

## A whole-school approach to improving student achievement

Every student has the ability to learn and should be able to demonstrate progress on an ongoing basis.

A whole-school approach to improving student achievement means that the responsibility for every student's achievement is shared by the school community. This shared responsibility and accountability requires:

- leadership and high expectations
- a commitment to continual cycles of inquiry and action to improve student achievement
- focused teaching for all students.

### Leadership and high expectations

Strong school leadership is a key to improving learning outcomes across the school.

Effective school principals actively build the tone and ethos of the school and establish high expectations for teachers and students. They develop a leadership team that promotes a shared commitment to quality teaching and improving student achievement. They establish ambitious goals for improving student achievement and provide for the ongoing professional learning needs of teachers.

School leadership teams ensure that:

- a range of data is used to provide insights into each student's achievements and learning needs
- evidence-based strategies are selected to meet learning needs identified in the data
- goals that promote high expectations for all students are established for individuals, identified groups, classes and the whole school
- targets aligned to system and school priorities are established to meet these goals
- student performance is continually monitored against the established targets
- student achievement is the basis for evaluating the effectiveness of strategies, initiatives and programs
- effective practice is shared and supported across the school.

### Setting targets

Having high expectations and setting targets leads to improved student achievement when classroom teachers and school leaders work together to:

- analyse evidence about student performance, using school-based, state and national data
- develop a shared understanding of student data and the established targets for improvement
- develop strategies and processes to monitor progress
- regularly review and refine strategies in response to student achievement
- provide teachers and students with the support and resources they need to meet established targets
- engage parents in supporting the school's priorities, promoting shared expectations for student achievement, and celebrating success together.

## Continual cycles of inquiry and action to improve student achievement

The following steps help to ensure that patterns of student underachievement across the school are addressed in the most effective way. Establish a team to improve achievement

Establish a team of teachers and school leaders to work together to investigate patterns of student underachievement. The team may consider data specific to phases, learning areas, groups of students or achievement across the whole school. Rather than being a basis for criticism or blame, achievement data should be seen as a catalyst for stimulating professional inquiry and action.

### Develop a hypothesis

As a starting point, the team develops a hypothesis about why students may be underachieving. Their hypothesis is based on their analysis of the school-wide patterns identified in achievement data, and may also be shaped by research or, in some cases, by informed guesses. Note: the team's assumptions will need to be continually tested.

The team frames the hypotheses in terms of positive action by considering a range of possible causes of student underachievement and putting the focus on practical responses. For example, our students need to be explicitly taught the literacies of the learning areas to support their overall literary development.

### Gather further data to clarify needs

The team then tests their assumptions and refines their understanding by gathering further data. For example, asking students about a particular issue can sometimes reveal an unexpected explanation for poor performance. This will then allow for targeted teaching focused on improving student achievement in literacy and numeracy, and in the learning areas.

### Which data?

- Data to answer the question: *Who are our students?*
  - demographic information
  - enrolment data
  - parent and community interviews
  - student voice (for example, forums to gather the students' own ideas about ways to improve achievement levels)
- Data to answer the question: *How are our students doing?*

Use school-based, state and national data including:

  - data from ongoing classroom monitoring
  - reported student achievement on a five-point scale (A–E)
  - moderated samples of student work
  - state assessment data (QCATs, early intervention)
  - Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 national literacy and numeracy data.

### Analyse the data

It is important to look at trends over time.

Look for patterns: across a learning area (for example, science results); within a learning area (for example, problem solving in mathematics); in groups (for example, students underachieving in English, or students with English as a second language); or relating to school tone (for example, parents not feeling welcome or teachers feeling overloaded).

Compare school data with like-schools.

An effective analysis answers the following questions:

- What does the data tell us about our intervention choices?
- What does the data tell us about our professional development needs?

## Develop a plan

Develop a plan of action, informed by the data analysis. To do this:

1. Select focus areas for improving student achievement from across the full range of A–E student achievement.
2. Establish targets that are:
  - aspirational as well as achievable
  - specific enough to ensure that student progress can be accurately tracked within teachers' regular classroom practice.
3. Choose strategies that have been successful in similar circumstances.
4. Carefully allocate all available resources to maximise student learning.
5. Enlist the support of the whole school community to foster a shared sense of responsibility for improving student achievement.

## Monitor improvement and celebrate success

Ongoing monitoring and assessment helps shape teaching and learning. Monitoring is part of regular classroom practice and is related to the teaching, assessing and reporting of the intended curriculum. Monitoring is not an additional, separate activity.

Use a range of monitoring tools to gather reliable information to analyse student progress and achievement. Choose tools that help teachers select the next steps to move the learner forward. Set school-wide expectations regarding monitoring tools and procedures for recording, interpreting, using and storing information gathered. This enables student progress to be tracked across year levels.

Ongoing improvement is most likely to be maintained when the school community — teachers, parents, students and school leaders — regularly reviews student data and progress towards the intended learning. Regular reviews provide opportunities to celebrate success as well as calibrate or adjust strategies where required.

## Focused teaching for all students — a whole-school approach

A whole-school approach to improvement directs support to different levels of need in response to student achievement data. Focused teaching to improve learning can be provided in three layers.

**Layer 1** responds to data indicating the need to address issues in curriculum design, explicit teaching and assessment. This response involves professional learning for teachers that leads to changes in practice.

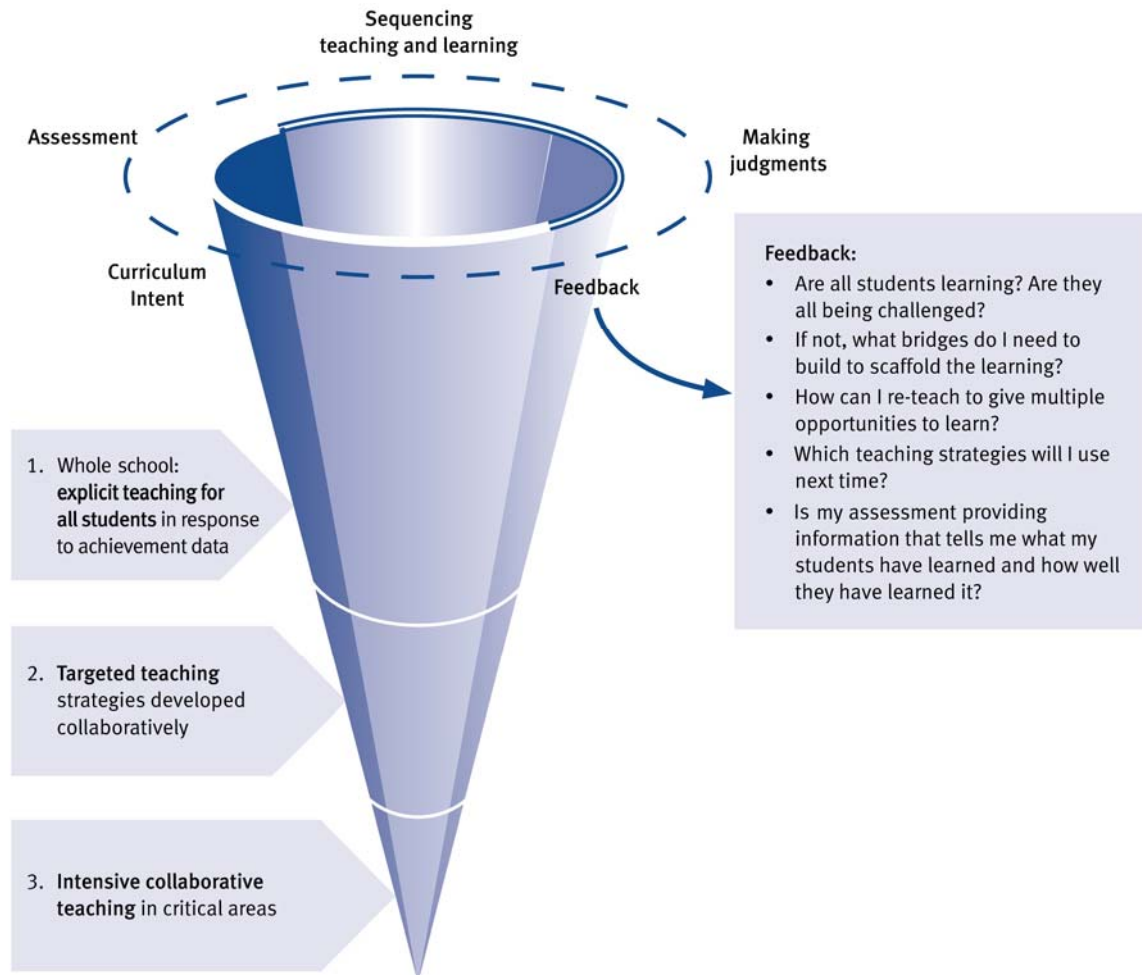
**Layer 2** responds to data indicating the need to address underachievement with small-group targeted teaching. This is for students who continue to underachieve (in relation to year-level expectations) or, in the case of gifted underachievers, in relation to their potential.

**Layer 3** responds to data indicating the need to address underachievement with intensive teaching, often involving specialist input. This is provided for limited periods of time for the small proportion of students who require this in addition to Layers 1 and 2 to achieve the expectations of their age-cohort. (This may involve teaching English to students new to Australia, or teaching students to use assistive technology such as screen readers and speech-to-text programs.)

The Queensland Curriculum Assessment and Reporting (QCAR) *Essential Learnings and Standards* are the core of learning programs for all students in Years 1 to 9. Continuous learning is expected for all students in every classroom. This means that each of the three layers involves:

- quality planning and teaching to address the essential learnings in all learning areas in each year from Year 1 to Year 9

- quality assessment of student progress and consistency of teacher judgments — to inform teaching and learning
- reporting of student achievement to parents and students against standards described by a five-point (A–E) scale.



The success of strategies chosen in all three layers is measured using student achievement data showing students achieving at least at year-level expectations.

The table on the following page lists questions that help inform quality provision of these three layers, and help achieve the most effective use of school resources.

| Focused teaching in three layers  | Considerations   |
|---|--|
| <p>1. <b>Quality teaching</b> to ensure <b>all students</b> achieve year-level expectations</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do we use data to evaluate student achievement patterns at all levels, that is, whole-school, phase of learning, year level, learning area, class, and cohort (gender, Indigenous, ESL)?</li> <li>• What are the patterns in student data telling us we could do better?</li> <li>• What do we need to investigate?</li> <li>• Do our choices for curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment support particular students to reach year-level expectations and beyond?</li> </ul> <p><b>Curriculum design</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the essential learnings presented in ways that are accessible and relevant for <i>our</i> students?</li> <li>• Do we teach the ways of working as well as knowledge and understanding?</li> <li>• Do we provide multiple opportunities for all students to achieve the essential learnings across year levels?</li> <li>• Do we focus on priorities to give students the time they need to achieve the essential learnings within the junctures?</li> </ul> <p><b>Pedagogy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do we have a clear understanding of what students are expected to learn? Do we understand the typical progression of learning and know the common difficulties in priority learning areas?</li> <li>• Do we use evidence-based approaches?</li> <li>• Do we provide effective feedback to help students improve?</li> <li>• Do we teach the literacy and numeracy demands of assessments?</li> <li>• Do we have access to the professional development (PD) we need to teach all students effectively? Is our PD plan responsive to school data (including the expressed needs of teachers)?</li> </ul> <p><b>Assessment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does our assessment actually assess the intended learning?</li> <li>• Is our assessment equitable/accessible for all students? (For example, do we avoid using unfamiliar language or contexts that make assessment inequitable?)</li> <li>• Is our assessment audited for literacy and numeracy demands?</li> <li>• Are assessments engaging and challenging for students?</li> <li>• Do we use a variety of assessment instruments?</li> <li>• Are assessment judgments moderated?</li> </ul> <p><b>Reporting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do the reports to parents reflect an overall judgment about the student's achievement across a range of assessment opportunities?</li> </ul> |
| <p>2. <b>Targeted teaching</b> to enable <b>some students</b> to reach year-level expectations<br/>(This could include revisiting, reteaching, co-teaching, or providing tutorial work in targeted learning areas.)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do we support the additional focused teaching that some students need?</li> <li>• Is our targeted teaching dealing with gaps that could be addressed in Layer 1? (For example, an increase in numbers of students requiring targeted teaching in reading may indicate a need to address the teaching of reading across the school.)</li> <li>• Do we measure the effectiveness of our targeted teaching using student achievement data?</li> <li>• Do we regularly review our targeted teaching together?</li> </ul>  |
| <p>3. <b>Intensive teaching</b> for <b>students</b> who need it in addition to targeted teaching</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How successful is our intensive teaching in moving students beyond the need for it?</li> <li>• Is there a sufficient link between the intensive teaching provided and the classroom program?</li> </ul>   |