

United in our pursuit of excellence

Education Queensland system review

Final report

Michael Fullan and Ben Levin Report

Education Queensland Response
February, 2012



Queensland Government



Overview

A report by Professor Geoff Masters titled *A Shared Challenge: Improving Literacy, Numeracy and Science Learning in Queensland Primary Schools* (The Masters' Report) was commissioned by the Premier the Honourable Anna Bligh in December 2008 to make recommendations on improving student achievement in Queensland.

Since this report the department has implemented a raft of initiatives aimed at driving achievement in state schools in Queensland. The agenda has been based on the recommendations of the Masters' Report and other international research on effective practices for continuous improvement in student learning.

The work is significant and includes:

- a roll out of more than 90 literacy and numeracy coaches in more than 170 schools
- 100 science facilitators and 15 regional managers to support best practice in science teaching in Years 4–7
- a *Roadmap for Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting* and a *Prep Roadmap*, developed to provide clear direction to teachers on five priorities to improve student learning
- 10 turn-around teams of experienced educators to work with Low SES National Partnership schools
- development and implementation of a Teaching and Learning Audit tool, with audits conducted in every state school in Queensland
- the launch of *United in our pursuit of excellence*, which outlines Education Queensland's agenda for improvement
- implementation of the Principals' Capability and Leadership Framework, which fosters knowledge, skills and understanding as well as an aligned Principals' Performance and Development Planning Process
- the implementation of a differential model of supervision and capability development for school principals
- development of Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C) resources to support schools to implement the Australian Curriculum.

This reform agenda has been firmly grounded in an evidence base, drawing on international best practice and research, including the internationally respected work of McKinsey & Company¹, Fullan², Levin³ and Elmore⁴.

In order to ensure that these reforms are aligned with world's best practice, international experts Professor Michael Fullan and Professor Ben Levin were asked to undertake a Systems Review to examine the school improvement agenda being implemented across the Queensland education system.

¹Mourshed, M. Chijioke, C. and Barber, M. (2010) *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better*, McKinsey and Company, London. Mourshed, M. and Barber, M. (2007) *How the World's Best Performing Schools Come Out On Top*, McKinsey and Company, London.

²Fullan, M. (2009) *The challenge of change: start school improvement now!* Hawker, Bronlow Education, Cheltenham. Fullan, M. (2010) *All systems go: the change imperative for whole system reform*, Hawker, Bronlow Education, Cheltenham.

³Levin, B. (2008) *How to change 5000 schools*, Education Press, Massachusetts.

⁴Elmore, R. (2004) *School Reform From The Inside Out: Policy, Practice, And Performance*. Harvard Education Press, Boston.



The initiatives implemented have already yielded outcomes, with NAPLAN results showing significant improvement in a number of domains and year levels from 2008 when the Masters' report was commissioned.

Throughout 2011, Levin and Fullan have undertaken a range of interviews and workshops with key educational leaders from across our system.

Fullan and Levin have provided feedback to Education Queensland during 2011 and have provided a report. The report has specified some foundational strengths of our state education system, as well as some key areas for improvement in order to achieve further successful whole system reform.

This paper provides an overview of the final report and recommendations provided by Professor Fullan and Professor Levin, and outlines the Department of Education and Training's response to their report.



The report

Background

Over the past 12 months we have been working with the Department of Education and Training to undertake a Systems Review of the state schooling system in Queensland.

The purpose of our work was to provide advice on the directions being taken by Education Queensland to drive improvement in state schools. Based on our work with education systems across the world, of what high performing education systems look like and effective ways of driving systems reform, we have participated in an ongoing conversation with the Minister, the Director-General and Deputy Director-General of Education, other executive leaders, school principals and other educational leaders in Queensland. Our work has had a two-pronged approach.

Firstly, we have supported some key directions that have been taken over the past 12 months. This has included workshops and conferences with educational leaders to explore key aspects of instructional leadership and the effective use of data to inform practice. We have also contributed to the development of a Principals' Capability and Leadership Framework which outlines the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to effectively lead an explicit school improvement agenda. Additionally, we have provided strategic feedback on *United in our pursuit of excellence*, which has been developed by Education Queensland to focus state schools toward improvements and to clearly outline the 'what', the 'how', the 'who' and ways in which capacity will be built.

Secondly, we have undertaken an examination of the system. This has included interviews with educational leaders and other stakeholders, and a review of key policies data and other documents.

Based on this work, we make the following comments and recommendations:

Strengths

1. Clear messages provided by Education Queensland

Education Queensland has developed consistent messages, emanating from the document *United in our pursuit of excellence*, which articulate the vision and agenda for school improvement. We commend this clear direction. The Director-General has played a key role in leading a clear and shared focus on school improvement. This is an important base on which to build.

2. The right tools

It is also evident that there are tools to support effective implementation of this agenda. Most notably, the Teaching and Learning Audits have established quality feedback around key curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment practices. The



process informs the future developmental needs of each school community and the system as a whole.

3. Relationships and support

Another vital element which creates a solid foundation for successful system reform is the strong relationships that the department has developed. Key stakeholders, such as the unions and parent and principal associations are consulted regularly, allowing collaboration and investment in a shared vision.

Recommendations

1. Common focus on goals and strategies

United in our pursuit of excellence has articulated the improvement agenda; however this can be strengthened through a common focus on goals and strategies.

A Guiding Coalition, consisting of senior leadership as a total group, should work on establishing a common focus on goals and strategies, whereby there is a common and consistent stance evident in relation to the reform strategy. This understanding should be succinct, commonly expressed and address the core elements of the goals and strategy.

It is vital that this common focus is enacted by the Guiding Coalition, individually and in concert.

2. Consistency of delivery across the seven regions

Consistency of delivery relates closely with the common focus on goals and strategies. It is acknowledged that the geography and diversity of community contexts in Queensland require local solutions that meet the needs of local issues. However, the core goals and strategies must be consistent across the state in order to harness effective system reform.

3. Instruction as the driver

Attention is required on instruction as a reform driver. The following three components should be examined and repositioned as a set:

- instruction in relation to the new National Curriculum
- use of data as a strategy for improvement
- the instructional role of the principal.

Education Queensland has told us that the *Curriculum into the Classroom* (C2C) has received positive feedback from principals and teachers. We note this and believe that resources are important.

However, resources won't stand alone. Education Queensland needs to ensure that teachers use them as an enabler when they are relevant and useful and feel empowered to build upon what is provided, or move in a different direction, to extend



teacher professionalism. It is essential that 'instruction' be the focus of implementing C2C, and that care be taken to ensure that teacher ownership of instructional practices associated with C2C be fostered.

While there is an array of data available, simplified data profiles are required in order to integrate the assessment and instruction as a two-way proposition. This assessment-instruction nexus needs to be at the heart of the day-to-day strategy in order for data to be used in practice.

The instructional role of the principal is key to this set. Currently this role is being embraced in the system. However, it is currently a vague notion that requires more definitional and developmental work. It should be noted that clarifying instructional leadership has been identified as a common problem across Australia and in other countries and one that should continue to be developed.

Final comment

In summary, we commend Education Queensland for the development of clear messages, valuable tools and strong stakeholder relationships to pursue the school improvement agenda.

We believe a concentrated effort that integrates and in some ways simplifies the work around the three core recommendations above will take the system forward in a substantial way. Finally, we would say that there seems to be general agreement in the field that the direction of the reform is the right one. The next stage — 2012 — is crucial for ensuring that this agreement is consolidated in practice.

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Education Queensland Response

Strengths

1. Clear messages provided by Education Queensland

Education Queensland is committed to the strong and unwavering focus delivered in our key school improvement agenda, *United in our pursuit of excellence*.

United in our pursuit of excellence articulates a commitment to teamwork and an unrelenting focus on improved student achievement through alignment and consistency. The document outlines how improvement will be achieved through focusing on core learning priorities and the consistent implementation of strategies that clearly outline the ‘who’, the ‘what’, the ‘how’ and how capacity will be built in schools. This agenda provides a clear focus for state schools, and the Education Queensland systems that support them.

2. The right tools

Many of the initiatives implemented by Education Queensland are unique and have the capacity to lead world practice on school improvement.

The Teaching and Learning Audit Instrument was developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) under contract to the Department of Education and Training using international research.

Education Queensland’s own experience of the Teaching and Learning Audits reflects the positive view of Professor Fullan and Professor Levin. Feedback from principals has been extremely positive, and points to the important role that the Teaching and Learning Audits can play in supporting principals and teachers to reflect on their practice, and to identify where there is room for improvement. Education Queensland is continuing to audit Queensland state schools in line with each school’s quadrennial school review, the term after a new permanent principal is appointed or at the request of the principal.

3. Relationships and support

Education Queensland believes in developing collaborative relationships with key stakeholders in order to achieve best possible outcomes. Strong partnerships have been developed with a wide range of stakeholders throughout Queensland. This has been achieved through establishing proactive and diverse channels of communication, and through providing opportunities for stakeholders to provide input on all key policy decision-making processes.

While productive relationships with key stakeholders are vital, it is also important to provide opportunities for all parents, teachers and principals to share ideas and identify areas for improvement. In 2011, *Raising the Bar* forums were held across the state and feedback from this process will enrich future actions contributing to the lifting of standards across state schools.



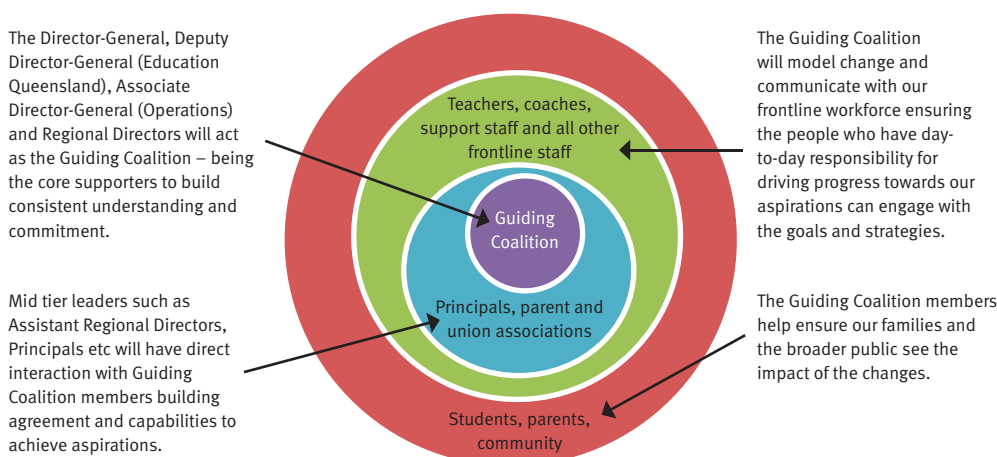
Recommendations

1. Common focus on goals and strategies

Fullan and Levin's recommendation to establish a common focus on goals and strategies through a Guiding Coalition is accepted. The concept of a Guiding Coalition requires representation from a group of people with significant influence in ensuring the key aim of strengthening the common focus on goals and strategies will build the shared agreement and commitment required for successful school improvement.

The Director-General, Deputy Director-General (Education), Associate Director-General (Operations) and Regional Directors form the nucleus of the Guiding Coalition. The Guiding Coalition will communicate a consistent message about the goals of state schools, and the department's commitment to the actions required to achieve these goals. The Guiding Coalition will work through the Executive Management Group⁵ and the Education Queensland Board⁶. Both these forums provide the Guiding Coalition with an opportunity to lead change and to ensure that there is involvement and commitment at the highest level of the organisation. This Guiding Coalition will widen 'circles of leadership' through the establishment of a network of relationships including our decision makers, educational workforce and stakeholders. This collective engagement is a crucial requirement in order to truly effect system-wide change (as demonstrated in the diagram below).

We acknowledge that for this common focus to be successful the Guiding Coalition must be sustainable and in constant communication. We are committed to building mechanisms to make this achievable and ensure there is a common focus across the system on our goals and strategies.



This diagram⁷ presents an iterative process, whereby communication travels in both directions. This two-way communication process is a crucial requirement in building the common understanding.

⁵The Executive Management Group consists of senior officers who report directly to the Director-General.

⁶The Education Queensland Board will consist of all officers who report directly to the Deputy Director-General, Education Queensland, and other senior officers from across relevant portfolios in the department.

⁷Adapted from Michael Barber (www.slidefinder.net/b/barber_deliverology_hse_lectures_dec/9033612), which is based on work by Michael Fullan.



2. Consistency of delivery across the seven regions

Fullan and Levin's recommendation to ensure consistency of goals and strategies across the state is accepted. We know from the large body of international research on educational reform that the change must embody the whole system in a consistent and coherent manner. Therefore, we are committed to cross-regional consistency.

Integrated and effective service delivery across the department is supported through the Integrated Service Delivery Board, comprising the Executive Management Group and the seven Regional Directors. In addition to this board, mechanisms will be put into place whereby Regional Directors and Assistant Regional Directors will link in regularly to build and strengthen communication channels, supporting consistency across the regions. This will include forums in which Central and Regional officers meet regularly to guide the implementation of *United in our pursuit of excellence*. These discussions will focus on tracking performance, sharing quality practices and ensuring that the goals for improvement are realised across the state. This group will also be charged with the job of ensuring consistency of operation and the development of key communication strategies across the state.

3. Instruction as the driver

Education Queensland has had overwhelmingly positive responses to C2C resources so far. It should be noted that C2C resources are not mandated, but rather are provided for Queensland teachers to support the implementation of the Australian Curriculum into our classrooms. We will continue to monitor the C2C resources and at the end of 2012 will analyse their effectiveness for teachers.

The messages from Fullan and Levin, in conjunction with other key international research which enforce instruction as a pivotal educational reform element, are clear. It is acknowledged that C2C is only one component of improving instruction in order to improve outcomes.

Building collective capacity

Instructional leaders create and develop a collaborative learning environment where learning is not confined to the classroom and is the objective of all educators. Instructional leadership is an important departure from the ancient model of administrator as authoritarian. It goes beyond curriculum leadership and focuses on the pedagogy (the how) and achievement. It develops the collective capacity of all staff members to ensure that the needs of every student are being met.

This collective capacity is a clear focus of the Teaching and Learning Audits, which operate under a peer review model that provides principals and teachers with the opportunity to collaboratively develop processes to improve outcomes in their schools, and across schools.

However, more can — and will — be done in this area. Education Queensland recognises the importance of leadership in driving outcomes in schools. In work that was conducted with Professor Geoff Masters, ACER, it was recognised that effective



leaders are an essential component of the school reform agenda; they create high expectations, they provide clarity of vision, and can establish effective professional learning communities. Effective, distributed leadership across the system is the key to leading ongoing efforts to improve instructional practice.

To ensure student outcomes are improved, an innovative model to support the development and supervision of school leaders has been advanced. Principals are provided with opportunities to develop knowledge, skills and behaviours required to effectively lead within diverse school contexts, as well as building their skills to effectively develop collective capacity across the school.

A range of models are supporting principal capability development, including professional development courses, online (live and on demand) and on *OnePortal* (the Department of Education and Training's intranet site), face-to-face coaching and mentoring. These targeted relationships are determined by the individual needs of the principal, in negotiation with their Assistant Regional Director, School Performance. A suite of multi-layered strategies to be used could include learning with and from other principal colleagues across and within schools, clusters, networks, regions and beyond; observing principal practice onsite and offsite; learning from other principals on the job; coaching and mentoring activities; professional development opportunities; and study tours.

Principals will identify specific benchmarks for improvement and design a whole-school explicit strategic improvement agenda to achieve them.

Data driven decision making

Data is the foundation of the *United in our pursuit of excellence* improvement agenda. The Department of Education and Training will continue to provide schools with the right data to support good decision making at a school level, a regional level and a Queensland-wide level. It is acknowledged, however, that just providing data is not enough. The focus of any data must be about student instruction and improving learning outcomes. We will continue to build collective capacity in data analysis, as well as reflect on progress in this area through domain two — analysis and discussion of data — of the Teaching and Learning Audit outcomes.

Final Comment

Fullan and Levin have identified that Queensland has adopted extremely strong approaches towards a reform agenda.

The strengths identified by Levin and Fullan are areas that Education Queensland has worked hard to get right. The recommendations outline three key areas for focus in order to further progress our school improvement agenda and will further embed the agenda as a system-wide reform.

We have seen some early gains in improved literacy and numeracy outcomes, and improved Year 12 outcomes. Education Queensland is committed to building on these improvements and will continue to pursue an agenda to improve outcomes for students.