Enhancing school improvement reform in New South Wales (Australia)

About this Education Policy Perspective

The New South Wales (Australia) (hereafter NSW) Government is committed to an education system that prepares its learners for rewarding lives and lifelong learning. To help realise this goal, the NSW Department of Education (DoE) has initiated several reforms over the years that recognise the importance of the learning journey for students, teachers, and school leaders. The Local Schools Local Decisions (LSLD) reform was announced in August 2011 and aimed to increase the authority of local schools to make decisions about how they deliver education to students. In December 2020, it was announced that LSLD would be replaced by the School Success Model (SSM) reform which is a school improvement reform that aimed to deliver high quality, tiered school improvement support to all NSW public schools. The SSM set out to achieve a better balance of autonomy and accountability for student improvement across schools by formalising system targets and priorities, lifting capability and sharing evidence-led support through a new tailored school support framework.

Realising successful educational change however is a long, complex, multifaceted process that, simply said, is hard to do – and the DoE reform journey is no exception to this. The DoE considered it important to build on lessons from past reforms and receive feedback from the education profession and other stakeholders to further enhance the design of its school improvement reform and determine the right enabling conditions for its successful implementation.

The DoE invited the OECD Implementing Education Policies project team to contribute to this effort. Drawing from OECD's international knowledge base and expertise, this report presents an in-depth assessment and offers concrete recommendations for enhancing the design and implementation of the DoE school improvement reform, as well as the larger NSW education reform agenda.

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1. Introduction

Background

The New South Wales (Australia) (hereafter NSW) Government is committed to an education system that prepares its learners for rewarding lives and lifelong learning. To help realise this goal, the NSW Department of Education (DoE) has initiated a number of reforms over the years that recognise the importance of the learning journey; starting by building strong foundations for learning in early childhood, through teaching and learning in schools and into lifelong learning (NSW Government, 2021[1]). This includes the School Success Model (SSM), a school improvement reform that was announced by the Minister for Education and Early Learning in December 2020.

The SSM followed and built on the strengths and identified areas for improvement following the completion of the Local Schools, Local Decisions (LSLD) reform (2012 - 2020), including the concerns about the quality and equity of education in the NSW public school system. The evidence shows that student performance in reading, mathematics and science has declined or stayed the same over the last 20 years, despite increased resources and funding to the school workforce (NSW Government, 2021[1]). The 2018 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) showed a student performance mean score in NSW that was equal to the OECD average in mathematics, and above average in reading and science. However, student performance was below the national average in all subjects and has been gradually declining in each PISA cycle (Thomson et al., 2019[2]; OECD, 2019[3]). Although the relationship between reading performance and socio-economic status was weaker in Australia than the OECD average, it was greater in NSW than the national average (OECD, 2019[4]). The evidence points to seemingly growing equity challenges in the NSW school system, with student performance in schools in remote and non-urban areas being significantly lower than in major urban areas.

Furthermore, evidence suggests that teachers and other school staff work under increasingly difficult circumstances due to, among others, staff shortages, high workloads and "red tape" (NSW Government, 2020[5]). Inequity can amplify the impact of such challenges, with schools in disadvantaged rural and urban settings often those in need of the most support. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the impact inequity can have on NSW students and teachers in such settings (NSW Government, 2021[6]; NSW Government, 2021[7]; Vidyattama, Tanton and NCOSS, 2019[8]; Gore et al., 2020[9]).

In response to these and other challenges, the SSM was set out to deliver high quality, tiered school improvement support to all NSW public schools. The SSM aimed to achieve a better balance of autonomy and accountability for student improvement across schools by formalising system targets and priorities, lifting capability and sharing evidence-led support through a new tailored school support framework. The SSM was set out to complement other school improvement work underway in NSW public schools, such as the School Excellence Policy, the recently initiated school curriculum reform which applies to all NSW schools (Public (or government), Catholic, Independent schools). The SSM also aimed to provide better guidance on best practices in teaching and learning to lift student performance across the NSW public school system (NSW Government, 2022[10]).

Realising successful educational change however is a long, complex, multifaceted process that, simply said, is hard to do (Kuipers et al., 2014[11]; Schleicher, 2018[12]; Viennet and Pont, 2017[13]) – and the SSM is no exception to this. The design and implementation of the SSM has been challenged by a number of factors since its announcement, including the COVID-19 pandemic. Partially as a result of this, there has been limited stakeholder engagement in the design of the SSM. The DoE considered it important to build on lessons from past reforms and receive feedback from the education profession and other stakeholders to further enhance the design of its school improvement reform and determine the right enabling conditions for its successful implementation.

The DoE invited the OECD Implementing Education Policies project team to contribute to this effort by providing implementation support for further enhancing the design of the DoE school improvement reform and to support its successful implementation. Drawing from OECD's international knowledge base and expertise, this report consists of an in-depth assessment of the design and implementation of the DoE school improvement reform to date and provides concrete guidance for enhancing these. Following an introduction and an overview of the methodology of the project and the NSW education system (Section 1), this report provides a detailed assessment of the design and implementation of the SSM (Section 2 and 3). This is followed by an examination of the current policy environment, socio-economic context and other factors of influence on the implementation of the DoE school improvement reform (Section 4). At the end of each section, the report offers concrete recommendations for enhancing the design and implementation of the DoE school improvement reform, as well as the larger NSW education reform agenda.

Overview of the project and methodology

The project titled "Enhancing school improvement reform in New South Wales (Australia)" is a collaborative effort between the DoE and the OECD. The OECD undertook a desk study and consulted through focus group discussions and meetings with representative groups, education partners, school staff and education support office department staff to expand the OECD's knowledge of the NSW public education system. This has supported the development of recommendations on how to support continuous improvement and school excellence in the NSW public school system. The project has been operationalised through two phases (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1. Project timeline
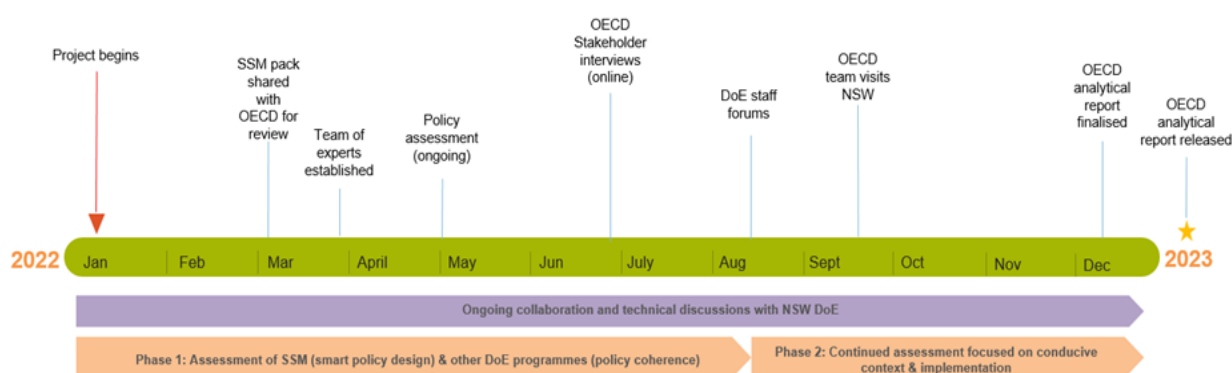
The first phase (January-August 2022) consisted of an in-depth assessment of i) the design of the SSM and ii) its policy coherence with other DoE policies and programmes. Using the OECD Implementing Education Policies framework as a lens for analysis (see Figure 1.2), an extensive desk study of (among others) DoE policies and studies, and interviews with DoE officers and selected (former) school principals was undertaken. This analysis allowed the OECD team to gain an in-depth understanding of the SSM and the broader education context and policy landscape.

The second phase of the project (August-November 2022) continued the assessment of the SSM's design and its policy coherence, expanding on this analysis by looking in greater depth at the conduciveness of the environment in which the school improvement reform is implemented. This phase was given shape through a continuation of the desk study, as well as interviews and focus group discussions with a wide range of education stakeholders from different levels of the NSW education system. For this work the OECD team travelled to NSW for an eight-day visit in September 2022.

This analytical report – which was finalised in December 2022 – is the result of this effort and includes concrete recommendations for enhancing the design and implementation of the DoE school improvement reform. Through these, it also aims to inform the larger NSW education reform agenda.

Figure 1.2. OECD Implementing Education Policies framework
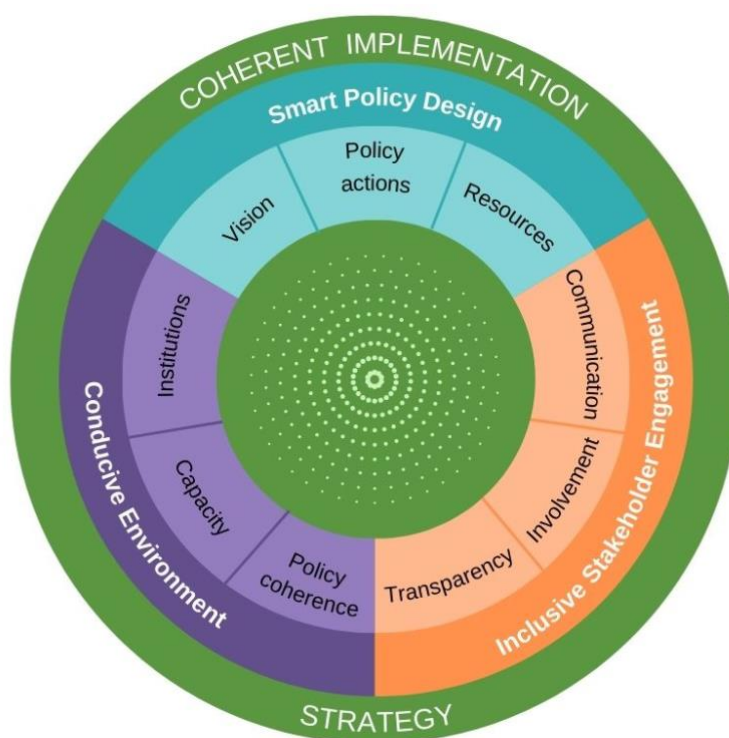
Source: Adapted from OECD (2020[14]), "An implementation framework for effective change in schools", *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 9, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/4fd4113f-en.

The New South Wales context

New South Wales (NSW) is a state located in the south-east of the Commonwealth of Australia, with Sydney as its capital. Australia is a federal parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy. The country has three elected governments: Federal, State or Territory, and Local. Each of these levels of government has its own powers, responsibilities, and services. Representatives are elected by the people they provide government for (Parliament of NSW, 2022[15]). As a state, NSW is responsible for policy areas such as education, health and justice (NSW Government, 2022[16]).

Figure 1.3. Three levels of Australian government
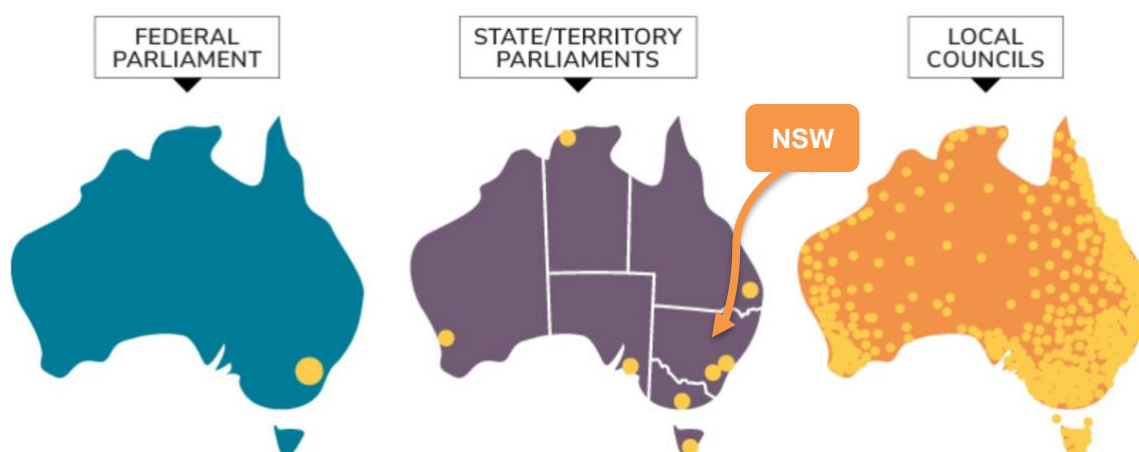
Source: Parliamentary Education Office (n.d.[17]), Three levels of government: governing Australia, https://peo.gov.au/understand-our-parliament/how-parliament-works/three-levels-of-government/three-levels-of-government-governing-australia/ (accessed on 3 October 2022).

NSW is characterised by four distinct geographical areas: the coast; the mountains; the Western Plains; and the Central Plains. Spanning a territory of over 800 000 km^2, NSW is about four times the size of the United Kingdom (UK) and slightly larger than Texas, USA (NSW Government, 2022[16]).

Figure 1.4. Map of New South Wales
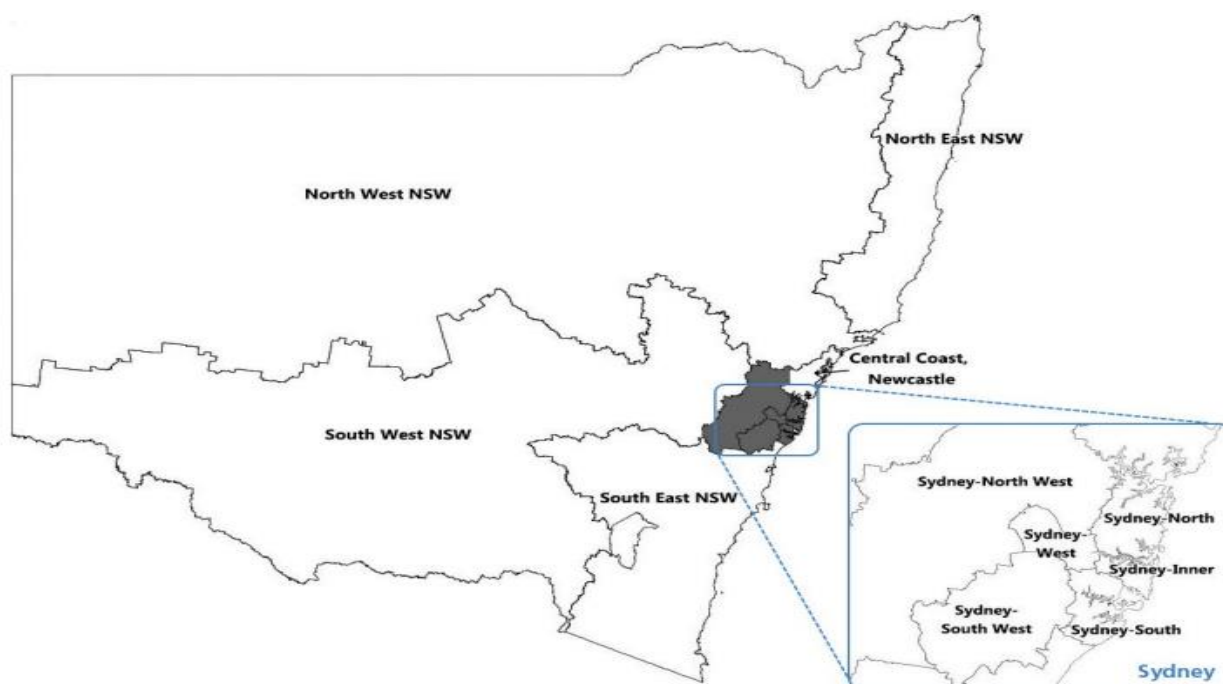
Source: NSW Government (2021[18]), Schools and students: 2021 statistical bulletin. Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation. https://data.cese.nsw.gov.au/data/dataset/schools-and-students-statistical-bulletin (accessed on 6 September 2022).

NSW had approximately 8.1 million inhabitants as of 31 December 2020, an increase from 7.5 million in 2016. This is the highest and fastest growing population of any Australian state, which also accounts for approximately one-third of the national population. Over 1.2 million inhabitants are school aged children and young people. Most residents live in the state capital of Sydney and the Greater Sydney area. By 2041, the NSW population is expected to grow to 10.57 million people, with Greater Sydney's population forecast at 7.1 million by 2041. Population decline is forecast in some rural and remote areas by 2041 (NSW Environment Protection Authority, 2021[19]). NSW is a diverse and multicultural state, with the largest population of Aboriginal people in Australia. Almost one-third of NSW residents were born overseas, with an even higher proportion having both parents born overseas. English is the national language while Mandarin, Arabic, Cantonese and Vietnamese, among others, are spoken in many households (NSW Government, 2022[16]).

NSW is Australia's largest state economy accounting for approximately one-third of the nation's economic output at half a trillion AUS dollars. Similar to other Australian States and Territories, and OECD countries, NSW faced significant health, economic and educational challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, the state has experienced a quicker and stronger economic recovery than anticipated to date. The pace of growth is projected to maintain a steady upward trajectory in the short to medium term. (NSW Government, 2021[20]; NSW Government, 2021[21]).

Despite a strong economy, a considerable number of NSW citizens live in poverty. In prosperous areas, more than one in 25 people live in poverty, while in some communities, often rural and remote communities, this figure can reach up to one in four. Children are the cohort most likely to be living in poverty and more than one in six children live below the poverty line (Vidyattama, Tanton and NCOSS, 2019[8]).

The NSW public school system

The education system at the national level

Across Australia, the federal level Department of Education sets the overall national policy and strategy for education in Australia. The administration of education is accounted for separately in each jurisdiction. In 2019, Education Ministers from the states and territories agreed on a new national declaration on education goals for all Australians. Known as the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (the Declaration), it sets out the national vision for education and the commitment of Australian Governments to improving educational outcomes: *"Our vision is for a world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face"* (Education Council, 2019, p. 2[22]).

The Declaration has two distinct but interconnected goals: Goal 1: The Australian education system promotes excellence and equity; and Goal 2: All young Australians become:

- confident and creative individuals
- successful lifelong learners
- active and informed members of the community (Education Council, 2019[22]).

Achieving these education goals is the responsibility of Australian Governments and the education community in partnership with young Australians, their families and carers and the broader community (Education Council, 2019[22]).

Furthermore, Education Ministers from each state and territory meet approximately four times per year to focus on decision-making priorities of national importance. The priorities have tangible deliverables within a six-month period (Australian Government, 2021[23]). At the time of writing this report, Ministers met on two occasions in 2022; in March to discuss improvements to National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) from 2023 (Australian Government, 2022[24]), and in August to address the issue of teacher demand, supply and retention. During this meeting Ministers committed to developing a National Teacher Workforce Action Plan to improve teacher supply and retention with five priority areas agreed:

- Elevating the profession
- Improving teacher supply
- Strengthening initial teacher education
- Maximising the time to teach
- Better understanding future teacher workforce needs (Australian Government, 2022[25]).

At the federal level, five ministerial authorities and organisations provide services for national education initiatives.

- The **Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)** manages the national curriculum, the National Assessment Programme, data collection and reporting.
- The **Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)** administers the National Quality Framework (NQF).
- The **Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)** commissions research on effective teaching and learning practices for teachers and school leaders across Australia.
- The **Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)** supports the implementation of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and the Australian Professional Standards for Principals, in partnership with jurisdictions.

- **Education Services Australia (ESA)** provides technology services for the education sector (Australian Government, 2021[23]).

The **National Assessment Program** (NAP) is an ongoing programme of assessments to monitor progress towards the Educational Goals for Young Australians and to support ongoing evaluation of the national education system. The NAP encompasses the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and three-yearly sample assessments in science literacy, civics and citizenship, and information and communication technology (ICT) literacy. Australia's participation in international assessments – Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) – are also part of the NAP (OECD, 2011[26]; ACARA, 2022[27]).

The NSW school system

Each state or territory in Australia has its own Department of Education, responsible for the administration of education within their respective jurisdiction. The **NSW Government Department of Education** (DoE) is responsible for the delivery and co-ordination of early childhood, primary school, secondary school, vocational education, adult, migrant and higher education. The DoE is the largest provider of public education in Australia with responsibility for delivering public education to a diverse range of communities across the state. The DoE delivers access to education for two-thirds of NSW's children and young people through the public school system. The DoE also oversees policy, funding and compliance issues relating to non-government schools (NSW Government, 2022[28]).

An important body of the NSW public school system (that will be discussed in the following sections of this report) is the **School Leadership Institute** (SLI) which in fact is part of the DoE. The SLI was established in 2018 to provide leadership development programmes and support for current and future school leaders at key points in their career. It sets out to offer world class, evidence-informed and future-focused leadership programs so that our school leaders can focus on the learning of both teachers and students in their schools (NSW Government, 2022[29]).

The **NSW Education Standards Authority** (NESA) is another important body of the NSW school system (and also discussed in the following Sections of this report). NESA is an independent regulatory body that is responsible for curriculum, assessment, school registration, and teacher quality in all of NSW schools (i.e. public or government and non-governmental schools (see below)). It is an independent statutory authority reporting to an independent Board and the NSW Minister for Education and Early Learning. It operates on the basis of yearly agreements or "Statements of Expectations" that consist of overarching objectives and more detailed guidance of work for NESA to achieve. The five overarching objectives for the year 2022/23 are:

- Provide strategic leadership and promote an evidence-based approach in improving standards of school education, while maintaining flexibility across the entire school education and teaching sector.

- Ensure that teaching quality and professional standards are developed, applied and monitored in a way that improves student learning.

- Ensure that the NSW school curriculum is developed, applied and monitored in a way that improves student learning.

- Ensure that forms of assessment are improved, applied and monitored in a way that improves student learning.

- Ensure that regulatory standards for schools are improved, applied and monitored in a way that improves student learning.

NESA is responsible for monitoring the compliance of non-government schools with the registration and accreditation requirements of the Education Act 1990. NESA also develops and endorses a mandatory curriculum for all NSW schools from kindergarten through the end of secondary school and as such plays a vital role in the ongoing curriculum reform (NSW Government, 2022[30]; NSW Education Standards Authority, 2022[31]) (see below).

School governance and funding

School governance

The three main education providers in NSW are the State Government (70%), Catholic Education (19%) and the Independent schools sector (11%). Government schools are often called state schools or public schools (see Figure 1.5) (NSW Government, 2021[18]).

The NSW DoE is responsible for all public primary and secondary schools of which there were 2 214 in 2021 (NSW Government, 2021[18]). Children are permitted to attend a public school if they live within the "in area" residential catchment zone. If parents or guardians want their child to attend a different government school, they can contact that school to inquire whether enrolment is possible. There are entrance exams for government "selective schools". All NSW public schools are non-denominational and the majority are co-educational, while there are some single-sex public secondary schools (NSW Government, 2022[30]).

Figure 1.5. Breakdown of NSW public (government) and non-government schools (Catholic and Independent), 2021
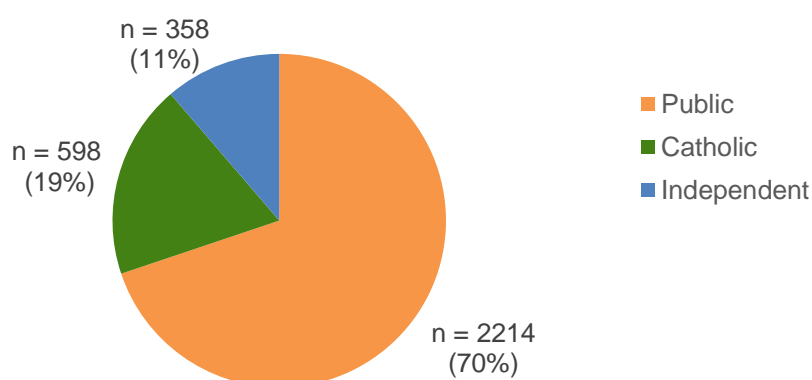
Note: This figure includes all NSW schools, primary, secondary, and schools for specific purposes (SSPs).
Source: NSW Government (2021[18]), Schools and students: 2021 statistical bulletin, https://data.cese.nsw.gov.au/data/dataset/schools-and-students-statistical-bulletin/resource/0d101b76-1bf5-436b-9aee-83567ad88899 (accessed on 6 September 2022); Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021[32]), Schools: Table 90A: Key information on States and Territories, https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release#staff (accessed on 2 October 2022).

In 2021, a third of all primary and secondary schools in NSW were non-government schools, i.e. Independent or Catholic schools (NSW Government, 2021[18]). Each non-government school is independently owned and operated. They must be registered to operate with the NESA guidelines, meaning the schools must meet minimum standards in a number of areas, such as premises and facilities, curriculum, teaching staff and governance. These requirements are detailed in the NSW Education Act 1990, which further stipulates that to be eligible for Government funding, non-government schools must not operate for profit. They must also develop and maintain good governance practices with clear guidelines in place regarding board of management structure, reporting and responsibilities. School board composition must include a diverse mix of skills/capabilities, experience and knowledge (NSW Government, 2022[30]; NSW Government, 2021[33]). It is noteworthy that the DoE do not recommend the

board members hold dual roles, i.e. members that are also teachers, principals or other school executives, as this may potentially cause conflicts of interest in decision making (NSW Government, 2021[34]).

In 2021, there were 598 Catholic schools operating in NSW (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021[32]). The DoE works closely with non-government school sector organisations, including the Catholic Schools NSW (CSNSW) and the Association of Independent Schools (AISNSW) (NSW Government, 2022[35]). The CSNSW are the representative voice of NSW Catholic education and their owners at a state and national level. Their role is to support the interests of Catholic schools in relation to education policy formation and resource allocation. Catholic Schools must also follow the requirements as set out in the Education Act 1990 (NSW) (NSW Government, 2021[18]; Catholic Schools NSW, 2022[36]).

The AISNSW is the representative body for Independent schools in NSW. There were 358 Independent schools operating in 2021 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021[32]). It is noteworthy that these schools can include Independent Catholic schools. The schools operate autonomously, with the schools registered and teachers accredited by the NESA. Schools are educationally and financially accountable to their boards, and the Australian and NSW Governments, and must follow all requirements as set out in the Education Act 1990 (NSW) (Association of Independent Schools NSW, 2021[37]).

Students with special educational needs are supported in mainstream schools or in Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs) that deliver specialist support in settings for students with moderate to high learning and support needs. In 2022 there were 117 public SSPs in operation across the state, including hospital schools, suspension centres, juvenile detention centres, and tutorial centres and programmes (NSW Government, 2021[18]).

School funding

The NSW Government provides funding to all of NSW public, Independent and Catholic schools. Public schools are funded through a needs-based system referred to as the Resource Allocation Model (RAM). The model recognises that each school is unique, and that student and school needs are not all the same. The RAM funding methodology underpins the allocation of resources based on the unique context of each school and levels of student need, provided to schools annually through the School Budget Allocation Report (SBAR). Five principles underpin the RAM methodology. The RAM is based on student and school needs; is evidence based; is efficient and transparent; provides certainty for schools; and is sustainable and adaptable (NSW Government, 2022[38]).

Figure 1.6 shows the different components of the RAM. RAM loadings are indicated on the left side, with needs-based funding allocations noted on the right side. Some RAM loadings are also needs-based funding allocations. All public schools are provided with a SBAR in October (i.e. close to the end of the NSW school year which starts in January). The SBAR outlines the school's funding allocation for the following year, including staffing and operational costs. The report includes allocations based on the RAM. This also aims to assist schools in their school self-assessment and improvement planning (NSW Government, 2022[38]).

Figure 1.6. Funding NSW Public schools
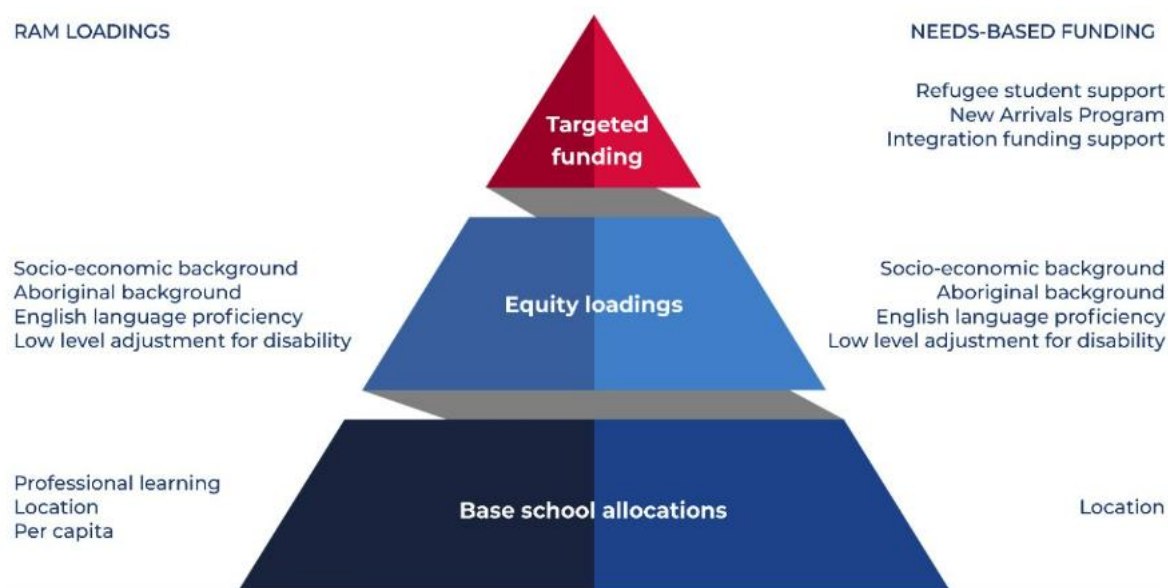
Source: NSW Government (2022[38]), Resource Allocation Model (RAM), https://education.nsw.gov.au/public-schools/schools-funding/resource-allocation-model#tabs_4_copy0 (accessed on 10 October 2022).

Funding for non-government schools is shared between the Commonwealth and NSW Governments, complemented with school fees. The Commonwealth pays 80% and the NSW Government pays 20% of the funding entitlement. The NSW Government supports needs-based, sector-blind funding for all schools (using the RAM). From 2019, the NSW Government started the transition to fund non-government schools at 20% of their Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) by 2029. The Commonwealth Government began transitioning its funding to 80% of SRS in 2018. Non-governmental schools require the contribution of enrolment fees (NSW Government, 2022[35]). The quantum of the funding entitlement is a calculation based upon the school's 'capacity to contribute' (CTC) ranking. Non-government school fees are increasing in NSW, with one report noting the median fee in 2022 as just over AUS 13 000 per annum. The highest fee is AUS 43 300 per annum in 2022 (Edstart, 2022[39]).

Structure of the NSW public school system

NSW students can enrol in kindergarten at the beginning of the school year if they turn five on or before 31 July of that year and must be enrolled by their sixth birthday. Close to 70 000 students started Kindergarten in a NSW public school in 2021, with almost 72% beginning at age 5. Approximately 4 200 children received preschool education in a government funded community preschool or other setting in the same year. The DoE plan to introduce a new universal pre-Kindergarten year in the year before primary school for every child by the end of 2030. At the time of finalising the report the DoE were engaged in a stakeholder consultation process to develop, design, trial and implement a model suitable for NSW (NSW Government, 2022[40]; NSW Government, 2020[41]; NSW Government, 2021[42]).

Students in NSW have 13 years of schooling organised into six stages of learning across primary and secondary school (see Table 1.1). Primary education starts from Kindergarten to Year 6 (K-6) and encompasses three stages of learning. Secondary School begins in Year 7 to Year 12 when students complete their Higher School Certificate (HSC) and encompasses three stages of learning. These stages of learning align to the curriculum syllabuses. School students in New South Wales generally work towards the Higher School Certificate (HSC) in Years 11 and 12 which is the highest level of school attainment. Since 2010, all NSW students must complete Year 10. After Year 10 and until the age of 17, students must be:

- in school, or registered for home schooling, or

- in approved education or training, or

- in full-time, paid employment (average 25 hours/week), or

- in a combination of these three.

A school year follows the annual calendar, beginning in January and ending in December. There are four school terms per year (NSW Government, 2022[30]; NSW Government, 2020[41]; NSW Government, 2021[42]; NSW Government, 2021[43]; NSW Government, 2022[44]).

Table 1.1. Overview of education stages and enrolments in NSW public schools, 2021

	Stage	Student enrolments
Primary education	Stage 1 (Kindergarten, Year 1, Year 2) Stage 2 (Years 3 and 4) Stage 3 (Years 5 and 6)	485 889
Secondary education	Stage 4 = Years 7 and 8 (starting around 12 years of age) Stage 5 = Years 9 and 10 Stage 6 = Years 11 and 12	310 421
Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs)		5 872
Total		**802 182**

Source: NSW Government (2022[30]), Schooling in NSW, https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/parents/parent-guide/schooling-in-nsw (accessed on 2 September 2022); NSW Government (2021[18]), Schools and students: 2021 statistical bulletin, https://data.cese.nsw.gov.au/data/dataset/schools-and-students-statistical-bulletin/resource/0d101b76-1bf5-436b-9aee-83567ad88899 (accessed on 6 September 2022).

All students in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 are expected to participate in the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) (ACARA, 2016[45]). However, there are significant differences in participation rates between and within states and territories. For example, while on average 91.4% of Year 9 students participated in NAPLAN 2022, this was significantly lower in the Northern Territory which had a participation rate of a mere 71.6% (ACARA, 2022[46]).

In 2021 there were 802 182 students enrolled in NSW public schools, including 5 872 students in schools for specific purposes (NSW Government, 2021[18]). Approximately 75% of NSW students are in public schools located in metropolitan areas with a further 24.5% of students in public schools that are located in rural and non-urban areas. The remaining 0.5% of students are in schools located in remote areas. Approximately 8% of NSW students are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander while 37% have a language background other than English (NSW Government, 2021[42]).

Enrolment growth is a key driver of teacher demand. In the past decade NSW enrolments have grown by 1% each year (NSW Government, 2022[47]). Public school enrolments are projected to increase substantially in the coming years; growing from 804 000 students in 2020 to an estimated 966 000 students by 2036, i.e. an increase of 20% (Rorris, 2021[48]). This sharp increase in student numbers is expected to put further pressures on the NSW public school system and education workforce.

Based on 2021 figures, the DoE employs approximately 92 000 permanent, temporary and casual teachers in public schools. A headcount of staff in 2021 indicated there are 29 300 permanent primary teachers and 23 100 permanent secondary teachers. The total number of full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers in 2021 was 70 300 (NSW Government, 2022[47]).

Since 2017 the DoE has employed an average of 5 000 permanent teachers, yet there are challenges with recruitment and retention. Fewer people are studying to become teachers, with enrolments in teacher training programmes decreasing by 17% between 2014 and 2019. Retirement rates for primary and secondary are 2.2% and 2.1% respectively, while there are pressing issues with teacher supply in rural and remote settings and for specific subjects in secondary. As of June 2022, there were over 1 600 (2.7%) vacancies in public schools (NSW Government, 2022[47]).

Internal and external school evaluation

School evaluation is increasingly considered as a potential lever of change that could assist with, among others, decision making, resource allocation and school improvement. Schools benefit from feedback on their performance to help them identify how to improve their practices, as does it offer an important means for holding schools accountable for their performance (OECD, 2013[49]). Many OECD countries and jurisdictions have aimed to answer the question "what is a good school?" for the development of their school evaluations (OECD, 2013[49]; Schleicher, 2018[12]). The evidence suggests that the coherence of school evaluation is considerably enhanced when based on a nationally agreed model of school quality. Also, the NSW DoE have developed such a model of school quality to support schools in their self-assessment and improvement planning, the School Excellence Framework (SEF). The SEF identifies quality practice across the three key domains of education – learning, teaching and leading – to help schools plan and monitor strategies for ongoing improvement. Annual self-assessment using the SEF is a key component of the school planning and reporting cycle (NSW Government, 2022[50]).

Schools also use the School Planning and Reporting Online (SPaRO) software platform which provides an online integrated process for self-assessment and improvement planning, including the development of the school Strategic Improvement Plan (SIP).

Principals are responsible for publishing their Strategic Improvement Plan on the school's website by the end of Term 1 at the commencement of a planning cycle. During the cycle, any updates to the plan will be published annually by the end of Term 1 each year.

Every four years, schools undergo external validation in which their self-assessment is validated by a panel of peers. This is aimed to provide schools with an opportunity to discuss their judgements about their practice – and the evidence that underpins them – with a panel of peers.

Schools undergo an external validation of the evidence of their school self-assessment once per four-year cycle. Schools engage in discussions with an external panel and have their self-assessments validated using the SEF. The panel, comprising of a Principal School Leadership (PSL) representative (see below) and a peer principal, meet with the school's external validation team and determine whether the school's evidence supports their self-assessment using each element of the SEF. An external validation panel report, which includes the school-determined next steps in the self-assessment process, and school-determined future directions to support school improvement, is provided to the school following the external validation (NSW Government, 2022[51]).

School improvement support structure

NSW has an extensive school improvement support (and accountability) structure. Starting from the school perspective, school principals are supported in the school's improvement efforts by the Directors, Educational Leadership (DELs). DELs have a key strategic role in supporting the continuous improvement of principals to ensure that the work of schools is evidence-based and responsive to the needs of all students, as are they the principals' line managers. DELs and principals engage in regular professional dialogue, with the DEL also guiding and validating the school's planning, self-assessment and reporting processes. In 2021 there were 113 DELs in NSW, each responsible for a cluster of approximately 20 public schools in a specific region, although in remote and non-urban areas these numbers may be lower (see Figure 1.7).

Figure 1.7. Overview of DoE Public school improvement support structure
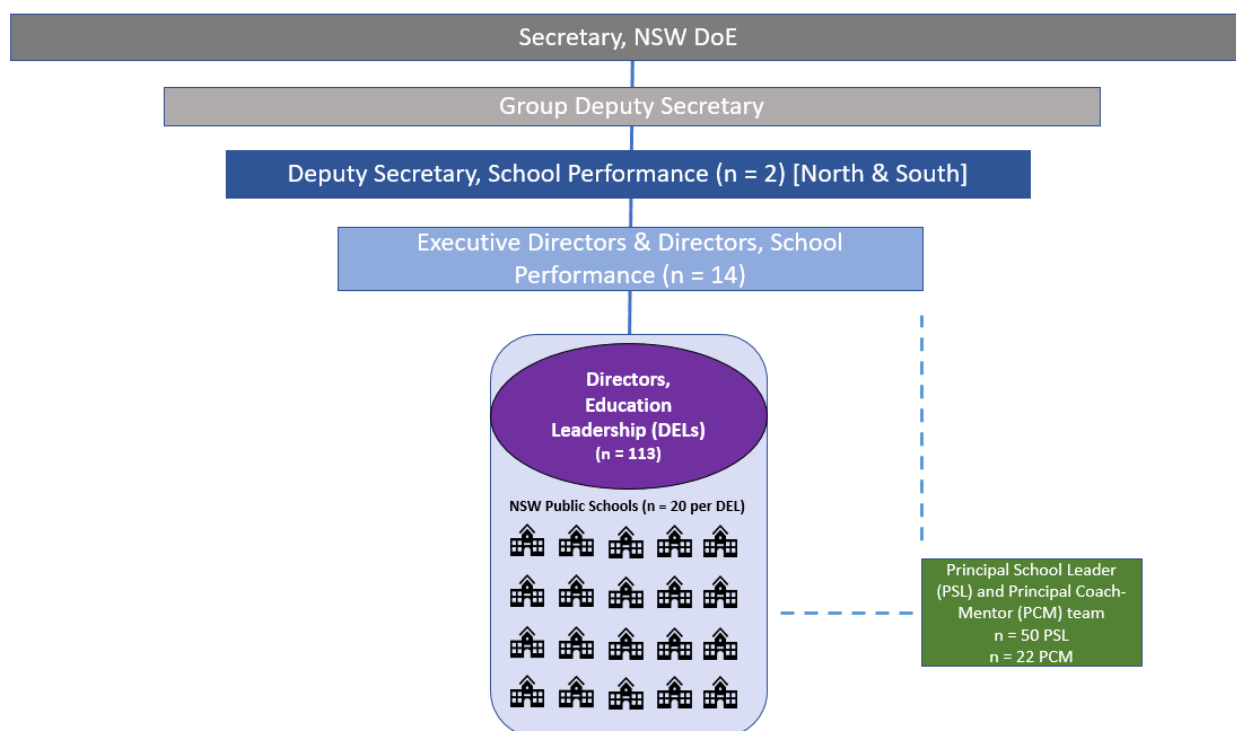
Note: Information regarding PSL/PCM teams has been provided by DoE officials and based on the 2022 school year.
Source: Based on NSW Government (2022[52]), NSW Department of Education Organisational Chart, https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/about-us/our-people-and-structure/media/documents/Department-of-Education-Organisational-Chart.pdf (accessed on 20 June 2022).

In addition to the DELs and the capacity development programmes offered by the School Leadership Institute, the DoE has established a Principal School Leadership (PSL) and Principal Coach Mentor (PCM) team (a total of 72 officers in 2022) that works closely with principals to support and enhance their continuing professional learning, well-being and the continued growth of all school leaders in NSW public schools. These officers are aimed to work in a complementary manner with the DELs, to help principals develop the mind-set and capabilities needed to create sustainable leadership practices and an effective, healthy school. Each PSL/PCM supports principals through coaching, mentoring and professional learning activities. These combine to build the skillset needed by principals to lead and manage their schools and enable strategic school improvement. The PSL/PCM team assists principals to improve quality teaching in their school, and ensure the progress of all students, in alignment with the School Excellence Policy. This includes working with principals to facilitate the development of an evidence-based Strategic Improvement Plan (SIP) and facilitating the external validation process (NSW Government, 2022[53]; NSW Government, 2022[53]).

Returning to the DELs, their work is overseen by Executive Directors, School Performance. These officers focus on strategic leadership for school improvement, leading strategy implementation and accompanying DELs to support principal performance. Each Executive Director covers a specific NSW region and reports to one of two Deputy Secretaries, School performance (NSW Government, 2022[52]).

Furthermore, the DoE provides some pedagogical and curriculum programming support to schools and this is planned to increase with the roll out of the new curriculum. School leaders and teachers can also seek support from subject-specific networks and associations which are often informal and not mandated. Schools may also seek additional types of support from the private sector. There is some evidence to

suggest a deficit of access to guidance and support around pedagogy and curriculum programming, in particular in non-urban and rural schools (NSW Government, 2020[5]).

The DoE has recognised the need for clarifying accountabilities and strengthening of its school improvement support structure, including for better responding to students' well-being needs (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2022[54]) (see Section 4).

Quality and equity of school education

In 2018, the mean performance of 15-year-old NSW students on the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) was similar to the OECD average in mathematics (both 489) and reading (493 compared to 487), but significantly above the OECD average in science (496 compared to 489). However, the performance was below national average in all subjects and has been gradually declining in each PISA cycle, with nearly half of the students in the state not meeting the National Proficient Standard (see Figure 1.8). The Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia defines the National Proficiency Standard as proficiency at or above Level 3 in PISA. This was decided based on being a "challenging but reasonable" expectation of students' performance at age 15 (ACARA, 2020[55]). Between PISA 2000 and 2018, five Australian jurisdictions showed declines in student performance. NSW had the largest decline (45 points) equivalent to around one-and-a-third years of schooling.

In addition, on PISA 2018 NSW 15-year-old students in the highest quartile of socio-economic status outperformed their peers in the lowest quartile on average by 96 points in reading, 89 in mathematics and 87 in science. These differences amount to about 3 years of schooling.

PISA 2018 also showed that NSW students from Independent and Catholic schools achieved higher mean scores in each subject than students from public schools. However, this picture changes once student-level and school-level socio-economic status are taken into consideration, with no statistically significant difference evident between the three school sectors. The data suggest NSW PISA 2018 results are not associated with school sector, but associated with the socio-economic status of students (NSW Parliamentary Research Service, 2020[56]; Thomson et al., 2019[2]; Thomson et al., 2020[57]).

Figure 1.8. Percentage of students who attained the National Proficient Standard in NSW across PISA cycles
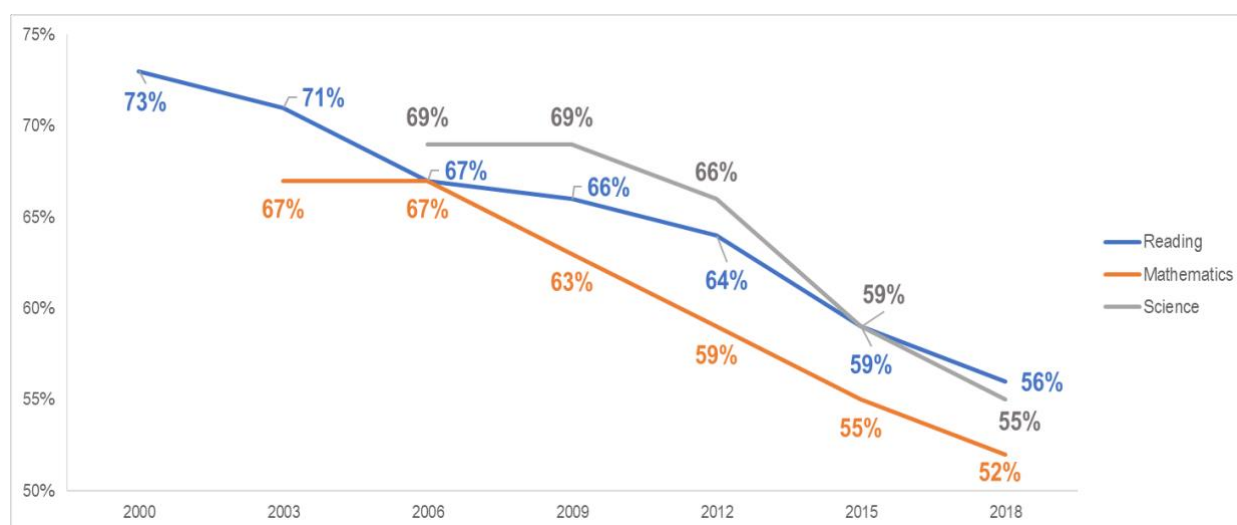
Source: OECD (2019[3]), PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do, https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en; Thomson et al. (2020[57]), PISA 2018 Reporting Australia's Results. Volume II Student and School Characteristics, https://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1050&context=ozpisa (accessed 10 December 2022).

Furthermore, as Figure 1.9 shows there are significant differences in the performance of 15-year-olds in remote areas, non-urban areas and major cities. These findings are corroborated by other data and sources that show a significant difference between student performance by geographical area, with students in remote schools on average performing significantly lower than their peers in major cities. This gap is larger in NSW than most other Australian States or Territories (NSW Government, 2013[58]; NSW Government, 2021[59]; Thomson et al., 2020[57]).

Figure 1.9. Proportion of students attaining the National Proficient Standard in NSW, PISA 2018

Note: The blue line indicates the percentage of students attaining the National Proficient Standard (Level of PISA 3 or above).
Source: Thomson, S., De Bortoli, L., Underwood, C., & Schmid, M. (2020[57]), *PISA 2018: Reporting Australia's Results. Volume II Student and School Characteristics*, Australian Council for Educational Research, https://research.acer.edu.au/ozpisa/49 (accessed on 10 December 2022).

When looking at the 2022 NAPLAN results, NSW students performed above the national average. The state ranked in the top three jurisdictions by mean scores in all domains for all Year levels, except in Year 9 Reading where it ranked fourth. The latest data also indicate some improvement in overall primary school Reading and Spelling (ACARA, 2022[27]; NSW Government, 2022[60]).

A study comparing differences in NAPLAN results from 2008 to 2019 found that NSW had no change in Year 5, 7 and 9 student Reading scores during this period. Year 3 student results increased moderately over time. Regarding Numeracy achievement, no difference in achievement was identified across the NSW year groups, apart from a slight increase in the Year 9 National Minimum Standard (NMS) and a slight decrease in the Year 7 NMS. National increases were moderate for Year 5, with Year 9 scores indicating a moderate increase in the NMS and no change in the mean score. Year 3 and Year 7 demonstrated no change nationally (McGaw, Louden and Wyatt-Smyth, 2019[61]).

Furthermore, the number of NSW students successfully completing Year 12 in major cities was 78% and 43% in very remote areas. Similar to the PISA 2018 results, the 2022 NAPLAN results showed that students in rural and remote schools continue to underperform when compared to their metropolitan counterparts. Challenges are even more pronounced for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attending schools in these areas (ACARA, 2022[27]; NSW Government, 2022[60]; NSW Government, 2021[7]).

These data point to significant equity challenges in the NSW public school system. In response, the DoE in recent years has implemented a number of important policies and programmes to improve student

performance across all public schools, such as the Rural and Remote Education Strategy (NSW Government, 2021[7]), the Connected Communities Strategy (NSW Government, 2021[62]) and Footprints to the Future programme (NSW Government, 2020[63]). There are concerns these alone may not be sufficient to respond to the seeming growing equity challenges that NSW schools are facing (Gore et al., 2020[9]; McGaw, Louden and Wyatt-Smyth, 2019[61]; NSW Government, 2021[59]; NSW Government, 2022[47]; Parliament of New South Wales, 2022[64]; Thomson et al., 2020[57]).

Recent policy developments

The NSW Government has initiated a number of new reforms and initiatives in recent years that aim to prepare NSW students for rewarding lives and lifelong learning. Two major policy initiatives (of particular relevance to this report) are the launch of the SSM reform and the school curriculum reform.

School curriculum reform

In 2018 the NSW Government announced a review of the school curriculum from Kindergarten to Year 12 which, as noted earlier, applies to all NSW schools. The review consisted of two public consultation periods which ended in 2020, when the first comprehensive reform of the curriculum in three decades began. The Curriculum Review report had highlighted the need for enhanced flexibility, time for teachers to teach and prepare students for the future to ensure they have the skills and competencies required in the twenty-first century (Masters, 2020[65]). Reform recommendations aim to shape the development of new syllabuses, and identify priorities for the early, middle and later years of schooling:

- building strong foundations for future learning by 2022 with new English and Mathematics syllabuses for Kindergarten to Year 2

- more time for teaching by 2022 by reducing the hours teachers spend on extracurricular topics and issues and compliance requirements

- strengthening post school pathways by 2022 with new learning areas for Years 11 and 12 that clearly link learning to future employment and study options

- a new curriculum from 2024 with new syllabuses focused on what is essential to know and do in early and middle years of schooling, and key learning areas in the senior years.

The new curriculum is being developed by NESA, with plans for full implementation from 2024. NESA has developed state-wide teacher expert networks (TENs) to ensure that the new curriculum connects with practice and works well in the classroom. TENs are comprised of over 200 teachers representative of all three NSW school sectors involved in curriculum reform (public, Independent, Catholic). The "expert" in teacher expert networks highlights the fact that teachers are best placed to user-test new resources and provide feedback and advice to NESA on the implementation of the new curriculum. They are 'expert networks'. The teachers were selected from each sector to provide feedback on behalf of their teacher colleagues. TENs teachers also share knowledge about the new curriculum in their schools, regions and sectors.

The DoE is collaborating with NESA and schools to support the implementation of the new curriculum in public schools, including by offering professional learning support and resources (NSW Government, 2022[66]). For example, the DoE conducted a pilot in 2022 to trial and test a model of support for teachers as they implement the new syllabuses being delivered by NESA. Around 400 "early adopter schools" provided rigorous feedback on the support and teaching resources and this has informed the ongoing model of support for teachers for all new syllabuses.

The DoE school improvement reform journey

The Local Schools Local Decisions (LSLD) reform was announced in August 2011 and aimed to increase the authority of local schools to make decisions about how they deliver education to students.

The School Success Model (SSM) reform was announced in December 2020 to deliver high quality, tiered support programmes aimed at improving educational outcomes for public schools and their students. The SSM followed and built on the strengths and identified areas for improvement following the completion of the LSLD reform (2012 - 2020), including the concerns about the quality and equity of education in the NSW public school system, as well as the administrative burden for schools which was found to have increased during the implementation of the LSLD (NSW Government, 2021[67]).

The SSM was intended as a whole-system, evidence-led reform programme that aimed to strengthen shared accountability across the system by putting in place clearer targets for school improvement, lifting capability through the design of new system support and sharing best practice across the system (NSW Government, 2021[67]). The SSM programme objectives were:

- developing quality-assured, evidence-led support around the needs of each school and their students to lift attendance, achievement and well-being

- sharing accountability for student improvement by putting in place clearer targets, lifting capability and sharing what works best

- freeing up more time for teachers, principals and school staff to spend on activities that improve student outcomes around teaching, learning and leading.

The SSM's key components included promoting the use of system and school targets; School Support Delivery Framework; the Universal Resources Hub; and the Ambassador Schools research programme. These are briefly discussed below and reflected on in greater depth in following sections.

The SSM detailed a range of ambitious targets for schools and reflected a shared commitment to improvement (see Box 1.1). Schools work towards realising these by setting annual targets for achievement.

Box 1.1. NSW School Success Model (SSM) targets for system and school improvement

The School Success Model (SSM) detailed a range of ambitious targets for schools and the system which built upon NSW education priorities and reflected a shared commitment to improvement.

In May 2022, the Minister for Education and Early Learning announced changes to the School Excellence cycle to give schools extra time to get back on track after two and a half years of pandemic disruption. Changes included:

- Strategic Improvement Plans – each school's Strategic Improvement Plan (SIP) were extended by one year

- Targets – NAPLAN Top 2 Bands targets for reading and numeracy remained for 2022 and have not been extended to 2023, however HSC, attendance and well-being targets that previously matured in 2022 have been moved to 2023. The introduction of phonics and pathways targets is also delayed

- External validation – External Validation (EV) paused for scheduled schools until after 31 Dec 2022.

These changes were aimed to provide schools with more opportunities to benefit from support initiatives under the SSM and the COVID Intensive Learning Support. The SSM targets are outlined in detail below.

NAPLAN	Increase public school students in the top two NAPLAN bands for literacy and numeracy by 15%.	Individual school targets in place from 2020.
Aboriginal Education	Increase Aboriginal students attaining the HSC while maintaining their cultural identity by 50%.	Individual school network targets in place from 2020 (percentage uplift). Individual school student uplift in place that underpins the network target.
HSC	Proportion of students' HSC results in the top two achievement bands from 34.6% (2018) to 35.7% (2023).	Individual school targets in place from 2021.
Attendance	Public school students attending school at least 90% of the time from 79.4% (2018) to 82% (2023) Primary from 64.5% (2018) to 70% (2023) Secondary.	Individual school targets in place from 2021.
Student growth (equity)	Public school students achieving expected growth in reading and numeracy from 62.3% (2018) to 66.4% (2023).	Individual school targets in place from 2021.
Pathways	Recent school leavers participating in higher education, training or work from 89.6% (2018) to 91.6% (2023) and 93.6% (2028). Students continuing to Year 12 from 73.9% (2018) to 76.7% (2023).	A measure will be selected with a baseline established for each high school in 2022 and with targets set for every high school from 2023.

Source: NSW Government (2022[68]), School Success Model, https://education.nsw.gov.au/public-schools/school-success-model/school-success-model-explained#/asset6 (accessed 6 June 2022).

Another key component of the SSM is the School Support Delivery Framework which outlines three new types of system supports developed: universal support, guided support and strategic support. The approach to supporting schools is based on the school's current results and their level of need and readiness to achieve progress. The greater the need, the greater level of support is given to schools.

The support is delivered to schools across priority learning areas such as reading and numeracy, attendance, Aboriginal HSC attainment and financial management content areas (NSW Government, 2022[68]) (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.2. Overview of the School Support Delivery Framework: three types of support for schools

Type of support	Description of support	Example in practice
Universal support	A self-service support type delivered through one central digital hub, currently the Universal Resources Hub, or professional learning. Curated and quality assured evidence-based resources available to schools.	Teachers using quality assured resources on the system's Universal Resources Hub. Head Teachers or Assistant Principals sharing examples of useful and effective resources with teaching staff on the Hub. Teachers view recently added, most viewed, liked, and popular resources that are tailored to their curriculum or interest area.
Guided support	Targeted guidance by DELs and/or other specialists to identify, discuss and support the implementation of appropriate universal resources. Guidance provided for specific area(s) identified by the system and/or schools such as reading or numeracy.	Directors, Educational Leadership (DELs) directing specific resources on the system's Universal Resources Hub for use in a particular learning area, for instance reading, in their planning sessions with principals. Regular consultations and ongoing coaching between Directors, Educational Leadership (DELs) and Principals on suitable universal resources.
Strategic support	Intensive and customised support delivered by dedicated specialists in collaboration with the school's leadership and DELs. Support provided for specific area(s) identified by the system and/or schools.	A 10-week support programme led by the system's Teacher Quality Advisors (TQAs), who work closely with schools to identify areas of teaching that need support and plan how to improve them, for instance improving students' comprehension and vocabulary skills.

Source: NSW Government (2022[68]), "School Success Model Explained", https://education.nsw.gov.au/public-schools/school-success-model/school-success-model-explained (accessed on 6 June 2022).

All schools are provided with quality tools, resources, and targeted advice they need to help every student achieve their potential. The online Universal Resources Hub is aimed to provide school staff with a central place to access quality-assured teaching, learning and school improvement resources to use and share. Another key component of the SSM is the Ambassador Schools research programme that was aimed to research the effective teaching practices in several schools with an aim of scaling these across other NSW public schools. Furthermore, SSM aimed to reduce the administrative burden on schools through a range of initiatives. This includes the Quality Time Action Plan (2021) that aimed for simplifying and modernising administrative processes and practices to ensure teachers and school leaders can focus on supporting quality teaching and learning, improving school operations, and enhancing student outcomes (NSW Government, 2021[69]).

These SSM programme components are discussed and reflected on in the following sections.

2. School improvement reform in New South Wales (Australia): general reflections

There is increasing awareness among policymakers in OECD Member countries that reforms or policy initiatives do not succeed or fail on their own merits; rather their success is dependent upon the process of both the design and their actual implementation (OECD, 2020[14]; May, 2015[70]) – with the latter often receiving scant attention, compared to the amount of time and other resources that were devoted to their development (Peckham, Hudson and Hunter, 2021[71]; McConnell, 2018[72]). That said, research evidence still shows there is much to gain from devoting more attention to the design of policies and/or greater scrutinising of policy proposals (Viennet and Pont, 2017[13]; May, 2015[70]; Fullan, 2011[73]). Faulty or less optimal policy design may stem from many causes, including a failure to clearly define and provide a consistent and convincing narrative on the rationale, logic and objectives of the policy; a lack of or limited engagement with key stakeholders in the design of the policy; overly optimistic expectations; or a lack of policy coherence with other related policies and programmes.

We will discuss these and other factors of influence to the design and implementation of SSM below. This section provides a general reflection on the SSM design and offers concrete recommendations for improvement. Building on this analysis, Section 3 will provide a detailed review of the SSM components and policy actions in which strengths, promising policy actions and areas for improvement and expansion are identified.

General reflection on the design of the School Success Model (SSM)

The SSM had several strong and promising design components and underlying policy actions to build on

The OECD team found that the SSM had several strong and promising design components and underlying policy actions features that are in line with international research evidence and best practices, but that importantly are tailored to the New South Wales (Australia) (hereafter NSW) context. One such example is the School Support Delivery Framework that is at the core of the SSM. Through this Framework support is provided to those schools most in need of it. Although there is scope for further enhancing and expanding the Framework (see below), this policy instrument is a promising development that could allow for more tailored responses to equity concerns.

Other examples are the Universal Resources Hub that provides access to a wide range of quality assured teaching, learning and school improvement resources; the ongoing engagement with universities to support the development of relevant resources ("what works") and support professional learning; and the focus on freeing up more time for teachers, school leaders and school staff. The latter is vital considering the increasingly difficult circumstances that teachers and other school staff are working in, among others due to staff shortages, high workloads and "red tape" (NSW Government, 2020[5]).

The OECD team considers the Quality Time Action Plan promising, not only because of its proposed actions, but also the fact that challenges are identified and solutions developed with the education profession. Research evidence shows that such a bottom-up approach can serve as a recipe for the successful design and implementation of policies (OECD, 2020[74]; OECD, 2020[75]; Viennet and Pont,

2017[13]; Landemore, 2012[76]). Elaborating on this, the OECD team found a strong commitment by the DoE to build on early lessons of implementation of the SSM and receive feedback from the education profession and other stakeholders to further enhance the design of the SSM and next steps for its successful implementation. Furthermore, the drive for results and professionalism of the DoE workforce are clear strengths to support successful implementation of the DoE school improvement reform and NSW's larger reform agenda.

These and other strengths will be elaborated on in the text below, as will we point to areas for further improvement.

The rationale, logic and overarching goal of the school improvement reform would benefit from further clarification

Research evidence shows that a clear understanding of the causal theory or theory of change underpinning any reform or policy is essential for its objectives to be realised. Success often hinges on clear communication of the rationale and the logic for change. The evidence shows such communication can lead to enhanced stakeholder engagement, guiding those involved on a journey toward the realisation of a shared vision for change (Threlfall and Althaus, 2021[77]; Althaus et al., 2021[78]; Ansell, Sørensen and Torfing, 2017[79]). The flip side of the coin is that, unless those expecting to implement the policy understand and share its meaning, it is unlikely to get implemented in full (Viennet and Pont, 2017[13]; Tummers, 2012[80]; Nogueira and Schmidt, 2022[81]; Hudson, Hunter and Peckham, 2019[82]). Education reform efforts have sometimes failed to draw on the valuable expertise and experience of the education profession; arguably those best placed to make logical connections between the needs of the classroom and the demands of the wider world (Schleicher, 2018[12]).

The OECD team believes there is a need for further clarifying and better communication on the rationale, logic and overarching goal of the school improvement reform. The team's interviews with school leaders and teachers revealed that the SSM was not well known. When asked, almost all interviewees failed to mention any of the objectives, main components or underlying policy actions. They frequently pointed to other policies, such as the School Excellence Policy instead (see below), that were not part of the SSM.

Apart from the relatively limited communication on the SSM, part of the challenge would seem to lie in the fact that the rationale and logic of the model were not well explained and/or underbuilt in various policy documents and resources on the SSM. For example, when looking at the NSW Government webpage on the SSM (NSW Government, 2022[68]) a clear rationale seemed lacking. It explained that the SSM is "a whole-system, evidence-led reform program that aims to strengthen shared accountability across the system by putting in place clearer targets for school improvement, lifting capability through the design of new system support and sharing best practice across the system" but failed to share a strong narrative as to why this reform is needed.

Another challenge was the lack of consistency in the narrative across different documents and resources. For example, the mentioned webpage presents the three key objectives of the SSM as the following:

- developing quality-assured, evidence-led support around the needs of each school and their students to lift attendance, achievement and well-being

- sharing accountability for student improvement by putting in place clearer targets, lifting capability and sharing what works best

- freeing up more time for teachers, principals and school staff to spend on activities that improve student outcomes around teaching, learning and leading (NSW Government, 2022[68]).

These objectives however were not included in the 3-page overview of the SSM that the DoE had published on its website (NSW Government, 2021[67]), nor are they included in the DoE Outcome and Business Plan 2021/22 (NSW Government, 2021[1]). The evidence suggests that this lack of consistency and clarity has

led to implementation challenges in the past. For example, the evaluation of the Local Schools, Local Decisions (LSLD) reform concluded that it lacked "policy clarity" and noted that "the department failed to communicate a consistent and cohesive narrative around LSLD's policies and tools, what actually constituted LSLD, and why these tools were important" (NSW Government, 2020, p. 32[5]).

Furthermore, although the DoE Outcome and Business Plan 2021/22 (NSW Government, 2021[1]) arguably includes (part off) what could make up a rationale of the SSM i.e. "why" it is needed (see below), it does not provide a clear vision for change and convincing narrative (or theory of change) that explains how the different SSM interventions (together with those of other DoE policies and programmes) could help in realising this purpose:

> The performance of the NSW school students in reading, mathematics and science has declined or stayed the same over the last 20 years despite increased resources and funding to schools, and the efforts of teachers and school staff under increasingly difficult circumstances. Research and consultation also indicated that significant improvements were needed from the department to support schools with higher-quality tools and resources tailored to their unique needs and context (NSW Government, 2021, p. 20[1]).

The OECD team found that in the SSM, as well as in various other DoE policy documents, little reference was made to the new school curriculum which may not be as successful without a clear rationale and link with the SSM (e.g. the SSM aims to empower all NSW public schools to make sustainable improvements in student learning and well-being i.e. help schools put the new curriculum into practice). This issue was also raised in several of the stakeholder interviews.

The knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that students are expected to gain through the teaching and learning of the new curriculum could arguably provide a vision for change and help focus the reform effort on supporting sustainable improvements in student learning and well-being. NSW may look to education systems such as Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Japan, Portugal, Slovakia and Wales (United Kingdom) that have placed much prominence on their curriculum reforms in their education reform agenda's in the last decade(s) (Looney et al., 2022[83]; OECD, 2021[84]; OECD, 2020[85]; Gouëdard et al., 2020[86]; NCEE, 2021[87]; OECD, 2018[88]; OECD, 2018[89]).

Drawing also from the stakeholder interviews, the OECD team proposes that the school improvement reform should be considered a vital reform to help deliver the curriculum i.e. empower all schools to ensure "all students receive an education that provides them with a solid foundation for life, preparing young people to make a productive contribution to our society" (NSW Education Standards Authority, 2022[90]). Such an inspiring vision not only responds to the vision and goals set out in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (see Section 1) it is also at the heart of what it means to be a teacher or school leader and could serve as a major driver for those aspiring to join the profession. The explicit link to the new curriculum may resonate well with the NSW education profession, in particular if the package of school improvement interventions provides all schools and the people working in them with the tailored support, time and space, and confidence to help them enhance the learning and well-being of all of NSW's students in the public school system (NSW Government, 2021[67]).

Be cautious of overoptimistic expectations when (re-)defining the rationale and logic of the school improvement reform

Despite several decades of criticism, the normatively attractive top-down, linear view of policy and its implementation still retains some popularity with policy-making authorities (Hudson, Hunter and Peckham, 2019[82]; Viennet and Pont, 2017[13]). The OECD team formed the impression, that to some extent, the NSW DoE can be considered to be among these. The team's review of DoE policy documentation, and interviews with DoE officers, school leaders and teachers, suggested that during the last decade several policies and programmes had been given shape primarily through a top-down approach, sometimes with

little input from the education profession. School leaders and teachers, as well as several DoE officers, were quite vocal about the challenges this has brought to the successful implementation of these policies and services and were unanimous in their desire to move away from such a top-down approach to policy making and implementation (see below). In line with a growing trend among OECD Member countries, they expressed an interest for adopting a broader view which involves integrating bottom-up and top-down activities, in which often more attention is paid to such things as stakeholder engagement, building of trust, systems thinking, and (organisational) "learning" for systematic problem identification and exploration of alternative solutions and their implementation (OECD, 2020[75]; OECD, 2020[74]).

Furthermore, the OECD team's review of SSM documents, as well as of other DoE policy documents, suggested a seeming implicit tendency towards adopting a linear logic in the design of these policies. The interviews corroborated this finding, with some DoE officers seemingly less aware of what sometimes struck the OECD team as an optimistic linear causal logic when talking about the (theory of change of) SSM interventions and school improvement processes, and their expected influence on realising sustainable improvements in teaching and student learning and well-being, often in seemingly short timespans.

Several school leaders and teachers noted their concerns about the large volume of DoE policies and often short time spans in which they are expected to implement these (see also Section 4). Research evidence shows that realising sustainable change takes time and schools may in fact face an "implementation dip" as they move forward. The implementation dip can be described as a dip in performance and confidence as one encounters an innovation that requires new skills and new understandings (Fullan, 2007[91]; Fullan, 2008[92]). A meta-analysis of effect studies of comprehensive school reforms warns for such an implementation dip. There is often some progress the first year, followed by a set-back over the next two to four years – the implementation dip – before changes are consolidated and results keep improving for five to eight years after the initial implementation (Borman et al., 2002[93]; Hopkins et al., 2007[94]). Directly related, although many of the school leaders and teachers the OECD interviewed were supportive of the use of targets for guiding their school improvement efforts, several shared their concerns on the practice of annual target setting that is part of the SSM and the school improvement planning process, noting that making sustainable improvements in student learning takes time.

The optimistic, and possibly overly optimistic linear causal logic may be rooted in several causes, including an underestimation of the delivery challenges and time it takes to bring about change. Therefore, the OECD team urges for caution and being wary of potentially overoptimistic expectations when updating the rationale and logic of the school improvement reform. A key means for diminishing the risk of overoptimistic expectations is engaging in a strong consultation process with school leaders, teachers, Directors, Educational Leadership (DELs), delivery partners, (where appropriate) students and other education stakeholders to learn their views and draw from their knowledge and expertise to help define viable solutions. We will return to this issue later in the report, however the OECD team identified a number of key organisations, such as the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) and the School Leadership Institute, that play vital roles in the delivery or implementation of reforms and policies. The explicit recognition of these "delivery bodies/partners" and clarification of their roles and responsibilities would seem vital for the successful design and implementation of the school improvement reform.

Limited stakeholder engagement initially has hindered successful policy design and implementation

A new policy or reform is unlikely to succeed unless those expected to implement it see its value, want to see it happen, are confident in their capacity to implement it, and ideally have ownership of the change (McKnight and Glennie, 2019[95]; Viennet and Pont, 2017[13]). A lack of "change readiness" for a new policy may be due to a lack of transparency or incomplete information about the nature of the proposed changes, their impact, or understanding of whether or not the stakeholders involved will be better or worse off (Viennet and Pont, 2017[13]). This can create stress and anxiety and even resentment or resistance to change. The absence of open resistance to a new policy or reform however should not necessarily be interpreted as a signal of its acceptance by the education profession. Some educators and schools may simply choose to ignore, delay or implement the desired change only half-heartedly, rather than voicing their resentment or lack of support (Starr, 2011[96]; Yılmaz and Gökhan, 2013[97]; Hartong, 2012[98]; Schleicher, 2018[12]; Fullan, 2015[99]).

On the other hand, research evidence shows that if, and how, key stakeholders are recognised and included in the design and implementation of a new policy or reform is crucial to its success (OECD, 2020[74]; OECD, 2020[14]; Blomkamp, 2022[100]; Ansell, Sørensen and Torfing, 2017[79]). When new reforms or policies are introduced, a combination of top-down and bottom-up initiatives can generally build consensus. Increasingly OECD Member countries are recognising the importance of engaging stakeholders early in the policy design stage as a key means for ensuring the relevance and quality of the new policy and gaining the much-needed support and ownership for its successful implementation (Burns and Köster, 2016[101]; Viennet and Pont, 2017[13]; Schleicher, 2018[12]). The involvement of teachers, school leaders and other (education) stakeholders in the design of a new policy can give them a strong sense of ownership and strengthen their confidence in the change process (Schleicher, 2018[12]) (see Box 2.1).

Box 2.1. The renewal of Ontario's education vision – the result of a large-scale stakeholder consultation process

In 2013, Ontario embarked on the development of a renewal of its education vision. Building on the positive results of Ontario's education strategy that succeeded in increasing elementary literacy and numeracy, improving graduation rates, and reducing the number of low-performing schools (OECD, 2011[102]), the Ministry of Education of Ontario initiated a large-scale stakeholder consultation process that sought the views of individuals and organisations across the province to consider and discuss the skills and knowledge Ontario learners will need in the future. The consultation process was guided by several key questions, including "What are the skills, knowledge and characteristics students need to succeed after they have completed school, and how do we better support all learners in their development?", "From your perspective, what further opportunities exist to close gaps and increase equity to support all children and students in reaching their full potential?" and "What more can we all do to keep students engaged, foster their curiosity and creativity, and help them develop a love of life-long learning?".

The stakeholder consultation took place over the course of several months and was (among others) given shape through consultation sessions that were conducted in person and online. These efforts resulted in *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* (Government of Ontario, 2014[103]), that focusses on realising four key goals:

- Achieving Excellence: Children and students of all ages will achieve high levels of academic performance, acquire valuable skills and demonstrate good citizenship. Educators will be supported in learning continuously and will be recognised as among the best in the world.

- Ensuring Equity: All children and students will be inspired to reach their full potential, with access to rich learning experiences that begin at birth and continue into adulthood.

- Promoting Well-being: All children and students will develop enhanced mental and physical health, a positive sense of self and belonging, and the skills to make positive choices.

- Enhancing Public Confidence: Ontarians will continue to have confidence in a publicly funded education system that helps develop new generation.

The consultation process was successful in engaging a large number of representatives from within the education system, including parents and students, teachers, support staff and school and system leaders, as well as individuals and groups outside the education sector, including businesses and non-profit organisations contributing. Achieving Excellence as such was the result of the inputs of thousands of Ontarians. This not only helped ensure the quality and relevance of the renewed vision, but it had also succeeded in generating public interest and awareness, and is believed to have created a broad basis of support and ownership for its successful implementation in the following years.

Source: Government of Ontario (2014[103]), Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario; Government of Ontario (2015[104]), Building the next phase in Ontario's education strategy, https://www.publications.gov.on.ca/building-the-next-phase-in-ontarios-education-strategy (accessed on 28 March 2023); OECD (2011[102]), Lessons from PISA for the United States, Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education, OECD Publishing, Paris.

The issue of a lack of stakeholder engagement was identified early on by the OECD team as an area for improvement for the SSM. The initial parameters of the SSM were initially defined by the Minister (NSW Government, 2020[105]) and were then further developed by DoE officers. The OECD team recognises that this was partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic which limited the engagement with the education profession in the design of the SSM.

With the pressures on the system due to the COVID-19 pandemic having diminished, the DoE was quick to take the initial feedback by the OECD team on this issue to heart and committed itself to a strong consultation process with educators across NSW being invited to help review the design of the SSM. The DoE organised a series of stakeholder forums in September 2022, as well as later in the year and early 2023. The OECD team was invited to complement these efforts and engage in a series of focus group discussions and interviews with school leaders, teachers and other education stakeholders (in September 2022) to learn their views on the SSM and help identify strengths and areas for improvement.

The DoE should continue to pro-actively seek the views and expertise of school leaders, teachers, Directors, Educational Leadership (DELs), delivery partners, students and parents, and other education stakeholders in the design of the school improvement reform and other policies and programmes. This will most likely result in improvements to the design and support their successful implementation. In addition, it could serve as a key means for building of trust, helping bring the worlds of policy makers and the education profession closer, and work towards mobilising support for the SSM and larger NSW education reform agenda. Realising these objectives may – and likely will – take time and a sustained effort by the DoE, as well as the education profession and other education stakeholders, such as the teacher unions and principal associations. This "joint journey" of common sense-making, co-construction of policies and finding solutions for implementation challenges that are bound to reveal themselves, will be vital for realising NSW's education reform agenda (Haverly et al., 2022[106]).

Although not yet common practice in the NSW education system, the OECD team learned of several promising examples of stakeholder engagement and "co-construction" of policies to build on. These include the Professional and Ethical Standards team's engagement with the education profession in the development of the Code of Conduct, the Assessment for Complex Learners (AfCL) project or the DoE's Quality Time Action Plan that calls for simplifying administration processes and practices through a collaborative approach by gathering insights and testing solutions with teachers, principals, administrative

staff, parents and carers, and other stakeholders (see Box 2.2). These are important and promising examples of stakeholder engagement and co-construction of policies with the NSW education profession that the DoE can build on to support the design and implementation of its school improvement reform, as well as of other future DoE policies.

Box 2.2. Examples of stakeholder engagement in policy making and planning from New South Wales

Quality Time Action Plan: Collaborating with school communities to simplify administration processes

Effective administration plays a key role in supporting teachers and school principals in their work. In 2021 the NSW DoE recognised administration tasks were becoming a barrier for teachers and school leaders to do what they do best: lead, teach and support students. To solve this issue, the DoE turned to the education profession and other key stakeholders for solutions via an extensive consultation process which led to the development of the Quality Time Action Plan. The plan seeks to simplify and modernise administrative processes and practices, to ensure teachers and school leaders can focus on supporting quality teaching and learning, improving school operations, and enhancing student outcomes.

The establishment of multiple forums ensured insights were gathered and solutions were tested with appropriate stakeholders. These involved teachers, school leaders, school administration staff, parents and carers, and other key stakeholders such as the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, the DoE process optimisation team, pilot schools, key corporate staff including Directors, Educational Leadership (DELs) and School Performance executives, and the Minister's working group. Feedback was, therefore, open to the profession and the public. The ongoing process of collaboration anticipates extensive opportunities for further reductions to administrative barriers. Feedback from the consultation process identified 6 key opportunity areas: 1) Curriculum resources and support; 2) Assessment and reporting to parents and carers; 3) Accreditation; 4) Processes and support services: 5) Extracurricular activities; and 6) Data collection and analysis.

The DoE set a target of a 20% reduction in low-value administrative tasks by the end of 2022, the equivalent to 40 hours of administrative work per teacher per year. It is envisioned that this process will continue to free up time for NSW teachers and support better teaching and learning practices moving forward. The Quality Time Action Plan is an important and promising example of co-construction of policies that aligns with the School Success Model's objective of promoting collaboration and a shared responsibility for improvement across all parts of the NSW school system.

Assessing the learning of students with special educational needs – An example of school-led ("bottom up") innovation supported by the NSW Department of Education

The assessment of all learners can be challenging, yet it also presents many opportunities. The NSW Department of Education (DoE) is responsible for 117 Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs) which support children and young people with special educational needs. As part of their continuing efforts to support learning for all students, several of these schools identified a knowledge gap regarding "what works" in the assessment of learning for students with complex learning needs, not just for themselves but for schools of all types across the state.

Building on existing collaborations among SSPs, a number of schools across NSW took the initiative to respond to this knowledge gap. The schools developed a shared vison of what the assessment of students with complex learning needs should look like based on their collective experience and expertise. *The Passport for learning*, a holistic assessment framework and teaching programme, was subsequently created to assess learners in an equitable and consistent manner across schools. At the same time, another group of schools developed the Literacy and Numeracy Precursor Indicators that focus on describing the skills needed to develop early language, literacy and numeracy skills.

The DoE's Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) became aware of these programmes and agreed to join in a supporting capacity, providing research expertise, professional learning, and other resources (NSW Government, n.d.[107]). This collaboration evolved into the *Assessment for Complex Learners (AfCL)* project in which over 300 schools, both SSP and

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mainstream schools, are now actively participating. Three formative assessment tools are currently being trialled: The *Passport for learning*; *Literacy and Numeracy Precursor Indicators*; and *Students with Additional Needs* (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1. The AfCL project – Three formative assessment tools under pilot
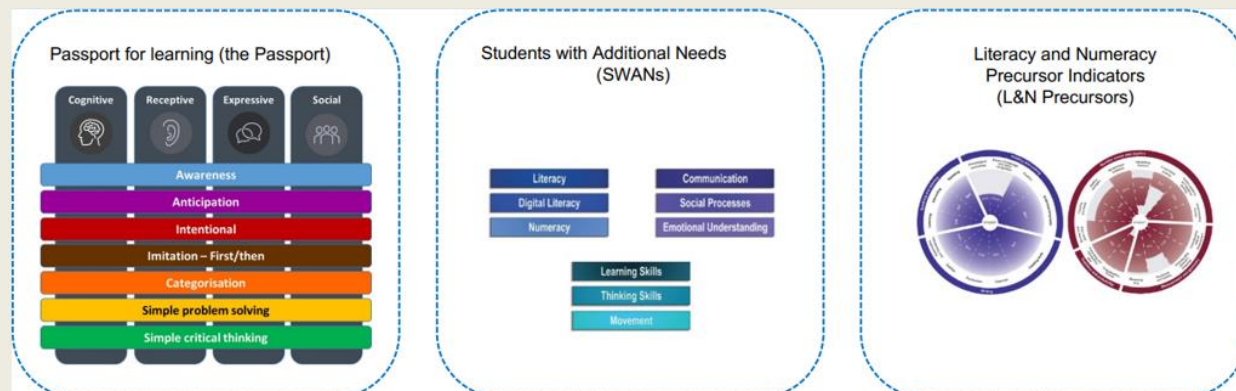
Each tool aims to support the assessment, tracking and measurement of learning of students with special education needs and support these in a progressive and flexible way, based on the level of need and support required. The initial findings of the trial are very encouraging. Teachers state the assessment data enhances their ability to reflect and report on their students' progress, revolutionising their ways of working: "Now we can assess [our students with disability] and show what they can do. This will assist us to develop and to deliver targeted learning programmes for our students that will be engaging for them and improve their learning outcomes."

This AfCL project can be considered a good example of a bottom-up approach to policy making and co-construction of policies that supports teachers and students with special education needs in a scalable and rigorous way.

Note: Adapted from information provided by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE), NSW Department of Education.
Source: NSW Government (2021[69]), Quality Time. Action plan to simplify administrative practices in schools, https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/about-us/strategies-and-reports/media/documents/Action_Plan_Quality_Time.pdf. (accessed on 21 June 2022).

However, the OECD team learned that DoE in the past has often engaged primarily with what have been identified as "excellent'' schools and "high performing'' teachers and school leaders in the design and implementation of policies. For the school improvement reform to be successful it is of great relevance to also seek the views of and engage with those schools and educators that are on "a journey towards excellence" and those that are most in need of support. Ultimately, the success of the school improvement reform will be determined by its influence on strengthening the capacity of all NSW public schools to make sustained improvements in student learning and well-being.

The need for enhanced two-way communication and stakeholder engagement in the implementation process

As noted above it is important to not only engage key stakeholders in the design of a new policy, but also in the implementation process (Hudson, Hunter and Peckham, 2019[82]; Viennet and Pont, 2017[13]; OECD, 2020[74]; OECD, 2020[75]). Communication plays a pivotal role in this. Two-way communication provides an important channel for building mutual agreement between stakeholders, gaining public support, and fostering ownership of a new policy and ensuring support for its implementation. Establishing the required infrastructure and associated feedback loops can be challenging, yet worthwhile in the long run. Meaningful consultation and regular feedback opportunities for all can provide opportunities for concerns and

suggestions to be aired, thereby minimising strong opposition from stakeholder groups (Schleicher, 2018[12]; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020[108]).

Failing to establish such a two-way dialogue with the education profession and other stakeholders may create a lack of understanding and even conflicts, thus hindering implementation (OECD, 2020[14]). It, for example, is important to consider teachers' and school leader's willingness and motivation (Fullan, 2011[73]) or their "readiness" for a desired policy change when considering policy options. Failing to, for example, identify negative emotions towards a policy or beliefs in its appropriateness may, and likely will, hinder its successful implementation (Rafferty and Minbashian, 2018[109]; Kin et al., 2015[110]; Armenakis et al., 2007[111]; Tummers, 2012[80]; Schleicher, 2018[12]). The early identification of such views however could allow for modifying the policy design, for example by adding and/or expanding a communication campaign to explain educators of the rationale and benefits of this policy.

To ensure two-way communication and continued stakeholder engagement in the implementation process, the DoE should continue to engage the education profession, delivery partners, teacher unions, principal associations, students, parents and guardians and other stakeholders to help monitor progress and receive their feedback on the implementation of the school improvement reform and underlying policy actions.

In addition, NSW should continue, and where possible further enhance, its communication with schools, parents and other stakeholders through various means. These could include the DoE website, the Universal Resources Hub that provides access to teaching, learning and school improvement resources or the NSW School Updates app for communicating with parents and carers. These are to form an integrated part of a communication strategy that promotes a consistent and cohesive narrative around the DoE school improvement reform that explains the "why" and "how" the different policy actions are important for realising its objectives and overarching vision for change. In line with the SSM emphasis on shared responsibility – a point of particular attention for the DoE – is the use of language/terminology, as will be explained below.

A "common language" to bridge the worlds of policy and practice

The OECD team was struck by the DoE's corporate approach and use of terminology that seemed strongly influenced by a new public management ethos. New public management (NPM) has heavily influenced education systems around the globe since the 1980's and on the one hand emphasised greater degrees of freedom regarding schools and, on the other hand, has also emphasised accountability and greater efficiency and effectiveness (Diefenbach, 2009[112]; Osborne, 2013[113]; Aoki, 2015[114]). NPM seems to have strongly influenced the DoE's corporate approach and organisational culture which places much emphasis on efficiency, a drive for results and professionalism. These are clear strengths for DoE to maintain and build on.

However, the DoE's use of terminology may require further consideration as it seemed to create some challenges in terms of stakeholder engagement and communication with schools, parents and other stakeholders. For example, when considering the language used to describe the SSM, as well as other DoE policies, one will find that much emphasis is placed on words/terms such as "corporate", "client", "accountability", "targets" or "expected growth". This language seems far removed from the world of teaching and 21st century learning, and as the evidence suggests, may have potentially distanced some members of the NSW education profession from the world of policy.

To address this challenge, the DoE should carefully consider the use of language/terminology when developing its communication strategy to ensure all policy documents and (media) outputs present a consistent language that bridges the worlds of policy makers and educators. Again, the involvement of the education profession in the development of the communication strategy may be a key means for bridging this gap. Such a common language is essential in the context of the new curriculum (see above) and for emphasising such things as the need for promotion of a learning culture and shared accountability to foster

collaboration and innovation; the need for creating sufficient time and space for professional learning; and the sharing of "what works" and the provision of tailored support to help all schools across NSW make sustainable improvements in student learning and well-being.

The need for a continued focus on supporting school development, promoting shared accountability and reducing the administrative burden

Since the 1980's many countries around the globe have moved towards greater school autonomy, often as result of decentralisation reform efforts and the adoption of NPM practices, while there others that have moved in opposite direction (OECD, 2018[115]; Tolofari, 2005[116]; Hanushek, Link and Woessmann, 2013[117]). For those countries that moved towards greater decentralisation and school autonomy, these shifts have often been accompanied by a strengthened role for central governments in setting broad national expectations through the curriculum and reinforcing performance monitoring through various forms of assessment and evaluation (OECD, 2018[115]; OECD, 2013[49]). The strong emphasis on performance measurement has resulted in an abundance of data and information about public service performance that is often publicly available. Such publicly available information has several benefits. Apart from informing education planning and policy development at various levels of the system, it offers opportunities to engage stakeholders in supporting improvements across the school system (OECD, 2018[118]). By measuring student outcomes and holding teachers, school leaders and schools responsible for results, accountability systems intend to create incentives for improved performance and identify underperforming schools.

The emphasis on a range of system- and school-level targets and their use for identifying and supporting underperforming schools came from the SSM – serving school development, as well as accountability purposes, both of which are ultimately aimed to serve school improvement. The NSW School Support Delivery Framework is a promising intervention in this regard that aligns with international research evidence and best practices among OECD Member countries, such as the Netherlands, Wales (United Kingdom) and Ireland, as well as partner countries, such as Singapore, that use data to identify schools on a spectrum of strong- to under performing schools and provide the latter with tailored support to schools to assist them in their school improvement efforts (Van Twist et al., 2013[119]; OECD, 2018[118]; Schleicher, 2018[12]; OECD, 2013[49]; Government of Ireland, 2022[120]). The DoE currently analyse the data on the system-level targets to identify those schools most in need of Strategic Support (see Table 1.1, Section 1). The greater the need, the greater level of support is given to schools. Although the OECD team found there is scope for some further development and expansion of the Framework that will be elaborated on in Section 3, it is a promising policy action that makes good use of data for supporting school improvements and responding to the seeming growing equity concerns across the NSW public school system.

> *Continue promoting the effective use of data for making sustainable improvements in student learning and well-being, while monitoring for unintended consequences*

While there is a wealth of research evidence indicating the benefits of collecting and using quality data and information for holding schools to account for the quality of education, and/or for supporting the improvement efforts at different levels of the education system (OECD, 2019[121]; OECD, 2013[49]; Burns and Köster, 2016[101]), research evidence also cautions for potential unintended consequences as a result of school principals, teachers and system leaders concentrating on the measures used to hold schools accountable. This may include an excessive focus on teaching students the specific skills that are tested, narrowing of the curriculum and focussing more on students near the proficiency cut score (Copp, 2018[122]; Ro, 2019[123]; UNESCO, 2015[124]; Darling-Hammond, 2020[125]; OECD, 2013[49]).

Also, in NSW some unintended consequences have been reported in the past. Some sources have pointed to risks of the NAPLAN results narrowing the curriculum and restricting pedagogy in NSW classrooms (Masters, 2020[65]; Louden, 2019[126]). The NSW Curriculum Review for example found that some teachers

felt pressured to prepare students for the NAPLAN. It also noted a widely held view that the publishing and comparison of school results had changed schools' approaches and made NAPLAN performance a higher priority for systems, schools and teachers and may have promoted competition between students and schools (Masters, 2020[65]). These findings stem before the introduction of the system- and school-level targets which suggests a need for continued monitoring of unintended consequences.

However, the stakeholder interviews conducted by the OECD team suggested that many school leaders, teachers and other education stakeholders were in fact supportive of the use of system- and school targets to help schools identify areas of improvement. Several interviewees noted that the use of targets impacted positively on teaching staff as these supported professional conversations and opportunities for collaborative reflection by providing purposeful and valuable discussion points for tangible school improvement efforts. That said, the desk study and some interviewees pointed to several issues of concern.

First, although the SSM targets for Aboriginal education, attendance, student growth, post-school destinations, NAPLAN and HSC aim to acknowledge a wide view of education quality (see Box 1.1, Section 1), several interviewees noted the risk that these latter student performance targets may still dominate perceptions of what a good or successful school entails in the NSW context (see discussion below on the School Excellence Framework) and as such what people will focus on. The various stakeholder interviews suggested this may in fact be happening in some schools, with a seeming particular focus on increasing student performance on the top-two NAPLAN bands.

Second, and related, several stakeholders noted the risk of (some) school principals feeling pressured by the system to "deliver quick fixes" or "chase the numbers". For example, several interviewees noted the risk of school principals – in particular those less experienced – feeling pressured to focus much effort on helping a few students increase their student performance to make the top-two NAPLAN bands, rather than making sustainable improvements in teaching and the learning of all students and across the full breadth of the curriculum.

Many interviewees, as mentioned earlier, also noted their concerns about the focus on achieving yearly targets, rather than seeing school improvement as an "improvement journey" that may take a few years before sustainable results are achieved. Schools may in fact face an implementation dip as they move forward (Fullan, 2007[91]; Borman et al., 2002[93]) which complicates the practice of yearly targets. Making improvements in teaching and student learning and well-being may take some time, or as one interviewee noted "making improvements in student learning is not a sprint, but a marathon". The interviewee clarified this statement by noting that sustained progress could be achieved in a period of several years, however.

The DoE organised a series of stakeholder consultations on a range of issues in quarter 4 of 2022 and quarter 1 of 2023, including on the school-level targets. Some amendments should be considered to ensure schools are supported and recognised for responding to equity and well-being concerns in their student populations, as will be elaborated on in Section 3. In addition, the emphasis placed on annual targets is an issue for reconsideration. Furthermore, the DoE should continue monitoring whether the targets lead to unintended consequences to inform possible adjustments to the DoE school improvement reform and/or other DoE policies and programmes.

The new curriculum calls for a reflection on assessment and evaluation arrangements, including system- and school-level targets

The Review of the NSW school curriculum calls for far-reaching change and innovation in the teaching and learning process from Kindergarten to Year 12. The long-term vision is "for a curriculum that supports teachers to nurture wonder, ignite passion and provide every young person with knowledge, skills and attributes that will help prepare them for a lifetime of learning, meaningful adult employment and effective future citizenship" (Masters, 2020, p. xi[65]).

The dilemma for policy makers and educators around the world is that routine cognitive skills, the skills that are arguably easiest to teach and easiest to test through tests, such as the NAPLAN, are also the skills that are easiest to digitise, automate or outsource in our rapidly changing world. Educational success is no longer only about reproducing content knowledge, but is about extrapolating from what we know and applying that knowledge to novel situations. Cognitive abilities such as literacy, numeracy and problem solving are still crucial, but teachers also must support students in developing the strong social and emotional foundation skills needed to thrive in a highly dynamic labour market and rapidly changing world. Education today is much more about ways of thinking that involve creative and critical approaches to problem solving and decision making, and where students influence what they learn (Schleicher, 2018[12]; Benevot, 2017[127]; Dumont, Istance and Benavides, 2010[128]; OECD, 2021[84]).

As noted by the Curriculum Review, it is essential that NSW's education assessment and evaluation arrangements promote such deep and rich learning experiences across the breadth of the new curriculum and not unintendedly distort the educational process. The DoE and the NESA should – as intended, but urgently – engage the NSW education profession in a dialogue on the implications of the new curriculum for: 1) assessment and reporting including NAPLAN, the Record of School Achievement and the Higher School Certificate; 2) pedagogical practices and teacher workload; 3) teacher preparation and ongoing professional learning; 4) school organisation and regulation; 5) relevant legislation; and 6) measuring the quality and impact of schooling, including the School Excellence Framework. The evidence shared with the OECD team suggested that relatively little action had been taken so far on some of these matters. The school leaders and teachers the OECD team interviewed were particularly concerned about the lack of guidance and support on assessments that they had expected to accompany the curriculum (syllabi) roll out.

The school improvement reform should continue promoting shared accountability and "freeing up time" by reducing the administrative burden and "red tape"

Research evidence shows that administrative burden and "red tape" can negatively impact on both organisational performance and staff outcomes. Administrative burden reduction has been a key issue in several OECD Member countries, including in the field of education (George et al., 2021[129]; Nielsen et al., 2017[130]; OECD, 2010[131]; European Commission, 2017[132]) – and this includes NSW. This is important as research evidence shows that innovative change and improvements in teaching and learning can be more difficult in bureaucratic structures that are geared towards rewarding compliance with rules and regulations (Schleicher, 2018[12]). However, as mentioned earlier, the final evaluation report of the LSLD reform concluded that the "Reducing Red Tape" reform area of the LSLD that was intended to allow schools to focus on the priority of teaching and learning by reducing the administrative burden had in fact achieved the reverse outcome and resulted in additional compliance requirements, administration, data collection and reporting responsibilities (NSW Teaching Federation, 2021[133]; NSW Government, 2020[5]; McGrath-Champ et al., 2018[134]; Hunter, Sonnemann and Joinier, 2022[135]).

Research evidence suggests that school systems that rely mainly on administrative forms of accountability and bureaucratic command-and-control systems to direct their work may struggle to attract the people they need (Schleicher, 2018[12]). Anecdotal evidence from NSW indeed suggests that the administrative burden may have negatively impacted on some school leaders' and teachers' willingness to experiment and innovate their practice, as may it have contributed to some of them leaving the profession. If further evidence is to support these findings that would be worrisome, particularly considering the NSW education profession is under pressure due to ongoing staff shortages and issues relating to heavy workloads (NSW Government, 2020[5]; Unions NSW, 2022[136]; Henebery, 2020[137]).

Modern school systems aim to transform the school organisation into one in which professional, shared norms of accountability can reduce the need for bureaucratic and administrative accountability (Schleicher, 2018[12]). Jurisdictions such as Ontario in Canada, Japan and New Zealand for example tend to pursue

more collegial forms of teacher and school leader accountability i.e. horizontal- or professional accountability. The aim is to ensure that school improvement is a collaborative endeavour, not something imposed from above. Although there is scope for further emphasising school improvement as a collective endeavour in the NSW public school system, and in the DoE school improvement reform (see Section 3), the SSM aimed to emphasise the promotion of shared (professional) accountability and a reduction of the administrative burden and red tape for schools – these can be considered strengths of the SSM that should be maintained and built on.

Recommendations

- **The SSM or following DoE school improvement reform's rationale, logic and overarching goal would benefit from further clarification**. A challenge noted by the OECD was the lack of a clearly defined and communicated rationale for the SSM reform i.e. "why" it is needed. It should provide an inspiring vision for change and a convincing narrative that explains how the different interventions (together with those of other DoE policies and programmes) could best enable the realisation of this purpose. Therefore:
    - **The DoE should consider its school improvement reform as a vital reform to help deliver the curriculum** – i.e. empower all schools to ensure "all students receive an education that provides them with a solid foundation for life, preparing young people to make a productive contribution to our society". Such an inspiring vision for change (which may require further development, see below) is arguably at the heart of what it means to be a teacher or school leader and could serve as a key driver for change.
    - **The DoE should continue to engage in a strong consultation process with school leaders, teachers, Directors, Educational Leadership (DELs), "delivery bodies/partners", teacher unions, principal associations, and other education stakeholders to learn their views and draw from their expertise to help enhance the design of the reform and underlying policy actions**; thereby diminishing the risk of overoptimistic expectations and help define viable solutions. There are several good examples of such stakeholder engagement on policies with the education profession to build on for the design and implementation of the school improvement reform, as well as other current and future DoE policies and programmes.
    - **The recognition of "delivery bodies/partners", e.g. the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) and the DoE School Leadership Institute, as well as the clarification of their roles and responsibilities would seem vital for the successful implementation of the reform**, and that of other policies and reforms.
    - **The DoE should continue to engage the education profession, DELs, delivery partners, teacher unions, principal associations, students and parents, and other stakeholders in monitoring progress and receiving feedback on the implementation of the school improvement reform and underlying policy actions**. This should include seeking the views of and engaging with those schools and educators that are on "a journey towards excellence" and those that are most in need of support.
- **The DoE should develop a communication strategy that promotes a consistent and cohesive narrative around the reform that explains "why" and "how" different policy actions are important for realising its objectives and overarching vision for change**.
- **Carefully consider the use of language/terminology when developing the communication strategy** to ensure that all policy documents and media outputs present consistent vocabulary that bridges the worlds of policy makers, educators, and education stakeholders.

- **Although there is need for further emphasising school improvement as a collective endeavour in the reform** (see Section 3), **the emphasis on providing targeted support to schools, promoting shared (professional) accountability and reducing the administrative burden and red tape (i.e. freeing up time) are strengths that should be maintained and built on**.

- Stakeholder consultations on the system- and school-level targets were expected to result in the decision to have them remain part of the DoE school improvement reform, given the general support of the use of the targets for guiding school improvements. However, **some amendments to the system- and school-level targets should be considered to ensure schools are supported and recognised for responding to equity and well-being concerns in their student populations** (see Section 3). Also, **the emphasis placed on annual target setting is an issue for reconsideration**.

  In addition, **the DoE should continue monitoring whether the school-level targets lead to unintended consequences** to inform possible further adjustments to the school improvement reform and/or other DoE policies and programmes.

- **The DoE and the NESA should – as intended, but urgently – engage the education profession in a dialogue on the implications of the new curriculum on a range of matters as identified by the Curriculum Review**. These include assessment and reporting (NAPLAN, the Record of School Achievement and the Higher School Certificate); pedagogical practices and teacher workload; and the School Excellence Framework, which should include a discussion on the system- and school-level targets.

3. The School Success Model: detailed reflections

Building on the analysis of Section 2 that provided a general reflection on the design of the DoE school improvement reform, this section offers a detailed review of the SSM components and policy actions. Building on its strong and promising design components, there is scope for expanding the DoE school improvement reform and underlying policy actions and establish a more comprehensive School Improvement Strategy that supports the realisation of a to-be-clarified vision for change – a recommendation that the DoE was already following up on while finalising this report (see Section 4). As mentioned, the DoE school improvement reform would benefit from a consistent and cohesive narrative that explains "why" and "how" different policy actions are important for realising its objectives and overarching vision for change. The DoE should consider underpinning the DoE school improvement reform as a vital reform to help deliver the new curriculum. The SSM contained a number of important and/or promising policy actions, several of which we will discuss below and point to some areas for further strengthening of these. This is followed by a discussion on several additional policy priorities and actions that should be considered for inclusion in the school improvement reform.

A detailed reflection on the SSM components and policy actions

Ensuring the Universal Resources Hub responds to professional learning needs

The DoE's Universal Resources Hub provides a central place for teaching and school-based staff to access quality assured teaching, learning and school improvement resources. Resources available in the Universal Resources Hub are developed by the department's experts and are assessed through a new standardised quality assurance process (NSW Government, 2022[10]). With this policy action New South Wales (Australia) (hereafter NSW) follows the examples of several sub-national entities and jurisdictions part of OECD Member countries, such as the Flemish Community of Belgium (Belgium), Scotland (United Kingdom) and Wales (United Kingdom) that have established similar Hubs to capture and disseminate effective practices to promote the professional learning of teachers and school leaders, including through more direct exchanges with pedagogical experts via online webinars and/or by fostering collaboration through, for example, a teacher forum (OECD, 2021[138]; Education Scotland, 2022[139]; Welsh Government, 2022[140]).

The Universal Resources Hub is a promising policy action to support the NSW education profession in their professional learning and school improvement efforts. However, the desk review of the various DoE policies and programmes and the stakeholder interviews raised a number of questions or issues to consider in the further development of such resources. First, the DoE is taking the lead in developing all these resources, often with the support of teachers and other experts. However, when the OECD team queried the extent to which these resources are responding to actual professional learning needs of school leaders, teachers and other school staff, the interviewees' responses varied, suggesting there may be scope for improvement. The DoE should continue to involve teachers and school leaders in the design and trailing of learning resources to ensure these respond to their professional learning needs. For example,

the involvement of "early adopter schools" in the trailing of the new curriculum is offering a valuable insight in the professional learning needs of teachers and other school staff. This has also informed the development of professional learning resources that are made available on the Hub and are aimed at supporting teachers in the implementation of the curriculum that are made available on the Hub. The DoE and NESA should continue to work collaboratively to ensure lessons learned from the curriculum trials inform the development of a comprehensive professional learning offer that support schools in the delivery of the curriculum

Second, considering also the investments involved in developing these quality-assured resources, the DoE should consider regularly assessing the professional learning needs of the education profession, including their use of these online resources.

Third, the OECD team's review of the various DoE documents and the interviews with key stakeholder suggest the DoE should ensure better co-ordination and a more strategic approach to developing these learning resources across the different DoE teams, ideally as part of a larger, comprehensive professional learning strategy (see below).

Lastly, the school leaders and teachers the OECD team interviewed were all positive about the richness and quality of the teaching and learning resources that are available in the Hub. However, searching through the wealth of resources on the Hub often takes a lot of time and is sometimes without success. We will elaborate on this issue in the text below when discussing the School Support Delivery Framework, also offering suggestions for improvement.

The School Support Delivery Framework – a promising policy action that can be enhanced to allow for better targeting of support

The School Support Delivery Framework is a key policy action of the SSM. It outlines three new types of system supports developed: universal support, guided support and strategic support. All schools in NSW will have access to system-designed and quality assured universal resources available under the universal support strand. Guided and strategic support is characterised by evidence-based and customised support for schools that is delivered by specialists in collaboration with the school's leadership team and Directors, Educational Leadership (DELs). The approach to supporting schools is based on the school's current results and their level of need to achieve progress. The greater the need, the greater level of support is given to schools across priority learning areas such as reading and numeracy, attendance, Aboriginal HSC attainment and financial management content areas (see Table 1.2, Section 1).

The NSW School Support Delivery Framework is a promising intervention that aligns with international research evidence and best practices among OECD Member countries such as Ireland, the Netherlands, and partner countries such as Singapore, that aim to provide tailored support to schools to assist them in their school improvement efforts (Van Twist et al., 2013[119]; Schleicher, 2018[12]; OECD, 2013[49]). This Framework in principle is a promising policy action for responding to the seeming growing equity concerns between schools in NSW (OECD, 2019[4]).

However, the OECD team found there is a need for further development and expansion of the School Support Delivery Framework to ensure it indeed responds to schools' needs and offers them with the tailored support they need. While in many OECD countries the school self-evaluation and planning process and/or external school evaluations are key to helping identify the level and type of support schools need, this isn't fully the case for NSW. The OECD team learned that instead the categorisation of schools in either the guided support or strategic support categories (see Table 1.2, Section 1) is done by DoE – and based on an analysis of the system-level targets, rather than on the school self-evaluation and improvement planning process against the School Excellence Framework (SEF) nor is there any apparent link to the external validation process. This primarily top-down approach caused confusion and some frustration among the interviewed school leaders, teachers and DELs. In addition, as one principal noted

this approach may in fact undermine the perceived value of school self-evaluation and improvement planning against the SEF, as well as the external validation process.

Furthermore, several principals and DELs noted their confusion about the selection criteria of schools receiving strategic support and those left out, while seemingly being in similar need of it. The OECD team learned that the system capacity to provide school improvement support has been a limiting factor on the number of schools receiving strategic support. In addition, the OECD team learned the offer in all priority areas provided through the strategic support had not been fully developed and made available to schools yet. While strategic support was in place for "reading and numeracy"; "behaviour"; "financial management"; "Aboriginal HSC attainment while maintaining cultural identity"; "attendance", and guided support was in place for "reading and numeracy"; "attendance"; and "financial management" in the 2022 school year, the support for other areas was not yet in place. The DoE was very much aware of this challenge and confirmed that the following school years the support offer will cover more areas. We will in Section 4 further examine the NSW school improvement support structure and system capacity to provide such services.

As mentioned earlier, a clear challenge to schools' capacity in making sustainable improvements is the large volume of policies and programmes that schools are expected to implement, sometimes in short timeframes. The desk review and stakeholder interviews revealed that schools are frequently approached by different parts of the DoE to implement new policies, sometimes in short timespans. Although some of these may warrant direct follow up, in other cases these are less relevant and/or urgent. It would seem essential to not only provide schools with the tailored support needed, but also make sure they have the time and space to (only) focus on their improvement priorities. This may require someone filtering and "shielding" schools from less relevant requests to implement new DoE policies and programmes.

Taking the above into account, the OECD team believes the School Support Delivery Framework is a promising initiative to build on and expand to ensure it can effectively support all schools in their improvement needs. The text below offers concrete guidance for doing so:

First, there is a need for developing a clear narrative that describes how school self-evaluation, based on the SEF (not merely the system targets), a school's Strategic Improvement Plan (SIP), and the external validation process are used to identify and allocate schools to the three levels of support available, and how that support is provided. DoE should consider developing guidelines and other resources that clarify how the school self-evaluation and planning process, and external validation are used to a) identify schools and allocate them to the different support categories - something that is not clear at present; and b) then describe how the support is provided. Obviously, the SEF resources are an important means to build on in developing such a process description.

The DoE should consider how to better link the external validation process with the support provided through the School Support Delivery Framework. Building on the current approach of using the system-level target data to identify schools for strategic support or guided support, it may look towards the example of the Netherlands that uses a risk-based inspection approach to assess the risk of an individual school underperforming (see Box 3.1). If a school is deemed at risk by the Education Inspectorate, it receives an inspection which leads to an overall assessment as "normal", "weak" or "very weak". Weak schools are also provided with specialised advice and assistance, mostly subsidised by the Dutch Ministry of Education. Schools labelled very weak must improve or be closed within two years.

The DoE may consider piloting a similar risk-based inspection/external validation approach that uses the system-level targets to prioritise schools for external validation to determine the targeting of support provided through the School Support Delivery Framework.

Box 3.1. Using risk-based external evaluation to identify and support weak schools – example from the Netherlands

For historical reasons, the Dutch school system is consistently ranked as one of the systems with the highest levels of school autonomy in the OECD. The Ministry of Education sees its main responsibility to ensure the quality of the collective education system. What happens in individual schools is the responsibility of school boards. A school board may have the responsibility for 1 to 60+ schools. A challenge of this highly decentralised system is how to cope with very weak schools while respecting the autonomy of school boards and ensuring each pupil receives a quality education.

The Dutch Inspectorate plays a key role in this process. It relies on a system of risk-based school inspections to do so. Based on a set of (output) indicators (with learning results being the most important) the Inspectorate assesses the risk of an individual school underperforming. If a school is deemed at risk, it receives an inspection which results in an overall assessment as "adequate", "inadequate" or "very weak". The procedure for giving a school the "very weak" label is extensive and thorough, as there are serious consequences for schools with this label. For example, school boards can appeal the Inspectorates decision in court. The Minister, the municipality in which the school is located, as well as parents of students are notified of the "very weak" label of the school.

Schools labelled "very weak" must improve within one year to at least the label "inadequate" and preferably the label "adequate". The Inspectorate makes arrangements with the school board and puts these arrangements in a supervision plan that includes monitoring the implementation of its recommendations. While the school board is responsible for realising improvements in the school, the role of the Inspectorate during this time is one of supervising. Most school boards will decide to call in specialised advice and assistance for the school. Sometimes, school boards will focus on closing the school in due time if they do not see the school improving in the near future. Should a school not improve within one year, the Minister can decide in principle to deprive the school of funding, thereby effectively closing the school.

The risk-based inspection system minimises interventions for schools that are doing well, thereby safeguarding their autonomy, while also allowing the Inspectorate to operate efficiently based on their capacity and resourcing allocation. The approach appears to work well as almost all inadequate and weak schools improve, albeit at high cost in resources and precious time for the children involved. Overall, while each year most schools labelled as weak or very weak improve, new schools are labelled weak as well. Still, partly as a result of the risk-based inspection system and targeted follow up support, the number of very weak primary schools has been gradually reduced throughout the years; from slightly less than 120 schools in 2009 to 24 in 2022 (out of 8031 primary, secondary and special needs schools).

Source: Van Twist et al. (2013[119]), Coping with very weak primary schools: "Towards smart interventions in Dutch education policy", OECD Education Working Papers, No. 98, https://doi.org/10.1787/5k3txnpnhld7-en; Education Inspectorate of the Netherlands (2022[141]), The State of Education in the Netherlands, https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/documenten/rapporten/2022/04/13/de-staat-van-het-onderwijs-2022 (accessed on 2 May 2023); Education Inspectorate of the Netherlands (2010[142]) Evaluation risk-based inspection, https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/blg-67094.pdf (accessed on 1 May 2023).

Second, the support provided through the Framework should respond to schools' improvement needs i.e. the improvement priorities as identified in the schools' SIP and/or external validation process. For this to happen the support offer available needs to cover all areas (and indicators) of the SEF.

Furthermore, the success of the School Support Delivery Framework – and the DoE school improvement reform at large – will depend on schools being given the time and space "to learn" and make improvements and embed these in their organisation and educational practices. Therefore, schools should be "shielded" from the pressures to implement non-essential, new DoE policies and programmes and allowed the time and space to focus on their improvement priorities and embed these in their organisation and educational practices. For some schools this may take a year, or two, before taking on the next improvement priority, while for others this period may be shorter.

Third, the Framework should clarify how it supports schools in responding to equity concerns and student well-being to ensure a "whole school approach". Thinking holistically about students means ensuring that they benefit from a wide range of services. Schools and students may need additional, tailored support and/or financial resources and the participation of health and other social services to adequately respond to the needs of disadvantaged students and those with additional learning needs (Cerna et al., 2021[143]; Kools and Stoll, 2016[144]). One of the SSM targets concerns Aboriginal Education, but no reference has been made to the ongoing policy initiatives to support Aboriginal students in the Framework, nor in the larger SSM.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has provided an additional, quintessential adaptive and transformative challenge, one for which there was no pre-configured playbook that can guide appropriate responses. The pandemic and consequent temporary school closures and forced rapid shifts to distance learning solutions have challenged the capacity of schools like never before. In many OECD countries there are great concerns that the final impact of the pandemic on students' learning loss is yet to reveal itself and that much of the progress made in addressing educational disadvantage to date will be reversed unless the appropriate policies and investments are put in place (OECD, 2020[145]; Schleicher, 2020[146]).

A recent review of student well-being services in NSW showed that the demand for mental health services is high in public schools and has progressively increased following the pandemic. More specifically, the review found increasing "unmet" demands in psychological distress, social status and support, stress and workload, alcohol and drugs and in juvenile justice centres. The review among others found an undersupply of services for primary school aged children and a demand for more school counselling services (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2022[54]).

As such, there is a need for clarifying how the School Support Delivery Framework and the larger DoE school improvement reform support schools in responding to these equity and student well-being challenges. In support of this, the OECD team believes it is vital to review the SEF and expand it (among others) with a strong focus on equity and student well-being – and make this into a fourth domain; "excellence in equity and student well-being", in addition to "excellence in learning", "excellence in teaching", "excellence in leading" (see below).

Fourth, the School Support Delivery Framework should consist of a mix of direct support provided to schools by specialists, while emphasising and promoting school-to-school collaborations. The OECD team found that the Framework lacks a focus on schools engaging in collaborative work and learning with their peers in other schools by establishing networks or school-to-school collaborations, or by engaging higher education institutions to help them experiment with and adopt evidence-based practices. Research evidence clearly shows that such collaborative working and professional learning between schools can help enhance their capacities and reduce the isolation of independently functioning schools; helping to transform themselves into "learning organisations" and ultimately for innovating teaching and making sustainable improvements in student learning and well-being (King Smith, Watkins and Han, 2020[147]; Kools and Stoll, 2016[144]; Schleicher, 2021[148]; UNESCO, 2021[149]; Boeskens, Nusche and Yurita, 2020[150]; Jensen and Farmer, 2013[151]).

For example, if a school's self-evaluation shows it is "Delivering" on the SEF quality indicator "attendance" it could learn from a school that had a similar starting point and has managed to make the journey from moving from "Delivering" to "Sustaining and Growing" or "Excellence". The DoE could for example consider trialling the use of a small grant to support one or more school visits by a small team of school leaders and teachers. Research evidence on school-to-school collaborations shows such "scaffolding" is often an effective means for mobilising and expanding the school improvement support capacity of the system.

The DoE may further look towards internationally successful school-to-school collaboration models, such as the City Challenge programme in the United Kingdom (in London, Great Manchester and Black County) (Baars et al., 2014[152]; Hutchings et al., 2012[153]) and Shanghai's (PRC) Empowered-Management programme (see Box 3.2), to develop and pilot one or more models of school-to-school collaboration fitting

the NSW context. A question for examination is whether there is a need for different models for schools in urban- and rural areas. For the latter, the distance between schools is an obvious factor to consider.

The DELs have a vital role to play in supporting effective school-to-school collaborations by identifying schools' strengths – going beyond the data and looking for truly innovative and effective practices to help schools and facilitate school-to-school collaborations. The OECD team learned of many such good examples taking place already to build on.

Fifth, the effective use of the Universal Resources Hub for scaffolding calls for presenting these resources in line with the SEF domains, indicators and stages of development. The school leaders and teachers the OECD team interviewed were all positive about the richness and quality of the teaching and learning resources that are available in the Hub. However, in its richness lies the challenge of having to search for and find the relevant resource(s), which as the school leaders and teachers noted often takes a lot of time, sometimes without success. Therefore, to save time and promote the effective use of the resources in the Hub for scaffolding DoE should consider presenting these resources in line with the SEF domains, indicators and stages of development of schools.

The DoE should also expand the Hub with more research-based examples of effective practice that provide an in-depth insight in the "improvement journeys" of schools and that support reflection and scaffolding against the School Excellence Framework. For example, if a school's self-evaluation shows it has reached the development stage "Delivering" on the SEF quality indicator "student growth" it could learn from a case study that describes the measures and journey of a school with a similar starting point, and move towards "Sustaining and Growing" from the "Delivery" stage of school development. The OECD team was impressed with the "What Works Best" research undertaken by the Centre for Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) (NSW Government, 2020[154]). CESE seems well-placed to take forward the development of these research-based examples of effective practice that could support schools in scaffolding against the SEF; thereby complementing the work undertaken as part of the Ambassador Schools research programme (see below).

In addition, the DoE should explore establishing a linkage between School Planning and Reporting Online (SPaRO) and the Universal Resources Hub to allow for automated presentation of resources that respond identified school improvement priorities (see Figure 3.1). NSW public schools use SPaRO software platform to develop and deliver many School Excellence cycle components, including the Strategic Improvement Plan (SIP) (NSW Government, 2022[50]). Following an examination of the software and relevant policy documents, the OECD team in its interviews with school leaders and teachers suggested the option of establishing a linkage between SPaRO and the Universal Resources Hub to allow for automated presentation of resources that respond to the identified school improvement priorities. This suggestion received strong support from all interviewees who were quick to recognise the potential of this automation in saving them the necessary time in searching for relevant resources on the Hub. Similarly, interviewees were supportive of the suggestion to link SPaRO to an up-to-date professional learning offer.

Box 3.2. Shanghai's empowered-management programme – school-to-school collaborations for school turnaround

Public school students in Shanghai (PRC) are outperforming their fellow students in most OECD countries. Using an innovative partnering approach that matches successful schools with low-performing schools, Shanghai's empowered-management programme aims to improve student achievement in all of its schools by contracting high-performing schools to turn around the academic outcomes of low-performing schools, and with good results as the initiative has markedly improved low-performing schools in Shanghai.

There are five main factors that considered critical to turning around low-performing schools:

- School leadership and strategic planning that raise expectations of students and teachers
- School culture that supports and promotes student learning
- Effective teaching that emphasises professional collaboration
- Measurement and development of student-learning and effective-learning behaviours
- Strong community relationships that promote student learning

The empowered-management programme contracts high-performing schools to work with low-performing schools—usually for a two-year period—in order to turn around their performance. Teachers and school leaders from both schools move between the two schools, thereby building capacity and developing effective practices to turn around the low-performing school.

Capacity constraints are always considered when establishing arrangements between schools. This is a particularly important issue when a high-performing school has multiple arrangements to help several schools. The support school must have the ability to help another school without compromising its own performance. As such, it must have the capacity across key areas such as teacher development and effective pedagogy that improves student learning, as well as in the skills of senior management and advanced teachers. The goal is to ensure that any assistance to another school doesn't reduce the performance of the high-performing school. A partnership between schools, however, is not a zero-sum game. In fact, there have been numerous reports of both schools benefiting from the arrangements. Exchanges between teachers and school principals increase the flow of information and the sharing of ideas and good practices. The effectiveness of school principals, other school leaders, and teachers often improves when they are exposed to different environments, face new challenges, and take on the task of improving learning and teaching in their school system. Similarly, effective teachers and school leaders who are close to retirement have moved to the low-performing school in some agreements, where they have been able to provide vital skills and experience.

Shanghai's empowered-management programme has shown good results as the initiative has markedly improved low-performing schools. The programme builds on existing strengths in the Shanghai school system to help low-performing schools. Rather than applying a top-down approach, it gets schools working with one another. In addition, Shanghai makes substantial investments in effective professional learning, classroom observation and feedback to teachers, professional collaboration, and the development of teachers' research skills to create schools that are learning organisations. These are emphasised in the empowered-management programme and throughout the education system in Shanghai.

Source: OECD (2021[155]), "Teachers' professional learning study: Diagnostic report for the Flemish Community of Belgium", OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 31, https://doi.org/10.1787/7a6d6736-en; Jensen and Farmer (2013[151]), School Turnaround in Shanghai: The Empowered-Management Program Approach to Improving School Performance, http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED561063.pdf (accessed on 16 March 2023).

Lastly, digitalisation in education has been gaining increased attention internationally with a focus, among others, to enhance and innovate teaching and learning, and for enhancing education governance (OECD, forthcoming[156]). The latter includes the use of digital solutions for aggregating school- and local level data and making these available in easily accessible formats for various purposes, including transparency and accountability, and for supporting monitoring and planning at different levels of the system. The NSW DoE has also developed specific digital solutions to support schools in their monitoring and making evidence-based decisions, including the mentioned online SPaRO that in turn is linked to the Scout platform. The Scout platform is the DoE's data and analysis platform that was developed to make key data and information about schools available in an easily accessible, central location (NSW Government, 2020[157]). Scout is aimed to support evidence-based decisions that are outcomes focused. Teachers can use Scout to review and monitor their students' assessment results, as well as student growth and performance trends. School leaders can use the platform to navigate rich data sources to inform planning and implementation.

The OECD team in its interviews with DoE officials suggested the option of further developing its software platforms to allow for easy identification of schools that could be matched for school-to-school collaborations. This suggestion was welcomed by DoE officials who recognised the potential of such a measure for matching schools for school-to-school collaborations. Referring to the example mentioned above, the school that has identified "student growth" as a priority for improvement would benefit from learning from the experiences of a school that has successfully dealt with this issue in the past. The self-assessment against the SEF indicators and SIP could allow for easy identification of potential schools to learn from. Such an automated function, possibly facilitated through a GIS-enabled map, could for example greatly support the work of the DEL in identifying and reaching out to schools that have shown effective practice in a specific area.

Figure 3.1. Visualisation proposed use of SPaRO for automated proposals of relevant self-learning resources, professional learning opportunities and schools for collaboration
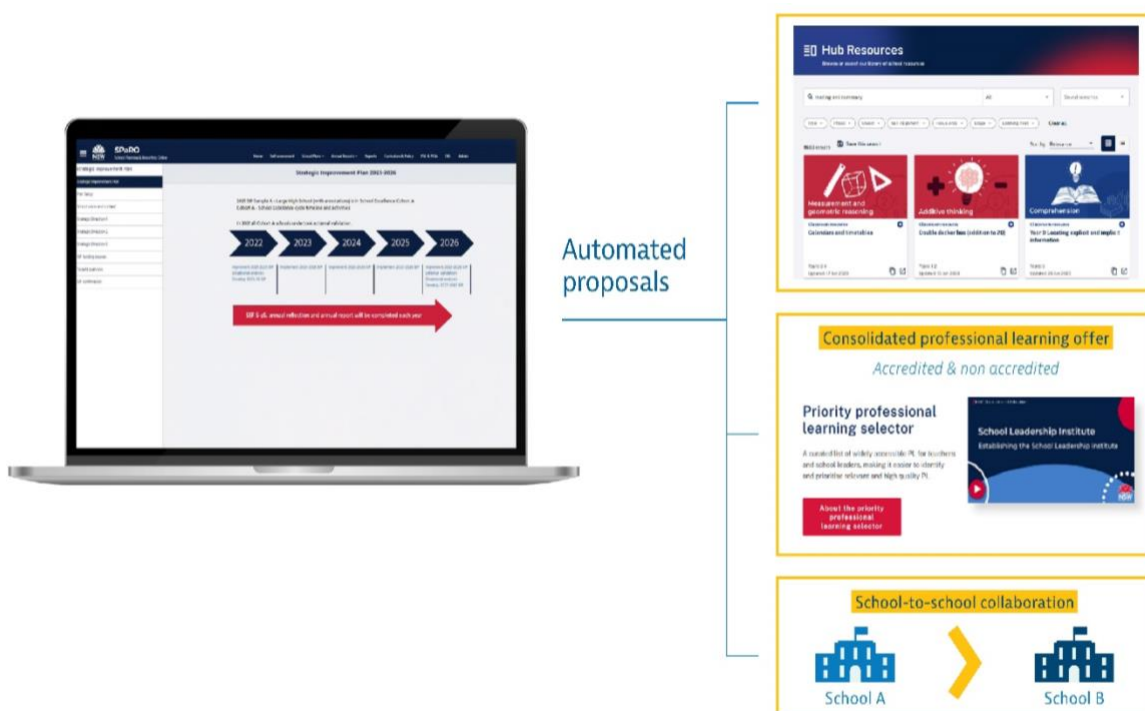
Note: Adapted from information provided by the NSW Department of Education.

Ambassador Schools research for supporting schools in scaffolding towards "excellence"

The Ambassador Schools research (which has been completed at the time of releasing this report) aimed to identify and share their effective practices with other schools across the state. The target schools of this research programme, the Ambassador Schools, have been identified as being high-performing public schools in NSW. These schools were selected for their strong performance compared with similar schools across a range of measures, including reading, numeracy, attendance and HSC results. The 10 Ambassador Schools and 16 contextually similar schools engaged in the research represent a cross section of NSW public schools and include primary, secondary, metropolitan, rural and non-urban, and schools from a range of socio-economic contexts.

The selection of the Ambassador Schools was largely based on the SSM targets, rather than the broader School Excellence Framework, which arguably may have been more desirable considering its holistic conceptualisation of what a good school entails in the NSW context. That said, the sampling approach did take into account several other indicators to arrive at a cross section of high-performing public schools.

The question can be raised as to how helpful such examples of high-performing or excellent schools are to those schools that are struggling i.e. those schools whose self-evaluation and/or external validation shows them to perform on the developmental stage "Moving Towards" on many of the SEF indicators. That said, if the research-based examples of effective practices provide an in-depth insight in the improvement journeys of schools and support scaffolding against the SEF, these may serve as useful sources of inspiration and support for school self-evaluation and improvement planning.

The SSM recognises the importance of freeing up time for teachers, school leaders and school staff

Research evidence shows that in many OECD countries the demands placed on education profession have changed markedly in recent decades. There is growing awareness that in order to meet the needs of increasingly diverse learners, enhancing teacher and school leader professionalism has become essential. Teachers today face more diverse classrooms than in the past and they need to continuously update their practice through professional learning and collaboration with peers in order to keep their pedagogical knowledge and skills up to date. Also, school leaders are struggling with many different tasks, while often faced with increasing expectations and responsibilities for leading change and implementing new policies in schools and ensuring these actually reach the classrooms (Pont, 2015[158]; Fullan, 2015[99]). This while a shortage or inadequacy of time to effectively lead educational change are well documented (OECD, 2019[159]; Schleicher, 2018[12]). In many countries, this transition towards enhanced professionalism is taking place in difficult conditions in terms of workload, administration, reporting requirements, levels of autonomy and budget pressures – as is the case for NSW.

The evidence shows that the work and workloads of school leaders, teachers and school staff in NSW have profoundly changed during the last decade. There are various factors contributing to this including significant increases in student needs, rapid changes in technology, new compliance requirements, administration, data collection and reporting responsibilities (i.e. "red tape"), and higher community expectations of what schools and teachers can do (NSW Teaching Federation, 2021[133]; NSW Government, 2020[5]; McGrath-Champ et al., 2018[134]; Hunter, Sonnemann and Joinier, 2022[135]; Masters, 2020[65]). As mentioned earlier, the final evaluation report of the Local Schools, Local Development (LSLD) reform concluded that reform had not succeeded in reducing the administrative burden for schools and had in fact achieved the reverse outcome (NSW Government, 2020[5]). The report noted that "for schools, the problem was two-fold as LSLD had been introduced in parallel with multiple other large-scale reforms and policies, each with their own set of tools and departmental expectations" (Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2020, p. 32).

Like in many countries around the globe, in NSW the COVID-19 pandemic has provided an unprecedented challenge that among others required teachers to rapidly switch to distance learning, with now much effort devoted to reversing potential learning loss among students (Schleicher, 2020[146]). In addition, several interviewees noted the continuous stream of new DoE policies and strategies has added to workload pressures and may have contributed to some staff leaving the profession. One example of a time-consuming practice that was mentioned (with some frustration) by almost all school leaders and teachers the OECD team interviewed were the 14 mandatory online professional learning courses that they have to take every year to comply with departmental and legislative requirements (NSW Government, 2022[160]). This number of mandatory courses has steadily grown in recent years.

In summary, the evidence strongly supports the importance of freeing up more time for teachers, school leaders and school staff, by reducing the administrative burden and red tape, as a key priority of the SSM. This can ensure teachers have sufficient time to focus on teaching and student learning and their well-being which has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2022[54]).

Furthermore, teachers and school leaders need (more) time for engaging in (collaborative) professional learning (Hunter, Sonnemann and Joinier, 2022[135]). This is also vital considering the curriculum reform NSW has embarked on. School leaders and teachers need time for deep professional learning to fully understanding what the new curriculum changes are about, and to gain the procedural knowledge and understanding to ensure they not only know what new curriculum concepts and elements mean, but also what this means for changing their practice. They need opportunities to learn about new or altered practices that they and others should use to realise curriculum aspirations and those to do less of or abandon (Sinnema and Stoll, 2020[161]; Schleicher, 2018[12]). We will come back to this issue below.

As mentioned earlier, the DoE aims to help the education profession through (among others) the Quality Time Action Plan by seeking to simplify and modernise administrative processes and practices, to ensure that teacher and school leader time is spent on the work that matters most and best supports quality teaching and learning (NSW Government, 2021[69]). Importantly, the DoE is drawing from the expert opinions of its school leaders, teachers, support staff and other education professionals and stakeholder organisations to jointly identify and trail new and better ways of working that frees up time for the education profession.

For the implementation of the Quality Time Action Plan the DoE had set itself an initial target of reducing the administrative burden on school staff by 20% by the end of 2022. Although DoE informed the OECD team it was set to achieve this target, the interviews with school leaders and teachers suggested that they had yet to notice these changes in their daily practice. The OECD team, for example, learned that the above mentioned 14 courses had been reviewed, resulting in a reduction in the time spent on these courses. Although these are useful gains, each school-based staff in NSW is still required to take these courses on an annual basis. As such, they may not feel sufficient gains are being made, while there may be scope for further measures, for example by having some of these courses taken once every two or three years (e.g. on cyber security or data breach preparedness). Such a measure would be directly noticed and appreciated by the education profession, and could help in building trust and raise awareness that progress is being made in reducing their workload.

That said, the OECD team believes that the Quality Time Action Plan is a promising policy initiative for freeing up time for the NSW education profession that should continue to be prioritised within the DoE. The DoE should monitor the effectiveness of the action plan in terms of actual – and perceived – workloads and professional learning time, and take additional measures as needed.

A promising policy initiative for safeguarding and monitoring staff well-being

Related to the above, the team learned of a recently initiated policy initiative by the DoE to develop a staff well-being framework which would seem a valuable complementary policy action under the SSM, and to the Quality Time Action Plan and the DoE Teacher Supply Strategy (NSW Government, 2021[6]). On the latter, the OECD team formed the opinion that this is an ambitious strategy which objectives are unlikely to be realised with the identified policy actions alone (see below).

With the new staff well-being initiative NSW follows a seeming growing international policy interest in staff well-being in education (see Figure 3.2). The international policy interest in staff well-being in education stems from the growing awareness that in order to respond to growing demands placed on education professionals, enhancing teacher and school leader professionalism, and thereby safeguarding their well-being has become essential (OECD, 2021[162]; Viac and Fraser, 2020[163]; OECD, 2020[164]). Several interviewees noted the importance of recognising staff well-being in the School Excellence Framework. Such a measure would send an important, positive signal to the education profession. NSW would follow the examples of education systems like the Flemish Community of Belgium (Belgium), Ireland, and Scotland (United Kingdom) that not only recognise the importance of student well-being, but that of the whole school team in their conceptualisations of "what is a good school" and their school self-evaluation and improvement planning processes. Therefore, the DoE should review the SEF with the education profession and other stakeholders, and consider including one or more quality indicators on staff well-being. In the text below we will elaborate on all the proposed areas for improvement of the SEF.

Figure 3.2. Conceptual framework of for teachers' occupational well-being
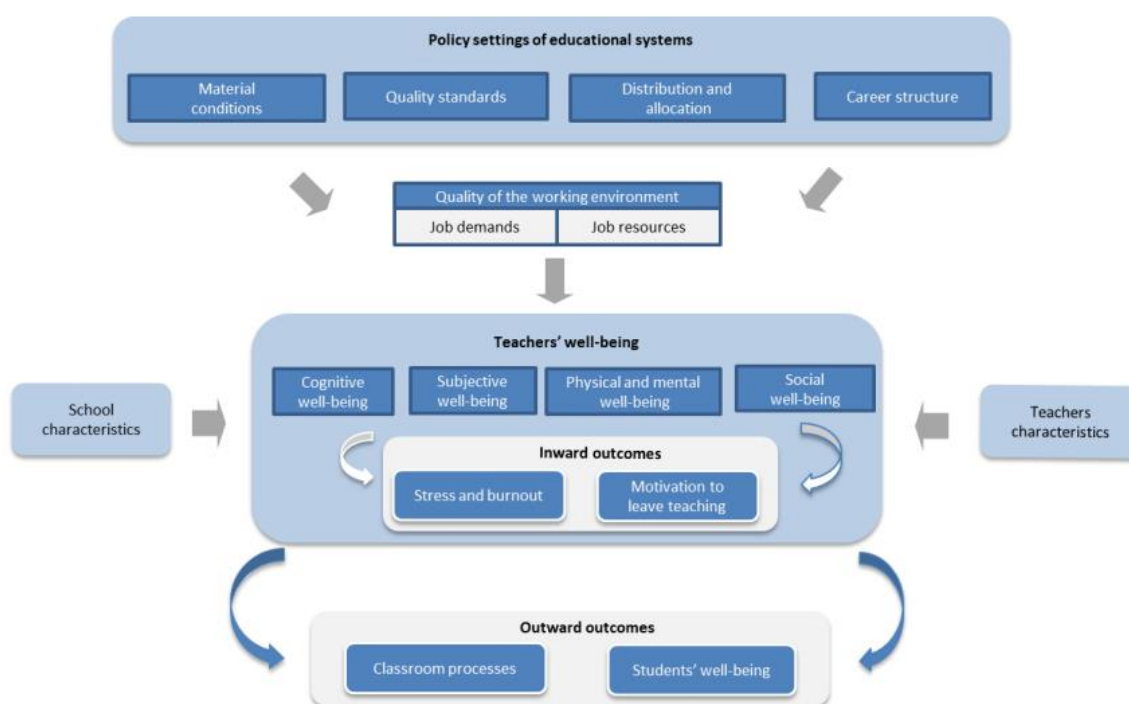
Source: Viac, C. and P. Fraser (2020[163]), "Teachers' well-being. A framework for data collection and analysis", OECD Education Working Papers, No. 213, https://doi.org/10.1787/19939019.

Policy priorities and actions to consider for inclusion in the SSM

After having highlighted several important and promising policy actions that are included in the SSM, we will now focus on a number of additional priorities and policy actions that should be consider for inclusion in the SSM, as may these inform the design of other (future) DoE policies and programmes and/or its new Strategic Plan.

Limited focus on equity and student well-being in the SSM and School Excellence Policy

International research evidence shows that the highest performing education systems are those that focus on both equity and excellence (OECD, 2019[4]; OECD, 2012[165]; Schleicher, 2021[148]). These systems often identify and provide additional support to those schools that are most in need of it. The OECD team learned of several such strategies that provide disadvantaged schools with the much-needed support, fitting their specific student population and local context. These include Aboriginal Education Policy (NSW Government, 2022[166]), Footprints to the Future 2020-2030 (NSW Government, 2020[63]), the Rural and Remote Education Strategy (NSW Government, 2021[7]), and Connected Communities Strategy (NSW Government, 2021[62]). Such programmes are of great importance knowing that equity challenges provide the most significant barriers to student learning in many NSW schools, with different levels of incidence (see Section 1). Across schools with high, medium and low incidence of students requiring targeted support, excellent practice can be both identified and recognised, and should be shared to support other schools in their improvement efforts.

Therefore, responding to the significant and seemingly growing equity challenges in the NSW school system, it is vital to continue the "equity" programmes and/or built on these and expand their reach to ensure all students receive the needed additional support to address the impact of educational disadvantage. The interviews with school leaders, teachers and other stakeholders corroborated the need for these and argued for scale up. Integration of these programmes in the SSM should be considered.

Furthermore, as discussed above, the demand for student well-being support is growing across NSW schools, partly as a result of increased student mental health issues (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2022[54]). The DoE has recognised the need to improve the way it collectively supports student well-being in schools. The SSM can serve an important enabling role in ensuring a "whole school approach" to responding to students' learning and well-being needs.

For this to happen, it essential to place a much stronger focus on equity and student well-being in the SSM and School Excellence Policy. This as mentioned above includes clarifying how the School Support Delivery Framework supports schools in adopting a "whole school approach" for responding to students' learning and well-being needs. Also, as will be discussed below, the SEF should be reviewed to among others ensure a stronger focus on equity and student well-being.

In addition, as also proposed in the recent review of student well-being services in NSW, there is a need for improving the way the Government collectively supports student well-being in schools (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2022[54]). A review and strengthening of the NSW school improvement support structure, including student well-being services would seem warranted (see Section 4).

The need for an explicit integration of the School Excellence Policy in the SSM

The OECD team was surprised to find that the SEF, which is used for school self-evaluation and improvement planning, is not an explicit component of the SSM (NSW Government, 2022[167]). The mere name suggests this is a model that answers the question "what is a good school?" in the NSW context and supports schools in realising this holistic view of a good or successful school. The interviews with school leaders and teachers corroborated this finding, with them consistently (incorrectly) assuming the SEF was part of the SSM.

Research evidence shows the vital contribution self-evaluation and improvement planning can make towards improving the quality of education and student performance (McNamara et al., 2021[168]; Ehren et al., 2013[169]; Hofman, Dijkstra and Hofman, 2009[170]; OECD, 2013[49]). Also, in NSW the school self-evaluation and improvement planning process against the SEF is considered a key means in the pursuit of excellence or "school success". As discussed above, schools use the SPaRO software platform for school self-evaluation, planning and reporting – the key components of the School Excellence Policy cycle. This provides schools, as well as their Directors, Educational Leadership (DELs) and other system leaders, with a key means for identifying strengths and areas for improvement. These can, as proposed above, inform the identification of those schools that are in need of guided support and strategic support offered through the SSM.

Therefore, given their strong interdependence and complementarity, the DoE should consider consolidating the School Excellency Policy and the SSM into one. As mentioned above, there is scope for strengthening this process and their interdependence for which concrete recommendations have been proposed. These include developing a clear narrative or process description that (step-by-step) discusses how school self-evaluation, based on the SEF, and a school's Strategic Improvement Plan informs the support schools can receive through the School Support Delivery Framework. This policy design effort would likely greatly benefit from consultation, ideally "co-construction", with the education profession.

The education context and recent policy developments argue for reviewing the School Excellence Framework

Although the OECD team recognises the SEF as a comprehensive framework, the analysis of the NSW education context and recent (policy) developments argue for reviewing the framework. First, the new curriculum brings about changes to teaching and student learning. The successful delivery of the new school curriculum calls for gearing school leaders' and teachers' professional learning towards curriculum change, as well as the practices involved in creating and enhancing school conditions that are conducive to this change. This includes the development of a pervasive spirit of inquiry, initiative and willingness to experiment with new ideas and practices. Such a learning mind-set is vital for the successful delivery of the curriculum. Therefore, it is essential to review the SEF to ensure realisation of the ambitions of the new curriculum is fully supported.

Second, as explained above, to respond to growing equity concerns and challenges relating to student well-being, it is vital to expand the SEF with a strong focus on equity and student well-being – and make this into a fourth domain; "excellence in equity and student well-being". Recognising the current conceptualisation of student well-being in the SEF is limited in its focus (e.g. not taking into account students mental, physical and emotional health), this effort should include a review of the student well-being concept and moving towards a broader conceptualisation that encompasses the overall health of a student, including social, mental, physical, and emotional health.

In addition, if following the stakeholder consultations on the SSM targets that took place in quarter 4 of 2022 and quarter 1 2023 the decision is made to continue with the target setting approach, DoE should consider including a student well-being target to help ensure it gets the much-needed attention in policy and practice, and recognises schools for pursuing a whole school approach.

Third, as explained above, the SEF should be expanded with one or more indicators on staff well-being. This would send an important, positive signal to education profession that they are valued by the system and society at large.

Fourth, there is a need for revisiting the concept of a learning culture in the SEF. The OECD team found what seems a contradiction in how the "learning culture" concept is defined and operationalised across different DoE policies and resources. The NSW Government website defined a learning culture as "a set of factors that characterise the learning environment of a school, including its physical features, its culture, and teachers' practices. These factors alongside quality instruction and learning time, are the foundations for success of a school" (NSW Government, 2022[171]). Although there may be scope for further refining this definition, it arguably aligns relatively well with conceptualisations often found in the international literature (Kools and Stoll, 2016[144]; Seashore Louis and Lee, 2016[172]; Hollins, 2015[173]; OECD, 2021[174]; OECD, 2014[175]).

When looking at the concept of a learning culture in the SEF however, this is interpreted quite differently and directed only towards students in terms of having high expectations for them, transitions and continuity of learning, and their attendance. Therefore, DoE should revisit its conceptualisation of a learning culture in its SEF. For this it may look towards the examples of education systems of those like Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Wales (United Kingdom) and Victoria (Australia) that have emphasised developing a school culture that is geared towards professional learning and collaborative improvement i.e. promoting the development of a thriving collaborative learning culture in their schools (OECD, 2020[176]; OECD, 2018[118]; Kools and Stoll, 2016[144]; Government of Ireland, 2022[177]) (see Box 3.3).

The proposed review should consider expanding the Framework in several areas as proposed above. At the same time, the proposed SEF review calls for caution in making it too large and unwieldly. Explicit consideration should be given to limiting it by revisiting of domains and consolidating or dropping less relevant themes or indicators.

Box 3.3. Developing a thriving learning culture in schools – examples from Victoria (Australia) and Wales (United Kingdom)

The Professional Learning Communities Initiative in Victoria (Australia)

The Victorian Directorate of Education considers professional learning communities (PLCs) as a vital means for school improvement as it supports groups of teachers to work collaboratively at the school-level to improve student outcomes based on a simple concept: students learn more when their teachers work together. Over a period of four years (starting in 2021), over 800 public schools will receive intensive PLC implementation support that includes a comprehensive programme of professional learning and expert advice from regionally based teams. These teams are made up of experienced educators that advise, coach and train school and instructional leaders in all aspects of PLC implementation, including budget and resource prioritisation, meeting facilitation, inquiry-based improvement, curriculum and assessment, and data interpretation and analysis.

Several tools have been developed to support teachers and leaders, including a "Professional learning Communities Maturity Matrix" to support schools in self-assessing and monitoring their progress against seven PLC dimensions:

- Vision, values, culture
- Building PLCs through a culture of collaboration for improvement
- Data used to focus and drive collaborative improvement and evaluate impact on learning
- Structures and systems to support collaboration for improvement – focus on strategic resource management
- Building practice excellence

- Curriculum planning and assessment
- Empowering students and building school pride.

Four levels are described within the matrix: emerging; evolving; embedding and excelling. For each key element (or indicator), the Maturity Matrix provides descriptors so that a school can self-assess its level of progress and set developmental goals.

A range of online modules have been developed to support the implementation of the Victorian PLC approach (Department of Education Victoria, 2019[178]), as well as a toolkit to help schools evaluate the impact of teaching on student learning growth (Department of Education Victoria, 2019[179]). In addition, the Leading Professional Learning Communities programme offers two concurrent streams of professional learning, one for School Leaders and one for PLC Instructional Leaders. The programme was established to build the capacity and skills of school leaders to improve the learning outcomes for all students through a consistent and disciplined approach to collaborative inquiry.

Developing schools as learning organisations in Wales (United Kingdom)

In 2015, Wales embarked on an ambitious curriculum reform. The Welsh Government considers the development of schools as learning organisations as vital for supporting its schools to put the new curriculum into practice. Building on international research evidence on schools as learning organisations (SLOs) (Kools and Stoll, 2016[144]), the Welsh SLO model was developed through a process of "co-construction" with the education profession and other education stakeholders and launched in November 2017. The SLO model for Wales focuses the efforts of school leaders, teachers, support staff, parents, (local) policy makers and all others involved into realising seven dimensions in its schools. Seven action-oriented dimensions and their underlying elements highlight both what a school should aspire to and the processes it goes through as it transforms itself into a learning organisation:

- developing a shared vision centred on the learning of all learners
- creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff
- promoting team learning and collaboration for all staff
- establishing a culture of enquiry, innovation and exploration
- embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge for learning
- learning with and from the external environment and wider learning system
- modelling and growing learning leadership.

All seven dimensions are to be implemented for this transformation to be deemed complete and sustainable, while also acknowledging the key role of supporting stakeholders. Since its release the SLO model has been widely used by schools across Wales to inform their improvement efforts. For this a range of resources (Welsh Government, 2022[180]) were developed, including an online school as a learning organisation self-assessment survey that generates an automated feedback report, case studies and other resources that aim to support the establishment of a collaborative learning culture across the Welsh school system. Schools can count on the support of the regional consortia (i.e. regional school improvement services) and municipalities for realising this objective.

Source: Department of Education Victoria (2021[181]), Professional Learning Communities, https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/improvement/plc/Pages/default.aspx (accessed on 16 March 2023); Department of Education Victoria (2018[182]), Professional Learning Communities Maturity Matrix, https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/teachers/management/improvement/plcmaturitymatrix.pdf (accessed on 16 March 2023); OECD (2018[118]), Developing schools as learning organisations in Wales, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264307193-en; Welsh Government (2022[180]), Schools as Learning Organisations, https://hwb.gov.wales/professional-development/schools-as-learning-organisations/#resources (accessed on 2 March 2023).

Treating school and system-leadership as a prime driver of reform

*The pivotal role of school leaders in successful change management and innovation*

In many OECD countries school leaders are often at the forefront of the implementation of education policies, while they are already facing high and seeming growing expectations. In particular in those countries that have granted greater autonomy to schools, the role of the school leader has grown far beyond that of administrator. School leaders are expected to take responsibility for putting learning at the centre of the school's mission – and keeping it there – and serve as proactive and creative change agents. School leaders have a vital role in establishing a learning culture. They are responsible for shaping the work and administrative structures to facilitate professional dialogue, collaboration and knowledge exchange, all of which are crucial for promoting educational change and innovation (OECD, 2020[164]; Leithwood and Seashore Louis, 2012[183]; Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009[184]; Kools and Stoll, 2016[144]).

In line with international research evidence, the NSW principal standards and principal role description (AITSL, 2014[185]; NSW Government, 2021[186]) explicitly recognise the pivotal role principals play in, among others, leading and managing self-evaluation, planning and improvement, including by engaging the wider school community and working to embed a collaborative, consultative culture of continuous improvement and promote evaluative thinking. Strong leadership however does not just emerge; it must be developed and cultivated. Leadership recruitment and development must be a key part of any successful improvement strategy (Schleicher, 2018[12]; Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008[187]). It is therefore surprising to find that in some education systems, school leadership development and that of other system leaders still receives relatively little attention or is even an afterthought of education reform. School leadership development is increasingly recognised as an area for investment in other DoE reform programmes (NSW Government, 2021[1]), with the establishment of the School Leadership Institute in 2018 (see Box 3.4) and the recently released School Leadership Development Strategy (NSW Government, 2022[188]) being key milestones. These highlight the vital role school principals and other school leaders play in leading and managing improvement, innovation and change in NSWs education reform(s). Their commitment, knowledge and understanding of the new curriculum – and learning mind-set will be essential for innovating and improving teaching (Sinnema and Stoll, 2020[161]) and ensuring the learning and well-being of all students in NSW.

Box 3.4. The New South Wales Department of Education's School Leadership Institute (SLI)

In 2018, the NSW DoE established the School Leadership Institute (SLI) to provide leadership development and support for current and future school leaders at key points in their career. The Institute strives to provide evidence-informed, future-focused leadership development programs, resources, research and initiatives for middle and senior school leaders and principals as well as support and resources for Directors, Educational Leadership (DELs) to shape a future that enables all educational leaders to influence and impact positively on the learning of teachers and students in public schools (see Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3. School Leadership Institute Development Continuum
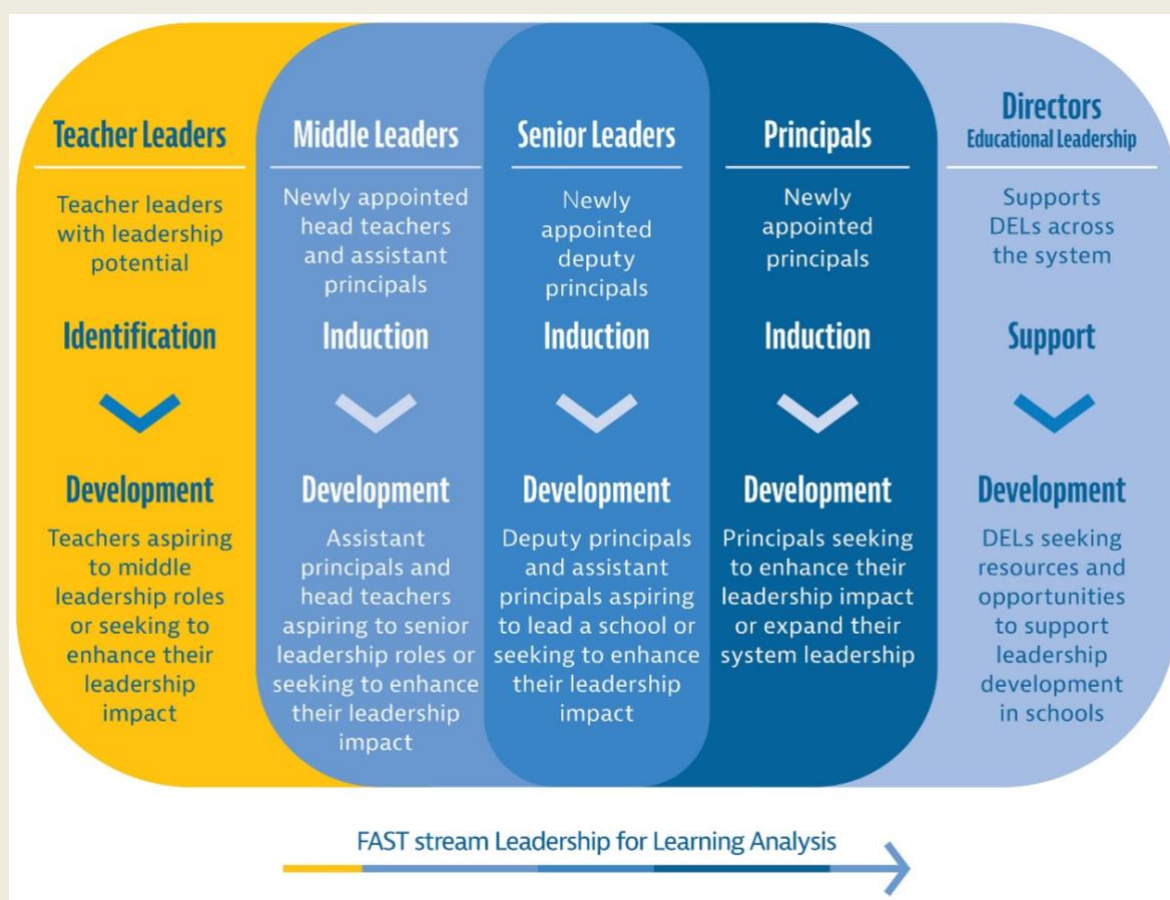
Source: NSW Government (2022[29]), About the School Leadership Institute, https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/school-leadership-institute/about-the-sli#Vision (accessed on 22 September 2022).

Since its establishment, the SLI has developed and implemented a steadily growing number of programmes and resources to develop school leadership capacity across the NSW public school system. These include:

- **Senior Leadership – Aspiring Principals Leadership Programme (SL-APLP):** A 12-month professional learning programme which develops the leadership capabilities of aspiring and current senior school and system leaders. The evidence-based program consists of nine leadership seminars delivered by international experts and practitioners through a blended model of face-to-face and online learning. Participants analyse their current practice, develop new understandings and reflect on the impact of their leadership actions by leading an inquiry in their context.

- **Growing Great Leaders (GGL):** A school leadership programme for first-time principals delivered by the SLI in partnership with the University of Auckland. GGL aims to develop student-centred leadership by embedding evidence-informed theory into practice. Consisting of six modules the programme aims to enhance participants' leadership capabilities by applying relevant knowledge, solving complex problems, and building relational trust.

- **Middle Leadership Development Programme (MLDP):** An 18-month programme for assistant principals and head teachers which centres upon four key themes: identity, inquiry, improvement, and influence plus two elective modules. Participants who successfully complete the MLDP may also apply for credit of prior learning for postgraduate studies in educational leadership. The programme is delivered by the SLI in partnership with the University of Newcastle and the University of Wollongong.

- **Principal, Deputy principal and Middle leader induction conferences:** A range of bespoke online conferences for newly appointed, first-time and long-term senior school leaders. Facilitated annually by experienced principals and deputy principals (for middle leaders), each event seeks to grow participants' leadership capabilities, understanding of their role, and develop sustainable support networks for all.

- **NSW Public School Leadership and Management Credential:** A requirement for all newly appointed, first-time principals in NSW public schools, the Credential aims to enhance participants' knowledge and understanding of DoE policies, processes, and procedures. Participants must complete 19, 2-hour modules which aim to enhance understanding and awareness of the steps required to effectively lead and manage schools.

- **School Leadership Identification Framework (SLIF):** Developed to identify and develop future school leaders, the SLIF provides a collection of professional learning resources to support teacher leadership identification and development in NSW public schools. A supervisor coaches each candidate through a process of planning, observation and shadowing. Feedback sessions further prepare prospective school leaders for the next step in their careers.

- **Principal Leadership Learning programme:** A programme available to all DoE principals offering webinars and guided discussion sessions with global and national educational and leadership experts. It is complemented by a Principal Leadership Hub providing a central source of information and resources on leadership, and an online Learning Resource for Principals which brings together evidence-informed practices and research to support school leaders in enhancing their leadership capabilities.

- **Scholarships for School Leaders:** This programme supports principals, Directors, Educational Leadership (DELs) and graduates of the SL-APLP to undertake postgraduate or higher degree study to lead improvement in student learning. Up to AUD 15 000 may be awarded to cover fees and ancillary costs at a recognised Australian university.

Source: NSW Government (2022[29]), About the School Leadership Institute, https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/school-leadership-institute/about-the-sli#Vision (accessed on 22 September 2022).

Therefore, the DoE should make school leadership development a key component of the SSM. Again, such a decision would most likely be appreciated by NSW school leaders, teachers and other education stakeholders, and could contribute to building trust and gaining support of the education profession for the SSM.

System leaders play a pivotal role in promoting a learning culture and shared accountability

Research evidence shows the vital roles system leaders, and in particular those leaders operating at the "meso-level" of the system can play in promoting a collaborative learning culture and shared accountability that is geared towards innovation and making sustainable improvements in teaching and student learning in all schools across the system (Spillane, Hopkins and Sweet, 2018[189]; King Smith, Watkins and Han, 2020[147]; OECD, 2018[118]; OECD, 2015[190]). Achieving system-wide transformation requires all those within the system to communicate and connect, to drive change forward and to align their efforts. It

depends on the capacity and active co-operation from leaders across the system – from school to state level – and on having the kinds of systems that engage and link people to create and a sense of common purpose (OECD, 2014[191]).

In the context of NSW such meso-level leadership roles are given shape by the Directors, Educational Leadership (DELs), the Principal School Leadership (PSL) and Principal Coach Mentors (PCM), under the leadership of the Executive Directors, School Performance (see Figure 1.7, Section 1). As noted above, these officers have a vital role to play in discouraging a culture of bureaucratic compliance and the pursuit of quick fixes, like giving those few students that are just below the two-top NAPLAN bands extra attention in an effort to make the school look better against the targets.

On the flip side of the coin, these officers are also vital for encouraging collaborative professional learning, promoting pedagogical innovations and school-to-school collaborations to help enhance schools' capacity for delivering the breadth and depth of the (new) curriculum. The OECD team learned of many such good examples already taking place across the NSW school system. These present a partially untapped opportunity for greater school-to-school collaborations, peer learning and the scaling of effective practice that is geared towards the successful delivery of the curriculum.

For this to happen, it is essential that these system leaders, as well as school leaders, gear school leaders' and teachers' professional learning towards curriculum change, as well as the practices involved in creating and enhancing school and system conditions that are conducive to this change. Individual teachers or even schools who confidently take on whatever challenges a new curriculum poses, bring it to life, make it their own and engage students in powerful learning experiences can always be found (Sinnema and Stoll, 2020[161]; Tichnor-Wagner, 2019[192]). But for systemic and system-wide change to happen, whole schools and systems must also engage committedly and be empowered to develop a pervasive spirit of inquiry, initiative and willingness to experiment with new ideas and practices. Such a learning mind-set or learning culture is vital for the successful delivery of the curriculum – ultimately, support all of NSW's students in realising their potential.

Therefore, the DoE should continue to invest in developing the capacity of its meso-level system leaders and ensure they have the knowledge, skills and learning mind-set to take on their vital roles in supporting schools in their improvement efforts. For this, several interviewees noted the leadership development programmes of the School Leadership Institute (see Box 3.4).

Furthermore, the DoE should review the job descriptions of Directors, Educational Leadership (DELs) and other meso-level system leaders to ensure they are further empowered to focus on their improvement function, along a more balanced focus on accountabilities. These should highlight their vital roles in promoting a learning culture within and across NSW schools that is geared towards innovation and improvement in teaching and student learning and well-being. A strong emphasis on promoting school-to-school collaborations and networking will be vital to disseminate and embed effective practices across the NSW school system – and work towards a true self-improving "learning system" (Chapman and Muijs, 2014[193]; Kezar, Gehrke and Bernstein-Sierra, 2018[194]; OECD, 2019[195]; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012[196]).

For this to happen, the OECD team believes it is essential that the DELs are given the time and space to focus on their core task of supporting schools in their improvement efforts. The OECD team learned that DELs are frequently given additional (ad hoc) tasks by DoE, often of a more administrative and bureaucratic nature that not only overwhelms them, but it also limits their capacity to support school improvements. We will return to this issue in Section 4.

Moving towards a more a strategic approach to professional learning that emphasises collaborative working and professional learning

Research evidence points to the conclusion that the quality of an education system can never exceed the quality of its teachers and education workforce at large. Attracting, developing and retaining the best teachers is the greatest challenge education systems have to face (Schleicher, 2018[12]) – a challenge that NSW has taken to heart through a wide range of initiatives (NSW Government, 2020[197]; NSW Government, 2021[6]; NSW Government, 2022[68]). A review of policy documents and interviews with stakeholders showed the commitment of the DoE in supporting the professional learning of teachers. These include – but are not limited to:

- The establishment of a "Best in Class" Teaching Unit, which will support improved performance by developing evidence-based teaching resources and scaling best practice through professional learning for teachers.

- Teaching oversight mechanisms including NESA school and teacher accreditation processes, educational leadership by school principals.

- Increasing entry standards for Initial Teacher Education programmes, working with the tertiary sector to improve the quality of graduates entering the profession and raising minimum standards for employment in NSW public schools.

- The review of the quality of externally run professional development courses for teachers in NSW. From 2021 each individual course will need to demonstrate a genuine focus on improving teaching in the classroom through best practice to receive NESA accreditation.

- Working with NESA across sectors to streamline the accreditation process for Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers, along with support programs to utilise our expert teachers and increase the numbers reaching these higher accreditation levels.

- The quality assured resources developed and included in the Universal Resources Hub as part of the SSM.

On the latter, as noted earlier, there would seem scope for further ensuring these resources respond to the learning needs of teachers and other school staff. Furthermore, as also mentioned earlier, the new curriculum brings some fundamental changes to teaching and student learning. School leaders and teachers need time for deep professional learning to fully understanding what the curriculum changes are about and understand what they mean for changing their practice (Sinnema and Stoll, 2020[161]; Gouëdard et al., 2020[86]; OECD, 2021[84]) (see Box 3.5).

Box 3.5. Four key professional learning demands to meet curriculum aspirations

Countries consider curriculum reform as an important and necessary measure to make schools enter the 21st century and respond to a fast-changing world. In recent years, many OECD countries have engaged in curriculum reform as a way to equip children with the knowledge, skills and competences needed for tomorrow. Capacity development is required for successful curriculum reform – and ultimately for improving teaching and student learning and well-being. Educators need 'professional know-how' and therefore, there may be a need for significant professional learning on four common and interrelated challenges – depth, spread, reach, and pace – that are associated with putting in practice a new curriculum.

This professional learning, from a curriculum point of view, should focus on the four challenges/dimensions below. These all have a role to play in meeting the challenges of depth, spread, reach and pace.

Committing to the curriculum change: A new curriculum for the future poses challenges that require teachers to think and act differently and to be open to doing this. Receptivity and commitment are prerequisites for responding in practice and teaching towards new curriculum aspirations. As many agents of curriculum change as possible must believe in the change, view it as an improvement and commit to playing their part in making it happen. With greater commitment to a new curriculum comes greater likelihood of a successful realisation. This demands that those across a system are willing to learn about the rationale for the change and are open to implications for changing their own practices.

Knowing what the curriculum changes are and what they mean: To ensure that people's efforts to respond to the curriculum and make changes to their practice are in line with the reform's intentions, deep learning about the nature of new curriculum elements and what they mean for elements remaining from previous curriculum policy are important. From a cognitive point of view, curriculum change agents must know and understand what the changes are, be they "capabilities", "competencies", "threshold concepts", "outcome statements' (or other possible new curriculum concepts). They must also understand about the broader curriculum structure and interrelationship between its elements.

Understanding how to respond to the curriculum changes: Alongside strong knowledge and understandings of what curriculum changes are about, procedural knowledge is required to ensure that curriculum change agents not only know what new curriculum concepts and elements mean, but what this means in terms of response – "what I actually need to do". They need opportunities to learn about new or altered practices they and others should use to realise curriculum aspirations and those to do less of or abandon. Furthermore, they need to learn in ways that strengthen their capabilities for those practices. Developing capability is, therefore, critical to realising curriculum aspirations. Explicit opportunities to develop skills associated with curriculum elements known to be important, and practices understood to be necessary, cannot be underestimated. Shifts required in terms of changed, added, revised, and/or abandoned practices bring a demand for learning new capabilities.

Improving practice to realise curriculum intentions (making changes): Ultimately, curriculum change requires change in practice, not only for teachers, but for everyone with any direct or indirect responsibility for curriculum enactment. For teachers, opportunities are essential to learn in ways that strengthen capabilities required for practices that are consistent with the new curriculum. If a new curriculum promotes children and young people to be adaptive, then the same should apply to those who teach them. To become "knowledge workers", confidently collaborating, inquiring into their practice and drawing on other evidence, they will need to have agency around their practice. They will need to become adaptive experts who are able to use deep conceptual knowledge to understand and work effectively to solve problems in novel situations. They must also break down existing barriers that isolate them from colleagues so that they can support and interrogate each other's practice as critical friends, develop ways of making informed choices together and enact and create curriculum.

Source: Sinnema & Stoll (2020[161]), Learning for and realising curriculum aspirations through schools as learning organisations, https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12381.

The school leaders and teachers the OECD team interviewed noted that providing them with only a few days of additional time to collectively study the new syllabi and explore how to adapt their teaching would already be of great help. On the flip side, they feared that without such additional time in many schools the desired curriculum changes may be implemented only partially with teachers adapting their practice only superficially, or not at all.

In recognition of the professional learning needs of teachers and school leaders the DoE recently announced that teachers will be given release time to focus on curriculum reform to help them effectively implement new syllabuses:

- Primary school teachers receive a guaranteed 5 hours per term in 2023, increasing to 10 hours per term in 2024, and 10 hours per term in 2025.

- High school teachers receive a guaranteed 5 hours per term in 2023, 5 hours per term in 2024 and 5 hours per term in 2025.

- Additional centrally funded release time are provided for primary school executive staff which will be equivalent to an additional 43 hours for assistant principals per term and 108 hours for deputy principals per term for the period of the curriculum reform.

The release time to focus on the curriculum reform is a positive development that will help in gaining support and awareness for the desired curriculum changes and assist teachers and school leaders in putting these into practice (NSW Government, 2022[198]).

The limited recognition of the importance of collaborative working and professional learning

As mentioned above, the desk review and interviews showed a lack of emphasis of the SSM on promoting collaborative learning and working within and between schools. A vast body of research demonstrates the value of collaboration working and learning for improving teaching and student learning (OECD, 2019[159]; Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner, 2017[199]; Earl and Timperley, 2008[200]; Hattie and Timperley, 2007[201]). Enhancing collaborative practice is often cited as a potentially powerful tool which can support and nurture the development of positive learning cultures in schools, particularly where high levels of school autonomy are evident (OECD, 2013[49]; Spillane, Hopkins and Sweet, 2018[189]; UNESCO, 2021[149]) – as is the case for NSW.

Although several important policies like the SEF (NSW Government, 2022[167]), the Professional Standards for Teachers (NSW Education Standards Authority, 2022[202]) and the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (AITSL, 2014[185]), emphasise the importance of a "learning culture" and collaborative working and learning within schools and between them, other policies and programmes seem less explicit in promoting such collaborative practice – and this includes the SSM. With much emphasis placed on the development of online courses and (self-) learning resources in recent years – of which several school leaders and teachers the OECD team interviewed questioned their effectiveness, it was not surprising to learn their strong appetite for engaging in more collaborative professional learning.

Therefore, the DoE should more strongly emphasise collaborative working and professional learning within and between schools in the SSM. The DoE may look towards the earlier mentioned examples of education systems such as Victoria (Australia), Wales (United Kingdom) and Shanghai (PRC) (see Box 3.2 and 3.3) that have aimed to develop a collaborative learning culture in and between their schools. Such schools also work with different pedagogical approaches to expand teaching and learning. This often includes a focus on inquiry approaches and collaborative work, both of which are critical for preparing students for future learning and for equipping students with 21st-century skills (Schleicher, 2015[203]). Examples are Lesson Study and Learning Study, associated particularly with Japan and Hong Kong (China) (Cheng and Lo, n.d.[204]), or Spirals of Inquiry that have been widely applied in schools in British Columbia (Canada), as well as in other jurisdictions around the globe such as Australia and New Zealand (Kaser and Halbert,

2017[205]; Timperley, Kaser and Halbert, 2014[206]). The OECD team also learned of examples of schools in NSW engaging in such collaborative inquiry-based pedagogical approaches, with the support of higher education institutions. Drawing from such international and national examples, the DoE should consider systematically promoting one or more collaborative inquiry-based pedagogical approaches through the SSM.

Developing a comprehensive DoE-wide professional learning strategy

The review of the various DoE policies and programmes and the interviews with key stakeholders revealed there is insufficient co-ordination across DoE teams on the different professional learning initiatives. The DoE should ensure a strategic approach to its many professional learning initiatives through the development of a comprehensive DoE-wide professional learning strategy. This strategy should emphasise and promote the development of a "learning culture", including a strong(er) recognition of the importance of collaborative working and learning within and between schools. As mentioned above, the DoE should also consider the systematic promotion of collaborative inquiry-based pedagogical approaches through this strategy and the SSM. It will be essential to engage teachers, school leaders and other education stakeholders in the development of this strategy to ensure its relevance and ownership by the profession (Viennet and Pont, 2017[13]).

As part of this effort, DoE should consider consolidating all professional learning offers that are available (accredited and non-accredited) and hosting these on the Universal Resources Hub; thereby consolidating these with self-learning resources in one place. Structuring these offers against the SEF, as well as the curriculum subjects and sequential modules may facilitate easy searching. This measure would respond to the frustration shared by the school leaders and teachers the OECD team interviewed that noted long searches for relevant professional learning offers, sometime without success.

Also, as mentioned earlier, DoE should consider establishing a linkage between this professional learning offer and the automated self-evaluation and planning process using SPaRO. This could allow for the automated presentation of professional learning courses and resources that respond to the identified school improvement priorities; thereby saving time and promoting engagement in professional learning.

Recommendations

Building on the strong design components, the DoE should develop a more comprehensive school improvement reform by clarifying and expanding its policy actions that support the realisation of a to-be-clarified vision for change (see Section 4). This includes:

- **Ensuring the Universal Resources Hub responds to professional learning needs.**
  - o **The DoE should continue to involve teachers and school leaders in the design and trail of learning resources, as a key means for ensuring these respond to professional learning needs.** In addition, it should regularly assess the learning needs of the education profession, including their use of these online resources.
  - o **The DoE should continue to enhance co-ordination across the different DoE teams to develop these learning resources, ideally as part of a larger, comprehensive professional learning strategy** (see below).
- **Expanding the School Support Delivery Framework to ensure it responds schools' needs and provides them with the tailored support they need by:**
  - o **Developing a clear narrative that describes how school self-evaluation, based on the School Excellence Framework (SEF) (not merely the system targets) and a school's Strategic Improvement Plan (SIP), and the external validation process, are used to**

identify and allocate schools to the three levels of support available, and how that support is provided. The DoE should consider developing guidelines and other resources for this purpose. The SEF resources are an important means to build on.

The DoE should consider how to link the external validation process with the support provided through the School Support Delivery Framework. It may look towards the example of the Netherlands and consider piloting a risk-based inspection/external validation approach to determine the support to be provided through the School Support Delivery Framework.

o **The support provided through the School Support Delivery Framework should respond to schools' improvement needs i.e. the improvement priorities as identified in the schools' SIP.** For this to happen the support offer available needs to cover all areas (and indicators) of the SEF. In addition, schools should be "shielded" from the pressures to implement non-essential, new DoE policies and programmes and allowed the time and space to focus on their improvement priorities and embed these in their organisation and educational practices.

o **The School Support Delivery Framework should clarify how it supports schools in responding to equity concerns and student well-being to ensure a "whole school approach".** Schools and students may need additional, tailored support and/or financial resources and the participation of health and other social services to adequately respond to the needs of disadvantaged students and those with additional learning needs. In addition, the **DoE should review the SEF and expand it (among others) with a strong focus on equity and student well-being – and make this into a fourth domain; "excellence in equity and student well-being"**, in addition to "excellence in learning", "excellence in teaching", "excellence in leading".

o **The School Support Delivery Framework should consist of a mix of direct support provided to schools by specialists, while emphasising and promoting school-to-school collaborations.** For example, if a school's self-evaluation shows it is "Delivering" on the SEF quality indicator "attendance" it could learn from a school that had a similar starting point and has managed to make the journey from "Delivering" to "Sustaining and Growing" or "Excellence". Such "scaffolding" is an effective means for mobilising and expanding the school improvement support capacity of the system.

  ▪ **The DoE may look towards internationally successful school-to-school collaboration models, such as the City Challenge in the United Kingdom or Shanghai's (PRC) Empowered-Management programme, for developing and piloting one or more models fitting the NSW context.** A question for examination is whether there is a need for different models for schools in urban- and rural areas.

  ▪ **The Directors, Educational Leadership (DELs) have a vital role to play in supporting effective school-to-school collaborations by identifying schools' strengths – going beyond the data and looking for truly innovative and effective practices to help schools and facilitate school-to-school collaborations.**

o **The effective use of the Universal Resources Hub for scaffolding calls for presenting these resources in line with the SEF domains, indicators and stages of development.**

o **The DoE should also expand the Hub with more research-based examples of effective practice that provide an in-depth insight in the "improvement journeys" of schools and that support scaffolding against the School Excellence Framework.**

o **The DoE should establish a linkage between SPaRO and (i) the Universal Resources Hub and (ii) an up-to-date professional learning offer to allow for automated**

presentation of professional learning programmes/courses and (self-learning) resources that respond identified school improvement priorities.

- o Similarly, **the DoE should consider further developing its software platforms to allow for easy identification of schools that could be matched for school-to-school collaborations.** The self-assessment against the SEF indicators and SIP could allow for easy identification of potential schools to learn from.

- **The Quality Time Action Plan is a promising policy initiative for freeing up time for the NSW education profession that should continue to be prioritised within the DoE.** The DoE should monitor the effectiveness of the action plan in terms of actual – and perceived – workloads and professional learning time, and take additional measures as needed.

- **Given their strong interdependence and complementarity, the DoE should consider consolidating the School Excellency Policy and the SSM into one.** In addition, **the SSM and School Excellence Policy should place a much stronger focus on equity and student well-being.** This includes:

  - o **Clarifying how the School Support Delivery Framework supports schools in adopting a "whole school approach" for responding to students' learning and well-being needs.**

  - o **Continuing the "equity" programmes and/or built on these and expand their reach to ensure all NSW students receive the needed additional support to address the impact of educational disadvantage.** Integration of these programmes in the DoE school improvement reform should be considered.

  - o **Strengthening the NSW school improvement support structure, including student well-being services** (see Section 4).

- **Although the OECD team recognises the SEF as a comprehensive framework, the analysis of the NSW education context and recent (policy) developments argue for reviewing the framework.** This includes:

  - o **Reviewing the SEF to ensure realisation of the ambitions of the new curriculum is fully supported.**

  - o **Expanding the SEF with a fourth domain; "excellence in equity and student well-being".** In addition, the DoE should consider **including a student well-being target to help ensure it gets the much-needed attention in policy and practice, and recognises schools for pursuing a whole school approach.**

  - o **Expanding the Framework by including one or more quality indicators on staff well-being.**

  - o **A review of the "learning culture" concept in the SEF.** For this it may look towards the examples of countries like Finland, Latvia, the Netherlands and Norway, and sub-national entities like Wales (United Kingdom).

  The proposed SEF review calls for caution in making it too large and unwieldly. Explicit consideration should be given to limiting it by revisiting of domains and consolidating or dropping less relevant themes or indicators.

- **Treating school and system-leadership as a prime driver of reform:**

  - o **The DoE should make school leadership development a key component of the school improvement reform.**

  - o **The DoE should continue to invest in developing the capacity of its meso-level system leaders and ensure they have the knowledge, skills and "learning mind-set" to take on their vital roles in supporting schools in their improvement efforts.** The School Leadership Institute is well-placed to play a vital role in this.

- o **The job descriptions of Directors, Educational Leadership (DEL) and other meso-level system leaders should be reviewed to ensure they are further empowered to focus on their improvement function – along a more balanced focus on accountabilities.** A strong emphasis on promoting school-to-school collaborations and networking will be vital to disseminate and embed effective practices across the NSW school system.

- **NSW should develop a comprehensive DoE-wide professional learning strategy to help ensure greater co-ordination and a strategic approach to the different professional learning initiatives.** This strategy should:

  - o **Promote the development of a "learning culture", including a strong(er) recognition of the importance of collaborative working and learning within and between all NSW public schools, while ensuring school leaders and teachers have the time and space to engage in deep professional learning to fully understand the implications of the curriculum changes to their practice.** The DoE should consider the systematic promotion of collaborative inquiry-based pedagogical approaches through this strategy i.e. as part of the school improvement reform.

4. Ensuring a conducive environment to support the successful implementation of the school improvement reform

Many factors influence how a policy unfolds in practice and is often far from a straightforward exercise. The implementation process may require, on one hand, to rely initially on the existing educational governance and institutional settings, the available capacity, and the current policy environment. On the other hand, the implementation process may shape progressively these elements to reach the reform objectives (OECD, 2020[14]). Policies are also not designed in a vacuum and have to articulate with an existing policy framework. Complementary policies support the successful implementation of a new policy, while policy contradictions may challenge this (OECD, 2020[75]; Vanheukelom, Mackie and Ronceray, 2018[207]). Another factor influencing the successful implementation of education policies in many OECD countries at present are staff shortages and workload challenges. Attracting, retaining and developing a high-quality education profession is essential for securing short- and long-term success in policy implementation – and ultimately for ensuring all students reach their full potential (OECD, 2020[164]; Schleicher, 2018[208]). This final section of the report examines the "conduciveness" of the environment in which the education reforms are implemented in New South Wales (Australia) (hereafter NSW) by looking at the key factors of influence, offering concrete recommendations to support successful implementation of DoE school improvement reform.

Establishing a conducive institutional and policy context

Continuing and expanding efforts to work towards greater policy coherence

The OECD defines policy coherence as the systematic promotion of mutually reinforcing policy actions across government departments and agencies creating synergies towards achieving the agreed objectives (OECD, 2019[209]). For the purpose of this report, we define policy coherence as an outcome where various education policies and tools are aligned so that efforts in one policy area do not undermine efforts in another area, and even reinforce those efforts where possible. Policy incoherence can vary in scope and degree. The most challenging/detrimental types of incoherence can occur when general policy objectives are misaligned and result in contradictions and confusion among those expected to implement the new policy. Although not an easy task, the evidence suggests that policy coherence is essential for good governance of the education system and that the benefits outweigh the higher transaction costs (OECD, 2020[75]; Vanheukelom, Mackie and Ronceray, 2018[207]; Viennet and Pont, 2017[13]).

A lack of coherence and overlap in policies and services

This report has identified several examples of policy incoherence, overlap or lack of co-ordination between the SSM and other DoE policies and programmes and has offered some concrete opportunities for improvement. However, there are other examples beyond those identified, where coherence of policies is an issue. For example, a review of the DoE Outcome and Business Plan 2021/22 showed that there is an

ongoing curriculum reform, a Literacy and Numeracy programme, a NSW Mathematics Strategy and a programme on assessment (NSW Government, 2021[1]). The stakeholder interviews confirmed the perceived lack of alignment and seeming overlap between these and other DoE policies. The DoE's organisational structure, culture and business processes, as well as the sheer volume of policy initiatives that are initiated by the DoE are also factors of influence.

The large volume of policy initiatives puts at risk successful implementation and may lead to "reform fatigue"

The evidence suggests NSW public schools are challenged in their capacity to implement the policies and reforms that the DoE has embarked on in recent years, particularly because there are so many. The stakeholder interviews revealed the large number of reform programmes and policies, and often short time spans for schools to implement these, risks only partial implementation or schools simply ignoring these. Several stakeholders pointed to "policy- or reform fatigue" among some of the NSW education profession, which is not that surprising given the challenges it faces in terms of a heavy workload.

The OECD team was in fact struck by the large number of policies and supporting resources that the DoE produces and strives to implement. On the one hand these showcase the drive for results and competence of the DoE workforce and organisation at large. However, at the same time it challenges the DoE capacity to safeguard or move towards greater policy coherence.

The interviews with DoE officers revealed a full recognition and understanding of these challenges, and importantly a desire to strive for greater policy coherence across the DoE. The DoE has initiated several measures to realising this objective. For example, as part of the Quality Time Action Plan a range of improvements are underway that aim for streamlining of policies, improving administrative technologies and simplifying processes. As noted in the plan, the DoE anticipates further opportunities will present themselves as it continues to get feedback from teachers and school leaders across the state and learn from innovative schools approaching administration in a different way. This "bottom up" approach to stakeholder engagement and co-construction of policy solutions with the education profession can serve as a powerful means for working towards greater policy coherence and for creating the time and space for focussing on teaching and student learning and well-being (OECD, 2020[75]; OECD, 2018[118]).

Developing a vison for change to guide all improvement efforts and bring greater policy coherence

Research evidence shows that a key means for moving towards greater policy coherence is the development of an inspiring vision for change (the "why") to motivate the education profession and direct all improvement efforts and services towards. As mentioned earlier, the OECD team found that such a vision for change for the SSM and the education sector at large is missing at present. The DoE should consider formulating a vison for change to guide all improvement initiatives towards, aimed at empowering schools to put the new curriculum into practice. This could be an important opportunity for the DoE to engage the education profession and other stakeholders in defining this vision for change. As mentioned above, countries that have engaged their educators and other stakeholders in such a consultative process have often benefitted from enhanced trust and commitment to change (OECD, 2021[174]; Schleicher, 2018[12]).

Possible starting points for defining such a vision could be the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (the Declaration) and the Curriculum Review. The Declaration states that "Our vision is for a world class education system that encourages and supports every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face" (Education Council, 2019, p. 2[22]). The Declaration has two goals: 1) "the promotion of excellence and equity in the Australian

education system; and 2) that all young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community" (Education Council, 2019, p. 4[22]).

Additionally, the Curriculum Review offers a long-term vision "for a curriculum that supports teachers to nurture wonder, ignite passion and provide every young person with knowledge, skills and attributes that will help prepare them for a lifetime of learning, meaningful adult employment and effective future citizenship" (Masters, 2020, p. xi[65]). The DoE could seek the views of the NSW education profession and other stakeholders to reflect on these starting points and work towards developing a vision for change to direct all improvement initiatives towards.

Furthermore, the DoE should – as planned – use the initiated development of its new Strategic Plan as an opportunity for catalysing ongoing efforts to drive towards greater policy coherence. A strong consultation process with the education profession and other stakeholders to help develop the Strategic Plan – that builds on and integrates the DoE school improvement reform, would greatly benefit this effort.

A need to strengthen the school improvement support structure to ensure a "whole school approach"

Building on the recent review of student well-being services (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2022[54]), the DoE should – as planned – look at the school improvement structure that is currently given shape through several meso-level system leaders. The OECD team believes that a particular point of attention should be the DEL. The evidence shows that the DELs are dealing with heavy workloads and as a result may struggle to fulfil the roles effectively. The OECD team learned that DELs are often given many additional tasks by the DoE, often of a more administrative and bureaucratic nature that not only overwhelms them, but also limits their capacity to support school improvement efforts.

Part of the challenge is their "double role" as line manager which includes holding school principals to account for their performance, while being responsible for supporting school principals and their schools in improvement efforts. The evidence points to the conclusion that this double role may have "clouded the relationship" and caused unintended consequences in some cases. School principals – particularly those of schools whose performance has been low and/or who are new to the profession – may be hesitant or even reluctant to show their schools' weaknesses, as well as their own professional challenges when they know this may influence their own performance appraisal. Research evidence shows that when assessment and accountability arrangements are perceived as "high-stakes" this is likely to temper people's willingness and confidence to do things differently and innovate their practice, which will be vital for making sustainable school improvements (OECD, 2018[118]; Kools and Stoll, 2016[144]). The interviews with some stakeholders revealed further concerns about this double role, including some DELs being perceived to favouring schools when dealing with complaints by parents because of their often-close working relationships with principals.

Therefore, a point of attention for DoE should be a reflection on the DEL role and responsibilities. One option could be to "split" these, for example, by giving up their line manager role and focussing fully on the much-needed task of supporting schools in their improvement efforts. Such considerations should of course be made in relation to the roles and responsibilities of the Principals School Leadership (PSL), Principal Coach Mentors (PCM), as well as other system leaders.

Furthermore, the number of schools supported by a DEL was frequently raising in the interviews that the OECD team conducted. Currently, on average a DEL covers 20 schools. Several stakeholders noted that adjustments may be needed. These could be informed by a more tailored approach, based on schools' developmental stage and support needs, as well as geographical considerations of course. The school self-evaluation and Strategic Improvement Plan, and/or external validation, and the (above mentioned proposal for a) corresponding School Support Delivery Framework categorisation could provide valuable means for making possible adjustments (in due time).

In addition, a key question to examine is whether there is sufficient system-wide capacity to support schools in the areas of pedagogy, curriculum and assessment; a question that is particularly pertinent in light of the curriculum reform NSW has embarked on. With the Local Schools, Local Decisions (LSLD) reform, the DoE released over 800 of its officers who worked directly with schools to support student learning. The OECD interviews with school leaders, DELs and other stakeholders corroborated the findings of the LSLD evaluation, with several interviewees voicing their concerns about the DoE having reduced its central- or regional-level support such as curriculum consultants. The evidence suggests this has led to a deficit of guidance and support around pedagogy and curriculum programming, particularly in non-urban and rural schools for whom access to these specialised staff is more challenging (NSW Government, 2020[5]).

The OECD team has noted the partially untapped potential of promoting school-to-school collaborations, learned how some schools have engaged universities to draw from their expertise and capacities (in e.g. innovative pedagogies, research and inquiry). The team also recognises the School Support Delivery Framework as a promising policy initiative to enhance the system-wide capacity to provide targeted support to those schools that need it most, as is there of course the private sector that can offer support. That said, the new curriculum brings some fundamental changes to teaching and student learning which provides further impetus for examining whether this specific expertise is available (in sufficient numbers) to ensure all schools that need it (as identified by the SEF-based school self-evaluation and external validation process) can benefit from it.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, the OECD team identified a number of partners that play vital roles in the delivery or implementation of reforms and policies, including the SSM. The explicit recognition of "delivery bodies/partners", like NESA and the School Leadership Institute, and clarification of their roles and responsibilities would seem vital for the successful implementation of the DoE school improvement reform.

Recruiting, retaining and developing a high-quality education profession

Attracting, retaining and developing a high-quality education workforce is a prerequisite for every education system. The best performing education systems offer attractive working conditions and rewarding and intellectually stimulating careers for their education workforce, with opportunities for career progression and personal and professional growth (Schleicher, 2018[208]; Sutcher, Darling-Hammond and Carver-Thomas, 2016[210]). The perceived value and status of the education profession in society is a key factor that can impact deeply on aspiring and practising teachers, often determining who enters and remains in the profession. Evidence indicates teachers in high-performing education systems such as Alberta (Canada), Singapore and Korea feel their profession is valued by society (OECD, 2020[164]). Teacher shortages impact on all students, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds and with special education needs. Although a lack of sufficient teachers and school principals is not new in the international context, concerns about present and future shortages remain in many countries and jurisdictions (Schleicher, 2021[148]) – and as mentioned earlier, this includes NSW.

Staff shortages are likely to grow without urgent action

The NSW public school system is facing challenges in terms of staff shortages, with retirements outpacing recruitments (see Figure 4.1). Less people are also studying to become teachers in NSW, evidenced by an almost 30% reduction in enrolments in teacher training programmes between 2014-2019 (NSW Government, 2021[6]). At the secondary level are supply deficits in specific subject areas (STEM, languages, and others). Teacher supply challenges are particularly prevalent in schools with lower socio-economic status, and schools in rural and remote areas whose students' performance on average is below that of their peers in schools in urban areas (see Section 1) (NSW Government, 2020[211]; NSW Government, 2021[6]).

Figure 4.1. NSW workforce – enrolments in teacher training, appointments, vacancy rate and retirements, 2021
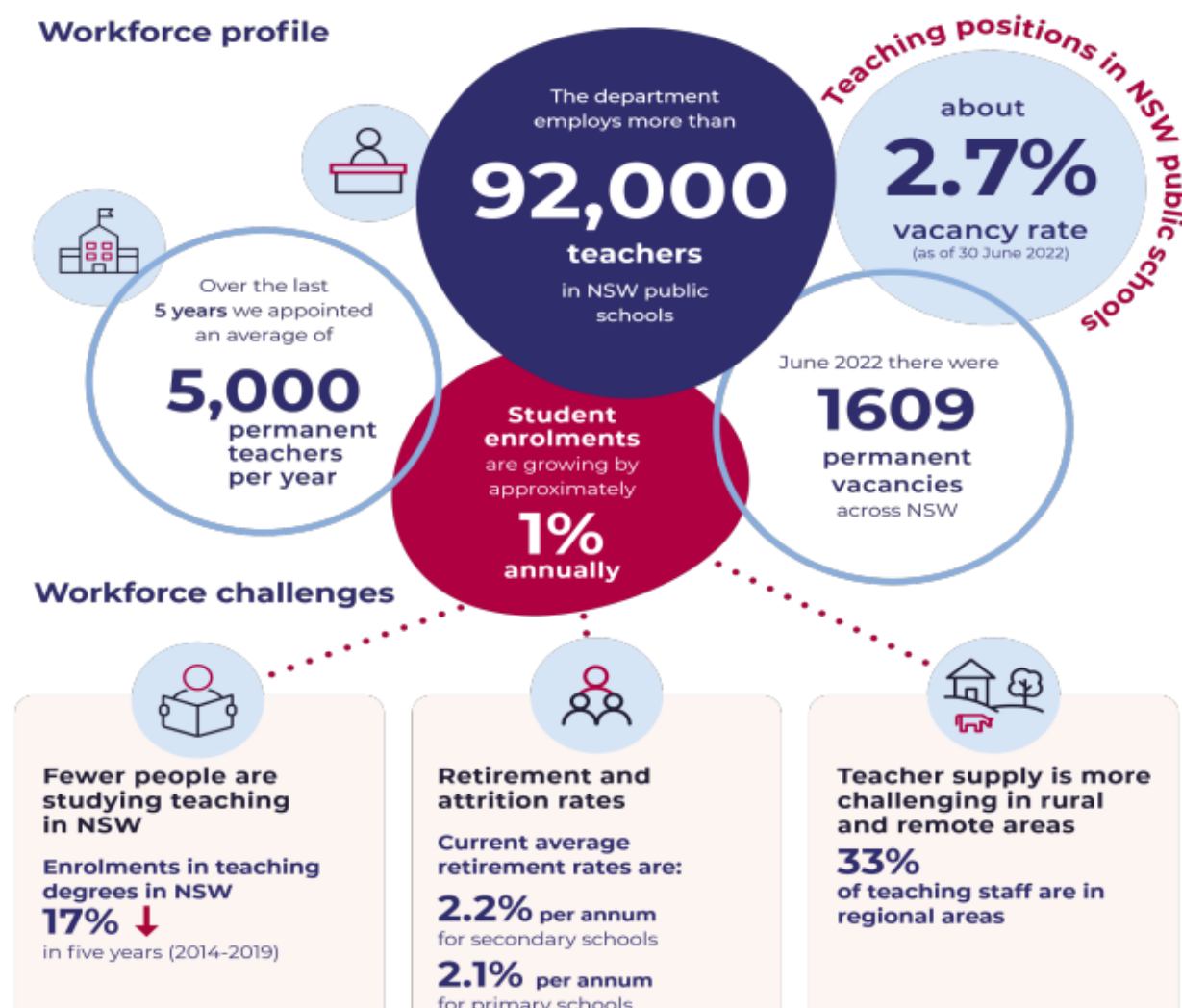
Source: NSW Government (2022[47]), Inquiry into teacher shortages in New South Wales - Submission No. 109, Legislative Council, Portfolio Committee No.3 – Education.

The NSW student population is projected to significant increase the next two decades (see Section 1). By 2036 total public school enrolments are projected to have grown by 20% compared to 2020 enrolments and reach nearly 966 000 students. By 2036, primary and secondary schools are projected to enrol 594 000 and 373 000 students respectively. The evidence also suggests that by 2036 NSW public schools will require at least 12 400 additional FTE teachers above 2020 FTE teacher numbers (Rorris, 2021[48]).

As in many OECD countries the challenge lies in responding to the shortages and demands for teachers in specific subjects and for students with disabilities, and in those schools that are facing difficulties in recruiting, often those schools in remote and rural locations. This calls for having access to detailed data about what disciplines teachers teach, to make detailed supply and demand projections, by discipline and location. In recent years, the DoE has worked to improve its data collection to be able to make such detailed short-, medium- and long-term supply and demand projections.

The need for enhancing working conditions

Teacher quality is determined by many factors, including the environment they work in. Good working conditions are key to attracting and retaining quality teachers and school leaders. Education systems should offer good financial packages and working conditions to prospective and in-service teachers and school leaders (OECD, 2019[159]). Many OECD countries have taken action to attract teachers and school leaders to high-need areas, with incentives found through increasing salaries, offering differential pay for specific expertise, providing scholarships and subsidies for teachers working in disadvantaged or rural and remote areas, and enhancing the provision of professional learning (OECD, 2022[212]; OECD, 2020[164]; OECD, 2018[118]).

While drafting this report an industrial dispute was ongoing between NSW Government and the teacher unions, partly in response to the heavy workload and concerns regarding staff well-being (Rorris, 2021[48]; Parliament of New South Wales, 2022[64]; NSW Government, 2022[213]). Findings from a survey of 8 600 teachers, commissioned by a NSW parliamentary inquiry committee, indicated that more than half of NSW teachers planned to leave the profession in the next five years. The top reasons mentioned were the heavy workload, a need for a better work/life balance and the job being too stressful (AITSL, 2021[214]).

Salaries are also an issue for dispute. Although first-year earnings by graduate teachers are competitive when compared to people with similar level bachelor degree working in other sectors (NSW Government, 2022[215]), teacher pay fails to increase in line with other professions requiring similar qualifications (Gavin, 2021[216]). However, similar to many other OECD countries, teachers and school leaders working in rural and remote locations in NSW, including areas with high teacher demand, are entitled to additional financial benefits (New South Wales Industrial Relations Commission, 2022[217]; NSW Government, 2022[215]).

The high proportion of temporary contracts is causing adverse effects for schools, teachers and students

Research evidence shows that temporary contracts can create essential levels of flexibility in the management of staffing levels to respond to changing student demographics and to keep long-term financial commitments in check. Temporary appointments may also facilitate the evaluation of a teacher's skill and ability to grow before offering a permanent contract. However, they can also create adverse effects for schools, teachers and students. Temporary teachers for example often do not benefit from the same statutory rights as their colleagues on permanent contracts e.g. when it comes to professional development opportunities or career and salary progression. Temporary teachers may need to move from one school to another and can be dismissed in a relatively straightforward manner, also possibly affecting their motivation to stay in the profession (OECD, 2019[195]; OECD, 2005[218]).

The stakeholder interviews conducted by the OECD team corroborated the findings of earlier studies that showed these and other adverse effects to negatively impact on NSW public schools, teachers and students (NSW Education Standards Authority, 2020[219]; McGrath-Champ et al., 2018[134]; Gallop, Kavanagh and Lee, 2021[220]). Temporary teachers in NSW are employed full-time for up to one year, or part-time for two terms or more (NSW Government, 2022[221]). Approximately 20% of NSW public school teachers are currently in temporary positions. The number of temporary teachers has increased rapidly, from 11 700 in 2011 to 21 400 in 2021 (an increase of more than 80%). In contrast, the number of permanent positions increased from 43 800 to 44 400 (a mere 1% increase) during the same period (Parliament of New South Wales, 2022[64]). The large proportion of temporary contracts is regarded by some as a barrier to retaining graduate teachers and negatively affecting their motivation, as is also evidenced by a growing number of newly qualified teachers leaving the profession. The OECD team's interviews with school leaders, teachers and DELs revealed several examples of the challenges schools face due to temporary teachers leaving their school upon completion of a short term or one-year contract. This negatively impacted on schools' improvement efforts.

The need for urgent action to invest in recruiting, retaining and developing a high-quality education profession

As is the case in many OECD countries, the challenge of present and future staff shortages is high on the education reform agenda of the NSW Government. In June 2022 the NSW Parliament initiated an inquiry on the issues facing the teacher supply in its public schools (Parliament of New South Wales, 2022[64]). Also, as mentioned earlier, in response the DoE has taken several measures including the Quality Time Action Plan (NSW Government, 2021[69]) and the DoE Teacher Supply Strategy (NSW Government, 2021[6]). Another recent example is the Rewarding Excellence in Teaching (REIT) reform that was announced by the NSW Government in August 2022 (NSW Government, 2022[222]). The REIT reform has two objectives:

1) To leverage the skills of highly effective teachers to strengthen teaching practice across our system, for the benefit of every student.

2) To create a more attractive career path for classroom teachers, while raising the status of the profession. The aim is to attract more people into teaching and ensure students have continued access to quality teaching from great teachers who might otherwise leave the classroom.

The reform was started by engaging in substantial research and consultations with key stakeholders. During September and October 2022, a survey was set out on this reform initiative. Over 1 350 staff including teachers, school leaders and other school staff in NSW public schools responded. These responses have helped shape an "Options paper" that sets out a number of proposed options for realising the reform objectives. This options paper will serve as input for an extensive consultation process that had started while finalising this report (NSW Government, 2022[222]). The OECD team believes this to be a promising reform as it is drawing from international research evidence and best practices, and is based on an extensive consultation process with the NSW education profession. The REIT reform – which is vital also for the successful implementation of the school improvement reform – should continue to be pursued and prioritised by the NSW Government in the coming years for it to be able to recruit, retain and develop sufficient numbers of high-quality education professionals to serve the learning and well-being needs of a growing student population.

That said, the OECD team was surprised to find that the reform fails to take into account the large numbers of teachers on temporary contracts. Responding to the reform objective of creating a more attractive career path for classroom teachers and the mentioned adverse effects that come with a large education workforce on temporary contracts, the DoE should consider expanding the REIT reform with an explicit focus on temporary teachers. The reform should explore options for facilitating their advancement to permanent positions.

Furthermore, the stakeholder interviews, as well as other research evidence, suggest that the negative media reporting on the NSW public school system has been harmful to the perception and valuing of the education profession (Shine, 2020[223]; Blackmore and Thorpe, 2003[224]; Fetherston and Lummis, 2012[225]). Such reporting may discourage people from joining or add to them leaving the education profession. On the flipside of the coin, the evidence suggests that the most successful education systems are often also those in which teachers are valued by society (Schleicher, 2018[208]). Therefore, in addition to the above noted policy and reform measures, the DoE should continue and where possible expand its communication efforts that emphasises the importance and good/excellent work of the NSW education profession. This includes identifying and publicly celebrating excellent teachers, "good practices" and successful examples of schools' "improvement journeys" that can inspire and inform educational change and innovation in other schools. This report has aimed to capture several of such good practices for further dissemination within NSW – and other OECD Member countries.

Continued engagement with the education profession and other stakeholders to ensure successful implementation of the school improvement reform and the larger reform agenda

To conclude this report, as mentioned above, while finalising this report the DoE was engaged in a series of consultations with the education profession and other stakeholders on a range of policy initiatives and reforms. It was apparent to the OECD team that these consultative efforts were "bearing fruit" in that these were providing the DoE with the much-needed feedback and expertise to (further) enhance the design and support successful implementation of these policies and reform. The OECD team would like to reiterate the importance of and express its appreciation for DoE's commitment to enhancing its engagement with the education profession and other stakeholders for enhancing the design and implementation of the SSM – that while preparing this report was already being updated and expanded into a comprehensive school improvement reform strategy.

The DoE should – as planned – continue the engagement and constructive dialogue with the education profession and other stakeholders to ensure successful implementation of the school improvement reform. This includes engaging the education profession and other stakeholders in the development of a monitoring and evaluation. This framework will support DoE and education stakeholders in the timely identification of implementation challenges and finding of suitable solutions. Importantly, the monitoring and evaluation framework will also support the identification and public celebration of realising key milestones and "good practices" that can inspire and inform further educational change and innovation across the NSW public school system.

Recommendations

- **The DoE should continue its efforts of working towards greater policy coherence**. Realising this objective will take time and a sustained commitment not only by DoE, but all education stakeholders.
- One key means for moving towards greater policy coherence is through **the development of a vision for change to guide all improvement initiatives towards**. Possible starting points could be the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (the Declaration) and the Curriculum Review. The DoE could seek the views of the NSW education profession and other stakeholders to reflect on these starting points and work towards developing a shared vision for change to direct all improvement initiatives towards.
- **The DoE should – as planned – use the initiated development of new Strategic Plan and the internal reflection on its business processes for catalysing ongoing efforts to work towards greater policy coherence, including by consolidating DoE policies, while streamlining its operations**. Again, collaboration with the education profession and other stakeholders, like NESA and the teacher unions, will be essential for enhancing policy coherence, as may it contribute to building trust.
- **The NSW Government should strengthen its school improvement support structure to ensure a "whole school approach"**. Building on the findings and recommendations of the recent review of student well-being services this includes:
  - **Reviewing the job descriptions of Directors, Educational Leadership (DEL) and other meso-level system leaders to ensure they are further empowered to focus on their improvement function, along with a more balanced focus on accountabilities** (see Section 3).
  - **Consideration should be given to the double role of DELs**. An option could be to "split" these, for example by giving up their line manager role and focussing fully on the much-needed task of supporting schools in their improvement efforts. Such a consideration should of course be made in relation to the roles and responsibilities of other system leaders.

- o **Adjustments in numbers of schools for which DELs are responsible may be needed. These could be informed by a more tailored approach based on schools' developmental stage and support needs**, as well as geographical considerations of course. The school self-evaluation and Strategic Improvement Plan, the external validation process, and the (proposal for a) corresponding School Support Delivery Framework categorisation provide valuable means for making possible adjustments.
- o **A key question to examine is whether there is sufficient system-wide capacity to support schools in the areas of pedagogy, curriculum and assessment; a question that is particularly pertinent in light of the curriculum reform NSW has embarked on**.
- o **The DoE should mobilise the partially untapped potential of systematically promoting school-to-school collaborations**.
- **The Rewarding Excellence in Teaching (REIT) reform should continue to be pursued and prioritised by the Government in the coming years for it to be able to recruit, retain and develop sufficient numbers of high-quality education professionals to serve the learning and well-being needs of a growing student population**.
  - o **The DoE should consider expanding the REIT reform with an explicit focus on temporary teachers**. The reform should explore options for facilitating their advancement to permanent positions.
- **The DoE should continue and where possible expand its communications on the importance and good/excellent work of the NSW education profession. This includes identifying and publicly celebrating excellent teachers, "good practices" and successful examples of schools' "improvement journeys" that can inspire and inform educational change and innovation in other schools**.
- As planned, **the DoE should continue the engagement and constructive dialogue with the education profession and other education stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation of the DoE school improvement reform**. This includes – as planned – engaging the education profession and other stakeholders in the development of the school improvement reform to support the timely identification of implementation challenges and finding of suitable solutions, as well as the public celebration of realising key milestones and "good practices" that can inspire and inform further educational change and innovation across the NSW public school system.

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Annex A. Team members

Professor Steve Davies OBE has been a Professor of Practice at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David since 2021. Before that he served as the Director of Education of the Welsh Government, from 2015 to 2021. In this senior leadership position, he worked directly with the Minister for Education to develop and deliver the most significant reform since devolution of the education system (in 1997). In this position, Steve worked closely with the key representatives of the middle tier of the Welsh education system and led the collaborations with the OECD and the Atlantic Rim Collaboratory, which is a global education movement that advances equity, broad excellence, inclusion, well-being, democracy, sustainability, and human rights in education.

Prior to this, Steve worked in the public and private education sectors within the United Kingdom and internationally. Steve was appointed Managing Director of the Education Achievement Service for South-East Wales in March 2012 after a successful spell as Managing Director of Gleeds-Cocentra Ltd, an education company that worked with more than 5 000 schools in the United Kingdom and internationally and 147 local authorities in England (United Kingdom) and Wales (United Kingdom). Steve held senior leadership roles in four local authorities, including senior school improvement roles in Cumbria and West Sussex and developed education delivery expertise through his work as Chief Inspector of Schools and Director of Education in two London Boroughs. Steve started his career as a teacher in secondary schools in Kent and Bristol. In 2022, Steve was awarded an OBE (Officer of the Order of the British Empire) in The Queen's Birthday Honours.

Marco Kools is a project manager and education analyst with the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills. He currently leads the Implementing Policies: Leading Education Change that consists of a complex portfolio of implementation support/technical assistance projects, including in the Flemish Community of Belgium (Belgium), Ireland, Latvia, Moldova, New South Wales (Australia) and Spain. He has specialised in various areas of education policy, including effective policy design and implementation, assessment and evaluation, and the development of (schools as) learning organisations.

Marco in September 2021 returned to OECD after a two-year secondment with UNICEF Laos where he served as Education Manager of the Partnership for Strengthening the Education System of Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) Project. Before that he worked at OECD with individual countries such as the Netherlands, Latvia, Sweden and Wales in support of their school improvement reform efforts. Between 2005 and 2012, Marco worked with UNICEF in the Solomon Islands, Laos and at the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Italy. Before that he worked in the field of education in the Netherlands, where he in 1999 started his career as a secondary school teacher. Marco has written and coordinated several publications and academic articles. He holds several degrees, including a PhD in Public Administration, MBA and a BSc in Educational Sciences.

Barry Kenny is working with the Implementing Education Policies at the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills. He is serving as a project manager and analyst for several tailored policy implementation support projects, including for New South Wales and Moldova. Prior to joining the OECD, Barry worked with the Teaching Council of Ireland in the development and implementation of teachers' professional learning policy, also supporting teacher research engagement. Barry began his career in education as a primary teacher and he has managed numerous projects in the not-for-profit education sector. He holds several degrees, including a MEd from Trinity College Dublin (TCD) where he is currently a PhD student.

Inés Sanguino is working with the Implementing Education Policies at the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills. Inés is coordinating and supporting several tailored policy implementation support projects. She has previously worked with organisations such as What Works for Children's Social Care and Unlocked Graduates. Most of her work has been in research, collaborating with various projects at the Junior Researcher Programme, King's College London and The University of Oxford where she also engaged in

tutoring undergraduates. Inés completed a BSc in Psychology, and an MPhil in Evidence-Based Social Intervention and Policy Evaluation as a "La Caixa" Scholar.

Solène Burtz is working with the Implementing Education Policies at the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills. Solène is serving as a project manager and analyst for several tailored policy implementation support projects, including for Ireland, Latvia and Spain. Prior to joining the OECD, Solène worked at the French National Institute for Public Service (former ENA) in Paris on international governance projects and capacity building for high-level civil servants in Europe and Africa. She previously worked for the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, specialising in bilingual education in the United States. Solène holds a Master's in Education Policy and International Development from University College London (UCL) Institute of Education in the United Kingdom.

Implementing Policies: supporting change in education

This document was prepared by the Implementing Education Policies team.

The OECD project *Implementing Policies: Supporting Effective Change in Education* offers peer-learning opportunities and tailored support to countries and jurisdictions to help them achieve success in the implementation of their policies and reform initiatives.

For more information:

Contact:

- Marco Kools, project manager & education analyst, marco.kools@oecd.org

Website: OECD Implementing Education Policies