SCHOOL AUTONOMY AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT CASE STUDIES IN AUSTRALIA
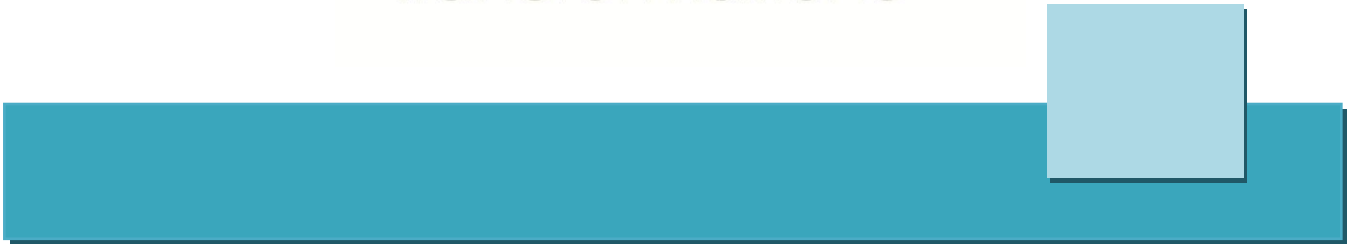
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context

Researchers from six countries met in May 2014 to plan an international research project to investigate the strength of links between higher levels of school autonomy and student achievement. Countries / jurisdictions represented were Australia, Canada - Alberta, China – Hong Kong, England, Finland and Israel. Singapore and Canada - Saskatchewan have been added to the project. The focus is on government schools. The project, entitled the International Study of School Autonomy and Learning (ISSAL), reflects international interest in raising levels of student achievement in a context in which public schools in participating countries are operating with a higher level of autonomy than has traditionally been the case.

Case studies have / will be conducted in each country of schools that have used their increased authority and responsibility to make decisions that have led to higher levels of student achievement. Case studies in Australia have been conducted in four schools in three jurisdictions: Australian Capital Territory (ACT) (1), Queensland (1) and Victoria (2).

Research question

The case studies are intended to provide responses to the following question: 'How have schools with a relatively high degree of autonomy used their increased authority and responsibility to make decisions that have led in explicit cause-and-effect fashion to higher levels of student achievement?'

Organisation of report

Chapter 1 provides the context. The case studies reported in Chapters 2 to 5 are preceded by a statement on the jurisdictional context, describing in particular the level of autonomy of schools using an adapted OECD continuum and the framework for accountability in which schools must operate. Particular attention is given in each case study to the processes and outcomes of three examples nominated by the principal to illustrate the links between school autonomy and student achievement. Diagrammatic maps of links are included in each instance. The school's performance in NAPLAN across several years is then summarised along with key findings on other indicators of performance and in a range of documents. Findings at each school are discussed in the light of international research on the links between school autonomy and student achievement. The report concludes in Chapter 6 with a reflection on the findings in light of the purposes of the international project and the review of evidence on links between school autonomy and student achievement conducted in the first phase of the Australian contribution. It is acknowledged that the four schools do not constitute a representative sample.

Case study schools in Australia

The table below summarises the characteristics of the four schools and the three examples nominated by principals where links between school autonomy and student achievement are demonstrated. The schools are in three settings: urban, regional and rural. Three of the four schools have an ICSEA score between 900 and 1000, indicating a moderate level of socio-educational disadvantage. One has an ICSEA score between 1000 and 1100 indicating a moderate level of socio-educational advantage. There is considerable diversity among the three examples nominated by principals. These include a capacity to select staff, capacity-building including coaching, community engagement, and personalising support for students.

No attempt is made to generalise from the experience of these four schools. They are considered 'demonstration schools' that illustrate how the links to student achievement have been made under conditions of autonomy for certain functions.

School	Jurisdiction	Level	Setting	2014 ICSEA	Examples of where links to student achievement were demonstrated
Broadmeadows Primary	Victoria	Primary	Urban	927	International experiences in professional development Coaching Local selection of staff
Specimen Hill Primary	Victoria	Primary	Regional	970	'Great expectations' School improvement Team planning [with an integrating theme of wellbeing]
Canberra High	ACT	Secondary	Urban	1086	Selection of staff Student support and development of literacy and study skills Band and music program
Millmerran State P-10 School	Queensland	Primary - Secondary	Rural	944	Whole-school capacity-building Targeted Personalised Approach Community engagement

Findings in light of international evidence

Each of the chapters containing the case studies included a discussion of the extent to which the findings were consistent with international evidence on the links between higher levels of school autonomy and student achievement.

The three key findings in the review of evidence on the links between school autonomy and student achievement prepared in the first phase of the international project are as follows:

1. Evidence from analysis of results in PISA tends to confirm that higher levels of school autonomy are associated with higher levels of student achievement providing there is a balance of autonomy and accountability.

2. The focus of autonomy should be on professional practice, with the aim being to make connections between the functions associated with school autonomy and actions that are likely to have an impact on student achievement. Exclusive reliance on structural changes for their own sake is unlikely to have an impact. It is important to align a range of strategies that research shows are linked to gains in student

achievement.

3. The most powerful evidence on mediating factors linking school autonomy and student achievement is on the work of principals and other school leaders in building professional capacity through staff selection, professional development and appraisal; setting priorities on the basis of data about performance; and communication of purpose, process and performance. Cultural factors may limit effects in some settings. These capacities can be built and made effective in settings where there may be only moderate levels of school autonomy.

The findings in each of the case studies were consistent with each of #1-3 above at a very high level.

Professional standards

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) developed the Australian Professional Standard for Principals in 2011 which was approved by all ministers for education. The principals in the case study schools demonstrated their achievement of the Standard at a high level in matters explored in the case studies. There is a strong case that the Standard describes how all principals should exercise a high level of professional autonomy. It was also evident in each case study that building the capacity of teachers to meet selected elements of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers was a priority for principals and other leaders.

Coherence

A high level of coherence is evident in each of the case studies in the sense that leadership and management are closely if not tightly connected to curriculum and pedagogy. There was a time when leadership and management appeared to be disconnected from the core work of the school. This coherence extends to the selection of staff and the allocation of funds in budgets, each of which reflect the unique mix of learning needs at a school and priorities for action. The four case studies in these 'demonstration schools' provide rich descriptions of what was done and by whom to make the link to learning.

CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT

Researchers from six countries met in May 2014 to plan an international research project to investigate the strength of links between higher levels of school autonomy and student achievement. Countries / jurisdictions represented were Australia, Canada - Alberta, China – Hong Kong, England, Finland and Israel. Singapore and Canada - Saskatchewan have been added to the project. The focus is on government schools. The project, entitled the International Study of School Autonomy and Learning (ISSAL), reflects international interest in raising levels of student achievement in a context in which public schools in participating countries are operating with a higher level of autonomy than has traditionally been the case.

Case studies have / will be conducted in each country of schools that have used their increased authority and responsibility to make decisions that have led to higher levels of student achievement. Case studies in Australia have been conducted in four schools in three jurisdictions: Australian Capital Territory (ACT) (1), Queensland (1) and Victoria (2).

Research question

The case studies are intended to provide responses to the following question: 'How have schools with a relatively high degree of autonomy used their increased authority and responsibility to make decisions that have led in explicit cause-and-effect fashion to higher levels of student achievement?'

Selection of schools

In Australia, nominations of schools were sought from senior leaders of the three jurisdictions. There were two main criteria. First, the nominated schools have taken up a higher level of autonomy for at least two years. Second, the nominated schools have achieved gains in measures of student achievement and there is confidence that they can describe in direct cause-and effect fashion how they used their autonomy to achieve their success (while acknowledging there will be a range of factors that have contributed). Leaders were invited to nominate up to three schools in their jurisdictions from which the researcher made a selection to ensure that different kinds of schools (primary, secondary and primary-secondary) and locations (urban, regional and rural) were represented in the set of four. Formal applications to conduct the research were made in each jurisdiction and approval to proceed was granted.

There is no claim that the nominated schools are 'the best' as far as gains in student achievement are concerned or 'the best' in exercising school autonomy. They are however, exemplars of the exercise of autonomy within a system framework, and the raising of levels of school achievement, and they are able to explain the links between the two. The case study schools are not, therefore, a representative sample, and no attempt is made to generalise the findings. The schools are intended to be 'demonstration' schools of how the links were made.

Methodology

The research was conducted by Professor Brian Caldwell, Managing Director and Principal Consultant at Educational Transformations and Honorary Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne, with the support of a grant from the Australian Government.

The principals of selected schools were formally invited to participate in the project, indicating whether they wished their school to remain anonymous. Anonymity was a requirement in Queensland as a condition of conducting the study at the nominated school.

Information about each school was gathered before the first visit. Sources included online reports of school plans and reviews as well as information in the school's entry on the My School website maintained by the Australian, Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). Information was then gathered at the school site over two days. The

principal was invited to provide information about the history, context and special characteristics of the school as well as its performance in recent years.

The principal was also invited to describe up to three school-based examples where the school had used its authority to make decisions that led to gains in student achievement. Further information was then sought from the principal and other staff nominated by the principal, including where relevant the council / board president or nominee, to illuminate the processes and outcomes, gathering evidence wherever possible to enable the links to be mapped. The Interview Guide is contained in the Appendix to this report.

Times for interviews were about two hours for the principal, in either one or two sessions, one 45-minute interview with each of a maximum of nine staff (up to three for each of the three school-based examples) and where relevant the council / board president or nominee. In some interviews more than one person met with the researcher.

Interviewees, including the principal, completed consent forms, indicating whether they wished to remain anonymous, and informing them that they could withdraw from the project at any time.

The researcher made notes during each interview and prepared an account of discussions that was then forwarded to each interviewee to make corrections or add or delete material. Reports of each case study drew on the agreed accounts of discussions. A draft of each case study was forwarded to the principal for final changes to ensure the accuracy of facts contained therein.

Assessing the level of autonomy in each jurisdiction

The OECD has gathered information on the extent of autonomy in different countries / jurisdictions around the world (OECD 2012). There are five levels in the OECD continuum: decision taken by a higher authority in full autonomy, decision taken by a higher authority after consultation with the school, decision taken by the school within the framework set by a higher authority, decision taken by the school after consultation with others, and decisions taken by the school in full autonomy. There are four domains in which decisions are made: organisation of instruction, personnel management, planning and structures, and resource management.

The OECD reported on the locus of decision-making for member countries / jurisdictions for each of 47 items in the four domains for government lower secondary schools. A panel of people who were knowledgeable about policy and practice in their jurisdictions provided an assessment of the level at which decisions were made and the mode of decision-making.

The items in the OECD survey were adapted slightly to suit the Australian context and the researcher assessed the level of autonomy for each of the three jurisdictions where case study schools were located, basing his assessment on his knowledge of policy and practice as well as advice from principals. The following continuum was used as a point of reference in assessing the level of autonomy for each of 44 items:

1. Decision taken jurisdiction in full autonomy

2. Decision taken by jurisdiction after consultation

3. Decision taken by school within framework

4. Decision taken by school after consultation with others

5. Decision taken by school in full autonomy
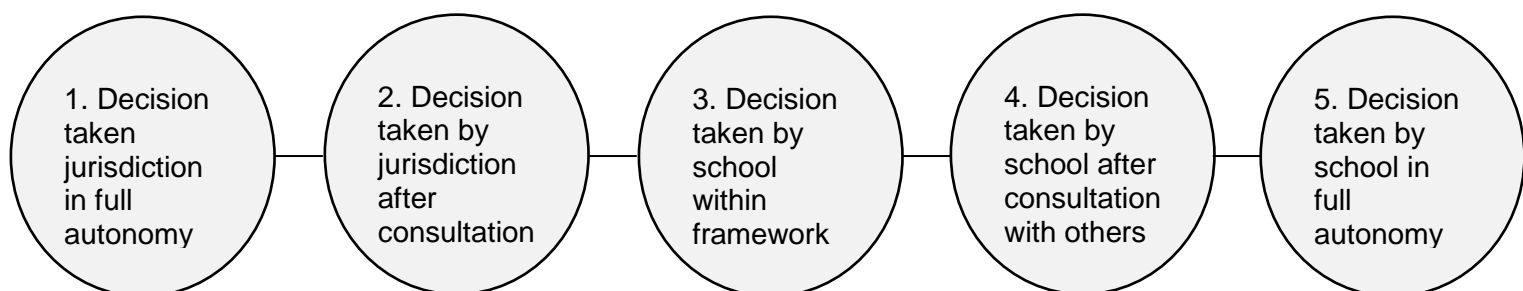
Assumptions

It was assumed that system leaders had nominated schools that satisfied the criteria that were provided to them. The researcher made no attempt to 'second guess' the nominations; it was assumed that the school met the criteria and the task of the researcher was to gather information about processes and outcomes of school-level decisions made under conditions of autonomy within a system framework.

The researcher drew only from the sources described above. No interviews were conducted with students and no observations were made of what occurred in classrooms or in other activities described during school visits. There is therefore an assumption that what was described or read actually took place. In this respect these are exploratory studies. Deeper extended case studies are planned in another phase of the international project. These would enable data to be gathered, for example, on levels of achievement of students who participated in particular programs that resulted from school decisions under conditions of autonomy and those who did not, on a before and after 'treatment' basis.

Australian Context

There are six states and two territories in Australia, each with its own government. There is also a federal government. The population of Australia is about 23.8 million. The two largest states in population terms are New South Wales and Victoria.

The constitution of Australia assigns responsibility for school education to the states and territories but the federal government has played an increasingly powerful role over the last 50 years because it can make grants to states and territories to which conditions are attached. The federal role arises to a large extent because vertical fiscal imbalance is severe by international standards.

About two-thirds of students attend public (also referred to as government or state) schools with the others attending either Catholic or Independent schools (also referred to as private or non-government schools). There has been a trend to the latter in recent years to the extent that the majority of senior secondary students in the largest cities attend non-government schools.

'School-based management' is a term that is widely used internationally but is rarely used in Australia to describe the decentralisation of authority and responsibility to schools within a centrally-determined framework of policies, standards, and accountabilities. The term used most frequently in the 1970s and early 1980s was 'devolution', as advocated in a landmark report in 1973 described below. The idea of the 'self-managing school' was frequently used in the late 1980s and the 1990s. More recently, the concept of 'autonomy' has been invoked, although schools in the public sector operate in the aforementioned framework. Most Catholic schools are organised into systems of education that provide varying degrees of autonomy to schools. Independent schools have a high level of autonomy. Catholic and Independent schools receive funds from the public purse and may charge fees for instruction. Public schools may not charge fees for instruction.

The reasons that have been advanced to support initiatives in school autonomy have varied with the change in terminology. Empowerment of teachers and the community was frequently advocated in the earlier developments ('devolution'). The focus in more recent times has shifted to an educational rationale, reflecting the uniqueness of schools and the need to set priorities, select staff and formulate budgets in a way that best matches the mix of needs, interests, aptitudes and aspirations of students.

Historical perspective

At first sight Australia may be expected to have a relatively decentralised system of public education given the physical size of the country and the relatively small population.

However, most of the population is concentrated in large cities. Education departments were established in the late 19th century to control what has been traditionally described as the 'free compulsory and secular' systems of state schools. Schools were supervised by centrally-appointed inspectors.

As far as public policy on decentralisation is concerned, the seminal event was the release in 1973 of the Interim Report of the Australian Schools Commission, generally known as the Karmel Report. Decentralisation, or devolution as it was referred to at the time, was elevated to the status of a value that underpinned its recommendations. The Committee agreed that 'there is an obligation on it to set forth the principal values from which its recommendations have been derived' (Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission 1973: 10). The key statement is set out below:

> 2.4 The Committee favours less rather than more centralised control over the operation of schools. Responsibility should be devolved as far as possible upon the people involved in the actual task of schooling, in consultation with the parents of the pupils whom they teach and, at senior levels, with the students themselves. Its belief in this grass-roots approach to the control of schools reflects a conviction that responsibility will be most effectively discharged where the people entrusted with making the decisions are also the people responsible for carrying them out, with an obligation to justify them, and in a position to profit from their experience.

This excerpt shows unmistakably that the Committee was concerned with 'control over the operation of schools', not limiting its view of devolution to concepts such as participation or consultation, and that a role for the centre, at a state rather than national level, was important in determining an equitable approach to the allocation of resources. As things turned out, these recommendations were taken up in some jurisdictions, as described below, but the federal role was strengthened to the extent that the Australian Schools Commission became the agency for distributing a growing pool of federal funds. The Commission ceased operations in the mid-1980s but a larger federal bureaucracy replaced it, continuing to the present.

Trends

In the decade following the release of the Karmel Report only three public school authorities took up to any noteworthy extent the cause of community involvement through structural arrangements for school councils or school boards. A rudimentary form of school councils was already in place in South Australia. Recommendations for school boards in the Australian Capital Territory (Hughes 1973) coincided with the Karmel Report and these were implemented with a higher level of authority and responsibility than in any other system at the time. A range of options for school advisory councils was developed for adoption in Victoria in the mid-1970s.

There were few major initiatives until the 1990s when Victoria made dramatic changes to the extent that more than 90 percent of the state's annual recurrent budget for school education was decentralised to schools for local decision-making and principals had the power to select staff. School councils, with parents and other members of the community in the majority, set policies and approved budgets. Schools continued to operate within a centrally-determined framework of curriculum and work-force enterprise agreements. There have been important changes in other states over the last five years. For example, Western Australia established 'independent public schools' along similar lines to Victoria, with Queensland adopting the same terminology. New South Wales, traditionally the most centralised system, has introduced a policy of 'local schools, local decisions'.

There is now bi-partisan political agreement on the left and the right at the federal level and in most states and territories. The left-of-centre federal government that served from 2007 until 2013 implemented a scheme known as Empowering Local Schools (ELS) that provided substantial funding to all states and territories, with the exception of Western Australia that

declined its share of funds, as well as to Catholic and Independent schools. Implementation was made possible by a series of National Partnership Agreements between the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments as well as Catholic and Independent schools. While these funds supported a shift in authority and responsibility in some instances, most were used to build a capacity for local decision-making, with a focus on professional development and community engagement. The creation of 'independent public schools' is a policy of the current right-of-centre federal government, which has set a target of 25 percent of all public schools in Australia achieving this status. Some jurisdictions have declined to use this terminology even though federal funds have been made available on mutually agreed terms.

Goals of school education

Every ten years ministers for education in Australia reach agreement on a set of goals that become touchstones for policy and practice in the years that follow. Three sets have been adopted: 1988 (Hobart Declaration), 1998 (Adelaide Declaration) and 2008 (Melbourne Declaration). The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA 2008) proposed that successful learners should be able to do the following:

- develop their capacity to learn and play an active role in their own learning

- have the essential skills in literacy and numeracy and are creative and productive users of technology, especially ICT, as a foundation for success in all learning areas

- are able to think deeply and logically, and obtain and evaluate evidence in a disciplined way as the result of studying fundamental disciplines

- are creative, innovative and resourceful, and are able to solve problems in ways that draw upon a range of learning areas and disciplines

- are able to plan activities independently, collaborate, work in teams and communicate ideas

- are able to make sense of their world and think about how things have become the way they are

- are on a pathway towards continued success in further education, training or employment, and acquire the skills to make informed learning and employment decisions throughout their lives

- are motivated to reach their full potential.

Several of these goals fall in the category of what have become known as 'twenty-first century skills', notably those related to creativity, innovation, resourcefulness, collaboration, and capacity to work in teams.

National curriculum

Until recently Australia was one of three nations / jurisdictions in the Asia-Pacific Region that did not have a national curriculum, the others being Canada and the United States. First proposed more than two decades ago, a national curriculum (referred to as the Australian Curriculum) has been achieved through the work of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), established under federal legislation in 2009 (foundational work was undertaken by the former National Curriculum Board). Funding for ACARA is shared 50 percent federal, 50 percent states and territories. Its policies and programs are approved by a board chaired by Professor Barry McGaw, former head of the education division of OECD and before that the CEO of the Australian Council for Educational Research. Apart from the Chair, Deputy Chair and a nominee of the federal minister, members of the board are comprised of representatives of states and territories and representatives of Catholic and Independent schools.

The Australian Curriculum for the years F (Foundation) (Pre-Year 1) to Year 10 is now virtually complete (the curriculum at senior secondary years 11 and 12 remains a state and territory responsibility). The curriculum has now been developed in eight learning areas: English, mathematics, science, humanities and social sciences (incorporating the subjects of history, geography, civics and citizenship, and economics and business), the arts (incorporating the subjects of dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts), health and physical education, technologies (incorporating the subjects of design and technologies, and digital technologies) and languages (incorporating 11 language-specific curriculum and a framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages).

Of particular relevance to the notion of twenty-first century skills is the specification of seven generic capabilities: literacy, numeracy, information and communications technology (ICT) capability, critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, ethical understanding and intercultural understanding.

There are also three cross-curriculum priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, and sustainability. It is not expected that these cross-curriculum priorities apply in each of the eight learning areas.

Specifications for each of the foregoing may be obtained from the ACARA website at www.acara.edu.au. The Australian Curriculum has undergone an independent review since early 2014 (Donnelly and Wiltshire 2014) and planning for change in several areas is underway.

Testing and reporting

National tests in literacy and numeracy have been conducted since 2008 for all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. These are known as NAPLAN tests (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy). They are explained in some detail here because the NAPLAN scores for case study schools are included in this report.

Design and delivery of NAPLAN have been the responsibility of ACARA since 2009. Results for every school in the country are reported on a website that is readily accessible under the title of My School (www.myschool.edu.au). These paper-and-pencil tests are conducted in each school in May, with state-by-state performances reported publicly in August, and school-by-school performances published early in the following year. Parents receive reports on the performance of their children. There are plans for online testing that will enable reports for each student within a week or so of the tests.

What is reported for every school in Australia, about 9,500 in total, is arguably the most sophisticated, indeed elegant, presentation of data on student performance on national literacy and numeracy tests at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 to be found in any nation. Schools are compared to 'similar' schools on the basis of their scores on an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) (see below). The graphical presentations of these comparisons are impressive. The extent to which a school adds value to the learning of students is made possible by tracking the performance of the same students from one level of testing to the next, and this is shown graphically along with how similar schools, schools with the same 'starting point', and all schools at the same grade level have performed. The school provides material to describe itself and this appears at the beginning of each entry.

ACARA describes ICSEA on its websites in the following terms:

> The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) was created by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) specifically to enable fair comparisons of National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test achievement by students in schools across Australia. A value on the index corresponds to the average level of educational advantage of the school's student population relative to those of other schools. Research shows that key factors in students' family backgrounds (parents' occupation, their school education

and non-school education) have an influence on students' educational outcomes at school. Research has also shown that school level factors (a school's geographical location and the proportion of Indigenous students a school caters for) need to be considered when summarising educational advantage or disadvantage at the school level. ICSEA provides a numeric scale that represents the magnitude of this influence, or level of educational advantage, and takes into account both student and school level factors. My School visitors can use the ICSEA value to understand the levels of advantage or disadvantage that students bring to their schooling based on these factors.

ICSEA values are calculated on a scale which has a median of 1000 and a standard deviation of 100. ICSEA values typically range from approximately 500 (representing extremely educationally disadvantaged backgrounds) to about 1300 (representing schools with students with very educationally advantaged backgrounds).

Following the usual interpretation, 68.2 percent of schools will have ICSEA scores within one standard deviation of the median (ICSEA from 900 to 1100), 95.4 percent within two standard deviations (ICSEA from 800 to 1200), and 99.7 percent within three deviations (from 700 to 1300).

A new approach to calculating ICSEA was adopted by ACARA in 2013 for implementation in 2014 to reduce year-to-year variability in scores for a school.

Use of NAPLAN results in reporting the case studies

The performance of the four schools on NAPLAN tests is used as the main indicator of gains in student achievement, with performance compared to similar schools based on ICSEA and all schools. While contentious in some respects, scores on NAPLAN tests are available for virtually all schools in Australia and a school's performance relative to other schools is of major interest within a particular jurisdiction as well as at the school. There is now general acceptance across the country of the merit of NAPLAN and the publication of test scores on the My School website. It is the main, though not the only, indicator used in the four case study schools.

Other indicators are based on results of surveys of parents and teachers in some instances, and performance against intentions in strategic and operational plans, as reported in school audits, reviews and validations.

Organisation of report

The case studies for each school reported in Chapters 2 to 5 are preceded by a statement on the jurisdictional context, describing in particular the level of autonomy of schools using the adapted OECD continuum and the framework for accountability in which schools must operate. Particular attention is given in each case study to the processes and outcomes of the three examples selected by the principal to illustrate the links between school autonomy and student achievement. Diagrammatic maps of links are included in each instance. The school's performance in NAPLAN is then summarised along with key findings on other indicators of performance and in a range of documents. Findings at each school are discussed in the light of international research on the links between school autonomy and student achievement. The report concludes in Chapter 6 with a reflection on the findings in light of the purposes of the international project and the review of evidence on links between school autonomy and student achievement conducted in the first phase of the Australian contribution. It is acknowledged again that the four schools do not constitute a representative sample.

CHAPTER 2: BROADMEADOWS PRIMARY SCHOOL (VICTORIA)

Chapters 2 and 3 contain case studies of two schools in Victoria. The first part of Chapter 2 describes the Victorian context before reporting the case study of Broadmeadows Primary School.

Victorian context

In population terms, Victoria is the second largest state in Australia. As far as school autonomy is concerned, its government schools were early movers in the 1970s following the Karmel Report, with limited decentralisation and its school councils having advisory powers only. There were important changes in the early 1980s when school councils were given the power to set policy and approve budgets within guidelines provided by the Minister. However, the staff function remained centralised.

There were major changes in the early 1990s under an initiative known as Schools of the Future. More than 90 percent of the state's recurrent budget for school education was decentralised to schools for local decision-making. This included the selection of staff with schools advertising positions, short-listing and interviewing applicants. The contract of employment continued to lie with the Department. In similar fashion, the position of principal was largely a local decision, with recommendations for appointment being forwarded to the Department which remained the employer. Conditions of employment, salaries and many other matters were part of enterprise bargaining agreements. The staff profile of the school had to be accommodated within the overall school budget, formerly known as the School Global Budget, now known as the Student Resource Package.

Level of school autonomy in Victoria

The bold underlined number best describes the level of autonomy for each item based on the classifications illustrated above.

Item	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Organisation of instruction					
1. Grouping of students	1	2	3	4	**5**
2. Choice of textbooks	1	2	3	4	**5**
3. Choice of software / learningware	1	2	3	4	**5**
4. Instruction time	1	2	3	4	**5**
5. Teaching methods	1	2	3	4	**5**
6. Assessment of students' regular work	1	2	3	4	**5**

	1	2	3	4	5
7. Assistance to students: Health	1	2	3	4	**5**
8. Assistance to students: Welfare	1	2	3	4	**5**
Personnel management					
1. Principals: Criteria for appointment	**1**	2	3	4	5
2. Principals: Selection	1	**2**	3	4	5
3. Principals: Dismissal	**1**	2	3	4	5
4. Principals: Duties	**1**	2	3	4	5
5. Principals: Fixing of salary levels	**1**	2	3	4	5
6. Teachers: Criteria for appointment	**1**	2	3	4	5
7. Teachers: Selection	1	2	**3**	4	5
8. Teachers: Dismissal	1	**2**	3	4	5
9. Teachers: Duties	1	2	**3**	4	5
10. Teachers: Conditions of Service	**1**	2	3	4	5
11. Teachers: Fixing of salary levels	**1**	2	3	4	5
12. Non-teachers: Criteria for appointment	**1**	2	3	4	5
13. Non-teaching staff: Selection	1	2	3	4	**5**
14. Non-teaching staff: Dismissal	1	2	**3**	4	5
15. Non-teaching staff: Duties	1	2	3	**4**	5
16. Non-teaching staff: Conditions of service	**1**	2	3	4	5
17. Non-teaching staff: Fixing of salary levels	**1**	2	3	4	5
Planning and structures					
1. Creation or closure of school	**1**	2	3	4	5
2. Creation or abolition of a grade level	1	2	3	4	**5**
3. Designing programme of study	1	2	3	4	**5**
4. Selection of programmes of study offered in a particular school	1	2	3	4	**5**
5. Selection of subjects taught in a particular school	1	2	3	4	**5**
6. Definition of course content	1	2	3	4	**5**

Resource management					
1. Allocation of resources to the school: Teaching staff	1	2	3	4	**5**
2. Allocation of resources to the school: Non-teaching staff	1	2	3	4	**5**
3. Allocation of resources to the school: Capital expenditure	1	**2**	3	4	5
4. Allocation of resources to the school: Operating expenditure	1	2	3	4	**5**
5. Allocation of resources to the school: For principal professional development	1	2	3	4	**5**
6. Allocation of resources to the school: For teacher professional development	1	2	3	4	**5**
7. Use of resources in the school: Staff	1	2	3	4	**5**
8. Use of resources in the school: Capital expenditure	1	2	3	**4**	5
9. Use of resources in the school: Operating expenditure	1	2	3	4	**5**
10. Use of resources in the school: For principal professional development	1	2	3	4	**5**
11. Use of resources in the school: For teacher professional development	1	2	3	4	**5**
12. Support for school from jurisdictional authority	1	2	3	4	**5**
13. Support from corporate, philanthropic or not-for-profit sectors	1	2	3	4	**5**

Accountability and the review of schools in Victoria

The relatively high level of autonomy for government schools in Victoria occurs within a robust framework of accountability. Schools are the subject of review at least once every four years that occurs within a system framework (DEECD 2013: 10):

Peer Review: Principals are supported by at least two peers, plus an externally accredited reviewer, to conduct a review of the school's performance, leading to the development of a new four-year school plan.

Exemplary Practice Review: Where peers have identified exemplary practice in a specific field of practice, a review will be initiated to document that practice so that it may be shared with the broader Victorian learning community.

Priority Review: An accredited review team (of one to four people, depending on school size and complexity and which may include principals) is appointed to undertake an in-depth diagnosis of the causes underlying the school's below threshold performance. Feedback is provided to the community by the review team.

Support and Intervention Review: Given the findings from the Priority Review, support will be designed and delivered along a continuum. A design process will involve central and regional staff, school leaders and others as required. The design team will agree on interventions and their objectives, processes and timelines. Interventions will be closely monitored by Regional Services Group.

Peer Reviews and Exemplary Practice Reviews occur when a school's performance is 'above thresholds'. Priority Reviews and Support and Interventions Reviews occur when performance is 'below thresholds' or 'where there is other evidence of significant risk to student achievement, well being or engagement'.

Schools also conduct a self-evaluation every year. Surveys of student, teacher and parent opinion have been conducted for more than 20 years and the results are published in the annual report of the school. School Climate and Professional Learning surveys of staff are conducted annually. Schools prepare annual operational plans and four-year strategic plans. The principal submits an annual report to the school council.

Victoria was an 'early mover' on state-wide frameworks of curriculum and testing, with a Curriculum and Standards Framework established in the mid-1990s along with system-wide testing in literacy and numeracy in primary and lower secondary schools. These have now been subsumed within the AusVELS curriculum framework adopted by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), which integrates the Australian Curriculum, and the national system of NAPLAN tests administered by ACARA.

A school's performance in NAPLAN tests is included in the various documents cited above, with comparisons not only with similar and all schools around the country, but especially with similar and all schools in Victoria.

Selection and description of Broadmeadows Primary School

The Department of Education and Training in Victoria nominated, through its Northern Region, four schools for the researcher to select from (one regional primary, one regional secondary, one urban primary and one regional secondary). The two primary schools were selected to ensure as much variety of types and locations as possible in the three jurisdictions (ACT, Queensland and Victoria). One is Specimen Hill Primary School located in Golden Square, a suburb of the regional city of Bendigo, reported in Chapter 3. The other is Broadmeadows Primary School located in Broadmeadows, a suburb of Melbourne, as described in Chapter 2. Its ICSEA score in 2014 was 927, indicating that the school served a community of lower socio-educational advantage.

A description of the context of Broadmeadows Primary is contained in the Annual Report to the School Community in 2014:

> Broadmeadows Primary School was established in 1961 and relocated to new school buildings in October 2009. The school shares its site with the Hume Central Secondary College Blair Street Campus. The school's enrolment has stabilised at 280. We have 3 Principal Class officers, 19.3 teaching staff (EFT) and 7.1 Education Support staff (EFT) making 32 staff in all. The emphasis for all staff is around building capacity and working in effective teams.
>
> Students with a Disability (PSD) students made progress at satisfactory or above in achieving their individual goals.
>
> National Partnerships funding has been used to build teacher capacity in Literacy and Numeracy interventions.
>
> The school's purpose: 'to maximise the learning opportunities of every child every day' is supported by some fundamental beliefs: every child can learn; where you start does not matter - it's where you end up that counts; the 3047 postcode does not determine your destiny; high expectations and effective teaching are the best tools for engagement; assessment is most effective when data is used to inform the next stage of learning; teacher collaboration on student learning is paramount to effective teaching; target setting for children and teachers is critical to school improvement; and we can impact on the pre-conditions for effective learning by forming more constructive relationships with our children's parents.

An adaptation of the last paragraph is the self-description of the school that appears in its entry on the My School website.

Interviews with key staff

Keith McDougall has been principal of Broadmeadows Primary School for 28 years and is particularly well-placed to describe what has occurred at the school. He contributed extensively to the school-wide perspectives set out below.

Keith nominated three examples where the links between decisions made by the school under conditions of autonomy had an impact on student achievement: international experiences in professional development, coaching and the local selection of staff. Nine teachers provided their insights on the processes and outcomes.

School-wide perspectives

1. Long-standing interest in higher levels of school autonomy

Broadmeadows Primary was one of the first schools in the Schools of the Future program in the mid-1990s that significantly increased the level of school autonomy of Victorian government schools. It was selected as a self-governing school in the late 1990s that would have provided an even higher level of autonomy but the initiative was abandoned with a change of government.

2. Turnaround in performance

The school dipped in performance in 2007. One factor was likely to be the selection of staff, with five teachers working with 85 students but they 'did not get on'. They are no longer at the school. The leadership team had a retreat at a hotel in Canberra to work out a course of action and the school quickly recovered. It seems that performance can collapse and then pick up again in a relatively short time. Trust is important. The same leadership team is still at the school.

In 2009, the school moved to a new purpose-designed facility on a different site in the Broadmeadows Regeneration Project (adjacent to Hume Central Secondary College).

3. Involvement in other initiatives

The school is one of eight in Australia participating in the Powerhouse Schools project of Social Ventures Australia (SVA). It has received a grant of $200,000 over three years. Other participating schools in Victoria are Hume Central Secondary College (adjacent to Broadmeadows Primary), St Albans Secondary College, Dandenong North Primary School and Silverton Primary School. The school was nominated by the Northern Region on the basis of performance. Some teachers travel to Sydney to participate in SVA 'provocation' sessions (four are held each year).

'Program logic' guides the participation of Broadmeadows Primary in the SVA project. The issue it seeks to address is: 'We recognise that identifying and developing effective learning behaviours is the key to improving educational outcomes. Our students, parents and teachers have a limited understanding of the learning processes. Participants and activities are specified as follows:

- Teachers are trained in the use of a research-based learning behaviours toolkit, and are able to develop solutions for students.

- Targeted 30 percent of students are assessed through an interview. Teachers develop tailored solutions for each student. Each student receives an individualised program and support through the use of the learning behaviours toolkit.

- Parents attend forums to build their awareness and capacity to improve their children's learning behaviours.

The school is also participating in a project of Victoria University, with support from the Myer Foundation which links universities and schools in Victoria and Queensland.

4. International outlook

Keith travels widely to monitor developments in education, including visits to Denmark, England, New Zealand and USA (Harvard). He spent time in England with David Hopkins, who has worked with former director of the Northern Metropolitan Region Wayne Craig to conduct professional development for staff in all schools in the region. The school uses a toolkit developed by David. A total of 15 teachers have travelled internationally, mainly to New Zealand. Visits to New Zealand are considered to be 'domestic travel' for which school approval only is required. A visit to a school may only take a few hours but there is much learning that occurs while travelling together. The school has ceased Reading Recovery as a result of visits to New Zealand. New Zealand is a useful place to visit; it is close and has a similar curriculum. Schools visited have a similar demographic profile (Maori and South Pacific Islander students in New Zealand; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Australia). These schools are low SES but are high-performing. Keith finds the work of NZ academic Helen Timperley to be particularly helpful. Among academics, Brent Davies, especially, and John West-Burnham, both from England and both with a good understanding of developments in Australia, have shaped his thinking. The school has studied initiatives in Singapore and has noted the low take-up of ICT in that country.

5. Curriculum

Keith described how students are comfortable with concepts such as metacognition. The school is interested in concept-based learning and makes use of the SOLO Taxonomy. He believes that more could be achieved for bright students. There is strong interest in the connection between art and oral language. Six teachers are involved. One of the teachers co-authored Nelson Mathematics books which are international rather than 'watered down' AusVELS (the curriculum in Victoria that integrates the Australian Curriculum). The school develops its own curriculum in some areas including reading.

The school has a particular interest in neuroscience and its application to learning in schools and recently co-sponsored and contributed extensively to a major conference on the topic in Melbourne.

6. Building the capacity of staff

Building the capacity of staff is an integrating theme at the school, including the internationalising of professional development described above. Keith trains staff to mentor younger teachers. He aims to raise student achievement further, given that the school seems to have 'hit a glass ceiling' as far as student achievement is concerned (see below on results in NAPLAN tests). Professional Development is built around 'seven essential agreements'. The school has allocated $300,000 in its budget for coaching and employs a full-time curriculum coach. It tends to select other coaches from the private sector rather than rely on departmental staff. The school does no fund-raising: 'The current revenue from public funds is sufficient'. It is the careful setting of priorities within the budget that is important.

Performance & Development focuses on development. The school has adopted for this purpose a Performance and Development Rubric based on the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, developed by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and endorsed by all ministers for education. The school specifies a number of 'BPS Fundamentals' that apply to the different standards; for example, for Standard 2 (Know the content and how to teach it) the 'fundamentals' are content; learning and teaching sequence; curriculum, assessment and reporting knowledge; literacy strategies; numeracy strategies, and use of ICT.

Keith believes that leadership teams should have diverse talents, and this is evident at Broadmeadows Primary in the capacities of the Principal, Assistant Principals (2) and Leading Teachers (2).

7. Analysis of data

The school analyses NAPLAN data and can readily identify students who contribute to the profile. Context is important: there is a very high transiency rate among students. The school has its own tool for data management called Grade Xpert. One indicator of the impact of current strategies is the success of students after they leave the school. Keith singled out the success of students at Hume Central, Gladstone Park and Pascoe Vale Girls. The school administers staff and parent opinion surveys, as do all government schools in Victoria. It did not administer the student opinion survey in 2014 but the school rated at the 90th percentile when the survey was last administered in 2013.

8. Future

As far as the future is concerned, Keith McDougall believes that there will be further change. 'It will be a more litigious environment for schools. The number of "helicopter parents" will increase. Principals will need considerable support to deal with these issues but schools will need to be proactive (rather than reactive)'.

International experiences in professional development

Most of the teachers who were interviewed had international experience as part of their professional development, and it was clear in these and other discussions that such experiences have become part of the culture of the school. Broadmeadows Primary is using its autonomy in relation to the design and delivery of professional development to give a particular emphasis to the international experience. As noted above, visits to New Zealand are considered to be ''domestic travel' and so related decisions can be made by the school whereas department approval is required for international travel. The first visit to New Zealand was made about 15 years ago.

Emma Fuller and Callum McKenzie recounted their experience. Emma has 10 years of teaching experience at Broadmeadows Primary including three as Leading Teacher. She has also worked in England, and completed study tours to New Zealand and Singapore. Callum has seven years' experience at the school. He is leader of the Grades 5 / 6 team. They travelled to New Zealand in 2012 (the school sends a group every year). There were five from Broadmeadows Primary and five from Broadmeadows Valley Primary. The focus was on parent engagement (Callum) and assessment (Emma). One of the changes they brought back was the 'news broadcast' idea in which the school presents to parents in assembly twice a term.

Emma and Callum noted that the New Zealand experience served to 'affirm what we are doing' but some schools in New Zealand are ahead in terms of having a 'common language'. Community engagement is generally high in New Zealand, especially for Maori and South Pacific Islanders. This has influenced developments here but 'we have a way to go'. Broadmeadows Primary has had some behavioural problems in the past and we learned from New Zealand on how to use the environment of the school to create special / differentiated space, especially applicable as the school was newly constructed and had little in terms of 'interactive' play areas outside.

Teachers from Broadmeadows Primary and Broadmeadows Valley Primary made a presentation together on their return from New Zealand, with school council / regional staff in attendance.

Anne Giulieri and Debra Hosking were recently in New Zealand for seven days, noting that particular attention in visits to that country is given to innovative primary schools. Schools in New Zealand were to a large degree self-governing in that they answer to their boards. They found that schools were very community-focused. On their recent visit they explored how

schools managed curriculum and the use of space. Some of their learning has informed the school's work in the Social Ventures Australia (SVA) project described above.

Debra travelled to the National College for School Leadership in England and visited neighbouring schools. She noted the pressure under which they worked with the 'league tables' of results on national tests. She observed 'amazing leaders' and learned how they turned their schools around.

The benefits of international links and visits contrast to what would happen if the school was closed to new ideas. There would be no innovation. Anne and Debra referred to conversations and debriefing among those visiting from Broadmeadows. Lots of questions are posed – often more questions than answers. The intention is not so much to make comparisons but to ask questions. Personal goals are also set for these visits.

Amy McDonald and Matt Bailey provided operational details on the visits to New Zealand; for example, there was a focus question for each school visit. 'We didn't know what we were going to do on a visit until the day before, when the school was named, the focus question delivered, and the hotel arranged. Keith McDougall (Broadmeadows Primary) and Andrew Jones (Broadmeadows Valley Primary) prepared envelopes for distribution. Amy and Matt concluded that 'The biggest takeaway is "we must make it our own"'.

Coaching

Amy McDonald and Matt Bailey provided insights on coaching at Broadmeadows Primary. Amy has been at the school since 2002. She returned from seven years family in 2014. Matt is in his second year at the school (he was at the school on a teaching round while at Victoria University). He was initially a contract appointee but is now ongoing.

The school has adopted an independent reading model, which is now in its fourth year. There was a need for sustained coaching to build the capacity of staff to use it well. School needs have changed and there is now more 'internal' expertise among teachers at the school. Amy and Matt found the coaching to be very effective and they are now at ease in the use of the new model for reading. Staff with particular expertise often led staff meetings.

Amy referred to one coach who helped her achieve Professional Development goals about effective feedback 'We met about five times over six months. She did a lot of questioning rather than telling – "she drew it out"'. Matt came to the school as a graduate and had useful coaching from another person on the use and interpretation of data – 'most beneficial'.

As far as the future is concerned, Amy and Matt believe there is likely to be more collaborative teaching and this needs to be developed. Classrooms will be different and this was a focus of Amy's visit to New Zealand – she saw some good stuff but it can't be immediately translated to our setting – 'it has to fit our school'. There will be a shift in coaching from external to internal. There will be more conceptual learning for students ('we may need coaching for this; for example, the use of the SOLO Taxonomy').

Connie Cerra, Samantha (Sam) Steele and Lauren White also recounted their experiences in coaching. Lauren has been at the school for nine years; Sam three. Connie is Assistant Principal and Curriculum Coach working with the model developed by Helen Timperley (NZ). They noted that there has been coaching at the school for about four years, with a focus on curriculum, pedagogy and leadership in literacy and numeracy. They referred to the value of 'external coaches' who 'can lead us through and in some instances model new practices'.

Coaching helped Lauren develop clear goals relating to her teaching and establish a plan of attack. 'Coaching helped us come to self-realisation rather than telling us what to do'. Teachers were coached on monitoring, assessment and use of data to help them become more purposeful in their teaching. Coaches helped us set high expectations. Some coaches selected by Keith were private consultants, some came from Victoria University. None were from the Department of Education and Training (formerly DEECD). Coaches have different styles to which teachers must respond. Coaching in leadership came through a partnership

with Broadmeadows Valley Primary School and its principal, the Northern Metropolitan Region, and the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership.

Sam described how Connie assisted her with planning on one day each week. She described how coaches would observe and give feedback. They would also work with staff in the analysis of data. The link to better teaching and thus to improved learning was understood to follow from the acquisition of new skills and new strategies, facilitated by the use of feedback and analysis of data. One difficulty was writing learning intentions for differentiated teaching and learning.

Connie's full-time role in coaching is relatively new; previously it was about half-time. She described how three different teachers within the team with three different passions became coaches last year and shared their experiences, providing evidence of impact. She started using the Timperley Model this year. She referred to the use of data and the development of a common language; for example, in persuasive writing where previously teachers had different views. Teachers learn these things in teams, so there has been a need to build capacity to work in Professional Learning Teams.

As far as the future is concerned, there will always be a need for coaches and coaching. The form it will take depends on needs, issues, developments and innovations at the time. The school will need to be 'nimble'. There will be considerable internal staff expertise. The role of middle management will expand to build capacity within the school for coaching. There is a future for technology but as a tool.

Local selection of staff

The take-up of autonomy in respect to the selection of staff is evident in several places in Chapter 2, including a selection in 2007 that did not work out and a relatively quick recovery soon after. School autonomy is also evident in the size of the allocation to coaching in the school budget and the appointment of private rather than departmental coaches in some areas.

Anne Giulieri and Debra Hosking provided additional insights on local selection of staff and autonomy in curriculum. Anne and Debra believe local selection of staff is important. The school may receive as many as 40 applications for a one-year contract position.

The school does not take account of where a teacher did their initial teacher education. Graduates must like students and be good team players – 'we can teach them the skills'. There will be a specific intake from Victoria University in the future because the school is part of the project at Victoria University funded in part by the Myer Foundation described above.

The school exercises a high degree of autonomy in curriculum, giving priority to literacy and numeracy, and takes account of AusVELS and a range of other curriculum documents before making hard choices on staff arrangements that address student needs and the setting.

Perspectives of teachers on the future directions of the school

Interviewees shared their ideas on future directions for the school. The main themes are listed below without attribution:

- There is likely to be more collaborative teaching and this needs to be developed. There will be a shift in coaching from external to internal. There will be more conceptual learning for students ('we may need coaching for this'; for example, the use of the SOLO Taxonomy).

- There is likely to be a more focused and strategic use of space. New practices will not be 'add-ons'. There will continue to be a search for better ways to teach. It will be important to keep thinking, strengthening the ethos and culture to ensure that it is

'principal proof' [in the sense that the appointment of a new principal will not reverse current and future directions that have had a positive impact]

- A strategic view of developments in ICT will continue to be taken. The school used to pour money into it but teachers are conscious of the evidence base on its impact – it is just a tool. An evidence-based trial was undertaken of the use of the iPad in Grades 3-5. The outcome was positive but the school is now 'smarter' when it comes to the take-up of the new technologies.

- There should be / will be changes in the nature and use of technology – 'popping the 8-3 bubble' – learning outside school hours. Much will depend on the leader and a stable staff. As far as the teachers' role is concerned, current trends will continue. The challenge is to get all staff to buy into change given that sooner or later there will be a turnover of staff.

These themes sit comfortably with but are even more futures-focused than the strategic directions of the school as set out in its Strategic Plan for 2014 to 2018. These directions are in the areas of Achievement, Engagement, Wellbeing and Productivity. In each instance goals are formulated, targets are set and key implementation strategies are proposed.

Improvement in student achievement as measured in results in NAPLAN tests

Principal Keith McDougall reported a 'dip' in school performance in 2007 and recalled how the leadership team held a retreat workshop to plan what should be done about it (see above). The table below contains average NAPLAN test scores at two-year intervals from 2008 to 2014 inclusive. Improvement from 2008 to 2012 is striking. The school performed better than or substantially better than similar schools and all schools in 11 out of the 20 comparisons in 2008. This number increased to 16 out of 20 in 2010 and in 2012 it was 14 out of 20. Performance fell away slightly in 2014 when the equivalent number was 13 out of 20. However, on no occasion out of a possible 40 occasions did the school perform below or substantially below similar schools.

While no cause-and-effect is attributed, it is worthy of note that the 2010 results were achieved one year after the school moved to its new and attractive site in 2009.

There were changes in the demographic make-up of the school after 2008 when the ICSEA score was 907, almost one standard deviation below the median for all schools in Australia. The score increased to 926 in 2010 and 936 in 2012, falling slightly to 927 in 2014. This reflects an observation made in one interview that the community served by the school is changing.

The My School website provides information on student gains from when they did the NAPLAN tests in 2012 and when they did them again in 2014. These gains are provided for the same students and, at Broadmeadows Primary, 73 percent of students who did the tests in 2012 did them again in 2014. Comparisons of gains are made with all students across the country with the same starting point in 2012 and also with gains in schools with similar students. The gains for students at Broadmeadows Primary were slightly less in the three domains where gains are calculated (Reading, Writing and Numeracy) compared to students with the same starting point and in similar schools.

Key findings in surveys at Broadmeadows Primary

The following are key findings in a sample of surveys conducted at Broadmeadows Primary in 2014:

- There are 10 components in the School Climate survey of all staff: collective efficacy, collective responsibility, academic emphasis, trust in students and parents, staff trust in colleagues, teacher collaboration, parent and community involvement, collective focus on student learning, guaranteed and viable curriculum and shielding / buffering. The mean result for Broadmeadows Primary in 2014 exceeded the mean

for all primary schools in Victoria for six of the 10 items, falling below the mean for collective efficacy ('school staff believe they have the necessary skills, expertise and resources to successfully educate the students they serve'), trust in students and parents, teacher collaboration, and parent and community involvement. The overall score placed the school at the 33rd percentile among all primary schools in Victoria.

Test	Year	Comparitor	2008	2010	2012	2014
Reading	3	Similar	Substantially above	Above	Same as	Above
		All	Above	Same as	Below	Same as
	5	Similar	Above	Substantially above	Above	Same as
		All	Below	Same as	Same as	Below
Writing	3	Similar	Above	Above	Substantially above	Substantially above
		All	Same as	Same as	Above	Substantially above
	5	Similar	Above	Substantially above	Substantially above	Substantially above
		All	Same as	Above	Substantially above	Above
Spelling	3	Similar	Substantially above	Substantially above	Above	Above
		All	Above	Substantially above	Same as	Same as
	5	Similar	Same as	Substantially above	Substantially above	Same as
		All	Below	Same as	Substantially above	Below
Grammar Punctuation	3	Similar	Above	Substantially above	Substantially above	Above
		All	Same as	Above	Same as	Above
	5	Similar	Above	Substantially above	Substantially above	Same as
		All	Same as	Above	Substantially above	Below
Numeracy	3	Similar	Above	Substantially above	Substantially above	Above
		All	Same as	Above	Same as	Same as
	5	Similar	Substantially above	Substantially above	Substantially above	Above
		All	Same as	Substantially above	Above	Same as
ICSEA			907	926	936	927

Substantially above	(dark green)
Above	(light green)
Same as	(white)
Below	(light pink)
Substantially below	(red)

- There are seven components in the Professional Learning survey of all staff: school level support, renewal of knowledge and skill, applicability of professional learning, collective participation, active participation, coherence, and feedback. The mean result for Broadmeadows Primary in 2014 exceeded the mean for all primary schools in Victoria for all but one component (applicability of professional learning). The overall score placed the school just above the 67th percentile among all primary schools.
- There are three components to the Parent Opinion survey: school climate, student behaviour and student engagement for a total of 18 items. Compared to all primary schools in Victoria, Broadmeadows Primary ranked in the fourth quartile for 15 of the 18 items, in the third quartile for one item, in the second quartile for one item (parent

input) and in the first quartile for one item (extra-curricular). Compared to all schools, Broadmeadows Primary ranked in the fourth quartile for 15 items, in the third quartile for one item, in the second quartile for one item, and in the first quartile for one item – the same profile as for the comparison with all primary schools and for the same items. Year-by-year comparisons from 2013 to 2014 at Broadmeadows Primary compared to all schools indicated an increase for all 18 items.

Mapping the links between school autonomy and student achievement

Figure 1 maps the links between school decisions to build capacities of staff and higher levels of student achievement at Broadmeadows Primary School. It integrates what has been documented for each of the three examples, hence the three 'lines' in the figure. The top line illustrates how school decisions to build the capacity of staff through the design and delivery of international experiences lead to higher levels of student achievement. Many teachers have had these experiences over 15 years, spending time in New Zealand primary schools in similar settings to Broadmeadows Primary, namely, schools in relatively low SES communities but are also high-performing.

Participants acquire new knowledge and skill in areas relevant to Broadmeadows Primary and three examples are included in Figure 1: how some New Zealand schools have adopted a common language to describe their intentions and actions, the use of space (of particular interest to Broadmeadows Primary given its move to a new site and that parts of its grounds are still relatively under-developed) and how schools manage the curriculum. It is one thing to acquire this knowledge, so Figure 1 makes clear that participants must take from the experience what is relevant to Broadmeadows Primary and successfully apply what they have learned. There is an impact on student achievement to the extent that the application of new knowledge and skill is relevant to the achievement of intentions for improved learning at the school. Taking these actions together, it is indeed an example of the school using its autonomy to design and deliver such experiences. International experiences on this scale in more centralised systems would be very difficult to achieve.

The middle 'line' in Figure 1 is concerned with a major initiative at Broadmeadows Primary in recent years: coaching. The school has used its flexibility in funding and staffing to build the capacity of staff to implement new approaches to literacy, in particular. A notable feature is the way the school selects its coaches from the private sector. There is an ongoing intention to build an 'internal' capacity for coaching, and there are growing numbers of teachers who can do this, with an Assistant Principal taking the lead. As always, effectiveness depends on teachers being able and willing to learn and then successfully apply their new knowledge and skill. The very impressive gains in student achievement, demonstrated especially in NAPLAN results in 2010 and 2012, suggest that this strategy has proved successful. The principal and teachers are mindful that the already relatively high level of performance has 'plateaued' and that new approaches must be designed and delivered, thus foreshadowing further internal and external coaching in matters related to the use of the SOLO Taxonomy and the application of neuroscience in learning.

The bottom 'line' in Figure 1 is concerned with the local selection of staff. This could well have been integrated in the other lines or simply noted as an integrating theme, but it is clearly an example of the way the school has taken up its autonomy. The particular aspects of this process that are highlighted in Figure 1 contribute to the development of new appointees in a context where the school identifies its staffing needs, advertises, shortlists, and recommends appointment (ongoing staff are employed under a central contract). Also mentioned in Figure 1 is that a degree of autonomy in staffing gives the school a capacity to act if staff do not 'fit', as occurred in 2007. As Keith McDougall noted, schools can quickly recover after such setbacks (see above).
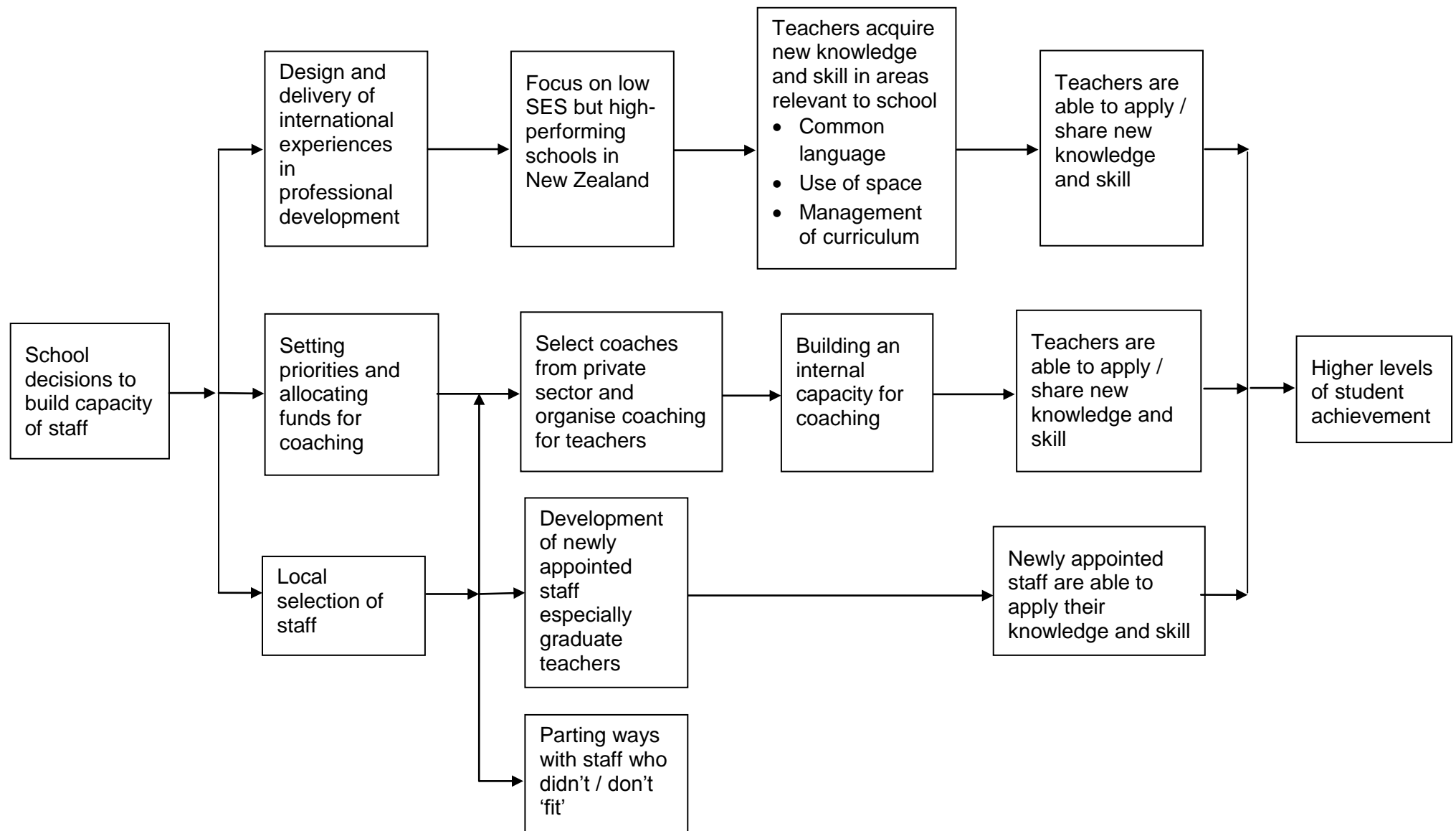
Figure 1: Links between school decisions to build capacities of staff and higher levels of student achievement at Broadmeadows Primary

Discussion of findings at Broadmeadows Primary in light of international evidence

The three key findings in the review of evidence on the links between school autonomy and student achievement prepared in the first phase of the international project are as follows:

1. Evidence from analysis of results in PISA tends to confirm that higher levels of school autonomy are associated with higher levels of student achievement providing there is a balance of autonomy and accountability.

2. The focus of autonomy should be on professional practice, with the aim being to make connections between the functions associated with school autonomy and actions that are likely to have an impact on student achievement. Exclusive reliance on structural changes for their own sake is unlikely to have an impact. It is important to align a range of strategies that research shows are linked to gains in student achievement.

3. The most powerful evidence on mediating factors linking school autonomy and student achievement is on the work of principals and other school leaders in building professional capacity through staff selection, professional development and appraisal; setting priorities on the basis of data about performance; and communication of purpose, process and performance. Cultural factors may limit effects in some settings. These capacities can be built and made effective in settings where there may be only moderate levels of school autonomy.

For #1 above, even though the level of autonomy for government schools in Victoria is arguably the highest in Australia, there is a balance between autonomy and accountability in that the school must operate within a system framework. This is illustrated in requirements for strategic planning; annual planning; annual reports to the school council; school reviews conducted every four years; and annual surveys of students, teachers and parents. The school also operates within a national framework of curriculum, assessment and reporting, as illustrated in the way it draws on AusVELS, the curriculum for government schools in Victoria that integrates the Australian Curriculum; its participation in the annual NAPLAN tests; and the reporting of results of NAPLAN on the My School website. While the school plays the key role in the advertisement for, short-listing and interviewing of applicants, it operates within a system framework.

Each of the strategies described in the three examples at Broadmeadows Primary is consistent with the international evidence on what should be the focus if there is to be an impact of school autonomy on student achievement, as described above in #2 and #3. Three examples were examined: international experience in professional development, coaching, and local selection of staff. There is a compelling argument that the successful implementation of these strategies led (along with other strategies) to higher levels of achievement since 2008, as indicated in the results in NAPLAN tests and the generally positive rankings in surveys of teachers and parents. While turnaround of this nature is often associated with the appointment of a new principal, this is not the case at Broadmeadows Primary where Keith McDougall has been principal for 28 years. There is evidence that he has continued to 'grow' professionally, sharpening his focus as the years passed on strategies that have built the capacity of staff to teach well in areas of high priority. Each of the three examples has been concerned with building this capacity, especially in recent years with coaching, as the school has developed a new model for reading and it was necessary to provide support for staff. There has been a trend to the creation of 'internal' coaches rather than rely exclusively on the services of those appointed from outside the school. The links between these strategies and gains in student achievement are mapped in Figure 1.

An important issue is the extent to which the successful design and implementation of these strategies was influenced by the level of school autonomy that is available to government schools in Victoria. After all, it can be argued, the impressive outcomes could be attained

through the exercise of effective leadership under any conditions. In the case of Broadmeadows Primary, it is evident that the school has had a long-standing interest in higher levels of autonomy and has joined every initiative of this kind over the last two decades. The school has used its autonomy in particular ways that are not normally available in more centralised systems, including the design of international professional development experiences and the selection of private consultants to serve as coaches.

A noteworthy finding in parent and staff surveys was the relatively low level of parent and community input (ranked in the first quartile of primary schools in Victoria). While there is a legislated requirement that government schools in Victoria have a school council, with parents in the majority, this is no guarantee of a high level of community engagement. The review of research in another phase of the international project suggested that the benefits of parent involvement lie mainly outside their involvement in governance and more in the support they provide their children, especially at the primary level. It is notable in this respect that Broadmeadows Primary seeks to increase involvement along these lines.

CHAPTER 3: SPECIMEN HILL PRIMARY SCHOOL (VICTORIA)

Chapter 3 contains the case study of Specimen Hill Primary School located in Golden Square, a suburb of the regional city of Bendigo in Victoria. The other school in Victoria (Broadmeadows Primary School) was described in Chapter 2 that also included a description of the Victorian context.

Description of Specimen Hill Primary School

Specimen Hill Primary provided the following description in its 2014 Annual Report:

> Specimen Hill Primary School . . . has a rich historical background dating back to 1874. The school was built on the goldfields, hence its name in reference to the gold specimens that were found in the area. In 2005 / 06 the original building was demolished to be replaced by a new school that was rebuilt on the original site, enabling a learning environment more compatible to twenty-first century teaching and learning. The school grounds are very picturesque and the school community takes pride in the environment. The school has a population of 288 students with 21 teaching staff and seven support staff members. There are 13 classrooms operating and specialist areas consist of Physical Education, Art, Indonesian (P - Grade 4) and Chinese (Grade 5 / 6). There are two Reading Recovery teachers who work with six students in the program at a time. The school has a nominated school improvement officer (SIO) who provides coaching to staff and literacy and numeracy support along with the Space Traveller's program targeting creative and higher order thinkers across the school. The assistant principal role is dedicated to wellbeing and this is supported by a wellbeing officer who works for four days per week. Underpinning all school programs is the effective Speci Wellbeing Program that operates across the school. The wellbeing program is supported by the allocation of grant funds from the NSCSWP. The school receives extra funding through the National Partnerships low SES school communities funding. An effective transition program operates to, through and beyond Specimen Hill with about 60% of the Grade 6 students moving on to Crusoe Secondary College and 20% to Eaglehawk Secondary College. Specimen Hill has a sister school relationship with Xing Hai Elementary School in Suzhou, China. Each year the school hosts up to five Chinese students for an eight week cultural experience and up to five Specimen Hill Grade 5 / 6 students visit China for a nine-day cultural visit each year. The school has a hard-working, highly-skilled and cohesive staff who are dedicated to improving the education and future pathways for all of its students.

Interviews with key staff

Information was gathered from interviews with staff and two members of the School Council. A total of 14 people participated, many in groups of three. What follows is drawn from agreed summaries of discussions. Direct quotations from these summaries are included in some instances, without attribution to particular people unless they are named.

Principal Di Craig nominated three examples where there is evidence that local decisions (autonomy) had led in cause-and-effect fashion to gains in student achievement. These were the setting of Great Expectations, the employment of a School Improvement Officer (SIO) and Team Planning. Wellbeing emerged as an integrating theme and a special section is devoted to this. Details of these strategies are set out in other parts of Chapter 3 along with a mapping of links between these strategies and student achievement.

Context

The school has an ICSEA score of 970, just below the median for all schools in Australia, indicating that it serves a community of moderate socio-educational disadvantage (42 percent of its students are in the bottom quartile; 7 percent in the top quartile). The school serves a somewhat impoverished older estate where there is low employment but it draws

its students widely, reflecting its strong widely-recognised student wellbeing orientation. The school has 13 Indigenous students (relatively high for schools in Bendigo). Some students do not eat at home unless they prepare the food themselves. Related to this, there has been a successful attempt to bring parents into the school, which is seen by many to be the hub of the community. Difficulties are experienced by some poorly-educated parents and a significant number of male family members; the one-third of teachers who are male serve as fine role models.

The Uniting Care Food Bank provides the school with a wide range of fresh and packaged food and essentials on a weekly basis and these are often distributed to families in need through food hampers on a Friday. A free breakfast is provided to everyone who chooses to come along every Wednesday – privately funded by a staff member's family but operated by staff. A number of students are provided with lunch on a daily basis.

School-wide perspectives

1. Principal and School Council

Principal Di Craig has been at the school for 11 years, and has been Principal since 2011, serving previously as Acting Principal. She was Acting Principal at the time of the Continuous Improvement Review of the school in 2011. She was described by some teachers as 'the hardest worker on staff'. She was also described as strategic in her decision making: 'Every decision is made for a reason, all supporting the future vision of the school'.

Hayley Davis, who has been a member of school council for six years (school councillors serve two-year terms, with community representatives serving a one-year term) believes that Di 'is genuinely consultative: everyone feels valued and motivated – all feel ownership of decisions'. 'Everyone is "reading from the same book": the leadership team and the staff'. 'There is consistency and follow-through in decisions'. Hayley considers the most important decision made by council during her time of service was the appointment of Di Craig as Principal after several years as Acting Principal.

Naomi Evans has been a member of school council for four years and is currently the Secretary. She also believes that the council's most important decision was the appointment of Di Craig as principal. 'Di is very inclusive and open to new ideas. She monitors results in NAPLAN and other data'. Naomi is on the Student Learning sub-committee that focuses on curriculum development and learning outcomes. Among other things, the sub-committee reviews NAPLAN results. She noted that the school does not rest on its laurels, prioritising first Numeracy then Literacy over recent years as key areas for improvement. Naomi believes that the school council plays a critical role – 'we add a lot of value' – complementing the perspective of educators.

2. International Outlook

Di Craig will travel to China with three students who will attend a sister school Xing Hai in Suzhou for part of a nine-day Shanghai / Suzhou tour. This is the fourth year of the school's involvement in a regional initiative named Team China and the second year that students have travelled to China. A total of 48 students and 20 teachers from 14 schools in Bendigo will make the trip to their sister schools. Accompanying Di and the students will be a second staff member who is a Year 5 / 6 teacher. The funds for this trip are raised from parents of the students and various fund-raising activities. A total of 13 students from Years 5 and 6 were interviewed with three selected. Chinese (Mandarin) is taught in the school in Years 5 and 6, with teaching provided by a teacher from Bendigo Senior Secondary College (the school works closely with BSSC in several areas including Chinese and cultural programs). Chinese students (total of 15) from the sister school have attended Specimen Hill Primary over the past three years for a period of two months for a cultural immersion program. The Chinese students reside with home-stay families in the Specimen Hill community. The

experience has / will be transforming for all students. Among other things, the above indicates the global outlook of the school.

3. School culture

School Councillor Naomi Evans indicated that there had been a significant change in culture since she took up her role on council, and the change is now 'entrenched'. Di Craig made a commitment to improving outcomes, as illustrated in the appointment of Wendy Jackson as School Improvement Officer (SIO). The community, including the school council, has embraced this change of culture. Assistant Principal Corey Warne, cited again in several places below, stated that building the capacity of staff has become a feature of the new culture at the school. Professional Development has included a focus on research on effective teaching. 'The leadership team is very strategic in staffing matters. Several teachers ("blockers") were opposed to the changes, and the new direction the school was taking was challenged repeatedly. It was made clear to all that, for the school to make much-needed improvements, it required all to be "on board" with the changes that were being implemented. The school leadership team expected that all staff were "on board"'.

Wellbeing has evolved to the point that it is now part of the school culture supporting curriculum. 'Wellbeing enhances the academic, with deeper and more critical thinking, rich speaking and listening, writing and discussions'.

Teachers are encouraged to provide input in decision-making: 'we're proactive'. There is a student council (two students per class). 'We encourage leadership' and 'there is a lot of compassion among students and an awareness of the needs of others in the wider and global community. Teachers also challenge each other. Performance and Development has 'worked' for the school, with a focus on development rather than evaluation. Di Craig is the 'end point' of the process; she writes the reports and has 'critical conversations' with staff. Di Craig believes that her staff are highly skilled and capable teachers and this not only makes them valuable to Specimen Hill but to state education.

4. Curriculum delivery

An issue raised in the review of the Australian Curriculum (Donnelly and Wiltshire 2014) was the 'crowded curriculum', especially in primary schools. This is not an issue at Specimen Hill due to its particular approach to delivery. There are 5 X 2 hour blocks of Literacy and 5 X 1 hour blocks of Numeracy for each class. Specialist programs consist of Physical Education, Language (Indonesian-Prep to Grade 4 and Chinese-Grades 5 / 6) and Art. To cover other areas, learning teams have 'rotations' each week that include music, circus skills, science, Asian studies (juniors), cooperative games and ICT. During these sessions the students are divided into smaller groups and rotate through these activities each week. Integrated Studies is built in to all learning areas. Asian Literacies and Indigenous Studies are integrated across all learning areas. Integrated Studies topics are offered on a five-week (half-term) basis.

Di Craig believes that 'the school has learned to integrate areas really well so that staff don't feel that there are continual "add-ons"; they know how to integrate effectively. All teams have a half-day planning session together at the end of each term to allow for planning and preparation for the next term'.

5. Resources

The school does not have enough space or the right kind of open multi-functional learning spaces. Di Craig with the support of the school council bought a classroom on eBay for $22,000. The school did not qualify for a new classroom provided by the Department but it intends to use the new building for professional interviews, a parent area and quiet learning areas for modified programs such as the Lifestyle program.

There are few constraints on the school as it works within budget and a system framework. The Region and Department are supportive ('they trust our judgement and provide a level of support when required'), reflecting the performance of the school in recent years.

6. Looking to the future

It is likely that further efforts will be required to track individual students so that each sees a pathway to further learning. Many students have very low aspirations since their parents are unemployed or in 'semi-employment'. Students want to achieve and there is evidence that they are starting to 'think differently'. So the future will call for continuous improvement; attention to different learning styles, including inclusive programs that are effectively catering for students with ADHD and ASD; and increasing use of technology. The school has an excellent IT learning team, and technology is being integrated in learning programs. Di Craig sees her role becoming even more of a 'strategic thinker' (as well as an instructional leader – she regularly goes into classrooms to teach – and that is her preference).

School councillor Hayley Davis wishes to see an 'embellishment' of good things that are already occurring and the introduction of a consistent music program. The future role of school councillors depends on the principal; the council role is a good one with Di Craig's appointment – she is consultative and transparent. School councillor Naomi Evans believes the school now has the right balance in serving the needs of all students, including those of high achievers. Students in the latter do well in Australasian tests. 'The school must continue to serve all, and is getting better at it. The wellbeing program is great and the extra-curriculum program continues to grow. The school is continually looking to improve the skill sets of teachers, and build the curriculum around teacher's knowledge, learning backgrounds and skills; for example, the introduction of the circus program. Fantastic!' Naomi believes the role of the school council will continue to be important, working collaboratively with Di Craig and staff. She noted that there are healthy debates on council and that 'we continue to review our outcomes and achievements against our identified priorities and goals'.

Great Expectations (setting high and higher expectations)

Two members of the Great Expectations team participated in the interview for this example: Rebecca (Bec) Eastley and Scott Pysing. Bec is in her third year as a graduate teacher; Scott is in his fifth year following 18 years in a non-school setting (managerial experience in Telstra). Bec reported that her experience at this school was an 'eye-opener'; Scott found this school a contrast to the 'cold and stale' climate in one school he worked in during initial teacher education.

Great Expectations were established following the school review in 2011 which was conducted when Di Craig was Acting Principal, before she was appointed substantive principal. Some teachers did not think raising expectations was possible. It also involved working with families. The 'standard and consistency of good parenting' is apparently declining. Di took the lead in formulating these expectations and then worked with other school leaders, then staff, students and parents in implementation.

Corey Warne, a long-serving member of staff, now Assistant Principal, recalled that the review took place only four weeks after his current appointment. 'Teachers were provided with an opportunity to 'unpack' key data indicators in greater detail. Prior to the school review, these indicators were analysed but never unpacked to any depth. By all staff developing their capacity to understand and read data more accurately, owning the data as a whole school and understanding the importance of how the data informed our teaching, allowed staff to clearly see that as a school many components of the key learning areas needed to be addressed across the whole school. It "opened everyone's eyes" to the areas across the school that needed to be addressed'.

It was clear that there needed to be a change in direction, with a downward trend, especially in NAPLAN Literacy. Additional funds from a National Partnership Agreement for low socio-economic schools were secured. Wendy Jackson was appointed SIO. Team planning was introduced. High expectations were set and there was much 'unpacking' of data. Some

teaching departments were 'all over the shop' in terms of what was being taught and how; 'we've really tightened up' and 'are expected to read professionally'.

Illustrations were provided of some of the Great Expectations. One was 'don't waste a minute' – students are ready to work when the bell goes. There is consistency in the application of rules, with a focus on the positive. The school lives its five values; attention is paid to one of these values each month. Students have a deep understanding of these values: they have been internalised. 'We are not into worksheets at this school'. There is a focus on 'thinking': there is no 'hands up' – the teacher may call on any student – meaning that all students are engaged in the moment. In the past the school was 'teaching to the middle'. There is now extensive use of Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences and these have been adapted for use at the school. Each student in Grade 6 gives a speech at 'graduation night'. 'We continually celebrate success – success of each other among staff and among students'. 'Wellbeing underpins everything here'.

As far as the future is concerned, Bec would like to see even more community engagement, further instilling the idea that students can be whatever they want to be, and that Specimen Hill becomes the school of choice because of its results. Scott would like to see Specimen Hill continue to be a benchmark school for wellbeing; the embedding of multiple intelligences; broader involvement in other countries as is done now with China; and further expansion of an already robust wellbeing program. The role of the teacher is likely to continue to change – more facilitation but with a focus on personalising the learning experience for students. It was noted that there was a wide range of ability in each classroom – in Scott's class ranging from 'Grade 2' to 'Grade 10', so personalising will be particularly challenging. Attention to multiple intelligences will assist.

Figure 2 maps the links between the decision to set high or higher expectations and higher levels of student achievement based on information obtained in interviews. There are three 'lines' in the links with 'Wellbeing underpins everything' serving as an integrating theme (described in more detail below and included in the mapping in Figure 3). The first line is concerned with expectations for teachers while the third line is mainly concerned with expectations for students.

School Improvement

School Improvement Officer Wendy Jackson along with three members of the School Improvement team (Jo Bergin, Kim Manley and a colleague) participated in two separate interviews.

The focus in the work of the SIO is building teacher capacity through coaching, instructional planning, deepening the understanding of data, strategic teaching and student learning. Personalising the learning for all students through goal setting, differentiation and modified programs for students with significant needs is a key strategy in all planning.

The school has worked hard to build the capacity of parents to be a crucial part of the home / school learning partnership. Many parents have attended teaching sessions such as: 'How to actively listen to your child read'. Regular newsletter items include a range of home reading strategies, good parenting strategies along with ideas and support available for parents. A strong home / school partnership around student learning has developed and has been a key factor in the enhancement of student learning. Parents are proud of their involvement and of their child's level of achievement. In recent times the school can see a shift in thinking where a high number of parents expect that their children will learn and do well at school. They are also becoming more aware and interested in future pathways for their children.

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Decision to set high(er) expectations for staff and students
  → Teachers analyse performance data at much greater depth (see School Improvement)
      → More professional reading
      → Priorities are set more strategically
      → Common approaches in teaching (see Team Planning)
          → Teachers successfully apply new knowledge and
  → 'Wellbeing underpins everything' (see Wellbeing)
  → Examples
      • Readiness to learn
      • Consistent application of rules
      • Honouring values of school
      • No 'hands up'
      • No worksheets
          → Higher level of student engagement in learning
          → Higher level of parent engagement
              • Parents value learning
              • Parents read to children
  → Higher levels of student achievement
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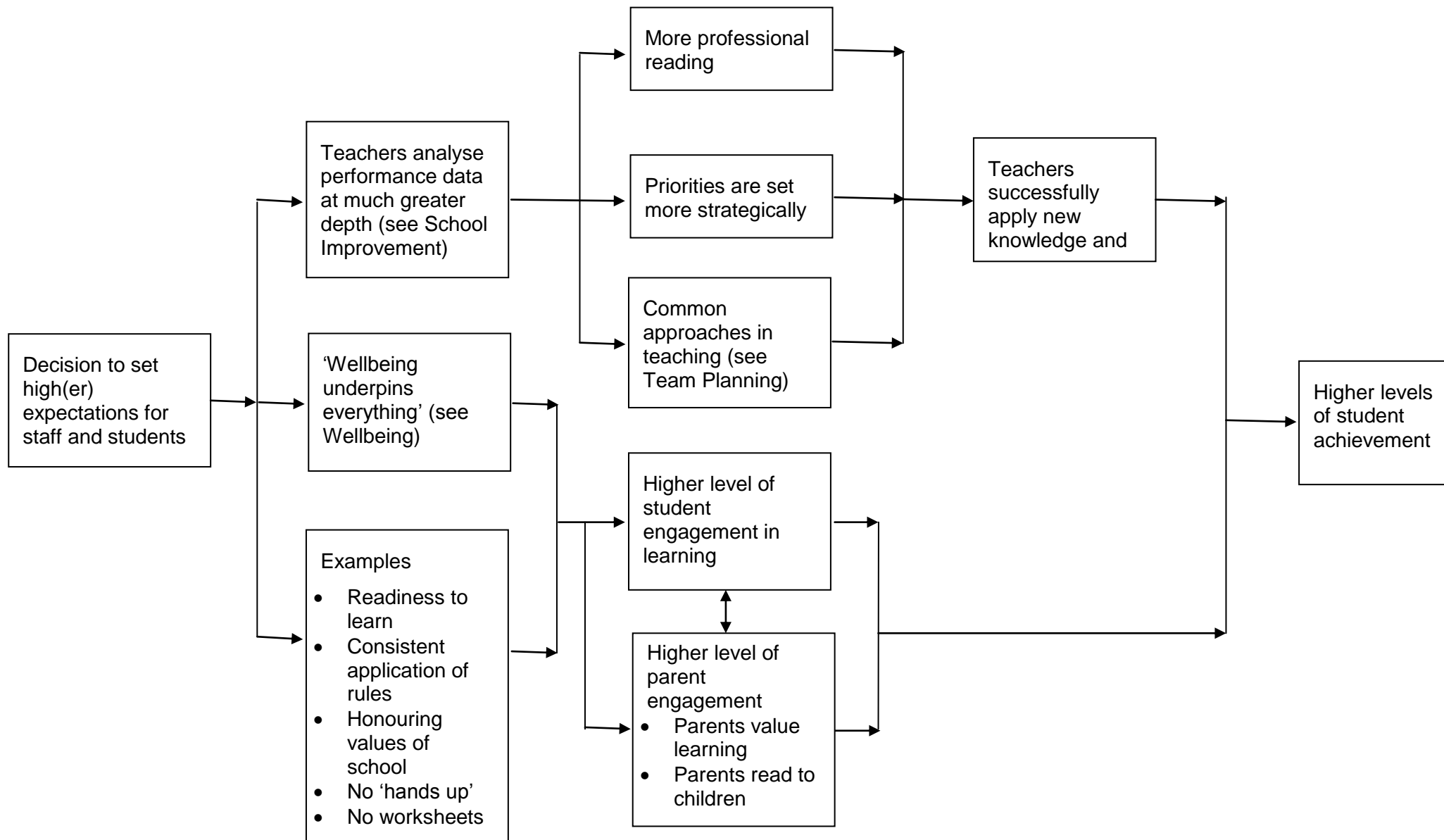
Figure 2: Links between decision to set high(er) expectations and higher levels of student achievement at Specimen Hill Primary School

Over the past two years there has been a focus on oral language, and a private speech pathologist has been employed for one day per fortnight with a trained support staff member working for four days per fortnight, serving 22 students. A department pathologist would only be able to support about three to four students. In the Prep (Preparatory) area, students in the bottom third of oral language skills are involved in a 30 minute intensive daily oral language program – two groups of six students each. All teachers are trained to enhance oral language in their everyday program. The school also employs from its budget a teacher who implements a circus skills program on Wednesdays and gives lessons in guitar.

The school has an effective wellbeing program (see also below). Di Craig and the Assistant Principal (Corey Warne) and Wellbeing Officer (Bernadette Wright) (3 days per week) work with students and families on wellbeing issues. These include the Wellbeing Officer working in classrooms for one hour per classroom per fortnight (Prep to Grade 4) and one hour per week (Grades 5 / 6), facilitating the 'Speci Wellbeing program'. A boys and a girls group operate weekly with the aim of teaching the students involved how to deal with issues in an appropriate manner and in breaking the cycle of violence that many students experience on a regular basis. The school also works closely with families in assisting them with family, parenting or relationship issues, and connecting them to community services if required. The trust between the parents, students and the staff is strong and effective.

Wendy Jackson has been at the school since the late 1990s and was appointed SIO by Di Craig after Di became Acting Principal. Wendy completed her initial teacher education in the 1970s, holds a masters degree in Numeracy and Educational Leadership (Monash) and has completed a 20-day course in literacy coaching from the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership. These were completed in 2011.

Di Craig set very high standards for improvement and some teachers were challenged by these. But it was agreed that to teach at Specimen Hill all staff members must be moving in the same direction. Over the last couple of years some staff members have retired resulting in a number of relatively young staff members. School councillor Hayley Davis suggested that one of the biggest changes has been the appointment of new, younger, energetic staff but that now 'the school runs like a well-oiled machine'.

Wendy advocates that colleagues be guided by research around teaching and learning. As the leader of teaching and learning in the school she has been able to assist teachers turn current research on best practice in the teaching of literacy and numeracy into classroom practice at Specimen Hill. Without this knowledge Wendy feels she would not have been able to lead teaching and learning in the school in such an effective manner.

There is now consistency across the school in how it teaches literacy and numeracy. The numeracy approach is very much the one advocated by Professor Peter Sullivan around teaching for understanding and a problem-solving approach. Teachers have been empowered in decision-making around teaching and learning and there are many 'robust discussions' in teams about different approaches.

Wendy models the processes and there is much peer observation in the school. A Literacy Consultant / coach has worked in the school for one day per week for several years. The coach models a lesson and then returns the next week to observe a lesson and provide the teacher with feedback. As a school, the focus was decided and was often accompanied by a professional development session: 'one focus across the school at a time'. For example, independent reading, guided reading

There was much analysis of NAPLAN results in the recent past but the school has developed its own approaches to identifying student needs. Now, as part of its preparation for NAPLAN, the school administers last year's NAPLAN reading and numeracy tests, analyses the errors and addresses the issues. There is a particular focus on numeracy. Previously, teachers revised during the last term of the year but does this now at the beginning of Term 2, before the annual NAPLAN tests. There is, however, a belief that the

best preparation for NAPLAN is solid teaching throughout the year. The school also has students prepare a sample piece of writing and teachers use the NAPLAN rubric to determine weaknesses which they address in their teaching. NAPLAN has helped staff to learn how to analyse data and engage in explicit teaching. When encountering the 'teaching to the test' statement, Wendy counters with 'I hope so. The tests are based on the curriculum so I hope that's what we are doing'. There is a whole-school assessment schedule that Wendy closely monitors.

Having improved data around teaching and learning has been very empowering and this has changed the culture of the school. 'We know we can improve student performance and we no longer make excuses for our NAPLAN results'. Comments about the lack of student ability used to be a common place excuse for performance in NAPLAN.

Wendy believes that the support and dynamism of the principal is vital in this role. Di Craig has fully supported Wendy as SIO and, without this, she doesn't think such a role would work.

Wendy considered the most important part of her role to be the building of capacity of the teachers through professional learning. 'There's a lot of learning around here: research based, not the "I reckon" approach!' Wendy finds planning with all teams effective in developing a consistent approach across the school. Professional learning is very close to the classroom. Having strong teams has been a cornerstone in improving teaching and learning, providing a forum to share practice and address issues. There has been a large investment in things like classroom libraries which include books students like to read. There are lots of concrete materials for the teaching of numeracy.

As far as the future is concerned, Wendy believes that further effort is required to raise levels of student achievement, further development in the use of ICT, continuing reflection on what teachers do, and attending to individual needs (for which the wellbeing program is important). The role of SIO will call for lots of knowledge about curriculum, with at least a part-time appointment.

To develop future leadership at Specimen Hill Primary and in other government schools, Specimen Hill is focussing on building the capacity of its staff to become dynamic and strategic leaders. Teachers are involved in Professional Development; opportunities are made within the school and there is encouragement for staff to participate in Regional leadership experiences.

Wellbeing

It was noted above that 'Wellbeing underpins everything here'. Particular attention is given here to what this entails, with three people provided information: Principal Di Craig, Assistant Principal Corey Warne and Wellbeing Officer Bernadette Wright. Corey's main role as Assistant Principal has been wellbeing. He has been at the school for 13 years, with four in his current role.

Bernadette (Bern) is the Wellbeing Officer who works three days each week. Bern was formerly working four days per week, but it is now three due to budget constraints as a result of the school losing some funding in 2015. It is impossible to condense the wellbeing program into fewer days as its impact will be diminished and be less effective across the school. She has been the Wellbeing Officer for many years and has an extensive background in hypnotherapy and social work. School councillor Hayley Davis referred to funding shortfalls that meant that Bern's time was reduced from four days per week to three.

The Speci Wellbeing approach is unique in that it is a whole-school approach that has an underpinning philosophy that wellbeing enhances school achievement. This approach has become embedded at Specimen Hill over many years. This differs from the approaches at other schools that tend to use a range of programs for short periods of time.

According to Bern, Di Craig's vision for wellbeing, including key strategies such as those included in Great Expectations, have made a 'huge difference'. For example, no raised voices by staff or students, a deep understanding of child trauma and its impact, a focus on engagement in learning through pace of lesson and that 'it's the students who should be doing the thinking and not the teacher having a verbal work-out'. Di Craig's philosophy on education is that it is our core business to provide the best education and opportunities for every student.

Bern visits every classroom over a fortnight. Sample activities include 'catch-up time' where students sit in a circle and share their personal experiences. Students are very good in observing confidences such as bereavements and family break-downs. She believes the program has an impact on student achievement because it builds resilience, confidence, and greater emotional intelligence.

Bern believes that strong and strategic leadership has been the key in successfully implementing plans for academic success, wellbeing and community learning. Leaders have supported and targeted the building of teacher capacity, enabling staff to attend Bastow Institute courses and one staff member to obtain her Masters in numeracy, thus helping to fill an identified gap. Articles in the school newsletter have reinforced wellbeing issues such as restricting the time that students should be using digital devices, appropriate times for bed, healthy eating and the importance of conversations in the household. Through the newsletter the school has managed to reinforce the importance of home-reading in relation to student achievement. Strategies for home-reading are regularly placed in the newsletter and a number of parents who are illiterate have described how they are learning to read along with their children.

The inclusive and creative approach that Di Craig encourages empowers parents, teachers, students and the community. This has brought about change in the school council. It has created vibrant involvement and interest, with rich and diverse discussion, endorsement and direction. 'School Council is not a "rubber-stamp" but its input is invited and valued'.

Hayley Davis, a member of school council, commented on the value of the wellbeing program, already in place when she came on council, but 'it is now going from strength to strength'. There is now a firm 'mind set' of encouragement and support for students. Parents & Friends raises funds to support this work. Hayley praised the way the school 'lives' its values; some schools don't do this well. 'Specimen Hill takes its values seriously'. Hayley also indicated that there is now good support for high-performing students ('A Space travellers' program targeting higher order thinkers and learners'); previously many of these students were 'coasting'. She also described how students are comfortable moving between classrooms for particular purposes, often at different grade levels. Teachers are also comfortable with this. Senior students often mentor younger students in these matters (thus creating opportunities for leadership).

Di Craig provided more details on aspects of the wellbeing program.

- Wednesday: free breakfasts with up to 70 usually in attendance. This is funded privately by the business belonging to the parents of a staff member. All teachers are rostered for breakfast duty and really enjoy the program. Many turn up whether they are on duty or not and it is a very enjoyable start to the day for students, staff and parents.

- Thursday: 'walking school-bus' with pick-up at three meeting points.

- Thursday: the school collects boxes of fruit from a local green grocer, and a support staff member and a team of students cut them up to be shared as one large platter for each classroom. The selection of fruit is varied, encouraging a wide range of choice. This program is financed by the school.

- Daily: The Alternative Lunchtime Program. Students who have been behaving inappropriately attend this program during the lunch break. Once there the students reflect on their behaviour and the choices that they made and the impact of their behaviour. They then have a restorative conversation around the changes that they will make and how they can help to repair the situation. The students then positively participate in games with other students who are volunteers in the program.

- Daily: lunches are provided for students without lunch each day at no cost.

- Daily: there is fresh fruit available for the students to supplement their lunch. This is provided by the Uniting Care Foodbank as well as staff donations.

- The school has a 'pre-loved' uniform shop where parents can get recycled uniforms at no cost.

- Students have an opportunity to 'talk' to a staff member when required with appropriate follow up.

As far as the future is concerned, Bern believes that policymakers need to make the connection between wellbeing and achievement. Leaders will need to be stronger in matters related to design and delivery of wellbeing programs. Additional funds should be committed. Initial teacher education should give attention to wellbeing. Addressing wellbeing issues is pivotal: 'how people live and come to school is "our business"'. Strategic planning at Specimen Hill has enabled this strong focus on wellbeing to occur.

Bern believes that a school like Specimen Hill will always need a person in the role she currently fills. The community has built up trust and strong relationships with the school at a time when some agencies are seen to shirk their responsibilities. 'We are in many ways the hub of the community'.

Corey Warne believes that the school must not rest or be complacent, but must build on what has been accomplished. The school should be open to new initiatives. 'We must continue to challenge each other'. A focus in the Assistant Principal role should continue to be wellbeing.

Team planning

Three members of planning teams participated in an interview on this example: Jenny Ball, Hayden Polglase and Adam Tanner.

Teams meet weekly in 'school time'. For example, the Years 3 and 4 team meets twice per week for an hour to plan literacy and numeracy for the week ahead. The Years 5 / 6 team includes four teachers. Adam provides expertise in ICT. A common language is created through team meetings. This common language is shared across the school, including with students and parents (through newsletters and meetings / assemblies). It is helpful as students move from one level to the next. Teams include a mix of graduate teachers and more experienced teachers and there is no 'opt out' for teachers to 'do their own thing'. All teaching has purpose and much thought is put into 'hooking' the students into lesson engagement. Team planning has a strong focus on personalising the learning and encouraging initiative and higher-order thinking. Jenny is not on a team this year but contributes to all teams through Reading Recovery. Team planning meetings of a half-day are held each term.

The link between team planning and student achievement is evident in the data on school improvement. The school has developed its own reporting system that meets the needs of the school and which the school considers more appropriate than the Department one. Teachers are better at using assessment to improve teaching. This involves more than NAPLAN. There is also On-Demand Testing developed by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) (online) and the benchmarking of students' reading levels in every classroom at the beginning of each term. The school has an assessment schedule.

The school does 'practice runs' for NAPLAN, focusing on the language and format of NAPLAN as much as content. School Councillor Hayley Davis noted that NAPLAN results are discussed in meetings of council. She described how hungry students are fed during NAPLAN week (all students sitting NAPLAN are offered the breakfast program on test days). NAPLAN is downplayed to some extent as the school does not wish students to be unduly stressed but realises that they do need to be prepared.

As far as the future is concerned, 'we're not complacent' and wish to continue to improve. Hayden referred to developing even further the traits of independence and initiative among students. Adam acknowledged that there will be more use of ICT but the school needs to be clear about its purpose. Four-year-olds are arriving at school knowing already how to use it. As far as the future role of teachers is concerned, it was noted that 'we are always called on' and that 'there is no down time'. It is likely that there will be more parental engagement / support. Teachers are in many respects on call 24/7. The facilitation role of teachers is likely to increase.

Figure 3 on page 34 illustrates the links between decisions and actions in School Improvement and Wellbeing and higher levels of student achievement based on information provided in interviews.

Improvement in student achievement as measured in results in NAPLAN

Test	Year	Comparitor	2008	2010	2012	2014
Reading	3	Similar			Above	Substantially above
		All		Below		Above
	5	Similar			Above	Substantially above
		All		Below		Above
Writing	3	Similar			Substantially above	Substantially above
		All		Below		Above
	5	Similar			Above	Substantially above
		All		Substantially below		Above
Spelling	3	Similar				
		All				
	5	Similar		Substantially below		
		All	Below	Substantially below	Below	
Grammar Punctuation	3	Similar		Below	Above	Above
		All		Substantially below		
	5	Similar	Above			
		All	Above	Below	Below	
Numeracy	3	Similar			Above	Substantially above
		All				Above
	5	Similar		Below		Substantially above
		All		Below		Above
ICSEA			982	958	957	970

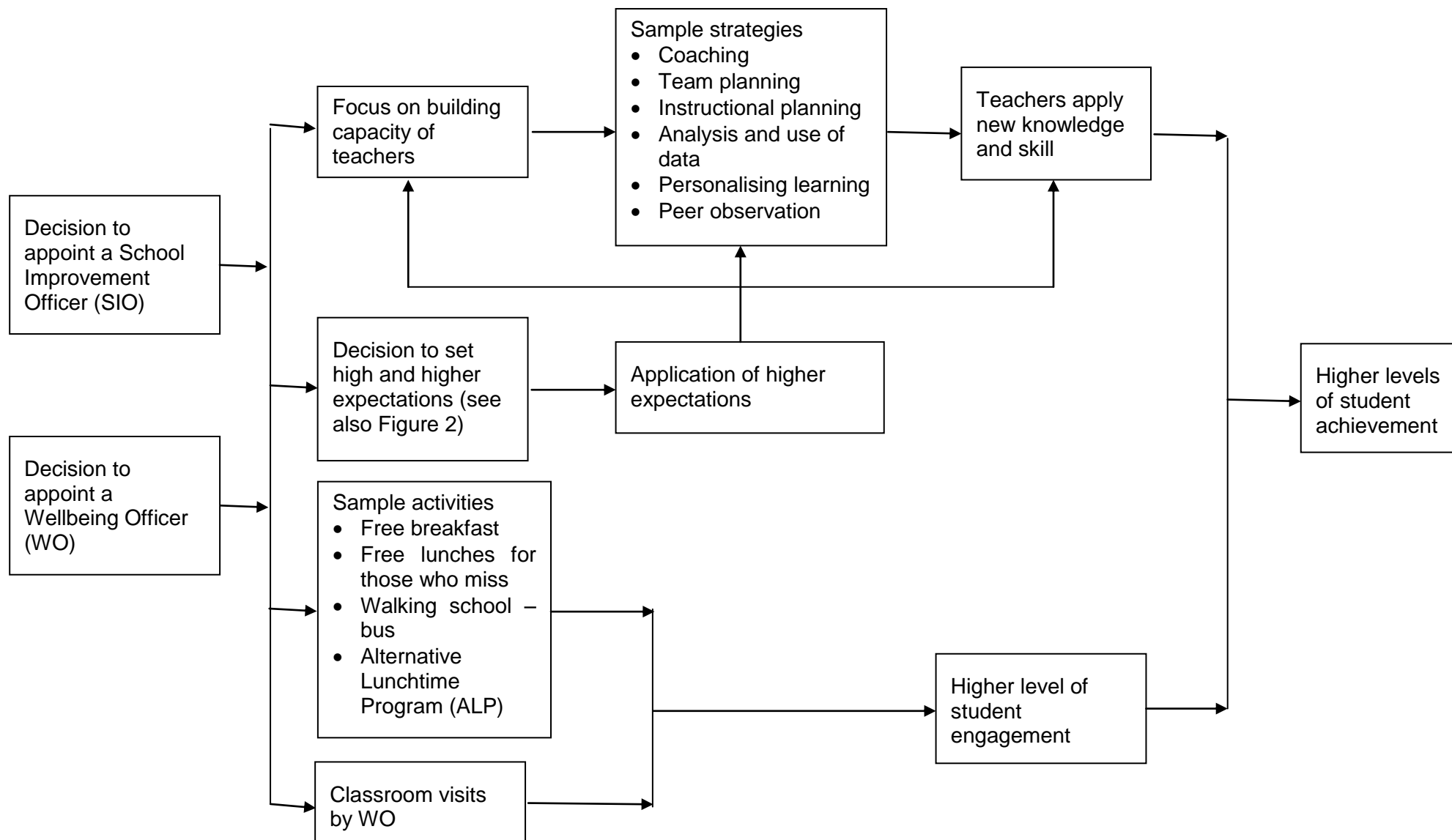|	
Substantially above	
Above	
Same as	
Below	
Substantially below	

Figure 3: Links between decisions and actions in School Improvement and Wellbeing and higher levels of student achievement at Specimen Hill Primary School

Team Planning is also included in Figure 3 as it was in Figure 2. Once again, wellbeing is an integrating theme. Taken together, Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the connections and high level of coherence among the different strategies.

These accounts of processes and outcomes referred to gains in student achievement. There is indeed evidence of recent gains after several years of decline, as indicated in results in the NAPLAN tests summarised in the table on page 33.

The performance of schools in NAPLAN is compared to that in schools with similar socio-educational characteristics (ICSEA) as well as with all schools. ICSEA is the Index of Socio-Educational Advantage. Comparisons are of five kinds:' substantially above', 'above', 'same', 'below' and 'substantially below'. The table illustrates changes in student achievement at Specimen Hill, as indicated in NAPLAN scores in Years 3 and 5 across the years 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2014. Specimen Hill had an ICSEA score in 2014 of 970, just below the median ICSEA across all schools (1000). The ICSEA score for Specimen Hill was 982 in 2008 indicating little change in the community supported by the school on the variables that make up ICSEA. There have been small changes to the way ICSEA is calculated in the intervening years but these do not affect this observation.

The comparisons in the table indicate that Specimen Hill performed at about the same level as similar schools and all schools in 2008, except for Grammar and Punctuation for Year 5 where it was above similar and above all schools, and below all schools for Spelling in Year 5. There was a decline in performance in 2010 when the school performed below similar and all schools on 13 of 20 comparisons, being substantially below all schools in Year 5 Writing, Year 5 Spelling and Year 5 Grammar and Punctuation.

A different picture emerged two years later, with the school performing better than like and all schools in seven of the 20 comparisons, and below in only two. NAPLAN 2012 was conducted the year after the appointment of Di Craig as Principal and a school review that confirmed the declining performance of the school in some areas (and praising others) and the need for the kind of strategies that were then implemented.

The transformation is starkly evident in the results for 2014. The school did not perform below like or all schools in any comparison but performed better or substantially better in 13 of the 20 comparisons, the reverse of what occurred in 2010.

Key findings in surveys at Specimen Hill Primary

The following are key findings in a sample of surveys conducted at Specimen Hill in 2014:

- There are 10 components in the School Climate survey of all staff: collective efficacy, collective responsibility, academic emphasis, trust in students and parents, staff trust in colleagues, teacher collaboration, parent and community involvement, collective focus on student learning, guaranteed and viable curriculum and shielding / buffering. The mean result for Specimen Hill in 2014 exceeded the mean for all primary schools in Victoria on each component.

- There are seven components in the Professional Learning survey of all staff: school level support, renewal of knowledge and skill, applicability of professional learning, collective participation, active participation, coherence and feedback. The mean result for Specimen Hill in 2014 exceeded the mean for all primary schools in Victoria on each component.

- There are three components to the Parent Opinion survey: school climate, student behaviour and student engagement for a total of 18 items. Compared to all primary schools, Specimen Hill ranked in the fourth quartile for two items, in the third quartile for 11 items and in the second quartile for five items (parent input, extra-curricular, student safety, classroom behaviour and student connectedness to peers). Compared to all schools, Specimen Hill ranked in the fourth quartile for two items, in the third quartile for 11 items and in the second quartile for five items – the same

profile as for the comparison with all primary schools and for the same items. Year-by-year comparisons from 2013 to 2014 at Specimen Hill indicated an increase for eight items, a decrease for nine items and no change for one item.

Discussion of findings at Specimen Hill in light of international evidence

The three key findings in the review of evidence on the links between school autonomy and student achievement prepared in the first phase of the international project are as follows:

1. Evidence from analysis of results in PISA tends to confirm that higher levels of school autonomy are associated with higher levels of student achievement providing there is a balance of autonomy and accountability.

2. The focus of autonomy should be on professional practice, with the aim being to make connections between the functions associated with school autonomy and actions that are likely to have an impact on student achievement. Exclusive reliance on structural changes for their own sake is unlikely to have an impact. It is important to align a range of strategies that research shows are linked to gains in student achievement.

3. The most powerful evidence on mediating factors linking school autonomy and student achievement is on the work of principals and other school leaders in building professional capacity through staff selection, professional development and appraisal; setting priorities on the basis of data about performance; and communication of purpose, process and performance. Cultural factors may limit effects in some settings. These capacities can be built and made effective in settings where there may be only moderate levels of school autonomy.

For #1 above, even though the level of autonomy for government schools in Victoria is arguably the highest in Australia, there is a balance between autonomy and accountability in that the school must operate within a system framework. This is illustrated in requirements for strategic planning; annual planning; annual reports to the school council; school reviews conducted every four years; and annual surveys of students, teachers and parents. The school also operates within a national framework of curriculum, assessment and reporting, as illustrated in the way it draws on AusVELS, the curriculum for government schools in Victoria that integrates the Australian Curriculum; its participation in the annual NAPLAN tests; and the reporting of results of NAPLAN on the My School website. While the school plays the key role in the advertisement for, short-listing and interviewing of applicants, it operates within a system framework in the selection and appointment of staff.

Each of the strategies described in the three examples is consistent with the international evidence on what should be the focus if there is to be an impact of school autonomy on student achievement, as described above in #2 and #3. Three examples were examined in depth: Great Expectations (the setting of consistent, high and higher expectations), school improvement and team planning, with wellbeing as an integrating theme. There is a compelling argument that the successful implementation of these strategies led (along with other strategies) to higher levels of achievement, as indicated in the turnaround of results in NAPLAN tests and very positive rankings in surveys of teachers and parents. The turnaround followed soon after the appointment of Di Craig as Principal and the design of these strategies. The school continued to serve the same kind of community as indicated by only minor fluctuations in the ICSEA score. Building capacity was the main thrust of these strategies, especially among staff but also of students. For the former, staff acquired new knowledge and skills, especially in respect to the analysis of data and actions that followed. For the latter, the many features of the wellbeing program helped ensure that many students were ready to learn who might otherwise be disengaged. The links between these strategies and gains in student achievement were mapped in Figures 2 and 3.

An important issue is the extent to which the successful design and implementation of these strategies was influenced by the level of school autonomy that is available to government

schools in Victoria. After all, it can be argued, the impressive outcomes could be attained through the exercise of effective leadership under any conditions. Team planning can occur irrespective of the level of autonomy, although it is indicative of a high level of professional autonomy. The impact of school autonomy is most evident in the capacity of the school in respect to the appointment of staff and taking up the significant flexibility that is possible in the budget. Overall, the striking feature of the findings is the high level of coherence among the different strategies and the roles played by different leaders led by the principal, staff and the school council.

CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY 3: MILLMERRAN STATE P-10 SCHOOL

One school was nominated by the Department of Education and Training in Queensland for participation in the study. It was agreed that this would be a combined primary-secondary school in a rural community. It was initially agreed that the school would remain anonymous but this was changed at the conclusion of the study when the principal and the Department agreed that the school should be named.

Millmerran State P-10 School in Millmerran provided the case study. Millmerran is located on the Darling Downs, 208 kilometres west of the state capital of Brisbane. It had a population of 1556 at the 2011 census.

Queensland context

Queensland is Australia's second-largest state (after Western Australia) and third-most populous state (after New South Wales and Victoria). It separated from New South Wales to become a colony in its own right in 1859. In area it is the world's six-largest sub-national entity. Its population is about 4.7 million. Ten of Australia's 30 largest cities are in Queensland. There is extraordinary diversity across the state ranging from a large metropolis in the capital city of Brisbane in the South to the remote sub-tropical Cape York in the North to the sparsely-populated 'outback' in the West and North-West, which includes very large cattle farms and mining communities. For educational purposes, the Department of Education and Training is divided into seven regions, indicating a relatively high level of centralisation of state-wide policy and support for all schools and decentralised administration in the regional offices. In the state as a whole, there are 1234 state schools and 497 Catholic and Independent schools.

Level of school autonomy in Queensland

The bold underlined number best describes the level of autonomy for each item based on the classifications illustrated above.

Item	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Organisation of instruction					
1. Grouping of students	1	2	3	4	**5**
2. Choice of textbooks	1	2	3	4	**5**
3. Choice of software / learningware	1	2	3	4	**5**
4. Instruction time	1	2	**3**	4	5
5. Teaching methods	1	2	3	4	**5**

	1	2	3	4	5
6. Assessment of students' regular work	1	2	3	**4**	5
7. Assistance to students: Health	1	2	3	4	**5**
8. Assistance to students: Welfare	1	2	3	4	**5**
Personnel management					
1. Principals: Criteria for appointment	**1**	2	3	4	5
2. Principals: Selection	**1**	2	3	4	5
3. Principals: Dismissal	**1**	2	3	4	5
4. Principals: Duties	1	2	**3**	4	5
5. Principals: Fixing of salary levels	**1**	2	3	4	5
6. Teachers: Criteria for appointment	**1**	2	3	4	5
7. Teachers: Selection	1	**2**	3	4	5
8. Teachers: Dismissal	1	2	**3**	4	5
9. Teachers: Duties	1	2	**3**	4	5
10. Teachers: Conditions of Service	**1**	2	3	4	5
11. Teachers: Fixing of salary levels	**1**	2	3	4	5
12. Non-teachers: Criteria for appointment	1	**2**	3	4	5
13. Non-teaching staff: Selection	1	2	3	**4**	5
14. Non-teaching staff: Dismissal	1	2	**3**	4	5
15. Non-teaching staff: Duties	1	2	3	**4**	5
16. Non-teaching staff: Conditions of service	**1**	2	3	4	5
17. Non-teaching staff: Fixing of salary levels	**1**	2	3	4	5
Planning and structures					
1. Creation or closure of school	**1**	2	3	4	5
2. Creation or abolition of a grade level	**1**	2	3	4	5
3. Designing programme of study	1	2	3	**4**	5
4. Selection of programmes of study offered in a particular school	1	2	3	**4**	5
5. Selection of subjects taught in a particular school	1	2	3	**4**	5

6. Definition of course content	1	**2**	3	4	5
Resource management					
1. Allocation of resources to the school: Teaching staff	**1**	2	3	4	5
2. Allocation of resources to the school: Non-teaching staff	1	**2**	3	4	5
3. Allocation of resources to the school: Capital expenditure	**1**	2	3	4	5
4. Allocation of resources to the school: Operating expenditure	**1**	2	3	4	5
5. Allocation of resources to the school: For principal professional development	1	**2**	3	4	5
6. Allocation of resources to the school: For teacher professional development	1	2	3	**4**	5
7. Use of resources in the school: Staff	1	2	3	**4**	5
8. Use of resources in the school: Capital expenditure	1	2	3	**4**	5
9. Use of resources in the school: Operating expenditure	1	2	**3**	4	5
10. Use of resources in the school: For principal professional development	1	2	3	**4**	5
11. Use of resources in the school: For teacher professional development	1	2	3	**4**	5
12. Support for school from jurisdictional authority	1	2	**3**	4	5
13. Support from corporate, philanthropic or not-for-profit sectors	**1**	2	3	4	5

State schools in Queensland operate within a strategic plan for the state, the current version being Strategic Plan 2014-18, the purpose of which is stated as 'preparing Queenslanders with the knowledge, skills and confidence to participate effectively in the community and the economy'. Outcomes are specified in four domains: Successful learners; Great people (comprising Teaching quality and Principal leadership and performance); High standards; and Engaged partners (comprising Regional support and Local decision making). The three most relevant to this case study are:

Local decision making: Schools ensuring community needs are central to decision making processes, autonomy and accountability

Successful learners: Students engaging in learning and achievement, and successfully transitioning to further education, training and employment

School performance: Schools achieving success through an intentional approach to improving the progress of every student

Each public school has a strategic plan that is consistent with expectation in the state-wide strategic plan, and that is the case for Millmerran State P-10 School. One of the priorities in the current plan for this school are to implement the Australian Curriculum as it has been approved to date by Ministers for Education across the country (English, Mathematics, Science and History with other subjects being those included in the QCAR (Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting) Framework which is now subsumed in the work of

the Queensland Curriculum & Assessment Authority (QCAA) (see www.qcaa.qld.edu.au) which replaced the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) in 2014. Other priorities of the school include implementing whole-school pedagogical practices; using data to inform teaching practice; developing instructional leadership with a focus on workforce performance; developing productive partnerships with students, parents and the community; improving school performance; and planning to transition Year 7 to high school (described in more detail below). The strategic plan is signed off by the principal, the chair of Parents and Citizens (or school council where one exists, as in Independent Public Schools) and the Assistant Regional Director.

Each school also has an annual implementation plan that specifies particular actions to be taken and the responsible officer. Each region also has its own plans and, in the case of the region in which the Millmerran State P-10 School is located, an annual Charter of Expectations.

Schools have the choice of using materials developed in the C2C (Curriculum into the Classroom) project, described on its website (www.education.qld.gov.au/c2c) as follows:

> State Schools Division is supporting Queensland state school teachers to implement the Australian Curriculum through the development of the *Curriculum into the Classroom* (C2C) resource, which delivers a comprehensive set of whole-school and classroom planning materials for single level and multi-level classes, students with disability and for students who study through the schools of distance education.

Initiatives in school autonomy

There have been three recent initiatives in school autonomy in Queensland. One is the Empowering Local Schools (ELS) program of the former federal government in which funds were delivered to states, territories and Catholic and Independent sectors through National Partnership Agreements. The initiative was intended to do as its title suggested but the funds were mainly used for a range of programs to build capacity for local decision-making and to support community engagement. Millmerran State P-10 School was selected for participation in the ELS initiative.

Another initiative, by name unique to Queensland, is the Great Results Guarantee (GRG) program that commenced in 2014. This delivers to selected schools funds from the Australian Government's Students First initiative which has similar purposes to ELS. In 2015 all schools in Queensland received a share of this funding. Schools must achieve the National Minimum Standard in Literacy and Numeracy or 'have an evidence-based plan, developed by the school, in place to address their specific learning needs'. The website for GRG specifies that:

> Schools will have the flexibility and autonomy to decide how the funding is invested in 2015 – for example, hiring specialist educators to provide additional support, using targeted professional development for teachers, or buying additional learning tools such as specialised literacy or numeracy programs.

> Student performance is measured throughout the year and schools are required to demonstrate to the school community how the extra funding is helping to maximise learning outcomes for all students.

It is clear from the foregoing that the intentions of GRG are consistent with the nature of this research and the case study of Millmerran State P-10 School, that is, it establishes the connection between school autonomy provided by GRG and student achievement. Millmerran State P-10 School received about $95,000 funding from this source in 2014 and about $120,000 in 2015.

The third initiative in school autonomy is the establishment of Independent Public Schools which provides a higher level of structural autonomy through the creation of school councils.

The name and many of its features are similar to a new class of public schools in Western Australia, with terminology adopted by the federal and some state governments, as described in Chapter 1. Millmerran State P-10 School is not an Independent Public School.

Framework for school accountability

In addition to accountabilities associated with the implementation of GRG (see above) and strategic and operational plans, each of which is subject to approval by the region, each school undertakes an audit every four years (Teaching and Learning Audit) conducted by a principal who is trained for the purpose. The audit is based on the elements in the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). The four classifications in the TSIT – Outstanding, High, Medium and Low – are used in the report of the audit. The format of the summary of the report follows the typical pattern of providing Commendations, Affirmations, and Recommendations. The last audit for the Millmerran State P-10 School was conducted in late 2012 and the school was rated Outstanding or High on each of the eight dimensions in the TSIT (there are now nine dimensions).

Selection and description of Millmerran State P-10 School

It took some time for the Queensland Department of Education and Training to approve the conduct of a case study in Queensland so only one nomination was sought to obtain diversity among the four case study schools, with the other three studies being substantially complete at the time of the case study in Queensland: an urban primary and regional primary in Victoria and a high school in an urban setting in the ACT. It was agreed that the Queensland study would be conducted in a combined primary-secondary school in a rural setting. Initial approval to conduct the study was given on condition that Millmerran State P-10 School would remain anonymous, but this was changed at the conclusion of the study by agreement between the school, through its principal Andrew Brandon, and the Department of Education and Training.

Millmerran State P-10 School is located in Millmerran on the Darling Downs, 208 kilometres west of Brisbane. Millmerran had a population of 1556 at the 2011 census. It was originally established under another name in the 1880s, changing its name in the early 20th century but occupying the same site. The original school building is still in use and a visit to the school reveals an attractive and well laid-out facility with fine sporting fields and nearby recreational facilities. New buildings were provided as part of the Building the Educational Revolution (BER) policy of the previous federal government. The school had an ICSEA score of 944 in 2014, indicating moderate socio-educational disadvantage against a national median score of 1000. It has consistently scored above similar schools on NAPLAN tests with very impressive gains from 2012 to 2014. The school was named by ACARA as a high-gain school in its rankings in early 2015.

The following is a self-description of the school on the My School website:

> The school caters for a wide range of students from Prep to Year 10 by providing varied learning opportunities within our curriculum. Every student in every phase of learning receives a personalised approach that responds to their individual needs. The implementation of the Australian Curriculum in English, Maths and Science in 2012 was very successful along with the more recent inclusion of History and Geography. A very strong supportive school community exists which combines the efforts of all stakeholders working together towards the goal of excellence in education. Our students have the opportunity to explore career pathways through work experience, TAFE courses and school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. We have a School Chaplain to address the religious, spiritual and / or ethical needs of the students. Our school encourages parent and community involvement from our strong volunteer helpers through to involvement in community based projects. Our

Parents and Citizens Association is very active in our school, providing support for our students and staff.

The school has joined other initiatives that have provided schools in Queensland with a higher level of autonomy, including the Empowering Local Schools (ELS) program and Great Results Guarantee (GRG) program, each delivered with funds from the federal and state governments under National Partnership agreements, as described above. The school is not an Independent Public School.

Interviews with key staff

The researcher spent two days at the school and interviewed the principal on two occasions and seven members of staff, including the deputy principal and head of department, meeting separately in each instance. A tour of the school was conducted and key documents were provided to help gain a deeper understanding of the Queensland context and of information provided in interviews. No names are used in the descriptions that follow, consistent with the initial condition of anonymity that applied when interviews were conducted.

School-wide perspectives

The principal and deputy principal provided a school-wide perspective. The principal has been at the school for seven years, being appointed in 2009, and has been principal all of that time. He served previously at three other schools, including one in a remote mainly indigenous community that was particularly challenging. He has been well-mentored along the way. The deputy principal is in her eighth year at the school, being initially appointed acting deputy principal but then appointed almost immediately as deputy principal.

1. Strategies for responding to results in NAPLAN

The first NAPLAN tests were conducted in 2008, one year before the principal took up his appointment. NAPLAN results have been 'mixed' in most of the intervening years when the school tended to look for 'excuses' for performance. However, a coherent set of strategies has been implemented leading to high performance in most areas in 2014.

The school has been influenced by some of the strategies in Victorian schools that have resulted in substantial commitment in that state to longer hours and continuous professional support, with support from the Australian Education Union in that state. Queensland teachers are not currently required to put in the same amount of hours. The strategies used by the Victorian schools were very structured, explicit and results-driven, with a focus on NAPLAN. According to the principal these schools 'were playing a different game and we didn't know the rules'.

He noted the best-ever Grade 5 NAPLAN results were achieved with the support of a very enthusiastic and effective graduate teacher. This reinforced the notion that effective planning alone doesn't produce the results, but the key is in the delivery and engagement of the students in the learning process.

2. Variability in NAPLAN results

The 'cohort effect' may partly explain variability in NAPLAN results, especially applicable in a small school. The context was the drop in NAPLAN in Grade 3 from 2013 to 2014. A small number of additional special needs students can make a big difference. A parent evening with 80 percent attendance was held for parents of Grade 3 students. The principal phones every parent before such events (this is possible in a small school). In respect to demography, some students come from farming families; some from the town and others come from low SES families who live in high-density 20 acre blocks outside the town. There are some passionate and motivated Filipino students whose parents are employed on local farms. Indigenous enrolment is about 5 percent.

3. Examples where local decisions led to improvements in student achievement

The principal nominated three examples: whole-school capacity-building, a targeted personalised approach, and community engagement. Each of these developments has occurred in the last two years. Details were provided by teachers, as reported below, but some general observations were made in the discussion with the principal.

In respect to capacity building he noted the shortcomings of C2C (Curriculum into the Classroom), the state-wide curriculum resource, which tended to be content heavy, not allowing contextualisation or consolidation, and that could not be delivered as intended. C2C is however an excellent resource but difficult to deliver in its current format. The school has made changes to more fully implement the Australian Curriculum which serves as a syllabus as well as a curriculum. It has been tailored to the school's context.

The intent of C2C in taking the 'what' off the table and having teachers focus on the 'how' is very much 'a part of what we do'. It is now possible to have a stronger focus on explicit instruction, helped by the very good teacher-student relationships. The timetabling adjustments have allowed time for consolidation of the content and not just exposure to it.

As one example, the principal referred to the way staff has implemented ACARA History in the lower years. A half-hour lesson per week was not conducive to effective teaching and learning in a unit of work, so the school has moved to a two-week block with a focus on history, but with attention to literacy and numeracy and even the arts within that unit. The new timetable has allowed staff to deliver what they know is important and in a way that allows for effective teaching and learning.

In respect to the targeted personalised approach, the principal described how this applied especially to preparing and supporting students for NAPLAN. Different strategies are needed for Grade 3 and Grade 9; the former need to learn the language of NAPLAN; the latter need to be motivated to do their best. There are other strategies underpinning this approach; for example, working with small groups of 6-8 students, with each group needing particular kinds of support such as that offered to gifted and talented students. He takes one of these groups. General cognitive strategies are also addressed.

In respect to community engagement, the principal, local members and mayors met to discuss strategies at a special state government organised event in a coastal city. He has subsequently led / hosted a number of local events and engaged a wide range of stakeholders. He has established links with Queensland Health, local police, Early Childcare providers, another local school (Catholic) and the local commerce with the purpose of developing a strategy to work with the 0-5 age group within the community. The aim is to have all children Prep ready when they come to school through the provision of support and learning opportunities with a consistent practice. An event with a guest presenter of note was organised at the school with financial support from GRG and ELS funding

Teachers are encouraged to use Google and YouTube where excellent material including examples of good teaching can be found. All teachers have the technology to access these and use relevant items in the classroom. The principal also encourages parents to play board games with their children. Among other things, this fosters good parent-child conversation.

The principal indicated that the three examples are being implemented in particular ways at this school, reflecting context and local decision-making. Other schools may be addressing the same themes but will likely be doing so with different approaches. He has a very high regard for leaders in the region in which his school is located and for the support that the school receives.

4. Strengthening the culture of the school

While most of the above have occurred recently, the foundation was laid in a change in culture at the school following the appointment of the current principal and with the support of the deputy principal from 2009. For example, in 2009 there were more than 60 suspensions per year; now there may be 15 at most.   Positive behaviour support was provided and the teaching of the school values, rules and expectations began. The culture / climate are now much more conducive to learning. A common lunch time was replaced by separate lunch times for primary and high school.

To develop and maintain productive partnerships with parents / caregivers, there is always a telephone call by the principal or deputy principal to a parent if there are any issues of concern. The head of department also makes these kinds of calls (see below).

The new facilities funded through BER have also helped to create a more conducive learning environment. The grounds and gardens are very attractive. Staff help create the environment; for example, one staff member made curtains for the staff room and most primary teachers provide curtains and decorations for their rooms.

Whole-school capacity-building

Three teachers provided insights on whole-school capacity-building at the school. One works in the early primary years, another in the secondary years, and the third (the deputy principal) had no current teaching responsibilities but offered a school-wide perspective.

The *primary teacher* has been at the school for nearly two decades, teaching Prep and Year 1 throughout that time, and is well-placed to comment on developments in whole-school capacity-building. Some teachers had started to redefine their planning towards the end of 2012 and 2013 but in 2014 it became a whole-school approach. The move away from reliance on C2C mentioned by the principal occurred in 2014. Teachers were concerned that content was missing, that there were gaps in literacy and numeracy, and poor scaffolding. There was no problem-solving in C2C. There didn't seem enough time to talk to students with C2C. There was interest in explicit teaching but not enough time to do it justice. 'The school leadership team listened and acted!' 'We started again from scratch, with four days of release time'. 'Having a small and trusting staff helped'.

More attention was given to the Australian Curriculum developed by ACARA but the best was kept from C2C. The Australian Curriculum is explicit and deliverable. There was a consistent effort across the school to make these changes. Attention then turned to delivery, with particular attention being given to phonics and phonemic awareness which was missing in C2C, and the way different genres were delivered. These were whole-school decisions and 'we were very professional'. The changes apply to all Key Learning Areas. The outcomes have included a common language, a common understanding of the need for data and how to use it, and 'we are free to call on anyone for support'.

It is clear that teachers search widely for resources to support their work. Cars and Stars and LEMS (literacy) are used, the former a phonics program learnt from a teacher in another part of the state who had a licence to deliver it. Back to Front Mathematics has been introduced (see below). Neuro-sensory programs in education are being explored. Appealing to the five senses is important. Lower primary students participate in 'brain gym' exercises (which had to be stopped for a while with C2C).

The school has a literacy coach and a new appointment was made recently to the position of Master Teacher (the teacher whose experiences are cited above served as Master Teacher for a time). It is noteworthy that poetry is taught to students in Prep and Year 1 at a level appropriate to the age of the cohort.

As far as the future is concerned this teacher believes there will always be a need for building capacity and getting better. There will always be a need for intervention regardless of the curriculum.

A *secondary teacher* provided additional insights on whole-school capacity-building. She is in her 10th year at the school after serving at two other schools 'out West'. She teaches Mathematics and English and provides support for the Music teacher. Instrumental Music is a popular extra-curricular activity at the school. She is a member of the Years 4-7 sector team (which also includes a learning support teacher) that meets for one hour each fortnight – an initiative over the last four years as part of the effort to lift performance across the school. The team chose Cars and Stars (see above) as a reading and comprehension program that, through an initial placement test, assigns students to ability levels and addresses areas of strength and weakness. She has been able to use the program twice each week and students have shown improvement. Another teacher uses it daily and so is able to show stronger effects. A particular strength of the program is the common language across all levels. The team also makes decisions arising from the progress being made by individual students. Cars and Stars replaced the SRA program that had been used for a number of years. This teacher had seen Cars and Stars at a bookshop in Brisbane and had purchased it for her own classroom. The program was later introduced to colleagues.

The school also uses Spelling Mastery, with placement of students on the basis of an initial test. They are then moved up or down according to progress, as discussed at sector meetings. The school has been using this for at least 10 years.

This teacher explained Back to Front Mathematics (see above) that involves students drawing out the patterns in mathematics from problem-solving experiences. It includes working back from the answer to discover and ensure understanding of the concepts. A group including this teacher went to a nearby town led by the person who developed the program. All were impressed and materials were purchased and used. It is evident from this and other interviews that teachers have lots of opportunities for professional development.

The importance of working together to develop a common language was highlighted along with the focus on more explicit teaching. Teachers are encouraged to visit each other's classrooms. There is consistency in teaching and stability of staff.

This teacher faces particular challenges for she works with Year 7 student, and this year level became part of the secondary school in 2015, having historically been the highest level in primary school. A particular challenge is using the Cars and Stars and Spelling Mastery programs when different approaches to school organisation apply in the secondary years.

The third teacher interviewed on this theme was the *Deputy Principal* and she provided a school-wide perspective. She was the Literacy Coach for one year, taught English and History for two years, but now devotes all of her time to leadership, with no class responsibilities other than to provide relief from time to time.

She confirmed that the move away from C2C occurred in second term in 2014. No approval was required to do this – a local school decision (schools are free to make these kinds of decision in the take-up of C2C). C2C was introduced in QLD in about 2010. Through discussion with experienced teachers, at least two had trialled school-developed English and Mathematics units in 2012 and 2013.

Whole-school capacity-building includes the following activities: improving teachers' capacity to deliver through the building of knowledge and skill, building a curriculum that suits the school, focusing wherever possible on explicit / direct instruction, and generally building the confidence and capacity of staff. It also includes the choice of teaching and learning programs and resources used across the school to ensure consistency, such as Cars and Stars, LEM phonics, Reading Eggs and Mathletics, and developing staff capacity to implement them. Moderation processes have been established within and between schools to ensure consistency in decision-making around student achievement.

The principal and deputy principal attended, and were impressed by, a workshop on Direct Instruction led by Anita Archer in April 2014. They shared their views with teachers at the school. Two other teachers were 'early adopters'. Implementation had started in 2013 and

the attendance at this workshop confirmed the direction of the school's pedagogical approach.

According to the deputy principal, most of the above occurred after NAPLAN 2014 although the earlier appointment of literacy coaches from 2009 to 2012 will have had an effect. Later support (2013 and 2014) from external staff based at another school was not so effective. Acting Master Teachers were appointed in Term 1, 2015 but a new appointee has just commenced, working for three days per week (see above).

As far as the future is concerned, a priority for the school is improvement in Numeracy. There will be more data-driven strategies through the appointment of the new Master Teacher.

Figure 4 maps the links between school decisions on whole-school capacity-building and higher levels of student achievement at Millmerran State P-10 School. There are two lines in Figure 4. The top line illustrates how teachers take up a high level of professional autonomy in the selection of resources to support teaching and learning.

There is an impact on student achievement if teachers can consistently apply new knowledge and skill in how to use these resources. The support of a master teacher assists in this effort and the skilful analysis of data helps target the use of these resources. The bottom line describes a broader range of strategies that have been adopted in the whole-school approach, including professional development, planning in sector teams, building capacity in direct / explicit instruction and generally, build the confidence of staff. There is an impact on student achievement if teachers consistently apply new knowledge and skill.

Targeted personalised approach (TPA)

Three teachers provided details of the Targeted Personalised Approach (TPA), one working in the secondary school and two working in the primary school.

The *secondary school teacher* is in her tenth year at the school and teaches English from Years 8 to 10. She also teaches Drama. She plays a special role in preparing students to do NAPLAN tests in Year 9. As noted by others, different approaches to TPA are taken at different levels in the school so the Year 3 approach will be different to the Year 9 approach.

There are special challenges for NAPLAN at Year 9 because many students are not well-motivated after doing the test on several occasions in the past. They realise it does not 'count' for anything at the personal level. This teacher presents the test to students as the culmination of learning over the previous eight years.

She learns about the needs and dispositions of students when she first meets them in Year 8 and works with them right up to the morning of the tests when they are in Year 9 to ensure they are relaxed before the experience. Games are played, students run around outside, and there is lots of visualisation. A special room is needed for some of these activities and it is often a challenge to find the space. She has special expertise because of her background, knowledge and skills in Drama. This approach has been taken for the last two years.

Boredom and lack of engagement may be less of an issue in this small P-10 school because of high levels of trust, stability of staff – students 'see our concern for their wellbeing'. A major difficulty is finding time to meet with students, but it is easier in a smaller school.

On another matter, this teacher described the capacity of the school to move away from C2C is an illustration of local decision-making. Another example was the way adjustments were made to the allocation of time for History, This teacher was prepared to re-allocate to English that needed the time, and what was required in History could be done with slightly reduced time. High levels of trust in a small school make this possible.
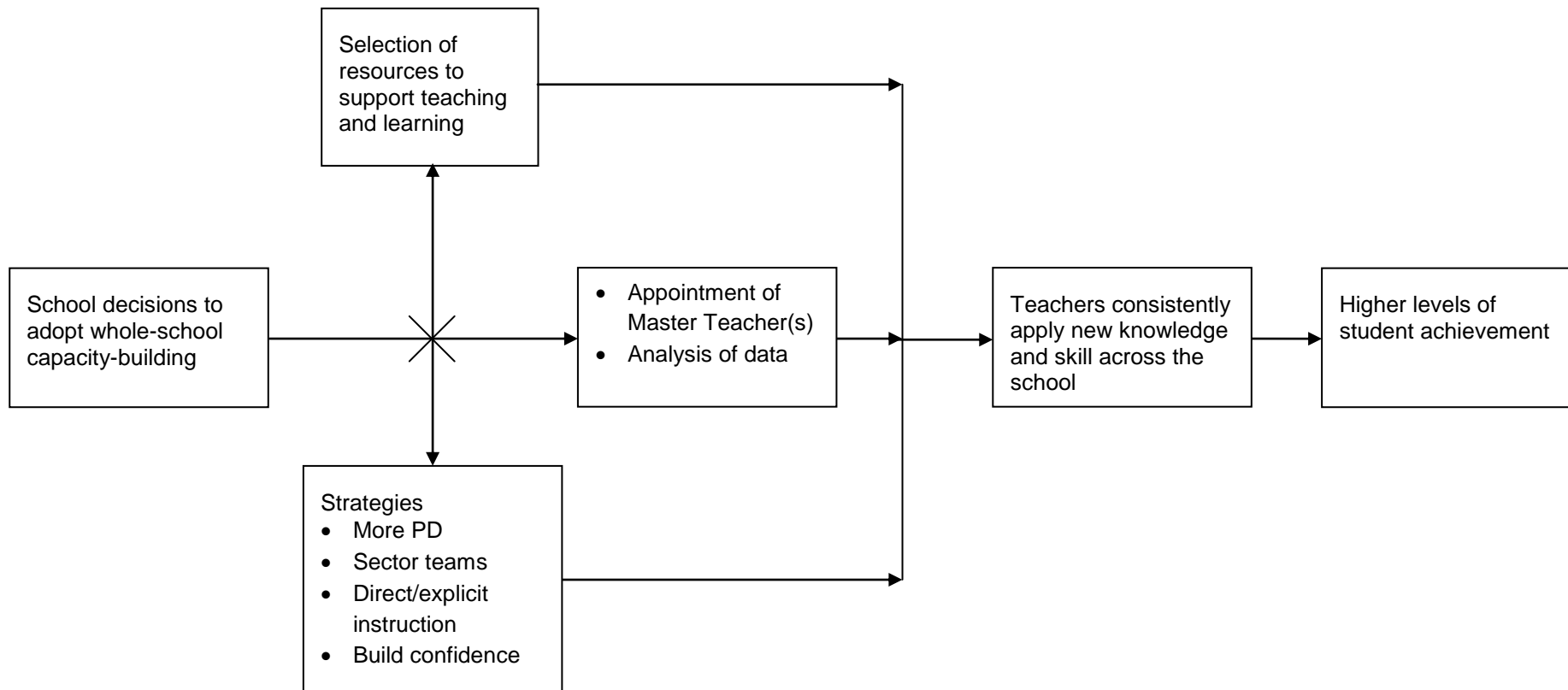
Figure 4: Links between school decisions on whole-school capacity-building and higher levels of student achievement at Millmerran State P-10 School

As far as the future is concerned, the school will need to provide more of this kind of support but will need to monitor outcomes to see if it makes a difference to student achievement.

The researcher formed the view that students are learning other skills besides just preparing for NAPLAN. These skills have life benefits; for example, visualisation and dealing with potentially stressful situations.

A teacher who works with the TPA *in the primary years* is employed at the school for three days per week as a teacher-librarian but also provides special support in targeting students who need assistance in learning, especially as NAPLAN approaches. She takes time out from her library schedule to do this. Work throughout the years focuses on reading and comprehension strategies / lessons.

The class teachers for Years 4 to 6 test students and allocate them to a level at which support is needed. To provide a more targeted approach she and another teacher work with smaller groups who leave their classes for short periods of time to provide targeted assistance that can be more personalised.

A similar approach is employed as NAPLAN tests approach when a small team of teachers is involved. Groups may range in size from three to 11, with students nominated by their class teachers. She works a fourth day each week, with costs met from the school's budget. She described a sample approach in the following terms:

> Four groups were withdrawn from Year 3 classes yesterday: two 'gifted'; two 'struggling'. Students were working on Narrative Writing that they had done in regular classes. We took them further, deeper and better, enriching their writing with adverbs and similes. Their needs will vary. We do a lot of modelling.

These strategies have been in place for about five years but with a more intensive and targeted approach involving a wider range of specialist staff for the past three years. Indicators of success are student progress, feedback from teachers and NAPLAN results.

As far as the future is concerned, this teacher would like to see more personalisation. This is a 'value' for her. However, the issue is time. How can more time be made available and more funds to secure staff who can do this kind of work? Being a small school helps.

A third teacher who also works in the *primary years* also shared information about the Targeted Personalised Approach. She has been at the school for 14 years and has taught Year 3 throughout this time (but had more diverse responsibilities at previous schools). She believes that the aim of TPA in recent years has been to improve Literacy, but this year the approach has also included Numeracy. She described how smaller groups come out of regular classes – it's just one more opportunity to address questions and provide support. This occurs once per week. Each student can receive about 10 minutes of personalised support. A teacher comes to the school for one day each week to assist small groups in Years 3 and 5 prepare for NAPLAN, making use of ICT (iPad). Students learn the language of NAPLAN testing and strategies to work out the best of the four options provided. During the small-group work students take up the 'test position' as far as arrangement of desks and chairs is concerned. Even though the focus is on improving results in NAPLAN, there are 'spill-over' effects in strategies acquired by students through assistance in small groups.

This teacher believes that group assistance of the kind described above may have helped achieve the outstanding Year 5 results in NAPLAN 2014. The Maths Mentals textbook is another resource that is likely to have contributed to improved NAPLAN results. It was introduced in 2013 and is used every day. As far as the future is concerned, this teacher believes that there will always be something new, so teachers must be ready to acquire related knowledge and skill; for example, in Back to Front Mathematics as described above.

Figure 5 maps the links between the school decision to adopt the Targeted Personalised Approach and higher levels of achievement of selected students.
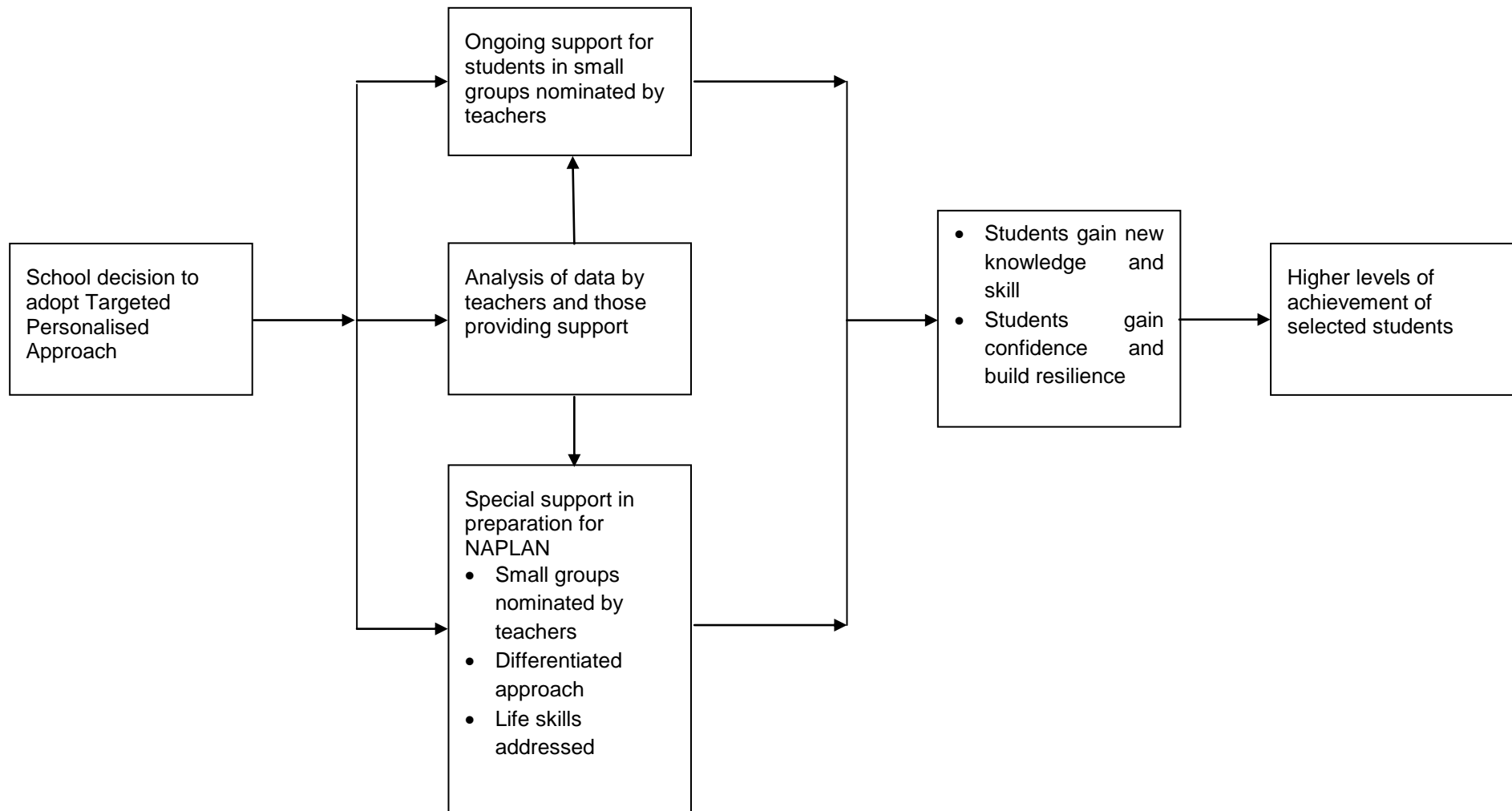
Figure 5: Links between school decision to adopt Targeted Personalised Approach and higher levels of achievement for selected students at Millmerran State P-10 School

There are two lines in Figure 5. The top line is concerned with targeted assistance for students in small groups as nominated by their teachers. The bottom line is the more sharply focused support as NAPLAN tests approach. The latter also involves students nominated by teachers. Different approaches are required; for example, for Year 3 and Year 9 students. A broad range of skills are addressed in these small groups. These two strategies depend on the careful selection of students and this calls for skilful analysis of data on the part of teachers and those providing support. Whether there is an impact on student achievement depends on students gaining and utilising new knowledge and skill. In the longer term, many may acquire life skills in the form of increased confidence and resilience.

Community engagement

The school has a Head of Department with a general rather than special designation and she leads the effort in community engagement. She also teaches History to Years 9 and 10, and provides support for teachers in pedagogy, curriculum planning, student welfare, community engagement and relationships in general. She has taught in NSW, and in the past has taught in the primary sector at this school as well as Science and Geography in the secondary years.

This teacher described a wide range of tasks including the school's newsletter, phone calls to parents, organisation of ANZAC day commemorations, school parade, investiture, speech nights, class visits to the community, information evenings such as 'Meet and Greets' and NAPLAN Bar-B-Qs, intercultural activities such as for Filipino and Burmese students, swimming and athletic carnivals. These are appreciated by all, and students especially appreciate them because when they go on to Year 11 in another town they often say that it takes a term or so to settle into a new larger school where it takes time to make these connections.

The links to student achievement are made when all are 'on the same page' in respect to expectations for students – parents, teachers and students.

This teacher acknowledged that community engagement is improving continually, getting stronger and better at the school but she posed a question: 'given the challenges faced by young people, are we trained for this kind of work?'

As far as the future is concerned, this teacher believes that work in the areas of VET and Pre-Prep needs to be continued. These areas have been used by the school as a conduit to engaging with the wider school community. Care will need to be taken with language in communication with parents and the wider community. Care must be expressed in a genuine rather than condescending fashion, ensuring also that a common language is used. However, there are limits to 'care'; for example, 'we can't hug students or take them home, but we feel confident as professionals we have done all we are able to do in helping each individual within our school to "be the best they can be" in achieving educational goals and developing social skills'.

Figure 6 maps the links between the school decision to strengthen the engagement of the community and higher levels of student engagement. There are two lines in Figure 3. The top line refers to the wide range of activities to engage the community and build partnership. These efforts are led by the head of department. The bottom line refers to the many personalised approaches by the principal, deputy principal and head of department to parents in a range of circumstances, including when students encounter difficulties or when every parent may be phoned to encourage attendance at a school function. The two lines coincide in respect to building a common purpose and common language, so that all are 'on the same page'. It is through all of these efforts that the social capital of the school is strengthened. There is potential impact on levels of student achievement, especially in the bottom line as parents are more actively engaged in supporting their children in learning.
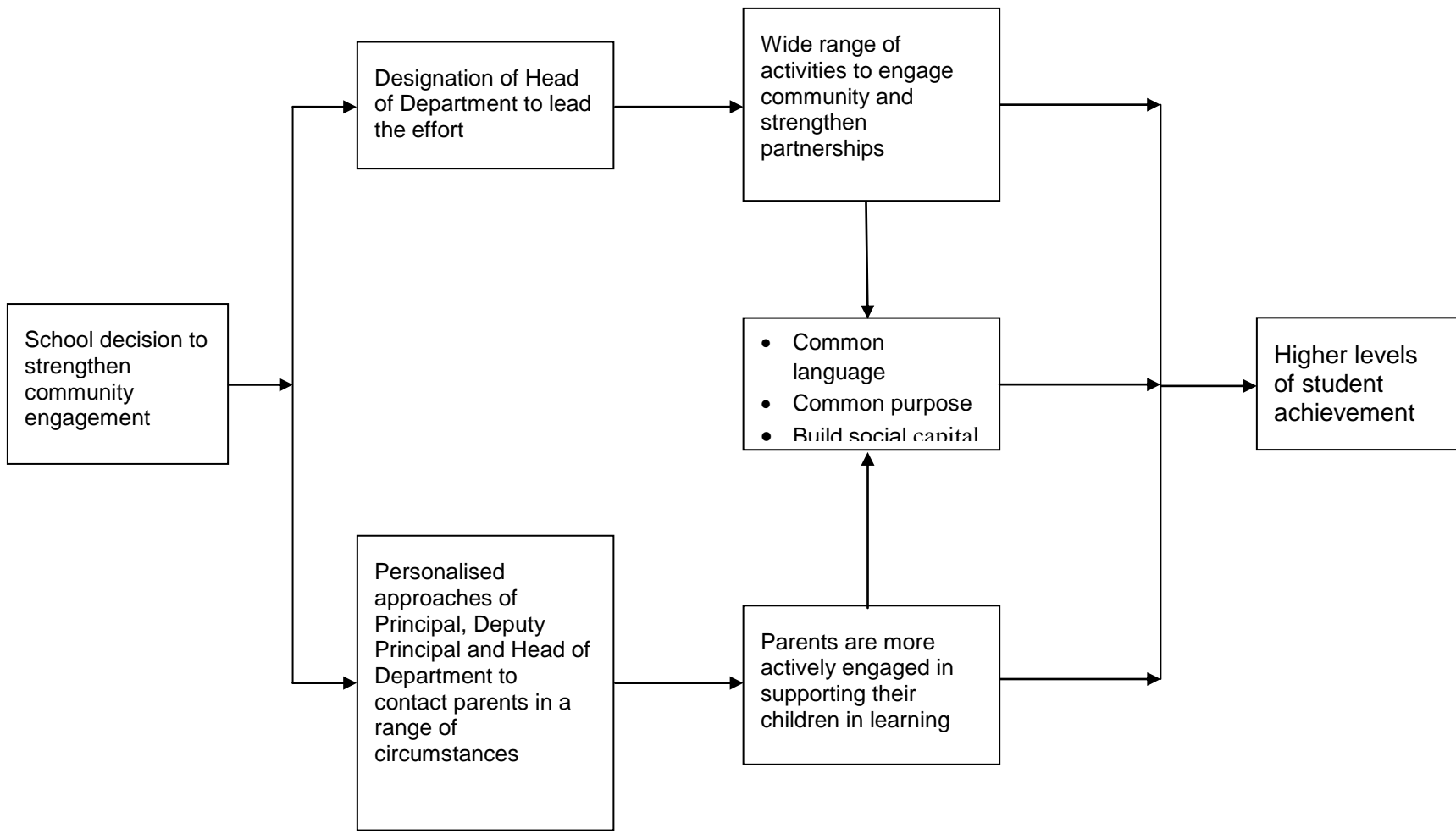
Figure 6: Links between school decision to strengthen engagement of community and higher levels of student achievement at Millmerran State P-10 School

Improvement in student achievement as measured in NAPLAN tests

The table below shows results in NAPLAN for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2014.

Test	Year	Comparitor	2008	2010	2012	2014
Reading	3	Similar				Below
		All		Below	Below	Substantially below
	5	Similar				
		All	Below	Below	Below	Below
	7	Similar				Above
		All	Below		Below	
	9	Similar	Substantially below	Above		Substantially above
		All	Substantially below		Below	
Writing	3	Similar				
		All		Below	Below	Below
	5	Similar	Below	Substantially below		Substantially above
		All	Below	Substantially below	Below	Substantially above
	7	Similar			Above	Substantially above
		All				
	9	Similar		Above		Substantially above
		All	Below		Below	
Spelling	3	Similar			Substantially above	
		All	Below	Above		Below
	5	Similar	Below			Substantially above
		All	Below	Below	Substantially below	
	7	Similar		Above	Above	Above
		All				
	9	Similar	Above	Above	Above	Substantially above
		All				Above
Grammar Punctuation	3	Similar	Above		Above	
		All				Below
	5	Similar	Below			Substantially above
		All	Substantially below	Below	Below	
	7	Similar	Below	Above	Substantially above	Above
		All	Substantially below			
	9	Similar		Above		Substantially above
		All			Below	Above
Numeracy	3	Similar		Below	Below	
		All	Below	Substantially below	Substantially below	Below
	5	Similar	Below			Above
		All	Substantially below	Below	Below	
	7	Similar			Above	
		All	Below			Below
	9	Similar		Above		Above
		All				
ICSEA			956	937	945	944

Substantially above	
Above	
Same as	
Below	
Substantially below	

53

The transformation from 2008 to 2014 is immediately apparent in a visual sense with the change from shades of red (below or substantially below) for most results in 2008 to shades of green (above or substantially above) for most results in 2014, with the most noteworthy changes occurring from 2012 to 2014 when the initiatives described above were designed and delivered. The ICSEA score was essentially the same in these two years (945 in 2012 and 944 in 2014) suggesting that, overall, the characteristics of the community as reflected in the demographics of the school had not changed although, as noted above, there may be important changes in the student profile at a particular year level where there is only one class.

There are some noteworthy patterns in the table of NAPLAN results. First, overall, when compared to similar schools, of the 80 possible comparisons, results at the school were the same as or above similar schools in 69 instances. Second, for changes from 2012 to 2014, of the 20 possible comparisons with similar schools, there was improvement or no change in 15 instances and a decline in 5 instances. Third, again for comparisons with similar schools, in 2008 the school performed the same as or better in 14 of 20 comparisons; the corresponding figures were 19 of 20 in 2014. In comparisons with all schools, in 2008 the school was the same as or better in 7 of 20 instances; the corresponding figures for 2014 were 13 of 20.

The results compared to those in similar schools according to year level are also interesting. For Year 3, the school performed the same as or above similar schools in 18 of 20 instances. The corresponding figures were 14 of 20 in Year 5, 19 of 20 in Year 7 and 19 of 20 in Year 9.

As far as comparisons with similar schools in the different domains is concerned, the school performed at the same level or above in 14 of 16 comparisons in Reading, Writing and Spelling, and in 13 of 16 comparisons in Numeracy.

Taken together, it is understandable that ACARA listed this school among those in Queensland that had made noteworthy gains from 2012 to 2014. This was especially evident in student gains from Year 3 to Year 5 when comparisons were made with the performance of students in similar schools and students in all schools with the same starting point'. The school outperformed schools with these students in all comparisons in Reading, Persuasive Writing, and Numeracy (the only domains in which gains were calculated).

Discussion of findings at Millmerran State P-10 School in light of international evidence

The three key findings in the review of evidence on the links between school autonomy and student achievement prepared in the first phase of the international project are as follows:

1. Evidence from analysis of results in PISA tends to confirm that higher levels of school autonomy are associated with higher levels of student achievement providing there is a balance of autonomy and accountability.
2. The focus of autonomy should be on professional practice, with the aim being to make connections between the functions associated with school autonomy and actions that are likely to have an impact on student achievement. Exclusive reliance on structural changes for their own sake is unlikely to have an impact. It is important to align a range of strategies that research shows are linked to gains in student achievement.
3. The most powerful evidence on mediating factors linking school autonomy and student achievement is on the work of principals and other school leaders in building professional capacity through staff selection, professional development and appraisal; setting priorities on the basis of data about performance; and communication of purpose, process and performance. Cultural factors may limit effects in some settings. These capacities can be built and made effective in settings where there may be only moderate levels of school autonomy.

Two of the three examples nominated by the principal (Whole-School Capacity-Building and the Targeted Personalised Approach) lie squarely in the findings in #2 and #3 above; that is, are concerned with professional practice. What has been mapped in each instance provides persuasive evidence that local decisions have indeed led in explicit cause-and-effect fashion to improvements in student achievement. The strategies have been designed and delivered in consistent fashion, especially in the last three years when the most impressive gains in student achievement were realised. The profile of staff remained virtually unchanged during this time, leadership was stable, and there is no evidence that the characteristics of the community had changed.

Capacities of staff were built in several respects and these applied across all learning areas across primary and secondary years. A striking feature is the way teachers used their capacities to select learning materials to support the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. This was particularly evident in the lesser reliance on C2C resources and the testing in the school setting and subsequent adoption of resources that were highlighted in professional development programs. These flexibilities are available to all schools in Queensland but it is clear that staff at Millmerran State P-10 School used that flexibility to the full.

The Targeted Personalised Approach (TPA) is noteworthy in two respects. At first sight it is a powerful effort to prepare students to participate in NAPLAN tests by providing special assistance in knowledge and skills that are addressed in NAPLAN. However, it is evident that aspects of this assistance extend to what might be called 'life skills' reflected, in particular, in support provided for students doing NAPLAN in Year 9. Learning how to relax and engaging in visualisation of the experience to follow are transferable to many of life's experiences. Similarly for students in Year 3, when becoming familiar with the forthcoming testing experience extends to different arrangements of furniture. However, this is not the only use of TPA. Students at different levels are withdrawn in small groups from their regular classrooms throughout the year to receive specialised support before returning to their classrooms. These students are nominated by their teachers. There are similarities in this approach to what is a feature of schools in Finland (Sahlberg 2011).

The third example cited by the principal (Community Engagement) is also consistent with the findings of international research although the links to learning are less direct. The many activities cited by the head of department serve to build trust in the school and bring resources to support the school. There are many reciprocal relationships here, exemplified at the time of the researcher's visit in the commemorations of ANZAC day. Members of the community contributed to school activities; the school led the town's ANZAC march because it has the only marching band in the community. However, the more direct links to learning are evident in the way the principal, deputy principal and head of department telephone parents when there are matters of concern and, in one example, the principal phones every parent to invite them to a parent-teacher evening. Newsletters and the school's prospectus convey consistent messages about strategies to improve learning and the way that parents can support the effort. An effort has been made to build a common language so that everyone is 'on the same page'.

Community Engagement at the school is an illustration of the way the school builds its social capital, defined by Caldwell and Harris (2008: 59) as 'the strength of formal and informal partnerships and networks involving the school and all individuals, agencies, organisations and institutions that have the potential to support and be supported by the school'.

A feature of this case study is the coherence among intentions at the state, regional and school levels. All public schools have a higher level of autonomy than in the past, especially from 2015 in the GRG initiative. It is clear that Millmerran State P-10 School

has used this autonomy well and provided powerful evidence of links to higher levels of student achievement.

CHAPTER 5: CANBERRA HIGH SCHOOL (AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY)

The Director-General of the ACT Education and Training Directorate nominated three schools for possible inclusion in the study: two primary schools and one high school. The high school was selected to ensure diversity among the four case study schools in Australia. The ACT context is described before attention is turned to the case study of Canberra High School.
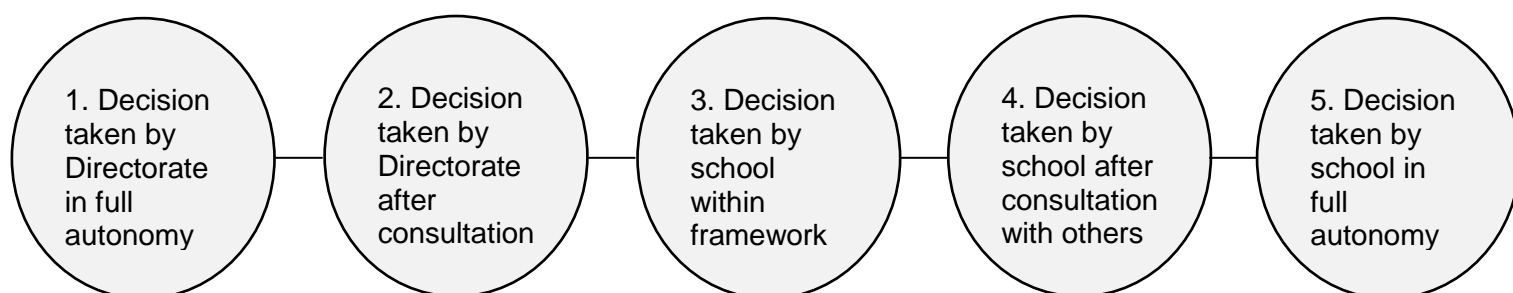
The ACT Context

Schools in the ACT have been part of the New South Wales system for much of their history but a new system of schools was created in 1974 when an Interim Schools Authority was established. The ACT Schools Authority was formally established in 1977. The authority was disbanded in 1987 as part of the move to self-government of the ACT and education today is managed by the ACT Education and Training Directorate which is essentially a department of the ACT Government with its own Minister and Director-General. As noted in Chapter 1, schools in the ACT have enjoyed a relatively high degree of autonomy from the time of the Interim Schools Authority. Each school has had its own school board since that time. Four-year plans, annual operating plans and annual reports must be submitted by the principal to and approved by the school board, which also receives the report of the school's validation conducted every four years.

The Directorate adopts a strategic plan every four years, with the plan for 2014-2017 entitled *Education Capital: Leading the Nation*. The title reflects in part the fact that the ACT is the top-performing jurisdiction in the annual NAPLAN tests. Five priorities have been set in this plan: quality learning; inspirational teaching and leadership; high expectations, high performance; connecting with families and the community; and business innovation and improvement. Schools and networks of schools are expected to take account of these priorities in their plans.

The Directorate is organised into four districts serving a total of 86 government schools (there are 44 non-government schools) in 2013-2014. The number of students in government schools in 2013-2014 was 42,211, an increase of 3.3 percent from 2012-2013. Of these students, 185 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, 2,180 students had special needs, and 4,683 were pre-schoolers.

Level of school autonomy in the ACT

1. Decision taken by Directorate in full autonomy

2. Decision taken by Directorate after consultation

3. Decision taken by school within framework

4. Decision taken by school after consultation with others

5. Decision taken by school in full autonomy

The bold underlined number best describes the level of autonomy for each item based on the classifications illustrated above.

Item	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Organisation of instruction					
1. Grouping of students	1	2	3	4	**5**

	1	2	3	4	5
2. Choice of textbooks	1	2	3	4	**5**
3. Choice of software / learningware	1	2	3	4	**5**
4. Instruction time	1	2	**3**	4	5
5. Teaching methods	1	2	3	4	**5**
6. Assessment of students' regular work	1	2	**3**	4	5
7. Assistance to students: Health	1	2	**3**	4	5
8. Assistance to students: Welfare	1	2	**3**	4	5
Personnel management					
1. Principals: Criteria for appointment	**1**	2	3	4	5
2. Principals: Selection	1	**2**	3	4	5
3. Principals: Dismissal	**1**	2	3	4	5
4. Principals: Duties	**1**	2	3	4	5
5. Principals: Fixing of salary levels	**1**	2	3	4	5
6. Teachers: Criteria for appointment	**1**	2	3	4	5
7. Teachers: Selection	1	2	**3**	4	5
8. Teachers: Dismissal	**1**	2	3	4	5
9. Teachers: Duties	1	2	3	**4**	5
10. Teachers: Conditions of Service	**1**	2	3	4	5
11. Teachers: Fixing of salary levels	**1**	2	3	4	5
12. Non-teachers: Criteria for appointment	**1**	2	3	4	5
13. Non-teaching staff: Selection	1	2	**3**	4	5
14. Non-teaching staff: Dismissal	**1**	2	3	4	5
15. Non-teaching staff: Duties	1	2	3	**4**	5
16. Non-teaching staff: Conditions of service	**1**	2	3	4	5
17. Non-teaching staff: Fixing of salary levels	**1**	2	3	4	5
Planning and structures					
1. Creation or closure of school	**1**	2	3	4	5

2. Creation or abolition of a grade level	**1**	2	3	4	5
3. Designing programme of study	1	2	**3**	4	5
4. Selection of programmes of study offered in a particular school	1	2	**3**	4	5
5. Selection of subjects taught in a particular school	1	2	**3**	4	5
6. Definition of course content	1	2	3	**4**	5
Resource management					
1. Allocation of resources to the school: Teaching staff	1	2	**3**	4	5
2. Allocation of resources to the school: Non-teaching staff	1	2	**3**	4	5
3. Allocation of resources to the school: Capital expenditure	**1**	2	3	4	5
4. Allocation of resources to the school: Operating expenditure	1	2	**3**	4	5
5. Allocation of resources to the school: For principal professional development	**1**	2	3	4	5
6. Allocation of resources to the school: For teacher professional development	**1**	2	3	4	5
7. Use of resources in the school: Staff	1	2	3	**4**	5
8. Use of resources in the school: Capital expenditure	1	**2**	3	4	5
9. Use of resources in the school: Operating expenditure	1	2	**3**	4	5
10. Use of resources in the school: For principal professional development	1	2	3	4	**5**
11. Use of resources in the school: For teacher professional development	1	2	3	4	**5**
12. Support for school from jurisdictional authority	1	**2**	3	4	5
13. Support from corporate, philanthropic or not-for-profit sectors	1	2	**3**	4	5

Description of Canberra High School

The following is an excerpt from the description Canberra High School provided for the My School website maintained by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA):

> Canberra High School is a year 7 - 10 ACT public high school located in the suburb of Macquarie. The school was established at the beginning of 1938 and maintains a long tradition of excellence. There are over fifty different nations represented in the student population and the school operates in an environment that supports social

harmony. The school continues to provide a comprehensive and contemporary education. Canberra High is proud of the quality of the programs and academic offerings for students at the school. Canberra High streams classes by ability and performance in appropriate areas to ensure students adequately receive attention to their learning needs. This enables students to fulfil their potential in a supportive environment. There are specialist teachers in all of the school's learning areas to ensure students are learning from teaching staff with high standards of understanding and professionalism. All staff have been involved in developing course content that is rigorous and engaging. Canberra High has been at the forefront of curriculum development by being a pilot school in the design and implementation of units from the Australian Curriculum framework during 2011. In addition to the extensive quality teaching and learning in each discipline, extension activities are provided through the Inspire Program for Gifted and Talented students, the Elite Sports Program and the Band Program. Students are also able to participate in a vast array of extra-curricular activities. Some of these include: school sporting teams, debating, national and international subject competitions and the Dance Festival. All school programs and learning activities cater for the different multiple intelligences and are differentiated to ensure all students are given the opportunity to experience success. Canberra High has embraced a range of targeted strategies supported by current professional learning of staff, to improve the literacy and numeracy of all students across the school. Smaller class sizes for students with difficulties have been created in identified learning areas. Literacy and Numeracy Officers have provided support for staff in their teaching, and students in their learning, across all curriculum areas for a school wide approach. Canberra High School has developed a relationship with the University of Canberra which has seen students access individual tutoring to further support their literacy needs. Canberra High School celebrates the diversity of its community in a number of ways.

Interviews with key staff

Interviews were conducted with Principal Phil Beecher and Deputy Principal Paul Branson, who provided a general account of developments since 2008 and nominated several areas where strategies arising from local decision-making led to gains in student achievement. They nominated four staff who agreed to provide more detailed information about these strategies: Peter Radford, an Executive Teacher who described the change in culture since 2008; Samara Chisholm, Head of Curriculum, who described the impact of the appointment of six outstanding graduates to the staff of the school; Viviane Gerardu, who leads programs in student support and the development of literacy and study skills; and Eileen Currie, who has led the growth in band and music programs.

It is acknowledged that these are three examples only. There are likely to be more amid a range of factors that have led to improvements in levels of student achievement.

Developments since 2008

The appointment of Phil Beecher in 2008 was a significant event in the life of the school and the subsequent turnaround in performance. Prior to 2008 the school was physically run down, with the number of enrolments dropping and poor community perceptions of the school. The program offered by the school was relatively narrow. As a school it was underperforming.

Phil led a series of initiatives that fundamentally changed the culture of the school. School uniforms were modernised and wearing was enforced as part of the values of the school. School leaders including Phil himself were more 'visible' in and around the school. Buildings and classrooms were upgraded. A band program was expanded and prioritised by being made a part of the curriculum to the point that about 200 students are currently involved. A vocational program was also formulated to address disengaged students. In 2010, when Paul Branson joined the staff, a significant redevelopment of the curriculum was underway

which resulted in a school-wide curriculum plan. There is now a Gifted and Talented program incorporating philosophy. This program has evolved to now be part of a differentiated assessment strategy and is mentioned on student reports.

The need for culture change and greater engagement with the community was illustrated by an occasion when 67 windows at the school were smashed in the first couple of weeks of the 2008 school year.

The outcome has been soaring enrolments so that Canberra High School is now the public school of choice in Belconnen. Enrolments are approaching their maximum of 800 (there were about 550 in 2008), with a capped intake in Year 7 of 200. Staffing is stable and there is little voluntary loss of staff, with only one leaving in 2014. Leadership is similarly stable with only one change out of 12 in the leadership team since 2010.

More than two-thirds of students come from outside the school's enrolment zone. Demographic change is unlikely to be a significant factor, although there may soon be a 'bulge' in the age group served by the school within local primary school boundaries. The number of students who have left the local area to attend other schools (both government and non-government) has decreased over time,

Canberra High was one of the schools in the ACT that participated in the Empowering Local Schools program funded by the Australian Government under a National Partnership Agreement. A grant of $50,000 was received. The program was one of 'empowerment' rather than 'autonomy'. Allocation of staff to the school was expressed in terms of funds available ($) (based on actual costs of staff) rather than 'points' (not based on staffing costs but rather based on position within the school) but there has been a return to the latter. The school may advertise for teachers who continue to be employed by the Directorate. A notable development was the capacity of the school in one year to select graduates for up to 50 percent of new staff appointments. This development is described in more detail below because it is one factor accounting for improved student achievement.

Professor Michael Fullan, who has an international reputation for his expertise in school improvement, spent a day at the school in 2013, when Canberra High was on its trajectory from 'fair' ('maintenance') to 'good' ('improvement') and was seeking to move to 'great'. His visit to the school was filmed.

Canberra High has used the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research. Two staff from ACER visited the school (funded by the Belconnen Network and the ACT Directorate) and staff found the initial experience on the first of two days to be 'confronting', due to the different approach of the consultants from the ACT Validation experience. However, both processes provided similar commendations and recommendations for school planning.

Several examples of strategies made possible by higher levels of autonomy and which led to higher levels of student achievement were nominated: (1) the selection of six outstanding graduates to new positions on staff; (2) building capacity of the leadership team in curriculum and pedagogy; (3) allocation of funds for professional learning and production of support materials (for example, staff diary and planner, student diary, research skills booklet); (4) introduction of the UCanRead program (developed by the University of Canberra) and tutoring in support of students; and (5) allocation of funds for band programs (for example, purchase of instruments and other extra-curricular activities). The UCanRead program is a first attempt at targeting students in need of special support in reading. Graduates from the University of Canberra are trained in the approach and there is good evidence of impact for individual students. More detailed information was sought on these developments and this was provided by other staff, as reported below.

The evidence of overall impact of local decision-making in these matters is provided in NAPLAN data, especially improvements in literacy in 2014; increases in satisfaction, especially among staff, and school climate (positive on almost all indicators); and the

numbers of students applying to come to the school and enrolling in its programs. The school continues to consider how it may gather evidence of impact. As far as NAPLAN is concerned, the school has also moved to be now performing at or above the ACT high school average; it was previously at or below the average in most areas. The improvement appears to result from strategies adopted by the school rather than any changes of the student cohort. Teachers are now starting to 'drill down' to better interpret results in NAPLAN. Particular attention is being given to formative assessment. There is heightened attention to how funds are allocated in devising strategies that may impact on student achievement.

As far as the future is concerned, much will depend on the availability of funds (for example, whether the final years in the 'Gonski' roll-out[1] are funded). Further changes in technology are anticipated and this will mean an upgrade in wireless capability which will have an impact on classroom pedagogy. Other issues likely to arise include shifting from a narrow but important focus (PISA, NAPLAN) to more of a 'whole student' approach, and the extent to which parents will take on more responsibility / control of their children's learning. Schools may be expected to take on more responsibility for students' wellbeing and this illustrates or hints at a concern about 'overcrowding' in the curriculum.

The role of the principal and other school leaders may shift further in the direction of accountability, and managing the tensions between a focus on teaching and learning and other matters. Expectations for engagement in the former may be even stronger.

Changing the culture

As described above, a factor that contributed to gains in student achievement in recent years is the change in culture that started with the appointment of Phil Beecher in 2008. Evidence that there has been such a change includes (a) the 'feel' of the school has steadily improved, (b) suspensions are down, (c) enrolments are up, (d) increase in recognition of students (Peter Radford, an Executive Teacher also appointed in 2008, introduced merit-based medals for students 'in the middle' – awarded on the basis of nominations of three members of staff), (e) introduction of a 'three card' system related to management of student behaviour, and (f) clear and consistent messaging by Phil Beecher. This consistency and professional learning through collaborative problem-solving are major strategies.

As described below, the appointment of outstanding graduates also appears to have made a big impact on staff and students even though several of the former have now left the school. They helped reinvigorate some older staff.

A key feature of implementation has been to get the 'right people' to take the lead in implementation – and 'we have got this right'. The school does not spread its efforts too thinly; there is a focus on a few key strategies and programs. The main difficulties are associated with attitudes of some teachers who have been at the school for a long time (some appear 'scared' of change) and the background of some students.

As far as the future is concerned, there will be further development of professional learning communities and a continuing focus on the 'core business' of the school. There will be more extensive use of data. The teacher's role will accommodate these developments, but an issue will be how teachers will manage the many demands on their time. A challenge will be

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[1] David Gonski was Chair of an Expert Panel that made recommendations (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2011) to the former federal government on the needs-based allocation of public funds (federal and state) to schools. A range of national partnership agreements was struck between different levels of government and the Catholic and Independent sectors on a six-year timetable for the distribution of funds. The chief matter of contention is the agreement with some governments for higher levels of funding in the fifth and sixth years.

the sharing of data among teachers (some highly regarded teachers may need to come to terms with poor data).

Selection of staff

The opportunity to select six outstanding graduates to new positions on one occasion was a matter of 'timing' because the opportunity to do this on such a scale is rare, but the school was growing and there had been a significant number of pre-service teachers through the school who possessed impressive skill sets. The school is mindful that it is part of a system in which such beneficial opportunities should not be detrimental to other schools' staffing. The aim in this special instance of 'cherry picking' was to diversify the staff mix. There were sufficient teachers to serve as mentors.

Samara Chisholm is Head of Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE) and Head of Curriculum at Canberra High. This is her third year at the school. She is well placed to comment on the impact of these appointments. Two of the six graduates were placed in SOSE and these and others all had the following characteristics:

- All were very keen on student engagement and to embrace the culture of the school as it related to students, staff and parents

- All had an understanding and commitment to the implementation of the Australian Curriculum (AC) and were keen to make the connections between the AC and the existing curriculum at the school

- All were not necessarily wedded to past practice

- All were highly enthusiastic and their enthusiasm 'snow-balled' to staff across the school. They succeeded in getting a high level of engagement and commitment of staff to the new ideas and practices they were keen to share.

Samara facilitated the transition of these graduate teachers and linked them to a mentor teacher. Some of the six graduate teachers have now moved on to other schools (one is on maternity leave).

Samara described 'engageable moments' which had become a feature of staff meetings at the school. These arose from surveys of staff and students who felt a need for higher levels of engagement. Teachers who were 'good at it' provided a five-minute demonstration in staff meetings. Similar demonstrations occurred in faculty meetings. 'Formative assessment' moments are now also conducted in staff meetings.

As far as the future is concerned, Samara expects a continuing focus on improving outcomes for students, the establishment of a 'growth mindset' with a holistic view of the student, and further account being taken of changes in society and the economy. Developments along these lines are starting to occur. The teacher role may change to the extent that new opportunities to create 'multiple pathways' to student success will need to be strengthened.

Figure 7 maps the links between school autonomy in the selection of the six outstanding graduates, and student achievement at Canberra High School, based on information gathered in interviews and evidence of improved student achievement, as indicated by improvements in NAPLAN scores. There are two 'lines' of impact, one arising from the way the graduates shared new knowledge and skill with other teachers in staff and faculty meetings, the other through the direct application by the graduates of their knowledge and skill in addressing school priorities in curriculum and pedagogy. Successful application in each instance is one of many factors accounting for higher levels of student achievement. Also included in Figure 7 is the contribution to enhanced school climate through the energy and enthusiasm of graduates.

Student support and the development of literacy and study skills

An important appointment was that of Viviane Gerardu who came to the school in 2011 to enhance student support and the development of literacy and study skills (which are understood to have been important factors in improvement in student achievement).

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                    ┌─────────────────┐                      ┌─────────────────┐
                    │ Graduate teachers│                     │ Higher levels of │
                    │ share new        │                     │ achievement for  │
                    │ knowledge and    │─────────────┐       │ students taught by│
                    │ skill with others│             │       │ other teachers   │
                    │ in staff and     │             │       │ who apply new    │
                    │ faculty meetings │             ▲       │ knowledge and    │
┌─────────────────┐ └─────────────────┘      ┌ ─ ─ ─┴─ ─ ─┐  │ skill            │
│ School decision  │                         │ Contribution │ └─────────────────┘
│ to select six    │                         │ to enhanced  │
│ outstanding      │                         │ school climate│
│ graduate teachers│                         │ through energy│
│ and to provide   │                         │ and enthusiasm│
│ them with mentors│                         │ of graduate  │
└─────────────────┘ ┌─────────────────┐      │ teachers     │  ┌─────────────────┐
                    │ Graduate teachers│     └ ─ ─ ─┬─ ─ ─ ┘  │ Higher levels of │
                    │ apply their      │             │        │ achievement for  │
                    │ knowledge and    │             ▼        │ students taught by│
                    │ skill in their   │──────────────────────▶│ graduate teachers│
                    │ teaching,        │                      │ who apply new,   │
                    │ addressing       │                      │ relevant         │
                    │ priorities in    │                      │ knowledge and    │
                    │ curriculum and   │                      │ skill            │
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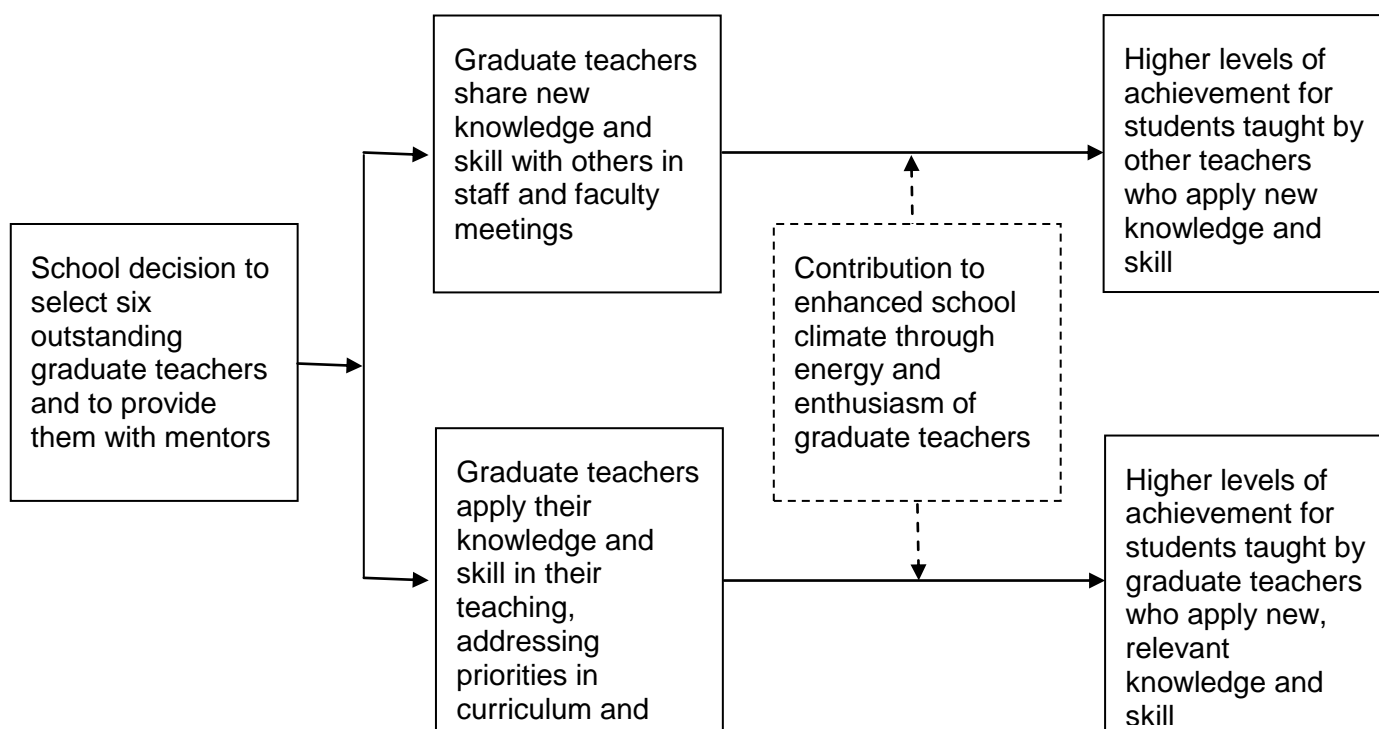
Figure 7: Links between school autonomy in selection of outstanding graduates and student achievement at Canberra High School

She holds a 0.7 FTE appointment. Her position is supported from the staff allocation to the school and was a timely match to needs at the school. She is now supported by another teacher (they have complementary skills). The aim of the program is to help students but things needed to build slowly to ensure that teachers were comfortable and trusting. 'Literacy moments' have been presented in staff meetings. Many teachers now value attention to literacy (in addition to their work in English).

The school has a 'study skills centre'. This is not a physical location but a capacity to provide support anywhere at any time on a 'withdrawal' basis. A number of students with low literacy levels are supported through Individual Learning Plans or targeted programs. These students have Individual Learning Plans. Viviane wrote the research skills booklet described earlier.

In 2014 a reading tutor program and mentoring assignment program, where older students help younger students, was established. In 2013 a sustained writing initiative began in which all students in Years 7 and 9 participate. This occurs three times a week to help prepare them for NAPLAN. Support is now part of the culture of the school and is associated with improvement in NAPLAN results. Some students aren't used to 'sustained writing'.

Support is provided to 'high flyers' who may 'go off the rails'. Support is also provided for all teachers, with Viviane securing external support to conduct related professional learning for staff.

The impact of the program on student learning is likely to follow from the following: (a) de-mystifying the area of literacy, (b) teachers are now starting to talk about literacy, (c) assignments reflect teachers' awareness of literacy – the culture is changing ('if you can assess it you can teach it'). The best evidence of impact is in NAPLAN results.

The major difficulties encountered include (a) not enough time, (b) timetabling to provide support as needed, (c) availability of ICT to assist students on the program, and (d) funding to address these.

As far as the future is concerned, schools will always need capacity of the kind that Viviane possesses and has helped build in others. This extends to support for gifted students. Some schools don't know how to do this (and don't have principals like Phil Beecher who provide support). Graduate teachers don't seem to have the knowledge, skills and passion for this kind of work. The role of teachers in the future should change so that they have and can use these capacities.

Figure 8 maps the links between the school decision to appoint staff to lead programs for student support and the development of literacy and study skills, and student achievement at Canberra High School, based on information provided in interviews and evidence of improved student achievement, as indicated by NAPLAN scores in literacy.

There are three 'lines' of impact in Figure 8 arising from professional learning for staff, the reading tutor and sustained writing program for students, and Individual Learning Plans for students who cannot read or write or who 'fall off the rails'. The links to achievement are made if staff and students acquire and apply new skills. These three 'lines' depend on the building of trust among staff and students to take them to the point of their being willing to participate in the relevant programs. The need to start slowly was acknowledged.

Band and music program

Eileen Currie arrived at the school in 2008 to find very low participation by students and just a few instruments (many damaged). By the end of the year there were about 20 students involved. From 2008 the number of rehearsals per term increased from one to three, with good support from the principal and Parents and Citizens. About 30 students were involved in 2008. Some parents preferred their children to go to a private school because Canberra High did not have a band program. About half of the students don't have related experience in primary schools upon entry to the band program in Year 7.

There is now good investment in instruments (about $30,000 in 2014). The school enters competitions. Classes are conducted to Year 10. Four rooms are dedicated to band and music.
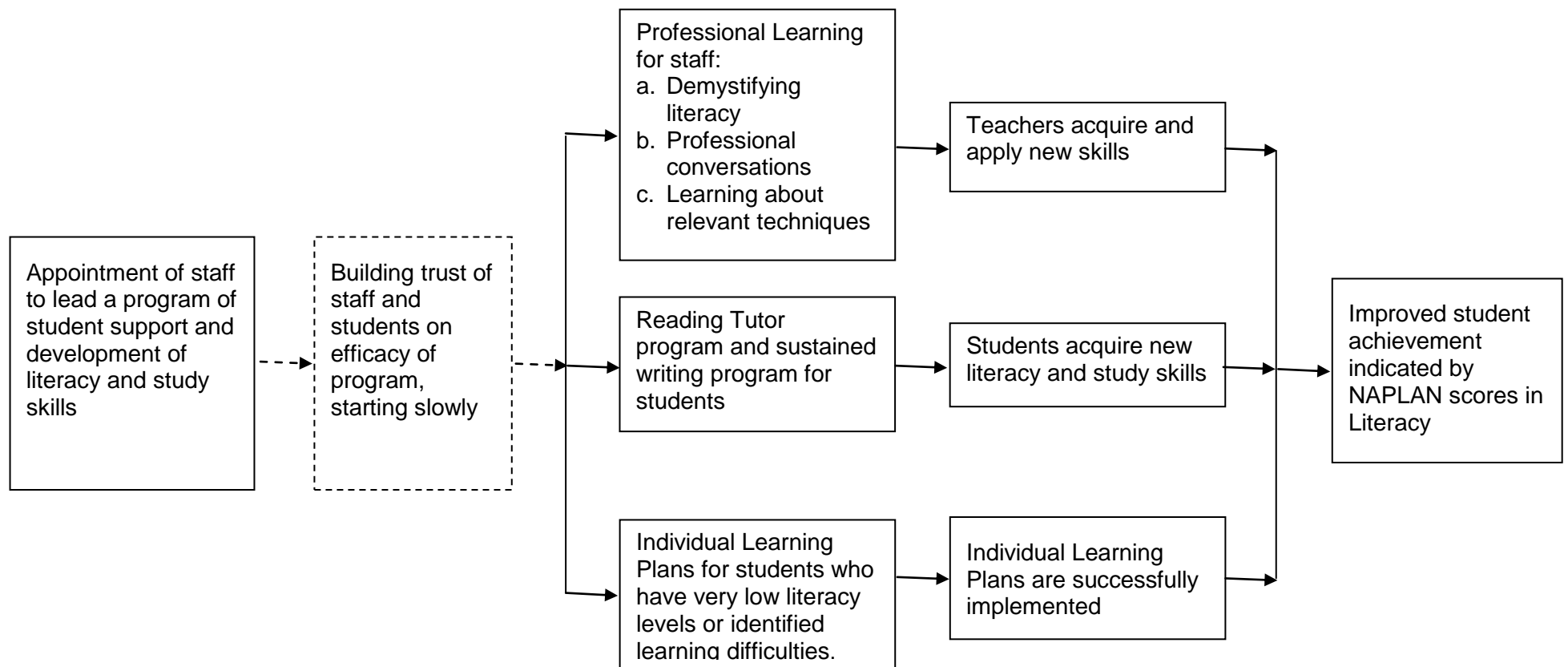
Figure 8: Links between school autonomy in decisions on student and teacher support and student achievement at Canberra High School

Evidence of the success of the program lies in the growth in numbers of students from 2009, as summarised in the following table:

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Total
2009 (Semester 1 only)	36	5			41
2010	45				45
2011	66	20			86
2012	88	38	10		136
2013	86	33	14	11	144
2014	96	42	25	14	177

This table was included in a report prepared by Eileen for the school validation in 2014 (see below). She provided other measures of success and student engagement including participation in the ACT Schools Band Festival (all bands every year since 2011) and the National Eisteddfod (one band in 2012, two bands in 2013 – with award of gold medals, two bands in 2014). The Senior Band participated in the Advanced Section of the National Eisteddfod for the first time in 2014, and also participated in the Sydney Eisteddfod. Regular performance opportunities include the Winter Band Concert (2012, 2013 and 2014) and Arts & Technology Showcase (annually since 2010), assemblies, Open Night, 75th Anniversary, and McHappy Day.

The impact of the program on student learning is understood to be related to the development of the brain, discipline and teamwork. [The body of evidence for this impact is summarised in Brian Caldwell and Tanya Vaughan *Transforming Education through the Arts* (Routledge 2012)]

As far as the future is concerned, improved facilities are needed. The school did not receive funding from the Building the Education Revolution (BER) federally funded initiative for something that would serve as a performing arts centre. Appropriate use of ICT would likely enhance programs in the arts.

Figure 9 maps the links between the decision of the school to expand its band and music program through the selection of specialist staff, and student achievement. There are two 'lines' of impact, one leading to the acquisition by larger numbers of students of the direct, intrinsic benefits of participation in music – students acquire new knowledge and skills – and the other deriving from existing international research evidence that participation in music increases measures of student social and emotional wellbeing and higher levels of student engagement such as improved attendance, each leading to improved levels of student achievement. This international evidence has been summarised (and added to) through work reported in Caldwell and Vaughan (2012).

Improvement in student achievement as measured in results in NAPLAN

There is evidence of gains in student achievement as indicated in results in the NAPLAN tests, as reported on the My School website. NAPLAN tests were first conducted in 2008, which was the year in which current principal Phil Beecher was appointed. As reported in interviews summarised above, his appointment was highly significant in the development of strategies that helped achieve improvements in student achievement.
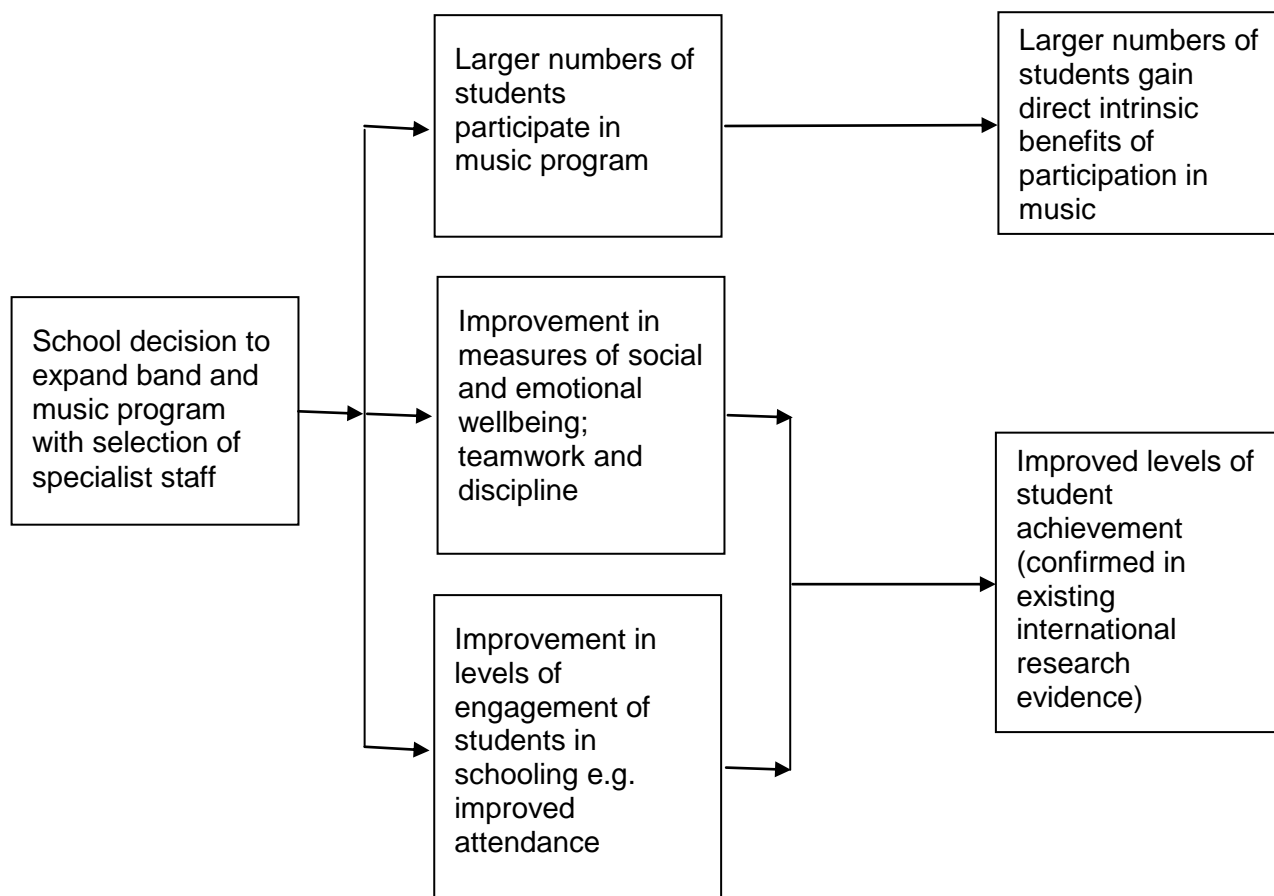
Figure 9: Links between school autonomy in decisions to expand music program and student achievement at Canberra High School

The table on page 69 illustrates the noteworthy improvements in student achievement at Canberra High School, as indicated in NAPLAN scores in Year 9 in 2008 and 2014.

Canberra High School had an ICSEA score in 2014 of 1086, nearly one standard deviation above the median for schools in Australia (the median ICSEA across Australia is 1000; schools one standard deviation above the median have an ICSEA score of 1100). In 2008 its ICSEA score was 1091 indicating little change in the community supported by the school on the variables that make up ICSEA. There have been small changes to the way ICSEA is calculated in the intervening years but these do not affect this observation.

Tests are conducted in Years 7 and 9. Year 7 results are not included here because students sit the tests barely three months after they arrive at the school. They have been at the school for more than two years when they do the tests in Year 9.

As indicated in the table, students at Canberra High School have improved relative to similar schools and all schools in 7 of the 10 comparisons. There has been a relative decline in scores on the numeracy tests and no change in spelling.

Analysis of NAPLAN across the country in 2014 enabled comparisons of Year 9 results with the results of matched students in 2012, that is, average gains in student achievement (a) for students in schools with similar students and (b) for students in all schools who had the same 'starting scores'. The gains for Canberra High School students in reading were greater than those for students in both categories. The gains in persuasive writing were greater than those of students with the same starting scores. Gains were slightly smaller in the same comparisons for literacy.

Test (Year 9)	Comparator	2008	2014
Reading	Similar		
	All		
Writing Narrative writing in 2008; Persuasive writing in 2014	Similar		
	All		
Spelling	Similar		
	All		
Grammar and Punctuation	Similar		
	All		
(Grade 9 only)Numeracy	Similar		
	All		
ICSEA		1091	1086

Substantially above	
Above	
Same as	
Below	
Substantially below	

External Validation Report 2014

Each school in the ACT prepares a four-year plan, an annual operating plan and provides a report to its school board on progress. Each school is required to participate in a process of 'validation' every four years, conducted by an external team. The most recent External Validation Report for Canberra High School was prepared in September 2014. The validation team comprised two people from government schools (Julie Murkins, Lake Tuggeranong College and Nina McCabe, Garran Primary School) and one from a non-government school (Martin Keast, Covenant Christian School). The co-director of Quality Learning Australia (Jane Kovacs), that has oversight of the external validation process in the ACT, confirmed that the panel had acted within the guidelines set by the Directorate. The panel took account of the various plans and priorities of the school and was provided with substantial documentation to assist in reporting the evidence of achievement.

The report provided a more comprehensive account of developments at the school than was possible in the interviews reported above, which highlighted particular strategies that arose from a capacity for local decision-making and their impact on student achievement. The report gathered evidence on the extent of achievement of four priorities: (1) achieve improved learning outcomes for students, (2) build a professional and accountable school, (3) increase student empowerment and support, and (4) expand community links with a range of stakeholders to improve student outcomes.

The panel offered five commendations:

1. The school's calm and orderly improvement journey
2. Well-designed whole-school initiatives
3. Improvements in whole-school curriculum delivery and assessment
4. Whole-school effort towards differentiated teaching and learning
5. Rich variety of student leadership opportunities across the school

There were five recommendations:

1. Make explicit the way the school goes about learning and work
2. Develop a school-wide data strategy
3. Embed Professional Learning Communities as a prime vehicle for continued school improvement
4. Strengthen and make explicit school-wide pedagogical practices that support learning for all students
5. Formalise and make explicit a school-wide coaching and mentoring framework

In its reflections on what had been achieved, the panel stated that:

> A striking feature of the school is the success of the interventions or specialised programs that run in support of student learning and wellbeing. . . . A measure of the success of these strategies is the student take-up of the opportunities they provide, and the achievements reported for participating students. The panel heard from students, parents and teachers who described the overall effect of these interventions as having a significant positive impact on the culture and the tone of the school.

Further information about these interventions was presented in the interviews summarised above.

Discussion of findings at Canberra High School in light of international evidence

The three key findings in the review of evidence on the links between school autonomy and student achievement prepared in the first phase of the international project are as follows:

1. Evidence from analysis of results in PISA tends to confirm that higher levels of school autonomy are associated with higher levels of student achievement providing there is a balance of autonomy and accountability.

2. The focus of autonomy should be on professional practice, with the aim being to make connections between the functions associated with school autonomy and actions that are likely to have an impact on student achievement. Exclusive reliance on structural changes for their own sake is unlikely to have an impact. It is important to align a range of strategies that research shows are linked to gains in student achievement.

3. The most powerful evidence on mediating factors linking school autonomy and student achievement is on the work of principals and other school leaders in

building professional capacity through staff selection, professional development and appraisal; setting priorities on the basis of data about performance; and communication of purpose, process and performance. Cultural factors may limit effects in some settings. These capacities can be built and made effective in settings where there may be only moderate levels of school autonomy.

It is immediately evident that strategies adopted at Canberra High School in a framework for public education in the ACT are consistent with the international evidence. For #1 above, there is a balance between autonomy and accountability in that the school must operate within a system framework, as illustrated in requirements for four-year planning, annual operational planning, annual reports to the school board and the validation report prepared every four years. The school also operates within a national framework of curriculum, assessment and reporting, as illustrated in the staged adoption in the ACT of the Australian Curriculum, its participation in the annual NAPLAN tests, and the reporting of results of NAPLAN on the My School website. The school operates within a system framework in the selection and appointment of staff.

Each of the strategies described in the three examples is consistent with the international evidence on what should be the focus if there is to be an impact on student achievement, as described above in #2 and #3. The selection of six outstanding graduate teachers is an example of building the capacity of staff to address priorities in learning. Their appointment had 'spill-over' effects in their influence on other members of staff. Similarly for the appointment of those who provided support for students and helped build the capacity of staff in the teaching of literacy, with evidence of impact in improvements in student achievement, as illustrated in NAPLAN results in literacy.

The expansion of the band and music program through the appointment of specialist staff is an example of building the capacity of the school to offer a broader program for its students. While this may have been a factor in attracting and retaining students who might otherwise attend private or other public schools, the link to gains in student achievement are affirmed in the substantial international evidence of the impact of participation in music on achievement.

Plans for 2015 and beyond

A review of plans for 2015 and beyond indicate the expectation and capacity of Canberra High School to set priorities that suit the setting, taking account of Directorate, Network and Local requirements. In this instance they also address some of the matters raised by the validation panel, described earlier, and the application of the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) as undertaken in 2014. The 2015-2018 School Plan specifies the following:

- Strategic Priority 1: Differentiated Teaching and Learning, with Key Improvement Strategies being the development and implementation of measures that capture student progress, differentiation and its use as a priority of professional learning, and effective collection and use of data to inform learning.

- Strategic Priority 2: Effective Pedagogical Practices, with Key Improvement Strategies being effective pedagogical practices are a priority of professional learning; develop, implement and use appropriate classroom observation tool to improve teacher standards; and increased rigour of staff Professional Pathways agreements and processes.

- Strategic Priority 3: A Positive Culture of Learning, with Key Improvement Strategies being consistent with clear communications regarding school priorities and targets, Professional Learning in the effective use of student learning data, and access to appropriate and effective tools for identification of student ability and learning.

- Strategic Priority 4: School Community Partnerships, with Key Improvement Strategies being development and implementation of the Canberra High School

communication strategy, access to appropriate and effective tools to support student communication and parent communication between home and school, and document current community partnerships and identify opportunities for future partnerships while consolidating and strengthening current partnerships.

The Operational Plan for 2015 takes each of these and specifies the particular actions to be taken in 2015, the person who will lead the effort, the resources required and the timeline.

CHAPTER 6: REFLECTIONS

Chapter 6 carries the title Reflections rather than Summary or Synthesis. It is not intended to provide a summary of the four case studies or to provide a synthesis. The latter, in particular, suggests that the findings can be brought together in a way that indicates that they can be generalised. Generalisations are not possible because the four schools are not a representative sample, either in their own jurisdictions or among all schools where there is a higher level of autonomy than has traditionally been the case.

The four schools are drawn from three jurisdictions (Australian Capital Territory, Queensland and Victoria). The jurisdictional contexts are different but, perhaps more significantly, the schools are different: in different settings, with different histories, with different mixes of students with different needs, different priorities, and different ways in which they exercise their authority and responsibility. While several commonalities and differences are noted in the pages that follow, there is no intention to provide a synthesis or form judgements on the efficacy of the different approaches to the exercise of autonomy. As stated in the research plan (Chapter 1) they are best considered as 'demonstration schools'.

The purpose of Chapter 6 is to reflect on the four case studies in the light of the aim of the International Study of School Autonomy and Learning (ISSAL), with the research question for these case studies in Australia being 'How have schools with a relatively high degree of autonomy used their increased authority and responsibility to make decisions that have led in explicit cause-and-effect fashion to higher levels of students achievement?' The focus is on public rather than private schools.

How much autonomy do these case study schools have?

Public (government or state) schools in Australia generally fall in the mid-range[1] in respect to their level of autonomy, among all members or associates in OECD and among the seven nations participating in ISSAL.

As described in Chapter 1, no school in Australia has full autonomy. Both public and private schools receive at least some public funds and all must satisfy conditions for registration as a school. Public schools are built, owned, operated and funded by governments. Teachers and continuing non-teaching staff are employed by a central system authority even if schools in some jurisdictions may select and recommend staff for appointment. There is no equivalent in Australia to charter schools in Canada, New Zealand and the United States, or academies or free schools in England, and none have been proposed. This statement applies regardless of the terminology that has been adopted from time to time. For example, 'independent public schools' have been created in Western Australia and the same terminology has been introduced to a class of public schools in Queensland. The current federal government has a policy of and pool of funds to support 'independent public schools' across the country, inspired by the experience in Western Australia, where school boards remain advisory unincorporated bodies and staff continue to be employed by 'the system'.

The OECD continuum (with minor adaptations) was used to obtain a profile of the extent of school autonomy in each of the three jurisdictions in which the case studies were conducted. Assessments were made for 44 items in four domains, with five levels of autonomy used as the basis of assessment. These profiles are presented at the start of Chapter 2 (Victoria),

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[1] The comparison reported here is drawn from an analysis of PISA 2012 (Programme for International Student Assessment) and TALIS 2013 (Teaching and Learning International Survey), both conducted by OECD, and reported in an unpublished document (for internal use of researchers in ISSAL). This document also reports evidence on the impact of different aspects of autonomy on student achievement. A separate Australian contribution to ISSAL provided a comprehensive report of the evidence.

Chapter 4 (Queensland) and Chapter 5 (ACT). Generally speaking, the highest level of autonomy is found in Victoria, especially in respect to resource management.

There has been a trend to higher levels of school autonomy in all states and territories over the last four decades, with the Karmel Report of 1973 generally considered the starting point (see Chapter 1), but with different rates and levels being designed and delivered in different jurisdictions in the intervening years. Overall, it is fair to conclude that all public schools in Australia now have higher levels of autonomy than their counterparts nearly 50 years ago. Paradoxically, all may have higher levels than were described in a book co-authored by the researcher (Caldwell and Spinks 1988) (*The Self-Managing School*) that was considered by some at the time to be a radical document. The 'demonstration school' in the book was in Tasmania which had modest levels of autonomy at the time, now exceeded by all schools in the country.

Australian Professional Standard for Principals as a touchstone

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) developed the Australian Professional Standard for Principals in 2011 (AITSL 2011 available at www.aitsl.edu.au) (the Standard) which was approved by all ministers for education in Australia. The principals in the case study schools demonstrated their achievement of the Standard at a high level in matters explored in the case studies. There is a strong case that the Standard describes how all principals should exercise a high level of professional autonomy.

The Standard specifies three leadership requirements – vision and values; knowledge and understanding; and personal qualities, social and interpersonal skills – each of which is applied across five areas of professional practice: leading teaching and learning; developing self and others; leading improvement, innovation and change; leading the management of the school; and engaging and working with the community. Successful practice is intended to impact on high quality learning, teaching and schooling, which in turn results in successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens. Context is recognised: School, sector and community; socio-economic and geographic; and educational systems at local, regional, national and global levels. The Standard has a robust evidence base and was the outcome of extensive consultation with stakeholders across the country. The following excerpts (AITSL 2011: 9-11) illustrate the role in three areas in a manner consistent with a high level of professional autonomy:

> *Leading teaching and learning* Principals create a positive culture of challenge and support, enabling effective teaching that promotes enthusiastic, independent learners, committed to lifelong learning. Principals have a key responsibility for developing a culture of effective teaching, for leading, designing and managing the quality of teaching and learning and for students' achievement in all aspects of their development. They set high expectations for the whole school through careful collaborative planning, monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of learning. Principals set high standards of behaviour and attendance, encouraging active engagement and a strong student voice.

> *Leading the management of the school* Principals use a range of data management methods and technologies to ensure that the school's resources and staff are efficiently organised and managed to provide an effective and safe learning environment as well as value for money. This includes appropriate delegation of tasks to members of the staff and the monitoring of accountabilities. Principals ensure these accountabilities are met. They seek to build a successful school through effective collaboration with school boards, governing bodies, parents and others. They use a range of technologies effectively and efficiently to manage the school.

Engaging and working with the community Principals embrace inclusion and help build a culture of high expectations that takes account of the richness and diversity of the school's wider community and the education systems and sectors. They develop and maintain positive partnerships with students, families and carers, and all those associated with the school's broader community. They create an ethos of respect taking account of the intellectual, spiritual, cultural, moral, social, health and wellbeing of students.

The Standard is silent on important matters related to autonomy. For example, a 'plan and act' element of leading the management of the school is 'Within the framework established by employing authorities / school boards manage available resources to support effective learning and teaching. Ensure budgets are integrated and aligned with learning priorities'. The 'available resources' are greater in some jurisdictions than in others; for example, in Victoria, where about 90 percent of the state's recurrent budget for school education is decentralised to schools for local decision-making. The Standard is also silent on personnel matters such as the determination of the mix of staff at a school and local selection of staff. Nevertheless, the processes in the Standard apply, regardless of how schools may differ on these matters.

The Standard is also silent in matters related to structures that are normally associated with a higher level of autonomy for schools. For example, there is no explicit reference in the Standard for engaging and working with the community. There is reference to school boards, and for public schools these may be advisory or have decision-making powers. In Independent Public Schools in Western Australia, they are essentially advisory, although there is provision for them to become incorporated bodies. School boards (ACT) or school councils (Victoria) have a history extending over several decades and they have powers to make certain decisions. As noted in the review of research in a separate part of Australia's contribution to the International Study of School Autonomy and Learning (ISSAL), the impact of parent and community engagement lies largely in the area of support for children's learning rather than the exercise of autonomy in governance. Nevertheless, there was a view at one school (Specimen Hill Primary in Victoria) that the council adds value, notably in its role in the selection[1] of the principal who the evidence shows has had an important role in building the capacity of teachers in ways that helped raise levels of student achievement. Generally speaking, much depends on the capacities of councils or boards to take up their responsibilities.

It was evident in each case study that building the capacity of teachers to meet selected elements of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers was a priority for principals and other leaders (these Standards are available at www.aitsl.edu.au). For example, the Standards call for capacity in respect to curriculum, assessment and reporting, with five levels applicable: Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead. The Graduate Standard (for teachers who have just completed initial teacher education) calls for teachers to 'Use curriculum, assessment and reporting knowledge to design learning sequences and lesson plans' while the Lead Standard refers to ''Lead colleagues to develop learning and teaching programs using comprehensive knowledge of curriculum, assessment and reporting requirements'. Accounts of how these capacities were developed pervaded the case study reports, including description of teachers analysing NAPLAN results and planning to take account of these, especially in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

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[1] The council has an important role in selection in Victoria, making a recommendation to the Department of Education and Training, which appoints the principal, whose contract as a continuing teacher and principal lies with the Department.

Discussion of findings in light of international evidence

Each of the chapters containing the case studies included a discussion of the extent to which the findings were consistent with international evidence on the links between higher levels of school autonomy and student achievement. This evidence was reported in an unpublished review in the first part of Australia's contribution to ISSAL.

The three key findings in the review of evidence on the links between school autonomy and student achievement prepared in the first phase of the international project are as follows:

1. Evidence from analysis of results in PISA tends to confirm that higher levels of school autonomy are associated with higher levels of student achievement providing there is a balance of autonomy and accountability.

2. The focus of autonomy should be on professional practice, with the aim being to make connections between the functions associated with school autonomy and actions that are likely to have an impact on student achievement. Exclusive reliance on structural changes for their own sake is unlikely to have an impact. It is important to align a range of strategies that research shows are linked to gains in student achievement.

3. The most powerful evidence on mediating factors linking school autonomy and student achievement is on the work of principals and other school leaders in building professional capacity through staff selection, professional development and appraisal; setting priorities on the basis of data about performance; and communication of purpose, process and performance. Cultural factors may limit effects in some settings. These capacities can be built and made effective in settings where there may be only moderate levels of school autonomy.

It is not the intention here to provide a detailed summary of the findings. It is sufficient to observe that the findings were consistent with each of #1-3 above at a very high level. After all of the debates about the efficacy of higher levels of autonomy that occurred over several decades, the findings are consistent with the 'strategic directions' proposed in the researcher's co-authored book (Caldwell and Spinks 1998) (*Beyond the Self-Managing School*), that contained a review of developments in the 1980s and 1990s. 'Self-management' in the following set of 10 may be replaced with 'a higher level of autonomy than has traditionally been the case in public schools':

1. The primary purpose of self-management is to make a contribution to learning, so schools that aspire to success in this domain will make an unrelenting effort to utilise all of the capacities that accrue with self-management to achieve that end.

2. There will be clear, explicit and planned links, either direct or indirect, between each of the capacities that come with self-management and activities in the school that relate to learning and teaching and the support of learning and teaching.

3. There is a strong association between the mix and capacities of staff, and success in addressing needs and priorities in learning, so schools will develop a capacity to optimally select staff, taking account of these needs and priorities.

4. There is a strong association between the knowledge and skills of staff and learning outcomes for students, so schools will employ their capacity for self-management to design, select, implement or utilise professional development programs to help ensure these outcomes.

5. A feature of staff selection and professional development will be the building of high-performance teams whose work is needs-based and data-driven, underpinned by a culture that values quality, effectiveness, equity and efficiency.

6. There is a strong association between social capital and learning outcomes, so schools will utilise their capacities for self-management to build an alliance of

community interests to support a commitment to high achievement for all students.

7. Self-managing schools will not be distracted by claims and counter-claims for competition and the impact of market forces, but will nonetheless market their programs with integrity, building the strongest possible links between needs and aspirations of the community, program design, program implementation and program outcomes.

8. Schools will have a capacity for 'backward mapping' in the design and implementation of programs for learning, starting from goals, objectives, needs and desired outcomes, and working backwards to determine courses of action that will achieve success, utilising where possible and appropriate the capacities that accrue with self-management.

9. Incentive, recognition and reward schemes will be designed that make explicit the links between effort and outcomes in the take-up of capacities for self-management and improvement in learning outcomes, acknowledging that as much if not more attention must be given to intrinsic as to extrinsic incentives and rewards.

10. A key task for principals and other school leaders is to help make effective the links between capacities for self-management and learning outcomes, and to ensure that support is available when these links break down or prove ineffective. (Caldwell and Spinks 1998: 217-218)

Convergence and coherence

As noted at the start of Chapter 6, autonomy for public schools does not extend to the equivalent of charter schools, academies or free schools as these may be found in other places. School autonomy in Australia means a shift in a continuum from decisions made by a jurisdiction in full autonomy to decisions taken by schools in full autonomy. There has been a shift toward the latter over more than 40 years. There is convergence of policy and practice; for example, there is generally bi-partisan agreement at the political level that such a shift should be made. The issue is how far and for what functions, and there are differences from one jurisdiction to another. It is likely that all public schools have a much higher level of autonomy than did their counterparts 40 years ago.

A high level of coherence is evident in each of the case studies in the sense that leadership and management are closely if not tightly connected to curriculum and pedagogy. There was a time when leadership and management appeared to be disconnected from the core work of the school. This coherence extends to the selection of staff and the allocation of funds in budgets, each of which reflect the unique mix of learning needs at a school and priorities for action. The four case studies in these 'demonstration schools' provide rich descriptions of what was done and by whom to make the link to learning.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Principal

The principal shall be invited to provide information about the history, context and special characteristics of the school as well as its performance in recent years. It is expected that this information can be obtained from annual reports and from documents provided by the principal. A request for relevant documents will be made prior to the school visit.

1. Can you describe up to three examples where the school has used its authority to make decisions that led in explicit cause-and-effect fashion to gains in student achievement. For each:
2. In which domains was this authority exercised; for example, personnel, finance, facilities, curriculum, pedagogy, organisation of the school, or combinations of these and other domains. Please provide details of the decision-making process. Who was involved? When? How? What was your role?
3. How did student achievement improve as a result of decisions that were made? What evidence can you provide? What other factors contributed to this outcome?
4. Can you describe and work through the processes, starting from the decision and the reasons for making the decision, to the outcomes, to help me build up a 'map' of cause-and-effect?
5. Would the outcomes have been possible if the school did not have authority in the domain(s) concerned?
6. What difficulties or constraints were encountered? How were these managed? What support did the school receive? From what source(s)?
7. Please identify up to three members of staff or others who played an important role in the process and who can describe that role. What was the role of the school council? Is there a member of council who can describe that role and generally offer a perspective on the process?
8. What major changes in direction do you wish to see or expect to see for your school over the next 10 years if the goal is to achieve improvement in outcomes for students? Prompts include curriculum, pedagogy, technology, facilities, time and place of learning.
9. What changes to levels of authority and responsibility will be required at your school to ensure success in these changes in direction? What should / will be your role?

Are there other matters related to autonomy and achievement you would like to discuss?

Teachers and other nominees

The principal has nominated up to three school-based examples of how the school has used its authority to lead in explicit cause-and-effect fashion to gains in student achievement. He/she has nominated teachers and others, including a member of council, who can provide information on the process for each example.

1. Can you describe and work through the processes, starting from the decision and the reasons for making the decision, to the outcomes, to help me build up a 'map' of cause-and-effect? What was [your role] [the role of the council]? What difficulties were encountered? How were these managed?
2. What major changes in direction do you wish to see or expect to see for your school over the next 10 years if the goal is improvement in outcomes for students? Prompts include curriculum, pedagogy, technology, facilities, time and place of learning.
3. What changes to levels of authority and responsibility will be required at your school to ensure success in these changes in direction? What should/will be the role of people in your position?

Are there other matters related to autonomy and achievement you would like to discuss?