Principal Performance Improvement Tool

ACER

Contents

Foreword

What is a highly effective school principal, and what do they do that makes them so effective?

The *Principal Performance Improvement Tool* sets out to answer these questions. It provides a point of reference that principals can use to reflect on their current practices and to identify areas in which their work could be still more effective.

The *Tool* was developed through a profession-led collaboration of school principals and the Australian Council for Educational Research, facilitated by the Western Australian Department of Education. The *Tool* describes the work and practices of highly effective principals based on lived school leadership experiences, combined with evidence from an accompanying review of international research findings.

In a nutshell, schools led by highly effective principals are especially successful in identifying and meeting the needs of all students. In these schools the principal leads a school-wide commitment to a single, deep-seated moral purpose: to see every student learning successfully and working toward their potential. The principal regards this as the core mission of the school and this commitment drives and guides all aspects of their work.

In practice, highly effective principals lead this agenda by:

- articulating and achieving widespread commitment to the school's moral purpose;

- creating a cohesive school culture built on strong, purposeful relationships;

- applying the school's available resources in ways that maximise outcomes for students;

- building teachers' commitment and capacity to make improvements in teaching practices;

- ensuring that decisions are informed by, and evaluated in terms of, quality data; and

- leading the collaborative implementation and systematic study of strategic change.

Importantly, the *Principal Performance Improvement Tool* is developmental; for each of these aspects of a principal's work, the Tool describes four levels of increasingly effective practice. These levels can be used in self-reflections and to identify specific areas for further attention and development. The *Tool* also should be useful to other school leaders aspiring to take on the role of principal.

Using the Tool

In using the *Principal Performance Improvement Tool* as a basis for self-reflection it is important to keep in mind that:

- The six domains (areas of practice), although designed to describe different aspects of a principal's work, are inevitably interrelated. Self-reflections made in relation to one domain are likely to be related to, and possibly influenced by, self-reflections made in other domains of the *Tool*.

- In each domain, the four levels Low, Medium, High and Outstanding describe increasingly effective practices. The practices described at any given level include, extend or are an improvement on practices described at lower levels.

- There is no expectation that a principal's practices will be at the same level in all six domains, and within any domain, a principal is likely to demonstrate some practices from different levels. The value in using the *Tool* is more likely to be in reflecting on the details of current practice than on making an overall judgement about a level of performance.

- Context is an important consideration when using the *Tool*. How a principal works and what they are able to do usually depends on contextual factors including: how long they have been a principal, how long they have been in the current school, the context in which the school operates and internal school factors.

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Chief Executive Officer
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Leading the moral purpose

Highly effective principals are driven by a personal commitment to seeing every student learning successfully and working toward their potential. Their ambition for the school is to nurture every student's talents and to provide all students with the knowledge, skills, attributes and values they will require for successful ongoing learning and life beyond school. They recognise that, for many students, education is the key to ameliorating disadvantage and they are driven by a moral imperative that has at its heart a commitment to the care and development of each and every student.

They appreciate that this means working as a school to understand individual learners, the points they have reached in their learning and their personal circumstances. They believe that every student is capable of making excellent personal progress when they are engaged, motivated to make the required effort and provided with well-targeted, challenging learning opportunities. These understandings and beliefs underpin and shape all facets of their leadership. They also expect those with whom they work, including staff, students, parents/carers and members of the school board/council, to share these beliefs and commitment. They take every opportunity to articulate the moral purpose of the school, to encourage others in their dedication to this purpose, and to align their work and the work of the school around improving outcomes for all students.

Just as highly effective principals have a deep belief in the ability of every student to make excellent ongoing progress in their learning, they also have a deep belief in the ability of the school to make ongoing improvements in its effectiveness. They promote a vision of a future in which the school is more effective in meeting the academic and non-academic needs of every student and they challenge and lead the whole school community toward that vision.

Highly effective principals also see themselves as members of a wider education community dedicated to seeing all students learning and being well prepared for their futures. They seek opportunities to contribute to, lead and influence this broader professional agenda, including by providing input to school education policy and decision making.

In summary, the principal's effectiveness in *leading the moral purpose* depends on their effectiveness in:

- leading a school-wide commitment to caring for, and promoting the development of, every student;
- promoting a school-wide belief in the capacity of every student to learn successfully;
- engaging and leading the school to higher levels of effectiveness in meeting individual student needs;
- making successful student learning the central consideration in all aspects of their leadership; and
- influencing others beyond the school in their commitment to, and pursuit of, this educational agenda.

Leading the moral purpose

OUTSTANDING

The principal is driven by a deep personal commitment to seeing every student's needs identified and met and all students engaged and learning successfully. This is their main priority in leading the school. They are motivated by a moral imperative that has at its heart a commitment to the care and development of each and every student. Underpinning this commitment is a belief in the capacity of every student to learn when provided with the right conditions and opportunities.

The principal articulates and continually champions these beliefs in ways that are intellectually and emotionally stimulating. They make them part of everyday conversations with staff, students, parents/carers, members of the board/council and the wider community, and the central consideration in school-wide reflections on progress and performance. They work to ensure that all members of the school community have ownership of, and are committed to, these shared beliefs and that, for the staff of the school, daily work has deep meaning because of its connection to this common purpose.

The principal is highly respected for initiatives they have taken and innovative programs they have introduced to address the needs of particular students (for example, Indigenous, disengaged, new arrivals, students with disabilities, vocationally focused students, teenage mothers). These initiatives may have required the principal to establish effective partnerships with local businesses, community groups, health organisations or other educational institutions.

Reflected in the principal's activities is a conviction that, no matter how poorly or how well the school is performing, it is capable of still greater effectiveness. They lead and promote a vision of a future in which the school is more successful in achieving its core mission. They align the work of the school around this vision and ensure that all members of staff understand their roles and feel part of the collective effort to bring it to fruition. Staff describe feeling a sense of influence and empowerment, as well as responsibility and accountability for achieving the school vision. When required, the principal is willing to take calculated risks, to demonstrate courage and to take a firm stand in support of the school and its moral purpose.

The principal also sees themselves as part of a wider professional community dedicated to seeing all students learning successfully and being well prepared for their futures. They work closely with other schools to share knowledge and experiences and they initiate and lead collaborations beyond the school to achieve enhanced outcomes for students.

HIGH

The principal is driven by a commitment to delivering quality education. Their main priority is to ensure that all students are exposed to an agreed curriculum delivered by accomplished teachers, with an accompanying range of extracurricular opportunities. Underpinning the principal's commitment is a belief in setting high standards and giving every student an opportunity to succeed (although they may be less focused on what it would take as a school to guarantee the success of every student).

The principal explicitly communicates these expectations to staff, students, parents/carers, members of the board/council and the wider community. They make clear their commitment to quality practices throughout the school. This includes delivery of the intended curriculum and aligned assessment processes to establish how well students have mastered year-level curricula. Their commitment to quality practices extends to teacher professional learning, mentoring arrangements, teacher collaboration, teamwork, performance management and a school-wide focus on the interpretation and use of data. The principal monitors success in terms of improved school results, particularly on external tests and examinations.

The principal has taken initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the school. For example, they may have introduced new curriculum materials, teaching programs, extracurricular activities or professional learning programs, some of which may have involved working with external organisations.

The principal works with staff to plan ways of improving teaching and learning within the school. This is undertaken at the level of the whole school, but the principal also encourages collaboration within staff teams to identify, plan and implement ways of improving the quality of teaching and learning and thus student outcomes.

The principal actively engages in professional communities beyond the school, including by working productively with other schools to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

MEDIUM

The principal is driven by a commitment to the smooth running of the school. Their main priority is to provide all students and teachers with a safe, orderly, well-resourced learning environment. Underpinning the principal's commitment is a belief in the importance of clear structures, processes and expectations to the effective operation of the school and to successful teaching and learning. They see their role primarily as the creation of an environment in which the core work of the school can be pursued by others.

The principal communicates this priority to staff, students, parents/carers, members of the board/council and the wider community. Their daily work is focused on running a school in which rules are clear, behaviour is managed, external obligations are met, families are content, complaints are minimised and risks are mitigated. They place a high priority on establishing and implementing consistent school processes, overseeing operations and effectively managing the school's resources. They expect all staff to be similarly committed to ensuring that the school runs smoothly and communicate this expectation regularly. Through their actions they may communicate an underlying belief that the quality of teaching and learning in the school is the sole responsibility of teachers.

Initiatives the principal has taken and the contributions they have made are more likely to relate to aspects of school management, such as operations, processes, buildings, grounds and the introduction of new technologies, than to the direct improvement of teaching and learning.

They lead the collaborative development of the school's strategic plan with staff and members of the board/council, although this may have elements of being a compliance activity. The resulting strategic plan usually does not include strong strategies for addressing the needs of all students or for ensuring that all students learn successfully. There appears to be quiet acceptance of the inevitability of some students in the school performing poorly.

The principal participates in professional activities beyond the school and is committed to working with other schools.

LOW

The principal is driven by a variety of influences, which may include self-interest. Their main priority is to maintain the status quo, avoid risks and reputational damage to themselves and the school and to manage staff and parent concerns. They are not significantly engaged in the core business of teaching and learning.

The principal does not clearly communicate school priorities, which members of the school community may describe as inconsistent. It may not be clear what the principal stands for and the school vision statement may be primarily for compliance purposes. The principal may openly question the capacity of all students to learn successfully (including by explicitly or implicitly communicating lower expectations of students from particular cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds) and use students' backgrounds as an excuse for the school's performance. Across the school community, there is little confidence in, or expectation of, improvements in student performance.

It may be difficult to identify worthwhile initiatives or changes that the principal has introduced and the changes they have made may have been counterproductive. They tend not to question existing arrangements or to address obvious problems in the school and in general play it safe and take the course of least resistance.

The principal has no obvious vision of a better future for the school and implicitly views and represents the work of the school as routine. This 'business as usual' approach does not inspire emotional connection to a shared improvement agenda. The principal has been ineffective in aligning the work of the school around the objective of improving teaching, learning and student outcomes. Improving the quality of classroom teaching may be given lip service, but is not a personal priority of the principal. The absence of a meaningful school vision means that staff tend to work in isolation rather than in concert.

The principal appears to see little value in educational activities beyond the school and, when they do engage in such activities, the implications for the school and their own leadership are unclear.

2 Building productive relationships

Highly effective principals understand that the successful pursuit of the school's mission depends on a team effort, which in turn depends on strong, purposeful relationships between all members of the school community as well as with external stakeholders. They foster a cohesive culture in which the whole school collaborates around the common objective of meeting every student's learning needs and seeing all students learning successfully.

They understand that high levels of trust, mutual respect and alignment of purpose are essential to a high-performing culture focused on achieving change, which inevitably involves taking risks and innovating. They work to promote relationships of this kind across the school community, including by themselves modelling optimism, open and honest communication and persistence.

Highly effective principals build, and encourage others to build, strong and effective relationships with individual members of staff as they work to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and student outcomes. They understand the importance of establishing trust and of frank two-way conversations in reflecting on current practices and finding ways to improve these.

They are also committed to creating and maintaining an inclusive school environment that is welcoming, fair and equitable, and they place a high priority on the health and wellbeing of all students and staff, including themselves.

Highly effective principals build mutually beneficial relationships with families, other schools, external organisations and the local community for the purposes of sharing experiences and expertise, enhancing opportunities for students, and better meeting individual learning needs.

In summary, the principal's effectiveness in *building productive relationships* depends on their effectiveness in:

- creating a cohesive culture built around a commitment to improving outcomes for students;
- communicating and modelling the kinds of behaviours and relationships they wish to see;
- building and promoting staff relationships that are based on high levels of trust and respect;
- creating an inclusive school environment in which everybody feels valued and supported; and
- establishing productive partnerships with parents, the local community and other organisations.

Building productive relationships

OUTSTANDING

The principal leads and promotes a caring and cohesive school culture conducive to the pursuit of the school's mission. They work to create warm, purposeful and mutually supportive relationships between staff, parents, students and members of the wider community.

In the principal's interactions with others they model behaviours consistent with the culture they are working to promote. These behaviours reflect high levels of trust, optimism, persistence, resilience, empathy and self-awareness. The principal is a supportive presence in the school and is sensitive to what is happening and to the experiences of others. They interact with students and take an interest in their learning and wellbeing. They also challenge staff behaviours when required, confront conflict productively and resolve issues proactively and promptly. By seeking regular feedback from others they model responsiveness and eagerness to learn.

In pursuing improved teaching, learning and student outcomes, the principal works both directly and indirectly with individual members of staff. They communicate openly, listen to and consider viewpoints, and share professional knowledge and experience. They work to understand the strengths, interests and personal circumstances of colleagues and use these understandings to build robust relationships, influence practice and develop staff capacity.

Consistent with their commitment to seeing every student learning and working toward their potential, the principal promotes a school environment that is inclusive, welcoming and equitable. They collaboratively plan and implement initiatives to encourage and celebrate diversity and to ensure a culturally responsive and socially inclusive school. They also actively prioritise the health and wellbeing of students and staff, including their own.

The principal initiates and builds effective relationships and partnerships with key stakeholders and outside agencies; develops mutually beneficial relationships with other schools and professional associations (sometimes globally); and actively supports staff in their development of productive relationships with parents and other stakeholders.

HIGH

The principal leads and promotes a positive school culture based on harmonious relationships and mutual respect.

In their interactions with others, the principal models collegiality, reliability, fairness and a commitment to supporting others. Staff typically describe the principal as dedicated, approachable, sensitive and supportive. They are readily accessible to staff, students and parents and are regularly seen interacting with members of the school community. They also take time to acknowledge and celebrate school, student and teacher success.

The principal interacts with individual members of staff in relation to their day-to-day work, although this may be largely in the context of school processes such as performance management and staff professional development. In these interactions, the principal is welcoming and supportive. They develop, promote and support effective teams and encourage leadership at all levels in the school. They also encourage events and opportunities to build relationships and a team spirit.

The principal is committed to maintaining an inclusive school environment in which all students and staff feel welcome and valued and they communicate this commitment clearly and regularly. They work to ensure the effective integration of all students and staff into the school community and act swiftly to address any signs of marginalisation or discrimination. They also are committed to the health and wellbeing of all students and staff.

The principal builds relationships with external organisations in the interests of improving opportunities and outcomes for students and plays an active role in school networks and professional associations.

MEDIUM

The principal works to maintain a school culture that allows people to get on with their work. They have found ways to work with staff, students, parents and the wider community to minimise tensions and work around differences.

In their interactions with others, the principal is cordial and polite. They maintain respectful relationships and expect others to do the same. In general, their interactions are focused and business like and so may be limited and infrequent. They may have limited direct contact with students.

The principal has interactions with individual members of staff, however these tend to be in more formal staff meetings and other group settings. In these meetings, the focus usually is on school policies and processes rather than on matters relating to teaching and learning. The principal consults with staff, but often only in relation to major changes in school policies and practices. In general, they do not engage with teachers in relation to their teaching or build relationships by getting to know them.

The principal espouses an inclusive school culture, but may not be proactive in communicating this commitment, celebrating diversity or designing and implementing initiatives to ensure particular students and staff feel welcome and valued. They also are committed to the health and wellbeing of students and staff, although this may be limited to mitigating risks to health and wellbeing.

The principal establishes relationships beyond the school but these tend to be limited and focused on specific, short-term objectives. They participate in wider school networks and meetings.

LOW

The principal has not built a culture of collaboration and trust and this undermines the work and effectiveness of the school. The principal's relationships are generally not well developed, contributing to unresolved tensions between some parents and/or teachers and the principal.

The principal's interactions with others are often unproductive. They have not built effective relationships with, or won the trust and support of, most staff. Their communications are often limited and one-way. In their interactions with others, the principal may be described as: unpredictable, unapproachable, less than open and honest, promoting a divisive culture, engaging in favouritism, making decisions behind closed doors, dismissive and/or defensive. They regularly use their positional authority rather than interpersonal skills to get things done. Staff may describe them as distant and aloof.

The principal has very little, if any, direct engagement with staff in relation to their day-to-day work and generally makes little effort to support and influence the practices or development of individual members of staff. They do little to build leadership skills in others or to encourage the development and work of professional teams. They may be described as having an autocratic management style, making decisions hastily with little or no consultation or explanation. They may micromanage in ways that undermine staff confidence. Or they may have a laissez-faire approach to leading the school, failing to engage when they should and over-relying on the leadership of others.

As a result, the school environment is not particularly welcoming. Some in the school community may feel marginalised, undervalued or ignored. Levels of staff satisfaction and community engagement tend to be low, and staff turnover tends to be high as a direct result of dissatisfaction with the principal. There may be reports of staff experiencing stress and leaving the school, and of parents withdrawing their children because of the principal. The workplace may be described as a threat to mental health and wellbeing.

The principal does not build productive relationships with external stakeholders or other schools.

3 Creating enabling conditions

Highly effective principals direct and apply the school's available resources in ways that maximise outcomes for students. They understand that the resources available to them – time, staff expertise, money, school facilities and infrastructure, the board/council, school policies and processes, and external stakeholders – are key determinants of how well the school achieves its mission. They work to further develop these resources and to harness and direct them to the improvement of teaching, learning and student outcomes.

Highly effective principals ensure that their objective of making best use of available school resources to create a coherent, focused and effective operating environment is understood throughout the school. They encourage, support and expect others to work with them in this agenda.

To the extent possible given the size of the school, they play a hands-on role in the planning, recruitment, development and deployment of the school's human resources, including by overseeing processes for selecting, inducting, coaching/mentoring and building the capacity of staff.

They apply the school's financial resources to the objective of maximising outcomes for students. This requires them to take responsibility for budgeting and financial planning, targeting available money effectively, and actively pursuing alternative sources of funding.

Highly effective principals act to ensure that the school's facilities and infrastructure, including technologies, are used to maximum benefit, and they look for ways to enhance and deploy these to improve teaching and learning.

They ensure that time is used efficiently and effectively. This involves detailed forward planning, ensuring that deadlines are met, minimising time-wasting activities and protecting quality time for teaching and learning. They also understand that an orderly school environment in which there is clarity about policies, processes, roles and responsibilities is a key to success and they work to clarify and improve these.

Highly effective principals also see the board/council, parents and community stakeholders as important resources in the pursuit of the school's mission and prioritise the enhancement of these relationships and opportunities.

In summary, the principal's effectiveness in *creating enabling conditions* depends on their effectiveness in:

- selecting, developing and making best use of available staff experience and expertise;
- targeting the school's financial and physical resources on improved student outcomes;
- ensuring that available time is used efficiently and effectively for quality teaching and learning;
- clarifying and communicating school policies and processes and staff roles and responsibilities; and
- drawing on resources, perspectives and expertise of parents, the board/council and the community.

Creating enabling conditions

OUTSTANDING

The principal is strongly focused on developing and applying the school's available physical and human resources in ways that maximise outcomes for students. They create a coherent school operating environment aligned with the school's mission and the context in which the school works (including the regulatory and policy context). They encourage, support and expect others to be similarly ambitious in creating conditions and securing and enhancing resources to improve the quality of teaching, learning and student outcomes.

The principal is committed to creating the best possible team to deliver improved student outcomes. They put in place quality processes for workforce planning and for selecting, inducting and mentoring new staff; deploy existing staff in ways that make optimal use of their expertise and interests; invest in targeted and strategic staff capacity building; and empower others by encouraging leadership in the context of professional teams.

They build skills in financial management, apply discretionary funds to initiatives to improve outcomes for students, actively identify alternative sources of funding, and develop and deploy the school's facilities, technologies and other physical resources to improve student learning and wellbeing. This may include the creation of special-purpose facilities or spaces within the school to meet the needs of particular students.

The principal acts to ensure that time is used efficiently and effectively for teaching and learning. They intervene to protect classroom time from extraneous demands and unnecessary interruptions, eliminate time-wasting activities and busy work, and plan ahead so that available school time is used to maximum benefit. School policies and processes are designed to promote quality teaching and learning.

They see members of the board/council as resources and partners in the pursuit of the school's mission to improve outcomes for all students and find practical ways to engage them in building the school's capacity and their capacity as a board. They also establish and maintain purposeful partnerships with local businesses, community organisations, schools and other educational institutions to access external expertise, resources and opportunities for students.

HIGH

The principal is focused on creating and maintaining an orderly, safe, well-resourced environment in which all staff and students feel connected, valued and supported. They work to ensure that the school has quality teachers and non-teaching staff as well as quality physical resources. They ensure that roles, responsibilities and behavioural expectations are clear, and that school structures, policies and processes are communicated and understood.

They put in place quality human resource processes in areas such as staff recruitment, induction, performance management and professional development. They identify staff capable of taking on formal leadership roles and give them additional responsibility, training and support. They also establish and support the work of teams within the school.

The principal ensures that quality processes are used in the preparation of the school budget and in managing the school's finances. They work to ensure that discretionary funds are used wisely and share an appropriate level of financial detail with the board/council. They place a priority on improving the school's facilities and infrastructure and work with parents and the board/council to achieve this.

The principal undertakes forward planning to ensure that the school runs smoothly. All members of the school community are well informed through timely communications. Timetables are clearly communicated and school deadlines are routinely met. The principal also works to ensure that all staff and students understand school policies, processes, roles and responsibilities.

The principal has established a good working relationship with the board/council, which operates effectively. They establish partnerships and relationships with external bodies, although the objectives and mutual benefits may not always be clearly articulated.

MEDIUM

The principal maintains a school environment in which staff and students have access to the resources they need. They take seriously their stewardship of the school and its physical and human resources, but are less focused on how those resources might be significantly enhanced or employed more effectively. In general, they are more focused on operational matters than on the strategic development of the school's capacity.

The principal works productively with the staff they have. Staff induction processes and mentoring arrangements are in place, although these may be limited and somewhat informal. The principal supports staff professional development, although this may be largely in response to staff requests rather than being planned and strategic.

The principal manages the school's finances competently, but is not particularly innovative in applying available school funds or in sourcing additional funds. They place a priority on ensuring that the school's buildings, grounds and infrastructure are well-maintained and accessible to all.

The principal plans and manages the timing of school activities, but is not always focused on the most effective uses of available time. For example, they may not be proactive in protecting classroom time for teaching and learning or in minimising disruptions, and time in meetings may not always be used efficiently. They ensure that school policies and procedures are documented but may be less focused on ensuring that they are widely understood and implemented.

The principal engages effectively with the board/council, although they may not have high expectations of members' contributions to the effective oversight of the school and its work. They build relationships with bodies external to the school, but may not make strategic use of those relationships to improve outcomes for students.

LOW

There is little evidence that the principal is focused on developing the school's capacity or making best use of available resources. Their behaviour suggests that they have limited awareness of the expertise and resources available to the school and are not committed to the most effective use of those resources.

The principal has very little obvious commitment to developing staff capacity. There is little or no evidence of strategic workforce planning and the appointment of staff tends to be ad hoc. Staff commonly describe feeling that best use is not being made of their experience and expertise. The principal's staffing decisions may lack due process and/or be counterproductive. For all these reasons, some staff may have left the school.

The management and enhancement of the school's finances and physical resources are low priorities for the principal. Lack of attention to financial management may result in budget over-runs and unproductive expenditure.

The principal does not ensure that all staff have access to the resources they require and there may be inequities in access to resources.

The principal regularly leaves tasks to the last minute, putting staff under pressure. Deadlines are missed and errors are common, resulting in a climate of frustration, stress and low morale. There is uncertainty about, and inconsistency in, school processes, expectations and responsibilities. Incidents within the school are not well managed and the principal may be dismissive of staff and community concerns.

Rather than using the board/council as an asset, the principal may keep members busy with low-level operational and policy matters. They may have alienated and lost the confidence of sections of the community and teachers may describe feeling disempowered and retreat to their classrooms.

4 Promoting improved teaching

Highly effective principals place a very high priority on improving student outcomes by improving the effectiveness of classroom teaching. They pursue this priority by building teachers' commitment and capacity to make sustainable improvements in their day-to-day teaching practices.

They understand that a key to improved teaching is the implementation of practices that have been demonstrated through experience and research to make measurable improvements to the quality of student learning. They draw on this evidence and their own curriculum knowledge and teaching expertise to model and encourage the use of proven teaching strategies throughout the school.

Highly effective principals put in place school-wide processes to support teachers in their implementation of effective teaching. These processes include collaborative planning, mentoring arrangements, classroom observations and the provision of feedback on teaching effectiveness. They share responsibility for improving teaching with other leaders in the school, build the capacity of others to guide and support more effective teaching, and work both directly and indirectly with individual classroom teachers.

They also encourage and support professional learning focused on improving teaching effectiveness. They work to create a professional learning culture by modelling ongoing learning themselves and by designing and participating in professional learning activities. They encourage and empower staff to work as teams to investigate ways to improve teaching, to reflect on current practices and to evaluate the impact of the changes they make.

Highly effective principals also work to improve teaching, learning and student wellbeing by introducing school-wide changes and innovations in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and reporting (for example, changes in learning priorities, teaching strategies, learning technologies and learning spaces). These changes may be made as a response to data on how well the school is achieving its objectives.

In summary, the principal's effectiveness in *promoting improved teaching* depends on their effectiveness in:

- promoting the use of more effective, evidence-based teaching practices throughout the school;

- providing high quality support to classroom teachers in their implementation of best-practice teaching;

- creating a school-wide culture focused on continually learning how to improve teaching effectiveness;

- encouraging teams to engage in the systematic investigation of alternative teaching strategies; and

- introducing and leading school-wide initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Promoting improved teaching

OUTSTANDING

Improving the quality of classroom teaching is a key priority of the principal and a significant component of their work. They employ a range of strategies to build teachers' understandings of the need for, and capacities to implement, more effective, school-wide teaching practices.

The principal promotes teaching that includes diagnosing where individual students are in their learning, identifying skill deficits and misunderstandings, and implementing proven, subject-specific interventions to address difficulties and to facilitate further learning. They encourage teacher collaboration to analyse student work and progress, diagnose problems and implement and evaluate specific teaching interventions.

The principal uses their curriculum knowledge and teaching experience to promote effective learning environments and shared, evidence-based teaching practices. They implement coaching and mentoring arrangements, observations of classroom teaching, feedback through student surveys, and one-on-one conversations with teachers about their teaching. They build the skills of others to support improved teaching and work both directly and indirectly with individual classroom teachers.

Importantly, the principal creates a school-wide professional learning culture. They model personal commitment to ongoing learning, regularly participate in professional learning activities, challenge and support the professional learning of colleagues, and create and support teams and peer-to-peer collaborations – all with a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching. This includes leading a culture of inquiry into practice by systematically investigating alternative teaching strategies, measuring and evaluating impact, and critically reflecting on the results of ongoing efforts to improve teaching practices.

The principal also leads the introduction of whole-school changes and innovations to improve teaching effectiveness. These take into account the school context and may be made in response to, and be guided by, data on how the school is performing.

HIGH

The principal is committed to improving teaching across the school and initiates and supports professional learning and other activities to drive improved classroom teaching. They actively encourage and support teachers and school leaders in their efforts to improve day-to-day teaching.

The principal promotes the implementation of general teaching practices demonstrated through research to be effective in improving learning and enhancing student outcomes (for example, setting learning goals, overt teaching, peer tutoring and providing feedback), but may be less focused on promoting 'clinical' teaching practices such as establishing and understanding where individuals are in their learning; diagnosing specific skill deficits and misunderstandings; implementing targeted, subject-specific interventions to address obstacles to progress; and assessing and monitoring individuals' long-term growth in an area of learning.

The principal puts in place school-wide processes that include setting performance objectives for teachers, conducting regular performance reviews, holding teachers accountable for improved student performance, and challenging underperforming teachers. They expect colleagues in leadership roles to work directly with teachers, including by providing coaching to improve the quality of teaching. They also expect staff to work collaboratively and in teams to support each other's ongoing improvement.

The principal is committed to the professional development of all staff, which is aligned with and planned around school needs and priorities and includes significant in-school, experiential learning. They encourage collaboration and reflective conversations to improve teaching practice and they support teachers to investigate alternative approaches in their work.

The principal initiates and leads collaborative processes to review and, if necessary, make changes to strengthen the school curriculum and teaching practices.

MEDIUM

The principal is committed to ensuring that teachers have what they need to teach effectively. They are proactive in providing this support and, where possible, respond positively to teachers' requests for additional resources and professional learning opportunities. They lead and participate in discussions of curriculum, teaching and learning, but may not initiate school-wide changes to drive more effective teaching practices.

From time to time the principal introduces programs that are promoted as 'evidence-based', 'research-based' or 'brain-based' approaches to teaching and learning. However, they may not always differentiate programs with a solid evidence base from those with little or no supporting evidence.

The principal supports teachers to make ongoing improvements in the quality of their teaching, but this support often is in response to teachers' requests rather than being initiated by the principal. There may be school-wide processes in place (such as performance management processes), but these may not be strongly linked to improved teaching practices and so are minimally effective in driving better teaching.

The principal values teacher professional learning, but professional development may occur primarily in response to teacher requests. The principal may not be proactive in aligning professional learning with school priorities, identifying the professional learning needs of staff or encouraging the sharing of what has been learnt though professional development activities.

The principal leads occasional whole-school changes to the curriculum, but these are generally not focused on improving teaching effectiveness.

LOW

The principal is largely disconnected from matters relating to the school curriculum, classroom teaching and assessment, which they may see as the responsibility of others. They may have no obvious personal position on effective teaching practices, and if they do promote a particular approach, this may lack an underpinning evidence base. Their primary focus may be on operational matters.

The principal is not engaged in discussions of, or attempts to identify, more effective teaching practices. They may be attracted to educational fads. If they introduce new programs, there is likely to be little accompanying explanation, rationale or ongoing commitment. They may display limited understanding of curriculum delivery and make little or no contribution to building teachers' instructional capacities.

The principal has little or no interaction with teachers around classroom teaching. They have a limited basis for evaluating the quality of classroom teaching and so provide little or no useful feedback to individual teachers on their practices. Underperforming teachers are not challenged and hard conversations do not occur. Visits to classrooms by the principal or other school leaders are rare and classroom observations, when they do occur, are ineffective in improving teaching and learning.

The principal places a low priority on professional development activities, which they may see as a distraction, even when the school's circumstances allow and would benefit from greater staff engagement in professional learning. Professional development that they do provide may be of questionable relevance and of little impact. The results of any professional learning they do personally tend to be invisible to others in the school. Mentoring arrangements are absent or ineffective.

They either do not take initiatives to improve the quality of teaching or introduce a flurry of unrelated activities with little or no underlying rationale.

5 Driving data-informed practice

Highly effective principals are committed to informed decision making. They expect school initiatives and classroom teaching to be guided by, and to respond to, evidence of existing student needs and performance. They promote the school-wide collection and use of quality data to identify starting points for action, to set goals for improvement, monitor changes over time, and to evaluate the impact of actions and decisions to improve student outcomes and wellbeing.

Highly effective principals actively and directly monitor the performance of the school. For this they use a variety of evidence, including student achievement and wellbeing data; surveys of parents, students, teachers and the community; informal observations; and anecdotal feedback. They use input of these kinds to inform and guide their leadership and the work of the school. This includes identifying priorities for action and areas requiring improvement, benchmarking performances against the achievements of other schools, setting targets for improved performance, monitoring progress, and reflecting on the effectiveness of the school's improvement efforts.

They also expect and require teachers and other staff of the school to use data to monitor student learning and to guide day-to-day teaching and decision making. They clearly communicate their expectation that teachers will use evidence to establish where individuals are in their learning, diagnose student difficulties and misunderstandings, set goals for students' further learning, monitor individual growth over time, and evaluate the effectiveness of teaching strategies and interventions.

Highly effective principals understand the importance of building their own skills and the skills of colleagues in collecting, analysing, interpreting and using data effectively. They provide access to training and put in place processes such as mentoring and team conversations to build the data literacy levels of staff.

They also work to ensure the school infrastructure required to make best use of data, including instruments and systems for collecting, recording, storing, analysing and displaying data. This infrastructure may include assessment resources, survey instruments and electronic systems and processes for capturing, recording and interrogating data.

In summary, the principal's effectiveness in *driving data-informed practice* depends on their effectiveness in:

- developing a school-wide understanding that all decision making should be guided by evidence;

- modelling the analysis and use of data to monitor progress, set targets and make decisions;

- promoting teachers' use of data to identify starting points for teaching and to monitor learning;

- building their own and colleagues' skills in collecting, analysing, interpreting and using data; and

- ensuring access to quality school infrastructure to collect, record, store, analyse and display data.

Driving data-informed practice

OUTSTANDING

The principal clearly communicates their strong expectation that the work of the school will be guided by quality data on student achievement and wellbeing. In this way, they promote a school-wide culture of informed decision making, transparency and collaboration around the use of data. They champion the use of data to identify starting points for school-wide action and classroom teaching, to set realistic but challenging goals for learning and improvement, to monitor progress/growth over time, and to evaluate the impact of decisions and interventions.

The principal actively monitors the performance and organisational health of the school to identify ways to improve outcomes for students. They work with staff to study trends over time, identify areas in which the school is performing unusually poorly or unusually well and monitor the performances of subgroups of the student population to guide actions and decisions. They prioritise data that will be most helpful for decision making and use data to benchmark the school against external standards of performance and to communicate school progress (eg, to the board/council; in the Annual Report).

They communicate their expectation that teachers will plan teaching and learning in response to evidence of students' current levels of achievement and learning needs. They encourage the regular collection of classroom data, including diagnostic information about student difficulties, skill deficits and misunderstandings. They work with leaders in the school to support teachers in their use of data to monitor individual progress, to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching and to provide meaningful feedback to students and their parents/carers in forms that guide further learning.

The principal places a high priority on building the capacity of all staff and the board/council to collect, analyse and use data to inform planning and decision making and to monitor progress. They model this through their own learning about data and its use in strategic planning to improve student learning.

They also ensure that staff have the resources, systems and support they require to make best use of data in their day-to-day work. This includes ensuring that staff have time to analyse and interpret learning data; focusing the school's attention on informative, actionable evidence; and ensuring that staff do not become overwhelmed by data.

HIGH

The principal promotes the use of data to monitor performance levels in the school and, at the classroom level, to monitor the performances of individual students. They place a high priority on analysing, displaying and sharing information about current levels of performance and trends in the school's performance over time. They demonstrate a clear belief in the value of quality data for monitoring performance and informing decision making.

The principal uses a variety of evidence to monitor the school's performance, including student achievement data, surveys of parents and the community, attendance rates, behavioural data, informal observations and anecdotal feedback. This close monitoring is undertaken to guide school management and operational decision making and to ensure that past gains are sustained. They find effective ways to present and share information about the school's performance with staff, students, parents and the school board/council.

They promote teachers' use of data for the purposes of monitoring student performance. They expect all teachers to assess students regularly and to keep records of how well individuals are performing. They may also encourage teachers to gather feedback from students on their teaching. The principal and other school leaders use classroom assessment data in teacher performance management processes and conversations.

The principal promotes staff professional development in the areas of assessment and data analysis for the purposes of improving assessment practices across the school and enhancing staff capacity to monitor and report student performances.

They ensure that staff have access to instruments and systems for collecting, recording, storing, analysing and displaying data. This infrastructure may include assessment resources, survey instruments and electronic systems and processes for capturing, recording and interrogating data. The principal may introduce more effective ways of displaying and communicating data in the school.

MEDIUM

The principal's use of data reflects their view that data are useful for summarising and communicating the school's performance (eg, in the Annual Report). They analyse and report data in routine ways, possibly to meet compliance requirements or because they appear to believe it is the right thing to do. They are generally less focused on using data to guide day-to-day school and classroom decision making.

The principal works with others in the school to analyse and report data on the school's performance using available data sources. They share these analyses and reports with staff and the wider school community, including the board/council and in the school's Annual Report. They may use data on the school's performance to inform their decisions and the work of the school.

They develop and implement school policies on assessment and promote the use of assessment to determine how well students have learnt what they have been taught. They provide support to teachers in this process. They are generally less focused on teachers' use of data to guide teaching, set goals for improvement, monitor student progress over time or to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching.

The principal is supportive of proposals to improve staff skills in the collection, analysis and use of data, but this tends to be in response to individual requests, rather than at the initiative of the principal who may also place a low priority on further developing their own skills in these areas.

They respond positively to staff requests for resources and systems for collecting, analysing, interpreting and reporting data but are not proactive in planning and providing infrastructure for data use in the school.

LOW

There is little evidence that the principal sees a role for data in the work of the school. Their personal engagement with available data sets is generally superficial and they are not proactive in planning, collecting or using data. They may make little or no use of the data available to them, interpret and/or use data inappropriately in decision making, or be openly dismissive of the value of data.

The principal may be aware of how students in the school perform on assessments such as literacy and numeracy tests, but makes little or no use of this information in their own work. Consistent with the low value they attach to school performance data, they consider a narrow range of evidence and make unsophisticated and sometimes inaccurate uses of available data.

They expect teachers to assess students and to provide reports to parents/carers on how individuals have performed. They assume that teachers are aware of, and make use of, students' results on external tests. But beyond this, they have no explicit expectations of teachers' collection or use of data.

The principal does not actively encourage staff professional development in the collection, analysis and use of data and has limited personal skills in these areas. There are few organised opportunities for staff to review and discuss the use of data in school decision making or their day-to-day work.

They place a very low priority on the provision of resources and systems for gathering and using evidence to inform day-to-day practice. They do not take the initiative in identifying ways to support the collection, analysis and interpretation of data in the school and may even be dismissive of requests for such support.

6 Leading strategic change

Highly effective principals understand that the pursuit of the school's mission depends on a willingness to introduce and lead major change when change is desirable. In addition to continually monitoring and fine-tuning the work of the school, highly effective principals occasionally lead larger-scale initiatives to improve student outcomes and wellbeing. These initiatives may involve changes to school programs, curriculum priorities, classroom processes, school facilities or the school culture.

In introducing and leading major new initiatives, highly effective principals are highly discerning; they avoid chasing educational fashions, making changes for the sake of change or introducing new initiatives in the absence of evidence that students are likely to benefit. The purposeful, collaborative changes they initiate and lead are responses to specific challenges, problems or opportunities to improve the quality of the school's educational offerings.

When convinced of the desirability of change, they take on the role of chief advocate for the proposed change and lead the school through a systematic process that includes advocating, planning, implementing, monitoring, evaluating and reflecting on the change process.

First, they work with senior colleagues and the school board/council to build understanding of, and support for, the proposed change throughout the school community. They become strong advocates for the change they wish to see and make a personal commitment to seeing the change through.

Second, they work collaboratively to specify how the intended benefits of the proposed change will be evaluated and demonstrated – usually in terms of measurable improvements for students.

Third, they develop implementation details. These details may include the introduction of new approaches or programs, the enhancement of school facilities/infrastructure, or changes to school processes or ways of working. The implementation strategy may require the sourcing of additional finances and/or the development of staff skills and capabilities required by the change.

Fourth, they closely monitor implementation against targets and milestones; intervene and make adjustments to implementation plans as required; carefully evaluate the extent to which the new arrangements achieve their purpose; reflect on what has been learnt through the change process; and communicate the benefits of successful change to staff, students and the school community.

In summary, the principal's effectiveness in *leading strategic change* depends on their effectiveness in:

- identifying needs/opportunities to deliver improved outcomes for students;
- communicating and promoting the case for change and securing buy-in and commitment;
- specifying what the intended results of change will be and how they will be measured;
- collaboratively developing, resourcing and executing an implementation strategy; and
- measuring and evaluating the impact of change and learning from the change process.

Leading strategic change

OUTSTANDING

The principal initiates and leads change in the purposeful pursuit of better outcomes for students. They treat change as a planned, systematic process through which the school collaboratively designs, implements and evaluates strategies for improving its educational effectiveness.

They are strongly focused on changes and initiatives that will lead to improved student outcomes and wellbeing – a focus that makes them less susceptible to distraction by educational fashions. They are constantly alert to ways of enhancing the school's educational offerings, including by understanding and building on what is already working well, addressing gaps, removing obstacles and pursuing emerging opportunities.

The principal demonstrates strong personal commitment to the change/s they wish to see. They work with colleagues and the board/council to build understanding of, and support for, change. This may include drawing attention to compelling evidence of the need for change, specific challenges or problems, or opportunities that will be missed without action.

The principal works with others to design implementation strategies and to create the conditions for change within the school. They demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the need to engage the hearts and minds of staff who will be impacted by change and carefully manage the amount and pace of change. They understand the importance of balancing change with stability and of developing staff skills and capabilities required by change.

They collaboratively establish how the impact of change will be measured and how the effectiveness of change strategies will be evaluated. They closely monitor implementation and systematically evaluate the extent to which new arrangements are successful in improving outcomes for students. They treat strategic change as part of an ongoing cycle of learning from practice.

HIGH

The principal pursues change as a response to the increasingly complex and changing environment in which the school operates. They are focused on responding to changing external demands, navigating increasing levels of uncertainty and ambiguity, and developing innovative solutions to problems.

Their focus is on providing students with a schooling experience that is responsive to the changing demands of the external world. They see school change as essential to keep pace with external change. They are constantly alert to new developments, thinking and educational trends to which the school could be responding.

The principal effectively communicates the need for ongoing change to colleagues, the board/council and the wider school community. They encourage all staff to embrace change, to be innovative, and to develop and explore new ways of working.

The principal works collaboratively with staff and the board/council to craft the details of whole-school change strategies. These may involve new approaches or school programs, enhanced school facilities/infrastructure, or changes to school processes and ways of working.

They are clear about the changes they wish to see and put in place processes to establish whether desired changes are being implemented. (For example, they may work with other leaders in the school to evaluate the extent to which newly acquired technologies are being implemented in classrooms.) They also intervene and make changes to implementation plans as required and communicate results of changes to staff and the school community.

MEDIUM

The principal's commitment to change is mainly limited to the implementation of initiatives identified in the school's strategic plan. They may treat the development and implementation of the strategic plan largely as a compliance activity.

Their focus tends to be on identifying strategies for improving how the school operates rather than on ways of improving outcomes for students. This focus underpins their commitment to change and may be reflected in the priorities they identify.

The principal clearly communicates to staff the need to implement agreed and documented whole-school improvement strategies. They demonstrate commitment to these agreed objectives and work to ensure that they are implemented.

They work with staff and the board/council to develop a detailed set of strategies that the school will pursue. These strategies reflect priorities for school improvement over the period of the school's strategic plan.

The principal's monitoring of strategic change may be limited to monitoring the implementation of the set of strategies in the school's strategic plan. They may be more focused on confirming that agreed strategies have been implemented than on evaluating the impact of change.

LOW

The principal has no clear focus for change. On one hand, they may lack interest in making changes and improvements, even those contained in the school's strategic plan, and leave change to others. On the other hand, they may make numerous, disconnected changes with little rationale, collaboration or explanation.

It may be unclear what needs the principal is addressing in the changes they do make. They may be oblivious to evidence and to the challenges the school is facing, even when the need for change is obvious to those around them. As a result, problems remain unaddressed and opportunities are missed.

The principal rarely identifies or raises issues and opportunities for change with others in the school. They may be dismissive of external reviews that have identified the need for change. They show little capacity to chart a new course or to build the trust and community engagement necessary for strategic change.

As a result, the principal does not collaboratively develop solutions or build buy-in to needed change. Staff and the board/council are not empowered to participate in significant change or innovation. Any changes that the principal does make tend to be minor adjustments and may be poorly implemented, reactionary, imposed, inconsistent or take the school backwards.

Because the principal generally does not make clear the purpose of change, there may be no basis for evaluating its effectiveness. They may move quickly from one change to another, not pausing to reflect on the effectiveness of the change process or whether it resulted in benefits for the school or students.

Overview

The principal's effectiveness in *leading the moral purpose* depends on their effectiveness in:

- leading a school-wide commitment to caring for, and promoting the development of, every student;

- promoting a school-wide belief in the capacity of every student to learn successfully;

- engaging and leading the school to higher levels of effectiveness in meeting individual student needs;

- making successful student learning the central consideration in all aspects of their leadership; and

- influencing others beyond the school in their commitment to, and pursuit of, this educational agenda.

The principal's effectiveness in *building productive relationships* depends on their effectiveness in:

- creating a cohesive culture built around a commitment to improving outcomes for students;

- communicating and modelling the kinds of behaviours and relationships they wish to see;

- building and promoting staff relationships that are based on high levels of trust and respect;

- creating an inclusive school environment in which everybody feels valued and supported; and

- establishing productive partnerships with parents, the local community and other organisations.

The principal's effectiveness in *creating enabling conditions* depends on their effectiveness in:

- selecting, developing and making best use of available staff experience and expertise;

- targeting the school's financial and physical resources on improved student outcomes;

- ensuring that available time is used efficiently and effectively for quality teaching and learning;

- clarifying and communicating school policies and processes and staff roles and responsibilities; and

- drawing on resources, perspectives and expertise of parents, the board/council and the community.

The principal's effectiveness in *promoting improved teaching* depends on their effectiveness in:

- promoting the use of more effective, evidence-based teaching practices throughout the school;

- providing high quality support to classroom teachers in their implementation of best-practice teaching;

- creating a school-wide culture focused on continually learning how to improve teaching effectiveness;

- encouraging teams to engage in the systematic investigation of alternative teaching strategies; and

- introducing and leading school-wide initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

The principal's effectiveness in *driving data-informed practice* depends on their effectiveness in:

- developing a school-wide understanding that all decision making should be guided by evidence;

- modelling the analysis and use of data to monitor progress, set targets and make decisions;

- promoting teachers' use of data to identify starting points for teaching and to monitor learning;

- building their own and colleagues' skills in collecting, analysing, interpreting and using data; and

- ensuring access to quality school infrastructure to collect, record, store, analyse and display data.

The principal's effectiveness in *leading strategic change* depends on their effectiveness in:

- identifying needs/opportunities to deliver improved outcomes for students;

- communicating and promoting the case for change and securing buy-in and commitment;

- specifying what the intended results of change will be and how they will be measured;

- collaboratively developing, resourcing and executing an implementation strategy; and

- measuring and evaluating the impact of change and learning from the change process.