WHY NOT THE BEST SCHOOLS? WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED FROM OUTSTANDING SCHOOLS AROUND THE WORLD

Brian J. Caldwell[1]

Expectations have been raised around the world for an education revolution that will secure success for all students in all settings. Such a revolution must ensure the alignment of educational outcomes, the skills required for a strong economy, and the needs of a harmonious society. This paper draws on the major themes of *Why not the Best Schools?* that reports the findings of The International Project to Frame the Transformation of Schools conducted in Australia, China, England, Finland, United States and Wales. These findings are consistent with those in the McKinsey & Company report on the world's best performing school systems that found that the quality of teaching is the most important driver of success.

Why not the Best Schools? goes beyond system characteristics to provide an in-depth account of how transformation occurs in schools. This paper includes fifty indicators to help shape strategies for policymakers and practitioners in schools and school systems. A self-audit on 10 indicators is provided to assist participants at this conference make the connections between the themes of the book to the title of this symposium. Guidelines for leadership and governance ensure a future-focus for those who are determined to ensure that all students will succeed in the 21st century.

The 'new world order' in education

A 'new world order' is emerging in education that should give each nation hope that all of its schools can be 'best schools' when judged against current standards.

Andreas Schleicher (2008) recently compared nations on a range of indicators to illustrate this contention. As head of the indicators and analysis division of the directorate of education at OECD, he is one of the world's foremost authorities on trends in student achievement. On school completion, as indicated by the percentage of people with high school or equivalent qualifications, he drew on four decades of data from the 1960s to the 1990s. Particularly striking was the declining performance among 35 countries of the United States, ranked 1st in the 1960s falling to 13th in the 1990s, while Korea moved from 27th to 1st over the same period. Finland improved from 17th to 9th.

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[1] Brian J. Caldwell is Managing Director of Educational Transformations Pty Ltd and Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne where he served as Dean of Education from 1998 to 2004. This invited paper was scheduled for presentation in a symposium on the theme 'Strengthening the teaching profession for the 21st century' at the now postponed 12th UNESCO-APEID International Conference to mark the 4th World Teachers' Day in Thailand, Bangkok, 9 December 2008. The event has been re-scheduled for early 2009. The paper is based on his book *Why not the Best Schools?* co-authored with Dr Jessica Harris, Director of Research at Educational Transformations and Research Fellow in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne.

Comparisons among the same nations in the percentage of people with tertiary level qualifications also reveal interesting trends. Big improvers were Korea (24th to 4th) and Ireland (21st to 14th). Noteworthy declines were Germany (13th to 27th) and United States (1st to 6th). Top-ranked country was Norway (4th to 1st).

Of particular interest in these comparisons is the movement among nations, with traditionally higher performers such as Germany and the United States slipping down the ranks and the relative improvement of nations like Finland, Ireland, Korea and Norway.

Schleicher described the relative performance of major groupings of nations on a critically important indicator, namely, the future supply of people with baseline qualifications, that is, completed secondary school. He compared China, European Union, India and the United States in 2003, 2010 and 2015. Projected increases for China and India far outstripped those for the EU and the US. He also compared China, EU and US on projections of people with tertiary qualifications. In 2003, China ranked 3rd with just under 1 million annually. By 2015 China will rank first with about 5 million annually, almost double each of the others.

The quality of teaching is the most important driver of success

These trends make clear that nations can move up or down the ranks as far as performance is concerned if the correct strategies are adopted. The good news – and cause for celebration at this conference to mark the 4th World Teachers' Day in Thailand – is that the quality of teaching is the most important driver of success.

The McKinsey & Company report on how the world's best performing systems come out on top (Barber and Mourshead, 2007) is one of the most widely-read studies in recent times. Its value was explained in Schleicher's foreword: 'the report provides policy-makers with a unique tool to bring about improvements in schooling and better preparation for young people as they enter an adult life of rapid change and deepening global interdependence'. He added, somewhat provocatively: 'The world is indifferent to tradition and past reputations, unforgiving of frailty and ignorant of custom or practice. Success will go to those individuals and countries which are swift to adapt, slow to complain and open to change'.

McKinsey's explanation of success is primarily concerned with the quality of teaching, expressed simply: 'The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers'. Among its striking findings is that 'the available evidence suggests that the main driver of the variation in student learning at school is the quality of the teachers'. It cites research at the University of Tennessee that found that 'if two average eight-year-old students were given different teachers – one of them a high performer, the other a low performer – their performance diverge by more than 50 percentile points within three years'. This finding contrasts with evidence on class size: 'By comparison, the evidence shows that reducing class sizes from 23 to 15

students improves the performance of the average student by eight percentile points at best' (McKinsey, 2007, p. 12).

The McKinsey study found that teacher quality also has an influence on the performance of school systems. It examined 25 school systems from around the world, including 10 top-performing school systems, to determine the tools they use to improve student performance. Each operates in a unique political, social and cultural context and faces different challenges in striving to meet the learning needs of their students. Despite these contextual differences, the study found some striking similarities in the approaches that high-performing school systems had implemented to improving student performance. All had sustained a focus on improving the quality of teaching in their schools. The study identified three key drivers that were effectively and consistently used by high-performing school systems to improve student outcomes and increase the performance of the school system (Barber and Mourshead, 2007, p. 13):

1. They get the right people to become teachers (the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers)
2. They develop these people into effective instructors (the only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction)
3. They put in place systems and targeted support to ensure that every child is able to benefit from excellent instruction (the only way for the system to reach the highest performance is to raise the standard of every student).

Our work in the International Project to Frame the Transformation of Schools affirms the findings of McKinsey. It considered the quality of teaching to be a form of 'intellectual capital', one of four forms of capital that must be aligned if schools are to secure success for all of their students. We highlighted three kinds of alignment and these are described in more detail in the following pages.

Alignment 1: Intellectual, social, spiritual and financial capital

The purpose of the International Project to Frame the Transformation of Schools was to explore how schools that had been transformed or had sustained high performance had built strength in each of four kinds of capital and aligned them through effective governance to secure success for their students. The project was framed by the model in Figure 1. Particular attention was given to secondary schools in systems where there was a relatively high level of school autonomy.

Intellectual capital refers to the level of knowledge and skill of those who work in or for the school. Social capital refers to 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. Spiritual capital refers to the strength of moral purpose and the degree of coherence among values, beliefs and attitudes about life and learning (for some schools, spiritual capital has a foundation in religion; in other schools, spiritual capital may refer to ethics and values

shared by members of the school and its community). Financial capital refers to the money available to support the school. Governance is the process through which the school builds its intellectual, social, financial and spiritual capital and aligns them to achieve its goals.

The model in Figure 1 was the outcome of work from 2004 to 2006 described in *Raising the Stakes: From Improvement to Transformation in the Reform of Schools* (Caldwell and Spinks, 2008). An innovative approach was utilised in the development and enrichment of the model including case studies (49), master classes (4) and workshops (60) involving school and school system leaders in 11 countries where there was an agenda for or interest in transformation and where schools had a relatively high level of autonomy. Forty of the 49 case studies were contributed by school leaders in 13 of the 60 workshops. Several workshops were incorporated in conferences and postgraduate programs in leadership and management.
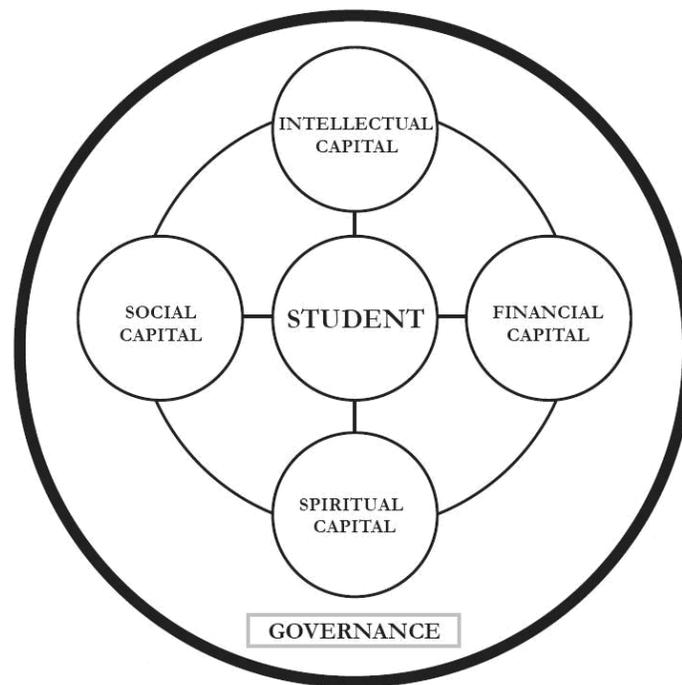

Figure 1 Alignment of four forms of capital

A feature of most of the workshops was the invitation to school and school system leaders to respond to key questions on design, implementation, issues and outcomes of efforts to achieve the transformation of schools. An interactive computer-based technology enabled large numbers of individual and group responses to be gathered for subsequent analysis. The interactive technology was utilised in 50 out of a total of 60 workshops, with

approximately 2,500 participants generating more than 10,000 responses for subsequent analysis.

The model in Figure 1 was the starting point for the International Project to Frame the Transformation of Schools. There were two stages. The first called for a review of literature on the four kinds of capital and how they are aligned through effective governance. An outcome of this review was the identification of 10 sample indicators for each form of capital and for governance. The second called for case studies in five secondary schools in each of six countries: Australia, China, England, Finland, United States and Wales. The project was carried out by Melbourne-based Educational Transformations with different components conducted by international partners and funding from the Australian Government and the Welsh Assembly Government.

Indicators

Sample indicators were devised for each kind of capital and of governance. They served as a guide to researchers in each of the six countries in the selection of schools and to help build a common understanding of what was meant by each concept (intellectual capital, social capital, spiritual capital, financial capital and governance). There was no expectation that information on each indicator would be systematically gathered at every site.

The 50 indicators – 10 for each kind of capital and for governance – are listed below. Those with an asterisk (*) were illustrated in each school in each of the six countries. Indicators marked with a hash symbol (#) were illustrated in the majority of schools. The others were illustrated in at least one school. These indicators suggest strategies to be employed in efforts to ensure that all schools are world-class schools.

Noteworthy findings are included for intellectual capital, given the theme of this symposium. Findings for the other forms of capital and for governance are set out in *Why not the Best Schools?*

Intellectual Capital

1. *The staff allocated to or selected by the school are at the forefront of knowledge and skill in required disciplines and pedagogies
2. *The school identifies and implements outstanding practice observed in or reported by other schools
3. *The school has built a substantial, systematic and sustained capacity for acquiring and sharing professional knowledge
4. Outstanding professional practice is recognised and rewarded
5. *The school supports a comprehensive and coherent plan for the professional development of all staff that reflects its needs and priorities
6. #When necessary, the school outsources to augment the professional talents of its staff

7. *The school participates in networks with other schools and individuals, organisations, institutions and agencies, in education and other fields, to share knowledge, solve problems or pool resources
8. *The school ensures that adequate funds are set aside in the budget to support the acquisition and dissemination of professional knowledge
9. #The school provides opportunities for staff to innovate in their professional practice
10. The school supports a 'no-blame' culture which accepts that innovations often fail

Intellectual capital was regarded in each of the six countries as one of the most important resources for schools. The case studies revealed a range of practices to build it.

- The education system in Finland has been highly successful in its aim of providing equitable access to high quality education for all students in Finland. The results of PISA (2000, 2003 and 2006) have shown that not only does Finland perform at a high level in international tests of student achievement, it also has one of the smallest gaps between the achievements of high and low performing students in the OECD and partner nations.
- The schools are focused on the recruitment and retention of high quality teachers. All had a capacity to select their own staff. The principals of schools in Finland are able to interview staff and recommend their selected candidate to the local education board, which is responsible for the employment of teachers. Schools in Australia and England are able to recruit, select and manage their own staff.
- The level of qualifications for teachers and school leaders varied between the countries. In Australia, England and the United States, teachers are required to complete at least an undergraduate education qualification. Teachers in Finland are required to hold a master's level degree. School leaders from each country are expected to have some practical knowledge and training in educational administration.
- Schools from each country described mentoring programs for newly qualified teachers. The Australian schools indicated that their long-serving staff are highly valued for their knowledge and experience. In many of the English schools, the mentoring of new teachers was one part of the staff professional development program. These schools reported that less experienced teachers are able to develop personalised development programs with their mentors.

Social Capital

1. #There is a high level of alignment between the expectations of parents and other key stakeholders and the mission, vision, goals, policies, plans and programmes of the school
2. *There is extensive and active engagement of parents and others in the community in the educational programme of the school

3. Parents and others in the community serve on the governing body of the school or contribute in other ways to the decision-making process
4. #Parents and others in the community are advocates of the school and are prepared to take up its cause in challenging circumstances
5. *The school draws cash or in-kind support from individuals, organisations, agencies and institutions in the public and private sectors, in education and other fields, including business and industry, philanthropists and social entrepreneurs
6. *The school accepts that support from the community has a reciprocal obligation for the school to contribute to the building of community
7. *The school draws from and contributes to networks to share knowledge, address problems and pool resources
8. *Partnerships have been developed and sustained to the extent that each partner gains from the arrangement
9. #Resources, both financial and human, have been allocated by the school to building partnerships that provide mutual support
10. *The school is co-located with or located near other services in the community and these services are utilised in support of the school

Financial Capital

1. *Funds are raised from several sources including allocations by formula from the public purse, fees, contributions from the community, and other money raised from the public and private sectors
2. #Annual planning occurs in the context of a multi-year development plan for the school
3. #The financial plan has a multi-year outlook as well as an annual budget
4. *Allocation of funds reflects priorities among educational needs that take account of data on student achievement, evidence-based practice, and targets to be achieved
5. There is appropriate involvement of stakeholders in the planning process
6. *Appropriate accounting procedures are established to monitor and control expenditure
7. #Money can be transferred from one category of the budget to another as needs change or emerge
8. Actual expenditure matches intended expenditure allowing for flexibility to meet emerging needs
9. #Educational targets are consistently achieved through the planned allocation of funds
10. The funds from all sources are sufficient and sustainable to meet educational needs

Spiritual Capital

1. #There is a high level of alignment between the values, beliefs and attitudes about life and learning held by the school and members of its community

2. *The values and beliefs of the school, including where relevant those that derive from a religious foundation, are embedded in its mission, vision, goals, policies, plans and curriculum
3. #The values and beliefs of the community are taken into account by the school in the formulation of its mission, vision, goals, policies, plans and curriculum.
4. *The school explicitly articulates its values and beliefs in publications and presentations
5. *Publications and presentations in the wider community reflect an understanding of the values and beliefs of the school
6. #There are high levels of trust between the school and members of its community
7. #Parents and other stakeholders are active in promoting the values and beliefs of the school.
8. *The values and beliefs of the school are evident in the actions of students and staff.
9. Staff and students who are exemplars of the values and beliefs of the school are recognised and rewarded
10. The values and beliefs of the school have sustained it or are likely to sustain it in times of crisis

Governance

1. *Authorities, responsibilities and accountabilities of the governing body and professional staff are clearly specified
2. Mechanisms are in place to ensure that obligations in respect to legal liability and risk management are addressed
3. *There is a clearly stated connection between the policies of the school and intended outcomes for students
4. #Policies have been prepared after consultation with key stakeholders within the school and the wider community
5. #Policies have been formally approved by the governing body
6. Policies are consistent in their application across the school so that students with the same needs are supported in the same manner
7. *Data are used in making decisions in the formulation of policies and making judgements about their effectiveness
8. *Data are gathered across the range of intended outcomes
9. #Information about policies and their implementation is readily available to all stakeholders
10. #There is a strong sense of commitment to policies and their implementation on the part of all stakeholders

Conducting a self-audit

We developed a self-audit instrument based on these indicators. For each indicator, respondents are invited to provide ratings of (1) importance in the context of your school, (2) how well your school is performing, and (3) the priority you attach to further development. The respondent might consider the school as a whole or a particular unit within the school.

The instrument may be used in a range of situations. Its principal use is to frame an audit of a school's capacity to achieve change on the scale of transformation or to sustain high levels of performance. The instrument travels well across international borders. We used it with leaders from many countries, most recently at conferences in Brunei of heads and senior managers from the Federation British International Schools in South-East and East Asia (FOBISSEA). Participants have not baulked at the inclusion of any indicator and have been able to work through the entire set in the context of their own schools or school systems. Where there was a group from the same school, they completed their ratings individually and then compared responses, or worked through the list as a group. The instrument may be completed in the school setting by a leadership team or a group of staff working in the same area. The Attachment to this paper contains a self-audit for indicators of intellectual capital.

Implications

A review of developments in recent years reveals that particular strategies have taken their turn in moving to centre stage and then retreating as others are spotlighted. One might be a curriculum for the 21st century which enables every student to find a pathway to success at the same time that the needs of society are addressed. Another might be pedagogy, taking up the extraordinary advances in scholarship about how the brain functions and young people learn. It might be a matter of money, because quality and equity cannot be addressed without appropriate allocation of funds to schools and within schools. It might be to attract, reward and sustain the best teachers and other professionals. It might be to replace the run-down and obsolete stock of school buildings that are no longer fit for learning and teaching if there is to be success for all. It might be to build the support of the community for public education. It is all of these strategies and more, and the key to success is to bring them together and make them effective. Leadership is required at all levels – for a system of schools as well as within schools. New concepts of leadership are emerging – system leadership, but not in its traditional form, and distributed leadership, but not constrained to a simple sharing of tasks to make lighter the work of the principal. Outstanding governance is also required, but there must be a breakthrough in how we understand the concept. It is time to draw together what we have learnt from schools that have been transformed. The outcomes of the International Project to Frame the Transformation of Schools, as reflected in the 50 indicators and the illustrative noteworthy findings, show how this can be done.

There were few findings that cannot be transferred from one country to another providing there is appropriate adaptation to context and sufficient time is allowed for design and implementation. Each of the illustrative noteworthy findings falls into this category. It is disappointing that some observers reject the notion that we can learn from others such as Finland. There are of course cultural and socio-economic differences, but there is no reason why we cannot adapt strategies to different settings. An example where local adaptation is possible is the practice in Finland wherein every student who falls behind is given 1:1 or small group support. Thirty percent of all students

at primary and secondary levels receive such support each year. In Finland this is 'special education'. Special education teachers have an additional year of training and receive higher salaries.

Alignment 2: Education, economy and society

Most nations around the world are facing the challenge of ensuring that graduates have the mix of knowledge and skills that ensure success in a 21st century global economy. Figure 2 illustrates the alignment of education, economy and society.

The disjunction between the three is illustrated in a statement that is often heard along the lines that 'I want to live in a society not an economy'. It may take some time for the disjunction to become a convergence of the kind illustrated in Figure 2 in which education is accepted as important for the well-being of society and the economy. A quality education and a strong economy contribute to a vibrant society.

The convergence has been strong in the past. An example is the alignment of schools and society in an agricultural economy, a situation that continues to prevail in communities in many countries. A similar alignment was evident in industrial times to the point that the curriculum was determined to a large extent by the requirements of factories and management of education reflected a 'factory model'. Such an alignment is still important in many countries. New alignments are necessary for education in a knowledge economy in which the technologies of learning have been transformed.
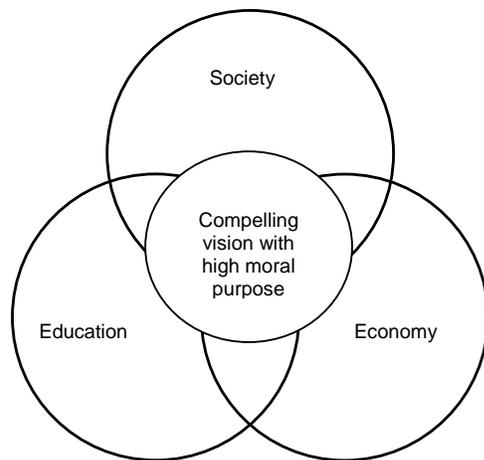
Figure 2: Alignment of education, economy and society

Some in education may feel uncomfortable with the explicit link between education and economy. Can a 'compelling vision with high moral purpose' include such a link? UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown demonstrated how this can be done in his vision of education:

> I make no apology for saying that education is the best economic policy. And I make no apology for wanting every child to be able to read, write and add up. But education has always been about more than exams, more than the basics, vital as they are. To educate is to form character, to shape values, and to liberate the imagination. It is to pass human wisdom, knowledge and ingenuity from one generation to the next. It is a duty and a calling. As Plutarch said, the mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled. And that is why we have such high ambitions. Not just because education is a matter of national prosperity, although it is certainly that. It is because education is the greatest liberator mankind has ever known, the greatest force for social progress. And that is why it is my passion. (Brown, 2007)

Alignment 3: Passion, strategy and trust

Educational leaders at all levels will need to articulate such a vision and to do so with passion. But passion by itself is insufficient, and herein lies the need for the alignment of passion, strategy and trust illustrated in Figure 3.
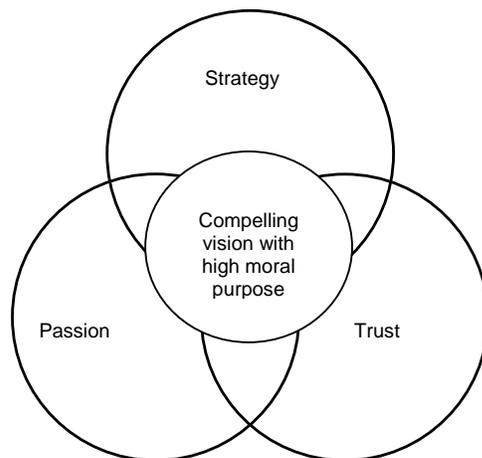

Figure 3: Alignment of passion, trust and strategy

Loss of trust has been a key theme in discourse on leadership in recent times, especially in respect to political leaders, although some writers contend that the loss is endemic. Fukuyama put this position in distinguishing between low-trust and high-trust societies, contending that 'Widespread distrust in a society . . . imposes a kind of tax on all forms of economic activity; a tax that high-trust societies do not have to pay' (Fukuyama, 1995, pp. 28029). Covey suggests that 'this low-trust tax is not only on economic activity, but on all activity – in every relationship, in every interaction, in every communication, in every decision, in every dimension of life (Covey, 2006, p. 19).

Conclusion

School leaders regardless of the setting need to articulate a compelling vision with high moral purpose that is suited to the times. Such a vision makes clear the relationship between education, economy and society that is suited to the 21st century global knowledge era. Such a vision should be articulated with passion, but passion by itself may be counter-productive unless accompanied by appropriate strategies and a high level of trust among key stakeholders. The 50 indicators that were identified in the International Project to Frame the Transformation of Schools suggest the strategies.

The integrating force in all of these matters is trust. This is an underlying theme of Stephen Covey writing in *The Speed of Trust* (Covey, 2006).

> There is one thing that is common to every individual, relationship, team, family, organisation, nation, economy, and civilisation throughout the world – one thing which, if removed, will destroy the most powerful government, the most successful business, the most thriving economy, the most influential leadership, the greatest friendship, the strongest character, the deepest love.

> On the other hand, if developed and leveraged, that one thing has the potential to create unparalleled success and prosperity in every dimension of life. Yet it is the least understood, most neglected, and most underestimated possibility of our time.

> That one thing is trust. (Covey, 2006, p. 1)

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ATTACHMENT

CONDUCTING AN AUDIT OF YOUR SCHOOL

INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL

For each indicator, provide ratings of (1) how well your school is performing,
and (2) the priority you attach to further development.

Indicator	Performance 1 2 3 4 5 Low High	Priority 1 2 3 4 5 Low High
1. The staff allocated to or selected by the school are at the forefront of knowledge and skill in required disciplines and pedagogies 2. The school identifies and implements outstanding practice observed in or reported by other schools 3. The school has built a substantial, systematic and sustained capacity for acquiring and sharing professional knowledge 4. Outstanding professional practice is recognised and rewarded 5. The school supports a comprehensive and coherent plan for the professional development of all staff that reflects its needs and priorities 6. When necessary, the school outsources to augment the professional talents of its staff 7. The school participates in networks with other schools and individuals, organisations, institutions and agencies, in education and other fields, to share knowledge, solve problems or pool resources 8. The school ensures that adequate funds are set aside in the budget to support the acquisition and dissemination of professional knowledge 9. The school provides opportunities for staff to innovate in their professional practice 10. The school supports a 'no-blame' culture which accepts that innovations often fail		
TOTAL	**/50**	☐ ☐ ☐ **Top 3 Priorities**