaluation, staff felt confident that *ILPs* were a contributing factor to improvements in student outcomes in reading.

Almost all respondents would recommend the use of *ILPs* to a colleague, as shown in Figure 5.2.

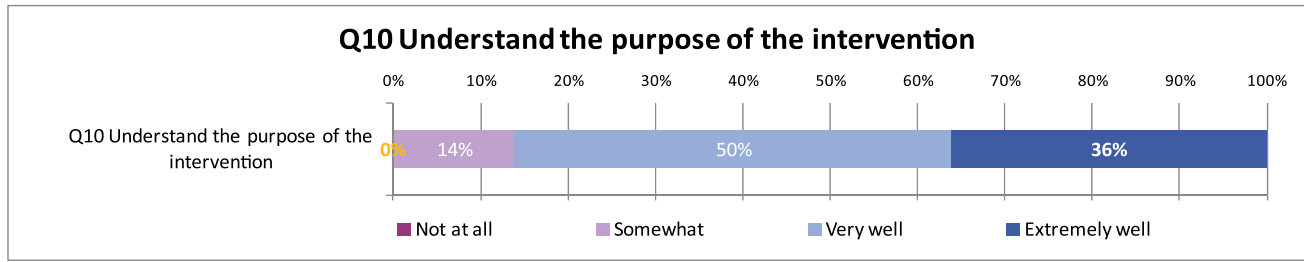
Figure 5.2: Teacher recommendation of *Individual Learning Plans*



5.2 Understanding of *Individual Learning Plans* intervention

The concept and purpose of *ILPs* were reported to be very well or extremely well understood by most respondents, as shown in Figure 5.3. All said they have at least some understanding of the purpose.

Figure 5.3: Understanding of purpose of *Individual Learning Plans*

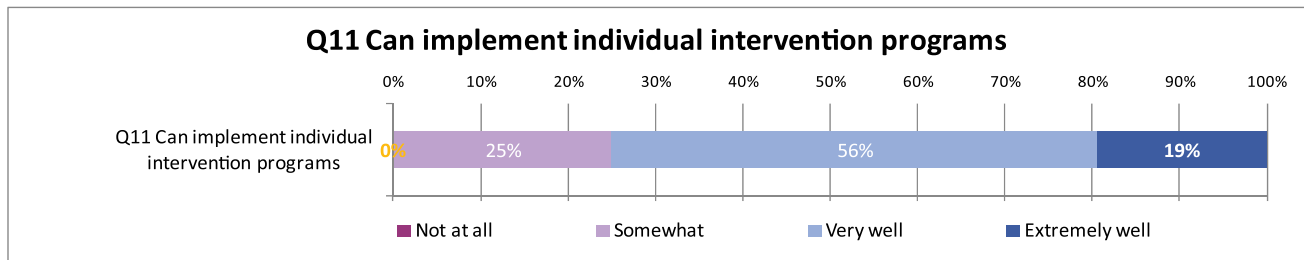


In developing *ILPs*, teachers and tutors became more aware of the importance of explicitly teaching individuals, as they teased out the syllabus outcomes and generated relevant activities to support students. As one teacher noted:

“As a teacher it is important to have explicit and individual outcomes for each student and I feel the plans provide and support this.”

Three-quarters of respondents said they implement individually designed intervention programs very well or extremely well. No respondents said they felt unable to do so, as shown in Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4: Capacity to implement program

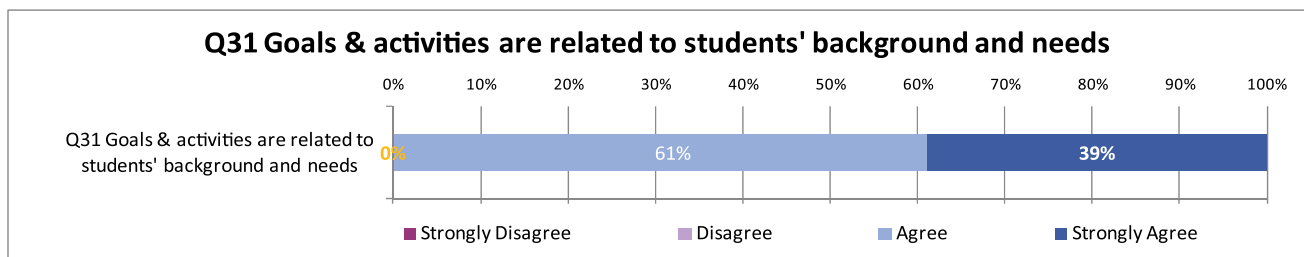


Teachers and tutors both indicated that developing the *ILPs* required careful examination of students' performance data and assessments. This close monitoring of student progress assisted in planning activities to address the particular needs of individual students.

Implementing *ILPs*, whether as a one-to-one withdrawal program or through in-class group intervention, allows for the individual needs of students to be addressed and, according to both interview and survey respondents, leads to improved results for students in reading.

Teachers and tutors both reported a close alignment of intervention activities with the identified needs of students, as shown in Figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5: Activities related to students' needs



5.3 Effect on teacher workload and commitment

There were mixed responses to questions of how *ILPs* affected teacher workloads. In schools where in-class interventions were used, many teachers reported that dividing students into groups relevant to their *ILPs* was relatively easy in terms of class organisation. However, some teachers believed that designing and creating individual plans was too time consuming. Other teachers felt that their workload had significantly increased due to the need to manage and continually update each student's plan. As noted by one teacher:

“More than half of my class are on ILPs, all having different learning needs. With this amount of students it is hard to track.”

The second year of implementation was easier, as routines were established and students knew what to expect.

“It makes it easier when you don't have to establish new routines every year.”

In those schools where students' *ILPs* were saved and updated on the school server, teachers indicated that planning and programming was easier. They also commented that being able to share resources and units of work through the network, or in one case via email, had reduced pre-planning time.

Most teachers indicated that having extra staff support, whether in-class or via withdrawal, reassured them that all students were being catered for. This was of particular importance to teachers around the time of NAPLAN testing when time needed to address skill needs was critical.

Teachers particularly noted that an impressive level of commitment was shown by support staff and paid tutors. They demonstrated a sense of responsibility for their work with students and put in more hours than necessarily expected.

Several tutors acknowledged that if they had been volunteers they may not have been so motivated. Teachers generally agreed with this assertion, stating that consistency for students on *ILPs* was important and that volunteers were not always reliable, over the long-term. Nevertheless, schools where volunteers were used expressed a huge increase in parent and community involvement and their commitment to school approaches.

Teachers interviewed in School 2 and School 3 were overwhelmingly positive about the development of their own school *ILP* model and showed a high level of commitment to the success of the program. One comment from a teacher in School 2 exemplified many comments from teachers in both schools:

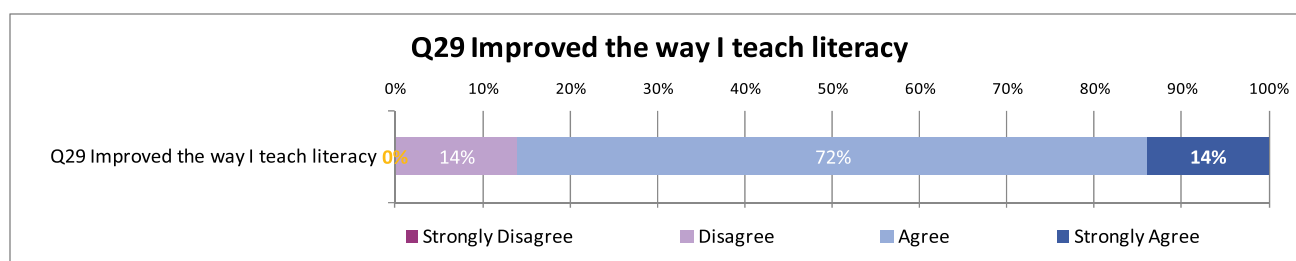
“It's been fantastic... because we've come up with something that suits us, not somebody else. This is the [school] program for our kids, for our community.”

Regardless of time needed for the planning and implementation, overall teachers appeared committed to the principles of *ILPs* as an appropriate intervention for students with high support needs.

5.4 Effect on literacy teaching practice

Teachers reported improvements in their literacy teaching practices, regardless of the model of implementation undertaken by the school. Some teachers commented that they were now more thoughtful or reflective about their practice, and were applying concepts from the training to their general teaching. One principal indicated that the regional NPLN Program Facilitator was particularly effective in encouraging staff to reflect on what they do, and how they do it.

As shown in Figure 5.6, most respondents said *ILPs* have improved the way they teach literacy. A small proportion disagreed.

Figure 5.6: Improvement in teaching literacy

Teachers indicated that focusing on individual as well as class needs enabled them to individualise the learning, more than previously, for students that require it, which in turn helped ensure students do not “fall below the radar”. One teacher summed up the shift in emphasis:

“The student population hasn’t changed, nor have their needs, but our understanding of how powerful ILPs are and the teachers’ understanding of them has changed.”

In those schools where the *ILPs* were part of class activity, teachers commented that they have become more reflective on their teaching practices. For example:

“Now that we’re focusing on skill sets, we’re not only teaching content, we’re more reflective. How does data inform your teaching? What skills do your students need to know?”

Changed class practice was identified particularly in those schools where a group in-class intervention approach was used, such as in School 2. Teachers advised that students were working more independently and there was less ‘teacher talk’ and more student exchanges.

“We’ve helped the kids work independently. The little steps were a critical part of it all. The routines are set up now: reading to get on with, reading groups, etc.”

A few teachers commented that having group in-class interventions required greater class management due to the large number of students, with various needs, having to be catered for at the same time. One teacher suggested that the intervention would have been more effective with a smaller number of students.

Teachers reported that their teaching and learning activities have become more streamlined and more focused to meet the individual needs of the students rather than having a “one size fits all lesson”.

“We used to teach to the middle of the class, now we know each student as an individual. You can no longer just ‘teach a lesson’.”

Teachers indicated that in having to pinpoint individual learning needs, they have become more aware of being explicit in their class teaching. The *ILPs* provide a guide on how explicit they need to be. In planning and programming, teachers reported being better organised, much more aware of goals and why they teach what they teach. As one survey respondent commented:

“The ILP is only as good as the person implementing it. If the student’s outcomes are clearly stated and followed through with effective teaching, they can work well.”

One teacher indicated that after implementing the *Individual Learning Plan* for reading as required by the NPLN, she has now gone beyond the program to develop specific *ILPs* for other areas of literacy as well as other KLA. Another teacher indicated that after having written *ILPs* for targeted students in her class she felt capable of applying the principle of individualised learning with other students with or without written plans.

Several teachers reported that they could also address the needs of more advanced students by using *ILPs* to differentiate tasks and allow independent work, as described by a year leader:

“My ILPs are for 3 kids in my brightest class. They display knowledge higher than average. My ILP addresses their needs as independent learners.”

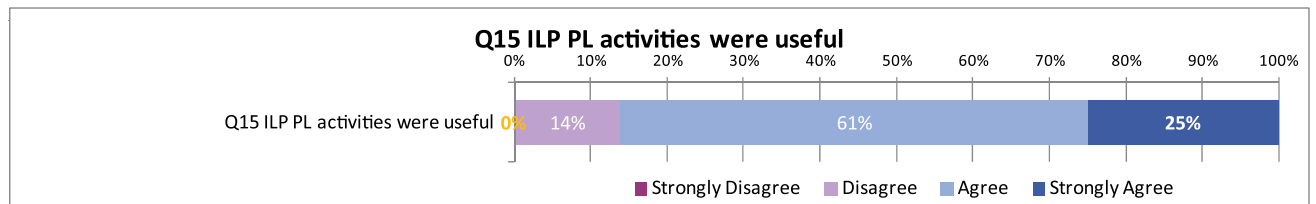
5.5 Professional learning

As outlined in section 3.3, professional learning and training in *ILPs* was very much determined by each school, dependent on their local needs.

Most teachers and tutors indicated that training and professional learning were necessary to ensure that everyone was consistent in their approach. Even after ten years of working with *ILPs*, one teacher suggested she needed ongoing training to improve her teaching skills, so that student outcomes would be enhanced.

Teachers and tutors who undertook training provided positive feedback. Most survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the *ILP* professional learning activities were useful, as shown in Figure 5.7.

Figure 5.7: Usefulness of professional learning



One principal commented that the process of having to identify what was needed for students also meant that teachers had to reflect on their own professional learning needs:

“We have motivated, engaged, enthusiastic teachers who are taking hold of their own professional development.”

In most schools, training was extended to school support officers and paraprofessionals in addition to teachers. For many teachers having extra personnel with whom to plan and collaborate, gave them security of knowing that even if they were absent their students would be catered for:

“When casual teachers come in, the program can continue as the support staff are so well involved.”

Whilst acknowledging the value of support from staff and paraprofessionals at their schools, teachers at one school noted that when participating in regional professional activities or network meetings, they had a sense of isolation due to the unique nature of the *ILP* model being implemented. They had difficulty sharing issues and programming ideas.

As stated by the teachers:

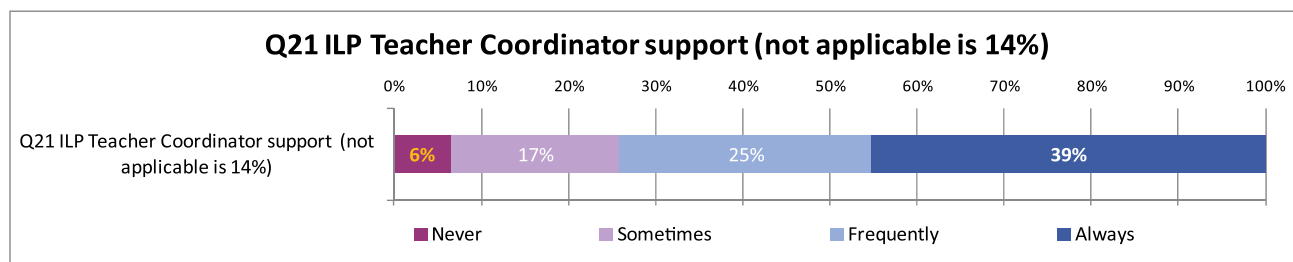
“When we’d go to network meetings, our work was not being acknowledged.”

“[We] feel isolated at times, since we are out there on a limb.”

5.6 Support for implementation

In each of the schools visited, support for teachers and tutors implementing *ILPs* was provided by a program coordinator. This coordinator may have been given responsibility specific to *ILPs* or may have been a leader for all NPLN activities within the school. All but five survey respondents said there was a teacher coordinator in the school (Figure 5.8). Two-thirds said they were frequently or always supported. Two respondents said they were never supported.

Figure 5.8: Support from coordinator

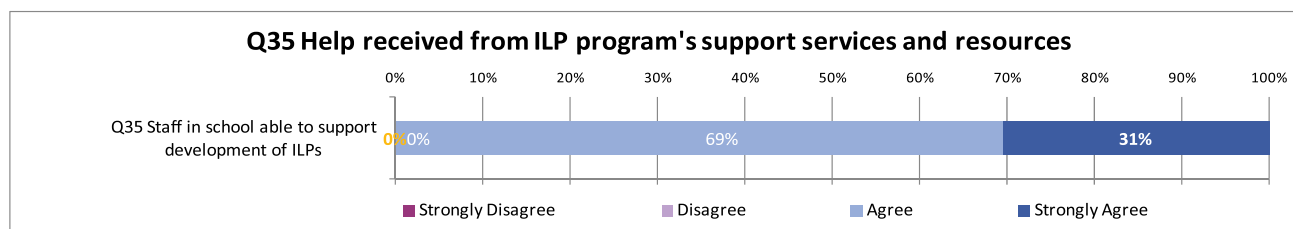


Every teacher and tutor interviewed or surveyed indicated that staff in their school are able to support them in the development and implementation of the ILPs, as shown in Figure 5.9.

One early-career teacher commented on the skills she gained from professional observation:

“I’m learning as much as the kids are. For me to watch an experienced teacher teach gives me ideas of how to plan ten lessons.”

Figure 5.9: Support from school staff



In most of the seven schools involved, a collaborative approach was used, reliant on class teachers, support personnel and specialist tutors working together to support students. Teachers and tutors indicated that there has been increased communication and collaboration, not only between teachers, but also between teachers and school learning support officers, and between school staff and parents.



6 Impact in schools

This section examines the effect that implementing *Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)* as part of the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN) has had on the organisational unit of the school itself.

Key findings:

- All staff are more active participants in the learning process and are engaging in greater professional dialogue.
- Teachers feel a greater sense of accountability and are using data to inform practice.
- There is greater consistency with teaching strategies for the same individual students, across the school.
- Parents and the community have become more involved in school planning, in many cases.

6.1 Whole-school benefits

Teachers and principals have overwhelmingly reported that the introduction of *ILPs* in tandem with the whole-class intervention has had a positive impact on schools, not only in improving student reading outcomes but also in terms of altering the culture of the school. Many of the changes at a whole-school level are difficult to attribute to a specific program, especially in the case of *ILPs*.

Significantly, the NPLN as a whole, has introduced a series of changes in each school, beyond the *Individual Learning Plan* intervention itself.

Throughout the interviews in particular, reference was made to the use of SMART data, the increased emphasis on leadership programs, and the level of professional learning in general. In some cases, principals and school leaders also commented on the value of the *NSW DEC Analytical framework for effective leadership and school improvement in literacy and numeracy* (PLLDD, 2010) which enabled them to identify areas where they were not as active, such as engaging parents and the community.

The different modes of *ILP* delivery resulted in varied effects on the school as a whole. Drawing from both survey and interviews, the following sections describe the types of effects experienced in different contexts.

6.1.1 Limited impact on the whole school

In School 1, where students received one-to-one instruction it was reported that the tutors were in regular contact with class teachers. *ILPs* were developed collaboratively and each student's progress was reported to teachers. Some guidance was provided and shared planning occurred within the group of tutors.

However, when working directly with students, the tutors worked separately from each other and from the class environment.

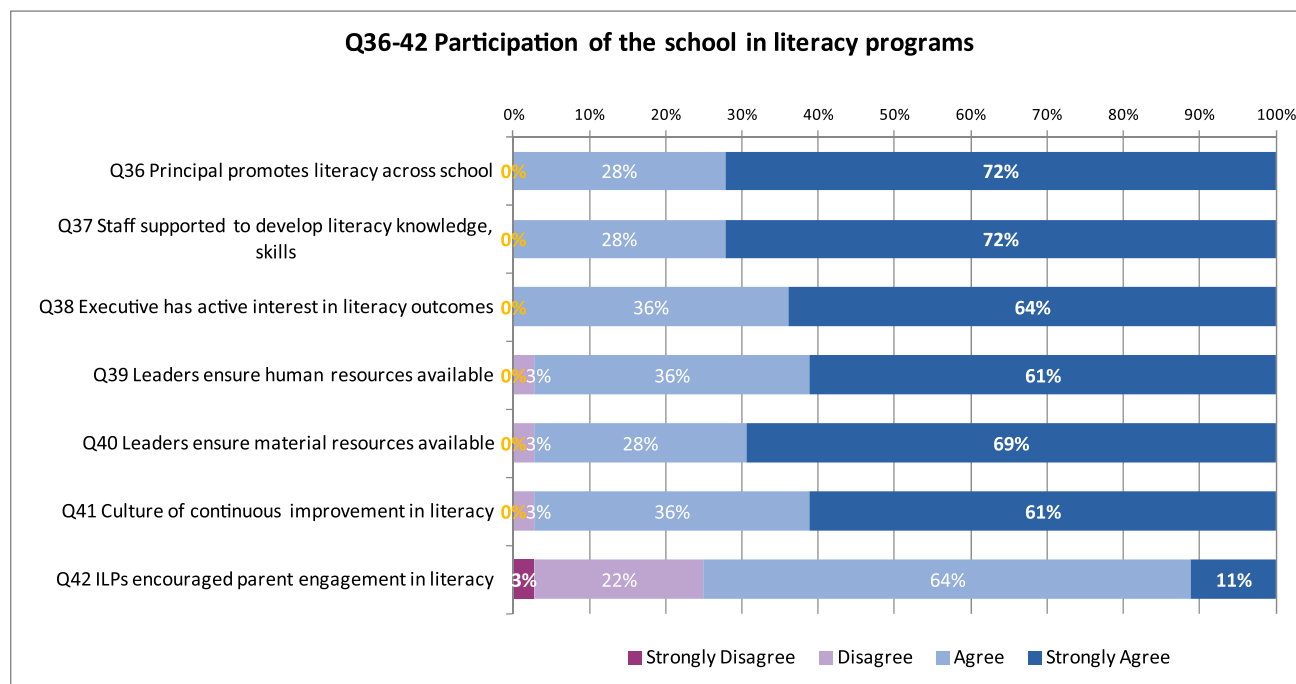
Because the tutors were all experienced teachers, they often operated as an independent group. Occasionally tutors would share successful activities with class teachers, but generally the materials and strategies used in tutoring sessions were quite distinct from those used in the students' classes.

There appeared to be little impact from the intervention on the practices of class teachers across the school. The benefit of the program was derived specifically from the gains made in improving students' reading.

6.1.2 Whole-school participation

Irrespective of the mode of implementation, the overwhelming majority of teachers were very positive about whole-school engagement and support for reading-based *ILPs*, as can be seen from Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1: Whole-school participation in *Individual Learning Plans*



All respondents reported that the school principal promotes literacy across the school, the school executive shows an active interest in student literacy outcomes and staff are supported to develop literacy knowledge and skills. Almost all respondents said a culture of continuous improvement in literacy is promoted and supported in the school.

One principal observed notable shifts in school culture, teaching activities and programming techniques. She believed each of these factors worked together to make a difference in teachers' work, as explained here:

“Six months ago no one was teaching like this. It’s not the program or the teaching skills; one forces the other.”

The only area where some variation existed in the range of responses, related to parent or caregiver involvement. Three-quarters of respondents said *ILPs* have encouraged parent or caregiver engagement in literacy, while the remainder disagreed.

Schools' commitment to *ILPs* was most clearly demonstrated through their ongoing inclusion in the School Literacy Plan and the School Management Plan. In two of the three schools visited, there was a strong *ILP* presence in the School Literacy Plan. School 1 made the decision to utilise all their NPLN resources and funding during the period of the partnership, in full knowledge that the individual withdrawal model would not be able to be sustained beyond the three-year period.

6.1.3 Active participation in working collectively

A strong message that emerged from the schools where *ILPs* were integrated into whole-class activity, was that literacy improvement was seen as a whole-school responsibility.

The nature of *ILPs* requires shared knowledge of students and their needs. From the time of identifying students to be involved, to the development and updating of long-term learning plans, teachers needed to work closely together, and closely with those who worked directly with students.

Individualising instruction has promoted a team approach and collaborative effort, involving class teachers, resource staff, and parents all working together to help the student. This was evident in statements made by parents and school staff. One School Education Director stressed that:

“It’s not only the teachers within the school who are delivering the outcomes.”

The principals of School 2 and School 3 suggested that both teaching and support staff seemed to accept a greater responsibility for literacy learning across the school. The identification of specific needs and the sharing of strategies to support students, has created a collegial atmosphere in schools where everyone is working toward the same goal.

Teachers reported increased collaboration, exemplified by increased professional dialogue and resource sharing. Regular monitoring of students’ progress and resultant updating of the *ILPs* required ongoing discussion of strategies and shared planning and programming. As noted by one principal:

“Teachers are frequently reporting in staff meetings what is happening with their students.”

It was clear from school visits that teachers realised that the collective responsibility also made everyone more accountable. Survey responses of teachers and tutors indicate parents’ knowledge of benchmarking and reading levels of students, locating responsibility for improvement with everyone involved. As indicated by one teacher:

“ILPs set the Guided Reading benchmark level to be reached in cooperation with student and parent(carer) giving student, parent and teacher joint responsibility for achieving the set benchmark.”

Increased responsibility and accountability resulted in greater teacher awareness of the need for consistency and structure in literacy teaching across schools. Nearly all parents interviewed indicated they had knowledge of targeted skills for their children and were involved in supporting the school to achieve those outcomes. One teacher commented that prior to implementing *ILPs*:

“we used to teach what we thought we needed to teach, but now it’s more streamlined.”

The changes in school culture were seen in all schools visited, as well as being reflected in teachers’ and tutors’ survey responses.

Overall, teachers and tutors identified benefits from the professional dialogue, collegial meetings and shared discussion around data analysis that accompanied the development of the *ILPs*.

6.1.4 Continuity of teaching and learning approach

Continuity of approach relies on a common understanding of how *ILPs* are formulated, and consistency in implementation. Despite the lack of widespread professional learning focussing on *ILPs* themselves (as shown earlier in Sections 3.3 and 5.5), collaboration and shared support within each school helped teachers to develop sound understandings of how *ILPs* would operate within the school.

In School 2, the shared foundation of the reading rubric provided a strong sense of common direction in literacy teaching. Further consistency was evident where teachers were responsible for the development and implementation of the plans, as part of their responsibility for their class as a whole.

Shared implementation of the *ILPs* was claimed to have increased pedagogical consistency between teachers and across classes in the school. A number of teachers remarked that *ILPs* have promoted greater consistency with teaching explicit strategies for the same student across the school. For example:

“I can share my ILP for a particular student with the librarian, the support teacher, the community languages teacher so that they are all aware of the literacy needs of that student.”

In schools where tutors were employed or volunteer parents or community members were utilised to work with students, continuity was not guaranteed. Even where tutors used a common program or resource, as in School 1, variation in delivery occurred from tutor to tutor.

With volunteers, while they were often reported to be enthusiastic and willing to be guided, reliability of participation was a problem, especially over time.

6.1.5 Building capacity across the school

Shared learning to build pedagogical expertise, is widely reported to have had greater impact than changes in individual teachers' practices.

In at least two of the schools visited as part of the evaluation, it was reported that the capacity of the school to make a difference in the literacy learning of students had increased as result of engaging with *ILP* processes.

Teaching capacity

Both teachers and support staff have gained skills through collaboratively planning the *ILPs*. Teachers clearly identified their increased capacity to identify when support is needed and know how to best address specific learning needs.

As outlined in Section 5.2, teachers have enhanced their ability to plan and program lessons which address individual needs rather than merely teaching a lesson around a topic.

Building leadership capacity

In some schools, the executive continued to lead staff in professional learning and provide support when needed. Other schools chose to place teachers in leadership positions in order to coordinate the program or manage all NPLN activities in the school. One school made the decision to employ a Highly Accomplished Teacher to coordinate and manage professional development, data analysis and support of staff.

Assessment and use of student performance data

This is the area in which engaging with *ILPs* has made the greatest contribution to building skills and changing attitudes across each school.

In order for *ILPs* to be designed effectively, it is necessary for teachers to plan, monitor, manage, and evaluate student achievement so they may identify specific learning needs and appropriate teaching and learning intervention strategies.

In first identifying those students to target through *ILPs*, it was necessary for teachers and other staff to become more proficient in the use of performance data. Ongoing monitoring of student progress then provides further data to track learning and inform decision-making.

Assessment and data analysis are two areas that have been improved. One surveyed teacher commented that:

“Individual Learning Plans have generally provided insight into, and a way to directly monitor the progress of students who have previously achieved or are achieving below minimum standard, and also those who are not making expected growth in standardised testing.”

It was noted in teacher interviews, that teachers are now using data evidence to support claims of improvement, as well as observational anecdotes. Monitoring individual student progress and the necessity for updating *ILP* goals were seen by teachers as important motivation for developing skills in interpreting performance data.

One principal asserted that working with data and seeing progress gave staff a sense of empowerment:

“The more teachers have worked with SMART data, the more empowered teachers feel, and the more progress teachers could see that they’ve achieved.”

Teacher capacity in analysing data to inform teaching and learning has been supported by the development of school-based computer tracking systems for individual student achievement in reading and literacy. Teachers asserted that data tracking and monitoring have allowed them to intervene when needed, as described by one teacher:

“It really allowed me to identify the students and look at their data to drive my teaching and learning program.”

Several schools have developed individual student tracking systems that are accessible by all staff in the school. One teacher indicated:

“We have EDUPRO. We enter their writing, reading ... results. It’s updated every term. Every assessment gets onto EDUPRO. Generally when we get our next year’s classes, we look at our class list during the holidays to get an idea of the makeup of our class.”

One school emphasised the importance of data tracking and the effect on teacher practice, as reported in the annual school report:

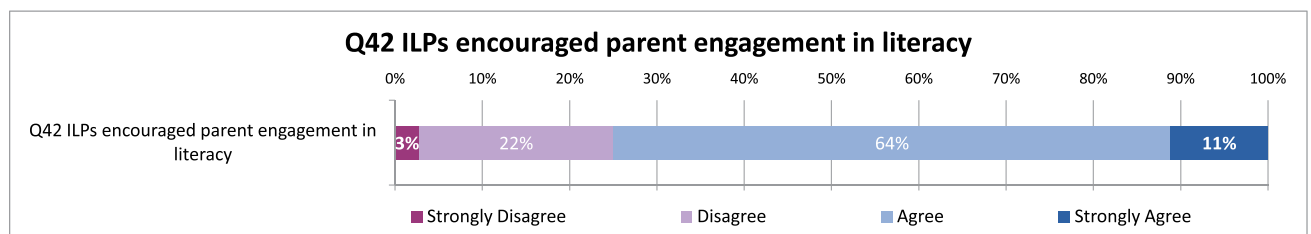
“During Term 4 staff trialled a computer-based data tracking system...used to monitor behaviour and academic data across the school for the purposes of record keeping, data retrieval and trend tracking. Teachers have utilised SMART 2 to analyse school, grade, class and individual student results in NAPLAN and used this information to plan explicit teaching sequences in areas that need to be improved. Individual Learning Plans have been developed for students who are underachieving in reading. Teachers’ programs are becoming more consistent as teachers collaboratively plan teaching sequences in reading. Professional dialogue has been promoted and consistency of teacher judgement is improving.”

6.2 Involving parents

The NPLN provided an avenue for increased communication with parents and community, particularly in the development of *ILPs*. Newsletters, information sessions, and community meetings were some of the strategies used to generally engage parents and community and promote awareness of the activities taking place. Some schools also consulted with parents in the development of their child’s *ILP*.

As shown in Figure 6.2, three-quarters of survey respondents said *ILPs* have encouraged parent or caregiver engagement in literacy. This was not the case in all schools, as demonstrated by the 25% who disagreed.

Figure 6.2: Parent engagement in literacy



One of the visited schools conducted an evaluation of the literacy interventions, which included a survey of parent and community members. They were pleased with the results which revealed:

“Survey data indicates that parents and community members are happy with what we’re doing. They know the kids are supported.”

Consistent with the teacher survey results, a few parents at one school indicated they had little knowledge of what work their children were doing at school in their *Individual Learning Plan*. One parent confirmed that she had not been part of planning or decision-making, and that she had just “*been told*” her child was targeted for the intervention.

Most interviewed parents, however, maintained they were provided with sufficient information about how to best support their children at home.

Parent and community involvement was described as a strength of *ILPs* in most schools visited, particularly where parents and community members were volunteer tutors. In parent interviews there was great praise for schools that had made concerted efforts to keep the parents and community informed.

Parents also provided extremely positive comments about their relationship to their child’s school. Examples of such comments are as follows:

“You don’t hear bad things about this school. Reputation of school is very positive.”

“I love this school – it’s been great for me and my children.”

“[We] feel welcome to go into classroom.”

One principal noted that parents liked the idea of being involved in their child’s *Individual Learning Plan* and were frequently seen thanking teachers at the school for improving their child’s skills. The principal also emphasised that many more parents were coming to the school as there was now a greater sense of a home-school partnership:

“Four years ago there were hardly any parents [involved] in the school; now we have a real sense of community in the school.”

6.3 Sustaining *Individual Learning Plans* beyond NPLN

Teachers, school leaders and principals overwhelmingly confirmed that they would like to maintain the *ILPs*. Some schools noted that they intended to expand the program to include students from Kindergarten to Year 6. One deputy principal reported that:

“[ILPs] are something all staff value and it will be planned for in the next 3 year school plan.”

Some schools commented that investment during the period of the NPLN to establish the support infrastructure, has enabled the establishment of databases, mentors, and induction of new teachers. As noted by one principal:

“ILPs are now no longer a part of the NP. It’s part of best practice and embedded in our school.”

Cost of relief for teachers to develop and deliver *ILPs*, as well as purchasing resources and employing extra staff as tutors, were seen as the major impediments to sustainability.

Those schools that receive supplementary funding either through other National Partnership initiatives such as the NP Low SES, or through programs such as the Priority Schools Program (PSP) or School Learning Support Coordinator (SLSC) initiatives, found it easier to identify budget sources to enable *ongoing* release for mentors and the provision of extra staff as required.

A few teachers commented that *ILPs* are a very intensive method of teaching, and may be difficult to sustain on a long-term basis, even if funds were provided. Using community and parent volunteers to work with students may solve the funding problem, but the experience of the NPLN schools is they are often not as reliable as needed, for the *ILPs* to operate efficiently. It is not always feasible for schools to expect a long-term commitment from parents, grandparents or any other volunteer.

Overall sustainability of *ILPs* in NPLN schools will rely upon:

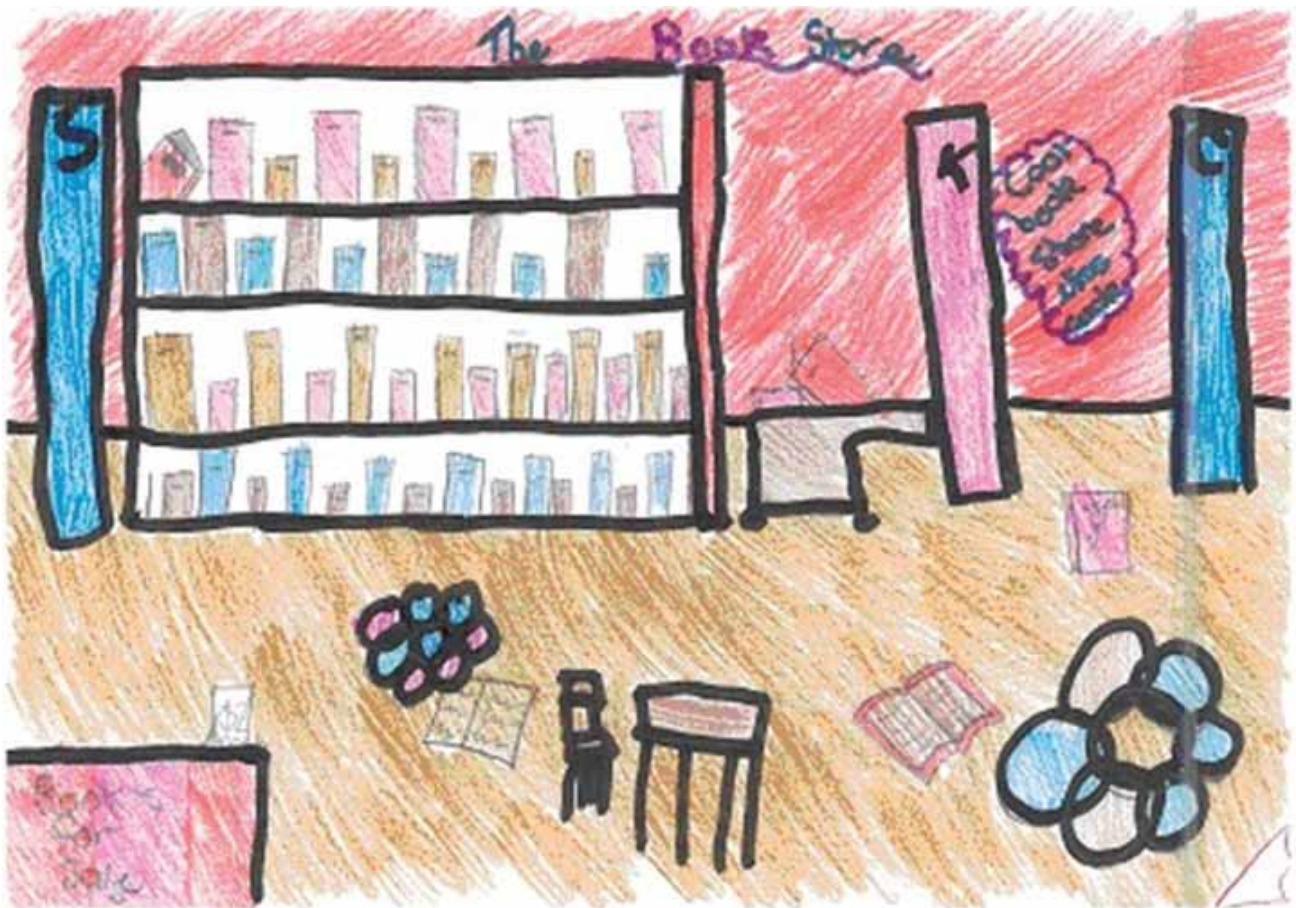
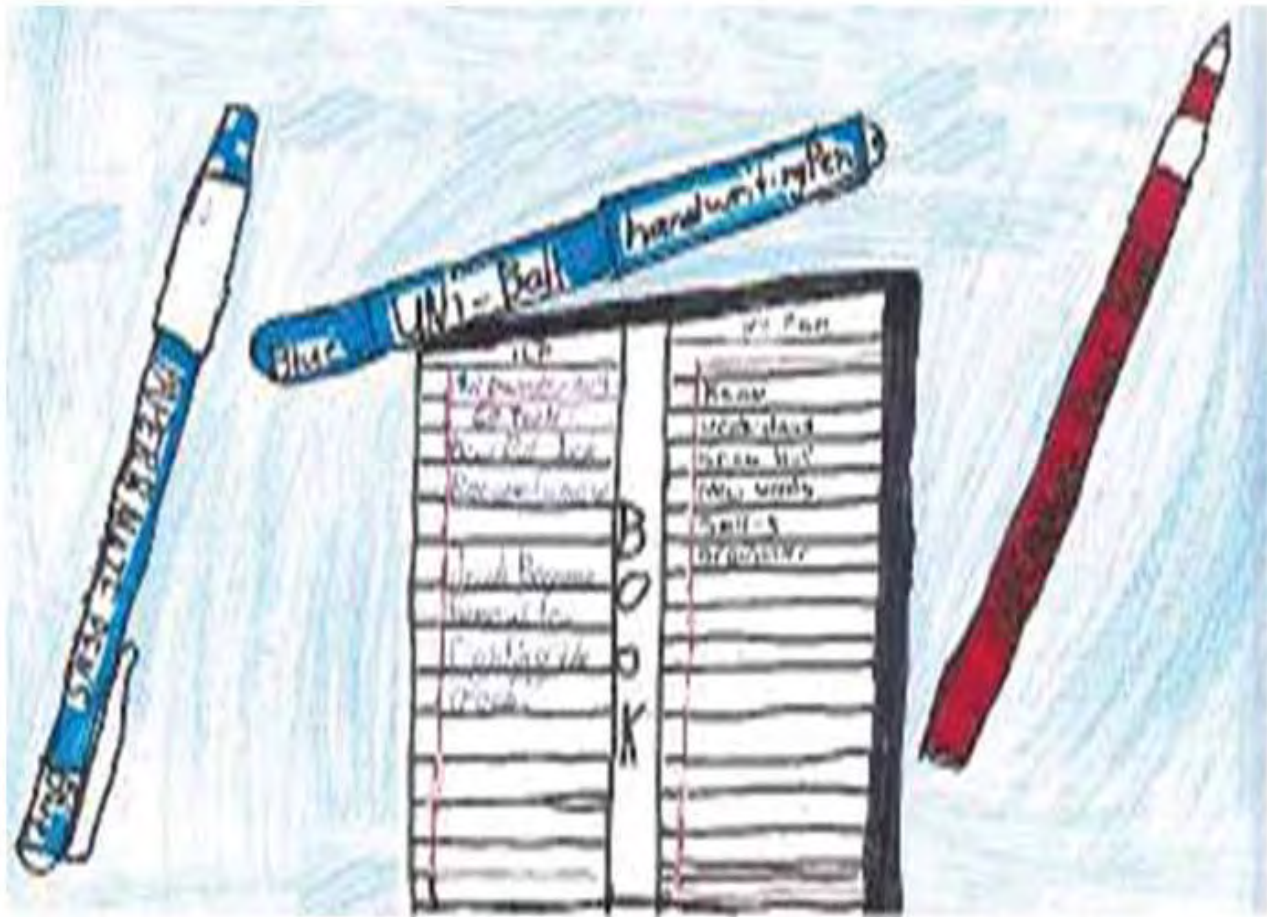
- ongoing commitment and support from the school principal and leadership team
- embedding teacher practices, such as ongoing data analysis, collaboration, planning, and *ILP* development in school plans and routines
- ensuring tutors are available, including from within the school
- provision of necessary release from class duties for future training and professional development.

One principal indicated that *ILPs* provide “value for money” noting:

“It is a significant amount of money but it has had monumental success. If [self esteem, confidence, behaviour] is what money can help with then it has been successful.”

The value of *ILPs* and the ease with which teachers have embedded strategies into their practice is exemplified by the following teacher comment:

“The learning plans have been embedded in our assessment and reporting processes which are systematic and whole-school. The learning plans are relevant and school-based and external data is collated and analysed. The data are then used to identify areas of need which inform and guide the teaching and learning. The Individual Learning Plans become a part of the teaching and learning cycle where assessment is ongoing and shapes improved classroom practice. This has no price tag on it.”



7 Summary of findings and conclusions

This section provides a summary of the efficacy and impact of *Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)* as they emerged through the evaluation. Findings from both quantitative and qualitative components are drawn together to address each of the Terms of Reference, as follows:

- assessment of the effectiveness of the program
- assessment of the extent to which the program achieves its goals in an efficient manner and where applicable, addresses the mandatory reform elements of the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy, which are:
 - effective and evidence-based teaching of literacy
 - strong school leadership and whole-school engagement with literacy
 - monitoring student and school literacy performance to identify where support is needed
- assessment of the extent to which the program has improved the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students
- investigation of the most effective ways for schools to be supported to participate in the evaluation and for the reforms to be incorporated into school practice.

It is acknowledged that in all but one school, *ILPs* were implemented concurrently with whole-class literacy programs. As such, it is difficult to attribute improvement to one approach or program alone. The significant finding of this evaluation is that *ILPs* have delivered positive effects for students, teachers and real benefits for school communities.

The other components of the NPLN have bolstered the effectiveness of *Individual Learning Plan* implementation. Both the team leadership component and the requirement to examine SMART data have contributed significantly, in most cases.

Timelines and funding were factors that were not always within the organisational control of participating schools. These limitations are taken into account within the following summary and conclusions, as appropriate.

7.1 Assessment of the effectiveness of *Individual Learning Plans*

The *Individual Learning Plan* intervention has been effective in schools, not only for improving students' reading skills, but also in terms of increasing student participation, engagement and confidence. Teacher capacity has been strengthened due to the emphasis on individualised learning and the necessity to analyse data to identify individual student needs. Parent and community involvement has also been enhanced due to better school communication and engagement of parents in the development of *ILPs*.

7.1.1 Effectiveness for students

Whilst NAPLAN and NPLN assessments indicate a general improvement in scores for students involved in *ILPs*, it cannot be concluded that any improvement is a direct result of this intervention alone.

However the majority of teachers, tutors, principals and parents indicated that the *Individual Learning Plan* intervention had made a positive difference in literacy and reading gains for their students.

Principals and school staff reported additional benefits for students resulting from the *ILP* intervention, including increased self-esteem, confidence, participation, engagement, and improved behaviour.

7.1.2 Effectiveness for teachers

More than 85% of teachers claimed that the *Individual Learning Plan* intervention improved their overall teaching practices. The experiences enabled them to analyse data on a more detailed level, identify individual student needs and target specific strategies to address those needs. They are now more able to target specific skills that needed improvement rather than merely "teaching a lesson".

Whilst teachers did not generally comment on evidence obtained from their online Data Analysis Skills Assessment (DASA) capability, they were able to articulate improvements in being able to analyse SMART data for individual students, their classes and for the school.

Teachers felt more able to identify their own professional learning needs, as well as those for the school.

7.1.3 Effectiveness of *Individual Learning Plans* for school communities

All participants identified *ILPs* as improving student outcomes. However, the impact on the school as a whole depended on the method of implementation.

Where *ILPs* were developed with the involvement of students, support teachers, paraprofessionals and parents, as well as class teachers, participants identified benefits beyond individual student achievement. Increased collaborative planning and programming was evident as well as a growing sense of responsibility amongst the whole school to work toward literacy improvement.

Where the *ILPs* were implemented as a discrete process of tutors and students working together, there was significantly less impact on individual class teachers or the school community as a whole.

Regardless of whether parents had participated in the development of their child's reading plan or not, increased parent and community involvement was a major benefit reported in interviews and through teacher surveys.

7.2 Assessment of efficient achievement of goals

Principals and teachers describe *ILPs* as having laid the foundations for ongoing improvement in teaching and learning in literacy. Issues of efficiency that emerged from the evaluation, relate to organisation of one-to-one sessions, the costs incurred and value that schools derived from participation.

7.2.1 Efficient implementation

The efficiency of the implementation can only be determined by the opinions of school staff in relation to the model implemented in their school. The following findings are drawn from analysis of the range of contexts in which the *ILPs* were situated:

- In schools where volunteer tutors were used, some teachers indicated that extra time was needed to work with the tutor to ensure they were able to adequately support students.
- In schools where qualified teachers were employed as additional staff members, teachers indicated that it made their job easier knowing that high-needs students were being catered for in a professional manner.
- In schools where interventions occurred either individually or in groups within the classroom environment, teachers maintained that *ILPs* worked efficiently if they had support from school learning support officers or other qualified personnel.
- Where withdrawal *ILP* sessions were scheduled during lesson times, or during lunchtime or before school, the acknowledged benefits of the tutoring were set against the difficulties students experienced in missing out on other learning activities. Social impacts such as missing out on time with friends and a level of stigmatising were strongly felt by several students.
- In situations where the school embraced *ILPs* as a major pedagogical innovation, students benefitted from non-withdrawal models of *ILP* intervention, through the use of school learning support officers and other support staff within class times, and greater use of group organised interventions.

7.2.2 Costs, funding and value

Costs were kept to a minimum in several schools either by using existing staff to work with students on their *ILPs*, or by involving parent or community members as volunteers. Volunteers provided a valuable service, at least in the short term. Over time, it was more difficult to rely on the availability of volunteers, and often their level of commitment to the work could not be sustained.

Learning resources did not pose the same problem as experienced with other programs implemented by schools. Materials were often available within the school already, or developed by teachers through professional learning activities. Where resource materials were purchased, school executive commented that they were value for money in providing a base from which to plan for each student.

One school chose to target specific students from Years 3 to 6, through the employment of qualified retired teachers, for the three-year period of the National Partnership only. Although the cost of this was extremely high, and the possibility of extending the model beyond the National Partnership funding period was unlikely, the principal believed that the cost was worthwhile for the overall benefits gained. Executive teachers at this school asserted that they would somehow find a way to continue the individualised intervention for their most disadvantaged students.

7.3 Addressing the mandatory reform elements of the NPLN

The NPLN comprised the three professional learning elements:

- focussed literacy interventions for whole-class groups and individual students
- teacher leadership development
- effective use of student performance information.

The evidence from this evaluation suggests that implementation of *ILPs* has contributed to schools' progress towards addressing the reform agendas of the NPLN, as follows:

7.3.1 Effective and evidence-based teaching of literacy

Teachers indicated that *ILPs* have refocussed their attention on their general teaching practices, and have improved their use of data to inform decision-making. The ability to share teaching practices and student outcomes with colleagues was seen by teachers as an effective means to strengthen evidence-based practice.

7.3.2 Strong school leadership and whole-school engagement with literacy

Nearly all participants reported that strong school leadership was important in developing and maintaining *ILPs* for students. In some cases teachers were encouraged to take on leadership roles to support implementation. It is anticipated that these will continue beyond the period of the NPLN.

Reference was made to the *Analytical Framework for School Improvement* (PLLDD, 2010) as an effective mechanism for identifying areas for improvement within the school. A number of schools identified the need for greater parent and community involvement, and had made specific attempts to engage parents and the community which were reflected in school plans.

As a result, nearly all schools reported that parent and community engagement had increased. Some parents had been involved in the development of their child's plan. Others had received information about the goals of *the Individual Learning Plan* and were able to effectively support their children's reading at home by using similar techniques to those used by teachers. School staff saw developing effective partnerships with parents as vital in building on the skills students were developing. Students who were previously observed by parents as being disinterested and unchallenged were reading more at home, and were now much more enthusiastic about going to school.

7.3.3 Monitoring student and school literacy performance

Across all seven schools teachers have developed a better knowledge of national literacy achievement standards and have become more skilled in using a range of data and assessment tools. Teachers regularly assess student achievement and use data to monitor learning, adjust classroom programs and inform future targets.

There is evidence in several schools that the availability of assessment measures and *ILPs* on the school server promoted regular discussion and analysis of student assessment data. Many teachers commented on their increased capacity to analyse SMART data. Assessment and data analysis are now being used more effectively to inform practice.

7.4 Improving educational outcomes of Aboriginal students

Not all of the seven schools working with *ILPs* had Aboriginal students enrolled at the school.

The evaluation of *ILPs* focussed on changes in teacher and school practices, and student achievement related to reading. In gauging improvements in general educational outcomes of Aboriginal students, the evaluation has relied on responses to the teacher survey and interviews with parents, teachers and students themselves.

In external assessments, some gains were evident in reading results for Aboriginal students, as detailed in Section 4.3 of this report. Similarly, teachers reported improvements in general literacy skills.

Staff in schools with Aboriginal students generally reported improvements in other educational outcomes, including improved attendance, increased participation in class activities, as well as increased self-esteem, confidence and improved behaviour. Teachers could not always identify specifically that these improved outcomes were directly related to the implementation of *ILPs*. A few teachers stated that they had observed no particular changes as a result of the literacy intervention.

Parents in particular, observed enhanced reading behaviours and commented that their children were more generally engaged in school.

7.5 Supporting schools to participate in the evaluation

Qualitative data was gathered from three schools. The evaluation team worked with each school to:

- minimise disruption to school routines
- provide schedules of interviews and parent consent forms well ahead of time
- provide funds for catering for personnel involved in the evaluation process.

In cases where parents were unable to attend as scheduled, phone interviews were arranged at a convenient time.

Schools that took part in the evaluation saw it as a valuable opportunity to reflect on their practice, both individually and collectively. Teachers in particular, appreciated the chance to provide feedback on their experiences with *ILPs* and as part of the NPLN in general.

Many principals, literacy team leaders and teachers indicated that questions asked by evaluation officers assisted their own assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of implementing the literacy initiative.

7.6 Support for reforms to be incorporated into school practice

The evaluation findings set out the factors contributing to the success of *ILPs*, and the issues that have arisen that may hamper their continued implementation.

Several factors were identified as contributing to the program's overall success. These included:

- strong school leadership and commitment to literacy improvement
- availability of funding to allow in-school coordinators and mentors appropriate relief to maintain professional learning and support
- quality and consistent availability of *ILP* tutors (paid or volunteer)
- regular monitoring of student progress using quality school-based assessments and SMART data
- flexibility in timetabling and reducing classroom interruptions
- minimising disruption to mainstream class participation.

Throughout the period of NPLN implementation, schools have found solutions to some of the real or potential barriers to the effective ongoing implementation of *ILPs*.

Where individualised withdrawal interventions were implemented, those schools that ensured that withdrawal occurred outside literacy time had a higher degree of student participation and teacher commitment.

All parents were aware that their child was involved in an *Individual Learning Plan*. Where schools had organised information nights or workshop sessions with the parents, support for the program and follow through at home were evident. Some parents commented that they would like to have been more informed about the program, thus ensuring support at home.

Many teachers indicated that professional support and collaborative planning with colleagues were major factors in contributing to effective, consistent and ongoing improvement. Having knowledge of and access to different programming approaches, including commercial programs, assisted in the development of appropriate strategies for specific learning needs.

7.7 Sustainability

A number of schools acknowledged that *ILPs* were very labour-intensive. Provision of expert tutors and other support people to work one-to-one with students presents the greatest barrier to maintaining practices in each school.

The schools that have tried to integrate *ILPs* into classroom practices and routines, demonstrate that withdrawal of students is not the only way of making good use of *ILPs*.

Overall sustainability of *ILPs* in NPLN schools will rely upon:

- ongoing commitment and support from the school principal and leadership team
- embedding teacher practices, such as ongoing data analysis, collaboration, planning, and *ILP* development in school plans and routines
- ensuring tutors are available, including from within the school
- provision of necessary release from class duties for future training and professional development.

The majority of schools and school staff were insistent that they would like to see the continuation of *Individualised Learning Plans* for their at-risk students. Several had incorporated plans into school documentation and budget allocations to ensure ongoing implementation.

Only one school advised that without appropriate funding *ILPs* as currently implemented could not be sustained beyond the National Partnership Agreement.



Glossary

TERM	DESCRIPTION
AECG	Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (NSW)
AEO	Aboriginal Education Officer
AETD	Aboriginal Educational and Training Directorate (AETD)
AL	<i>Accelerated Literacy</i>
Benchmark	Standard against which performance is measured
BST	Basic Skills Test
CEO	Catholic Education Office
DASA	Data Analysis Skills Assessment
DEC	NSW Department of Education and Communities
EMSAD	Educational Measurement and School Accountability Directorate
ESL	English as a Second Language
Goals	Specific targets to achieve a defined objective
ILPs	<i>Individual Learning Plans</i>
K-2	Kindergarten to Year 2
KLA	Key Learning Area
LBOTE	Language Background Other Than English
Literacy	Ability to read and write to defined levels
<i>MultiLit</i>	<i>Making Up Lost Time in Literacy</i> Reading tutor program
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NPLN	National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy
NP Low SES	National Partnership for Low SES Schools
PERG	Program Evaluation Reference Group
PLP	Personalised Learning Plan. All Aboriginal students in NSW government schools have a PLP
PAS	Priority Action Schools Program: schools with the greatest needs are provided with further support through the PAS
SEPEB	Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau, DEC
SES	Socio-economic Status
SLSO	School Learning Support Officer
SMART	School Measurement, Assessment and Reporting Toolkit
Strategies	Actions to achieve a goal in a particular program
ToR	Terms of reference

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Appendix 1 - NPLN Template *Individual Learning Plan (Literacy)*

Name:

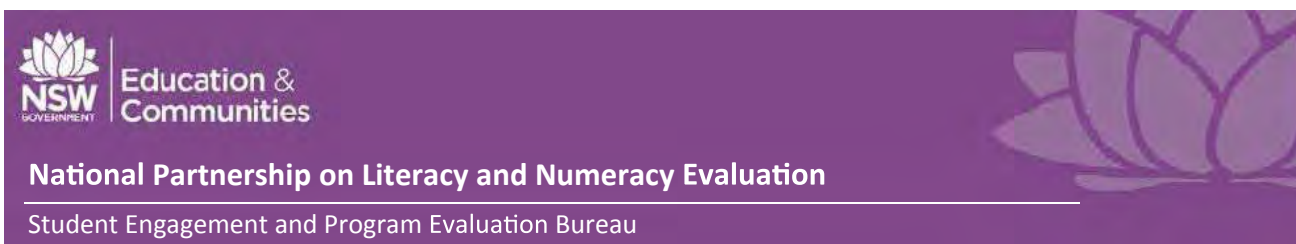
Implementation timeframe:

Strand:

Current text level:

Syllabus outcomes and indicators	Student's current skill level	Target skill	Intervention strategy	Responsibility	Monitoring and review

Appendix 2 - Evaluation instruments



Principal Interview

Program:	Data Ref:
School:	Region:
Date:	Time:
Evaluation officer:	Principal or delegate:

Introduction:

1. Reiterate purpose of evaluation:
 - Assess the effectiveness of the program
 - Assess the extent to which the program achieves its goals in an efficient manner
 - Assess outcomes for Aboriginal students
 - Assess the sustainability of the program for 2012 and beyond
2. Confirm procedure for day
 - Principal Interview
 - Class observation
 - Student focus group
 - Teacher interview
 - Parent/community focus group

3. Documents for discussion:

Annual School Report	
School Management Plan	
School Literacy plan	
any self-evaluation reports of the program undertaken by the school	
any periodic progress reports provided by the school for this program	
any analysis of DASA	
any relevant school-based assessments	
other: Analytical Framework	

Discussion points		Link to ToR
PA	Individual Learning Plans selection and purpose	
PA1	Why did the school select <i>Individual Learning Plans</i> as an intervention strategy? PROMPT: Data used (NAPLAN), <i>ILPs</i> in use prior to NPLN in the school	1
PA2	Is this the only program used for literacy lessons? If not, please describe how you determined your choice of other literacy programs.	2
PA3	PROMPT: Other NPLN intervention: MultiLit? <i>ILPs</i> ? Other?	2
PB	Individual Learning Plans implementation	
PB1	Describe the process you used to implement the program. Prompt: Training, Team leaders, grades involved, consultation with community	2 2
PB2	Comment on the factors that assisted or hindered the implementation.	2, 4
PC	Individual Learning Plans impact/outcomes	
PC1	What changes have you seen as a result of implementing <i>Individual Learning Plans</i> in your school? PROMPT: attendance, engagement, better student outcomes in reading, consistent teaching practices, enhanced teacher / staff professional focus	1, 2, 3
PD	Sustainability	
PD 1	Do you believe <i>Individual Learning Plans</i> is a cost-effective intervention program? PROMPT: resourcing, professional development, student outcomes, other benefits, other costs	2
PD 2	How will you continue the program without NPLN funding? PROMPT: resourcing, teacher practices	4

Thank principal for their time.

National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy Evaluation

Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau

Teacher Group Interview

Program:	Data Ref:
School:	Region:
Date:	Time:
Evaluation officer:	No of teachers:

Introduction: Reiterate purpose of evaluation:

- Assess the effectiveness of the program
- Assess the extent to which the program achieves its goals in an efficient manner
- Assess outcomes for Aboriginal students
- Assess the sustainability of the program for 2012 and beyond

Reiterate that this discussion is to supplement the feedback from the online teacher survey

Discussion points		Link to ToR
TA	<i>Individual Learning Plans</i> selection and purpose	
TA1	What is your view of <i>Individual Learning Plans</i> in terms of its effectiveness as a literacy program? PROMPT: What evidence do you have?	1
TA2	Does the program achieve its stated goals? PROMPT: effective with ALL students due to individual design, Aboriginal students What evidence do you have?	2
TB	<i>Individual Learning Plans</i> implementation	
TB1	From your experience with the program, what are the factors influencing the implementation of the program? PROMPT: Resources, space, time, tutor availability, SLSO relationship to student	1
TB2	How critical are these?	1
TB3	What are the critical factors necessary for the efficient implementation of the program? PROMPT: Strong school leadership, parent/ community involvement, professional networking	2
TC	<i>Individual Learning Plans</i> impact/outcomes	

Discussion points		Link to ToR
TC1	What changes have you seen in your school overall as a result of the introduction of this program?	2
TC 2a	What difference has your involvement in the program made to the way you teach? PROMPT: Planning, monitoring progress, collaboration with students/others	2
TC2b	What evidence do you have for these changes? PROMPT: DASA, program planning, assessments, lesson study	2
TC 3a	Has the <i>Individual Learning Plan</i> been an effective intervention for the particular student for whom it was designed? PROMPT: Has there been a difference in student performance overall? Has there been an impact on increasing their literacy/numeracy skill level?	1, 2, 3
TC 3b	What data do you use to monitor this improvement? PROMPT: NAPLAN, NPLN, other testing	2
TC 4	What impact has the program had on educational outcomes for Aboriginal students in your class? PROMPT: engagement, attendance, confidence	3
TD	Cost/sustainability	
TD 1	Will you continue with the <i>Individual Learning Plans</i> methodology even if there is no support through NPLN funding? PROMPT: Are you able to do this on your own as a teacher or do you need collegial support? Budget for appropriate texts? Budget for professional development?	4
TE	Additional comments	
TE1	Is there anything else you would like to add?	

Thank participants for giving their valuable time.



National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy Evaluation

Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau

Parent/Community Focus Group

Program:	Data Ref:
School:	Region:
Date:	Time:
Evaluation officer:	Parents: Community:

Introduction:

- Introduce evaluation team.
- Ensure they have coffee/tea etc if they want and feel comfortable in an informal setting for a discussion about literacy in the school.
- Ask how many have children at school, how many are members of community without students at the school (quick count).
- What do participants know about *Individual Learning Plans*. Brief description of the *Individual Learning Plans* intervention (very informal).

Discussion points		Link to ToR
CA	Involvement in the school program	
CA1	What is your understanding of how the school tries to improve literacy outcomes for students? PROMPT: Whole school literacy approach? Individual Learning Plans? Individual Interventions?	2
CA2a	Have you been given any information about how you would be able to support your child/students in this reading program? PROMPT: assisting reading at home, choice of books to use (relevant to their background and experience)	2
CA2b	By whom, or how was the information given? PROMPT: principal, teacher, school newsletter, school website	
CB	Impact and outcomes	
CB2	Have you noticed any changes in your child's reading? Have there been any other changes? PROMPT: reading more at home, reading independently, more engaged in school, better attendance, better English/literacy results	1, 2, 3,
CB3	Would you like to see it continue to be used as a program in the school?	4
CC	Additional comments	
CC1	Anything else you would like to comment on regarding the program or your child's reading?	



National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy Evaluation

Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau

Student Focus Group*

*with permission: 4-6 students (some who were present during lesson observation)

Program:	Data Ref:
School:	Region:
Date:	Time:
Total students: Male: Female: Aboriginal:	Year levels:
Evaluation officer:	Permissions:

Introduction:

- Thank students for being there.
- Introduce evaluation officers. Have students write their own names on place cards.
- Remind students why you are meeting with them (to talk about the literacy program they are doing).
- Bring up event in observation class where you were impressed with their learning (e.g. "When you were able to....., that was very impressive. Can you tell me a little bit more about what was happening in the lesson we observed?")

This should be a general discussion regarding reading and *Individual Learning Plans* and the impact upon the students present. Whilst there are specific questions that may need answering, the evaluating officers should guide the discussion around the main headings. Allow the students to talk freely about school, literacy, and reading.

	Discussion points	Link to ToR
SA	Engagement	
SA1	What is the first thing you think about when I say the word "READING"?	1, 2, 3
SA 2a	What can you tell me about the text you are currently working on?	1
SA 2b	What about the book/story do you like?	
SA 2c	Tell me about some of the other texts you have read in school this year.	



Discussion points		Link to ToR
SA 3a	Tell us what you think about your <i>Individual Learning Plan</i> lessons.	1
SA 3b	Are there things you like about your <i>Individual Learning Plan</i> lessons? Prompt: ability to read, comprehend, understand author intent	1
SA 3c	Are there things you don't you like about your <i>Individual Learning Plan</i> lessons? PROMPT: being withdrawn from class	1
SB	Skill development	
SB1a	Do you think you've improved in reading? PROMPT: In what ways? How do you feel? What's different? Are you reading different things at home?	1, 3
SB1c	Have you done any reading assessments? Have you improved your reading according to these tests?	1, 3
SC	Other benefits	
SC1	Think about all the subjects you do at school. How do you think your <i>Individual Learning Plan</i> helps you with these?	1, 3
SC2	Anything else you would like to say about your literacy lessons or reading?	

Thank participants for their time.

Note: May be positive for students if evaluators bring provide a small snack (check for allergies with teacher), or small item to reward students for engaging in focus group (check class/school reward system).

Appendix 3 - Online teacher survey responses

Individual Learning Plan teacher survey results

Including comments on item responses

Note: the sample size of 36 is relatively small and this limits the strength of the generalisations which can be made from the survey responses

Qualifications and experience

Q1 Qualified Teacher

Qualified teacher	97%
Not a qualified teacher	3%

Key points: Almost all respondents are qualified teachers.

Q2 Teaching Qualifications

Bachelor degree	61%
Diploma in Education	42%
Special Education (degree or diploma)	3%
Masters	11%
PhD	0
None of the above	3%

Key points: Two-thirds of respondents have a Bachelor degree, one-third of respondents have a Diploma in Education, one has a degree or diploma in special education, four have Masters and one has none of the listed qualifications.

Q3 Current role in the school

Class teacher	64%
School Learning Support Officer	0
Aboriginal Education Officer	0
School volunteer	3%
Other	33%

Key points: Most respondents are teachers. Others are tutors, assistant principals, school volunteers or other roles. There were no School Learning support Officers or Aboriginal education officers in the sample.

Q4 Career experience in schools

Less than a year	6%
1 to <3 years	6%
3 to <5 years	14%
5 to <10 years	17%
10 or more years	58%

Key points: Three-quarters of respondents have 5 or more years teaching experience. A quarter have less than five years experience.

Q5 Time at the school

Less than a year	11%
1 to <3 years	25%
3 to <5 years	17%
5 to <10 years	22%
10 or more years	25%

Key points: Half of the respondents have worked at least five years at the school. Many respondents have been at the school for three or more years. Around one third have been at the school for less than three years.

Involvement in the ILP intervention program

Q6 Experience in working with ILPs

Less than a year	28%
1 to <3 years	33%
3 to <5 years	22%
5 to <10 years	14%
10 or more years	3%

Key points: Two-thirds of the respondents have worked with ILPs for less than three years, while the rest had been involved for three years or more.

Q7 Have you participated in Cultural Immersion training?

Yes	22%
No	61%
Don't know	17%

Key points: Less than one quarter of respondents have had Cultural Immersion training

Q8 ILP intervention formal professional development programs/s (tick one or more)

ILP PL workshops	31%
School-based ILP PL	64%
Neither of the above	33%

Key points: One-third of respondents have participated in ILP intervention workshops. Two thirds have participated in school-based professional development. One-third of respondents had neither ILP workshops nor school-based professional development.

Q9 Have you participated in any other literacy professional development over the past 2 years?

Most respondents had participated in other literacy training, commonly that of another NPLN program.

Understanding of the ILP intervention program

Q10 I understand the purpose of the intervention

Extremely well	36%
Very well	50%
Somewhat	14%
Not at all	0

Key points: Most respondents said they understand very well or extremely well. All said they have at least some understanding of the purpose.

Q11 I can implement individually designed intervention programs for literacy

Extremely well	19%
Very well	56%
Somewhat	25%
Not at all	0

Key points: Three-quarters of respondents said they implement individually designed intervention programs very well or extremely well. No respondents said they cannot do this.

Implementation of the ILP intervention Program

Q12 When you implemented ILPs in 2009, what year/s were the students you worked with? (one or more)

Kindergarten	11%
Year 1	8%
Year 2	14%
Year 3	19%
Year 4	22%
Year 5	22%
Year 6	22%
Not applicable	47%

Key points: ILP intervention program was implemented in 2009 by half of the respondents, with greater frequency in Stages 2 and 3.

Q13 When you implemented ILPs in 2010, what year/s were the students you worked with? (one or more)

Kindergarten	11%
Year 1	11%
Year 2	6%
Year 3	31%
Year 4	47%
Year 5	28%
Year 6	25%
Not applicable	28%

Key points: Three-quarters of respondents implemented ILP intervention program in 2010. It was implemented mostly in Stages 2 and 3.

Q14 When you implemented ILPs in 2011, what year/s were the students you worked with? (tick one or more)

Kindergarten	14%
Year 1	17%
Year 2	14%
Year 3	33%
Year 4	47%
Year 5	39%
Year 6	31%
Not applicable	8%

Key points: Almost all respondents implemented ILP intervention program in 2011. It was implemented mostly in Stages 2 and 3.

Opinion of the support materials and services provided

Q15 *The ILP intervention professional learning activities I attended were useful.*

Strongly Agree	25%
Agree	61%
Disagree	14%
Strongly Disagree	0

Key points: Most respondents said the ILP PL activities were useful.

Q16 *I utilise the ILP template provided by the NPLN.*

Yes	56%
No	44%

Key points: About half the respondents said they utilised the template provided.

Q17 *I use a set of resources developed within the school.*

Yes	89%
No	11%

Key points: Nine out of ten respondents said they utilised a set of resources developed within the school.

Q18 *I use an externally developed resource.*

Yes	22%
No	78%

Key points: About one quarter of the respondents said they use an externally developed resource

Q19 *I modify resources to suit the specific needs of each student on Individual Learning Plans*

Always	31%
Frequently	56%
Sometimes	14%
Never	0

Key points: Most respondents frequently or always modify resources to suit the specific needs of each student on Individual Learning Plans.

Q20 *I plan with other Individual Learning Plan tutors in the school*

Always	17%
Frequently	33%
Sometimes	36%
Never	14%

Key points: Half of the respondents plan always or frequently with other Individual Learning Plan tutors in the school while half sometimes or never plan with other tutors.

Q21 *I feel supported by the ILP teacher coordinator*

Always	39%
Frequently	25%
Sometimes	17%
Never	6%
Not applicable (There is no ILP intervention teacher coordinator)	14%

Key points: All except five respondents said they had a teacher coordinator. Most respondents said they are at least sometimes supported by the ILP teacher coordinator, while two-thirds said they are frequently or always supported. Two said they are never supported.

Q22 The approximate length of time I spend each day teaching Individual Learning Plans with each individual student

30 minutes or less	61%
45 minutes	22%
60 minutes	8%
90 minutes	8%
more than 90 mins	0

Key points: Most respondents teach *ILP* intervention with each individual student for up to an hour each day. None said they teach more than 90 minutes.

Q23 I maintain student assessment folders which monitor student performance in literacy for

All my students	72%
Most of my students	6%
Some of my students	22%
None of my students	0

Key points: Most respondents use student assessment folders, with three quarters using the folders for all students.

Impact of the *ILP* intervention program

Q24 *ILPs* have improved general literacy outcomes for

All the students engaged in the program	39%
Most of the students engaged in the program	42%
Some of the students engaged in the program	19%
None of the students engaged in the program	0

Key points: Four out of five respondents said *ILPs* have improved general literacy outcomes for all or most students engaged in the program. No respondents said that no students improved.

Q25 *ILPs* have improved general literacy outcomes for

All of the Aboriginal students engaged in the program	31%
Most of the Aboriginal students engaged in the program	22%
Some of the Aboriginal students engaged in the program	17%
None of the Aboriginal students engaged in the program	3%
Not applicable (no Aboriginal students)	28%

Key points: Three-quarters of respondents have Aboriginal students using *ILPs*. Half of the respondents with Aboriginal students in the program said *ILPs* have improved literacy outcomes for all Aboriginal students. Other respondents with Aboriginal students in the program almost all said some or most Aboriginal students have improved. A very small proportion said no Aboriginal students improved.

Q26 *ILPs* have improved reading and comprehension skills for

All the students in the program	42%
Most of the students in the program	36%
Some of the students in the program	22%
None of the students in the program	0

Key points: Four out of five respondents said *ILPs* have improved reading and comprehension skills for most or all students. The other respondents said some of the students improved their skills. No respondents said that no students improved.

Q27 ILPs have improved reading and comprehension skills for

All of the Aboriginal students in the program	31%
Most of the Aboriginal students in the program	28%
Some of the Aboriginal students in the program	14%
None of the Aboriginal students in the program	3%
Not applicable (no Aboriginal students)	25%

Key points: Four out of five respondents with Aboriginal students in the program said *ILPs* have improved reading and comprehension skills for all or most Aboriginal students. Some respondents with Aboriginal students in the program said some Aboriginal students have improved. A very small proportion said no Aboriginal students improved.

Q28 ILPs have increased student engagement with reading

All the students engaged in the program	42%
Most of the students engaged in the program	42%
Some of the students engaged in the program	17%
None of the students engaged in the program	0

Key points: Most respondents said *ILPs* have increased engagement with reading for most or all students. A small proportion said engagement has increased for some students while no respondents said engagement has increased for no students.

Q29 ILPs have improved the way I teach literacy

Strongly Agree	14%
Agree	72%
Disagree	14%
Strongly Disagree	0

Key points: Most respondents said *ILPs* have improved the way they teach literacy. A small proportion disagreed.

Q30 Assessments for ILPs provide evidence of where support is needed

Strongly Agree	39%
Agree	61%
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Key points: All respondents said that assessments for *ILPs* provide evidence of where support is needed.

Q31 The teaching goals and activities chosen for ILPs are related specifically to students' backgrounds and learning needs

Strongly Agree	39%
Agree	61%
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Key points: All respondents said goals and activities chosen for *ILPs* are related specifically to students' background and learning needs.

Help received from the support services and resources provided by the *ILP* intervention program.

Q32 *A teacher coordinator plays an active role in the ILP intervention program*

Always	42%
Frequently	22%
Sometimes	25%
Never	0
Not applicable (i.e. no Teacher Coordinator)	11%

Key points: Nine out of ten respondents had a Teacher Coordinator. Two-thirds of those respondents who had a teacher coordinator said the coordinator always or frequently played an active role. The other respondents said the coordinator played an active role sometimes.

Q33 *The Aboriginal Education Officer plays an active role in the ILP intervention program*

Always	8%
Frequently	28%
Sometimes	17%
Never	6%
Not applicable (i.e. no AEO in school)	42%

Key points: Two out of five respondents did not have an AEO in their school. Of those who did, more than half said the AEO always or frequently played an important role in the *ILP* intervention program.

Q34 *Community volunteers play an active role in the ILP intervention program*

Always	3%
Frequently	6%
Sometimes	28%
Never	8%
Not applicable (i.e. no community volunteers)	56%

Key points: Half of the respondents did not have community volunteers in their school. One in five of those who did have community volunteers said they always or frequently played an active role while four out of five said the volunteers sometimes or never played an active role.

Q35 *Staff in my school have the experience, skills and knowledge to support me in the development of ILPs.*

Strongly Agree	31%
Agree	69%
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Key points: All respondents said staff in their school are able to support them in the development of *ILPs*.

Participation of the school in literacy programs

Q36 *The school principal promotes literacy across the school*

Strongly Agree	72%
Agree	28%
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Key points: All respondents said the school principal promotes literacy across the school.

Q37 School staff are supported to develop literacy knowledge and skills

Strongly Agree	72%
Agree	28%
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Key points: All respondents said the school staff is supported to develop literacy knowledge and skills.

Q38 The school executive shows an active interest in student literacy outcomes

Strongly Agree	64%
Agree	36%
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Key points: All respondents said the school executive shows an active interest in student literacy outcomes.

Q39 School leaders ensure human resources are available

Strongly Agree	61%
Agree	36%
Disagree	3%
Strongly Disagree	0%

Key points: Almost all respondents said school leaders ensure human resources are available.

Q40 School leaders ensure material resources are available

Strongly Agree	69%
Agree	28%
Disagree	3%
Strongly Disagree	0

Key points: Almost all respondents said school leaders ensure material resources are available.

Q41 A culture of continuous improvement in literacy outcomes is promoted and supported

Strongly Agree	61%
Agree	36%
Disagree	3%
Strongly Disagree	0

Key points: Almost all respondents said a culture of continuous improvement in literacy outcomes is promoted and supported in the school.

Q42 ILPs have encouraged parent/caregiver engagement in literacy

Strongly Agree	11%
Agree	64%
Disagree	22%
Strongly Disagree	3%

Key points: Three-quarters of respondents said *ILPs* have encouraged parent/caregiver engagement in literacy, while the rest disagreed.

Q43 I would recommend ILP intervention program to a colleague

Strongly Agree	39%
Agree	58%
Disagree	3%
Strongly Disagree	0

Key points: Almost all respondents would recommend the ILP intervention program to a colleague.

Q44 My involvement in ILPs has led me to conclude that the program overall is

Extremely effective	31%
Very effective	50%
Somewhat effective	19%
Not effective	0

Key points: Four out of five respondents said the program overall is effective or extremely effective, while the rest said it is somewhat effective.

Q45 Comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the ILP intervention program in relation to improving students' reading skills.

Number of open responses: 36

Q46 Comment on the extent to which ILPs are sustainable in your school. You can include comments on your willingness and capacity to implement ILPs for your targeted students without the present funding level for professional development and support.

Number of open responses: 36

Note: Free text answers have been included in the analysis of the evaluation interviews and focus groups.

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March 2012

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