

Low SES School Communities
National Partnership Evaluation

Case studies of staffing,
management and
accountability

Fourth Progress Report

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Glossary

AECG	Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
AEDI	Australian Early Development Index
AL	Accelerated Literacy
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
ATSI	Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
CLAS	Connected Learning Advisory Service
CLO	Community Liaison Officer
COAG	Council of Australian Government
CS	Central School
DASA	Data Analysis Skills Assessment
DEC	Department of Education and Communities
DER	Digital Education Revolution
EARS	Executive Assessment and Review Schedule
ESL	English as a Second Language
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
HAT	Highly Accomplished Teacher
HS	High School
HSC	Higher School Certificate
HSLO	Home School Liaison Officer
HTM	Head Teacher Mentor
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IWB	Interactive White Board
KLA	Key Learning Area
L3	Language, Learning and Literacy
LATE	Learn, Apply, Tell and Embed
LBOTE	Language Background Other Than English
LOP	Leader Of Pedagogy
WSCS	Western Sydney Community of Schools
MOODLE	Modular Object Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment

MULTiLit	Making Up Lost Time in Literacy
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy
NSWIT	NSW Institute of Teachers
PBL	Positive Behaviour for Learning
PBS	Positive Behaviour for Success
PDHPE	Personal Development, Health and Physical Education
PLP	Personal Learning Plan/Professional Learning Plan
PS	Public School
PSFP	Priority Schools Funding Program
QT	Quality Teaching
QTF	Quality Teaching Framework
SAM	School Administrative Manager
SAO	School Administrative Officer
SENTRAL	A learning and student management software system.
SES	Socio Economic Status
SLSO	Student Learning Support Officer
SLST	Student Learning Support Team
SMART	School Measurement Assessment and Reporting Toolkit
SRC	Student Representative Council
STLA	Student Teaching and Learning Assistance
TARS	Teacher Assessment and Review Schedule
TELL	Teacher Effectiveness for Language Learning
TEN	Targeting Early Numeracy
TLSI	Team Leadership for School Improvement Program
TOWN	Taking Off With Numeracy
TPL	Teacher Professional Learning
UNSW	University of New South Wales
USYD	University of Sydney
UTS	University of Technology Sydney
UWS	University of Western Sydney

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents case studies of a small number of the schools that are participating in the Low Socio Economic Status School Communities National Partnership (Low SES NP). It is part of an agreed work plan for the *Evaluation of Staffing, Management and Accountability* and the fourth in a series of progress reports that will contribute to the final report of the evaluation to be submitted in 2014. The final report will draw on information from surveys, case studies, and other research.

The case studies relate to the *Evaluation of Staffing, Management and Accountability* being conducted by the Centre for Research on Education Systems (CRES) of the University of Melbourne. The case study component of this evaluation aims to gain a rich understanding of the implementation, impact and outcomes of initiatives implemented by schools and to assist with the broader analysis.

This executive summary contains key findings from case studies of twelve primary and secondary schools participating in the Low SES NP in New South Wales – six undertaken in 2013 (the 2013 case studies) and six initially undertaken in 2012 and revisited in 2013 (the 2012 case studies). The case studies are based primarily on interviews with school principals, other members of the school executive, persons occupying specific roles in the implementation of the partnership, teachers and, on occasion, paraprofessionals and other school support staff.

Respondents were asked to provide evidence for any claims they made about the efficacy of initiatives, and where they did, this evidence has been included. The case studies include some contextual information sourced from administrative data (including ACARA's *My school* website), but the claims made by respondents have not been independently verified. Hence the text includes phrases such as *The school reports that . . .* or *According to the Principal . . .*

While these case studies are first and foremost reports about the Low SES NP from the schools themselves, this report also seeks to identify differences and similarities in the experiences of the schools.

Case study findings

Implementation of initiatives

The 2013 and 2012 case study schools implemented a range of initiatives related to the five reform areas associated with staffing, management and accountability:

- incentives to attract high performing teachers and principals
- adoption of best practice performance management and staffing arrangements
- developing school operational arrangements that encourage flexibility and innovation
- providing innovative and tailored learning opportunities for teachers and students
- strengthening school development and accountability mechanisms.

School staffing, management and accountability reform components inter-connect, complement and reinforce these five Reform Areas. It should be noted that initiatives relating to a sixth reform area, developing external partnerships with parents, other schools, businesses and communities, is the subject of a separate evaluation.

Table 1 shows that of the 25 types of initiative, 17 have either the same number of schools implementing the initiative or a difference of one school. One initiative was implemented by all the schools as part of their Low SES NP activity—the provision of professional learning opportunities in data analysis and use. All schools also established new or modified leadership and strategic positions; in one case however this was funded from the Improving Teaching Quality National Partnership program. It is important to note that some schools were participating in multiple NPs and this level of participation must be taken into account in understanding strategies adopted to support Low SES NP goals.

High impact initiatives

It is not possible to rank the initiatives in terms of their impact because of the diverse contexts within which each initiative operates, including different implementation timelines, and the different goals of the initiatives. Discussions with case study schools, however, suggest that some initiatives are more important in facilitating change and achieving goals.

1. Establishing leadership, strategic and specialist positions

New and modified leadership and strategic positions have been major contributors to change in the school. Schools established new and modified positions to address their perceived needs frequently by including mentoring, supervisory and/or training and development functions in these key roles.

Schools reported that establishing such positions had allowed them to more effectively:

- implement professional learning and development strategies and in particular to increase staff engagement with student assessment data
- facilitate school development, planning, review and accountability processes, including staff performance management and review and reporting
- deliver evidence-based best practice teaching strategies and programs
- provide individualised learning support to students by, for example, developing personalised student learning plans.

Some schools also reported that leadership and strategic positions established through the Low SES NP were associated with improvements in students' attendance rates, school readiness, transition into the school, the number of new enrolments at the school and student learning outcomes.

Table 1: Overview of initiatives implemented by 2013 and 2012 case study schools

Reform Area	Initiative	Number of 2013 schools	Number of 2012 schools	Total number of schools
1	Establishing leadership and strategic positions	6	5	11
	Providing mentoring support	6	5	11
	Supporting leadership training and development	4	4	8
2	Developing professional learning plans	5	6	11
	Managing staff performance and review	4	5	9
	Supporting early career teachers	3	4	7
	Managing staffing mix	4	6	10
3	Employing paraprofessional and other school support staff	5	4	9
	Implementing team-based approaches	5	5	10
	Establishing new organizational arrangement	2	3	5
	Facilitating cooperation with other schools	3	1	4
	Establishing technological infrastructure	1	3	4
4a	Provision of professional learning opportunities in data analysis and use.	6	6	12
	Delivering literacy and numeracy programs	6	4	10
	Supporting targeted groups	4	1	5
	Using ICT	5	3	8
	Improving QT	0	5	5
4b	Supporting literacy and numeracy learning	2	3	5
	Engaging students in learning	4	5	9
	Supporting targeted students	4	3	7
	Providing transition support	3	2	5
	Supporting student welfare	3	3	6
5	Using evidence to inform planning	5	6	11
	Monitoring and evaluating	5	6	11
	Improving accountability and reporting	4	0	4
	Total number	99	98	197

2. Provision of professional learning and development opportunities

Schools report that the provision of professional learning and development support and opportunities and the implementation of professional learning plans have strengthened their leadership and teaching capacities. These initiatives, which have been in the main school-based and include learning through mentoring support, have contributed to improvement of:

- the knowledge, skills and attitudes of executive staff and teachers and the strengthening of professional dialogue.
- management and teaching skills and abilities.
- the quality of whole school and classroom collaborative planning, in particular, the use of data to inform decision-making.
- the quality of educational provision overall, including individualised literacy and numeracy learning support.

Some schools reported that provision of professional training, learning and development opportunities, funded through the Low SES NP, were associated with improvements in students' attendance rates and behaviour, school readiness, transition into the school and student learning outcomes.

3. Employment of paraprofessional and school support staff

Schools reported that Community Liaison Officer (CLO), Student Learning Support Officer (SLSO) and paraprofessional positions, including culturally specific positions, have contributed to the implementation and success of initiatives. In interviews principals claimed that these positions have often helped improve:

- the perception of the school in the community and/or the school relationships with community groups
- efficiency and effectiveness of teaching and leadership staff
- student attendance rates, readiness for school, attitudes to learning, and behaviour in the playground and in the classroom
- student learning outcomes.

4. Implementation of team-based approaches

The case studies suggest that team-based approaches have supported the development of whole of school, integrated and co-ordinated approaches to:

- staff professional training, learning and development
- navigation of databases for classroom and school use, set targets and design data driven pedagogy
- school development, planning, monitoring and evaluation
- program and classroom delivery, particularly for literacy and numeracy
- communication with students, parents and the broader community.

Team-based approaches also help facilitate staff collaboration better enabling teachers to have shared understandings, be consistent in their approaches and provide continuity in teaching and learning.

5. Provision of innovative opportunities for students to learn

Schools have focused efforts to provide innovative learning opportunities in the areas of literacy and numeracy development, introduction of new attendance and positive behaviour approaches, provision of individualised support, including culturally specific support; and building of support at critical transition points. School leaders believe that these programs have increased the level of student engagement in learning and supported better learning outcomes.

Reinforcing effects of multiple initiatives

Discussions with schools suggest that a multi-faceted approach is necessary to achieve goals and targets, particularly those related to student achievement and that this makes it difficult to quantify the contribution of individual initiatives. A number of the case study schools cite evidence about the effectiveness of the implementation of a number of inter-connected initiatives:

- improved readiness for school and improved learning outcomes (Best Start tests).
- successful transition of students from primary to secondary school (teacher observations and test results).
- increased attendance and increased motivation to learn (the number of student receiving awards).
- improved student behaviour (reduction in classroom incidents, student referrals and expulsions).
- improved literacy and numeracy outcomes (school-based assessments, for example, L3, Reading Recovery, MULTiLit, and Burt scores).
- positive gains made by Aboriginal students (school-based tests).

Immediate and long-term impacts

Most schools have had at least one and a half years to implement NP initiatives. Some schools have demonstrated NAPLAN test improvements for students, including Aboriginal students, but most report that it is yet too early in the implementation cycle to demonstrate the real impact of the Low SES NP initiatives in academic outcomes for students as professional and student learning is a cumulative process.

The case studies do point to identifiable short term impacts attributable to the program such as changes in staff or student confidence, motivation and engagement in learning. However, other changes, such as, cultural change and shifts in teaching and learning outcomes are expected to become more evident over time, as the application of innovative learning pedagogy and professional practices take effect.

Sustaining the gains

Case study schools claim that the Low SES NP has contributed to an overall sense of educational renewal and reform. School leaders report being motivated to continue their reform efforts as a result of some of the positive results already achieved. Sustainability, however, has been generally at the forefront of their thinking. They have focused on capacity building goals, through human resource development and the embedding of new practices, programs, structures and processes into school policies and operations.

Schools have indicated that they will sustain, to at least some degree, many of the initiatives after the conclusion of the program in order to gain the most from the impact of their efforts to date. They point to the potential flexibility that will be provided through the new *Local School, Local Decisions* policy and the introduction of a new resource allocation formula, providing greater discretion in the use of their funding. Some anticipate continuing to fund some of the key leadership and paraprofessional and school support positions that they have created from their global budgets in order to try to improve student outcomes and sustain them over the longer term.

The challenge for Partnership schools will be to maintain their momentum by monitoring and evaluating the impact of their reform efforts and to help realise the benefits of the Low SES NP on their school communities.

1. Introduction

This report presents case studies of schools that are participating in the Low Socio-economic Status School Communities National Partnership (Low SES NP). It is part of an agreed work plan for the *Evaluation of Staffing, Management and Accountability* initiatives and is the fourth in a series of progress reports that will contribute to the final report of the evaluation to be submitted in 2014. The final report will draw on information from surveys, case studies, analyses of data and other research.

These case studies are part of the *Evaluation of Staffing, Management and Accountability* initiatives being conducted by the *Centre for Research on Education Systems* (CRES) of the University of Melbourne. The evaluation was commissioned on behalf of the New South Wales (NSW) Minister for Education to address selected aspects of the bilateral National Partnership Agreement for Low SES Communities between the Commonwealth and NSW.

The evaluation has its origin in the 2008 changes to Commonwealth-State funding arrangements and the Council of Australian Government's (COAG's) subsequent approval of the National Education Agreement and creation of three Smarter Schools National Partnerships (SSNPs) that reflect mutually complementary reform processes (Smarter Schools National Partnerships 2011: 2):

- the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership
- the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership
- the Low Socio-economic Status School Communities National Partnership.

The case study component of the *Evaluation of School Staffing, Management and Accountability* initiatives aims to provide a rich understanding of the implementation, impact and outcomes of initiatives introduced by schools and to assist with the broader level of analysis.

The next chapter of this report reviews some of the background and context to the Low SES NP. An earlier report, Progress Report 2, provides a description of the case study methodology that is used in this report.

Part A of this report introduces, presents and analyses the case studies of the six schools visited for the first time in 2013 (the 2013 case studies). They are presented in separate chapters and ordered by broad type—primary and secondary. The case studies describe the range of initiatives implemented by schools and report on key impacts and outcomes. Similarly, Part B of this report presents case studies of the six schools originally visited in 2012, described in an earlier report, and now revisited in 2013 (the 2012 case studies). These case studies highlight developments at these schools since mid-2012, including changes to the Low SES NP school programs. The case study updates are provided in separate chapters for each school and describe recent developments and achievements.

Part C, provides an overview of initiatives implemented by both 2013 and 2012 case study schools and explores patterns of similarities and differences between the 2013 and 2012 case

study schools. The final chapter provides an overall conclusion.

Respondents were asked to provide evidence for any claims they made about the efficacy of the initiative, and where they did, this evidence has been included. The case studies include some contextual information sourced from administrative data (including ACARA's *My school* website), but the claims made by respondents have not been independently verified. Hence the text includes phrases such as *The school reports that . . .* or *According to the Principal . . .*

While these case studies are first and foremost reports about the Low SES NP from the schools themselves, this report also seeks to describe differences and similarities in the experiences of the schools and to draw some broader conclusions.

Background and context

The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians commits the Australian Government and the state and territory governments to working cooperatively with all school sectors to 'focus on school improvement in low socio-economic communities' (MCEETYA 2008: 16). The Low SES School Communities National Partnership addresses this commitment. Participating schools 'will be better equipped to address the complex and interconnected challenges facing students in disadvantaged communities' through the funding of school improvement programs (COAG 2008). Together with the *Literacy and Numeracy* and *Improving Teacher Quality* National Partnerships, the Low SES NP is one of the three *Smarter Schools National Partnerships*. These three Partnerships have been designed to function independently, but they 'are tightly integrated and mutually complementary processes of reform' (Smarter Schools National Partnerships 2011: 2).

The Low SES School Communities National Partnership is part of a cross-sectoral approach to lifting achievement and educational outcomes within low SES communities. School staffing, management and accountability are three key areas of educational reform supported by the Smarter Schools National Partnerships, particularly the Low SES NP. A substantial body of research highlights the importance of these initiatives, particularly in combination, for school improvement. An effective policy environment emphasises the interconnection among strategies and initiatives and the need for a systematic rather than piecemeal approach (Elmore 2007).

Subsequent to the Smarter Schools National Partnerships, COAG has endorsed the *Empowering Local Schools* National Partnership, which supports participating schools to make more decisions at a local level so that they can better respond to the needs of their students and their local school community and hence improve educational outcomes for their students. This Partnership, which was implemented in 2012 and 2013, builds on some aspects of changes under the Low SES NP. It further emphasises the role of the principal and school executive in strategic planning and operational management, including staffing and budgets.

In NSW, 331 schools are participating in this *Empowering Local Schools* NP. The participation of the 229 NSW government schools in this Partnership is linked to the broader *Local Schools, Local Decisions* reform in NSW government schools, which also seeks to devolve greater decision-making to individual schools. The introduction of a new resource allocation model is central to these changes in the government sector and will give principals

greater discretion in the use of their funding. As with the Low SES NP, these reforms seek a culture change in schools to underpin continual improvement in student learning outcomes.

The NSW Government's Plan, *Great Teaching, Inspired Learning – A Blueprint for Action*, is consistent with the *Smarter School National Partnerships* reform agenda. The plan emphasizes support for leaders and early career teachers and the alignment of professional learning and performance management to professional standards.

The *incentive scheme for rural NSW* is also relevant to this evaluation and the case studies. This scheme provides teachers with a range of benefits such as a rental subsidy, additional training and development days, eligibility to apply for incentive transfer after serving a required number of years in a rural or remote school; compassionate transfer status for teaching partner, an annual retention benefit, locality allowances such as a climatic allowance, an isolation from goods and services allowance, vacation travel expenses, reimbursement of certain expenses related to medical or dental treatment, and one week of additional summer vacation for schools in the western areas of NSW.

Supporting low socio economic schools

The relationship between the socio-economic status of school communities and the academic achievements of their students is well documented in Australia and internationally. For instance, National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data show that students from more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds achieve at lower levels compared with students from less disadvantaged backgrounds in Australia overall and in each of the states and territories (COAG Reform Council 2010: 56). Results from PISA point to a similar pattern in all OECD countries (Field, Kuczera & Pont 2007: 41).

Schools that serve low SES communities often encounter other patterns of social disadvantage. They tend to teach higher proportions of Aboriginal, non-English speaking and refugee students, or work with families with a history of generational poverty. The initiatives supported by the Low SES NP include strategies to address the needs of these students as well.

An efficient school system maximises the relationship between a student's ability and their achievement and minimises any influence of extraneous factors such as social disadvantage. Despite the sound performance of Australian students on many achievement measures, the relationship between SES and school achievement is stronger in Australia than in many other countries (Lamb & McGaw 2007). Although this relationship has weakened in Australia since 2000, the apparent improvement in equity can be attributed to the 'lower proportion of [Australian] students achieving at the top levels' (COAG Reform Council 2010: 34). The effect of socioeconomic background on scores in achievement tests is mirrored in a range of other educational outcomes such as Year 12 completion and post school destinations.

Targeted financial support for low socio-economic school communities can improve student outcomes (Gustafsson 2003). The extent of any improvement, however, depends on the way in which those funds are used. The research emphasises the need for simultaneous complementary interventions over a range of school practices. For instance, McKinsey & Company (2007) in a comparison of the performance of many education systems found that school reforms were often unable to deliver substantial improvements in student outcomes because other aspects of school practice or organisation impeded improvement. Similarly, schools in England using a combination of strategies suited to their context and stage of

development had an increased chance of achieving long-term transformational change (Harris, Allen & Goodall 2008).

Addressing staffing, management and accountability

School staffing

Low SES NP staffing reforms focus on improving retention while also supporting initiatives to encourage quality teaching. Researchers have documented the importance of retaining quality staff within low SES schools (Lamb & Teese 2005, Lamb 2007, Welch, Helme et al. 2007). Lamb and Teese's (2005) review of equity programs within disadvantaged schools in NSW found examples of successful and effective programs that were 'undermined by high staff turnover' (Lamb & Teese 2005: 133). The turnover in staff becomes a financial burden as schools need to reinvest to up-skill and build capacity once again. The long-term success of an initiative depends on the retention of expert staff, as 'continuity and stability in staffing are essential ingredients to a robust equity funding framework' (Lamb & Teese 2005: 150).

The Low SES NP addresses staff retention with various 'incentives to attract high-performing teachers and principals' (Smarter Schools National Partnership 2011). Incentives include:

- **additional staffing resource incentives:** employing a temporary *Highly Accomplished Teacher* (HAT), employing temporary paraprofessional and other support staff
- **school organisation incentives:** providing additional release for staff for professional development or team teaching
- **financial incentives:** one-off recruitment allowances, changing approaches to permanent and casual appointments, providing an allowance to high achieving teacher education students to undertake internships at targeted National Partnership schools.

The OECD report *Teachers Matter* found that reforms to build quality teaching in schools require a two-pronged approach. One dimension of reform needs to focus on attracting and retaining teachers to work in particular schools, while another addresses the status and effectiveness of teachers (OECD 2005). The report *How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top* encourages systems to invest in their staff and ensure that the right applicants become teachers as 'the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers' (McKinsey & Company 2007). The Low SES NP supports a range of measures to encourage quality teaching:

- employing high performing graduates, and/or ensuring that new graduates are mentored by more experienced teachers
- employing paraprofessionals and other school support staff with skills to provide in and out of classroom support to teachers and allow them more time to focus on student learning
- providing opportunities for existing staff to access professional learning and build capacity through collaborative planning and team teaching opportunities
- identifying an executive member with English as a Second Language (ESL) expertise to work across schools to lead professional learning and coordinate teaching and learning strategies

- employing a teacher with expertise in Aboriginal student learning outcomes to work across schools and embed Aboriginal content and viewpoints across all curriculum areas
- identifying an academic partner from a university to promote action research within the school setting and provide additional support for teaching and learning
- using new technologies to allow access and sharing of resources.

The temporary appointment of HATs (and their non-government sector equivalents) is a key strategy of the NP. A HAT is an excellent teacher who models high quality teaching for his or her colleagues and will lead other teachers in the development and refinement of their teaching practice to improve student learning outcomes within and across schools. The creation of the paraprofessional role through the National Partnerships is another key strategy to support quality teaching. Educational paraprofessional staff work under the guidance and supervision of teachers to support teaching and learning inside and outside the classroom, while operational paraprofessional staff work under the guidance of school executive to fulfil non-classroom based roles in schools. In addition to paraprofessional positions, many case study schools used other school support staff to help implement Low SES NP initiatives.

The Low SES NP also provides opportunities for staff to participate in professional development, especially in data analysis, literacy and numeracy intervention programs, as well as in developing individual learning plans for students, homework centres and introducing strategies that meet the needs of ESL and refugee students (Smarter Schools National Partnerships 2011).

School management

School management reforms within the Low SES NP can be grouped around three themes: leadership capacity, instructional leadership and distributive leadership.

Leadership capacity

Research on effective schools working within disadvantaged communities in Melbourne found that leadership culture is a precondition for high-performance (Kellock, Burke et al. 2007). Hence the Low SES NP involves strategies to attract high-performing principals into disadvantaged schools. Government schools participating in the Low SES NP may offer (with regional director endorsement) a one-off recruitment allowance ‘up to a maximum of \$15,000 gross to attract principals to challenging schools’, with the qualifier that ‘the principal will be required to remain at the school for at least 3 years’ (NSW Department of Education and Training). Catholic schools have also documented various measures to attract high-performing principals into schools that are difficult to staff or may be geographically remote (Smarter Schools National Partnerships 2011: 46). The Australian Productivity Commission sees ‘merit in offering higher remuneration for hard-to-staff positions as a way of signalling vacancies of the highest priority across the schools workforce’ (Productivity Commission 2012: 281).

The Low SES NP also seeks to build leadership capacity by encouraging schools to ‘adopt best practice performance management and staffing arrangements that articulate a clear role for principals’ (Smarter Schools National Partnership 2011). A clear role for principals ensures that schools are able to build ‘strong leadership with a clear vision and direction for the school and a high degree of leadership stability over time’ (Zbar, Kimber et al. 2008: 3).

Mentoring and coaching for school leaders by matching ‘aspiring executive with experienced executive at other schools’ is supported ‘to increase the numbers of school leaders in particular areas’ (Smarter Schools National Partnerships 2011: 44).

Targeted professional development for leadership is provided through programs such as the *NSW DET Analytical Framework for Effective Leadership and School Improvement in Literacy and Numeracy* and the *Team Leadership for Schools Improvement* (Smarter Schools National Partnerships 2011: 44). The Low SES NP also provides resources for schools to employ a business manager or other support which may ease the administrative workload on school leaders (NSW Department of Education and Training 2010).

Instructional Leadership

Some research suggests that successful school leaders should remain instructional leaders first and foremost and focus on the ‘the improvement of instructional practice and performance, regardless of role’ (Elmore 2000: 20; Robinson 2007). Instructional leadership is encouraged by the Low SES NP through ‘principals working with school executive teams to provide teachers with the appropriate knowledge and skills to implement strategies to improve outcomes for all students’ (Smarter Schools National Partnerships 2011: 46). School leaders involved in the Low SES NP will also be aware of the strategies that teachers are employing within classrooms, through the documentation of individual teacher professional learning plans, as teachers work with coaches/mentors to set goals, develop strategies and evaluate their own professional growth (Smarter Schools National Partnerships 2011).

Distributive Leadership

Distributive leadership is about building a model of leadership within schools that ‘is not top-down or overtly bureaucratic’ (Harris, Allen & Goodall 2008: 18). Fullan reports that an ‘organisation cannot flourish (or at least not for long) by the actions of the top leader alone: there needs to be leaders at many levels’ (Fullan 2002: 12). The Low SES NP provides school leaders with release time so they can offer teachers individualised professional learning in areas such as leadership development (SSNP 2011: 44). Distributive leadership of this kind creates new teams and ‘spreads out leadership practice’, which has proven effective to ‘secure greater collective responsibility, decision-making and support for the quality of teaching and learning’ (Harris, Allen & Goodall 2008: 18).

Accountability

The Low SES NP also encourages schools to set explicit goals, clearly describe strategies to achieve those goals and propose the methods to be used for assessing the success of the strategies—hence part of the broader emphasis on data analysis (Smarter Schools National Partnership 2011). The greater transparency inherent in these processes enhances the school’s management accountability, as well as contributing to a broader culture of evidence-based practices and reflection. The Low SES NP provides schools with many approaches to build greater accountability (including from Department of Education and Training 2011):

- implementing a new accountability process for school executives in schools
- strengthening school development and accountability within whole-school planning, such as through interviews with members of the school community, monitoring of

school performance, assessments of teachers and leaders, external evaluations and published annual report

- developing specialist teams within school clusters to visit schools regularly to assess outcomes in terms of the school plan
- employing additional staff with specific skills in the creation and maintenance of databases for data collection
- engaging school leadership teams in school accountability processes across the various levels of the school.

Schools and reforms

The Low SES NP seeks to improve the education and life opportunities of students from low socio-economic school communities (Smarter Schools National Partnerships 2011).

Initially 638, or about one in every six NSW schools were selected to participate in the Low SES NP. Schools progressively joined the Partnership between 2009 and 2012 for a period of four years. Compared with all NSW schools, the selected schools have a disproportionately greater number of students below national minimum literacy standards and, for secondary schools, lower Year 12 retention rates (CRES 2012).

Schools selected from a menu of activities with the view of making measurable differences to the educational outcomes of their students. The activities could be selected from six reform areas:

Reform Area 1: Incentives to attract high performing teachers and principals.

Reform Area 2: Adoption of best practice performance management and staffing arrangements.

Reform Area 3: Developing school operational arrangements that encourage flexibility and innovation.

Reform Area 4: Providing innovative and tailored learning opportunities for teachers and students.

Reform Area 5: Strengthening school development and accountability mechanisms.

Reform Area 6: Developing external partnerships with parents, other schools, businesses and communities.

All schools were required to implement activities from all six reform areas over the duration of their four year participation in the Partnership. Government schools were required to address all areas in each year of their participation. Most Catholic schools adopted the same approach as government schools. Independent schools were required to include activities that addressed Reform Areas 1 and 4 in the first year of their participation. Schools could also choose to introduce strategies to address activities from the two other Smarter Schools National Partnerships—Literacy and Numeracy and Improving Teacher Quality—where these also addressed a specific reform area.

School staffing, management and accountability reform components inter-connect, complement and reinforce these *Reform Areas*. Table 2 lists five of the six reform areas of the Low SES NP and initiatives to which they are related (The sixth reform area, *School*

partnerships, is the subject of a separate evaluation). The initiatives that are identified in the second column are those that have emerged from an analysis of the school case studies. The table identifies each reform area and its respective initiatives as either *highly relevant*, *relevant* or *slightly relevant* to an improvement to school staffing, management and accountability.

Table 2: Relevance of initiatives to improvement in school staffing, management and accountability

Reform area	Initiatives	staffing	management	accountability
1. Incentives to attract high performing teachers & principals	Establishing leadership and strategic positions	Highly	highly	highly
	Providing mentoring support	highly	highly	relevant
	leadership training & development	Highly	highly	relevant
2. Adoption of best practice performance management & staffing arrangements that articulate a clear role for principals	Professional learning plans	Highly	highly	highly
	Staff performance and review	Highly	highly	highly
	Early career teacher support	Highly	relevant	relevant
	Staff mix	Highly	relevant	slightly
3. School operational arrangements that encourage innovation & flexibility	Employment of paraprofessionals and other school support staff	Highly	relevant	slightly
	Team-based approaches	Relevant	highly	slightly
	Timetabling and school organisation	Relevant	highly	relevant
	Cooperation with other schools	Relevant	relevant	slightly
4a. Providing innovative & tailored learning opportunities for <i>teachers</i>	Data analysis	Highly	highly	highly
	Literacy and numeracy	Highly	highly	slightly
	Supporting targeted groups	highly	highly	slightly
	Using ICT	Highly	highly	slightly
4b. Providing innovative & tailored learning opportunities for <i>students</i>	welfare			
	Language, literacy & numeracy	Highly	relevant	relevant
	Supporting targeted groups	Highly	relevant	relevant
	Transition support	Highly	relevant	relevant
5. Strengthen school accountability	Welfare & student behaviour	Highly	relevant	relevant
	Using evidence to inform planning	Relevant	highly	highly
	Monitoring & evaluating	Relevant	highly	highly
	Improving accountability and reporting	Relevant	highly	highly

PART A: Case Studies in 2013

2. Introduction

Part A of this report presents case studies of six schools that are participating in the Low SES NP. Each case study focuses on initiatives in staffing, management and accountability. The case studies are presented in separate chapters, with those of secondary schools followed by those of central and primary schools. The case studies describe the initiatives implemented by schools and report on key impacts and outcomes.

Case study schools

The six case study schools cover a diverse range of contexts. Table 3 provides information about each school: their type, sector, region, enrolments, student characteristics and their Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) score. The names of the schools have been changed to ensure anonymity and both enrolments and ICSEA scores have been approximated to minimise potential for identification.

Table 3: List of 2013 case study schools and characteristics

School Name	Year joined NP	Sector	Region	Type	Enrolments	ICSEA	LBOTE
Western Heights High School	2011	Gov't	SW Sydney	7-12	>1000	900-920	85%
Sydney Region High School	2011	Gov't	SW Sydney	7-12	<500	900-920	46%
Western Central School*	2012	Gov't	Riverina	K-12	<300	860-880	3%
Coastal Public School	2010	Gov't	Illawarra	K-6	>250	900-920	1%
Hunter Non-Government Primary School	2009	non-Gov	Newcastle subdivision	K-6	<100	780-800	0
South-West Sydney Public School	2011	Gov't	SW Sydney	K-6	<200	930-950	93%

* Incentive School – further information provided in case study.

Different starting times

Entrance into the Low SES NP was staggered over four years. Hence case study schools have been implementing their initiatives for different periods of time. For instance, Hunter

Non-Government School joined the Partnership with the first cohort of schools in 2009, while Western Central School joined the program in 2012, only the year before the case studies were undertaken.

Diverse ICSEA quartiles

Hunter Non-Government School and Western Central School are in the lowest quartile of the ICSEA scores of schools participating in the Partnership, while Western Heights High School (HS)¹, Sydney Region High School and Coastal Public School (PS) are in the second lowest quartile of ICSEA scores for the program. South-West Sydney Public School is in the second highest quartile of ICSEA scores of schools participating in the Low SES NP.

Diverse staffing profile

Staffing data for government schools, provided for each of the five case study government schools, indicates that:

- three have a younger than average age profile of teachers
- four have a lower than average turnover of teachers
- three have a lower than average percentage of teachers who have been at the school for over 10 years
- four have a lower than average number of sick leave days taken per teacher. The fifth school has a slightly higher than average number of days (7.7 days compared with an average of 7.4 days).

Implementation of initiatives

The case study schools undertook to implement a range of Low SES NP initiatives. The initiatives undertaken by each of the case study schools and the reform area each addresses are identified in Table 4, as well as the total number of initiatives for each school and for the six schools overall. The table shows that:

- case study schools were implementing 98 initiatives, with between 12 to 20 initiatives per school.
- Reform Area 4a has the highest number of initiatives (21 initiatives), followed by Reform Areas 1, 2, 3 and 4b (with 16 initiatives in each reform area) and Reform Area 5 (with 14 initiatives).
- all case study schools reported implementing the following initiatives- *establishing leadership and strategic positions, providing mentoring support to staff, and providing professional learning opportunities for staff to analyse/use data and deliver literacy and numeracy programs.*

Table 4: Initiatives implemented by 2013 case study schools

Reform area	Initiative	Western Heights HS	Sydney Region HS	Western Central School	Coastal Public School	South-West Sydney Public School	Hunter non-Gov't School	All schools
1.	Establishing leadership and strategic positions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
	Providing mentoring support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
	Supporting leadership training and development	✓	✓	✓	✓			4
2.	Developing professional learning plans	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		5
	Managing staff performance and review	✓	✓	✓	✓			4
	Supporting early career teachers	✓		✓		✓		3
	Managing staffing mix	✓		✓	✓	✓		4
3.	Employing paraprofessionals and other school support staff	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	5
	Implementing team-based approaches	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	5
	Establishing new organizational arrangement		✓				✓	2
	Facilitating cooperation with other schools	✓	✓			✓		3
	Establishing technological infrastructure	✓						1
4a.	Analysing/using data	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
	Delivering literacy and numeracy programs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
	Supporting targeted groups	✓	✓		✓	✓		4
	Using ICT	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	5
4b.	Supporting literacy and numeracy learning	✓					✓	2
	Engaging students in learning	✓	✓	✓			✓	4
	Supporting targeted students		✓	✓	✓	✓		4
	Providing transition support			✓	✓	✓		3
	Supporting student welfare		✓		✓		✓	3
5.	Using evidence to inform planning	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	5
	Monitoring and evaluating	✓	✓	✓	✓			4
	Improving accountability and reporting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		5
	Total	20	19	16	17	15	12	99

Other high frequency initiatives are: *developing professional learning plans; employing paraprofessional and other support staff; implementing team-based approaches; using Information and Communications Technology (ICT); and using evidence to inform planning.*

Key initiatives and impacts

It is not possible to rank initiatives in terms of outcomes due to the diverse contexts within which each initiative operated. Discussions with school leaders, however, suggest that four key reform areas and specific initiatives have demonstrated strong positive impact. The

different years in which schools joined the Low SES NP have led to differing degrees of progress and success in these four key initiative areas.

1. Establishing leadership, strategic and specialist positions

Schools believe that creating new leadership and strategic positions has been a catalyst for change. The schools report that staff mentoring, supervision and/or training and development functions have been incorporated in key roles in their staffing and management structure. Some schools have also established new leadership positions, such as Highly Accomplished Teachers (HATs) or their equivalents. Schools report that these staff roles and functions have helped them to respond to the challenges they face and to achieve their goals and targets. Some schools have reported that some leadership and strategic positions established through the Low SES NP were associated with improvements in students' attendance rates, school readiness, transition into the school and student learning outcomes.

2. Providing professional learning and development opportunities

Schools report that their leadership and teaching capacities have been strengthened through the provision of opportunities for professional learning and access to development support for staff and through the implementation of professional learning plans. Learning through mentoring support is identified as a further source of improvement. In the main, these initiatives are school-based. Some schools also report that provision of professional training, learning and development opportunities, funded through the Low SES NP, has led to improvements in students' attendance rates and behaviour, school readiness, transition into the school and student learning outcomes.

3. Employing paraprofessionals and other school support staff

Schools report that paraprofessional positions and school support staff, such as the CLO and SLSO (and their equivalent) positions, including culturally specific positions, have been critical to the implementation and success of initiatives.

4. Implementing team-based approaches

An analysis of case studies indicates that team-based approaches have had positive outcomes. These approaches have enabled the development of whole of school, integrated, result focused approaches to professional learning, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Team-based approaches have increased staff collaboration, promoting shared understandings, consistency of approach, and continuity in teaching and learning.

5. Providing innovative opportunities for students to learn

The case study schools aim to provide their students with a range of best practice programs and strategies. These programs and strategies are designed to improve student literacy and numeracy; to provide access to individualised support, including culturally specific support; and to boost the active engagement of students in learning, through higher levels of school attendance and positive behaviour.

3. Western Heights High School

Western Heights High School reports implementing 20 initiatives across the five reform areas. Complementary activities have strengthened:

- *Leadership capacity. Support provided by the Head Teacher Mentor (HTM) and opportunities for staff to access training and development activities have enhanced leadership capacity.*
- *Teaching capacity. Professional learning opportunities for teachers and informal mentoring support, made available by the Head Teacher Teaching and Learning (HTTL), have enhanced teacher capability in the delivery of evidence-based literacy and numeracy programs. They have also strengthened staff capacity to cater for diverse student needs, including those of gifted and talented students.*
- *Early career teachers' capacity. The school indicates that its mentoring program is assisting early career teachers to gain classroom management skills and to develop self-confidence.*
- *Education provision. The school has achieved positive learning outcomes by providing students with assistance from Student Learning Support Officers (SLSO) and opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills through participation in school programs. The improvement is reflected in school reports, in MULTiLit tests and in NAPLAN Year 9 reading tests.*

School Profile

Western Heights High School is a co-educational comprehensive high school in South West Sydney with over 1000 students, drawn from over 45 primary schools. The school joined the Low SES NP in 2011. It receives additional support through the Priority School Funding Program (PSFP) and the Priority Action School Program.

The principal has been at the school since the beginning of the Low SES NP. The current staffing complement is 78.2 FTE teaching and non-teaching staff. Compared with all NSW government secondary schools, for selected teacher characteristics for 2010-12 Western Heights HS has:

- an older-than-average teaching workforce—56.3 per cent of teachers aged 30-49 years, compared with 46.5 per cent for government secondary schools overall. However, it has a lower proportion of teachers aged over 50 years—31.3 per cent compared with 43.5.
- a lower-than-average turnover of teachers—3.1 per cent, compared with 4.3 for all government secondary schools.
- a lower-than-average percentage of teachers who have been at the school for over 10 years—26.6 per cent, compared with the average of 29.4 per cent for all government secondary schools. On the other hand it has a similar proportion of teachers who have been at the school for 4 to 10 years—32.8 compared with 32.8 per cent.

- a lower-than-average number of sick leave days taken per teacher—7.5 days of sick leave, compared with 8.8 days for all government secondary schools.²

Key initiatives

REFORM 1: Incentives to attract high performing teachers

Establishing leadership and strategic positions

The school has identified quality, innovative and strategic leaders, from both inside and outside the school, to fill the following head teacher positions funded through the Low SES NP.

- Head Teacher Administration (Attendance) (1.0 FTE), to facilitate improvement in student attendance and proactively manage absences
- Head Teacher Teaching and Learning (0.6 FTE), to mentor teachers and support early career teachers
- Head Teacher Mentor (HTM) (0.2 FTE), to support leadership development of executive staff and assist the Head Teacher Teaching and Learning to facilitate effective induction of early career teachers. A retired principal has been recruited to perform this critical role.
- Head Teacher ICT (1.0 FTE), to strengthen the school's capacity to use new learning technologies. A teacher has been seconded from another school to fill this position.
- Head Teacher Literacy (1.0 FTE) to mentor individual teachers as well as faculties.

In addition, the Head Teacher Creative and Performing Arts and the Head Teacher Home Economics have been provided with release time to improve the effectiveness of educational provision.

The school intends to introduce additional measures to support the development and maintenance of leadership and strategic positions by increasing the number of staff in leadership roles. The school is also seeking ways to provide staff with incentives to encourage them to undertake continuous development to pursue their professional goals and interests and to remain at the school. Staff survey responses indicate that teachers value opportunities to participate in higher duties. Of the staff surveyed at the end 2012, 31.6 per cent had undertaken higher duties beyond their substantive role at the school.

² Data on government school workforce supplied by DEC

Providing mentoring support

The Low SES NP funds mentoring support for leaders and teachers at Western Heights HS. The “Head Teacher Mentor” appears to have a workload disproportionate to his 0.2 FTE appointment. He works with the 10 executive staff members and with 20 other teachers who aspire to executive positions at the school. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership’s (AITSL’s) *360 Reflection Tool for Principals and School Leaders*³ is used to demonstrate attributes evident in the behaviours and actions of high performing leaders.

The HTM works individually and collectively with the head teachers to meet their professional learning needs and to assist their development as leaders and managers. The HTM also assists the Head Teacher Teaching and Learning to work with early career teachers, including through:

- demonstrating content driven lessons
- observing and reviewing videoed lessons
- developing innovative approaches to answering Higher School Certificate (HSC) questions
- videoing HSC study sessions and loading them to Modular Object Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment (MOODLE).

The Principal also meets with the HTM—sharing reflections and seeking advice, in particular with regard to the school’s growth strategies.

The provision of mentoring support enables teachers to access an essential support service, the school reports, as the HTM goes into classrooms with teachers and works with them. He follows up with them at recesses and lunchtimes. The school indicates that in getting to know staff and working with them through the week, the mentor essentially develops one-to-one mentoring relationships which can serve to invest staff with great confidence.

Establishing the HTM position has helped to separate some supervision and professional support functions in the school. Staff are freer to discuss their professional needs with a skilled person who is not their line manager, or the Deputy Principal or Principal.

He is a very good guide, a good listener, and he knows how to work with people. He doesn’t take over. He shows my newly appointed HTs that it is possible to move to the next level. . . . It’s a vital role and it’s been fantastic for us.
[Principal]

Supporting leadership training and development

The school reports that aspiring teachers and executive staff have participated in a formal and developmental professional learning program, which began with a weekend Leadership Conference and was followed by a series of conferences outside school hours. The HTM delivers the *Team Leadership for School Improvement K-12 Program* over 10 sessions after school. Seventy percent of staff surveyed indicated a desire to continue this leadership program in the following year because they felt that it had helped them to become a more effective leader.

³ www.aitsl.edu.au/school-leaders/australian-professional-standard-for-principals/360-reflection-tool.html

The professional learning program plays an important role in facilitating the development of a positive school culture and in succession planning:

The consequential cultural change has been positive, with the increasing professionalization of staff at career transition points, as well as an increasing positivity towards their own skills and capabilities. [Principal]

REFORM 2: Best practice performance management and staffing arrangements

Developing professional learning plans

Staff at Western Heights HS develop *Professional Learning Plans* (PLPs) that are a part of the *Executive Assessment and Review Schedule* (EARS) and the *Teacher Assessment and Review Schedule* (TARS). According to the school, the HTTL coordinates the PLPs, which are reviewed by the professional learning team—the Principal, the Deputy Principal and the HTM. Teachers are asked to plan lessons that are consistent with school priorities and which builds their capacity to facilitate improved student learning outcomes.

Managing staff performance and review

The school reports conducting a thorough annual EARS and TARS process, which aims to meet DEC accountability requirements, ensuring that teaching staff have demonstrated continuing efficiency in teaching practice, satisfactory performance and professional growth. The three major elements of the process are:

- conferences between the school teacher and the principal or supervisor
- observations of educational programs
- review of documentation such as lesson planning, lesson material and student work, plans, evaluations and reports.

In addition to DEC'S requirements, teachers at Western Heights HS respond to a series of questions in Terms 1 and 3.

HSC teachers are asked to reflect on HSC exam results, to identify their achievements and areas of weakness and to devise improvement strategies. Teachers are also required to give an indication of their skills levels and the nature of their contribution to various school programs. Head teachers can provide further assistance to staff through classroom visits.

Supporting early career teachers

Western Heights HS reports supporting early career teachers through the delivery of a formal induction program to these staff and the provision of support for them to complete their accreditation. The program is delivered by the HTTL and the HTM, and begins early in the year with workshops held after hours on a fortnightly basis. Early career teachers participate in the induction program *until they are up to scratch* [Principal].

The formal induction program focuses on teaching methodology and subject knowledge, including the integration of Professional Teaching Standards and the Quality Teaching Model into teaching practice and programs. The school also advises that teachers are provided with guidance and resources to assist them in the planning and delivery of lessons and in reflection on them, and that staff are given the opportunity to engage in conversations about the impact and outcomes of their lessons.

The induction process includes:

- lesson observations and feedback
- advice on lesson differentiation, classroom management and student discipline
- assistance in understanding policy through analysis of scenarios
- presentations by staff who had undertaken the induction program in the previous year, focusing on the development of professional portfolios
- visits by the mentors of early career teachers (the head teachers).

The school reports that the process is proving effective in developing early career teachers' confidence, teaching and classroom management skills.

The school advises that it has retained teachers as a result of the scaffolding support it provides and that when staff leave to take up jobs in other schools "the feedback is that they are fantastic in their teaching" [Principal]. The school plans to continue its early career teachers' program through the Deputy Principal's role after Low SES NP funding ceases.

Managing staffing mix

The school has used Low SES NP funding to: build capacity in staff literacy and numeracy provision; build the school's ICT capacity; and address identified needs. The following literacy and numeracy positions have been established:

- Junior Learning Centre literacy and numeracy teachers (part time), to lead data analysis, undertake diagnostic activities, implement extension programs and develop individualised learning plans
- literacy and numeracy teachers (total FTE 0.6) to embed learning strategies across all Key Learning Areas (KLAs) and facilitate their integration in the culture of the school. Primary trained teachers have been recruited for these positions to ensure a focus on implementation of 'basic teaching and learning strategies' and to facilitate the delivery of intervention programs such as MULTiLit and Mathletics.

The school advises that these positions have enabled the building of the capacity of staff to deliver effective education in literacy and numeracy. The lower-than-average level of staff turnover means that Western Heights HS is able to retain more of the benefits of these programs than would schools with higher levels of staff turnover.

Other staffing strategies include:

- the school's Deputy Principal completing the work of the Head Teacher ICT to ensure sustainability. The Deputy Principal is facilitating the development of the computer skills of Year 7 students and the development of the school's ICT policy
- providing release time to head teachers to enhance their supervision and mentoring of staff with specific needs, for example, early career teachers
- employing a Hispanic and a Pacific Islander teacher part time to raise the engagement of male students in their learning:

I can't give you a quantifiable outcome on it but if I surveyed the staff on the attitudinal changes of our Pacific Islander boys ... who are now attending and focused, asking for help from the teachers and handing their work in - then the staff will say [the Pacific Islander teacher] has done a brilliant job. [Principal]

The Low SES NP is enabling Western Heights HS to resource additional strategies devised to meet specific needs and achieve school goals and targets.

REFORM 3: School operational arrangements that encourage innovation and flexibility

Employing school support staff

The school has employed school support staff to help implement Low SES NP to priorities. The positions are:

- A Student Learning Support Officer (SLSO) Junior Learning Centre (0.5 FTE)
- A SLSO MULTiLit (0.3 FTE) to provide individualized assistance
- An Aboriginal SLSO who works with the Head Teacher Attendance to support Aboriginal students to engage with the ‘Aim Up’ program. ‘Aim Up’ is a program designed to improve attendance through a reward system.
- A Community Liaison Officer (CLO). The key functions of this role are: coordination of parent and teacher meetings (including arranging for up to 12 interpreters); liaison with primary schools and coordination of transition to the school; management of the SMS service to parents; supporting the Parents and Citizens Association; and organising parent forums.

The school reports that the Low SES NP has given it flexibility to resource specific programs for a longer period. The principal believes that the support staff have been successful in their roles. For instance, Aboriginal students have responded positively after accessing individualized support. Their improved attendance has led to improved learning. Another example reported by the school is that of the MULTiLit SLSO who has been critical to the success of the program.

Implementing team-based approaches

Western Heights HS reports that the Low SES NP has enabled it to enhance the level and quality of teamwork among its staff. All teachers are provided with four hours of release time through the Low SES NP to enable them to participate in team planning. The school also acknowledges the enhancement of team-building skills through DEC’s Team Leadership for School Improvement (TLSI) professional development training.

Teamwork is evident in its provision of literacy education, including through:

- help provided to staff by the Literacy Whole School Committee to aid the development of an integrated approach across the school, identifying mainstream and intervention programs
- team training, which equips individual team members to provide training and support to their colleagues in the faculties
- the literacy teacher, who works with the staff in two faculties per term (on a rotating basis) modelling the development of KLA-related programs in areas of literacy identified through an analysis of NAPLAN results. To assist in the integration of these programs with existing programs and learning activities, the literacy teacher teaches with KLA staff and the Junior Learning Centre coordinator.

The school notes that the numeracy teacher also works with teachers on an individual basis and in groups, demonstrating lessons, developing links in content driven lessons, devising new strategies and providing feedback.

The school is planning to enhance teamwork through other strategies such as instructional rounds and peer reviews of teaching. Head teachers are preparing staff by providing them with information, filming lessons and facilitating discussions.

Facilitating cooperation with other schools

Western Heights HS funds the Community of Schools initiative. Since the beginning of 2011, a professional learning coordinator has been employed to facilitate collaboration and sharing of resources across four schools. Combined planning days promote high quality educational provision to all students. Staff also participate in research activities aimed at developing insights into the diverse learning styles of students and implications for classroom practice.

A literacy co-operative has been established between the school and two feeder primary schools. Staff work together, delivering a writing program across Stages 3 and 4 in English. Teacher release is provided to enable innovative writing sessions to be delivered to students. An example highlighted by the school was the development of literacy skills through poetry and film. Western Heights HS and another school created the *Virtual Professional Learning Project* through which teachers developed literacy computer-based resources for Year 9 students.

A joint primary and secondary staff team delivers the *Reading to Learn* initiative in classes across schools. The schools provide time release to support staff to access this opportunity to improve their teaching skills and boost literacy outcomes for primary and high school students.

The scope of the Aboriginal SLSO role includes work with feeder primary schools, providing assistance and advice on student transition to secondary school. The school believes that the work of the Aboriginal SLSO has resulted in the school becoming better informed about the needs of families before students arrive.

I get kids who are far better prepared for high school and their parents feel more comfortable with this school. [Principal]

Establishing technological infrastructure

Low SES NP funds have enhanced the implementation of the Digital Education Revolution (DER). The school reports that all classrooms are now equipped with the latest interactive data projectors or smart boards. All staff have been provided with a notebook laptop to allow them to integrate ICT into their teaching. The school notes that technical and pedagogical support are available to help staff use the various resources—data projectors, Interactive White Boards (IWBs), the Internet, MOODLE, ClickView, multimedia and BrainPOP⁴.

⁴ BrainPOP is a group of educational websites with over 1,000 short animated movies for students in grades K-12 (ages 6 to 17), together with quizzes, supplemental information and related materials, covering the subjects of science, social studies, English, mathematics, engineering and technology, health, and arts and music. www.brainpop.com/.

Examples of the uses of this technology recorded by the school include:

- the Virtual Professional Learning Project, which was implemented with another government high school. Teachers developed resources for Year 9 students to use during their literacy engagement period. The success of this initiative led teachers to develop additional resources for other teachers to access for use in their classroom teaching.
- the expansion of the school's technology platform to incorporate the use of MOODLE across all faculties, ensuring access to at least one full course for each KLA
- the creation of a digital library of model HSC exam questions to help students prepare for their exams
- the integration of iPads in lessons, particularly in the creative and performing arts
- establishment of a professional learning website, providing teachers with access to a large range of activities tailored for their needs.

The school reports that staff have increased the use of technology in classroom lessons. A 2012 staff survey indicated that 57 % of Western Heights HS teachers use technology in every lesson. The school believes that the Head Teacher Technology has played an important role in this achieving this outcome. The adoption of the new technology has resulted from continual training, mentoring and encouragement.

REFORM 4a: Innovative and tailored learning opportunities for teachers

The school notes that its staff are provided with professional learning opportunities to support them with their career development and to assist them with implementing the school's plan. The Low SES NP funds the employment of casual staff to release permanent teachers to participate in targeted professional learning activities related to the following areas: analysing/using assessment data; delivering literacy and numeracy programs; supporting gifted and talented students; and using ICT in teaching and learning.

Analysing/using data

Teachers of Years 8-10 can access NAPLAN student profile electronic booklets. These booklets are created for all students in all classes and provide information about each student's literacy and numeracy skills. The school reports that staff are trained to use the data to inform their programming and teaching and learning strategies. These, together with the results of other in-school assessments, provide the basis for the delivery of individualized learning. Staff are encouraged to provide, in all of their classes, individualised learning for any student who is below national minimum standards.

Student assessment data also informs the development of initiatives designed to address priority areas. For instance, the school reports the important role of student assessment results in the development of its whole of school writing strategy and its inferential comprehension initiatives, both of which are funded through the Low SES NP.

The school reports that teachers have been provided with informal mentoring to help them to address the goal of delivering targeted teaching and learning for diverse student groups. The mentoring assists teachers to design differentiated learning and assessment tasks for the

students in their classes.

Delivering literacy and numeracy programs

The school reports that funding from the Low SES NP has been used to deliver literacy and numeracy professional learning to the whole school. This training has been complemented by the Teacher Effectiveness for Language Learning (TELL)⁵ program to assist them in working with students who are English language learners. Of the 41.7 per cent of teachers who responded to the 2012 staff survey indicating training in TELL, 50 per cent believed the program had assisted them in improving the effectiveness of the delivery of literacy education in their classes.

Staff access individualized professional learning through participation in formal programs as well as through mentoring support provided by the literacy and the numeracy teachers. The learning strategies include demonstration of curriculum differentiation strategies, team teaching and review of faculty-based programs.

Teacher responses to a 2012 staff survey indicated strong uptake of learning by staff and a desire for further learning and development. The responses to the survey highlighted the importance of developing of strategies to integrate literacy within KLAS.

The same survey showed high levels of teacher knowledge of literacy teaching strategies—96 per cent of respondents reported incorporating literacy strategies within their lessons with 58 percent indicating that they incorporated literacy education in every lesson. The school cites this result as a reflection of the success of the school's literacy integration modeling strategy.

Supporting targeted groups

Gifted and talented

University of New South Wales staff delivered the Gifted Education Research, Resources and Information Centre (GERRIC) professional development program for teachers at Western Heights HS. This program is designed to enable staff to identify gifted and talented students in their classes and to adopt teaching styles that better meet individual learning needs. The school reports that training in the GERRIC program has increased staff's awareness of gifted and talented students in their classes and of techniques teachers can use to meet students' needs.

Staff have also been assisted to develop ways to identify students who would benefit from working in ability or special interest groups and to identify candidates for academic acceleration. School leaders believe that as a result, staff awareness techniques have been developed that are transferable to comprehensive classes.

School leaders believe that the school is well placed to meet the Australian Curriculum requirements to lift the level of curriculum differentiation for gifted and talented students. They report an increase in teachers' awareness of the use of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in teaching programs. A coordinated whole of school goal of revising teaching programs to promote HOTS has meant that it is part of all Faculty programs.

⁵ The TELL initiative is a collection of products and processes used to enhance the effectiveness of teachers. The TELL framework consists of seven domains and a range of tools, including self-assessments, goal setting forms, feedback techniques and implementation scenarios

Using ICT

The school reports supporting teachers to increase their use of technology in their teaching to improve student outcomes and in particular to meet the needs of gifted and talented students. All staff were provided with a half-day training and twenty staff received a full day's training delivered by a teacher. The focus of this training was to assist teaching teams to deliver tailored, technology rich lessons.

The professional development program demonstrated the use of ICT in delivering classroom lessons and prepared staff for the implementation of the new Australian Curriculum. All staff completed online e-learning modules designed to assist them in the transition to the new Australian Curriculum.

All of the school's overhead projectors were removed and replaced by interactive data projectors and laptops to encourage staff to use new technology. Older teachers were provided with additional assistance in their use. School leaders believe that with targeted support, teachers have produced more interesting lessons using the new technology.

The teachers love the projectors....and use them all the time. [Principal]

School leaders observe that teaching practices have improved because of the professional development. While teachers can find it time consuming, the interactivity of the software allows them to go straight onto the internet and select sites around the world using a computer at their desk:

So we've been successful – a lot more than we were before – in getting the teachers on board with ICT. [Principal]

REFORM 4b: Innovative and tailored opportunities for students

The school reports that it provides direct and individualized support to students to improve their literacy and numeracy skills and to increase school attendance and engagement.

Supporting literacy and numeracy learning

Western Heights HS aims to develop students' literacy and numeracy skills within all KLAs as well as providing specific and targeted support to students in reading, writing, spelling, grammar and comprehension. Learning occurs in the context of structured/scaffolded instruction, within the delivery of the KLA curriculum, often with a focus on assessments within those subjects.

In addition, the Literacy Class initiative aims to provide students who have missed direct instruction in key areas of literacy with structured support in functional literacy in their literacy classes. Structured support programs being provided by the school include:

- **MULTiLit**—for students with reading difficulties. Feedback from students and staff indicates tangible improvements in the confidence and competence of students who have completed the program. Students return to the classroom feeling confident and willing to engage in learning. Parents have also reported improvements in reading, with supported students teaching younger siblings with MULTiLit techniques.

- **Mathletics** is delivered to all Year 7 and 8 students, selected Year 9 and 10 students and Stage 6 Applied Mathematics students. This program is integrated with the teaching of numeracy across the school and the school believes that it is a successful aid in revision, remediation and acceleration.
- **Tutoring support** is provided to students who are below the literacy benchmark and to senior students deemed in need through the HSC/preliminary tutorial program. Students are provided with the opportunity to work intensively with teaching staff to improve the basic skills they require to access the curriculum.
- **A Learning Centre** supports students identified by teachers as needing additional assistance. Senior staff believe that this strategy gives students access to direct support and enables KLA staff to improve their capacity to provide students with a differentiated curriculum. A survey of 26 teachers at the end of 2012 found that 58 per cent indicated that they had referred students to the program and of these 33 per cent rated the program as *effective*. Another survey found that 72.5 per cent of students who had received support in the centre rated its effectiveness as ‘3 or higher’ on a scale of 1-5, where 5 is effective.

Western Heights HS reports that its literacy and numeracy support strategy is successful. One teacher finds that most students are now developing a functional grasp of basic English grammar, including its concepts and terminology, and that student writing is becoming increasingly error-free.

The school reports that the MULTiLit program has been particularly successful in improving students’ reading skills. School leaders believe that the impact of the literacy and numeracy strategy can be detected in the NAPLAN performance. The decline in the proportion of Year 9 students placed in the lowest two bands of the reading assessment from 47.6 per cent in 2011 to 35.3 per cent in 2012 may reflect the success of the literacy component of the programs if the student profile was similar in both years.

Engaging students in learning

The school aims to increase student attendance and improve punctuality. The appointment of a Head Teacher Attendance reflects the importance given by the school to student attendance. The promotion of student attendance is part of the roles of the Aboriginal Support Officer, the Home School Support Officer and the Community Liaison Officer and expectations about attendance have been clarified for all students.

The incentive-based points reward system strategy and the assembly recognition strategy are evaluated at meetings of the Network Schools Representative Group and the school executive also considers the weekly report on student performance, including school attendance. The school reports that when it initially implemented the attendance initiative, attendance was a significant problem. Currently the school has a student attendance rate of just over 90 per cent—higher than state average—and hopes to increase the student attendance rate further to 95 per cent.

The school indicates that its emphasis on attendance has strengthened its relationships with key stakeholders in the community. It attributes the success of the attendance strategy to the proactive work of the Head Teacher Attendance; indicating that staff consider this strategy to be most significant for the school because it is fundamental to enabling *at-risk* students to

access the learning opportunities provided by the school.

The school assists Aboriginal students through targeted literacy and numeracy support programs. The school lists the delivery of:

- the Aboriginal attendance program *Aim Up*
- student leadership programs
- *Community of Schools* activities and events
- the *Aboriginal Cultural Project*, involving Aboriginal Elders
- the development of PLPs in conjunction with community members.

The school cites a decline in the number of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students in the bottom two bands for reading, writing and numeracy NAPLAN results as evidence of the success of the overall strategy.

REFORM 5: Strengthening school development and accountability mechanisms

Using evidence to inform planning

Western Heights HS reports the use of a range of sources of evidence to inform the development of the school plan, including school reviews and evaluations and staff, student and parent responses to surveys. Evidence is also used from staff performance reviews and assessments of the impact of strategic actions and funding activity.

School leaders reported that the school plan develops strategies stemming from the 2012 evaluation of the Low SES NP and is used to drive change to improve student, teacher and school performance. The school plan is also a practical document that includes implementation plans and their costs.

Monitoring and evaluating

The Executive Planning Conference is a mechanism that helps the leadership team to identify critical agendas and urgent priorities for the school and to monitor the impact of strategies. The Conference identifies new and emerging issues, and devises strategies to address them, as well as facilitating the implementation of school review recommendations.

Improving accountability and reporting

Western Heights HS's accountability and reporting processes have sought to improve the school reports because of its participation in the initial implementation of the Student Data Management and Finance Systems project. The new computer systems have built the staff's capacity to manage complex databases, including the preparation of reports. School leaders noted in particular that the Low SES NP school planning processes have strengthened the school's capacity to implement the *Empowering Local Schools* Initiative.

Future directions

The school reports that the Low SES NP has permitted it to develop a flexible staffing and

operational structure, to establish new positions, and to put staffing arrangements in place to meet specific needs and achieve school goals and targets.

There is strong consensus among members of the school executive about the need to maintain the Head Teacher Attendance position beyond the school's participation in the Low SES NP. The school also plans to continue to resource the additional support staff positions given the importance of the staff to improving student learning outcomes.

The school also reports that there will be a concerted effort to generate funds to provide targeted release time for school leaders, with the aim of increasing the school's capacity to address specific, new and emerging student needs. Income from community's use of school facilities may provide the requisite funds.

4. Sydney Region High School

Sydney Region High School reports that the implementation of 19 initiatives across the five reform areas has resulted in significant developments at the school, including:

- the establishment of a new management structure, through the introduction of new executive positions and the redevelopment of roles and accountabilities, allowing the school to implement change through collaborative team-based planning, professional learning, program delivery and evaluation*
- the development of staff capabilities, through the use of the 4MAT pedagogical model, to inform program design and delivery and the integration of ICT in teaching, which the school notes has resulted in the development and delivery of innovative teaching and learning programs*
- the facilitation of the transition of students from primary feeder schools, through the Community of Schools strategy and the employment of a CLO, which the school believes has resulted in an improved perception of the school and an increase in student enrolments*
- the restructuring of educational provision at stages 4 and 5 through the creation of a Middle School and the plan to redesign stage 5, which has enabled the school to improve the learning environment and enhance student learning outcomes*
- the strengthening of school accountability, through the establishment of the Deputy Principal's role in facilitating data collection and use, and the school management team's role in facilitating school planning, evaluation and reporting, with the goal of better school governance and operational practices.*

The school welcomes the Local Schools, Local Decisions policy reform, as it will enable the new management structure to be maintained, the stage 5 reform to be implemented and other reforms to be continually supported.

School Profile

Sydney Region High School is a comprehensive coeducational high school.

The school joined the Low SES NP in 2011. The principal has been at the school since the beginning of the Low SES NP and the current staffing complement is 54.2 FTE teaching and non-teaching staff. A comparison of Sydney Region HS with all NSW government secondary schools for selected characteristics of teachers for the period 2010-12 shows:

- a teaching workforce that is slightly younger than average—11.9 per cent aged below 30 years compared with 10.0 per cent—and 42.9 per cent of teachers aged over 50 years compared with 43.5 per cent
- a higher-than-average turnover of teachers – 11.9 per cent, compared with 4.3 per cent

- a lower-than-average percentage of teachers who have been at the school for over 10 years (21.4 per cent, compared with the average of 29.4 per cent for all government secondary schools) and a higher-than-average percentage of teachers who have been at the school 4-10 years (45.2 compared with 32.8 per cent)
- a slightly lower-than-average number of sick leave days taken per teacher—8.0 days of sick leave, compared with an overall average of 8.8 days.

Key initiatives

REFORM 1: Incentives to attract high performing teachers

Establishing leadership and strategic positions

Sydney Region HS has funded two strategic positions through the Low SES NP:

- a Deputy Principal position (1.0 FTE) to coordinate the whole school change management process and to manage the school's Low SES NP initiatives, in particular the establishment of the Middle Years School and Stage 5 provision
- a Head Teacher Community Engagement (1.0 FTE) with responsibility for supporting whole school change, managing the West Sydney Region Community of Schools (WSRCS), engaging the local community in the operations of the school, and informing the wider community of the school's achievements. This role was established in response to the declining number of enrolments attributed by the school to negative perceptions of it in the local and wider community.

The higher duties allowances of three Head Teacher positions – Middle School, Curriculum and Student Wellbeing – are funded through the Low SES NP. Head Teachers are responsible for overseeing the development, implementation and review processes in designated areas.

In addition, the Middle School Year 7 and 8 coordinator positions have also been established through the Low SES NP, a move designed to provide support for the effective implementation of the reform agenda.

Providing mentoring support

The school reports that executive staff mentor and coach the teachers appointed to leadership positions, including those taking up the faculty manager positions which were established to drive reforms for Stages 4 and 5. The focus is on assisting staff to understand their roles and to perform their duties and responsibilities effectively, ensuring continuity and sustainability in the performance of critical functions:

People have to understand the roles and responsibilities that come with a position, including training others. So I've put it down to functions, not the people. [Principal]

The Manager National Partnerships has mentored Year 7 and Year 8 teachers in conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the Middle School initiatives, including surveys of students, parents, and staff and interviews with teaching and support staff. Executive staff are expected to promote and demonstrate innovative learning technologies and the use of 4MAT

pedagogy to teachers through the delivery of workshops and other strategies.⁶ The school is using the 4MAT pedagogic teaching and learning model because it believes that this approach helps students to be successful learners. The model appeals to the students because it is congruent with their accustomed learning style while also challenging them to function in less familiar and comfortable modes of learning.

Additionally, teachers are expected to informally mentor their peers through demonstrations of the success of new approaches. The school notes that this practice has been particularly evident in the Middle School initiative which emphasises team teaching and programming using the 4MAT model. According to the Principal, teachers have been able to “step up” because they “saw what others were doing” and knew that these teachers “believed in the changes they were making.”

Supporting leadership training and development

The development of insights into educational disadvantage has been an important component of the leadership professional training:

The only thing that changes these kids’ lives is education – we open doors, we don’t close them. [Principal]

As many teachers’ experience of their own days at school was positive, a challenge for leaders at Sydney Region HS is to facilitate insights into how students learn and how to give disengaged students a taste of success. According to the Principal, teachers’ perspective should shift from a “conception of how they were successful at school” to seeking to ensure that the students they teach experience success at school and see it as relevant to their lives.

The school seeks to provide opportunities for its teachers to develop the attitudes, skills and understandings essential for leading and teaching in low SES schools. Important areas of professional learning for the staff include the integration of technology and the use of the 4MAT model to create and deliver programs.

The school reports providing staff with professional learning opportunities designed to build capacity to lead and implement the Middle School and the Stage 5 provision. It seeks to enable staff to:

- co-ordinate collaborative planning, on-going professional learning and reflection through the development of skills in team building
- create and deliver programs using the 4MAT model for teaching and learning
- understand and use action research methodology to facilitate participation in school-based research and evaluation activities.

The school reports that executive staff and staff aspiring to executive positions have responded positively to opportunities to develop the skills that have been identified as essential for leading and implementing school change.

⁶ The 4MAT system was developed by *Bernice McCarthy* in 1972 in the United States, aiming to help teachers organise their teaching based on differences in the way people learn. It is an eight-step cycle of instruction that capitalises on individual learning styles and brain dominance processing preferences. This system combines the fundamental principles of several long-standing theories of personal development with current research on human brain function and learning. The design of the school’s curriculum reforms for Stage 4 and 5 are underpinned by 4MAT principles.

REFORM 2: Best practice performance management and staffing arrangements

Developing professional learning plans

Teachers complete and submit PLPs as part of their EARS and TARS with a section to be completed about professional learning to assist in bridging the gap of ATSI and Pacific Islander background students. Staff are encouraged to include professional learning opportunities that are specifically designed to build their capacity to improve educational provision for students from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Managing staff performance and review

The school reports that its executive staff prepare work plans which are monitored at weekly School Management Team meetings and evaluated through the EARS process and discussed as part of the TARS process. The implementation of these work plans is monitored through collaborative team planning and review processes.

REFORM 3: School operational arrangements that encourage innovation and flexibility

Employing school support staff

A Community Liaison Officer (CLO) has been employed 0.6 FTE through the Low SES NP and 0.4 FTE through Western Sydney Community of Schools (WSCS). The CLO assists the Head Teacher Community Engagement to:

- establish systems and deliver programs to support classroom teaching and learning in all WSCS schools
- liaise with school principals to ensure collective responsiveness to needs of schools and to promote common goals
- develop and maintain links with local businesses and other organizations.

Implementing team-based approaches

Stage 4 – Middle School provision

Sydney Region HS's Middle School was established in 2011 and expanded in 2012 to include Year 8 students. The school dedicated blocks to Year 7-8 for home-rooms, containing classrooms and a break-out area and fitted classrooms with interactive whiteboards. A new organizational arrangement was designed to facilitate whole school change, the school reports. It included a significant shift in the culture of the school and in the successful transition of students from primary schools, the school records, which was accomplished by providing students with a safe, vibrant and well-resourced learning environment.

The school reports that its Middle School approach is based on the primary school classroom model with a focus on the development of literacy and numeracy skills. Mixed ability classes have been established using data provided by feeder primary schools and internal school data. All students are expected to prepare a personalised learning plan and had access to a literacy teacher for 12 periods a week to cover English, history and geography. Similarly, a

numeracy teacher provided opportunities for students to access assistance in mathematics and science over another 12 periods a week.

The newly appointed Head Teacher was responsible for establishing the Middle School, while year level coordinators and teachers were recruited through a merit based selection process based on teachers' teamwork skills and their experience in collaborating with others in the delivery of teaching and learning programs.

Year level coordinators are responsible for facilitating collaborative planning, professional learning, and staff reflection, as well as for facilitating students' access to teachers. The coordinators also provide additional support in Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE), music, visual arts, technology and sport. The 4MAT pedagogic teaching and learning model underpins instruction in all subjects.

The school points to indications that formal evaluations involving student, parent and teacher feedback are improving student engagement in learning. Responses of Year 7 students to surveys undertaken at the end of 2011 and 2012 indicate both high levels of student motivation and a very slight possible improvement. Ninety three per cent of students surveyed in 2011 responded that they always or mostly *want to do the best in class* while the corresponding value in 2012 was 95 per cent. A Year 7 survey also revealed a slight increase in the percent of parents satisfied with their children's transition to the school from 94 per cent in 2011 to 96 per cent in 2012.

Sydney Region HS staff believe that student learning outcomes have improved. The school notes, for example, that relative to all NSW SSG (similar socioeconomically grouped schools) the school's NAPLAN test results indicate either increased performance growth from Year 7 to Year 9 or maintenance of growth whilst other schools decreased.

If you saw some of the samples of writing that are being produced by my Year 7s and 8s you would be blown away. There is that expectation; there is explicit and systematic teaching. [Principal]

Year 8 students completed the DEC *Quality Learning Environment* questionnaire in 2011 and 2012. The results show an increase in the proportion of students categorised as "always positive about their learning environment", "always more engaged" and "have a more positive view of their teachers". The school reports that teachers are also responding positively to working in the Middle School, with the Principal noting that a thorough selection process has been established in response to an increasing demand for teaching positions in the Middle School.

I never thought I could be reinvigorated after 30 years. [Teacher]

Stage 5 provision

In response to the perceived success of its new Middle School arrangements, Sydney Region HS is planning to create a more stimulating learning environment for the delivery of the Australian National curriculum to Stage 5 students. It notes that the Stage 5 reform is also intended to facilitate effective transition into Stage 6 streams – academic, vocational education and training, and work ready. The school reports that it intends to increase the use of new learning technologies and to deliver differentiated teaching and learning through the 4MAT pedagogic model. The school notes that its new approach to delivering the curriculum to Stage 5 students emphasizes cooperative learning and includes a multi age peer-learning component. It expects delivery of these initiatives to commence in 2014.

Establishing new organizational arrangements

Seeking to address low staff morale, low student expectations and poor student behaviour, the school reports that it has established an innovative management structure, which has enabled it to effectively manage change by “putting structures and processes in place” [Principal].

The Low SES NP funded leadership and strategic positions have enabled the establishment of a new management team, the school reports, with clear articulation of senior staff roles and responsibilities which are also reflected in the EARS and TARS processes. The effective performance of critical functions has been bolstered by these developments, the school advises, and cites the strengthening of:

- the operational function in the school, through the establishment of an operational team, including the National Partnerships Manager and the School Administrative Manager (SAM); providing ongoing support to English and Mathematics Faculty managers with regard to day to day matters, administration and welfare duties
- the educational delivery and program implementation function, through the establishment of three Head Teacher positions to provide ongoing support to the Stage 4.

School leaders report that the management structure is being continually modified to respond to new and emerging needs. For instance, the facilitation of the implementation of the Stage 5 initiative necessitated a change in management structure to help the school better implement the Australian Curriculum. According to the Principal, the management structure is effective because it supports student engagement and achievement by improving management capacity through the use of common language for teaching and learning across all KLAs.

Facilitating cooperation with other schools

The school notes that the Community Engagement Manager/Special Projects Officer (1.0 FTE) played an important role in establishing the WSCS in 2011—an initiative designed to develop stronger links with feeder primary schools and to facilitate continuity of learning as students make the transition from Year 6 to Year 7. WSCS meetings are held twice a term, providing a forum for teachers and school leaders to discuss educational and transitional matters.

Staff implement strategies designed to provide educational support for students as they make the transition from primary to high school including the move into the middle years of school. Low SES NP funds are used to support joint meetings and events, and the school reports that it is working with other high schools and community agencies to support the delivery of innovative programs and competitions designed to extend students’ academic skills. The school reports that several successful strategies have been implemented, noting the Gifted and Talented Program and the Endicott Cup in particular.

Gifted and Talented Program

The Stage 3 Gifted and Talented Program is designed to develop identified strengths of students within the Western Sydney Community of Schools (WSCS) and place them in an environment of academic excellence. Sydney Region HS delivers the program over 20 weeks, one afternoon a week. The program is delivered by a teacher who has experience across a range of KLAs and primary and secondary education, and who also has extensive

experience in the business sector.

Students participating in the program use the Microsoft Office suite of programs to engage in a ‘starting your own business’ exercise, and managing a stock portfolio in ‘building wealth’ units of work. They use Microsoft Word, OneNote and PowerPoint in the workshops to record notes and complete set tasks. The number of students participating in this program increased from 16 in 2011 to 24 in 2012.

Endicott Cup

The Endicott Cup is an academic challenge between four feeder primary schools held once a term at Sydney Region HS. The school reports that this competition helps the school to work proactively with feeder primary schools, and to provide parents of participants with opportunities to observe learning.

The academic challenge tests students on their knowledge and skills in numeracy, literacy, visual arts, technology and general knowledge. Two teams of four students are fielded from each of four primary schools in the high school’s area. Points are awarded at the end of each round to determine the champion school and winner of the Endicott Cup. Students’ participating in the competition increased from 128 in 2011 to 192 in 2012. The school notes that participation of students and teachers in competition activities supports and extends teaching and learning in the Stage 3/4 curriculum.

The school reports that it also participates in other Western Sydney Community of Schools (WSCS) activities, including:

- the WSCS Athletics initiative which aims to provide Years 5-10 students with access to the program 24 hours a day, seven days a week free of charge. Athletics is a web-based resource designed to improve literacy and numeracy skills.
- the High School Expo which is held at the same time as the Endicott Cup, providing Parents and Citizens Associations with information about programs and initiatives delivered by Sydney Region HS
- the Campbelltown Academic Challenge for primary schools within the Campbelltown LGA, which is held under the patronage of the local member of State Parliament. To date 64 students from 20 schools have participated in this competition which, it is hoped, will serve as a model for other locations, ultimately feeding into a Premier’s Academic challenge.

The WSCS strategy has achieved external recognition—it received the 2012 DEC Director General’s Award. It has expanded from five to eight primary schools in 2013 and continues to generate ideas for new events, such as the conduct of the WSCS Swimming Carnival, alongside the school’s own swimming competition. The WSCS Swimming Carnival enables top swimmers from primary schools to compete and participate in secondary school activities.

An evaluation of the WSCS initiative indicates that it has:

- developed linkages between teaching staff at the school and feeder primary schools, facilitating dialogue related to curriculum and to teaching and learning pedagogy
- helped equip students with a level of knowledge and proficiency necessary for a successful transition into high school and identified and supported the educational

needs of high achieving students. A survey of parents undertaken in 2012 indicated that 96 per cent of Year 7 parents were happy with their son/daughter's transition into the school's Middle Years program.

- engaged parents in their children's education as they prepare to make the transition from primary to high school, and presented the school to parents as a valued place of learning.

The WSCS had contributed to an increase in the number of students enrolling for Year 7 at the school. The school's enrolments had been declining due to factors in addition to reputational issues, particularly the renewal process that was occurring in the public housing estate with the demolition of houses and families moving out of the area. The school increased enrolments into Year 7 from 40.2 per cent of students in the feeder primary schools in 2010/11 to 69.5 per cent in 2012/13—an enrolment figure 19.5 per cent above the target set by the school, part of which the school attributes to WSCS.

REFORM 4a: Innovative and tailored learning opportunities for teachers

Analysing/using data

The school reports that its staff access training provided by DEC to enable them to analyse SMART (School Measurement, Assessment and Reporting Toolkit) data and to understand the implications for practice. Staff are encouraged to use insights developed from data analysis to inform planning and delivery of programs across the school and in classrooms. Assistance with the design, implementation and recording of student learning/achievements is provided to staff by the school in order to improve assessment and reporting processes.

The school's Manager National Partnerships is responsible for facilitating the professional training and development of staff, assisting staff to access data (including NAPLAN results) and to use it to inform planning of whole school and classroom programs.

Delivering literacy and numeracy programs

The school reports assisting staff to design literacy and numeracy strategies that can be integrated across the middle years curriculum and plans to facilitate staff development for staff involved in the reform of Stage 5 schooling.

Supporting targeted groups

Sydney Region HS reports that it has provided its teachers with professional learning to assist them to cater for the learning styles of Aboriginal students and students from other cultural backgrounds.

Using ICT

A 2011 staff survey found that only 65 per cent of teachers at Sydney Region HS were confident about integrating new technologies in their lessons. The school notes that as a consequence it increased the support available to staff, including Digital Education Revolution (DER) regional support, which aims to help teachers to develop their skills in the integration of technology in the classroom through:

- participation in DER peer coaching program
- workshops conducted after hours by ICT students on using programs on DER laptops
- demonstrations to staff of the use of learning technologies, provision of best practice examples and instructional materials.

School leaders have set a target for more than 70 per cent of teachers to be confident about integrating technology into their teaching practice by the end of 2013.

REFORM 4b: Innovative and tailored opportunities for students

Engaging students in learning

The school reports that personalised learning plans provide teachers with a basis for planning and delivering a differentiated classroom program to meet a broad range of student needs. There are a range of inputs to the development of personalised learning plans for students in Years 7 and 8. The Head Teacher responsible for the Middle School interviews the students and parents are invited to discuss and contribute to the plans. Teachers use assessment and interview data to inform the development of the plans, the school reports, including school based literacy and numeracy assessments undertaken at the start of students' secondary education, insights gained from analysing information provided by primary schools and NAPLAN data.

The aim of the school's personalised learning plan initiative is to be responsive to students' needs and to assist them to achieve goals and targets, the school records. It reports too that the plans identify the nature and level of support required by students to achieve their learning goals; and notes that teachers can also identify the needs and support required by high achieving students across Years 9-12.

Supporting targeted students

High achieving students

The school has implemented a High Achieving Student program for students in Years 8 to 11, with a focus on Year 9 students making the transition from Stage 4 to Stage 5. School leaders said that an analysis of student performance data (NAPLAN results, student surveys /interviews and internal data sets) had indicated a culture of complacency and under-achievement by higher achieving students. The High Achieving Student Program was a response to this finding. The program aims to expand the horizons of students who are either demonstrating proficiency in their studies or showing potential.

The program, developed by a senior teacher and an aspiring teacher with a professional interest in gifted and talented education, entails:

- conducting parent/student interviews designed to help students, parents and teachers to understand student performance and to guide student learning and aspirations
- holding student workshops on study skills, time management and career planning
- arranging presentations by motivational speakers who had excelled in their schooling
- providing access to before and after school hours study and tutorial sessions

- providing access to web-based interactive programs designed to enhance learning and change mindsets
- supporting students' attendance at events where high achieving students from other schools are participating or competing
- organising visits to universities and providing information about tertiary education.

The High Achieving Student program is integrated with the University of Western Sydney's (UWS's) *Fast Forward* program. The success of the partnership with UWS was recognised when Sydney Region HS was selected as a winning school in the National Australia Bank's *Schools First* award 2012. Annually up to 80 students participate in this program as well as accessing mentoring support from the *Fast Forward* team. These students are able to access UWS's tutoring service via *yourtutor.com.au*. Sixty students and parents participated in the development of a TV program designed to identify role models of successful students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

So it gives our kids the opportunity to see that they can do anything. [Principal]

The High Achieving Student program is complemented by follow-up activity in mainstream classrooms and through mentoring programs offered by the *Australian Business and Community Network*. Students are selected to participate in mentoring programs with employees from CSR and Citibank and some students are also able to participate in other specialised programs such as the Art Access program.

The Low SES NP at Sydney Region HS is being used to staff and resource learning spaces and linkages with external organisations. These initiatives have provided more opportunities for students, which, according to some staff, has resulted in the students feeling affirmed by the recognition of their capacities and achievements. School leaders believe that these programs have helped students to become more focused on their studies and more enthusiastic about seeking advice and guidance about their future direction.

Aboriginal students

The Low SES NP provides release time for staff to support the development of personalised learning plans for all Aboriginal students. The purpose of these plans is to improve the attendance, retention and educational attainment of these students by improving their literacy and numeracy skills. The school advises that an analysis of student performance data has informed the identification of specific areas requiring attention in the personalised learning plans. The plans may include opportunity for students to access intervention and support providers and are prepared and updated every semester.

The Low SES NP has also been used to resource the implementation of a range of specific learning strategies for Aboriginal students, including mentoring programs with universities and external agencies, exposure to and participation in external competitions such as the Aboriginal Numeracy Competition, and career/education awareness programs. The school notes that students are also encouraged to participate in school-wide initiatives, such as the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL), which have the aim of helping students to learn more effectively.

School leaders believe that individualised support provided to Aboriginal students has led to improved learning outcomes. In 2012, the average growth for Aboriginal students in Year 9

Naplan-assessed numeracy was 63.5 points, well above the state average of 38.8, the average of 42.0 for Aboriginal students in the Sydney South West region and the mean of 47.4 for Aboriginal students in schools from the same School Education Group.

Supporting student welfare

Sydney Region HS has appointed a Student Wellbeing Manager who is responsible for providing leadership and facilitating the establishment, implementation and ongoing review of the school's student welfare strategies. Establishing a PBL program was a central element of this strategy. Key actions to improve students' expectations and behaviour; included:

- establishing a committee to develop fortnightly plans, detailing areas of learning focus, student activity and teacher instruction
- delivering weekly PBL lessons
- data analysis to inform the development of targeted interventions for students with poor attendance
- recognising student achievements in all aspects of school life during Assemblies of Excellence held each term
- establishing Junior and Senior Review panels, which are designed to encourage and support students to: strive for excellence, to apply themselves to learning and to be responsible and respectful of others.

The principal believes that the program has contributed to a cultural shift, which is reflected in the increasing the number of students receiving awards. The percentage of students achieving bronze, silver and gold level in the student management system increased from 52 per cent in 2011 to 65 per cent in 2013. Teachers also observe that students are more motivated to receive awards and that students have become more comfortable with receiving acknowledgement at school assembly for their achievements across a broad range of activities.

REFORM 5: Strengthening school development and accountability mechanisms

Using evidence to inform planning

The Manager National Partnerships at Sydney Region HS has responsibility for the collection of school and system data to inform school planning and identify strategies to achieve targets. The situational analysis undertaken in 2010 to develop the school's Low SES NP highlighted the importance of using data to inform decision-making. The school reports that the design of strategies and programs by specific teams at the school is now informed by data. As an example, the principal points to analysis of evidence from a review of the initial pilot of the Year 7 Middle School initiative, which led to an expansion of the initiative to Year 8. The perceived success of the new arrangements for Years 7 and 8 has now informed the school's decision to rethink learning for students in Years 9 and 10.

The school reports that its management team oversees the development of the school plan, including any work plans to implement identified strategies. Evaluation of strategies and the collection of data to underpin that evaluation are key parts of the planning process. The management team sets targets and makes decisions about planning, execution, data

collection, evaluation and reporting. Progress and overall evaluation of strategies are monitored with weekly meetings and scheduled term meetings facilitating this process.

Monitoring and evaluating

Sydney Region HS has implemented a cycle of review for school policies and procedures and for any new programs. For example, an evaluation of the Middle School initiative (incorporating the use of the DEC Middle Years self- assessment matrix.) at the end of 2012 informed the current direction of teaching and learning arrangements for these year levels.

Improving accountability and reporting

Faculties have redesigned their faculty plans, handbooks, policies and procedures to reflect structural changes in the school and to align with new pedagogies. This information is available on the school's website. The school's administrative policies, procedures and staff handbook have also been placed on the school's intranet.

The school has organised forums in a range of settings to inform parents, community and the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) about the school's most significant goals and targets and is exploring effective methods of communicating student progress to parents, to provide them with better information about student participation and progress.

Future directions

School leaders believe that the Low SES NP facilitated major changes in the school. The situational analysis undertaken at the start of the program was an important stimulus for the changes. The analysis enabled the school to collect and analyse data and to develop an evidence-based school plan that detailed future priorities and goals.

This case study outlines areas of success and significant outcomes achieved through the Low SES NP reported by Sydney Region HS. School leaders indicate that they are proud of their achievements, such as the establishment of the Middle School. They note a strong commitment to building on their perceived success by facilitating the Stage 5 reform, which is intended to provide continuous and high quality learning for students.

The school notes that most staff have indicated willingness to remain in leadership positions beyond the Low SES NP, without receipt of higher duty allowance presently funded through the program. The school has welcomed the potential opportunities presented by *Local Schools Local Decisions*, which carries a commitment to staff flexibly and to continuing to work to meet the specific needs of the school.

5. Western Central School

Western Central School joined the Partnership only in 2012. It is implementing 16 initiatives in the five reform areas. School leaders believe that the instructional leadership from a recently employed Highly Accomplished Teacher (HAT) has had a strong impact. The mentoring provided by the HAT has improved staff morale and increased teachers' confidence, knowledge and skills and has helped the school to retain quality teachers.

New professional learning opportunities for teachers have also resulted in positive outcomes. The principal believes that through their professional learning programs teachers have developed a better understanding of their students' needs and been better able to devise teaching strategies to improve their students' learning.

A Special Program Teacher and several SLSOs work collaboratively with teachers to devise personalized learning plans for students, to assist students to effectively transition at critical stages of their schooling and to provide intervention support for students with special needs. The school reports that students have become more engaged in their learning, evidenced by a reduction in the number of classroom incidents and student referrals.

Staff leadership training opportunities have led to the strengthening of school planning processes and more frequent and better monitoring and evaluation of policies and practices. Meeting structures have been established to allow tracking of progress on school targets and development of appropriate strategies.

The school has been able to recruit the teacher performing the HAT role into another program-specific leadership position at the school. It will continue to explore ways of supporting its efforts to improve student achievement and school performance.

School Profile

Western Central School is a K-12 public school catering for around 250 students in the Riverina region of NSW.

The school entered the Low SES NP in 2012. It is also supported by the PSFP and the Country Areas Program (CAP). The school is also a designated *incentive school*, providing teachers with a number of benefits: six transfer points, extended summer vacation, hot climate allowance, four additional training and professional development days, 70-90 per cent rental subsidy and three personal leave days.

The principal has been at the school since the beginning of the Low SES NP and the current staffing complement is 26.6 FTE teaching and non-teaching staff. A comparison of Western Central School with all NSW government central schools for selected characteristics of teachers for the period 2010-12 shows:

- a younger than average age profile of teachers, mostly because of a higher proportion of teachers aged below 30 years of age (28.6 compared with 15.3 per cent) and a

higher per cent of teachers aged 30 to 49 years (57.1 compared with 47.1 per cent for all central schools)

- a lower-than-average turnover of teachers—9.5 per cent compared with 10.8 per cent
- a lower-than-average percentage of teachers who have been at the school for more than 10 years (14.3 compared with 17.8 per cent) and between 4-10 years (28.6 compared with 32.7 per cent)
- a lower-than-average number of sick leave days taken—5.3 sick leave days, compared with 7.4 for all central schools.

Key initiatives

REFORM 1: Incentives to attract high performing teachers

Establishing leadership and strategic positions

At the beginning of 2013, the school created and filled a temporary HAT position to improve the engagement of students in the middle years of schooling (Years 5 to 9). She led and supported KLA and stage group staff to develop quality teaching and assessment practices. Provisions of the agreement limit the school to a defined period in which the HAT may be employed with NP funding; however, she is now employed in a three-year position at the school in an instructional leadership role under the *Early Action for Success* program.

Despite the limited time that the school has had a HAT, the school reports that the instructional leadership offered has been valued. The HAT has been working collaboratively with staff, attending professional learning activities, applying new learning in classroom teaching, and facilitating professional dialogue at team meetings. The staff have benefited from the professional learning delivered at staff meetings and through informal discussions. The HAT has improved staff morale and increased teachers' confidence, knowledge and skills. Anecdotal evidence indicates that teachers have responded positively.

We now get a group of teachers going into a class, for example, to benchmark kids on the numeracy continuum... And that is secondary and primary teachers working together going into a Year 3 or 4 class to do that! [Principal]

Providing mentoring support

Teachers have had access to a higher level of support from the head teachers because of additional time release they receive through the Low SES NP. The HAT and head teachers have spent time with teachers, providing guidance and practical assistance in areas such as middle years teaching and literacy and numeracy strategies. Consequently, senior staff believe that teachers have become more confident and willing to try new ideas.

The mentoring support has also helped the school to retain quality teachers. The support enabled teachers to rethink their need to move closer to the city because of their geographic isolation:

I know we had a couple of teachers who weren't going to stay ... but I think having that close mentoring role with their head teacher has made them more confident. [Principal]

Supporting leadership training and development

The school provides staff with opportunities to develop leadership skills. School leaders and staff aspiring to take up leadership positions have participated in the Team Leadership for School Improvement (TLSI) Program. They have also had opportunities to access professional development and training related to whole school priorities and programs, including preparation for the implementation of the Australian Curriculum.

REFORM 2: Best practice performance management and staffing arrangements

Developing professional learning plans

Staff develop Professional Learning Plans (PLPs) based on key accountabilities linked to performance reviews, using the NSW Institute of Teachers' (NSWIT) Professional Teaching Standards and other leadership standards. Teachers provide a rationale for activities included in their PLPs and a statement of the relevance of these activities to the school's plan and their teaching goals and targets.

The PLPs are reviewed termly at scheduled conference meetings, enabling responsiveness to new and emerging needs. Additionally, these plans may be revised in response to teachers' efforts to meet accreditation requirements of the Institute of Teachers. The PLPs address learning in areas that cannot be provided through the school's strategy and that may entail participation in externally provided activities.

The Principal outlined process and structures to encourage teachers to share their professional learning. At a Staff Development Day teachers who had accessed professional learning presented and discussed their courses. Similarly, staff meetings are used as an opportunity to share new learning and promote accountability for staff who are funded to undertake professional learning. The sharing supports whole school approaches and a seamless delivery of the K-12 curriculum. It encourages primary and secondary teachers to understanding each other's perspectives. An evaluation of this strategy indicated that teachers value presentations made by their peers and the insights and knowledge gained.

The school is also undertaking a skills audit to identify the school's areas of expertise and facilitate ways in which it can be accessed by staff.

Managing staff performance and review

The school has used Low SES NP funding to permit head teachers to allocate more time to staff and performance management. This has meant that head teachers are more accessible to teachers. The head teachers believe that this has allowed them to develop a more informed view about the challenges their teachers face as well as their needs and areas of strength.

The performance of early career teachers is managed by experienced teachers who ensure that these teachers have opportunities to shadow teachers with skills relevant to their needs or areas of interest.

Supporting early career teachers

Early career teachers are supported through the staff performance and review process as well

as through mentoring provided by head teachers in small groups and the provision of additional support staff positions to assist with classroom challenges.

The school takes an informal approach to mentoring early career teachers, ensuring that needs are met through faculty and stage meeting processes. Early career teachers are at times linked up with other early career teachers working in other schools, to collaborate on a shared interest or goal.

The school's efforts to support early career teachers and assist them to do their job, develop professionally and remain at the school are viewed positively by the school's leaders:

One [Early Career Teacher] was definitely leaving at the end of term but she is now going to complete the year and has put her hand up to be the Year 7 advisor next year.
[Principal]

Managing staff mix

The Low SES NP enables the school to allocate teachers and support staff to particular school strategies. The school employs:

- a Special Program Teacher (1.0 FTE) and a classroom support staff position (0.2 FTE) to provide intervention support to targeted students
- a CLO (0.5 FTE) to support home school communication, publishing newsletters, making phone calls, and participating in community activities
- SLSOs (1.5 FTE) to support student learning in classrooms and in the home.

REFORM 3: School operational arrangements that encourage innovation and flexibility

Implementing team-based approaches

The school has sought to support teamwork through its organizational structures. The Low SES NP provides additional release time for staff to attend stage, faculty, learning support and year level meetings. Meetings are timetabled to enable teams to:

- share resources and information about the effectiveness of programs
- plan programs and assessment tasks to achieve desired outcomes
- reflect on the implementation of programs and monitor progress on targets identified in the school plan
- discuss solutions to ongoing or emerging issues.

As well as working in teams at scheduled meetings, teachers deliver lessons in teams and collaborate in local area networks. The Low SES NP provides additional resources to increase teachers' access to teaching across schools. For example, a cross-school team delivers the senior curriculum courses using video conferencing facilities.

The cross-school teaching teams provide opportunities for their participants to share ideas with others and expand their professional networks. According to the school, teamwork across schools results in more consistent teacher judgment in assessment tasks and improvements in the quality of program writing. The students, too, benefit from working

with students and teachers in other schools. Further, the team arrangement provides opportunities for teachers to develop leadership skills and advance their careers. Some teachers from other schools have been offered HSC marking casual positions at the school.

REFORM 4a: Innovative and tailored learning opportunities for teachers

The school provides professional learning and development opportunities through the Low SES NP. Funds are used to cover professional development costs, including teacher release to enable staff to participate in various school-based and externally delivered training, workshops, accredited courses and online delivered courses. Staff also access professional learning opportunities through attendance at collegial network meetings and through video conferences and other professional associations. Professional learning has focused on the areas of analysis and use of data, and on developing literacy and numeracy programs.

Head teachers and other mentors provide practical and professional support through day-to-day interactions with staff, visiting classrooms and directly experiencing teachers' work. Teachers also enhance their learning by visiting each other's classrooms, observing and modeling lessons. Teachers who are new to the school are able to shadow teachers, learning about the school programs such as Accelerated Literacy.

Analysing/using data

Low SES NP funds have been used to support teachers to learn to better analyse NAPLAN and HSC results and school-based program data, such as, Best Start, Reading Recovery, and Accelerated Literacy. Student assessment data is valued in the school:

It's important because it puts the mark into context and lets [teachers] know more about where their students are up to. [Principal]

Professional learning has focused on using the SMART package and data to inform the development of strategies to help each student to achieve better learning outcomes. Most teachers also participated in the NAPLAN marking workshop. The workshop enables teachers to:

- identify a student's position on a learning continuum as well as in relation to their peers
- plan effective teaching to move students on the learning continuum and to increase the number of students in higher bands in the NAPLAN tests. Faculties develop plans and set targets based on the class profiles and identification of students on learning continuums. These data inform the development of classroom planning and delivery.
- develop tailored programs for individual students, building on students' strengths and catering for specific needs
- monitor and track students' progress, identifying indicators of success and assessing progress towards targets. The expectation is that tests demonstrate greater than or expected student growth in learning.

Senior staff are also being trained in analysing HSC data. External markers have been engaged to improve teachers' understanding of tests and teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

The school principal notes that these professional learning opportunities are valued by staff. Practical actions have resulted, for example, in the plotting of all K–6 students on the literacy and numeracy continuums, and have enabled staff to plan and program for fluid and flexible groups based on student needs, using the cluster markers. Professional learning has enabled staff to develop a better understanding of the progress their students are making and of their learning needs.

Developing literacy and numeracy programs

Teachers have been trained to develop explicit and systematic literacy and numeracy strategies. Units of work have been developed for teachers to use, demonstrating these strategies as well as scaffolding techniques for sustained writing.

To support the effective implementation of best practice programs, teachers have been trained to deliver Reading Recovery, 2LS, L3, Accelerated Literacy (AL), MULTiLit, Focus on Reading, Drawing to Write, Taking Off With Numeracy (TOWN) and Count Me In Too.

Teachers' confidence in delivering school programs and in teaching explicit literacy and numeracy concepts has increased because of their learning. Teachers have improved their ability to deliver differentiated learning experiences by devising strategies that meet the needs of individual students and groups of students.

REFORM 4b: Innovative and tailored opportunities for students

The school supports students through special program assistance, personalised learning plans and transition support.

Supporting targeted students

Special needs

The Special Program Teacher works daily with a small group of Year 7-10 male students considered 'at risk'. The aim is to re-engage these students through hands on literacy and numeracy learning activities, using programs at the local gymnasium and the school's e-learning facilities. The Special Program Teacher also works collaboratively with classroom teachers and classroom aides to provide literacy and numeracy intervention support to students, providing program continuity and consistency.

The school also provides early intervention support through the services of the Reading Recovery Teacher, including for some follow up in-class support. The MULTiLit program has also been introduced to assist students performing below stage level.

These strategies are responsive to the complex needs of students, many of whom are involved in juvenile justice issues. They promote student engagement in learning in ways that are meaningful and relevant to them.

Engaging students in learning

Personalised learning plans

In the primary years, all students develop personalised learning plans, emphasizing the identification of educational goals. These plans are continually reviewed over the secondary

years of schooling. These plans are implemented by the Learning Support Team and Year Level Advisors.

Personalised learning plans inform the work of classroom and student support teachers. Twice a year students have the opportunity to review progress against goals and in particular to identify learning opportunities that meet their goals. Classroom teachers organise these meetings at the primary level and year advisors at the secondary level. Teachers and year advisors are able to refer requests or reports to the Learning Support Team Committee that meets weekly.

This strategy is proving to be effective. One indicator of effectiveness is the reduction in the number of classroom incidents and student referrals in the school. Incidences of bullying reduced from 77 separate reports in Term 1 of this year to 40 in Term 2. There was also a dramatic decrease in individual student incidences.

Providing transition support

The school releases teachers to conduct interviews with students and their parents in order to assist with students' transition at various stages of schooling – on entry to early Stage 1, Stage 4, Stage 5 and Stage 6. The intention is to improve not only student transition but also retention, and access to further education and employment. The University of NSW ASPIRE team also works with students K-12, exposing them to the opportunities for further education.

The school also facilitates the transition of Year 6 students into Year 7. In term three, students have access to the secondary playground and are provided with an opportunity to meet their Year 7 Adviser. As part of the transition process, secondary teachers deliver lessons in the specialist classrooms, such as, woodwork and science to enable students to experience a secondary learning environment. Further, at the end of the year, Year 6 students join with Year 7 students to participate in joint activities.

REFORM 5: Strengthening school development and accountability mechanisms

Using evidence to inform planning

The TLSI program enabled the school to strengthen its school planning processes by effectively using survey data to inform decision-making. For example, the 2012 survey of parents, students and teachers emphasized the importance of catering for individual needs of students.

Monitoring and evaluating

The school is continually monitoring and evaluating its policies and practices, for example:

- ongoing monitoring of literacy and numeracy policy to ensure that continuums are in line with Australian Curriculum and teaching and learning programs to ensure that they are responsive to needs as evident in performance data. The evaluation of primary literacy indicated strong support for the school's literacy policies and strategies.
- review of Learning Support audit process to ensure effective communication of

students' needs to staff

- evaluation and redesign of personalised learning plan template for use with all students to make them more relevant and user friendly
- review of timetabling to ensure flexibility and enable students to participate in out-of-classroom activities, such as school-based apprenticeships/traineeships.

The regional coordinator for the Low SES NP assists the school to continually monitor and evaluate the program and report achievements and targets. At staff meetings, staff are continually informed about the program goals, targets and implementation strategies.

Improving accountability and reporting

The school has established mechanism for facilitating improvement in accountability and reporting processes. Meeting structures have been established to enable staff to track progress on school targets, develop responsive strategies at staff, stage, faculty and 'target' meetings and reporting on outcomes. All primary staff have been released fortnightly to participate in stage meetings.

In addition, strategies outlined in the school plan are continually reviewed and the school provides its community with an update on developments through regular newsletters, website updates and reporting at P&C meetings.

Future directions

The Low SES NP has supported the school's efforts to reduce the achievement gap that has existed between isolated students in low socio-economic schools. The HAT's instructional leadership has been valued by staff and professional learning opportunities have enabled them to increase their confidence and level of skill.

The school will explore ways of capitalizing on staff capacities and skills built through Low SES NP initiatives.

6. Coastal Public School

Coastal Public School is implementing 17 initiatives in the five reform areas. The school believes that the complementary initiatives have facilitated whole school change and improved the overall performance of the school.

The two Assistant Principal positions, supported through the Low SES NP, have been critical in providing instructional leadership and mentoring support to staff, resulting in implementation of:

- *new literacy and numeracy programs, enabling the achievement of improved NAPLAN test results, from Year 3 to Year 5 in reading and numeracy*
- *effective implementation of personalized learning plans for Aboriginal students, enabling them to improve their learning, as evidenced by Best Start test results and NAPLAN Year 5 reading and numeracy test results.*

The employment of additional staff has produced positive results. A teacher delivers the preschool learning program, facilitating an improvement in students' readiness for school as reflected in Best Start test results. The additional Reading Recovery Teacher allocation enables the school to increase student access to intervention support, resulting in improved reading results by the end of Year 1. The SLSOs also make a critical contribution, assisting teachers to manage their workloads and providing students with targeted /culturally inclusive learning support.

The Low SES NP has also developed the school's leadership and management capacity, enabling it to strengthen staff performance management and review, school planning, and accountability and reporting. The challenge for the school is to maintain and strengthen its focus on school reform in a changed policy environment.

School Profile

Coastal Public School (PS) is a Kindergarten to Year 6 government school in the Illawarra region of NSW with an enrolment of around 280 students.

The school joined the Low SES NP in 2010 and is also supported by the Country Areas Program (CAP).

The principal has been at the school since the beginning of the Low SES NP and the school employs 20 FTE teaching and non-teaching staff. A comparison of Coastal Public School with all NSW Government primary schools for selected characteristics of teachers for the period 2010-12 shows that:

- the teaching workforce is older than average—62.5 per cent of its teachers are 50 years or older compared with 47.0 per cent for all primary schools and 6.3 per cent are under 30 years of age compared with 7.3 per cent for all primary schools

- teacher turnover is lower-than-average— 0.0 per cent compared with 16.3 per cent
- the percentage of teachers who have been at the school for more than 10 years is higher-than-average (37.5 per cent compared with 23.3) as is the percentage between 4 and 10 years (50 per cent compared with 35.9 per cent)
- the number of days of sick leave per staff member is marginally higher-than-the state average—7.7 compared with 7.4 days for all primary schools.

Key initiatives

REFORM 1 Incentives to attract high performing teachers

Establishing leadership and strategic positions

The Low SES NP funding has allowed the school to strengthen its school leadership team by employing an additional classroom teacher to release an Assistant Principal to provide mentoring support to staff, in literacy and numeracy and in data analysis. The Low SES NP also funds an additional half day of an Assistant Principal position to provide student welfare support and assist with behaviour management.

Providing mentoring support

The mentoring model focuses on supporting teachers to improve the quality of teaching in order to effectively deliver school programs and to achieve school goals and targets. Teachers are provided with customised and individualised professional learning support through the mentoring program. The position description for Mentor (Assistant Principal) in this school includes assisting teachers in:

- analysing student performance data
- developing an understanding of the teaching and learning cycle
- programming and developing quality teaching and assessment strategies
- classroom instruction and program implementation of quality teaching
- monitoring student learning and reporting on student progress.

According to the school the Mentor (Assistant Principal) schedules five weeks or term blocks in classrooms, working individually with teachers to design lessons and units across KLAs. The Quality Teaching Framework (QTF) is used as a tool to assist with program design as well as for the evaluation of units of work. The QTF helps staff to ensure that all elements of quality teaching are incorporated in the delivery of teaching and learning programs.

The mentoring model was developed in response to teacher feedback indicating a desire for peer and team teaching support. A teacher reflection exercise was undertaken, highlighting teachers' need for assistance with the application of learning that had occurred through the professional development opportunities they had received. In particular, teachers expressed a need for assistance using the QTF as a basis for programming and evaluation.

School leaders suggest that the mentoring model is effective because it provides scaffolded learning support to teachers rather than focusing on staff supervision and because it emphasises commonly agreed school goals and targets.

There has been a lot of positive response from teachers about the work we've done in the classroom. We negotiated that we would do it, as professional learning together in class for the best outcomes of the students. [Mentor]

The mentoring model provides simultaneous benefits for both teachers and students.

It was a positive process in that I think everybody got something from it—not only the teachers in the sense that we were doing professional learning around a very good framework, but the kids were not missing out. [Mentor]

School leaders report that the school as a whole is benefiting from the consistency in the approach used by teachers in programming units of work. A survey of staff about the school's Low SES NP initiatives found that teachers were positive about the mentoring support they receive. They have increased their awareness of various aspects of quality teaching and have improved their capacity to reflect on their teaching. The teachers appreciate the time provided by the school to enable them to experiment and apply their learning.

Supporting leadership training and development

The principal reports that the Low SES NP has allowed the school to strengthen its provision of leadership development opportunities to staff. Executive staff have had access to leadership training, through their participation in the TLSI program, Stephen Covey's Leadership program and the *Great Leaders, Great Teams, Great Results* professional learning program.

The school reports that leadership training and development opportunities have enabled executive staff to build their capacity to implement new government policies and planned changes, such as:

- the Learning Management and Business Reform
- the *Local Schools, Local Decisions* reform
- the Australian Curriculum
- the National Standards for Teacher and Principal Accreditation.

REFORM 2: Best practice performance management and staffing arrangements

Developing professional learning plans

Supervisors assist teachers to develop individual PLPs, which, through TARS, inform the development of the whole school professional learning plan. Professional learning needs, issues and strategies are discussed during meetings with supervisors. Once the individual learning plan has been approved, teachers record their professional learning activities as well as other learning.

The professional development plans are designed to support the key school priorities, for example, literacy and numeracy skill development and links with the Australian Curriculum. The *No Gap No Excuse* training is considered to be critical, especially for staff dealing extensively with Aboriginal students.

The school reports that it benefits supporting individual teachers to both devise and implement their professional learning plans. Teachers accessing professional learning opportunities are required to report to other staff, providing learning insights and advice about the applicability of their learning to their teaching and the school as a whole. They are also encouraged to make themselves available to teachers interested in gaining more information.

Professional learning plans also enable the school to ensure that staff comply with school policies and procedures related to student assessment and reporting; the management of student behaviour; and health and safety.

Managing staff performance and review

All staff participate in a TARS/EARS process on an annual basis.

In addition, teaching and executive staff complete a professional diary that records their professional goals and targets, their professional learning, the roles and responsibilities performed and strategies for meeting the professional teaching and/or leadership standards.

The school's review of the TARS and EARS process, outlined in the school's 2012 Annual Report, stresses the need to strengthen the process by addressing operational issues. The school reports that it is improving the efficiency and effectiveness of staff performance through the TARS process by:

- implementing a supervision time line to allow for regular meetings, reflection, goal setting and communication between principal, executive staff and teachers
- requiring all staff to complete an initial written survey and a monthly evaluation form to improve the quality of meetings with supervisors
- allocating sufficient time to address all aspects of the process effectively
- addressing staff concerns by emphasizing achievements, professional growth and continuous learning.

Similarly the school has sought to improve the EARS process through monthly reflections at school leadership team meetings. The Principal asks executive staff to identify achievements against their action checklist that has been customized to reflect roles and responsibilities of executive staff. At these meetings, executive staff also identify issues, challenges and future directions.

The TARS process has also become more structured, incorporating a generic checklist of actions related to roles. According to the Principal this revised approach is effective in identifying areas requiring attention and in facilitating collaboration between the teacher and supervisor. It also assists the school with its accountability and reporting requirements, as a result of the improved quality of information recorded through the process.

Managing staff mix

The school is using Low SES NP funding to resource and/or enhance strategic priorities in the school. A teacher is being employed during Term 3 2013 to facilitate the transition of students from kindergartens, pre-schools and childcare centres to improve student readiness for schooling and to support their social and emotional development.

The school has also expanded the Reading Recovery intervention program by employing an additional 0.19 FTE teacher for the Reading Recovery Teacher, which allows an additional Year 1 student per day to access the support program.

REFORM 3: School operational arrangements that encourage innovation and flexibility

Employing school support staff

Low SES NP funding is used to employ SLSOs (2.5 FTE) so that the school can “fill in the gaps in student learning” and address targeted needs [Principal]. They are allocated to work with specific groups, at specific stages of schooling, for specific purposes over a designated period of time. They work with students in the classroom and in small groups under the supervision of teachers, supporting: Kindergarten students, Aboriginal students, students requiring assistance with language development, and students unable to access the Reading Recovery program support. A male SLSO has been employed to work specifically with selected boys.

SLSOs participate in weekly SLSO meetings organised by the special education teacher and which are regularly attended by the Principal and the School Administrative Manager. SLSOs also work with teachers at their stage planning or other team meetings. At times they participate in parent and teacher meetings. SLSOs have access to learning and training opportunities designed to assist with the provision of explicit instruction in areas such as speech therapy and MULTiLit.

Discussion with school personnel suggests that the contribution of SLSOs is integral to student teaching and learning. SLSOs establish effective relationships with students and ensure that Aboriginal students and students with high learning needs are supported by the school. They allow the school to support teaching and learning, enabling flexible classroom groupings and the delivery of targeted programs to groups of students.

SLSOs help teachers to manage a workload associated with the delivery of more targeted programs, providing assistance meeting the literacy and numeracy needs of targeted and special needs students and delivering modified learning strategies related to designated instructional stages. School leaders say that teachers value the input of SLSOs at stage team meetings to set targets in designing learning programs and assessment strategies and conducting program evaluations.

REFORM 4a: Innovative and tailored learning opportunities for teachers

Coastal Public School seeks to provide teachers with professional learning and development opportunities that are linked to their individual learning plans and reflect the school’s goals and strategic priorities. The school’s focus is on providing professional learning to help teachers to:

- **use/analyse student data**—the mentoring program assists staff to devise, implement, analyse and use school-based student assessment data. Teachers are also helped to consider SMART 2 data to inform overall school and classroom planning.
- **improve delivery of literacy and numeracy programs**—Staff have access to training designed to build their capacity to implement selected literacy and numeracy

programs in the school—language, learning and Literacy (L3), Accelerated Literacy (AL), Reading Eggs, Spelldrome and Mathletics

- **support targeted students**—Aboriginal cultural awareness training is provided
- **support student welfare**—the Positive Behaviour for Success (PBS) program addresses the needs of students with behavioural issues
- **use ICT** in their teaching and learning.

The school notes that the role of the Mentor (Assistant Principal) is to help teachers to apply their professional learning during scheduled classroom blocks. She models new practices and builds teachers’ capacities to deliver quality teaching strategies to ensure that students achieve targeted outcomes.

School leaders suggest that the informal and semi-formal discussion resulting from teachers’ participation in professional learning activities is invaluable. Teachers are continually exposed to new ideas and challenged to think about the effectiveness of their teaching and learning approaches and practices. School leaders and teachers report that the targeted professional learning has improved the quality of teaching, which encourages greater student engagement in learning. L3 training enables teachers to provide explicit instruction in reading and writing to Kindergarten to Year 1 students through small group intensive teaching sessions that target specific learning needs. Similarly, AL training has improved teachers’ understanding of literacy development and has enabled them to deliver an explicit literacy program in Stages 1, 2 and 3 support groups.

The school notes that teachers use the Mathletics NAPLAN resource for practice prior to NAPLAN tests and are integrating this approach into the classroom learning environment, particularly in the use of computer-based activities:

We’ve got a couple of kids who are amongst the top 100 kids in the world for creating points and scores. [School Leader]

The school suggests that student learning outcomes have improved as a result of the better instruction produced by teachers’ professional learning. School leaders cite NAPLAN data which shows average progress between Year 3 and Year 5, from 2010 to 2012, to be above that of both the state and the region. These relatively better outcomes, however, also seem to have been evident before the school joined the Low SES NP and, if anything, the advantage enjoyed by the school relative to the reading and numeracy growth in similar schools and in DEC schools overall has declined since the school joined the Partnership.

Table 5: Year 3 to Year 5 Progress in NAPLAN Reading and Numeracy Test Results, Coastal Public School, 2008/10, 2009/11, 2010/12

Progress in reading				Progress in numeracy			
Average progress in Reading between Years 3 and 5				Average progress in Numeracy between Years 3 and 5			
	2008-2010	2009-2011	2010-2012		2008-2010	2009-2011	2010-2012
School	94.4	81.1	80.5	School	104.3	103.0	107.9
SSG	77.5	69.5	78.1	SSG	80.8	88.6	90.7
State DEC	83.7	74.0	79.2	State DEC	89.6	95.8	98.2

Source: Supplied by Coastal Public School.

Some other results suggest improvement. In 2012, the percentage of Year 5 students performing at minimum or below minimum standard for *Data, Measurement Space and Geometry* halved from 40 per cent in 2011 to 20 per cent in 2012. NAPLAN results showed that 76 per cent of all Year 5 students achieved equal to or above expected growth in NAPLAN numeracy and 65 per cent of them achieving equal to or above expected growth in reading.

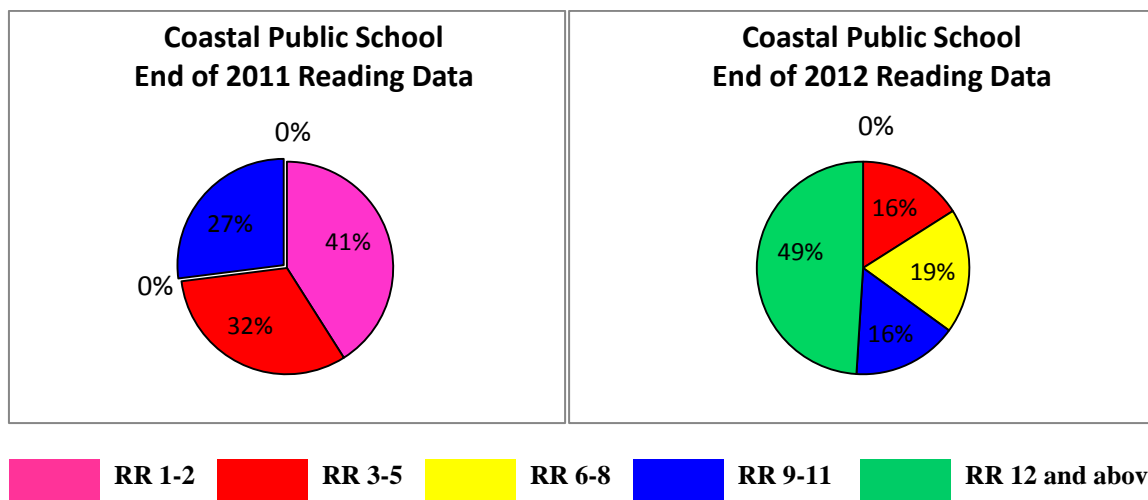
REFORM 4b: Innovative and tailored opportunities for students

Supporting targeted students

Special needs students

Low SES NP funding has allowed an additional Year 1 student per day to access the Reading Recovery program. The school believes that as a result of the Reading Recovery program, students have improved their reading results by the end of Year 1. Figure 1 shows the reading recovery levels achieved by Kindergarten students in 2011 when the school commenced L3, compared to the level achieved by Kindergarten in 2012.

Figure 1: Reading Recovery levels achieved by Kindergarten students, Coastal Public School, 2011 and 2012



Source: Supplied by Coastal Public School.

The Principal attributes the improvement to the effectiveness of the Reading Recovery program combined with school readiness and L3 programs.

Aboriginal students

The school enhances the learning of Aboriginal students through the development of personalised learning plans, facilitated by Aboriginal SLSOs funded through the Low SES NP. The school is preparing to use an online personalised learning plan software program being developed by DEC. Staff routinely refer to the plans when working with their students.

Although all parents were initially involved in the development of these plans, the number of parents involved decreased in 2013. The school is seeking new ways of engaging parents in this process and promoting the benefits of involvement to parents.

Student performance data indicates improvement in the performance of Aboriginal students:

- 50 per cent of Aboriginal students in Kindergarten are on Best Start Level 3 for numeral identification and early arithmetic strategies as compared to 0 per cent in 2011.
- The NAPLAN results indicate that the gap between ATSI students and all students, as measured by Year 5 tests in reading and numeracy, was reduced by 42 test points for both reading and numeracy.

Providing transition support

The school's transition to school support program was established in response to results from the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) survey and the Best Start assessment. These data showed that the students enter the school "without the readiness of the vast majority of Australian kids" [Principal] and a large proportion of students required literacy and numeracy intervention support.

The school delivers a pre-school learning support program, to improve readiness for school. Over a three-week block a teacher delivers a program designed to develop children's pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills. The program also seeks to support the children's intellectual, social and emotional development more generally.

To familiarise students and parents with the school, they are invited to attend a school event prior to the start of the official transition process. The school also conducts workshops for parents so that they can better assist their children at home. The welcome pack provided to parents and carers includes information on helping students to develop literacy and numeracy skills.

Teachers report that the program is highly successful because it has improved students' readiness for school as reflected in Best Start literacy test results. Students and parents are more comfortable and know their way around the school. Parents, local pre-schools and day care centres provided positive feedback about the initiative and consequently the Principal expects Kindergarten enrolments to increase.

The school implemented the L3⁷ program at the beginning of 2012 to ensure that all Kindergarten students were acquiring the skills needed to be successful readers and writers. Best Start and AEDI data showed the need for the program—the school had an above average percentage of students with a delayed capacity to read and write. L3 provides Kindergarten to Year 2 students with systematic and explicit instruction in reading and writing within small groups of three to four students. The students also participate in selected independent, individual or group literacy learning tasks that reinforce the teaching.

Supporting student welfare

The Assistant Principal ensures that students have access to an integrated and coordinated welfare support service. A central element of this service is the Positive Behaviour for Success (PBS) program that has been running since 2011. The program is a whole school community approach to student welfare. PBS seeks to provide the school with three core

⁷ Language, Learning and Literacy (L3) is a research-based, Kindergarten classroom intervention, targeting text reading and writing. It has been designed to complement the daily Literacy program for students who do not bring a rich Literacy background to their first year of school.

values—respect, responsibility and resilience—and includes staff and student reward recognition programs. Funding from the Low SES NP is used to help establish and maintain partnerships with local businesses, clubs and community organisations to support reward recognition programs.

The Assistant Principal reported that the reward system is motivating students to adopt positive behaviour, leading to an increase in the number of positive behaviour certificates awarded to students. The Principal reports that an analysis of the SENTRAL database indicates there has been a 30 to 40 per cent reduction in incidents—ranging from severe incidents which required suspensions to minor incidents such as students being out of bounds.

The Assistant Principal also supports targeted students to improve their behaviour at school in order to decrease the number of disengaged students and students receiving suspensions.

School leaders report that student welfare support initiatives have enabled the school to implement effective behaviour management strategies. The PBS is facilitating cultural change in the school community.

The climate in the school, and especially in the staff, has improved so that staff are willing to take on leadership roles and get involved. The teachers give freely of their time after school to maintain our programs. [Principal]

Parents, too, are positive about the school. A parent survey conducted at the end of 2012 found that 82 per cent of respondents would highly recommend the school to friends and family, while another 13 per cent were “satisfied with the school and would recommend it”. Only four per cent of respondents indicated that they would not recommend the school.

REFORM 5: Strengthening school development and accountability mechanisms

Using evidence to inform planning

Data collection is “now part of the school routine” [Principal]. Every class displays a literacy and numeracy learning continuum on SENTRAL that records student progress. School leaders also provide analyses of NAPLAN results, using the school’s results “as teaching points” at staff meetings. They report that staff collect, analyse and use NAPLAN, Best Start, AEDI and in-school assessments to inform classroom practice, programming in literacy and numeracy, identification of targets and the development of specific support programs. The school also analyses data to identify student need and determine whole school learning intervention strategies.

In the past we might have been able to identify areas of need but not had the personnel or flexibility in the structure of our staffing to be able to target those areas. So that is what I think the big difference is—being able to be a little more creative and flexible in the way we address target areas in the school. [School Leader]

The emphasis on data collection, analysis and use has developed in response to the increasing demand for educational accountability.

We learned very quickly that if we wanted National Partnerships, then regularly throughout the year, we were going to be asked big questions about how we were

spending our money and whether it was worthwhile. [Principal]

Monitoring and evaluating

The school uses the Analytical Framework for Effective Leadership and School Improvement to conduct self-evaluations to determine the success of initiatives. For example, staff responses to evaluation conducted at the end of 2012, indicate positive appraisal of a number of developments, in particular:

- allocation of human resources
- leader data analysis
- staff discussion
- focus on instructional time
- clear goals and expectations
- literacy and numeracy across KLAs.

Parent input was also sought, with survey responses indicating a high level of satisfaction with the school's literacy and numeracy programs, PBS and targeted support for students.

The school's evaluation suggests that the Low SES NP strategies have enabled the school to become more effective. According to the Principal, a comparison with like schools shows that Coastal Public School has improved.

We have demonstrated that we know our school and our kids, we have a fairly strong belief, based on data, where the areas of needs are, and we have proven effectively that we can, given the resource base, run targeted programs and modify what we are already doing. [Principal]

The focus on teacher support and professional learning has been a critical element of the reform agenda.

Some of our teachers needed convincing regarding some of our reforms and we needed to have conversations with them, and that was part of the project. But we now have structures and programs in place, with teachers who have been trained, that can be supported by extra SLSOs and extra support groups. [Principal]

Improving accountability and reporting

School leaders suggest that school planning, situational analyses and evaluation processes undertaken through the Low SES NP have enabled the school to collect quality evidence to strengthen its accountability and to inform reporting. According to the Principal, these processes have “forced our hand” and “prepared us” for the future, in particular, the implementation of the *Local Schools, Local Decisions* initiative.

Future directions

The case study shows the role of Low SES NP funding in implementing specific programs as well as itself modelling an evidence-driven approach to teaching and whole of school change to improve school performance. According to the Principal, the Partnership has enabled the school to implement a range of complementary strategies—professional learning for staff, use of assessment data to inform provision, focus on quality teaching, literacy and numeracy and Aboriginal education, student welfare support and school readiness programs.

The school has sought to achieve change through the implementation of “a total package and a holistic approach” to school reform, enabling the school to better target areas of need important for student learning. The availability of funding has enabled the school to allocate more staffing and training resources in ways that it believes will improve educational delivery.

The school hopes to continue to address the educational needs of its students through the *Local Schools, Local Decisions* policy platform, which seeks to give schools greater flexibility with their resource allocation.

7. Hunter Non-Government School

Hunter non-Government School is implementing 12 initiatives in the five reform areas. The most significant initiative is the employment of a Teacher Educator through the Low SES NP, which is part of a broader shift away from a focus on the provision of welfare support to a greater focus on quality teaching and learning.

The school reports the positive impact of key initiatives:

- *scheduled, individualized mentoring sessions designed to improve the quality of classroom programming and lesson preparation. The provision of opportunities for staff to access training in data analysis and use, the delivery of innovative literacy and numeracy strategies and the use of ICT in teaching have complemented this support.*
- *establishing new organizational arrangements to improve whole of school planning processes and to facilitate better coordination and continuity of educational provision*
- *better student access to ICT, peer mentoring support, learning support and rewards for positive behavior in order to improve student attendance, behavior and learning.*

The Low SES NP has provided the school with financial resources to support staff training and development, which school leaders believe has improved the quality of classroom teaching, including the use of quality teaching and learning resources. In the future the school hopes to maintain, albeit at a reduced level, the Teacher Educator and support staff positions.

School Profile

Hunter Non-Government School is a Kindergarten to Year 6 primary school in the Macquarie-Barwon subdivision. Enrolments number around 40 students.

The school joined the Low SES NP as part of the first cohort in 2009 and is also supported by the *Improving Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership* and the *Closing the Gap for Indigenous Education National Partnership*.

The current principal has held the position for five years and the school has a total of 6.8 FTE teaching and non-teaching staff.

Key initiatives

REFORM 1: Incentives to attract high performing teachers

Establishing leadership and strategic position

An experienced teacher was recruited at the beginning of 2010 to fill the Teacher Educator position (0.4 FTE) funded through the Low SES NP. The role was established to provide

mentoring and professional learning support to teachers.

The role of the Teacher Educator is to emphasize the importance of quality teaching and learning, although Hunter Non-Government School seeks to maintain a strong culture of pastoral care.

Instead of preparing lessons each day we were pouring milk on cereal. [Teacher]

She emphasised the school's role in providing an educational service and the availability of programs and resources relevant to the needs of their students. The Teacher Educator demonstrated programs and approaches designed to increase students' engagement in learning and improve their learning outcomes.

Providing mentoring support

The Teacher Educator works with teachers individually and collectively in the classroom and during teachers' allocated time release to:

- help with programming, developing units of work, scoping and sequencing lessons
- assess students' learning and tracking their progress
- differentiate the curriculum to meet diverse student needs
- demonstrate lessons and assist with classroom learning
- monitor the effectiveness of teaching strategies.

According to the Principal, the mentoring support has improved the quality of classroom programming. Teachers are better prepared to deliver their lessons and meet the school accountability requirements.

In the past I don't think we were professionally open to these things and we didn't venture out to find out all these new things that were happening. Now, with our programming, I feel a lot more confident. [Teacher]

REFORM 2: Best practice performance management and staffing arrangements

Employing support staff

Low SES NP funding is used to extend the time allocation of Learning Support Aides so that 49 per cent of their time is funded through this mechanism. Learning Support Aides work under the direction of the Special Needs Teacher, assisting students with language and literacy development. They play a key role in supporting student attendance by responding to students' welfare and health needs, for example, through the breakfast club.

Learning Support Aides have access to professional development opportunities, which equips them to perform their roles. They have been able to deliver, under teacher guidance, language programs on a daily basis.

REFORM 3: School operational arrangements that encourage innovation and flexibility

Establishing new organizational arrangements

The school has revised its timetable to improve its educational delivery. Literacy and numeracy learning blocks have been scheduled at the beginning of each day to maximise learning time in the first half of the day. Further, shorter recess and lunch breaks enable teachers to better manage students' playground behaviour.

Classroom delivery has been strengthened through whole school planning processes. Yearly and termly planners facilitate coordination and continuity of students' learning. Teachers collaboratively scope and sequence the KLAs across the school. They integrate and incorporate into classroom programs learning that has occurred through Low SES NP funded school excursions.

REFORM 4a: Innovative and tailored learning opportunities for teachers

Teaching and support staff participate in professional learning activities at staff meetings and scheduled professional development days. The school's focus has been on assisting staff to improve the quality of their teaching, in particular, in language and literacy.

Analysing/using data

Teachers are trained to understand and analyse students' language assessment data. This data is collected for all students and collected by the Speech Pathologist and the Teacher Educator. The language assessment data enables teachers to know their students' starting points and determine progress made after teaching whole class units or work. Teachers are able to identify students who benefited from teaching strategies and students who require additional intervention support.

The school Principal believes that the school introduced an innovative approach to developing teachers' skills in student profiling. The Teacher Educator facilitated a series of workshops at staff meetings designed to build teacher understandings and skills. Student profiles, detailing academic, behavioural and background information were discussed and strategies for addressing learning needs were considered. The student learning profiling strategy allowed staff to cater for student needs through curriculum differentiation. The case studies also permitted staff to learn about the complex needs of their students and to better support students through informal interactions around the school and in the playground.

The principal is confident that through these formal and informal professional learning activities, teachers have been trained to: assess students' progress against a learning continuum; analyse assessment data to determine students' progress towards benchmark standards; and use assessment data to inform classroom planning. Importantly, teachers are more able to identify students who need to be referred to community and government agencies for specialised support and intervention.

Developing literacy programs

The school has facilitated staff training for the implementation of literacy programs.

Teachers have had access to training in Focus on Reading, Reading Eggs, Reading Express, Ants in the Apple Program and Macquarie University’s School Wide Early Literacy Learning (SWELL) language program.

Professional learning has occurred during staff meetings and on scheduled professional development days. Teachers have also had the opportunity to visit other schools, to observe new practices and approaches to teaching. For example, teachers attended a demonstration session of Lexia, a computerised literacy program, at a neighbouring school during a staff meeting. The program is considered to be culturally appropriate for the school’s students because it emphasises visual and screen-based learning.

Professional learning opportunities have “opened up teachers horizons’ and increased their motivation and desire to learn [Principal].

Using ICT

Teachers have been encouraged and supported to use ICT in teaching and learning. Staff from the school’s central education office have provided teachers with in-service instruction on the use of interactive white boards (IWBs) and project staff are supported to develop innovative ways of using new technologies in their classroom teaching through the Gateway 21st Century—for example, online programming development, visiting websites for learning, and use of interactive learning experiences.

The Principal believes that there has been a significant cultural shift in the school. Teachers now consider ‘teaching’ to be the most critical function of the school. They have shifted their focus away from catering for students’ welfare needs to effectively responding to students’ educational needs and their active engagement in learning.

They could see that once they actually really got in and started teaching, their problems in the classroom dissipated. [Teacher Educator]

As a result of accessing professional learning opportunities, staff have applied new learning and reflected on its impact. Their confidence has increased because they ‘could see that they were achieving better educational results’ [Teacher Educator]. The new approaches and programs have been successful in motivating students to learn and participate in planned activities. For example, by using smartboards teachers help students to improve their concentration and focus on classroom learning.

They feel really proud of themselves for it... they saw that the children wanted to learn and they were starting to settle. [Teacher Educator]

REFORM 4b: Innovative and tailored opportunities for students

Supporting literacy learning

According to the Principal, at least 80 per cent of students require language intervention support to facilitate learning across all KLAs. The school introduced the *Focus On Reading* program, in order to provide students with a coordinated and seamless approach to reading in the school. Additional intervention support is provided to Kindergarten students through *Reading Eggs*, and to older students through *Reading Express*.

Lexia was also introduced at the start of the Low SES NP, to teach phonic skills and positive

attitudes to learning through games. The program enables Years 1 to 6 students to learn through self-directed and collaborative learning approaches. For some students, group learning is more effective because it does not label individual students as slow learners. Students' learning is affirmed through provision of awards. As the program is web-based, students are able to access it at home and in the library.

Teachers are able to access individual student and group language assessments and determine the number of hours students spent on the program, which allows them to determine students' growth and achievements presented in various ways, including, pie graphs. Teacher can more readily identify areas requiring attention in the classroom.

The *SWELL program* supports Stage 1 students' language learning using a phonetic-based approach. The program, originally developed for low SES students in New York city, assists students requiring a highly structured approach to language learning. To strengthen students' spelling skills, teachers assess their skill levels using the *Ants in the Apple* program and deliver recommended learning strategies and programs.

Students are also supported to develop the language of mathematics to facilitate access to learning in numeracy and mathematics.

Engaging students in learning

The school organises for community groups to **mentor** students in specific sporting and cultural activities. For example, the Newcastle Knights invited students to play football and accompanied them to see a football game one evening. Year 11 students attending the local, affiliated College, also mentor students. They interact with them in the playground, informally teach them specific skills and join them at the end of the year Christmas party and Year 6 graduations. Year 11 students from another non-government college also mentor students, through ongoing face-to-face and written communication. They invite students to visit the school and participate in learning activities.

Students have access to new life experiences, through their participation in a range of school excursions funded through the Low SES NP program. These experiences actively engage students and provide a broader context for their classroom learning. A visit to Canberra, for instance, including a meeting with the Prime Minister, was included in a unit of learning on government.

To see these kids' faces when they are experiencing these things ... is just amazing! I can't emphasise enough how much it does for the kids. [Teacher]

The school also used Low SES NP funding to purchase playground equipment and other essential resources, providing opportunities for physical development in a safe environment and enabling the students to have a better life at school. The resources include school uniforms that can be worn at school and breakfast before the start of the school day. The Low SES NP-funded aide organises a breakfast program in the school hall for targeted students so that they are better prepared for classroom learning. Students are also able to use spectacles that have been donated to the school by the local optometrist. Students requiring dental assistance are also taken to the local dental clinic.

Providing welfare support

Students are given incentives to behave in ways that are conducive to learning, responsible

and respectful of others. They are rewarded with ‘high fives’ for demonstrating positive behaviour, in the form of a token. The tokens can be used to purchase items or an experience, such as having lunch with teachers in the staffroom, sitting in the teacher’s chair or going fishing with the Principal.

The program also includes negative consequences for highly unacceptable behaviour in consultation with parents and carers, such as withdrawal and suspension. There are plans, however, to extend the program, by building in additional incentives to improve students’ behaviour. The positive behaviour program is complemented by positive affirmations and rewards that teachers give students throughout the day.

Impact/outcomes

As a result of the implementation of initiatives, the school’s student attendance rate has stabilised at 93 per cent. The main reasons for non-attendance or lateness are associated with family and community issues such as family breakdown.

Students are being actively engaged in their hands-on learning and in particular, through the use of learning technologies. According to teachers, students have improved their listening and speaking skills and the standard of their work. They are more settled and are presenting to school in uniforms and prepared for learning.

They aren’t aware of their learning ... they are just so enthusiastic to show off what they have learned. [Teacher]

Significantly, students’ discourse reflects a sense of accomplishment and an ambition for secondary education.

They assume they are going on to high school whereas before they didn’t talk like that. [Teacher]

The school reports that some students improved their reading age by five to six years within a calendar year. The language assessment data indicates that some students improved by 32 to 40 months over a five-month period. A student who had been in receipt of student with disability funding, had a chronological age (CA) of 6.11 and a Burt⁸ score of 5.0 in 2010. By 2012, her CA was 8.1 but a Burt score of 9.11 and 10.5, with and 11.0 to 11.6 on the Burt reading test.

The school notes that improvements are not as yet evident in NAPLAN test results, but that small gains are being made in student learning. Students are attending school more frequently and are more engaged in learning.

REFORM 5: Strengthening school development and accountability mechanisms

Using evidence to inform planning

The principal believes that the school’s participation in the Low SES NP enables it to assess student needs, using available evidence to inform the development of a whole school plan and to formulate a longer term goals and strategic priorities.

⁸ The Burt Test is a standardised reading test that is used to determine a student’s reading skills. Students are required to read a list of words presented in isolation and that increase in difficulty. The student’s ‘raw score’ is converted into a ‘Burt score’ which is used to determine the student’s reading age..

The school has been able to develop common goals and a common approach to educational delivery. This consistency helps to establish continuity in learning, to set expectations for all students and to facilitate effective communication in the school.

Future directions

The Low SES NP has provided the school with additional financial resources, enabling it to better respond to the needs of individual students. Teachers' professional skills have been improved and the school's new organisational structures have contributed to a more coordinated and focused approach to teaching. At the same time, new educational resources and learning technologies have enabled teachers to engage students in their learning more effectively.

It has taken the four years for real change to be embedded and for this cultural change to occur, and it will take more time ... [Principal]

Beyond the Low SES NP the school plans to continually improve its capacity to deliver a quality education to students. The new staffing positions will be funded through the school's global budget. The Teacher Educator position will be reduced to 0.2 FTE while the support staff positions will be maintained. Excursions and learning resources will continue to be supported by the school.

8. South-West Sydney Public School

South-West Sydney Public School is implementing 15 initiatives in the five reform areas. The school believes that positions funded through the low SES NP have been effective in improving student learning outcomes and increasing student enrolments.

The Partnership supports its two Assistant Principals and the Literacy and Numeracy Coordinator to:

- provide targeted and individualized mentoring/coaching support to teachers, enable teachers to improve their teaching skills and develop professional learning plans to address areas of need*
- facilitate school-based professional training and development opportunities for staff to improve their skills in data analysis and incorporation in lesson planning, delivery of best practice literacy and numeracy programs, support targeted groups and use ICT in their teaching*
- support early career teachers in settling into the school, supporting them in their professional development, setting of career goals, and development of aspirations to positions of school leadership*
- support targeted students and students' transition into Kindergarten, seeking to help them make positive learning gains through targeted intervention programs.*

The school reports that the SLSO and two CLOs have made important contributions, both through directly supporting students in classrooms and through helping the school to establish positive relationships with its Arabic-speaking and Karen communities⁹.

The school is exploring strategies for maintaining positions currently funded through the Low SES NP from its global budget in order to sustain and continue the improvements it believes have been achieved through team based approaches to planning, educational delivery and community outreach.

School Profile

South-West Sydney Public School is a small school located in Fairfield, South West Sydney with an enrolment of about 170 students.

South-West Sydney Public School joined the Low SES NP in 2011. The current principal has held the position for seven years and the school has a total of 13 FTE teaching and non-teaching staff employed.

A comparison of South-West Sydney Public School with all NSW Government primary schools for selected characteristics of teachers for the period 2010-12 shows:

⁹ The Karen are an ethnic minority group from Myanmar.

- a younger than average age profile of teachers, mostly because of a higher proportion of teachers aged below 30 years (18.2 per cent compared with 7.3 per cent for all primary schools) and a correspondingly lower proportion of teachers aged 50 years or older (36.4 per cent compared with 47.0 per cent)
- a lower-than-average turnover of teachers (0.0 per cent compared with 16.3 per cent)
- a higher-than-average percentage of teachers who have been at the school for 4 -10 years (45.5 per cent compared with 35.9 per cent)
- a lower-than-average number of sick leave days taken (3.4 sick leave days per staff member compared with 7.4 days for all /primary schools).

Key initiatives

REFORM 1: Incentives to attract high performing teachers

Establishing leadership and strategic positions

Low SES NP funding is used to release two Assistant Principals from their classroom duties for 3 to 4 hours a week to undertake the mentoring of teachers and the facilitation of professional learning. A literacy and numeracy coordinator position (0.8 FTE) has also been established to coordinate student learning support by assisting classroom teachers, support staff and early career teachers.

Providing mentoring support

The Assistant Principals provide mentoring support through scheduled sessions with individual teachers or groups of teachers. Their guidance includes:

- engaging in team teaching or team planning
- asking staff to engage in professional dialogue
- demonstrating lessons on curriculum delivery
- assisting with data analysis
- working to facilitate the development of new teaching and learning strategies
- advising about classroom programming, especially differentiation to meet the different needs of students
- encouraging the use of ICT through demonstrations in the computer room.

Teachers also have the opportunity to receive mentoring support from the literacy and numeracy coordinator, and are encouraged to provide effective learning support to all students. Staff can access assistance in undertaking various tasks—for example, creating student databases, developing classroom teaching and learning strategies, and selecting and using relevant resources.

The purpose of the mentoring is for the Assistant Principals and the literacy and numeracy coordinator to identify teachers' professional needs and to develop strategies to address teachers' needs and concerns. For instance, the school has identified that the needs of early career teachers are different to the needs of experienced teachers implementing new policies and programs.

The school reports that the Assistant Principals are able to blend their responsibilities for staff supervision with their mentoring role. According to the Principal, this approach has allowed the school to identify staff performance issues in the early stages and to provide timely and responsive intervention.

Now, because the Assistant Principals can go into the classroom to support teachers we try and avoid things before they become a big issue, rather than letting someone falter and struggle. If you see the need, you support it straight away. [Principal]

School leaders report that the mentoring strategy is effective as it provides targeted and individualised coaching support to teachers and has permitted the school to deliver a consistent and continuous approach across the school. They note that this approach has been effective in establishing literacy and numeracy teaching blocks at the beginning of the day and delivering school-designated programs.

REFORM 2: Best practice performance management and staffing arrangements

Developing professional learning plans

The school reports that, as part of TARS, all teachers are required to develop and implement PLPs within the context of the broader school professional development plan. The PLPs are designed to enable teachers to meet their own specific needs and to support their career goals. Additionally teachers are recording their reflections online, noting professional learning activities and identifying new learning.

Individual discussions are timetabled with the Principal to discuss professional learning needs and focus on school priorities such as Bridging the Gap for Aboriginal students and newly arrived LBOTE students,.

Alignment of professional learning plans with the school's strategic plan has supported a coherent approach to this process. The school and teachers seek to identify relevant professional learning opportunities through the development of the whole school professional learning plan. The principal reports that reviews are conducted each term to facilitate the co-ordination of professional learning activities, as part of the school's efforts to ensure responsiveness to new and emerging needs – for example, to students requiring special consideration as a result of illnesses such as diabetes, or the implementation of a guided reading program to build independent reading skills and of AL to develop students' comprehension and vocabulary skills. The school reports that these reviews also support the effective timing and arrangement of professional learning activities and management of teacher workload.

Supporting early career teachers

The school principal reports that the four early career teachers (three are first year graduates and the other is in her third year of teaching) were informally inducted in the operation of the school. Each teacher was matched with an Assistant Principal who has responsibility for their supervision and induction into the school. This responsibility includes giving the teachers assistance to obtain and maintain their accreditation and to meet the school's professional requirements.

The early career teachers are also teamed with experienced teachers who, through Low SES NP funding, are released from their teaching duties two days a year to assist their colleagues. Assistance can be given in student assessment, managing student behaviour, classroom programming and in the evaluation of educational delivery. School leaders report that experienced teachers engage early career teachers in professional dialogue, provide demonstrations, and observe and provide feedback on their teaching.

South-West Sydney Public School gives early career teachers support from their peers through, for instance, opportunities to engage in professional dialogue at planning days each term. In addition, the school reports that assistance to early career teachers is provided by the literacy and numeracy coordinator, who demonstrates lessons and provides teaching and learning ideas, activities and resources. Further assistance is available from student learning support teachers, who provide advice on the needs of individuals and groups of students.

Early career teachers believe that this approach is effective in helping early career teachers to settle into the school and to develop their confidence, knowledge and skills, in particular in curriculum delivery, student assessment and class management:

The school helped me greatly. When I first started I was very, very lost. I didn't feel that I had all the skills I needed to successfully run a classroom. [Early Career Teacher]

The university leaves a lot of holes in your education which have to be picked up through the support networks at your school. With the support of the experienced teachers it helped fill in the gaps in my knowledge which was what I needed. [Early Career Teacher]

I really don't think I would be the teacher I am right now without the help of the experienced teachers here, especially with programming and creating the correct cycle in your classroom. [Early Career Teacher]

The Principal reports success in helping early career teachers to aspire to and undertake leadership roles and responsibilities, noting that one of the Assistant Principals is only in her fourth year of teaching.

Some of the EC teachers who have been with me for two to three years are now saying, 'I can take on that responsibility.' [Principal]

Discussions with staff suggest that small schools may benefit from implementing models of support for early career teachers that integrate the key functions within the existing organisational structures, similar to the arrangements in place at South-West Sydney Public School. Such models have the potential to increase efficiency and promote a whole school approach to supporting early career teachers.

Managing staffing mix

The school employs a speech therapist for one day a week to support approximately 12 per cent of students experiencing language difficulties. The responsibilities of this position include:

- identifying students requiring assistance and collaborating with teachers on implementation strategies to assist students in the classroom
- preparing reports to assist the school with its communications with parents regarding any ongoing support required by students, including support provided by external agencies.

The school reports that the speech therapy service is proving effective in:

- facilitating improvement in students' speaking and listening skills and their self-confidence
- developing teachers' understanding of student needs and intervention skills
- raising parents' awareness of their children's needs and increasing knowledge of services available in the community to provide additional support to students.

REFORM 3: School operational arrangements that encourage innovation and flexibility

Employing support staff

Funding from the Low SES NP has supported the employment of an SLSO for two days a week to assist teachers to cater for students with special learning needs. The SLSO works with targeted individual students or groups of students in the classroom or the learning support room by, for example, assisting with the implementation of the MULTiLit program. The school reports that as a member of the Student Learning Support Team, the SLSO collaborates with classroom teachers and participates in school planning, evaluation days and whole school professional learning and training activities.

According to the Principal, the SLSO demonstrates sound professional judgement and proactivity, has established a rapport with students and teachers and is highly regarded in the school community.

There is a student who is struggling, and in the last two weeks he has learned three new sounds . . . this is a huge boost to his confidence. And when children are rewarded and that improvement is acknowledged they can only go up from there. It spurs them on to learn more. [Support staff member]

The school employs two other support staff (a total of 0.4 FTE) to assist newly arrived students by helping them to settle and integrate into the school. One CLO position supports students from an Arabic background while the second supports students from a Karen refugee background. The CLOs also facilitate access to parent orientation and education programs that cover areas such as the Australian education system, finance, and nutrition. Parents can also attend positive parenting courses run by the support staff.

The teachers believe that the support staff provide an invaluable service to students and their families. As the Karen CLO is an elder in his community, he has been influential in actively engaging parents in their children's education. Although, it has taken more time for the other CLO to build a relationship with the Arabic community, the principal considers that there are signs that parents' trust in the school is increasing and that the parents are more willing to interact with the school.

Implementing team-based approaches

School leaders suggest that team-based approaches to teaching and planning are allowing the school to implement whole school and integrated approaches to literacy and numeracy. The major mechanisms identified by the school for facilitating team-work are:

- providing professional development to the whole staff and/or relevant teams. A whole school approach to professional learning can promote professional dialogue and enable the school to develop a shared vision and a common language.
- positive change to school organisational structures, for example the delegation of responsibilities by principals to executive staff and the allocation of support staff both to assist in the coordination of teaching and learning across the school and to support classroom teachers
- school and classroom planning arrangements designed to facilitate collaborative planning, teaching strategies and joint delivery of programs
- implementing a staff mentoring support model that includes the promotion of team teaching and collaborative planning
- matching of experienced teachers with early career teachers in order to encourage a culture of shared responsibility and professional collegiality.

According to the Principal, the culture of collaborative team work has built the capacity of staff to take on an increased level of responsibility. She notes that in the past “everything landed on my desk” but that now she feels able to delegate leadership responsibilities to executive staff. She also notes that teachers increasingly undertake further student assessment and data entry responsibilities.

Facilitating cooperation with other schools

The Assistant Principal’s role includes establishing joint professional learning activities with other local primary schools. A number of joint meetings have been held with the three local primary schools to identify common areas of professional learning.

Partnerships with local pre-schools have also been established to improve the transition to school. Local pre-school staff and students visit the school in Term 4 to learn about, and participate in, the school’s pre-kinder programs (such as ‘Little Learners at South-West Sydney Public School’). The school reports that as a result of collaboration with pre-schools an effective transition to school program has been established and the difficulties experienced by many students in the first weeks of schooling have been significantly reduced for them. They “settle into school with ease and develop confidence because they know the teacher and understand expectations” [Principal].

REFORM 4a: Innovative and tailored learning opportunities for teachers

South-West Sydney Public School funds up to forty days of professional learning per annum through the Low SES NP with the aim of strengthening the school’s capacity to support teachers’ individual needs and to allow them to meet goals and targets outlined in the school plan. The school is providing opportunities for school-based learning as well as access to registered professional learning programs, including online courses, consistent with its aim of meeting the needs and demands of staff and encouraging them to apply new learning. The key areas of professional learning given priority by the school are outlined below.

Analysing/using data

The school has used Low SES NP funding to release teachers from their teaching to participate in professional learning activities designed to increase their ability to analyse and

interpret school and student data. The school also reports that staff have been introduced to the use of NAPLAN data and SMART 2 to inform classroom planning, student individual learning plans and overall future planning.

The school's Assistant Principals encourage staff to embed assessment and reporting practices in teaching and learning programs and also support staff in the use of assessment data as a way of identifying student learning needs and for planning classroom programs and individualized support strategies.

The Principal reports that improvements in staff skills in student assessment, whole school data collection and the development of teaching and learning strategies have "made a big difference in the school." She notes that the school's improved information base assists its effectiveness in meeting accountability and reporting responsibilities.

Delivering literacy and numeracy programs

South-West Sydney Public School has provided professional learning opportunities to permit teachers to increase the levels of literacy and numeracy achievement for all students, with teachers participating in training to assist them to implement a number of programs:

- *Accelerated Literacy* for all students, emphasising the selection of good literature
- *Focus on Reading* to help Year 3 to Year 6 students to develop comprehension skills
- *MULTiLit* to support Year 3 to Year 6 students experiencing difficulties with reading. The school also plans to train staff to deliver *MINiLit* (Meeting Initial Needs in Literacy) for K to Year 2 students and *PreLit* for Kindergarten students
- *Prioritising Grammar*
- *Targeting Early Numeracy* (TEN), a whole class approach for Kindergarten to Year 2 students
- Using the *Best Start K-2 Continuum* for student assessment data analysis
- Vertical Maths grouping across the school.

Supporting targeted groups

Staff have participated in training to enhance their ability to meet the diverse needs of their students by changing their teaching and learning strategies. The school notes improvements in staff capacity to differentiate in this way through the development of personalised learning plans, culturally inclusive strategies, use of the ESL Scales, class support and learning in small groups. The school records that these improvements have increased its responsiveness to the needs of Indigenous and LBOTE students.

School leaders believe that differentiation of learning skills will assist teachers to implement the Australian curriculum and facilitate continuous improvement in the school's educational delivery.

Using ICT

Staff have participated in training in the implementation of the technology scope and sequence plan, in the teaching of explicit computer vocabulary and skills and in the use of the

internet and interactive whiteboards (IWBs) in classroom teaching and learning across all KLAs.

The Principal reports that South-West Sydney Public School's whole school approach to professional learning and development is proving effective in building the staff's capacity to implement new programs and approaches to teaching and learning. She notes that staff absenteeism is low at the school, with staff taking an average of only 2 to 3 days of sick leave per year.

REFORM 4b: Innovative and tailored opportunities for students

Supporting targeted students

The learning support team supports students requiring additional assistance. The Literacy and Numeracy Coordinator and the Special Needs SLSO also work with classroom teachers to assist them to differentiate learning, through targeted strategies including implementing personalised learning plans and providing access to intervention programs such as MULTiLit.

Students also have access to a one-to-one weekly tutoring session through the Volunteer Helper Program (Timehelp), which assists students having trouble with their reading, writing and mathematics.

The Principal notes that she reviews the learning support program every term, seeking to ensure that students are able to access the targeted learning support services, particularly at transition points. She believes that students are achieving gains through their participation in intervention support programs.

Providing transition support

The school implements the *Little Learners at* [South-West Sydney Public School] program, delivered over 10 weeks from the middle of Term 3 to the middle of Term 4 each year to parents and carers of kindergarten students. A teacher is released to deliver the program, providing parents with information about the school and its expectations. The school also organises a playgroup for children aged four years or younger.

The school considers its Kindergarten transition support program to be effective. The program allows teachers to familiarise themselves with students and their families before school begins and hence they are in a better position to plan their classroom programs. The school notes that *Best Start* data indicates positive learning growth in the children by the end of the Kindergarten year.

Future directions

The school's experience is that the Low SES NP has encouraged it to build the capacity to be more effective by providing professional development and promoting quality professional dialogue. It reports that its strategies have been effective in improving student outcomes and increasing student enrolment, which increased from 116 students in 2006 to 186 students in 2013.

The school reports that positions funded under the Low SES NP have been particularly

effective, enabling the school to better target its students learning needs and to connect with the local community. The school will explore options for maintaining the CLOs and other funded positions beyond the life of the Partnership.

PART B: Case Study schools from 2012

9. Introduction

In 2012 six case studies of schools participating in the Low SES NP were conducted. They focused on identifying reform area initiatives implemented by the six schools to address staffing, management and accountability reforms. This section revisits those six schools to update the initial case studies by detailing recent developments, changes and achievements. As with the previous section, a separate chapter is provided for each school.

Profile of case study schools

Table 5 provides information about the school type, sector, region, enrolments, student characteristics and ICSEA score of each of the six schools. The names of the schools have been changed to ensure anonymity and enrolments have been rounded to the nearest 50 to minimise potential for identification. The table highlights the variation in the contexts in which the Low SES NP initiatives are being implemented.

Table 6: The 2012 case study schools and their characteristics

School Name	Year Joined NP	Sector	Region /Diocese	Type	School Size	ICSEA	LBOTE
Regional High School	2009	Govt	Western NSW	7-12	>700	927	2%
South West High School	2010	Govt	South West Sydney	7-12 Girls	>800	967	94%
Regional Central School*	2010	Govt	Northern Riverina	K-12	<150	989	0
Catholic College	2011	Catholic	Sydney Archdiocese	7-12 Boys	>1,000	999	81%
Western Public School	2010	Govt	Western Sydney	K-6	200-250	964	40%
Chambers ¹⁰ Primary School	2010	Govt	New England	K-6	200-250	890	2%

* Incentive School – further information provided in case study.

Different starting times

Regional High School was the first school to join the Low SES NP in 2009, followed by four schools in 2010 and one school in 2011.

Diverse ICSEA quartiles

Chambers PS has the lowest ICSEA score and is in the lowest quartile of ICSEA scores of Partnership schools, followed by Regional HS, in the second highest quartile of ICSEA scores. All other schools are in the highest quartile of ICSEA scores of Partnership schools.

¹⁰ Chambers Public School⁷ is a pseudonym which was also used for the school in the second Progress Report for the evaluation of Low SES NP Staffing, Management and Accountability Initiatives.

Table 7: Low SES NP reform areas and related initiatives – 2012 case study schools

Reform Area	Initiative	Regional HS	South West HS	Regional CS	Catholic College	Western PS	Chambers PS	All schools
1	Establishing leadership & strategic positions	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	5 ¹¹
	Providing mentoring support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		5
	Supporting leadership training & development		✓	✓		✓	✓	4
2	Developing professional learning plans	✓	✓	✓	new	✓	✓	6
	Managing staff performance & review	✓		new	new	✓	✓	5
	Supporting early career teachers	✓		✓	✓	✓		4
	Managing staffing mix	✓	Change	new	✓	change	✓	6
3	Employing support staff	✓	✓			✓	✓	4
	Implementing team-based approaches	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	5
	Establishing new organizational arrangements		✓		✓		✓	3
	Facilitating cooperation with other schools	✓						1
	Establishing technological infrastructure	✓	✓	✓				3
4a	Analysing/using data	✓	✓	✓	new	✓	✓	6
	Delivering literacy & numeracy programs	✓	✓	✓		✓		4
	Supporting targeted groups					✓		1
	Using ICT	✓	✓			✓		3
	Improving QT	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	5
4b	Supporting literacy & numeracy learning		✓	✓		✓		3
	Engaging students in learning	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	5
	Supporting targeted students	✓	✓			✓		3
	Providing transition support		✓		✓			2
	Supporting student welfare	✓			✓		✓	3
5	Using evidence to inform planning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
	Monitoring & evaluating	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
	Improving accountability & reporting							
	Total	19	19	14	14	18	14	98

Regional central School employs a HAT through the National Partnerships Quality Teaching Program

Diverse staffing profile

An analysis of government sector staffing data, provided in each case study, indicates that compared to other schools of a similar type:

- four have a younger than average age profile of teachers
- four have a lower than average turnover of teachers, while one has a higher than average turnover, 23.1 per cent compared with 10.8 per cent
- three have a lower than average percentage of teachers who have been at the school for over 10 years
- four have a lower average number of sick leave days taken per teacher. The fifth school has a slightly higher than average days (that is, 7.8 days compared with 7.4 days).

Implementation of initiatives

The case study schools implemented a range of Low SES NP initiatives. Table 6 identifies initiatives related to reform areas that have been implemented by each of the case study schools as well as the total number.

The table shows that:

- collectively, case study schools are implementing 98 initiatives, with between 14 and 19 initiatives per school
- three schools (Regional CS, Catholic College and Western PS) implemented new initiatives since the middle of 2012, with South West HS and Western PS making changes within initiatives that they had already implemented
- Reform Area 2 has the highest number of initiatives (21 initiatives), followed by Reform Area 4a (19 initiatives), Reform Areas 3 and 4b (16 initiatives for each), Reform Area 1 (14 initiatives) and Reform Area 5 (12 initiatives)
- all case study schools are implementing: *developing professional learning plans, managing staffing mix, providing professional learning opportunities for staff to analyze/use data and use evidence to inform planning and evaluation*
- other high frequency initiatives are: *establishing leadership and strategic positions; providing mentoring support; managing staff performance and review; supporting early career teachers; implementing team-based approaches; improving the quality of teaching through professional learning; and engaging students in learning (through student leadership programs, individual learning and/or attendance plans, homework centre programs and student awards).*

Key initiatives and impacts

Discussions with school leaders suggested that some key reform area and specific initiatives have also demonstrated strong positive impacts. As with the 2013 case study schools, the different starting arrangements have led to differing degrees of progress and success with regard to five key initiative areas. Across case studies, the discussions suggest that:

- *Establishing new leadership, strategic and specialist positions* has driven school

and cultural change

- ***Providing professional training, learning and development opportunities*** has strengthened leadership and teaching capacities
- ***Employing support staff*** has led to more effective implementation of the initiatives and to greater success
- ***Implementing team-based approaches*** has allowed staff to have shared understandings, to be consistent in their approaches and to provide continuity in teaching and learning
- ***Providing innovative opportunities for students to learn*** has contributed to better student outcomes, attitudinally, behaviourally and academically.

A comparison of the 2012 and 2013 case studies suggests that the 2012 schools were less likely to directly link initiatives to student outcomes or provide performance data to demonstrate improvement in student academic learning. Nevertheless, principals and other school leaders in the 2012 case study schools believe that the impact of initiatives on students, staff and school outcomes is cumulative and inter-related, producing positive immediate and intermediate outcomes.

10. Regional High School

Regional High School has continued to implement and consolidate 19 initiatives in the five reform areas.

The school reports that the employment of support staff has had a strong impact on student attendance rates. Employment of support staff has enabled the school to establish organizational structures and processes for managing students' attendance and engagement in learning. School data shows an improvement in student attendance rates, including those of Aboriginal students.

The school also reports that creating the Head Teacher, Teaching and Learning has been important in driving the school's Low SES NP reform agenda. The position has provided a strategic focus, facilitated whole school approaches, strengthened the TARS process and supported early career teachers and the professional learning and development of all staff.

The school plans to maintain these new positions beyond the Low SES NP to continue to benefit from its reform agenda.

School Profile

Regional High is a public high school catering for over 700 students in western NSW.

The school entered the Low SES NP in 2009 and is also supported by the *Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership*. The school is a designated *incentive school*, which provides teachers with several benefits: four transfer points, an additional training and professional development day and two personal leave days.

The current principal assumed the position in 2011. The staffing complement is 72.3 FTE teaching and non-teaching staff. A comparison of Regional HS with all NSW government secondary schools for selected characteristics of teachers for the period 2010-12 shows:

- a teaching workforce that is older than average—51.8 per cent of teachers are 50 years or older, compared with 43.5 per cent for all government high schools
- a lower-than-average turnover of teachers—3.6 per cent, compared with 4.3 for all government high schools
- a higher-than-average percentage of teachers who have been at the school for over 10 years—33.9 per cent, compared with the average of 29.4 per cent
- a lower-than-average number of days of sick leave taken per teacher—8.4 days of sick leave compared with an average of 8.8 days in NSW government secondary schools.

Key initiatives

REFORM 1: Incentives to attract high performing teachers

Establishing leadership and strategic positions

The school has maintained:

- the Deputy Principal position to manage administration and planning for the Low SES NP
- the Head Teacher Teaching & Learning position to continue to support the professional development of teachers and to expand school initiatives, such as the middle school programs, Year 7 transitions to high school, primary school curriculum and the gifted and talented program
- a higher duties allowance for the Head Teacher Welfare to establish and maintain whole school structures and delivery programs, such as PBL, anti-bullying and social skills programs.

The school reports that the Head Teacher Teaching and Learning position has been essential for driving the school's reform agenda. The position provides a strategic focus, facilitates whole school approaches and supports professional learning and development.

Providing mentoring support

The Head Teacher Teaching and Learning assists senior staff to implement the TARS process and in particular, to facilitate the development, monitoring and evaluation of individual professional learning plans. She supports senior staff by providing them with skills in educational leadership and program evaluation.

Staff needs are addressed through a school-based professional development program that is overseen by a professional learning committee. The school reports that the mentoring support offered by this program has enabled the school to strengthen its capacity to link the school plan with staff performance management and professional learning.

REFORM 2: Best practice performance management and staffing arrangements

Developing professional learning plans

All teachers develop and implement individual professional learning plans as part of the TARS process. These plans identify professional development needs that are related to the achievement of the school's goals and priorities. They also reflect teachers' career development needs and aspirations.

Teachers submit the plans to their supervisors at the beginning of each year and these are then collated and analysed by the Head Teacher Teaching and Learning. Whole school and faculty and group based needs are identified and addressed through the Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) sessions held weekly. According to the Principal, the school has learnt to better pace the delivery of professional learning activities and to select more effective programs. The school is focusing on the quality rather than the quantity of professional learning.

Managing staff performance and review

The school reports that it has linked the TARS and EARS processes more closely to school plans, targets and strategies and supporting school accountability. The Head Teacher Teaching and Learning has facilitated the process of improving the implementation of the TARS, building head teachers' capacity to better understand the purpose of the process and to implement it effectively. The school has focused on linking staff accountability with the school's support for staff development.

... Where are you keen to go? How do we help you get there? How does that align with our school and faculty program? How do we work as an overall team to all get to where we want to be? [Principal]

The Principal claims that most staff "now recognise its value." They see the benefit in discussing concerns with their supervisor, negotiating support structures, planning their professional learning and making sure that, at a faculty level, they are all heading in the same direction.

Supporting early career teachers

The Principal believes that as a result of the work of the Head Teacher Teaching and Learning:

- mentoring support provided to early career teachers and the amount of professional learning support they receive have increased
- the number of permanent and casual staff gaining NSWIT accreditation has increased. By the end of 2012, two teachers achieved accreditation at the level of Professional Competence.
- early career growth has translated into expert teachers
- the capacity for early career teachers to collect and use a wide range of data to inform their teaching and learning practice and the development of individual and whole school programs has increased
- the capacity for early career teachers to apply their professional learning and use student data to inform the design of student learning programs has increased.

The school reports that it is also planning for the future by ensuring that young teachers are able to develop professionally and are building their capacity to perform leadership and management roles.

Managing staffing mix

Through Low SES NP funding the school has continued to resource:

- a Year 6 Advisor position which is intended to facilitate effective transition of students to the school by increasing teachers' knowledge about students before they enrol at the school, enabling teachers to more effectively incorporate their educational needs in their teaching plans
- two 0.8 FTE literacy and numeracy Student Teaching and Learning Assistance (STLA) teachers to allow the school to provide programs better tailored to students' needs.

These positions assist the school to staff some strategic priorities designed to support the establishment of the middle years approach and the implementation of the whole school approach to providing instruction in literacy and numeracy.

REFORM 3: School operational arrangements that encourage innovation and flexibility

Employing support staff

The school employs several support staff members:

- an Attendance Officer (school's term) who works with other staff to improve student attendance. The Attendance Officer collates information, monitors, maps and analyses attendance patterns, reports to the executive team and follows up on non-attendance. She contacts parents and carers, using an SMS system, email and face-to-face contact.
- an Aboriginal Student Attendance Officer (0.6 FTE) who works closely with the CEO to encourage Aboriginal students to attend.

The school suggests that the employment of support staff provides the school with flexibility and improves its overall efficiency, enabling the school to:

- use professional staff more effectively, for example, enabling the Head Teacher Administration to focus on leadership priorities rather than on the day to day school operations, such as following up attendance issues
- effectively resource school strategies, by building key actions into staff's core roles and responsibilities as, "even with good intentions", adding duties to roles will not ensure timely and quality performance. For instance, the support staff enable the school to effectively follow up non-attendance, keeping records, maintaining ongoing contact with families and referring complex cases to the deputy and/or the HSLO.

The school believes that employment of support staff has made a positive contribution—for instance, they have helped the school to maintain and improve its overall student attendance rate over the last 3-4 years (see Reform Area 4 – Attendance). The support staffing strategy has also helped the school improve Aboriginal student attendance by establishing relationships with parents and the broader Aboriginal community.

As a result of staffing changes, and to enhance the future sustainability of the initiatives, the school has recently employed the CEO through its global budget. The role has been modified to include other duties. The school also hopes to retain the Aboriginal Liaison/Attendance Officer beyond the Low SES NP. Although the program has established structures and changed community attitudes about school attendance, "the human touch and personal interaction with the parents and community" is needed to maintain strong attendance [Principal].

Implementing team-based approaches

Initiatives funded through the Low SES NP are delivered through teamwork and collaboration. Some examples include:

- the whole school TPL initiative, which is designed to support the implementation of

school priorities and to create a culture of collective responsibility

- STLAs working collaboratively with faculty head teachers and classroom teachers in implementing Year 7-8 literacy and numeracy programs. These programs are highly structured, entail the integration of literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum and require the use of a common language.
- support staff working with other staff to promote and support student attendance with students and the broader community
- Year 6 Advisor initiative which has led to regular meetings with primary school staff, enhancing links between primary and secondary schools in the areas of literacy and numeracy, curriculum, ICT, transition to secondary school and teaching pedagogy.

School leaders believe that the team-based approaches have facilitated the development of a common understanding, and coordinated and focused actions.

Facilitating cooperation with other schools

The Head Teacher Teaching and Learning has worked with primary and secondary staff to improve the transition of students to Year 7. The new Year 6 Advisor position is designed to allow the school to better understand the teaching and learning pedagogy used by the primary schools and to identify any implications for the school. Senior staff believe that as a result of this initiative, teachers at the school have developed a better understanding of students' experience of learning in primary school and the starting point for their learning in Year 7. Programs have been adapted at the school to better meet students' learning styles and to take into account their cognitive development.

The school developed its science program to facilitate the development of a middle school structure. The initiative encourages primary and secondary teachers to identify student learning needs and determine the pedagogy that will best engage them. It promotes the joint use of staffing expertise and learning resources and facilities.

The school points out that the effectiveness of the initiative depends on the skill and knowledge of the teacher holding the position and on the responsiveness and engagement of primary school teachers. As a result of this initiative:

- primary and secondary science curricula are better aligned, providing continuity for students and consistency in approach. The limited capacity for primary schools to provide practical experiences has been a constraint for this initiative.
- the quality of professional dialogue has improved and the number of links and meetings between primary and high schools has increased
- the transition of students to the school and the engagement of students in learning have improved.

Establishing technological infrastructure

The school reports that it is promoting innovative approaches to integrate ICT into its everyday teaching and learning, school communication and accountability and reporting. It has purchased laptops for staff and is increasing students' access to Netbooks. More than 50 per cent of rooms have an interactive learning interface and computers located in classrooms are being used for a wider variety of tasks.

Low SES NP funding has been used to enable trialling and implementation of innovative approaches for using technology to support teaching, learning, communication and reporting. The systems trialled include Edval, Millennium, Clickview, MOODLE, Mathletics and SMS. In addition, MOODLE science and mathematics courses have been developed, together with policies on online harassment, use of communication devices, communication with teachers and the organisation of work areas.

A student technology survey undertaken at the end of 2012 indicated a 22 per cent increase in students' use of computers, from 55 per cent of students who used a computer at school in 2009 to 77 per cent in 2012.

REFORM 4a: Innovative and tailored learning opportunities for teachers

The school provides professional learning and development opportunities to support the career development of its staff and to assist them to comply with changes arising from new educational policies such as the Australian Curriculum and from legislative changes in areas such as disability and discrimination.

Analysing/using data

All staff have been trained to use SMART Data and to implement explicit teaching of NAPLAN sample questions in all KLAs. The school reports that KLA teachers are beginning to demonstrate understanding of the importance of collecting and analysing data and a capacity to use it to change teaching content, programs and practices.

Delivering literacy and numeracy programs

The school's key priority has been to support teachers to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes. Teachers have been assisted to implement a whole school approach to literacy and numeracy by integrating skill development across all KLAs and in all programs. They have also been trained to deliver specific intervention programs, such as, *Reading to Learn*, *Counting On*, *Mathletics* and *maths300*.

STLA teachers employed under the Low SES NP support staff learning by developing and demonstrating high quality teaching and learning resources. They assist teachers to use these resources in addition to any purchased material.

Using ICT

The school has continued to provide timetabled, site-based professional learning to help all staff to integrate technology into their teaching and learning. School administrative and support staff have also had access to professional learning designed to increase their technical skills and, as a consequence, their efficiency. Appointed ICT teachers have trained staff to use Moodle and integrate ICT in teaching and learning, such as *Clickview* video software and the use of connected classrooms to link students with those from other schools.

School leaders report that staff have increased their confidence and interest in using technology. Teachers are experimenting and trialling new strategies with the assistance of technical staff. Two teachers pursued this interest through enrolment in a Post Graduate Diploma in ICT Learning Pedagogy.

The Principal reports that head teachers' feedback highlights the impact of the professional development program.

My head teachers are also saying that they are observing teachers using those skills in their teaching . . . So the anecdotal data I have is saying that it is being well received and is being utilised fairly specifically across the school. [Principal]

Improving the quality of teaching

Teachers have been trained to use the QTF as a tool for quality planning and delivery. Staff in all KLAs have learnt to use an innovative template for programming that requires them to identify literacy, numeracy, gifted and talented, Aboriginal education and ICT strategies.

REFORM 4b: Innovative and tailored opportunities for students

Engaging students in learning

The school encourages and promotes school attendance through the work of support staff (see Reform Area 2 above). The school reports that the improvement in attendance has been clear. Figures 2 and 3 show the absenteeism rate in semester 1 for the period 2010 to 2013 for all students and for Aboriginal students respectively. Although the pattern varies across year levels, overall absenteeism was lower in first semester 2013 than in first semester 2010 and the pattern has been one of almost consistent decline across those years.

Supporting targeted students

Middle schooling students

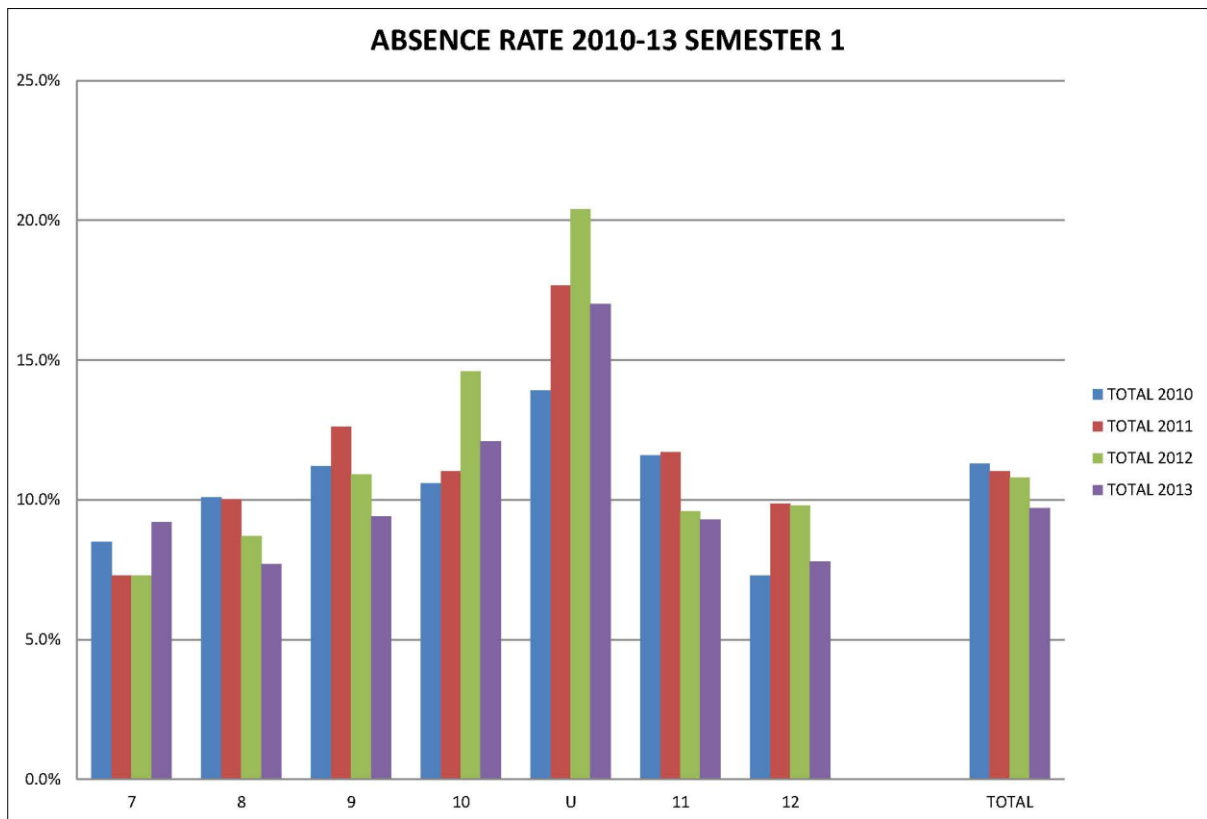
The school is catering for middle school students by:

- implementing the Year 6 transition to high school initiative
- establishing smaller class sizes in Year 7 and Year 8
- streaming classes based on academic aptitude
- expanding educational programs, including those aimed at supporting gifted and talented students and Aboriginal students.

The school reports that these strategies have led to:

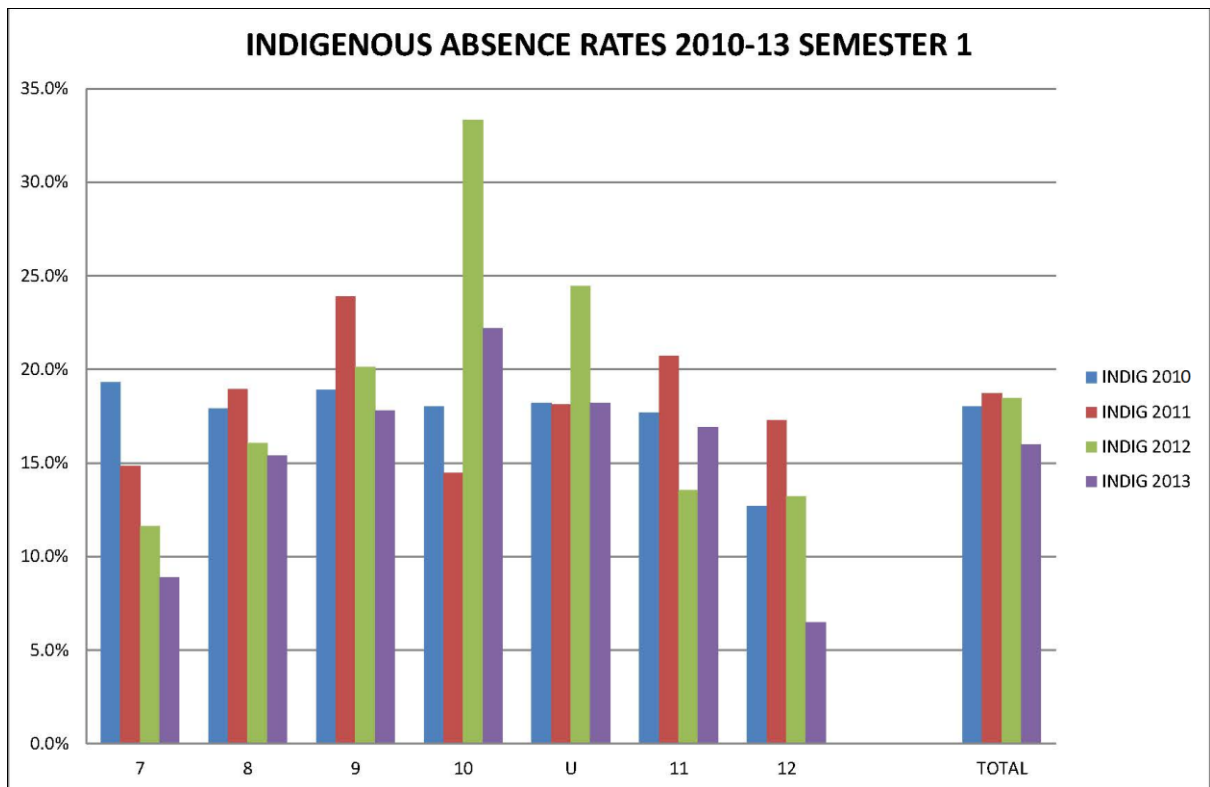
- better alignment of the secondary and primary school curricula
- establishment of a learning culture in the early years of high school
- the integration of Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum through the Eight Ways of Knowing Initiative
- improved individual learning outcomes for students in top and low bands.

Figure 2: Absence rates by Year level, Regional High School, 2010-2013



Source: Supplied by Regional High School.

Figure 3: Indigenous absence rates by Year level, Regional High School, 2010-2013



Source: Supplied by Regional High School.

Aboriginal students

The school caters for Aboriginal students through its overall teaching and learning reforms but also more specifically through initiatives such as:

- Breakaway/Adventure programs that are recognised as a 200-hour local content Board of Studies course
- partnership arrangements with the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), enabling the school to access the Yalbillinga PaCE (Parental and Community Engagement) program and the community garden facility at Erambie
- the behaviour support pathway to support students when they return to the Tirkandi Inaburra program
- raising funds to create an Aboriginal meeting place at school where parents and community members can gather
- providing students with access to Aboriginal Wiradjuri language courses through the LOTE curriculum
- strengthening cultural knowledge through whole school cultural events
- establishing a learning centre to assist Aboriginal students with assessment, literacy and numeracy.

Supporting student welfare

The school has continued to provide welfare support to students through the PBL and a range of anti-bullying and social skills programs. The school believes that these programs have been successful in developing a more positive school culture. DEC data shows a decrease in the number of suspensions since 2008, from 241 to 204 in 2011. The suspension ratio for all students decreased from 0.408 in 2008 to 0.284 in 2011.

REFORM 5: Strengthening school development and accountability mechanisms

Using evidence to inform planning

The school uses feedback from teachers, students and parents to inform school decision-making and future planning. The school has conducted annual surveys on school leadership from the School Map series since 2009.

Monitoring and evaluation

The school requires teachers to use the QTF as a tool for programming, monitoring and evaluating. Programs have been modified to permit explicit links to the school priority areas of numeracy, literacy, Aboriginal education, ICT and education for gifted and talented students. The school has also developed a structured assessment task template that includes unit evaluation.

School leaders report that the ongoing evaluation of classroom learning against quality teaching principles has increased professional dialogue and teachers' understanding of the importance of ongoing evaluation. Staff culture has changed, evident in increased openness to learning, peer assessment and external evaluations.

Future directions

School leaders believe that the school has benefited from its access to the Low SES NP. School capacity has been built through staff development, establishing new staff positions and the strategic use of resources.

The school plans to make the support staff positions ongoing given their central role in maintaining the school's improved level of student attendance. Similarly, as the Head Teacher Teaching and Learning position is considered to have helped the school to better manage change and to build teacher capacity, the school hopes to be able to fund the position through its global budget. Finally, the functions of the Head Teacher Welfare will be incorporated in a revised Head Teacher Administration position currently funded through the global budget.

11. South West High School

South West High School has continued to implement 19 initiatives in the five reform areas. The school has discontinued its transition from school teaching position and established an early intervention literacy and numeracy teaching position to meet better the needs of the school community. Further, the Quality Teacher Mentor initiative has been established to improve planning and classroom and assessment practices in all faculties.

The school believes that there have been long-term and sustainable improvements in teaching practice and student outcomes from its focus on teacher professional learning. Teachers have been provided with Quality Teacher Mentor support, an allocation of professional learning time and access to after school professional learning programs as well as school based professional learning opportunities. The partnership with the University of Newcastle has helped the school to build teacher capacity by using the NSW Quality Teaching Framework.

The whole school Year 7-10 reading and numeracy strategy has improved student learning outcomes. For example, school leaders point to improvements in Year 9 NAPLAN reading and numeracy results. They attribute the success to teachers' increased confidence and capacity to embed literacy and numeracy strategies across KLAs, team-based approaches to teaching and learning and targeted assistance provided by support staff.

The school believes that the expansion of technology based infrastructure and associated teacher training have shifted the school towards a learning culture that values greater engagement with relevant real-life contexts. Teachers are more skilled at accessing and utilising ICT-based resources within the classroom and can integrate these resources into effective teaching strategies.

The school reports that the multifaceted approach fostered by the Low SES NP will have an ongoing impact on teaching and learning. The shift in teachers' attitudes, skills and professional practice will promote improved student learning outcomes well into the future.

School Profile

South West is a public high school catering for around 800 girls in the South Western region of Sydney.

The school entered the Low SES NP in 2010 and is also supported by the Priority Schools Funding Program.

The current principal assumed the position in 2011. The school has 72.9 FTE teaching and non-teaching staff. Of the teaching staff, 51 per cent hold a degree or diploma and 49 per cent have a post graduate qualification.

Compared with all NSW government secondary schools, for the period 2010-12 South West HS had:

- a younger than average age profile of teachers, mostly because of a higher proportion of teachers aged 30 to 49 years (55.7 per cent compared with 46.5 per cent) and a correspondingly lower proportion of teachers 50 years or older (29.5 per cent compared with 43.5 per cent for all government high schools)
- a lower-than-average turnover of teachers (0.0 per cent compared with 4.3 per cent)
- a higher-than-average percentage of teachers who have been at the school for over 10 years (39.3 per cent compared with the average of 29.4 per cent)
- a lower-than-average number of days of sick leave (7.0 days compared with 8.8 for all government high schools).

Key initiatives

REFORM 1: Incentives to attract high performing teachers

Establishing leadership and strategic positions

The Low SES NP continues to fund additional time release from teaching duties for two Head Teacher positions:

- Head Teacher Creative and Performing Arts to lead, develop and manage quality teaching and assessment in the faculty
- Head Teacher Technology to coordinate professional learning to develop teachers' capacity in the use of ICT, especially IWBs, DER laptops and remote access for teaching and learning and supervise expansion of school's ICT infrastructure.

The school reports that these positions have strengthened the school's management structure enabling the executive as a whole to provide relevant and strategic leadership.

Providing mentoring support

In 2013 the school has maintained and expanded its Quality Teaching (QT) Mentor program to support teachers to develop improved classroom practice. Seven full-time Mentors have been appointed to faculties to support the provision of customised professional learning for individual teachers. The QT Mentors ensure that KLA/team management plans, programs, classroom practice, assessment tasks and feedback to students reflect the QTF and use of Quality Teaching lesson coding sheets and assessment practices.

The school reports that the QT Mentors have engaged in collaborative and innovative professional learning with individual teachers and supported the achievement of school targets. They have worked productively with teachers of varying levels of experience, from early career teachers to teachers seeking promotion. The use of this cooperative professional learning structure strengthened literacy and numeracy programs, quality teaching and student engagement through strategies such as classroom demonstrations and observations; presentations; provision of assistance with NAPLAN and HSC data analysis and program review.

The school's evaluation of the QT Mentor program, conducted in 2013, revealed that staff strongly support the program. Eighty six per cent of respondents to the evaluation survey

indicated that the program had “significantly assisted in the development of quality learning programs and in addressing faculty teaching and learning needs”.

Teacher responses to an internal survey conducted in the middle of 2013 also indicates support for the QT Mentor program because it:

- allowed for effective use of TPL time and the development of practical resources and teaching programs
- has been a significant help in making each TPL session worthwhile, meaningful and productive
- helped develop literacy/numeracy strategies in KLAs and quality assessment task criteria.

Supporting leadership training and development

The school has provided leadership training and development opportunities for teachers seeking accreditation beyond the proficient level. All executive staff and QT Mentors completed the TLSI course which provided a framework and strategies to plan and implement improvement through its focus on school planning and evaluation, teacher quality and leadership. The school reports that the TLSI training supported career path planning and strengthened school planning and evaluation processes. The level of discussion generated by the TLSI course, particularly in relation to acting for and evaluating school improvement, affirmed the value of the course.

Staff also supported professional development to assist teachers to implement the Australian Curriculum in 2014, with key personnel leading staff in curriculum planning and staff attending BOS forums, DEC information sessions, professional association workshops and local networks.

REFORM 2: Best practice performance management and staffing arrangements

Supporting early career teachers

All early career teachers are supported through the school’s mentoring program. The school reports that feedback from early career teachers indicates they value the mentoring support provided at both the whole school and faculty level. Further, teachers benefit from the assistance provided to gain accreditation with the NSWIT.

Managing staffing mix

The school continues to employ

- three additional quality targeted teachers to join the Student Learning Support Team (SLST) and implement the SLST Plan
- a Learning and Support Numeracy Specialist Teacher to support identified students in Stages 4 and 5
- a speech therapist to implement classroom-based targeted literacy intervention for identified students in Years 7 and 8 for two days a week

- an ICT specialist to support school-level systems development, implementation and coordination.

An early intervention teacher position was established at the beginning of 2013 to replace the transition from school support teacher. The early intervention teacher provides personalised support for at risk and under-performing students by liaising with students, parents, staff, counsellors and outside agencies and monitoring N¹² award warning letters, interviews and counselling sessions.

The school reports that the employment of additional staff to resources areas of priority and need has been essential to achieving positive outcomes through the Low SES NP.

REFORM 3: School operational arrangements that encourage innovation and flexibility

Employing school support staff

The school continues to employ a full time SLSO to assist students with Life Skill development and to deliver the Life Skills programs to identified students. A part-time School Administrative Officer (SAO) is also employed to support school improvement programs and evaluations.

The school reports that the appointment of SLSOs has been highly successful in providing support in the classroom for students at risk. It was noted that self-regulation skills had improved significantly and that students were more able to access teaching resources and achieve lesson outcomes with SLSO support.

Implementing team-based approaches

The student learning support team works with classroom teachers to support, for example, ESL students and students requiring remediation, particularly in reading comprehension and writing skills.

Establishing new organizational arrangements

The school has continued to implement an integrated professional learning, planning and delivery model. Teachers are allocated an additional period a fortnight into their workloads. The additional period is timetabled and teachers are required to account for the time through the TARS process. The school reports that TARS interviews and staff surveys conducted at the end of 2012 affirmed the success of the dedicated period allocation, with 96 per cent of staff stating that it was very useful and 98 per cent of staff recommending its continuation in 2013.

Teachers also have opportunities to access the Low SES NP school-based *Learn, Apply, Tell and Embed (LATE) after-hours TPL model* through an application process. The LATE model has been accessed by all faculties to support improvement in teaching practices and leadership capacity building. The school reports that the formal evaluation of the program indicates positive results.

¹² N Award: non-completion of course requirements

The LATE model is fantastic for PL . . . [Teacher]

The LATE model has really helped as a flexible option to use our time effectively as a faculty. [Teacher]

After hours professional learning at present has been really beneficial for me, as it has contributed to my maintenance of competence. Allocated time and place has been convenient and allowed me to gain knowledge and skills in different workshops. [Teacher]

Establishing technological infrastructure

The Low SES NP funding has been used to resource the ICT strategy by establishing a Head Teacher Technology position and expanding the technology based infrastructure—cabling, data projectors, laptops, IWBs, wireless connectivity and remote access—increasing staff and student access to technology. The Connected Classroom Program for videoconferencing with cluster, community and network schools has also been expanded.

Feedback from students indicates a high level of satisfaction with ICT access and utilisation. A student survey conducted at the end of 2012 and focus group discussions with students indicates that:

- 95 per cent of students are satisfied with the delivery of ICT in the school, indicating it makes learning more accessible and is beneficial to their learning
- implementing MOODLE has facilitated increased student access both at school and off site. Students have reported that on average they access MOODLE more than twice a week.
- accessing instruction through Smart boards and other interactive technology improves engagement in learning
- 97 per cent of all learning spaces within the school now have IWB access
- Stage 5 students, in discussion with their teachers, noted that they appreciated the explicit training provided in the use of Microsoft software, including One Note, which has supported them in organising their work using laptops, as well as improving engagement with ICT.
- upgrading ICT rooms and servers has generated greater efficiency for students with higher satisfaction levels (92 per cent).

The whole-school reading and numeracy strategy was implemented to support improved student learning outcomes for Year 7 to 10 students. An important outcome of this strategy is that all KLAs now have effective literacy and numeracy strategies embedded in all teaching and learning programs.

REFORM 4a: Innovative and tailored learning opportunities for teachers

Throughout the four years of the Low SES NP, teacher professional learning has been a key strategy within the school's plan to improve student learning outcomes by informing and improving the practice of teachers. Central to this teacher professional learning has been a focus on building teacher capacity through the use of the NSW Quality Teaching Framework.

Improving the quality of teaching

The school established a partnership with the University of Newcastle to facilitate staff's use of the QTF at the beginning of the Low SES NP. Academics from the university have worked with all faculties to support teacher professional learning and dialogue and strengthen classroom practice.

The academics facilitated the examination and collaborative coding of KLA-based assessment items using the Quality Teaching Assessment Practice Guide. After focused discussion and critical reflection, teachers in KLA teams developed a common understanding of the dimensions and elements of the QTF and agreed on amendments to enhance the quality of the tasks. The school reports that teachers found that by refining or redeveloping assessment tasks significant improvement in student achievement was evident.

In the second year of the program, academics supported KLA teams to develop classroom practice. Observed or videotaped lessons were evaluated using the QTF and this process, combined with robust discussion and critical feedback, enhanced professional reflection, and development.

The focus of the university partnership in 2013 has been on assessment. Academics assist KLA teams to use the Quality Teaching Framework to design high quality units of work, including lessons plans and assessment tasks. The school reports that teachers learnt about the importance of teaching more explicitly for assessment, higher order thinking skills and cultural knowledge and social connectedness.

The school reports that as a result of the ongoing university partnership, there is greater consistency in teachers' use of the QTF as a tool for unit evaluation. Teachers have valued the opportunity to develop quality units of work to improve student outcomes.

The partnership with Newcastle University has helped us as a faculty to revise the programs in order to target the students' learning. The external advice puts the teaching practice into perspective and forces us as a faculty to reconsider how to best teach to our students. [Teacher]

I have improved student feedback, especially in relation to assessment task feedback and giving students explicit criteria. [Teacher]

The QTF influences how I teach my students. I consider all the aspects in teaching different groups of students. I have reflected on the elements and altered aspects in the classroom. [Teacher]

The school received the 2012 *Director-General's School Achievement Award for Quality teaching*.

Using ICT

Incorporating ICT into teaching practice has been an important professional learning priority for the school. Teachers have been trained to use MOODLE as a platform for teaching and learning; Smart boards and the connected classroom through the LATE model of professional learning; school development days; intensive training of key staff; and services provided by DEC; and private providers.

Teacher feedback indicates that the focused training has enabled them to develop their capacity to use ICT, especially IWBs and DER laptops. Further, the assistance of the on-site technician has enabled them to overcome technical difficulties in a timely and efficient manner.

Delivering literacy and numeracy programs

Teachers have been trained to embed reading strategies and second language acquisition skills across KLAs and in all programs to support improved student learning outcomes for Year 7 to 10 students. All KLAs now have effective literacy and numeracy strategies embedded in all teaching and learning programs and teachers in all KLAs teach literacy and numeracy confidently.

The school reports a strong focus on reading for all team members, with 30 per cent of staff trained in practices and processes for effective reading. Twenty nine per cent of staff participated in the TELL professional learning program. Further, evaluations of staff accessing the LATE after-hours TPL model and the targeted faculty professional learning time suggest that teachers' capacities have been strengthened in analysing data, using the QTF, meeting needs of LBOTE students, and using ICT skills.

The school reports that the long-term and sustainable outcomes of its focus on professional learning include:

- the willingness of teachers to work collaboratively and collegially and observe and reflect on classroom practice and student assessment
- a shift in teacher perception from an emphasis on external workshops to one which places high value on collegial learning opportunities
- school-based professional learning that focuses on student learning and builds teachers' pedagogical skills
- improved teacher capacity to undertake action research to evaluate and improve programs and strategies.

REFORM 4b: Innovative and tailored opportunities for students

Engaging students in learning

The school implemented a whole-school reading and numeracy strategy to improve learning outcomes of Year 7 to 10 students. This strategy is designed to embed literacy and numeracy strategies across all KLAs and in all programs.

In 2012 the English faculty conducted a review of Year 8 reading to help students to develop their comprehension skills. Students, teachers and parents were surveyed to establish an understanding of reading habits and teaching practice. Explicit targets were then identified through an analysis of NAPLAN data as well as classroom observations. The review indicated that students and parents, while valuing reading, had a limited understanding of the strategies used to support comprehension and understanding. Teachers generated targeted interventions through the development of an explicit, meta-cognitive approach to the teaching of reading. They designed lessons to explicitly target reading strategies through the use of IWBs.

The school reports that pre and post testing after implementation revealed a mean improvement of two to three marks which, when projected onto NAPLAN Reading data, yielded significant results for students achieving in the lower and higher bands. NAPLAN test results indicate that the proportion of Year 9 students who achieve expected growth in reading increased by two percentage points from 57.4 per cent in 2011 to 59.4 per cent in 2012.

The school provides all Stage 4 and 5 students with access to Mathletics and My Maths programs in Stages 4 and 5. More than 30 Year 7-9 students accessed the voluntary after school numeracy tuition program at least weekly throughout 2012.

NAPLAN test results show:

- A two percentage point increase in the proportion of Year 9 students who achieve or exceed minimum growth in overall numeracy.
- A 9.3 percentage point increase in the proportion of Year 9 students achieving or exceeding minimum growth in overall numeracy (66.3 per cent in 2011 compared with 72.6 per cent in 2012).
- An increase in the Year 9 average growth scores in numeracy from 44 points in 2011 to at least 55 points in 2012.

Engaging students in learning

The school is also trying to expand and improve students' opportunities to increase their involvement in a range of student leadership activities – for example, the Student Representative Council (SRC), peer mediation, peer tutoring, amnesty, Bankstown Council partnership and environmental initiatives.

The school negotiates attendance plans to engage students at risk. The Low SES NP provides funding to release teachers from their duties to develop individual attendance plans and monitor student improvement in attendance, lateness and truancy. Funding has also been used to cover costs associated with the expansion of the SMS text messaging system to ensure its effective use by staff and parents.

A reward and recognition program is implemented to improve student self-regulation and sense of belonging in order to reduce the number of suspensions and improve students' attitude to school. The school has also expanded the number of welfare and support programs for at risk and special needs students, including refugees. Examples of programs include: Life Skills, remediation, Sister2Sister, Gifted and Talented, anti-racism, Pacific Islander community mentors, HSLO support, police programs and individual learning plans.

The school reports improvements in attendance, lateness and truancy as a result of monitoring at risk students, with truancy rates dropping by 48 per cent and explained absences increasing by 15 per cent. Informal discussions with parents at P&C meetings and school events suggest that parents also appreciate the text messaging system as a means of event notification.

Supporting transition from school

The school provides transition from school support to students through:

- developing individual transition plans for students at risk
- providing subject selection counselling and advice, designed to match students with appropriate courses and options
- meetings for parents and students with the Board of Studies Liaison Officer
- implementing an additional Year 10 work experience week
- implementing a ‘School to Work Log Book’ to inform decisions about the transition from school
- providing ‘catch up’ tuition to support students at risk of under achieving in Stages 5-6. In 2012, the school delivered up to 300 hours of after school tutoring and enrichment activities to HSC students.

Staff consider the catch up tuition strategy to have been successful, evidenced by the reduced number of return visits as well as the number of Board of Studies Warning Letters. An analysis of student exit surveys indicates that students seeking school-to-work or school-to-TAFE pathways emphasised the importance of the role played by the Early Intervention teacher in guiding them to responsible career and study decisions.

The school reports that all eligible students follow recognised vocational pathways and receive recognition for their attainments. Ninety two per cent of the students in the 2012 Year 12 cohort met HSC outcomes, six per cent entered full time employment, and two per cent of students went to TAFE. Similarly, 90 per cent of students in the 2012 Year 11 cohort met preliminary HSC outcomes, nine per cent went to TAFE and one per cent of them took up apprenticeships.

Supporting targeted students

Teachers embed Aboriginal perspectives in all teaching and learning programs and support the development and implementation of Individual Education Plans for all Aboriginal students at the school. The school has been building its relationship with the local AECG to support achievement of Aboriginal students and involvement in school decision-making.

REFORM 5: Strengthening school development and accountability mechanisms

Using evidence to inform planning

The school seeks feedback from members of the school community through a number of avenues—for example, parent forums, surveys, P&C meetings and parent-teacher

interactions. The school reports that the attendance rate improved by 29 per cent for the number of parents participating in the Term 2 2013 parent-teacher meetings.

Monitoring and evaluation

Separate faculty evaluations are also undertaken as part of the evaluation cycle in the school. In 2013 the History and PDHPE faculty reviews are being implemented and faculties are developing actions plans to address the recommendations arising from the school's Quality Teaching evaluation.

Faculty based evaluations are also being conducted, such as the Review of Year 8 reading practices and processes that highlight the importance of explicit teaching and the effectiveness of the meta-cognitive approach. Support provided by the QT Mentor and the TPL model was considered to be instrumental in the success of strategies that were identified and implemented as a result of the review.

Future directions

School leaders believe that sustainable improvements have been attained through the Low SES NP. The school's focus on professional learning has resulted in a shift in teachers' attitudes, skills and professional practice. Hence the enhanced teaching capacity will support continuous improvement in student learning outcomes beyond the Low SES NP.

As a result of implementing the whole school reading and numeracy strategy, teachers in all KLAs teach literacy and numeracy confidently. Additionally, the expansion of technology based infrastructure and associated teacher training has enabled teachers to use ICT-based resources within the classroom and integrate these resources into effective teaching strategies.

The school reports that Low SES NP has provided a multi-faceted legacy that will have a long-lasting impact on teaching and learning and support improved student learning outcomes well into the future.

12. Regional Central School

Regional Central School has continued to implement 14 initiatives in the five reform areas. At the beginning of the year, the school reduced the proportion of Low SES NP funding allocated to professional learning and development to fund an additional classroom teacher in the early years of schooling.

The school also sought to improve the staff performance and review process by better aligning individual professional learning plans with school goals and strategic priorities. Teachers have developed a more positive attitude to the TARS process as a result of being provided with additional tools, such as checklists and guidelines.

The school reports that investment in teacher professional learning has improved the quality of teaching at the school as evidenced by results of a number of surveys (NSW Institute of Teaching Standards, DASA and CLAS). It further reports that the improvement in the quality of teaching at the school has had a positive impact on students' attitude to reading. For example, there has been an increase in the number of texts that students are reading and an overall increase in students' reading ages.

The Low SES NP has enabled the school to improve its planning processes, using evidence collected through various means to identify its needs and strategic priorities. The challenge for the school is to ensure maintenance and enhancement of its organizational capacity through a global budget that is no longer supported by Low SES NP funding.

School Profile

Regional Central School is a K-12 public school catering for 100-150 students in the Northern Riverina area of NSW. The school entered the Low SES NP in 2010 and was also identified as a Centre for Excellence as part of the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership.

The current principal, appointed internally, assumed the position at the start of Term 1, 2013. The previous principal held the position for five years before taking up the position of principal at another school. There are currently 18.4 FTE teaching and non-teaching staff.

A comparison of Regional Central School with all NSW government central schools for selected characteristics of teachers for the period 2010-12 shows the Regional Central School has:

- a younger than average age profile of teachers, mostly because of a higher proportion of teachers aged 30 to 49 years (69.2 per cent compared with 47.1 per cent) and a correspondingly lower proportion of teachers 50 years or older (15.4 per cent compared with 37.6 per cent)
- a higher-than-average annual turnover of teachers – 23.1 per cent compared with 10.8 per cent
- a slightly lower-than-average proportion of teacher who have been at the school for

more than 10 years (15.4 compared with 17.8) and a somewhat lower proportion of staff who have been at the school between 4 and 10 years (23.1 per cent compared with 32.7 per cent)

- a slightly lower-than-average number of days of sick leave—7.1 days compared with 7.4 days for all NSW government central schools.

The school changed the focus of its Low SES NP strategy at the beginning of 2012, moving away from a strong focus on professional learning and development opportunities to strengthening its early years provision. By providing an additional primary classroom teacher for a year 1-2 class, the school wanted to establish a stronger learning foundation and allow for more timely student intervention.

Key initiatives

REFORM 1: Incentives to attract high performing teachers

Providing mentoring support

The school used Low SES NP funding to release teachers to access mentoring support provided by their HAT (funded through the *Centre of Excellence – Improving Teacher Quality NP*). The school reports that teachers have increased their level of confidence and developed innovative methods of teaching, in particular in the use of ICT to motivate and better engage students.

The Principal had provided mentoring support to executive staff (to the end of 2012) to help them to better understand their key responsibilities. One of the executive staff was appointed as the new school Principal at the beginning of the year.

Supporting leadership training and development

Staff have had opportunities to participate in leadership programs, such as, DEC's TLSI program, Stephen Covey's leadership programs and Learning Maps. All staff have been encouraged to develop and use their leadership skills, including in classroom learning.

REFORM 2: Best practice performance management and staffing arrangements

Developing professional learning plans

All teachers have continued to develop PLPs based on the NSWIT standards. The intention is to change to National Standards and use the AITSL framework by 2014. The PLPs also incorporate capacities included in the Data Analysis Skills Assessment (DASA) and Connected Learning Advisory Service (CLAS) survey instruments. The plans are available through MOODLE and evaluated through a formal evaluation in Term 3 as part of the TARS and EARS process.

The school reports improvement in the quality of the PLPs, that is, refinement of learning goals, selection of professional learning activities and reflections on application of learning.

Teachers have demonstrated enthusiasm for sharing learning experiences with their peers.

Managing staff performance and review

The school reports that it has consolidated and fine-tuned the TARS and EARS processes. To make the processes more effective and efficient there has been an alignment of staff PLPs, whole school professional development plans and school plan goals. In addition, the templates have been redeveloped to include a comprehensive checklist of items for staff to address prior to meeting with the supervisor. The checklist assists staff to identify the type and vehicle for identifying evidence to demonstrate compliance with professional standards—for example, units of work on MOODLE, professional learning recorded in PLPs, evaluations, student feedback, lesson observations, or through professional dialogue at TARS meetings.

The school reports that although the refinement process is still a work in progress, benefits have been evident. Through a focus on streamlining, the time spent on the compliance aspect of the process has been reduced. Instead, staff are able to use their time more constructively. For instance, the teacher and supervisor meeting is now more focused on professional dialogue and action. Further, staff consider TARS to be “less of a chore, less of a frightening experience” [Principal]. TARS is an accepted school practice, ensuring that all staff are performing and that timely intervention support is provided to teachers requiring assistance.

Supporting early career teachers

The school continues to provide targeted and informal mentoring support to early career teachers. The main areas of support in the early stages include coaching through lesson planning and delivery and classroom management. Mentors also guide early career teachers through the accreditation process, demystifying the steps and assisting teachers to intervene early and strategically.

The TARS process allows early career teachers to receive targeted support through regular informal conversations with their supervisor and tailored professional assistance that may include peer mentoring and professional learning strategies. The school reports that yearly evaluations of provision for early career teachers suggest teachers feel supported at the school, to settle, adjust and deliver the school programs.

Managing staffing mix

The school employed a classroom teacher at the beginning of 2013 to reduce class size in K to Year 2. As a consequence, there has been a reduction in the number of teacher release days available to staff for professional learning. The Low SES NP has permitted the school to strengthen its educational provision in the early years and provide more timely and relevant intervention.

REFORM 3: School operational arrangements that encourage innovation and flexibility

Implementing team-based approaches

The school facilitates teamwork through:

- whole school approaches to the delivery of literacy and numeracy programs and a K-12 perspective
- a professional learning model that encourages professional dialogue and sharing
- a whole school and stage planning processes that actively engage teachers in collaborative programming and action research projects
- assessment processes that develop consistency of teacher judgement processes.

Staff are provided with time release from their teaching duties to participate in collaborative practices. The school reports that opportunities provided to staff to share professional learning and professional practice have led to increased:

- professional learning through peer interaction
- staff willingness to contribute ideas and collaborate both inside and outside their faculty areas
- engagement in team-based action research projects in the school.

Establishing technological infrastructure

The school has established technological infrastructure to increase student engagement through e-learning, partly by allowing students and teachers to connect with their peers through the Connected Classrooms programs.

The infrastructure also assists the school to effectively manage the broad ranging and complex information bases. MOODLE enables student assessment data, school plans, review and evaluation reports, teaching and learning resources and planning resources to be stored and easily accessed. It also provides a vehicle for conducting surveys and forums with members of the school community and facilitating two-way communication between the school and the home.

REFORM 4a: Innovative and tailored learning opportunities for teachers

The school has reduced the level of funding for professional learning and development in 2013. To the end of 2012 it had provided each teacher annually with up to four days of time release from their duties to participate in professional learning and development opportunities. Through this time release, the school supports them to meet professional standards and the NSW Institute of Teachers' maintenance of accreditation requirements. The professional learning strategy aims to increase the quality of teaching skills by building teacher knowledge and understanding of syllabus outcomes.

Analysing/using data

The school has enabled staff to access the DASA training delivered by DEC and continues to support staff in using the software. Teachers consider the NAPLAN tests results at staff meetings, stage team meetings and individually. They also analyse HSC and school-based assessment data to inform their teaching practices. The school reports that data analysis is now a critical part of the school's operation, planning and delivery process.

Delivering literacy and numeracy programs

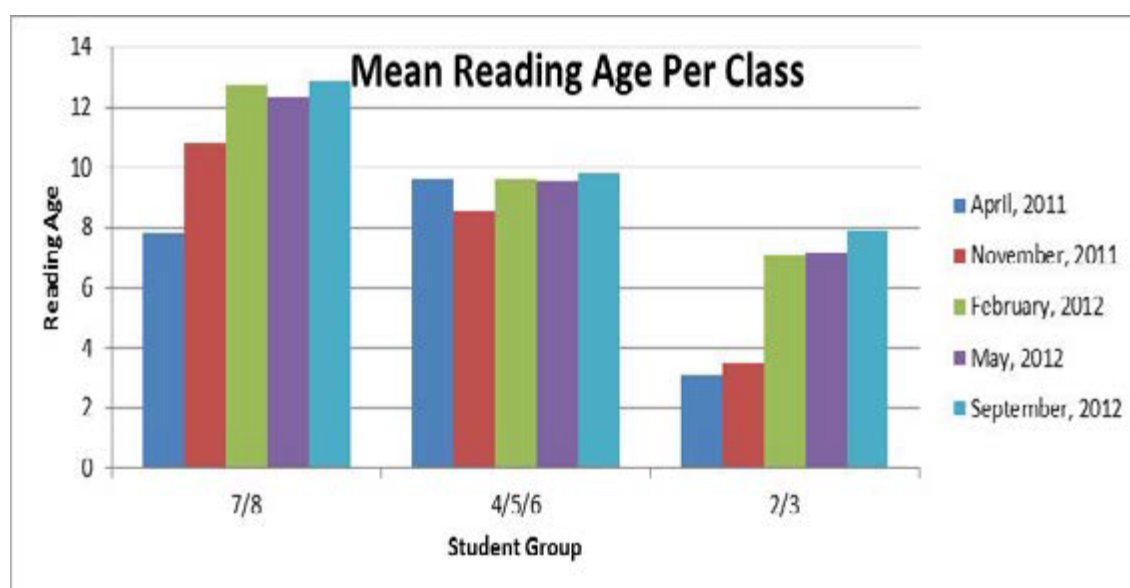
The school has continued to provide teachers, in particular those new to the school, with access to literacy-based training - AL, Accelerated Reading, Focus On Reading and Secondary Literacy Strategies (2SL). In addition to the formal training, teachers are able through the school's MOODLE to access a range of resources that have been developed by staff.

The school reports as a result of this training:

- an expanded range of explicit literacy strategies that teachers use in their teaching and learning
- staff are better able to develop explicit literacy strategies effectively and embed literacy strategies across the curriculum
- teachers' knowledge and understanding of effective literacy strategies have improved.

Staff professional learning has 'had an overwhelmingly positive effect on student attitudes to reading' [Principal]. Students are reading more texts and improving their reading age. The total books read by students in Years 2 to 8 rose by 16 per cent, from 942 in 2011 to 1117 in 2012. Figure 4 shows the average reading age improvement for students in Year 3 to Year 8 in 2012.

Figure 4: Mean reading age by Year level, Regional Central School, 2011-2012



Source: Supplied by Regional Central School.

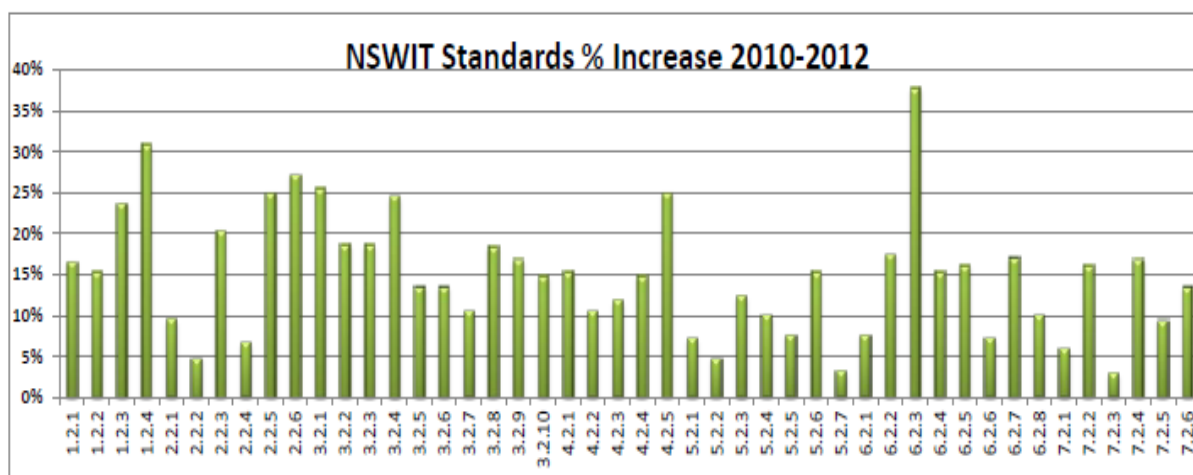
The school reports a more strategic approach to the delivery of 2LS¹³ in 2013, given the limited impact to date. The focus is on supporting teachers to effectively integrate the ‘Super 6’ literacy strategies across all KLAs.

The school reports that teachers’ access to numeracy-based training (i.e. TOWN, Mathletics and Maths Online and reports) has increased their confidence in implementing new programs and they are adapting their teaching more to meet the individual needs of their students. Teachers are better enabled to motivate students by using different modes of learning, including online homework and assessing student learning and track performance. Further, the e-learning methods enable teachers to better engage parents in student learning in the home.

Outcomes

The professional learning opportunities provided to teachers have enabled them to improve the quality of their teaching. The school reports that, by the end of 2012, all teachers demonstrated evidence of improvement on elements of the NSWIT Professional Teaching Standards. Figure 5 shows that teacher capacity increased on every professional standard over the three years.

Figure 5: Percentage increase in NSWIT standards, Regional Central School, 2010-2012



Source: Supplied by Regional Central School; data based on staff surveys

The areas of greatest improvement are:

- 6.2.3 Engage in professional development to extend and refine teaching and learning practices.
- 1.2.4 Apply current knowledge and skills in the use of ICT in the classroom to meet syllabus outcomes in the following:
- 2.2.6 Apply a range of literacy strategies to meet the needs of all students including:
- 3.2.1 Identify and articulate clear learning goals that reflect important conceptual understandings of the content/discipline(s) taught.

¹³ Secondary Learning Strategy, or 2LS, is a professional development program aimed at building teachers' capacity to integrate effective learning strategies that enable all students to become life-long learners. <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/docprs/publicViewEvent.do?jsessionid=996b1e23bbad38b527463b54f10a94093b4188455f6.e34Sa3eRbheTaO0Qc3uSa3qMaNr0?eventId=36099>

- 3.2.4 Select, develop and use a variety of appropriate resources and materials that engage students and support their learning.
- 4.2.5 Create, select and use a variety of appropriate teaching strategies and resources including ICT and other technologies to make content meaningful to students.

Teachers have been provided with opportunities to develop quality teaching skills by undertaking research projects, collaborating with their peers, developing teaching resources, completing self-paced professional learning and attending training programs.

The school supported teachers to complete credentialed programs. At the end of 2012, two teachers completed their submissions for accreditation at the level of Professional Leadership with the NSWIT and another two teachers completed a mentoring program. Staff accessing professional development opportunities are required to share their experiences with their peers, indicating new learning, its relevance to their work, and their application of the learning.

The school will sustain its newly developed capability by using staff expertise to continually mentor and train new staff. It will allocate funds to maintain and extend staff capacities and address new areas of need, such as student welfare and boys' education.

REFORM 5: Strengthening school development and accountability mechanisms

Using evidence to inform planning

The school reports that whole school planning “has been significantly improved since the initial development of a school situational analysis at the beginning of the Low SES NP initiative”. The school plan is a key document used to inform discussion and thinking at executive and staff meetings.

Monitoring and evaluating

The school plan is evaluated annually to determine the success of strategies implemented to reach school goals and meet targets. Data collected on the school MOODLE and through other means, such as focus group meetings, is analysed and used to evaluate the school plan.

Future directions

The Low SES NP has provided the school with resources to build the school's overall capacity to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The capacity has been built through the development of staff knowledge and skills, and teaching and learning resources, such as units of work that are easily accessible on MOODLE. This capacity will ensure the future sustainability of its quality educational delivery. The challenge is to ensure ongoing maintenance and enhancement of the school's capacity through strategic use of the school's global budget.

13. Catholic College

Catholic College has continued to implement 14 initiatives in the five reform areas. The College has made a number of changes. It has:

- refocused the work of the Leaders of Pedagogy to support the staff to introduce the National Curriculum*
- affirmed the success of stage 4 coordination support but discontinued stage 5 coordination funding. Alternative strategies are being explored to drive change at stage 5.*
- introduced AITSL's Reflective Partnership Model to facilitate staff development against the Australian Professional Standards Framework and to provide a basis for the development of professional learning plans and for improving the staff performance management and review process*
- established a student performance tracking system to facilitate data analysis and evidence-based planning and educational delivery.*

Evaluations and anecdotal evidence suggest that the initiatives are starting to have an impact. They are building staff capacity to operate effectively in a changing policy environment.

School Profile

Catholic College is a Catholic systemic school in the Sydney Archdiocese catering for around 1,100 boys in Years 7 to 12. The school entered the Low SES NP in 2011. It also receives ESL funding to employ additional staff (1.2 FTE).

The college principal has occupied this position for seven years. The current staffing complement is 99.4 FTE teaching and non-teaching staff.

Key initiatives

REFORM 1: Incentives to attract high performing teachers

Establishing leadership and strategic positions

Leaders of Pedagogy

The College has continued to employ two full time Leaders of Pedagogy (LOPs) to design and manage a range of innovative programs and activities to improve teacher pedagogy. It has retained one LOP and at the beginning of the year recruited a teacher from outside the school to fill a vacant LOP position.

The College is refocusing the work of LOPs in order to better respond to the needs of the school, in particular, allowing it to more effectively implement the Australian Curriculum by

facilitating improvement not only in pedagogy but also in KLA learning content.

Stage co-ordinators

The college is also providing higher duty allowances and two-period release time to the Stage 4 and Stage 5 coordinators who responsibilities include learning, literacy, ESL and transition to work and/or further education. The intention was to facilitate the development, implementation and evaluation of strategic programs and projects.

The school undertook a formal evaluation of this initiative to determine its effectiveness. Given evidence of the effectiveness of the initiative at the Year 7 level, the College intends to consolidate the initiative at that level only and reconsider its response for Years 8 to 10. Moreover, the evaluation highlighted the importance of effectively integrating provision for ESL and special needs students through collaborative models of leadership.

Providing mentoring support

The LOPs have continued to provide mentoring support to teachers, in particular, assisting them to prepare for the implementation of the Australian Curriculum by developing relevant pedagogy, assessment practices and program and unit development skills. The intention is to use the school's new centralised student achievement tracking system to provide feedback to teachers on the impact of their teaching on student learning.

The College reports that staff that have accessed the mentoring support have been able to make positive changes to their teaching practices:

It's more effective than a formal in-service. The most powerful thing you can do with a teacher is to just work with them—show them new things and model new ways of teaching to improve their practice. [LOP]

REFORM 2: Best practice performance management and staffing arrangements

Developing professional learning plans

In 2013 the LOPs are implementing a new initiative—the facilitation of teacher PLPs using the 'Reflective Partnership' method. Teachers have been briefed on the method and assisted to use the AITSL professional standards framework to rate their teaching practice. They will be individually matched to a 'partner' who will be responsible for listening to the teachers' reflections of their ratings and will explore the implications for their professional learning. The partner will play an important role in assisting staff to articulate their professional learning goals and develop and implement a plan for achieving those goals.

Managing staff performance and review

The Reflective Partnership method is being incorporated in the school's performance management system to improve its effectiveness. The school requires all staff to undertake the Personalised Performance Professional Review (PPPR) to facilitate teacher professionalism and accountability through continuous improvement. The Reflective Partnership Method will help staff to identify learning needs and collect evidence to demonstrate the achievement of learning goals as part of the PPPR process.

Supporting early career teachers

The College has continued to implement the *Leaders of Learning* initiative for early career teachers aspiring to take up leadership positions. Time release is provided to selected teachers to take up a range of Assistant Coordinator positions created through the initiative.

The school reports that this initiative is effective in providing aspiring staff with leadership experiences complemented with mentoring support. A formal evaluation of the initiative will be implemented to determine the future options and planning.

Managing staffing mix

As indicated above, the College has established Assistant Coordinator positions to support early career teachers to devise innovative ways to succession staff into leadership roles at the school and to retain quality early career teachers. Anecdotal evidence suggests that early career teachers have progressed at different rates. The challenge for the school is to determine the ideal conditions for this strategy to be effective.

The College also employs casual teachers to staff the homework centre.

REFORM 3: School operational arrangements that encourage innovation and flexibility

Establishing new organizational arrangements

The *Collaborative Learning Space* created at the beginning of the Low SES NP continues to facilitate cooperative learning for staff and students alike. Teachers use the space to share their learning with their peers and/or observe demonstrations of good teaching practice. They also timetable their classes to enable them to use innovative pedagogy, including team teaching and cooperative learning methods.

The school reports that this initiative has been successful in:

- supporting staff to develop new pedagogies, in particular, the integration of ICT into their teaching and learning
- engaging students in their learning through the use of cooperative learning methods and interactive technology. Students use the electronic white board to share ideas with their peers and learn from them.

REFORM 4a: Innovative and tailored learning opportunities for teachers

Improving teaching quality

The College continues to provide opportunities for teachers to improve the quality of their teaching by engaging in innovative school-based professional learning activities organised by the LOPs. A significant change is the emphasis on using the Australian Curriculum as the stimulus for change and the context for professional learning. Consequently, the College is refocusing the collaborative initiatives designed to facilitate teacher learning to support the school's efforts to prepare staff for the implementation of the Australian Curriculum.

- The Teacher Learning Community groups will focus on new and emerging curriculum priorities.
- The 'Strategy a Month' initiative, held in the collaborative learning space, will enable staff to continue to share their learning with their peers.
- The 'instructional rounds' method will be used to assist staff to deliver new programs by developing new skills, such as design skills.

The school reports that these initiatives have motivated staff to engage in professional learning activities that are directly relevant to their work. They have provided opportunities for staff to support the learning of their peers by sharing their knowledge and expertise. Similarly, staff have discovered the wealth of knowledge that exists at the school and the resources that are available.

Analysing/using data

The College has recently established a centralised student achievement tracking system which will enable student achievement data to be analysed and used as a basis for the identification of both individual and collective professional needs and, correspondingly, the development of professional learning strategies.

The challenge will be to analyse and present data in ways that are meaningful and relevant to the everyday contexts of teachers' work, demonstrating its value in providing feedback on the impact of programs.

REFORM 4b: Innovative and tailored learning opportunities for students

Engaging students in learning

Senior students volunteer to mentor students at the homework centre twice a week. They engage Year 7 students in literacy based activities and assist them to complete their homework. The school reports that this program has helped students to increase the quantity and quality of the homework they complete.

The College discontinued the Years 7 to 8 Peer Tutoring Reading program that aimed to increase students' reading speed and ability to read for meaning due to the declining number of Year 11 students volunteering to participate in the program.

Supporting transition from school

The Low SES NP has continued to fund the higher duty allowance of the VET coordinator whose role is to support VET pathways options by expanding the industry area offerings to meet students' needs. The coordinator works with an external agency to manage work placements for students, in areas such as information technology, metals, engineering and construction industries and hospitality.

The school reports that this initiative has been effective in facilitating the transition to work for non-matriculation students. The number of customised study programs devised for individual students has increased, providing students with increased pathways into VET courses delivered at local TAFEs.

Supporting student welfare

The College continues to provide student wellbeing services through:

- counselling services offered by the school counsellor and funded through the Low SES NP
- pastoral care sessions, which address issues such as cyber bullying, time management, and communication
- social and emotional support provided through the Rosemount Program. Low SES NP funds are used to engage CatholicCare to deliver the program to targeted Year 8, 9 and 12 students, assisting them to develop social skills, manage anger, and deal with academic stress and anxiety. The school reports that the Rosemount Program has proved effective in improving students' behaviour.

REFORM 5: Strengthening school development and accountability mechanisms

Using evidence to inform planning

The recently established centralised student achievement tracking system will allow staff to analyse student data and use it as a basis for planning whole school curriculum and stage, year level and individual classroom programs. The tracking system will also enable the college to support teachers individually and collectively to identify professional learning needs.

Monitoring and evaluations

The college has undertaken a number of evaluations designed to assess the effectiveness of Low SES NP initiatives. Consequently, some initiatives are being consolidated while others have been refocused or discontinued. A formal evaluation of all initiatives will be conducted in 2013 to inform the program's direction for 2014.

Future directions

The College will access the Low SES NP until the end of 2014, enabling it to refine and consolidate the innovative initiatives. It has refocused the work of the LOPs, ensuring that professional learning and teaching and learning activities are relevant to the immediate needs

of the college, in particular, the implementation of the Australian Curriculum.

14. Western Public School

Western Public School continued to implement 18 initiatives across the five reform areas.

The school has discontinued a speech pathology position and used the funding to extend the existing ESL teaching allocation to improve the literacy outcomes of LBOTE students.

The school reports the effectiveness of professional learning and development activities. These include providing mentoring support to staff as well as opportunities for teachers to be trained to deliver data driven, best practice literacy and numeracy programs, use ICT and support targeted students.

Evaluations and anecdotal evidence suggest that teachers' access to professional learning and development has resulted in the increased use of student data and improvement in the quality of planning and classroom practice.

The school reports that the improvement in students' engagement in learning and in their literacy and numeracy attainment can be attributed to not only teachers' enhanced teaching skills but also assistance provided by the Low SES NP funded SLSO. Targeted Early Numeracy test results and NAPLAN Year 3 and Year 5 reading results demonstrate improvements.

The Low SES NP has enabled the school to build its leadership and teaching capacity to sustain its improved educational provision into the future. The school intends to explore the employment of SLSO support beyond the Low SES NP.

School Profile

Western Public School is a preschool to Year 6 school in the Western Sydney region with an enrolment of around 200 students. The school entered the Low SES NP in 2010 and also receives support from the PSFP.

The current principal commenced at the start of Term 2 in 2012. The school currently has 17.6 FTE teaching and non-teaching staff. A comparison of Western Public School with all NSW government primary schools for selected characteristics of teachers for the period 2010-12 shows that Western Public School has:

- a younger than average age profile of teachers, with a higher proportion of teachers aged 30 to 49 years (69.2 per cent compared with 45.7 per cent) and a correspondingly lower proportion of teachers 50 years or older (23.1 per cent compared with 47.0 per cent)
- a lower-than-average annual turnover of teachers (7.7 per cent compared with 16.3 per cent)
- a lower-than-average percentage of teachers who have been at the school for more than 10 years (15.4 per cent compared with 23.3 per cent)
- a lower-than-average number of sick leave days taken (5.0 days compared with 7.4 days for all schools).

Key initiatives

REFORM 1: Incentives to attract high performing teachers

Establishing leadership and strategic positions

The school has continued to:

- employ an experienced Principal to provide mentoring support to executive staff and teachers aspiring to positions of leadership
- release a Deputy Principal to coordinate the Low SES NP, provide mentoring support to teachers, and collaborate with the regional Low SES NP officer.

According to the Deputy Principal, she has been able to be more productive in her work and more effective in her leadership of staff because of the additional time allocation.

Providing mentoring support

The Principal Mentor has continued to meet regularly with the Principal and the two Deputy Principals and has worked with a number of teachers who are aspiring to take up leadership positions in the future. She has also facilitated the entire TLSI course over the last four years and assisted with the identification of school priorities.

I think the benefit is that it is a pair of outside eyes—she can look at things in a different way. [Deputy Principal]

The Principal Mentor has assisted the staff to understand their role as leaders in the school and supported them in developing skills and abilities.

It is a sustainable thing because once the funding stops you've got that training. [Deputy Principal]

The Low SES NP funded Deputy Principal also mentors teachers through provision of:

- in-class support demonstrations in literacy, numeracy and technology to ensure that elements of the QTF are embedded in practice across KLAs.
- assistance with devising assessment tasks, analysing student data and developing learning continuums.
- assistance with the implementation of programs that have been developed using the QTF.

Supporting leadership training and development

All staff have had the opportunity to undertake the TLSI course and to participate in professional learning sessions held during staff meetings.

The professional learning opportunities have enabled staff to gain a better understanding of the overall operation of the school and the importance of their role to the school community.

I think there has been a lot more reflection on how we do things and there has been good collaboration . . . [Deputy Principal]

REFORM 2: Best practice performance management and staffing arrangements

Developing professional learning plans

The school requires teachers to write professional development plans as part of the TARS process. At the beginning of each year teachers discuss with their supervisors learning goals that are related to the QTF, their career aspirations and school goals. Opportunities available to teachers to achieve their professional learning goals are identified and the school executive develops a whole school learning plan based on the content of the PLPs.

Managing staff performance and review

The school uses the QTF as a basis for planning classroom delivery, program implementation and staff performance review. It also uses insights gained through the TLSI course to enhance teacher and school effectiveness—for example, to promote the importance of collaborative and complementary efforts of staff to achieve school goals and targets.

Supporting early career teachers

The Low SES NP funded Deputy Principal is responsible for early career teachers, ensuring that they have access to professional learning opportunities that will allow them to meet NSWIT teaching standards and requirements. She provides ongoing mentoring support and is responsible for their performance management.

Managing staffing mix

The school discontinued the employment of a speech pathologist because the school's capacity had been built through staff training, resource development and establishing links with external agencies. Low SES NP funding was used instead to employ an ESL teacher to improve the literacy outcomes of LBOTE Years K to 6 students by providing them with additional support during literacy sessions. The ESL teacher works in partnership with classroom teachers to develop and implement classroom programs, ensuring capacity to differentiate the learning for LBOTE students.

REFORM 3: School operational arrangements that encourage innovation and flexibility

Employing school support staff

The school has continued to employ a SAO for one day per week to manage the school database and purchase resources, and two 0.8 FTE SLSOs to implement the school's learning intervention program. The SLSOs work in K to 6 classrooms and at times in the preschool, providing additional structured support to targeted students. They work with small groups of students, delivering modified learning activities to meet specific literacy and numeracy needs.

The student support team considers student assessment data and referrals made by teachers at weekly meetings and identifies students and classes eligible for the support service and the type of assistance required. The team also determines the level of SLSO to be allocated to students and classrooms as well as other support services, such as counselling support. For instance, in 2013 the priority was for the school to intervene as early as possible and as a result, SLSOs spent most of that year working in the early years classrooms assisting students to effectively transition to school. The student support service is continually reviewed and adjusted to meet student needs.

The Low SES NP funded Deputy Principal coordinates the SLSO classroom service and interacts with SLSOs on a daily basis, discussing learning strategies and their impacts. She ensures that classroom teachers and SLSOs are clear about the student support strategy.

The school reports that SLSOs have assisted students in their learning. They develop a strong knowledge base about the students they work with – their daily news, preoccupations, attitudes and achievements. As a result they provide the school with important insights into program effectiveness. The school plans to maintain a reduced time allocation of the SLSOs and to increase their level of training so that they can more effectively respond to need.

Implementing team-based approaches

The Low SES NP continues to provide increased time release to KLA and stage coordinators to allow them to perform their role more effectively. Whole stage planning days, at the beginning and end of Term 1 and at the end of Term 2 and 3, also provide opportunities for discussion, reflection, consistent teacher judgment activities and collaborative programming.

School leaders believe that the school has developed a culture of teamwork and collective responsibility as a result of the additional time allocated for joint planning and delivery and opportunities for professional learning and development. The evidence of this is the development of whole school approaches to teaching and learning, collaboration with programming and classroom delivery, and the sharing of resources within stages and KLAs—for example, a shared file in the computer room for all KLAs.

REFORM 4a: Innovative and tailored learning opportunities for teachers

All staff have been provided with additional time release to enable them to participate in school-based professional learning that supports the school's priorities.

Analysing/using data

The Low SES NP funded Deputy Principal is ensuring that all teachers are able to analyse relevant data to inform classroom literacy and numeracy programming. Teachers have had opportunities to be trained to:

- understand school-based student assessment methods and purposes
- collect and analyse school-based data, such as *Best Start* assessment data, *TEN* data and *Early Arithmetical Strategies* (EAS) data
- understand data on the DEC intranet and use the associated applications
- analyse Smart2 data, particularly NAPLAN data, identifying results for classes, groups of students and individual students.

Staff are also helped to use data to inform: class programming, especially the development of literacy and numeracy strategies; teaching and learning provision for specific groups, such as Aboriginal and LBOTE students; and the development of personalised learning plans.

Delivering literacy and numeracy programs

The school's key focus has been on strengthening teachers' capacity to improve students' literacy and numeracy learning outcomes. It continues to ensure that all staff are trained to deliver the Australian Curriculum and the specific school programs, such as Accelerated Literacy (AL), Prioritising Grammar, L2¹⁴, the K–2 Comprehension project and the TEN program.

Targeted staff are being released from teaching duties to be trained to:

- use the literacy continuum and numeracy continuum to inform school planning, class programming, consistent teacher judgement and target setting
- develop units of work that incorporate rich tasks and Super 6 comprehension strategies.

Supporting targeted students

All staff have accessed professional learning in the *8 ways of learning* to support them to be more effective in teaching Aboriginal students. They attended an Aboriginal Education Conference and participated in a whole staff professional learning day, exploring and developing the Aboriginal Education Policy.

Using ICT

The school has provided ongoing professional learning to support teachers to integrate ICT strategies into their classroom teaching and learning. They have been encouraged to use technology to deliver innovative teaching practices, through the use of IWBs, the connected classroom and digital projectors.

¹⁴ Literacy Lessons (L2), a new program providing students at risk in Year 2 with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to achieve stage 1 literacy outcomes.

The school reports that as a result of professional development accessed by teachers, their confidence in using technology has increased—for example, using IWBs across all KLA teaching and learning, and to design and share quality resources.

Outcomes

The school reports that teacher professional development has led to an increased use of student data and to an improvement of the quality of classroom teaching. Teachers are able to effectively use the QTF, identifying specific elements and designing related assessment tasks and activities.

I think you see the practice in the activities they are doing with the kids now. [Deputy Principal]

Moreover, teachers' increased access to professional learning has improved the quality of staff discussion and reflection and produced consistent teacher judgement, whole school approaches and collaborative programming. The school has been able to build its capacity to sustain the delivery of quality future programs by ensuring that its workforce is able to train new staff to deliver programs and use teaching and learning resources developed by the school, such as units of work and assessment tasks. The school is also well placed to continually improve practice through program evaluation and the development of new strategies to meet new and emerging needs.

REFORM 4b: Innovative and tailored learning opportunities for students

Supporting literacy and numeracy learning

Students are provided with opportunities to improve their literacy and numeracy learning outcomes through their access to high quality literacy and numeracy programs and enhanced teaching skills, such as AL and TEN.

Students are able to participate in competitions (such as the Premiers Reading Challenge) and to access interactive learning programs (such as Mathletics, Reading Eggs and Literacy Planet). The school has purchased high quality literacy and reading resources through the Low SES NP to motivate students to access library resources and participate in the home reading program.

Supporting targeted students

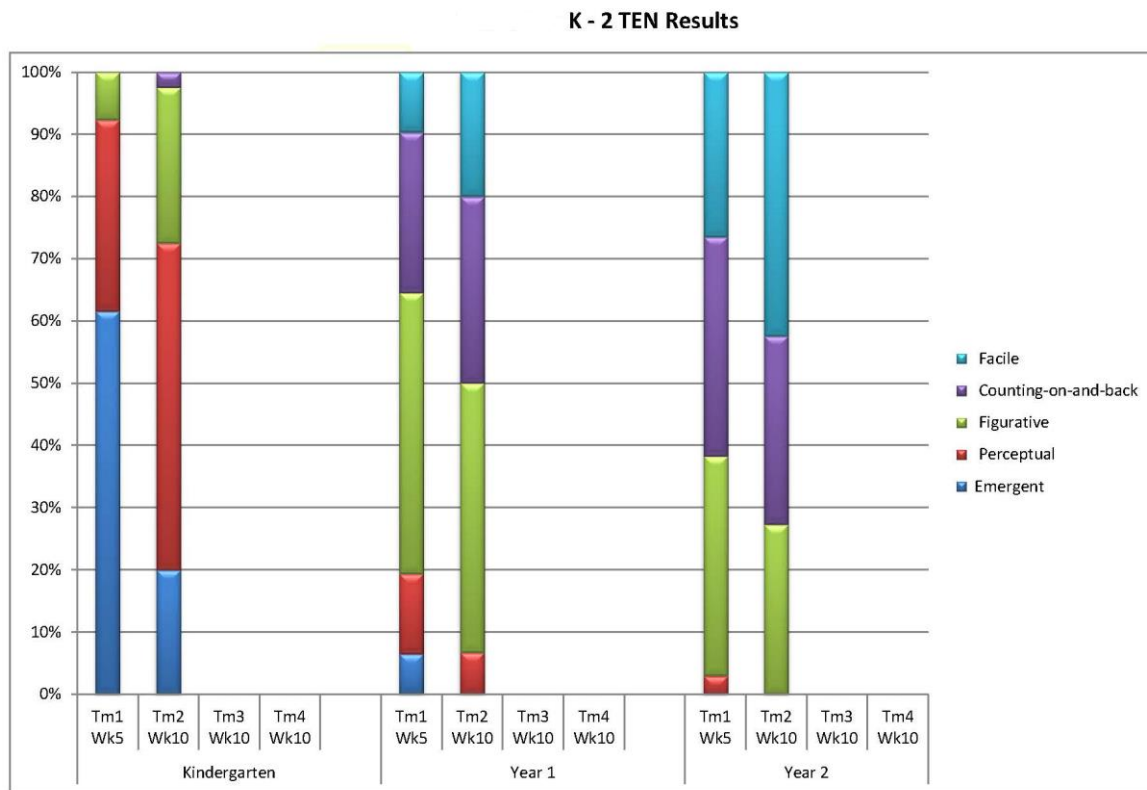
Students are able to access individualized support through:

- SLSO assistance to students from K to Year 6
- development of Early Learning Plans for all kindergarten students
- development of Personalised Learning Plans for all Aboriginal students
- development of attendance plans for targeted students
- peer support programs across stage groups, such as buddy programs.

Outcomes

The school reports an improvement in engagement and achievement in literacy and numeracy outcomes. TEN data shows strong growth over the first two terms of 2013, indicating progression from lower to higher levels of attainment (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Results from TEN scores, K-2 Years, Western Public School, 2010-2012



Source: Supplied by Western Public School.

NAPLAN test results also show some improvement:

- 23 per cent of Year 3 students achieving proficiency in Reading in 2013 compared to 20.5 per cent in 2012
- 12 per cent of Year 5 students achieving proficiency in Reading in 2013 compared to 9 per cent in 2012.

The Reading Recovery data shows that by the middle of 2013, 73 per cent of students were meeting benchmarks of 5–8.

REFORM 5: Strengthening school development and accountability mechanisms

Using evidence to inform planning

The School Plan “is referred to constantly and modified according to changing needs” [Deputy Principal]. The school plan is a working document used by staff at staff and team meetings to inform their educational planning.

Monitoring and evaluating

The development of the school plan was informed by the whole school evaluation undertaken as part of the Low SES NP as well as by the cyclic review conducted in 2011. These processes have enabled the school to better understand its needs and challenges.

Future directions

The school believes that there have been benefits from its participation in the Low SES NP since the beginning of 2010. Program funding has enabled the school to build strong leadership and quality teaching capacity, through professional learning and development, mentoring support, and the purchase of high quality teaching and student learning resources. This capacity will ensure that new staff will be trained effectively by school staff and supported to implement the school's programs and policies. The school is exploring ways of maintaining SLSO support to students requiring assistance in the future.

15. Chambers Public School

Chambers Public School has continued to experience cultural change by implementing 14 initiatives across the five reform areas. The school reports positive effects of the Low SES NP initiatives:

- The Deputy Principal Instructional Leadership position has strengthened the capacity of the school's executive and staff collaboration and teamwork. The staff performance management process has been improved by allowing additional time for quality conversations and professional learning planning.*
- Leadership training and development opportunities provided to staff have built the school's leadership capacity. More teachers are now aspiring to take up leadership positions and to leading regional networks.*
- Aboriginal support staff have made a positive contribution, evidenced by students' increased engagement in their learning, the increase in trust between parents and the school, and a reduction in the suspension rate.*
- The partnership with the University of New England has assisted staff to effectively use the QTF as a basis for their planning, student assessment and classroom delivery.*
- The development of individual learning plans enables teachers to plan and deliver a differentiated curriculum. The whole school approach to student welfare has increased students' engagement in the classroom and decreased suspension rates.*

The Low SES NP has built the school's capacity to use evidence to inform school planning and implement change through collaborative team structures and processes.

School Profile

Chambers Public School is a preschool to Year 6 government school in the New England Region catering for between 200 and 250 students. The school joined the Low SES NP in 2010 and is also supported by PSFP and Norta Norta.

The principal has been at the school for eight years and the school currently has 24.7 FTE teaching and non-teaching staff. A comparison of Chambers Public School with all NSW Government primary schools for selected characteristics of teachers for the period 2010-12 shows:

- a diverse age profile of teachers, with a higher proportion of teachers aged below 30 (10.0 per cent compared to 7.3 per cent); a lower proportion of teachers aged 30 – 49 years (30 per cent compared with 45.7 per cent); and a higher proportion of teachers aged over 50 (60 per cent compared with 47 per cent).
- a lower-than-average annual turnover of teachers (5.0 per cent compared with 16.3 per cent)
- a lower-than-average percentage of teacher who have been at the school for more

than 10 years (10 per cent compared with 23.3) and a higher than average proportion of teachers between 4 and 10 years (65 per cent compared with 35.9 per cent)

- a very slightly higher-than-average number of sick days per year (7.8 days compared with 7.4 days for all primary schools).

Key initiatives

REFORM 1: Incentives to attract high performing teachers

Establishing leadership and strategic positions

The school has continued the Deputy Principal (DP) position, 0.2 FTE, to provide instructional leadership to staff through professional learning and development. The DP's focus has moved from K to 2 to Years 3 to 6, enabling the school to strengthen its K to 6 educational provision.

The school reports that the Instructional Leadership position has had a positive impact. It has:

- facilitated continuity and consistency in teaching and learning across the school
- provided the DP with an opportunity to enhance and learn new leadership skills through the role
- enabled the Principal to delegate leadership responsibilities and therefore have more time to connect with classroom learning, visiting classrooms and interacting with students and parents in the playground.

Supporting leadership training and development

The school supports staff developing leadership skills. Executive staff have also been provided with opportunities to develop leadership skills through participation in the DEC TLSI program and the Marzano Executive Leadership Development workshops. The staff as a whole participated in the Marzano workshop on the art and science of teaching. According to the Principal, these professional learning opportunities have “made a big difference—getting everyone to think about the same thing at the same time.”

The school reports that because of their professional learning, the overall leadership and teaching capacity of the school has been enhanced.

There was a time here when staff were resistant to any change. [Principal]

Staff are no longer reluctant to express interest in taking up leadership positions at the school.

I'm seeing staff coming forward now, wanting to have a go at executive because they are believing in themselves now and they are able to contribute in a far greater way to the way the school is running. [Principal]

Two staff members are leading regional networks and facilitating professional development in the school. Staff meetings are now led by teachers and as a result there is an increased level of collaboration in planning and educational delivery.

We've had two new members of staff enter our school and they are now being swept up

by a feeling of ‘we can do’ at this place rather than ‘we can’t do.’ [Principal]

REFORM 2: Best practice performance management and staffing arrangements

Developing professional learning plans

All staff negotiate professional learning plans with their supervisors. These plans reflect the school’s management plan goals and priorities and address the specific professional needs of the individual teachers. The teachers identify their learning goals and strategies, keep records of their classroom application of new learning, and document reflections and professional learning.

The school reports that staff professional learning plans are effective because they enable multiple goals to be achieved. They provide individualised support, cater for the needs of the staff as a collective and enable the school to achieve its strategic goals and meet accountability requirements.

Managing staff performance and review

The Low SES NP has allowed the school to allocate more time to the implementation of EARS and TARS and emphasise ‘quality conversations’ between staff and supervisors. The school reports that this approach increased the level of collaboration in the school and staff ownership of the process and commitment to self-improvement.

For some [staff] it has been a difficult journey, but you reach that point where it is like being swept upon the crest of a wave. Suddenly when you are on the wave you have to stay on, otherwise you are left behind. That has been the effect. [Principal]

Managing staffing mix

The school continues to engage the services of a speech pathologist, for 0.2 FTE, to support the needs of targeted students. The speech pathologist identifies students requiring assistance and works with teachers and parents to develop and implement intervention strategies.

REFORM 3: School operational arrangements that encourage innovation and flexibility

Employing school support staff

The school discontinued the employment of the SAO, previously funded for 0.2 FTE. However, it continued to employ an Aboriginal SLSO for 1.0 FTE to support Aboriginal students with their learning.

Discussion with the school suggests that Aboriginal staff have had a positive impact on Aboriginal students. The key indicators are:

- a reduced number of Aboriginal student suspensions
- an increased engagement of Aboriginal students in their learning and communication with staff

- an increased level of trust between the Aboriginal community and the school.

Implementing team-based approaches

The school reports that teamwork is now part of the school's operation. Whereas in the past staff "were directed" to work together, teamwork is now a "core value". Teachers collaborate on a daily basis with executive staff, working through meeting agendas, planning and making joint decisions about whole school and classroom programs.

I see highly engaged staff really discussing the students and the nuts and bolts of what we are on about in the development of our program. [Principal]

This cultural change is due to staff's access to professional learning opportunities in leadership, emphasizing the importance of teamwork. School planning days have provided opportunities for developing an understanding of the significance of whole school approaches to programming, assessment, teaching and learning.

Establishing new organizational arrangements

The school continues to work with the changed school structure that enables teachers to learn and plan in teams. Tuesday afternoon staff meetings are scheduled for professional learning and Friday morning meetings are devoted to general business, including classroom program monitoring on a rotational cycle.

The school structure supports uninterrupted literacy and numeracy learning and consistency in delivery of programs by the teachers. An open plan classroom has been established to increase the engagement of senior students.

REFORM 4a: Innovative and tailored learning opportunities for teachers

Staff have been provided with professional development and training opportunities to build their capacity to deliver the new Australian Curriculum. They are assisted by the DP to develop classroom programs, based on the scope and sequence of learning, and to develop a consistent approach to teacher judgment through professional sharing and collaboration.

Improving teaching quality

The school believes that its partnership with the University of New England assists teachers to improve the quality of their teaching. They have been helped to use the QTF as a basis for their planning and classroom delivery in order to achieve goals and targets. Of significance has been the use of student and school data to inform decision-making and the integration of ICT in classroom teaching and learning to increase student engagement in learning.

The Principal reports that teacher competency in programming, development of assessment tasks and analysis of student and school data has improved. Teachers' "feeling of competency" has motivated them to be more willing to contribute and to value the contribution of others.

REFORM 4b: Innovative and tailored learning opportunities for students

Engaging students in learning

In first term of the year staff assist all students to develop individual learning plans. Teachers then invite parents to attend a meeting with the teacher and their child at the school to discuss the plan. The school reports that all parents accepted the invitation to attend the 2013 ILP meetings.

According to the Principal, this strategy is effective for several reasons:

- the process enables the school to focus on the needs of each individual student
- a holistic understanding of each student develops, together with and a clear direction for learning
- teachers use the individual learning plans to inform their programming, in particular, in providing a differentiated classroom learning program.

Supporting student welfare

Students are supported through a whole school approach to welfare. The Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) program, combined with ‘You Can Do It,’ enabled the school to re-develop its core values, focusing on the positive contribution that all students can make and the role of the school in supporting their learning.

Through the welfare approach, the school actively engages students in the life of the school - for example, the junior AECG and SRC have been given greater decision-making power to encourage student dialogue and input into school policy and planning.

The Principal reports that as a result of the new approach to student welfare, students have been more cooperative and increased their engagement in learning. The number of suspension days has dramatically decreased—to 20 suspension days for the first half of 2013, from 220 suspensions days for the same period in 2007.

REFORM 5: Strengthening school development and accountability mechanisms

Using evidence to inform planning

The school reports that its planning process is effective as it enables the school to achieve the cultural change. The school plan identifies a range of strategies designed to achieve particular goals and targets. These strategies emphasized building staff capacity in leadership and quality teaching.

Monitoring and evaluating

Through the collaborative team structures, the school staff have been able to not only use the school plan to drive change at the school but also monitor the impact and evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives.

Future directions

School leaders believe that the Low SES NP has enabled Chambers Public School to create a positive culture for students, staff and the community through a focus on student centred learning, collaborative teamwork and clearer organizational structures. The school is well placed to continue the reforms of the Partnership, building on its strengths and striving to bring about improvements in student learning outcomes.

PART C: All case studies

16. Implementation comparisons

This chapter provides an overview of Low SES NP initiatives implemented by both 2013 and 2012 case study schools. It also explores patterns of similarities and differences between 2013 and 2012 case study schools and identifies the significant implementation challenges.

Implementation of initiatives by all schools

Table 7 compares the total number of initiative types for 2013 schools with those for 2012 schools. The total number of schools implementing each initiative is also listed in the last column.

Table 8: Comparison of initiatives – 2013/2012

Reform Area	Initiative	2013 schools	2012 schools	Total number of schools
1	Establishing leadership and strategic positions	6	5	11
	Providing mentoring support	6	5	11
	Supporting leadership training and development	4	4	8
2	Developing professional learning plans	5	6	11
	Managing staff performance and review	4	5	9
	Supporting early career teachers	3	4	7
	Managing staffing mix	4	6	10
3	Employing paraprofessional and school support staff	5	4	9
	Implementing team-based approaches	5	5	10
	Establishing new organizational arrangement	2	3	5
	Facilitating cooperation with other schools	3	1	4
	Establishing technological infrastructure	1	3	4
4a	Analysing/using data	6	6	12
	Delivering literacy and numeracy programs	6	4	10
	Supporting targeted groups	4	1	5
	Using ICT	5	3	8
	Improving QT	0	5	5

Continued/-

Table 9: Comparison of initiatives – 2013/2012 continued

Reform Area	Initiative	2013 schools	2012 schools	Total number of schools
4b	Supporting literacy and numeracy learning	2	3	5
	Engaging students in learning	4	5	9
	Supporting targeted students	4	3	7
	Providing transition support	3	2	5
	Supporting student welfare	3	3	6
5	Using evidence to inform planning	5	6	11
	Monitoring and evaluating	5	6	11
	Improving accountability and reporting	4	0	4
	Total number	99	98	197

The total number of initiatives for 2012 and 2013 is similar. Of the 25 initiative types, 17 of them have either the same number of schools implementing the initiative or a difference of one school.

Of the remaining nine initiatives, five of them have a higher frequency in the 2013 case study cohort of schools:

- Facilitating cooperation with schools (RA 3)
- Delivering literacy and numeracy programs (RA 4a)
- Supporting targeted groups (RA 4a)
- Using ICT (RA 4a)
- Improving accountability and reporting (RA 5).

Further, three initiatives have a higher frequency in the 2012 case study cohort of schools:

- Managing staffing mix (RA 3)
- Establishing technical infrastructure (RA 3)
- Improving teacher quality (RA 4a).

These patterns of similarities (high and low uptake of initiatives) and differences in the 2013 and 2012 cohort of case study schools are explored below.

Similarities – 2013/2012 case study schools

Higher uptake of initiatives

The high uptake by both the 2013 and the 2012 case study cohorts of schools reflects a priority on building strong staff, management and leadership capacity in schools.

Analysing and using data

There was only one initiative that all schools report implementing, that is, the provision of professional learning opportunities in data analysis and use. Schools provide these opportunities through DEC, literacy and numeracy program providers and school-based activities. Schools report that staff have improved their ability to navigate SMART data for classroom and school use, set targets and design data driven pedagogy.

Establishing leadership and strategic positions

All schools established new or modified leadership and strategic positions; in one case however this was funded from the Improving Teaching Quality National Partnership program rather than Low SES NP allocations. They appointed deputy principals, assistant principals, head teachers, HATs (or Leaders of Pedagogy/Teacher Educator in the case of non-government schools), ex principal consultants, program (two schools) and stage of schooling co-ordinators.

Schools report that the creation and/or expansion of leadership and strategic positions strengthened the school's leadership and management capacity by:

- providing staff with opportunities to perform leadership roles and pursue career interests
- enabling the Principal to delegate responsibilities and in so doing improve leadership effectiveness
- establishing executive management structures that are responsive to the immediate and specific needs of school communities
- implementing strategic plans more effectively in order to achieve specific goals and targets (for example, the implementation of whole school approaches to literacy and numeracy or the establishment of middle schools).

The case studies suggest that school leaders felt that the appointment of a HAT or Teacher Educator was effective in providing strategic and targeted support to teachers. Teachers have responded positively to the modelling of best practice teaching, facilitation of professional learning and provision of mentoring support.

Discussions with schools suggest that instructional and distributive models of leadership are being implemented. Schools have established leadership teams in order to provide teachers with the appropriate knowledge and skills to implement strategies in order to improve outcomes for all students. They are aiming to foster a common culture throughout the school, with various identified leaders explicitly working towards common goals, by emphasising the importance of the contribution of all members of the school community and the school accountability.

Providing mentoring support

Eleven schools provided mentoring support to executive and teaching staff through Low SES NP leadership positions that are either designated mentoring positions or have the mentoring function incorporated within a broader role. An analysis of case studies suggests that mentoring support is provided to staff by:

- modelling, demonstrating, observing and reviewing lessons
- providing guidance and feedback
- facilitating differentiated learning to provide for diverse needs of students
- assisting them to perform new roles, implement and evaluate new strategies and programs.

Schools report that the mentoring initiative improves staff performance through the provision of relevant and targeted professional learning opportunities for staff. As a result of gaining access to mentoring support, teachers' confidence has increased and their knowledge and skills have improved. They are better equipped to plan effectively and improve the quality of their teaching.

A question arising from these case studies is whether the mentoring support function should be separated from the supervisory one. Schools that have appointed a HAT, Teacher Educator or external consultant to perform the mentoring role, advocate for the separation of mentoring support from line management, on the basis that teachers are more responsive to a mentoring model geared to their learning and development objectives rather than institution-focussed performance oversight.. Other schools suggest that there are advantages of blending mentoring and supervisory functions because it enables the school to take an integrated approach to staff management and development. Moreover, managers are able to identify performance issues at an early stage which enables timely intervention.

Developing professional learning plans

Eleven schools require staff to develop professional learning plans. Government schools require staff to develop individual professional learning plans that are:

- integrated with the TARS and the EARS processes
- linked to teachers' professional needs and career aspirations
- responsive to school goals and priorities.

Schools have been aligning professional learning plans to various standard frameworks:

- NSW Professional Teaching Standards
- NSW QTF
- Standards underpinning the DASA and CLAS survey instruments
- AITSL Professional Standards Framework
- insights from the TLSI course (one school).

Schools report that the Low SES NP has enabled them to improve the PLP process by strengthening professional dialogue, refining areas of learning and selecting effective professional learning activities.

The key challenge for schools has been the selection of framework standard/s to use as a basis for planning, implementing and evaluating plans in a changing policy environment, at both the state and national levels. Schools are preparing to align their professional learning plans to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

Using evidence to inform planning

All government schools undertook an initial situational analysis to inform the development of a detailed school plan. They report that they have used the school plan to guide change to improve student outcomes and school performance by identifying a range of initiatives to achieve school goals and targets. The school plan enables schools to develop shared school community understandings about the school's strategic priorities and actions.

Catholic school plans have been developed in conjunction with Catholic Archdiocesan/Diocesan office arrangements.

Monitoring and evaluating

Government schools have undertaken formal annual evaluations of their Low SES NPs and submitted their reports to DEC. Some schools report that staff training in the use of DEC's *Analytical Framework for Effective Leadership and School Improvement* has allowed them to effectively evaluate their Low SES NP initiatives and implement a cycle of review for school policies and programs. Regionally employed Low SES NP staff also assist schools to conduct program evaluations.

Catholic schools undertake Low SES NP evaluations in conjunction with Archdiocesan/Diocesan office arrangements.

Implementing team-based approaches

Five schools in each of the 2013 and 2012 sets of case studies implemented team-based approaches to school planning and review, educational delivery, and ongoing professional learning and reflection. These approaches reflect their leadership and management models, emphasising whole school approaches to planning and program delivery.

Schools have established organisational arrangements to facilitate teamwork such as: scheduling of staff meetings, including professional learning time; implementing collaborative planning sessions; developing roles and responsibilities; identifying common goals and targets; and implementing evaluations and reviews. They report positive outcomes from the implementation of team-based approaches:

- increased delegation by schools to stage and KLA teams.
- increased professional learning through peer learning, staff collaboration, engagement in action research.
- improved NAPLAN performance as a result of team teaching.
- increased school coordination, continuity in curriculum delivery and consistency in approach.

Managing staff performance and review

Government schools are implementing the school-based performance management processes—TARS and EARS. The Principal Assessment and Review Schedule (PARS) process includes School Education Directors (since July 2013 referred to as Directors, Public Schools NSW) visiting schools on a regular basis. Schools report that due to the additional leadership positions and/or time release provided through the Low SES NP, supervisors have been able to allocate more time to the performance management process—working with teachers in classrooms, engaging in professional dialogue, demonstrating lessons and

providing significant feedback.

Discussions with school suggest that they have improved the performance management processes by:

- ensuring that supervisors understand the purpose of performance management processes
- consolidating and fine-tuning procedures
- improving efficiency by developing additional tools
- introducing new methods, such as, the Reflective Partnership Method using AITSL's professional teaching standards framework.

Schools report that the increased engagement of supervisors in the management process is affecting teachers' perception of the process. Rather than thinking of the process as an administrative task, staff are experiencing the process as professionally supportive. Teachers value their engagement in professional dialogues and the practical assistance and feedback provided to them.

The challenge for schools is to align their performance management processes with the new Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and their school plans.

Employing support staff

Eleven schools employed support staff:

- SLSOs or equivalent, including an Aboriginal SLSO (8 schools) to provide in and out of classroom support to students, for example, personalized teaching and learning assistance to students most in need of individual student intervention
- CLOs (4 schools) to enable schools to develop positive relationships with community groups
- Attendance Officer and Aboriginal Attendance Officer (one school)
- SAOs (two schools).

Discussions with schools suggest that targeted support staff positions can be effective in helping improve behaviour and learning outcomes for students at risk and assisting leaders to better manage school administration.

Supporting leadership training and development

Eight schools implemented initiatives to support learning and development as part of their strategy of school reform and continuous improvement. Schools have continued to provide professional learning opportunities to staff to develop their leadership capacity, for instance, the TLSI K-12 program. Schools confirm the effectiveness of the program—as a result of participating, staff have improved their capacity to use data and their ability to facilitate whole school planning.

As required under NP provisions, the HAT undertook accreditation at the higher levels of the Professional Teaching Standards with the NSWIT, and the LOPs and Teacher Educator accessed leadership training through opportunities provided by the Archdiocesan/Diocesan Catholic Education Offices.

Discussions with schools suggest that the provision of leadership training and development opportunities has increased staff confidence and provided a pathway for the career development of staff. Some schools report that an increasing number of staff are aspiring to take up leadership positions in schools and/or at the regional level.

Supporting early career teachers

Four of the 2012 schools and three of the 2013 schools emphasise support for early careers teachers through:

- a formal induction program
- structured mentoring, including matching with supervisors, coordinators and/or experienced teachers
- incorporating early career support functions in the roles of executive and support staff, particularly in smaller schools
- additional release time for meeting accreditation requirements and familiarizing themselves with school policies and programs
- access to learning support staff in classrooms and assistance with undertaking key functions, such as preparation of student reports, for the first time.

However, the support provided by 2013 schools with a higher number of early career teachers was more formal. Discussions with schools indicate that early career teachers benefit from the support they receive. They have been assisted to settle into the culture of the school and develop their confidence, knowledge and skills, particularly classroom management skills. One school leader indicates that their school has been able to improve its retention of early career teachers because of the scaffolding support provided. Another leader has been able to shift an early career teacher into a Low SES NP funded leadership position.

A key challenge for schools is to interpret and apply the Professional Teaching Standards through their supervision of early career teachers, including mentoring and assessment of teachers for accreditation at Proficient Teacher (Professional Competence) with the NSWIT.

Engaging students in learning

Seven schools implemented initiatives to engage students in their learning, through peer learning, leadership, school attendance programs, individualised student plans.

LOWER uptake of initiatives

The lower uptake of initiatives related to providing opportunities for students reflects less emphasis on student focused and structurally focused initiatives.

Establishing new organisational arrangements

Six schools have established new organisational arrangements to facilitate cultural change. They report positive outcomes from establishing:

- stage-based delivery structures, in particular, middle years schooling
- innovative school management structure
- scheduled professional learning period in teacher workloads
- staff meeting and professional learning meetings
- uninterrupted literacy and numeracy blocks
- an innovative learning space, to facilitate connected learning and cooperative teaching and learning methods

School evaluations suggest that these new organisational arrangements have facilitated staff collaboration and the design and delivery of innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

Supporting student welfare

Six schools provided opportunities for students to access welfare support programs to assist them with their behaviour and support their social and emotional development.

Supporting students literacy and numeracy learning

Five schools implemented initiatives through the Low SES NP designed to provide opportunities to students to assist them in their literacy and numeracy learning. This entailed the delivery of whole school or class literacy and numeracy programs, such as AL and Mathematics.

Providing transition support to students

Five schools implemented Low SES NP initiatives to provide opportunities to help students to successfully transition to the next stage of schooling, for example, from preschool to Kindergarten, from Year 6 to Year 7 and from school to work or further training and education.

Differences – 2013/2012 case study schools

2013 case study school cohort

Facilitating cooperation with other schools

More 2013 case study schools are facilitating cooperation with other schools than 2012 schools, that is, three to one. The initiatives are designed to:

- **enrich student learning experiences and improve performance through the sharing of resources, such as, academic challenges**
- **support professional learning**
- **facilitate successful transitions and provide high quality educational options to local communities.**

Discussions with schools suggest that as a result of these collaborative efforts, variously relationships have been built, staff have shared their expertise, student learning has been enriched and enrolments have increased.

Delivering literacy and numeracy programs

More 2013 schools than 2012 schools (six to four) have focused on providing opportunities to support teachers in delivering literacy and numeracy programs. Teachers have been trained to deliver programs such as R2L, AL, MULTiLit, Focus on Reading 3-6, L3, QuickSmart Numeracy and TOWN. Schools report that the skills and knowledge of teachers has improved, which, in turn, has allowed them to improve the quality of their planning and the delivery of programs.

Using ICT

More 2013 schools than 2012 schools (five to three) have focused on providing staff with professional learning opportunities to integrate ICT in teaching and learning. Schools report that teachers' greater capacity to use ICT in teaching and learning is increasing students' motivation and engagement in their learning.

Supporting targeted groups

More 2013 schools than 2012 schools (four to one) have focused on providing professional learning opportunities to enable staff to support targeted groups of students, such as special needs, Aboriginal and LBOTE students as well as gifted and talented students. Schools reported improvement in students' attitudes and their educational attainment.

Improving accountability and reporting

More 2013 schools than 2012 schools (four to one) made reference to the significance of improving school accountability and reporting.

2012 school cohort

Managing staffing mix

More 2012 schools than 2013 schools (six to four) used Low SES NP funding to employ the following professional staff to meet school needs and address strategic priorities:

- literacy and numeracy teachers to staff a student learning centre and/or provide additional support to students (four schools)
- a reading recovery teacher (one school)
- speech pathologists to support students experiencing difficulties with language (three schools)
- ICT officers (two school)
- a Year 6-7 transition advisor (one school)
- Hispanic or Pacific Islander teachers to assist targeted students (one school)
- a classroom teacher to strengthen provision in the early years (one school)
- an ESL teacher, as a result of the discontinued speech pathologist (one school)
- an early intervention teacher, as a result of the discontinued transition from school position (one school).

Schools report that they have valued the increased staffing flexibly provided by the Low SES NP funding which has allowed them to address new and emerging school community needs.

Improving the quality of teaching

More 2012 schools than 2013 schools (five to zero) provided opportunities for teachers to improve the quality of teaching, using the NSW QTF as a tool for professional learning and program design and delivery. Two schools established partnerships with university staff to assist them to use the QTF as a basis for professional learning and performance management as well as for program planning, delivery and evaluation.

Establishing new technological infrastructure

More 2012 than 2013 schools (three to one) used Low SES NP funds to build on the digital capability they developed through the DER initiative. These schools found that the improved technical infrastructure supports teachers to analyse and use student data and to integrate ICT in their teaching and learning. The quality of data used to inform school planning processes and evaluations has also improved as a result of the school's increased capacity to implement surveys and store information.

Considerations and challenges

Changing in a changing policy environment

The implementation of reform initiatives in a changing national and state policy environment has been another of the challenges faced by case study schools. Schools have implemented changes to meet the requirements of the Australian National Curriculum and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and the transition from state-based frameworks is already underway.

The provision of support to early career teachers has been complicated by the need to interpret and apply the professional teaching standards to assist early career teachers to attain accreditation at Proficient Teacher (Professional Competence) with the NSWIT.

Assessing progress over time

The case studies reveal the use of various frameworks as a basis for planning, delivering and evaluating staff performance and professional development and school and classroom programs. For example, the Quality Teaching Framework, 4MAT pedagogy, NSW Professional Teaching Standards and other frameworks underpinning staff learning survey tools (such as, DASA). As schools, change to comply with policy changes, there may be challenges associated with tracking progress over time and progress in relation to like schools.

Determining the relationship between mentoring and supervision

The case studies suggest that there are diverse views about the merit of separating mentoring support from supervisory functions. Schools that have appointed a HAT, Teacher Educator or external consultant to perform the mentoring role, support the separation of mentoring support from line management because they believe that teachers are more responsive to a non-threatening and supportive model. Other schools suggest that there are advantages from blending mentoring and supervisory functions because this enables the school to take an

integrated approach to staff management and development and in identify performance issues at an early stage and enables timely intervention.

17. Key initiatives and impacts

It is not possible to rank initiatives in terms of their impact because of the diverse contexts within which each initiative operates, including different implementation timelines. However, discussions with all case study schools suggest that some initiatives have greater importance in facilitating change and achieving goals. Their implementation has led to differing degrees of progress and success. These more important initiatives are outlined below.

High impact initiatives

1. Establishing leadership, strategic and specialist positions

Establishing leadership and strategic positions has been central to implementing change in the schools. Schools established positions that were responsive to perceived need and that would enable them to achieve their goals and targets. These new or modified positions typically combined authority with mentoring, supervisory and/or training and development functions.

Schools reported that as a result of establishing such positions, the school has been able to:

- implement professional learning and development strategies and particularly to increase staff engagement with student capability data
- facilitate school development, planning, review and accountability processes, including staff performance management and review and reporting
- deliver evidence-based, best practice teaching strategies and programs
- provide individualised learning support to students, for instance through the development of personalised learning plans.

Some schools also reported that leadership and strategic positions established through the Low SES NP were associated with improvements in students' attendance rates, school readiness, transition into the school and student learning outcomes.

2. Provision of professional learning and development opportunities

Schools believe that the provision of professional learning and development support and opportunities and the implementation of professional learning plans have strengthened their leadership and teaching capacities. These initiatives, which have been in the main school-based and include learning through mentoring support, have led to the improvement of:

- the knowledge, skills and attitudes of executive and teaching staff and strengthening of professional dialogue
- management and teaching skills and abilities
- quality of whole school and classroom collaborative planning, in particular, the use of data to inform decision-making
- quality of the overall educational provision, including individualised literacy and numeracy learning support.

Some school leaders reported that the provision of professional training, learning and development opportunities, funded through the Low SES NP was associated with improvements in students' attendance rates and behaviour, school readiness, transition into the school and student learning outcomes.

3. Employment of support staff

Schools reported that CLO and SLSO (and their equivalents) positions, including culturally specific positions, have contributed significantly to the implementation and success of other initiatives. These positions have improved:

- the perception of the school in the community and the schools' relationship with community groups
- professional staff's efficiency and effectiveness
- student attendance rates, readiness for school, attitudes to learning, and behaviour in the playground and in the classroom
- student learning outcomes.

4. Implementation of team-based approaches

The case study schools show that team-based approaches have helped in the development of whole of school, integrated, and result-focused approaches to:

- staff professional training, learning and development
- navigate data bases for classroom and school use, set targets and design data driven pedagogy
- school development, planning, monitoring and evaluation
- program and classroom delivery, particularly for literacy and numeracy
- communication with students, parents and the broader community.

Team-based approaches have increased staff collaboration enabling teachers to have shared understandings, to be more consistent in their teaching styles and to provide continuity in teaching and learning.

5. Provision of innovative opportunities for students to learn

Schools provide students with a range of programs and strategies designed to improve their literacy and numeracy learning, to actively engage in learning through school attendance and positive behaviour, to access individualised support, including culturally specific support; and to support them at critical transition points. School leaders have said that these programs have increased the level of student engagement in learning and supported better learning outcomes.

Reinforcing effects of multiple initiatives

Discussions with schools suggest that a multi-pronged approach is necessary to achieve goals and targets, particularly those related to student achievement, making it difficult to quantify

the contribution of individual initiatives. However, a number of case study schools suggest the following student outcomes result from the implementation of several inter-connected initiatives:

- improved readiness for school and improved learning outcomes (*Best Start* test results)
- successful transition of students from primary to secondary school (teacher observations and test results)
- increased attendance and increased motivation to learn (the number of student receiving awards)
- improved student behaviour (reduction in classroom incidents, student referrals and expulsion rates)
- improved literacy and numeracy outcomes (school-based assessments, for example, L3, Reading Recovery, MULTiLit, and Burt scores)
- gains made by Aboriginal students (school-based tests).

Immediate and long-term impacts

While most schools have had at least one and a half years to implement initiatives, the case studies suggest that they have yet to fully realise the gains. Schools suggest that continued implementation of initiatives will lead to further improvement in outcomes for the school community.

The case studies point to near-term changes such as changes in staff or student confidence, motivation and engagement in learning. However, other changes, such as, cultural change, have been evident over time, as reflected in the application of innovative learning pedagogy and professional practices.

Further, although some schools have demonstrated NAPLAN test improvements for students, including Aboriginal students, most schools report that it is yet too early in the implementation cycle to demonstrate the real impact of the Low SES NP initiatives as professional and student learning is a cumulative process.

Sustaining the impacts

Case study schools suggest that the Low SES NP has contributed to an overall sense of educational renewal and reform. School leaders have been motivated to continue their reform efforts by the positive results already achieved. Sustainability, however, has been generally at the forefront of their thinking. They have focused on capacity building goals, through human resource development and the embedding of new practices, programs, structures and processes into school policies and operations.

Schools have indicated that they will sustain, to at least some degree, many of the initiatives after the conclusion of the program in order to fully realise the impact of their efforts. They welcome the flexibility that will be provided through the new *Local School, Local Decisions* policy and the introduction of a new resource allocation formula, providing greater discretion in the use of their funding. They expect that they will be able to continue to fund some of the

key leadership and support staff positions from their global budgets in order to improve student outcomes over the longer term.

The challenge for Partnership schools will be to maintain their momentum by continually monitoring and evaluating the impact of their reform efforts and to realise the full benefits of the Low SES NP on their school communities.

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