



**FINAL REPORT ON ANALYSIS OF ACTIVITY AND EVALUATION EFFORT IN  
THE SMARTER SCHOOLS NATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS**

**Phase 1 of the National Evaluation of the Smarter Schools National  
Partnerships**

**June 2012**

**Atelier Learning Solutions Pty Ltd**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Context

The Smarter Schools National Partnerships represent a shared commitment by all Australian governments to improve educational outcomes for school students, particularly those students falling behind. The Smarter Schools National Partnerships (SSNPs) comprise the:

- Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership – 2008-2012
- Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership – 2009-2013
- National Partnership for Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities – 2008-2015

The Quality Teaching and Literacy and Numeracy element of the Northern Territory Closing the Gap National Partnership is also being administered through the SSNPs and runs from 2009 to 2012.

Collectively, the Smarter Schools National Partnerships contribute to the outcomes articulated in the National Education Agreement (2009) and the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (2011).

## The National Evaluation

The Smarter Schools National Partnerships Evaluation (the National Evaluation) will be carried out in four phases, with the timing of each phase to coincide with the conclusion of each National Partnership. While each phase will consider the achievements of all SSNPs, it is intended that there will be a particular emphasis placed on the concluding National Partnership.

The Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations engaged Atelier Learning Solutions to conduct the first phase of the National Evaluation of the SSNPs (the National Evaluation).

Phase one, conducted during 2011, included the following aspects:

1. An analytical overview of state and territory education authorities' activity across all SSNPs
2. An analytical overview of state and territory education authorities' evaluation effort across all SSNPs
3. An interim evaluation of the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership
4. An evaluation of the education component of the CTG in the NT National Partnership

The evaluation approach was formative in that it analysed evidence about progress in activity towards the achievement of outcomes and progress in jurisdictional evaluation effort. Findings from the first phase of the National Evaluation will inform future directions for the Australian Government in supporting better educational outcomes for all students. Further, it is intended that the first phase of the National Evaluation will provide foundational understandings for the subsequent phases of the National Evaluation. The National Evaluation considered the work of each of the SSNPs. The project specifically included evaluation of the Quality Teaching and Literacy and Numeracy element of the Northern Territory Closing the Gap National Partnership and the interim evaluation of the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership. These evaluations assessed the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of each of the relevant SSNPs.

There was a wide base of evidence for the first phase of the National Evaluation. Evidence was gathered through a review of the national and international literature and reference was made to data published through the MySchool website. A desktop analysis of key administrative documents and data was undertaken, including state and territory reports and the National Partnership for Literacy

and Numeracy COAG Reform Council Report.

Strategic stakeholder interviews and focus group discussions were undertaken, including with key system and sector officers in the states and territories responsible for implementation of the SSNPs and their evaluation at the jurisdictional level. Over the course of the National Evaluation, more than 85 visits were undertaken to school sites, including a substantial number in remote locations. This aspect of the research was critical in providing a school-level dimension to the evidence considered by the National Evaluation.

## Key Findings

### Highlights

Overall, findings from the first phase of the National Evaluation suggest that the SSNPs are generating extensive activity, enthusiasm and commitment across the education sector. There are many instances where they are also securing notable improvements.

The SSNPs are supporting improved school leadership, contributing to improving teacher quality, strengthening student engagement and are contributing to higher levels of student attainment in literacy and numeracy. Success is being demonstrated through improvements in approach and practice impacting at the classroom level. Importantly, the SSNPs are providing a national base of evidence for what reform looks like that can underpin future effort. Figures 1 – 4 below present the high level findings for each of the four areas examined by the first phase of the National Evaluation.

### State and territory education authorities' activity

This aspect of the National Evaluation considered the processes and approaches being implemented across the SSNPs by the states and territories, and evaluated the extent to which activity was contributing to intended outcomes. Consideration was given to the effectiveness and sustainability of the work being undertaken, with cognizance of the fact that in most cases implementation was still at an early stage. The analysis was based around key themes, including: in-class support for teachers; use of data to monitor and address student learning needs; student attendance and engagement; and, support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

**Figure 1: High level findings from the analytical overview of state and territory education authorities' activity**

Improvements embedded across the majority of participating schools/sectors	Improvements emerging across participating schools/sectors	Instances of improvements occurring in some schools/sectors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A significant level of activity to improve student performance</li> <li>• Progress in Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership schools in securing outcomes that contribute to increased literacy and numeracy attainment levels</li> <li>• Significant co-investment by the jurisdictions as partners with the Australian Government</li> <li>• Improved teacher practice and performance, including instructional leadership</li> <li>• Better pathways into teaching</li> <li>• Teacher coaching initiatives and other activities that make a critical contribution to students' attainment levels</li> <li>• Teacher engagement with student data as a means to inform and improve classroom practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing recognition of the imperative to improve student performance</li> <li>• Spreading understanding of the importance of establishing and communicating higher teacher expectations for students</li> <li>• Emerging professional structures that can underpin reform</li> <li>• Growing recognition of the benefits of cross-sectoral effort focussed on school improvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instances of jurisdictions integrating and aligning the Smarter Schools National Partnerships to achieve maximum impact and leverage system change</li> <li>• Trials of approaches to recruiting quality teachers in hard to staff schools</li> <li>• Instances where student engagement activity is placed within new community-based structures intended to complement the work of schools so that barriers to engagement can be addressed</li> </ul>

### *Evaluation effort by state and territory education authorities*

This aspect of the National Evaluation considered the evaluation work that state and territory authorities had either undertaken or were planning. The analysis of the evidence identified emerging models of evaluation and considered progress to date. Consideration was also given to gaps in evaluation effort and possible future directions to strengthen the effectiveness of approach and practice.

**Figure 2: High level findings from the analytical overview of evaluation effort by state and territory education authorities**

Improvements embedded across the majority of participating schools/sectors	Improvements emerging across participating schools/sectors	Instances of improvements occurring in some schools/sectors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monitoring of activity and outputs achieved through the Smarter Schools National Partnerships</li><li>• Commitment to investing in some form of evaluation in discrete areas prior to or at the time of the conclusion of particular Smarter Schools National Partnerships</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A growing understanding of the distinction between the monitoring of outputs, activity and expenditure, and the evaluation of progress towards achievement of outcomes</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A recognition of the importance of evaluation as a key component of the State and Territory effort under the auspices of the Smarter Schools National Partnerships</li><li>• An appreciation of the difference between process and input/output evaluation <i>versus</i> outcomes-based evaluation</li><li>• Some cases where jurisdiction evaluation frameworks have been developed to structure and guide outcome oriented evaluation effort</li></ul>

### *The Interim Evaluation of the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership*

This aspect of the National Evaluation assessed the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership in driving reform to improve the quality of teaching and leadership in Australian schools. It also identified areas where further action may be required to ensure that the intended outcomes of the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership can be achieved before its conclusion in 2013.

The Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership is a significant national instrument with potential to make a considerable contribution to the education reforms vital to improving student outcomes. Its success will be foundational to the capacity of the other SSNPs to contribute to the national productivity agenda.

Through the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership, substantial national work is progressing under the auspices of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and the jurisdictional teacher registration authorities.

At this stage, however, there remains a disconnection between the work being undertaken to build professional standards and accreditation procedures and the work of jurisdictions to implement the facilitation and reward reform elements set out in the Bilateral Agreements under the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership. The evidence suggests that continuing reforms will be dependent on ongoing Australian Government funding. Reform will also require recognition by

authorities of the essential links between the work of AITSL and the registration authorities, and reformed structures, principles and procedures in school employment, remuneration, promotion and teacher development.

**Figure 3: High level findings from the Interim Evaluation of the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership.**

Improvements well embedded	Improvements emerging	Some instances of improvements occurring
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership has developed national standards for teachers that differentiate among teacher performance levels</li> <li>• System-wide procedures and practices being implemented or strengthened to address issues of teacher quality in particular contexts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement has been reached on the principles of measurement of achievement of the teacher standards, including assessment of teacher performance external to the school and the employer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trials and approaches intended to improve teacher quality which impact those who are immediately involved</li> </ul>

*Note:* As the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership involves all teachers and school leaders, the categories above refer to how well embedded the improvements are within the education sector.

*The quality teaching and literacy and numeracy element of the Northern Territory Closing the Gap National Partnership*

This aspect of the National Evaluation considered the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of the Quality Teaching and Literacy and Numeracy element of the Northern Territory Closing the Gap National Partnership. In addition to findings about progress to date, areas were identified where further action may be required to sustain and strengthen outcomes achieved.

**Figure 4: High level findings from the Quality Teaching and Literacy and Numeracy Element of the Northern Territory Closing the Gap National Partnership**

Improvements embedded across the majority of participating schools/sectors	Improvements emerging across participating schools/sectors	Instances of improvements occurring in some schools/sectors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substantial level of activity and effort to achieve improved outcomes of schooling for Indigenous children and young people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emerging understanding about the critical conditions that must be created and sustained if the COAG agenda and targets are to be addressed and met</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A number of schools have addressed critical pre-conditions for capacity to address the closing the gap agenda</li> <li>• Instances of schools working with partner agencies to address issues related to enrolment and attendance</li> <li>• Instances where a strong focus on outcomes for Indigenous students is leading to demonstrable progress, pride in achievement and growth in personal resilience</li> </ul>

## Challenges

Analysis of the evidence points to the importance of the distinction between activity to *improve* student outcomes, such as the use of external literacy and numeracy coaches in classrooms, and *reform*, such as whole-of-system change that systematically works towards all teachers having the skill level required for sustained improvement in student literacy and numeracy outcomes. For improvements to be maintained, it is important that they are supported by ongoing reform effort.

The central challenge identified by the first phase of the National Evaluation is that across the SSNPs there is a range of factors hampering the transformation of positive activity into sustained reform. The SSNP agreements articulate intended outcomes that will contribute to reform. However, analysis of the evidence indicates that the link between National Partnership outputs or activity and these intended reform outcomes is not always clear. In some cases this has meant that elements of improvement achieved through the SSNPs are seen as belonging to separate and unrelated initiatives. Consequently, the potential to leverage from these elements of improvement into broader reform across the education sector is not sufficiently identified or taken. In addition, the synergies between the National Partnerships, and in particular the synergies that extend from the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership, are not well recognised.

There are numerous examples of significant activity within National Partnership schools contributing to discernible improvement in outcomes for students. While this is encouraging, and would not have been possible without the National Partnerships, analysis of the evidence indicates that, more broadly, the focus on activity and improvement is limiting the potential contribution that the SSNPs could make to whole-of-system reform. The improvements gained through the SSNPs need to be underpinned by embedded changes in approach and structure such that they become intrinsically part of core business across all schools.

The reward frameworks in the Improving Teacher Quality and the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnerships are intended to reward achievement of agreed literacy and numeracy targets or milestones for improving teacher quality. However, the first phase of the National Evaluation found that reward for activity can have the effect of distorting investment away from long term reform. Reward funding for the achievement of ambitious targets/milestones in the short-term distracts focus away from longer-term sustainable reform. For example, the use of NAPLAN data to quantify the impact of reform activity at the state level, after only two years of activity under the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership, is not consistent with the longer-term reform intent of the National Partnership.

The first phase of the National Evaluation found instances where jurisdictions had developed evaluation frameworks to structure and guide outcome-oriented effort. However, there were also instances where the distinction between an evaluation based on outcomes rather than outputs appears not to be well understood. The lack of a nationally coherent evaluation framework through which all jurisdictions could contribute to the national picture of progress, outcomes and achievements is limiting the potential of the SSNPs to achieve their reform intents.

## Recommended priorities for action

Findings from the first phase of the National Evaluation suggest a range of opportunities to build on instances of success and to realign activity so that reform outcomes are achieved. From the analysis of evidence about activity and evaluation effort, it is now opportune for consideration to be given as to how activity and effort could be better aligned with the reform objectives of the SSNPs. The possible priorities for action are to:

- shift from the monitoring of activity as the primary focus to ensuring that the focus of the SSNPs is on achievement of reform
- ensure that reporting accounts for progress towards the reform objectives of the SSNPs
- develop agreed indicators of progress towards reform outcomes
- develop a nationally consistent framework for measuring, reporting and rewarding reform outcomes
- develop an agreed cohesive evaluation framework to gather evidence on the most cost-effective approaches to achieve reform
- develop a process and platform for the national sharing of understanding about achievements against the reforms
- leverage from improvements achieved through the Smarter Schools National Partnerships so that they contribute to whole-of-system reform.

From the analysis of evidence, an Outcomes Framework has been developed that describes the outcomes that would contribute to achievement of the reform intents of the Smarter Schools National Partnerships. Given that it is grounded in the evidence gathered and analysed for the National Evaluation, the framework may constitute a starting point to guide future effort within and across the SSNPs as they progress from a focus on activity-based improvements towards a stronger focus on their contribution to sustainable reform. An overview of the Outcomes Framework can be found at Appendix 1 of this Executive Summary.

## Conclusion

The first phase of the National Evaluation found that the SSNPs have generated significant interest, enthusiasm and activity in the approaches and practices required to lift outcomes for students. Within National Partnership schools it is possible to identify significant effort that involves putting into place the approaches, structures and practices necessary for sustained higher levels of student attainment. In particular, work within many Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership Schools is pointing the way to the wider whole-of-system reforms required to ensure improved learning outcomes for all students in the critical areas of literacy and numeracy.

While progress and success are demonstrable, some challenges remain. The National Evaluation has identified a number of factors that are limiting the improvements achieved through the Smarter Schools National Partnerships from being transformed into reform. If these are not addressed, there remains a risk that the improvements achieved to date through the SSNPs will prove unsustainable without continuing funding.

The SSNPs have a potentially powerful place in Australian schooling by contributing highly informed strategic understandings about the nature and scope of the reforms required to improve the learning outcomes of all students. Harnessing these understandings will enable this potential to be realised, building from activity-focussed improvement to outcome-oriented reform.

## OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK

AN OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK FOR QUALITY TEACHING				
Supply			Demand	
Professional Status, Quality and Recognition			Employment Tenure, Placement and Remuneration	
Standards	Principles	Development	Position/Remuneration	Approach/Support
As the basis of differentiating levels of teacher quality from pre- service to principal	Of agreement related to criteria, processes, time frames and contingencies to ensure standards	To guide development, assessment and recognition across standards from initial to advanced levels	Establishment of classroom oriented ‘promotion positions’ obtained by attainment of status through accreditation against standards, so that all teachers have in class and ongoing learning-oriented guidance and support	Schools determine the skill sets and standards required to ensure all teachers, from pre-service to principals, have the skills and competencies needed to engage students from all backgrounds in learning to reach national curriculum standards
Supply is a function of professional choices, access to a variety of pathways into teaching, quality and availability of pre-service provision, access to development support, accreditation and certification criteria against standards, and registration and deregistration procedures			Demand is a function of resources available to pay and support teachers, eligibility, differential salary allocation based on position acquired through status, with incentives to attract particular skills as needed and reward based on outcomes that ensure the professional competencies of fellow teachers	

AN OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK FOR LITERACY AND NUMERACY		
Domains	Dimensions	Outcomes
<b>Student learning</b>	The learning environment	The classroom is a learning-centred environment where students have a strong sense of belonging, purpose and resilience. It is widely valued, publically shared, performance oriented and based on trust.
	Student attainment	High expectations, and the timely and skillful support provided to attain them, contribute to all students being able to achieve learning outcomes commensurate with the norms established through the Australian Curriculum.
	Student development	Student learning in literacy and numeracy is constructed so there are continuous platforms for sustained progress. Students monitor and extend their learning towards goals that represent high expectations.
	Learning analysis	Student learning data collection and analysis are embedded in classroom practice, contributing to decisions about classroom practice and learning provision.
<b>School leadership</b>	Instructional leadership	Instructional leadership actively connects whole-school improvement and classroom transformation to build-in capacity for continuous improvement in literacy and numeracy.
	Professional structure	Around each classroom, school leaders build and sustain the professional structures critical to the achievement of the highest possible levels of literacy and numeracy outcomes.



	Performance management	School leaders require all teachers to demonstrate regularly the quality of their classroom practice.
	School evaluation	The school has a framework that provides the basis for a regular cycle of evaluation to understand the impact of whole-school approaches on literacy and numeracy outcomes.
<b>Teacher quality</b>	Teacher engagement	Each teacher exercises professional responsibility for the quality of classroom practice, including incorporation of approaches identified through research as most effective.
	Teacher knowledge	Each teacher understands language and number and connects that knowledge with student learning to produce continuous improvement in learning outcomes for each student.
	Teacher inquiry	Teachers recognise the importance of integrating inquiry into their practice, especially exploring the link between practice and improved student learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy across the spectrum of performance.

<b>AN OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK FOR ENGAGEMENT OF ALL STUDENTS</b>		
<b>Domains</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
<b>Student learning</b>	The learning environment	The learning environment is open and extended, addressing any learning alienation issues so that school learning highly valued. The learning environment is inclusive and provides a strong sense of belonging, purpose and opportunity.
	Learning engagement	The purposes of learning are made explicit and are continuously reinforced as the key to a positive life pathway. The focus and provision ensures each has a strong belief in their own capabilities, ensuring they make good decisions and accomplish their own goals.
	Learning expectations	High expectations are held for all students regardless of prior progress, background or context. All necessary provision is arranged to ensure that expectations and challenges necessary for high levels of achievement can be met.
	Learning pathway	Through early identification, a case management approach is implemented so that personalised provision ensures a sustained connection with learning and progress towards attainment and formal recognition.
<b>School</b>	Flexible and additional provision	There is flexible provision in the school budget to attract and retain high quality staff, including through incentive and reward. Provision could include additional teaching staff, tutors, teacher assistants and special needs staff.
	Transition support	The school develops and implements personalised, flexible and differentiated structures and support around all key transition points. Each student is prepared and supported by the school to engage in new forms of learning as the basis of attainment, broader social connection and extended challenge.
	Broadened worldview	School culture, curriculum and provision extend students into a range of contexts to ensure growth in personal identity and recognition of the life possibilities that come from sustained commitment to learning.
	Continuous improvement	The school analyses and responds to evidence about each student's attendance, engagement and attainment and implements an evaluation plan to understand the effectiveness of approach and practice with a focus on continuous improvement.
<b>Teaching</b>	Instructional leadership	Selection processes and professional packages enable recruitment and retention of high quality leaders who are oriented to reform and innovation and have the skills and capacity to transform classrooms and learning outcomes.

	Professional standards	There are expectations that the professional learning obligations related to the national curriculum and teaching standards will be met, including as a basis for progression to higher levels of professional status, accreditation and remuneration.
	Professional development	There is a strong culture of staff professional growth and learning, with an emphasis on on-site professional coaching, mentoring and support and structured opportunities to learn collaboratively through inquiry and reflection.
Family and community	Early years connection	The school works in partnership with other agencies to ensure that families have the understandings and skills so that the early developmental years provide a foundation for future formal learning.
	Family engagement	The school actively engages parents so that they value, understand and participate in their children's learning, especially with regards to literacy and numeracy.
	Community partnerships	There is a partnership between schools and community-based agencies, employers and others to strengthen the community infrastructure that guarantees all children and young people are connected to learning.

AN OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK FOR CLOSING THE GAP		
Domains	Dimensions	Outcomes
Student learning	The learning environment	For all students, there is a personalised approach to learning through a challenging program to meet the requirements of the Australian Curriculum. There is a sustained focus on literacy and numeracy in every aspect of the school program, across all years of schooling.
	Student connection	The school works in partnership with agencies and families to ensure school learning outcomes are valued. It provides a capacity-building case management approach to ensure each child participates in learning. All students have a sense of belonging to the school.
	Learning success	Every student has access to learning support to ensure an inclusive, continuous and successful learning environment. Early identification of issues is the basis for response.
	Learning outcomes	Learning outcomes for all Indigenous students are benchmarked against national and international cohort performance. There is a commitment to these outcomes as a basis for progression to higher education and entrée into a wider world of challenge and success.
Teaching	Professional standards	There are expectations that the professional learning obligations related to the national curriculum and teaching standards will be met, including as a basis for engaging with Indigenous people and their communities.
	Indigenous workforce development	The role of Indigenous staff members is integral to learning success. Multiple pathways facilitate Indigenous recruitment, capacity building, training and leadership within each school community. Extended support is provided to ensure continued skill development.
	Professional development	On-site professional mentoring, time and support are provided for all staff to undertake further professional learning. All staff learn from working collaboratively with specialist support.
	Personal support	Personal support is provided to ensure continued wellbeing of all staff. Each has access to a personnel liaison officer to address pressing issues. Support, especially during the early stages of a placement, is planned, pro-active and interventionist.
School leadership	Leadership capacity	Additional provision enables a structured focus on the critical areas impacting the learning outcomes of Indigenous students. This approach to leadership enables a strong focus on the instructional dimension.

	Professional development	School leaders access professional mentoring, learning opportunities that focus on instructional leadership, and professional networks. They have frequent supportive contact with line managers and ready access to university courses and accreditation.
	Continuous improvement	The school analyses and responds to evidence about each student's attendance, engagement and attainment and implements an evaluation plan that includes community consultation, responding to findings with a focus on continuous improvement.
<b>School Structure and resourcing</b>	School climate	There is an open, safe, inclusive, welcoming and culturally sensitive learning focused environment for all students, teachers and families. An inclusive, quality Indigenous culture program is provided to strengthen students' identity, resilience and self-esteem.
	School structure	The school has scope to provide a flexible and extended structure to offer opportunities that connect students to learning, whether at school or not. The extended structure involves cooperation between the school and community-based agencies and organisations.
	Flexible provision	The budget allocation ensures an appropriate staff mix as well as maintenance and acquisition of capital and technology infrastructure and support to address individual professional needs, including accessing coaches, mentors and relief teachers as needed.
	Additional provision	The school is provided with sustained additional capacity so that each student's learning is personalised. This may include additional teaching staff, tutors, teacher assistants and special needs staff as well as home liaison staff to maintain cultural connection.
<b>Pre-conditions for learning success</b>	Access to learning	Resource provision is to a level that will guarantee ready and continuous access through to a Year 12 pathway, including through flexible, residential or online arrangements.
	Governance	The governance of the school focuses strongly on creating and sustaining connections with families and community groups to enable endorsement of and commit to the work of the school in areas such as attendance, engagement, behaviour, aspirations and attainment.
	Early years support	The school works in partnership with other agencies to ensure that families have the understandings and skills so that the early developmental years provide a foundation for future formal learning.
	Family engagement	From the commencement of school, parents are supported to value and engage in their children's literacy and numeracy learning. Family connections are supported through regular engagement, participation in programs and personalised discussions about progress.
	Enrolment and attendance	There are dedicated resources within partner agencies that ensure each young person of compulsory school age is enrolled and attends on every school day. The school has explicit processes to respond to early indicators that have potential to impact attendance.
	Acceptable absences	The school has explicit and well-communicated expectations of what constitutes acceptable absences, what does not and why. The wellbeing of the child and the continuity of the learning program are the paramount considerations with regard to acceptable absence.
	Mobility and portability	There are processes across schools that address mobility and portability issues including portable registration of enrolment between schools and jurisdictions, monitoring of attendance among sites, guaranteed continuity of learning programs and reporting.
	Continuity and stability	There is a structured approach to ensure the maximum continuity and stability of principals and staff. Incentive and reward packages are provided that attract, retain and develop high quality staff for periods of at least three years.

## AN OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK FOR NATIONAL EVALUATION

Dimension	Outcomes
<b>Evaluation of student performance</b>	Assessment and diagnosis of literacy and numeracy outcomes with data systems at student, class, school sector, jurisdiction and overall national levels are universally embedded practice.
<b>Evaluation of teacher quality</b>	Teachers are regularly assessed to maintain their status. Registration involves submission of proof against criteria, verified by the principal. Accreditation at more advanced status requires external moderation of class practice
<b>Evaluation of best classroom practices</b>	University partnerships facilitate action research and evaluation to establish the links between classroom practices and outcomes.
<b>Teacher practice evaluation</b>	Practices identified as most effective are used as the judgement bases in registration and accreditation, ensuring most effective practice is embedded in all classrooms.
<b>School evaluation</b>	Regular school review and performance management processes support resource allocation and reallocation decisions, identify key staffing needs and underpin school professional development programs.
<b>Partnership evaluation</b>	As a partnership for reform, key findings from meta analysis of these evaluations are shared nationally to inform the changes necessary in culture and structure to reform system and school operation.

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## CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND KEY FINDINGS

### The national context

The Smarter Schools National Partnerships (SSNPs) are part of a funding approach recognising that the Australian Government and the States and Territories have a mutual interest in and shared responsibility for improving educational outcomes. The SSNPs take their place alongside the National Education Agreement (NEA), the Schools Assistance Act 2008 (the Act), the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) and related funding arrangements that contribute to reform to achieve and sustain improved educational outcomes. In terms of the SSNPs, other initiatives contributing to reform include the work of the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). Other National Partnerships impact specific issues such as youth attainment and digital literacy in further support of reform.

The SSNPs are the:

- Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership
- Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership
- National Partnership for Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities
- Quality Teaching and Literacy and Numeracy element of the Northern Territory Closing the Gap National Partnership.

The SSNPs especially address improvement in student performance for that proportion of the national cohort below the national average as measured by NAPLAN results. Through the SSNPs, all Australian school education jurisdictions, across all sectors, have committed to work collaboratively in implementing reforms to improve teacher quality, boost literacy and numeracy outcomes, support low socio-economic status school communities and contribute to closing the gap for Indigenous students. Additionally, the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership (ITQNP) includes a focus on issues of teacher quality in relation to hard-to-staff schools.

These commitments are represented in the respective SSNP Agreements entered into between the Australian Government and the States and Territories. While the distributed funding for the SSNPs is provided to jurisdictions, the SSNPs are designed to engage all school systems and sectors.

### Background

The SSNP Agreements contribute to achieving the objectives, outcomes and targets for schooling under the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) participation and productivity agenda, the National Education Agreement (NEA), the Schools Assistance Act, 2008 (the Act), the 2008 National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (the Melbourne Agreement) and the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA).

The Australian Government is investing approximately \$2.5 billion through the SSNPs.

- Through the ITQNP, the Australian Government is providing total funding of \$550 million in facilitation and reward payments, over five years from 2008-09 to 2012-13. This provision is made up of \$444 million direct to States and Territories, with \$106 million retained by the Australian Government, including \$50 million to support professional development of principals and \$56 million to support joint national activity. In addition, States and Territories are required to co-invest a total of \$29.6 million over this time. The first reward payments will

be made under these agreements in 2012.

- Through the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership (LNNP), the Australian Government is providing \$540 million in facilitation and reward payments to States and Territories to support literacy and numeracy, the essential foundation skills that allow young people to achieve at school, go on to further learning, and participate fully in society and work. An additional \$30 million has been allocated to fund Literacy and Numeracy pilots in schools serving low socio-economic status communities. A further \$40 million has also been provided for strategic initiatives.

Over the first two years of the LNNP, \$150 million has been distributed in the form of facilitation payments, based on each State and Territory's share of students at or below minimum standards in reading and numeracy for Years 3, 5 and 7. However, it is the States and Territories that decide which schools will participate in activities related to the funding.

Over the last two years of the LNNP, 2011-2012, \$350 million is to be allocated to reward reform. States and Territories will receive reward payments as they meet the targets for improving literacy and numeracy that they have outlined in their Implementation Plans. At the time of this analysis, the reward process had already commenced, with first payments made in 2011 on the basis of 2010 performance against agreed targets that vary amongst the jurisdictions.

- Through the Smarter Schools National Partnership for Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities (Low SES NP), the Australian Government is providing \$1.5 billion over seven years, 2008-09 to 2014-15, in the form of facilitation payments. The provision is to support education reform activities in approximately 1,700 low socio-economic status schools around the country. This funding is to be matched by co-investment from State and Territory governments over the life of the National Partnership.
- The Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) has responsibility for the Northern Territory Closing the Gap National Partnership (NT CtG NP). However, initiatives supporting Quality Teaching and Literacy and Numeracy (QT and LN) are part of the Enhancing Education measures in the NT CtG NP. These initiatives are the responsibility of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). As a National Partnership under the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA), the NT CtG NP objectives complement those of the NIRA.

The NT CtG NP was originally agreed between the Australian Government and the Northern Territory Government in July 2009 to cover a three-year period beginning in 2009–10. A new Agreement came into effect in May 2011 and runs until 30 June 2012<sup>1</sup>.

The NT CtG NP continues the work of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), begun by the former Australian Government in June 2007. The NT CtG NP maintains and strengthens core NTER measures while placing a greater emphasis on community engagement and partnerships, and building capability and leadership within Indigenous communities. It supports the Northern Territory's Indigenous education reform agenda, which is at the core of *A Working Future, A Smart Territory* and *Territory 2030* strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> With the exception of the additional teachers provision, which is extended until December 2012.



The Enhancing Education schedule (Schedule J in the new Agreement) of the NT CtG NP provides the Northern Territory with additional funding to support the improvement of education outcomes for Indigenous students living in prescribed communities. Schedule J includes funding for teacher housing, school-based nutrition programs and classroom construction as well as initiatives supporting QT and LN. Only initiatives supporting the QT and LN are managed and reported in conjunction with the SSNPs.

The Australian Government has committed \$44.294 million over three years (2009-10 to 2011-12) for the QT and LN<sup>2</sup> measures of the NT CtG NP, in recognition of the poor education results and challenges in remote Northern Territory communities.

## Purpose

In 2008, COAG identified the achievement of several high-level outcomes in relation to competition reform, regulation reform and human capital reform as keys to boosting Australia's workforce participation and productivity. In relation to improving the outcomes of school education, COAG established the NEA to pursue the reform agenda within the government school education sector. The non-government sector is supported through the funding arrangements under the Schools Assistance Act (2008). The SSNPs support the NEA and the Schools Assistance Act in pursuit of particular elements of the agreed reforms.

### Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership

The ITQNP is designed to improve teacher and school leader quality in order to sustain a quality teacher workforce. Successful implementation of this National Partnership is critical to the achievement of the aspirations, objectives and outcomes set out in the NEA, the Act and other elements of the national architecture. It aims to deliver system-wide reforms targeting critical points in the teacher 'lifecycle' to attract, train, place, develop and retain quality teachers and leaders in schools and classrooms in all areas across the nation. The ITQNP also has a specific focus on professional development and support for principals.

### Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership

The LNNP focuses on the key areas of teaching, leadership and the effective use of student performance information to deliver sustained improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students, especially those who are falling behind.

This National Partnership is envisioned as a tool to galvanise the collective resources and energy of the Australian Government and the State and Territory government and non-government education systems and sectors to put in place the infrastructure and practices that will deliver sustained improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students. It is also designed to accelerate progress towards the ambitious literacy and numeracy target set by COAG to halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy.

### National Partnership for Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities

The Low SES NP is designed to transform the way schooling takes place in participating schools and to address the complex and interconnected challenges facing students in disadvantaged communities. It

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<sup>2</sup> The 2009 Agreement referred only to improving literacy in the Enhancing Education (Schedule J) although the Outputs referred to both literacy and numeracy.

aims to: improve student engagement, educational attainment and wellbeing in participating schools; make inroads into entrenched disadvantage, including in Indigenous communities; contribute to broader social and economic objectives: and, improve understanding about effective intervention that can be implemented beyond the schools participating in the Agreements.

This National Partnership provides facilitation funding for both in-school and broader reforms. The Low SES NP Agreements set out: objectives, outcomes and outputs; the roles and responsibilities of each party; performance benchmarks and reporting arrangements; and, financial and governance arrangements.

### Northern Territory Closing the Gap National Partnership

The Quality Teaching and Literacy and Numeracy element (QT and LN) of the Northern Territory Closing the Gap National Partnership (NT CtG NP) is designed to:

- develop career pathways for Indigenous staff
- increase the number of Indigenous staff with education qualifications
- provide support and programs to enable teachers and students to achieve improved outcomes in literacy and numeracy in 73 targeted (prescribed) remote communities.

The CtG (QT and LN) element is providing supplementary funding to enhance delivery of SSNP reforms in targeted schools. Most of the CtG (QT and LN) initiatives are additional and complementary in nature, but some particular initiatives are co-funded.

### Facilitation and reward

Each of the SSNP Agreements includes arrangements for facilitation payments from the Australian Government in order to achieve the agreed reform objectives. Two also include arrangements for reward payments.

- The ITQNP has a suite of mandatory facilitation and optional reward reforms.
- The LNNP includes both facilitation funding and reward funding, with rewards based on achievement of bilaterally negotiated targets.
- The Low SES NP includes facilitation payments only.
- The NT CtG (QT and LN) element includes facilitation payments only.

Funding is provided to all States and Territories so that they can implement the facilitation reforms under the SSNPs.

In addition, within the ITQNP, there is a pre-determined menu of reward reforms provided in the relevant Agreements from which States and Territories could select those that best suited their agenda. If they elected to participate in the ITQNP, they then agreed to address all of the facilitation reforms. In relation to the reward reforms, they could select all, some or none, and would be rewarded (or not) according to that decision. However, the largest proportion of ITQNP funding is in relation to reward payments, providing an incentive for jurisdictions to participate at what is presented as a more ambitious level.

The Australian Government makes reward payments to the States and Territories in accordance with a schedule reflecting the achievement of reform milestones, identified in the bilateral Agreements and assessed by the COAG Reform Council (CRC). This schedule is set out in each of the bilateral Agreements.

States and Territories can also receive reward funding for demonstrated improvements in literacy and numeracy under the LNNP. Under this SSNP, Australian Government payments to the States and Territories were provided for the first two years as facilitation payments, and for the second two, as reward payments. Reward payments are conditional upon jurisdictions achieving pre-determined bilaterally agreed performance benchmarks over the first two years of implementation.

## Reform elements

Objectives within each of the SSNPs are couched in terms of reform elements or areas. These are presented below.

### Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership reform elements

The ITQNP facilitation reform elements are as follows.

1. World leading professional development and support which will empower principals to better manage their schools to achieve improved student results and higher quality teaching to lead performance improvement at the local level
2. New pathways into teaching
3. Better pathways into teaching
4. Indigenous education workforce pathways
5. New professional standards to underpin national reforms
6. Nationally agreed process for accrediting and certifying Accomplished and Leading Teachers
7. Joint engagement with higher education providers to improve teacher quality
8. Establish quality placements for teacher education courses
9. Establish School Centres of Excellence
10. Improved mobility of the Australian teaching workforce
11. Improved quality and availability of teacher workforce data
12. Improved performance management and continuous improvement in schools (linked to the professional learning and national standards).

The ITQNP reward reform elements are as follows.

1. Improved pay dispersion to reward quality teaching
2. Improved reward structures for teachers and leaders who work in disadvantaged Indigenous, rural/remote and hard-to-staff schools
3. Improved in-school support for teachers and leaders, particularly in disadvantaged Indigenous, rural/remote and hard-to-staff schools
4. Increased school-based decision-making about recruitment, staffing mix and budget
5. Continual improvement program for all teachers
6. Indigenous teachers' and school leaders' engagement with community members.

### National Partnership for Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities reform areas

The Low SES NP focuses on six key reform areas. They are as follows.

1. Incentives to attract high-performing principals and teachers
2. Adoption of best-practice performance management and staffing arrangements that articulate a clear role for principals
3. School operational arrangements which encourage innovation and flexibility
4. Provision of innovative and tailored learning opportunities
5. Strengthened school accountability
6. External partnerships with parents, other schools, businesses and communities and provision of access to extended services.

#### Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership reform areas

The LNNP identifies three key priority reform areas. They are as follows.

1. Teaching and Learning
2. School Leadership and Whole School Engagement
3. Monitoring Student and School Performance.

#### The Quality Teaching and Literacy and Numeracy element of the Northern Territory Closing the Gap National Partnership

The QT and LN element of the NT CtG NP identifies the following key priority reform areas.

1. Enhanced literacy and numeracy outcomes for children in targeted communities
2. Improvements in the number, qualifications and career pathways of Indigenous staff.

## The National Evaluation

Phase 1 of the SSNP National Evaluation (the National Evaluation) aims to: assess the extent to which SSNP outcomes have been achieved; identify and share learnings; and, inform decisions about future directions for the Australian Government in supporting better educational outcomes for all students. The National Evaluation is designed to complement jurisdictional evaluation work and is intended to build on the evidence emerging from that work. The National Evaluation is also to assess the Australian Government's contribution to achieving the SSNP outcomes, including national reform objectives.

There are several reporting components of Phase 1 of the National Evaluation. In this Report, the focus is on analysis of activity and evaluation effort for each of the four SSNPs. This Report is supplemented by a Report of the Evaluation of the Quality Teaching and Literacy and Numeracy element of the Northern Territory Closing the Gap National Partnership, and a Report of the Interim Evaluation of the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership. However, the latter is also re-presented as Chapter 2 of this Report so that the full suite of evidence about the ITQNP can be seen in the context of the Smarter Schools National Partnerships initiative as a whole. Similarly, the Report of Evaluation Effort is re-presented as Chapter 6 as the analysis needs to be seen in the wider context of the National Evaluation.

The methodology for the National Evaluation has included: an extensive desktop analysis of administrative material; strategic interviews with key stakeholders in jurisdictions and representative or specialist organisations; a wide range of case studies conducted as visits to National Partnership schools; and, analysis of measurement issues associated with the SSNPs.

The nine Papers that constitute the desktop analysis of activity contain a comprehensive description of

jurisdictional effort within each of the SSNPs.

- Paper 1 is an overview of the SSNPs.
- Paper 2 provides a description of the reform structure and activity within the reforms.
- Paper 3 deals with issues of sustainability.
- Paper 4 relates to data structures and processes used in measurement of the reforms.
- Paper 5 focuses on support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Paper 6 analyses activity within the Low SES NP.
- Paper 7 analyses activity within the LNNP.
- Paper 8 analyses activity within the ITQNP.
- Paper 9 analyses activity within the focus element of the NT CtG NP.

Subsequent desktop analysis work related to evaluation effort led to the development of a further Paper. This Paper provides an account of evaluation plans and effort to date within the SSNPs across the jurisdictions.

Building from the descriptive information provided in the above Papers, and supplemented by interview and case study work, the National Evaluation has focused on analysis of the evidence in order to identify progress in the SSNPs. The key findings are presented below. From this work, the analysis then considers implications for the SSNPs and the higher-level meanings of the findings in the context of the contribution of the SSNPs to the national productivity agenda.

## Key findings

### *Progress in activity*

The National Evaluation has involved the examination of a considerable body of evidence about progress in activity within the SSNPs. From the examination, there is identification of a number of key findings indicating the impacts and traction arising from activity under the auspices of the SSNPs.

Figure 1 sets out an overview of the key findings about progress in activity and effort. The figure provides an insight into the scope, progress and attainments of work currently underway. Taken together, these key findings establish the extent to which the SSNPs are acting as a catalyst for the work required as jurisdictions move towards attainment of the respective National Partnership objectives.

The findings from the analysis of the evidence about progress in activity fall into five categories. The categories are:

- Strategic implementation
- Teacher quality
- Classroom practice
- Student engagement
- Closing the gap

While there is considerable overlap across the categories, and indeed potential synergies amongst them, they nevertheless provide a basis for consideration of the findings about progress in activity. Issues related to strategic implementation are considered in the following and subsequent sections of this Chapter. Although reference to the other categories is made throughout this Chapter, they are

explored in more detail in subsequent Chapters.

### Figure 1: Overview of key findings about progress in activity

In terms of activity, the evidence for progress in implementation indicates:

- growing recognition of the imperative to improve student performance
- considerable co-investment by the jurisdictions as partners with the Australian Government, including instances of jurisdictions integrating and aligning the SSNPs to maximise impact
- instances where the SSNP effort is integrated with major jurisdictional priorities and initiatives to provide leverage into whole-of-system change
- growing recognition by the systems and sectors of the benefits arising from cross-sectoral effort focused on school improvement
- significant activity intended to improve student performance
- emerging professional structures that can underpin reform
- development of new and better pathways into teaching, including for Indigenous people
- trials of approaches to recruiting high quality staff for hard-to-staff schools
- spreading devolution of decision-making to school principals
- engagement of many teachers and school leaders in the pursuit of improved performance
- establishment of school centres of excellence for pre-service practicum, internship and ongoing support
- embedding of improved performance management approaches to support continuous improvement in teacher quality
- spreading establishment of increased performance expectations for all students
- growing commitment to the development of capacity for instructional leadership
- increasing focus on the skill and knowledge of teachers for effective classroom practice
- increasing in-class teacher support and direction from coaches and tutors
- emerging recognition of the importance of data analysis to inform pedagogy
- emerging identification of the learning tools that lead to improvement
- emerging identification of the analytical tools to measure and understand learning issues
- substantial success in obtaining improvement in many previously intractable situations
- emergence of new models of student engagement.

#### *Strategic implementation*

Across all jurisdictions, the evidence indicates that the SSNPs have galvanised a strategic view of the imperative to improve student performance, especially in the areas of literacy and numeracy. System and sector leaders are engaging with how best to ensure that work across all National Partnership schools is based on strong research evidence about what is the most effective practice to increase literacy and numeracy learning outcomes.

Working from this research evidence, system and sector leaders are putting into place a range of key strategic overlays that have potential to inform, guide and support activity in National Partnership schools. These strategic overlays include the following.

- Leverage gained through collaboration among the jurisdictional systems and sectors, including cross-sectoral governance arrangements so that capacity to impact learning outcomes is maximised
- School support structures within each of the education sectors, including the independent sector, to provide leadership and to facilitate implementation of school plans within each of the SSNPs
- Facilitation of partnerships with higher education providers so that pre-service preparation

and teacher professional learning are informed by current research and evidence-based practice

- Facilitation of partnerships with key stakeholder groups, including Indigenous community organisations, so that students' learning takes place in a context where practice is informed by cultural connections
- Development and application of data systems to monitor and understand student learning outcome performance as well as other relevant indicators, including those associated with attendance and engagement
- Development of implementation strategies that harness potential synergies across the SSNPs, and the promotion of these at regional and school level
- Investment in system, regional and school cluster leadership capacity and support structures, focused especially on literacy and numeracy pedagogy, to strengthen the quality of support at the school level
- Investment in school leadership, focused especially on increasing instructional leadership capacity so that priority is given by school leaders to working with staff to impact student learning outcomes
- Identification of changes to policy and operations to increase capacity at the local level to address identified issues that impact on student learning outcomes
- Adjustments to school level budgets and staffing practice to attract high quality staff to hard-to-staff schools and to schools where the evidence indicates a continuing pattern of student under-achievement
- Development of system and sectoral initiatives such as incentives, scholarships, internships and special entry provision designed to attract and retain high quality teachers so that equity of learning opportunity is provided for all students
- Development and facilitation of models that accord both responsibility and flexibility to schools so that extended provision of learning opportunities can address issues of connection and engagement for all children and young people
- Targeted investment in new models of operation, including inter-agency partnerships, which explicitly address local factors inhibiting student learning and engagement.

The evidence shows that, across all jurisdictions, the SSNPs are identified as appropriate and timely investments into which effort can be placed to bring about system improvement. Moreover, there is recognition that the national imprimatur attached to the SSNPs is enabling issues to be addressed and support garnered that otherwise would not have been possible. The design of the SSNPs means that the States and Territories can align their investments and efforts aimed at performance improvement with a national approach that accords them significant imprimatur, resource support and flexibility.

The jurisdictions are making considerable co-investments to the SSNPs as partners with the Australian Government. The investments include those that derive from established effort in the jurisdiction consistent with the directions and activities implemented through the SSNPs. In other instances, the co-investment enables an expansion of activity and effort through the SSNPs so that there is a wider base of schools benefiting from participation.

Beyond these two approaches, there are instances where jurisdictional resources have been invested

to develop structures and arrangements into which SSNP activity and effort are placed to maximise impact and traction. In such instances, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the SSNPs are contributing to a high level of systemic change.

At the strategic level in the jurisdictions, the evidence indicates consideration being given to how work can be leveraged from the SSNPs to impact more broadly. There is evidence for a growing belief that it is imperative for this leveraging to occur. It needs to be substantial and well resourced. There is a view that the SSNPs provide an opportunity to maximise impact in the systems and sectors by leveraging from current work to address and achieve improved student outcomes in all schools, across the full performance spectrum.

### *Teacher quality*

The evidence indicates a growing preparedness on the part of the jurisdictions to move towards the adoption of the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* developed by AITSL. In most instances, this includes transition from current jurisdiction-level teacher standards.

To a varying extent, negotiations to facilitate the transition are proving successful, with jurisdictions participating in trials of implementation processes. In some jurisdictions, amendments to industrial agreements have built elements of an emerging professional structure, including accomplished and lead teacher positions, into awards. In others, trials of the approaches have been established using SSNP funds to demonstrate the efficacy of such approaches in relation to teacher quality. In some jurisdictions, consideration is being given to legislative changes that may be required.

New and better pathways into teaching are being facilitated by several jurisdictions. The work includes initiatives whereby Indigenous people and people with qualifications other than teaching are invited and supported to enter teaching through these pathways. The evidence shows an emphasis on clinical practice and on-the-job training in these new pathways. In many instances, the arrangements involve a joint higher education and employer delivery model.

Learning, accreditation and employment pathways for Indigenous people are being facilitated, with employers supporting both professional development and placement. The evidence indicates that a greater number of culturally appropriate courses are being provided by tertiary partners to facilitate all levels of training. These include training for community liaison personnel, school support officers, learning support specialists, assistant teachers and fully qualified and registered teachers.

There is evidence in some instances for the early identification of potentially highly suitable people for these roles, including young people in school. It is a feature of the work that support is being provided through mentoring and tutoring to ensure sustained connection to and progress in the pathway. Internships, scholarships, living allowances and other incentives are being made available to those involved in the pathways. In many jurisdictions and sectors, the pathways have been developed to meet goals of increasing the number of Indigenous people working in schools.

The evidence indicates that trials have been established involving the recruitment of high quality staff for hard-to-staff schools and increased devolution of decision making to principals. Decisions by principals about particular staffing and placement are becoming more common. Situational analyses are being used to identify school staffing needs. In some instances, changed budget structures and rules are enabling decisions to be made about variations to staffing in relation to status and roles.

In some jurisdictions, there is evidence of movement towards more flexible resource allocation. Packages involving differential remuneration and incentive are being offered to attract teachers. Internships are being offered to facilitate entry into teaching of high quality graduates, especially for



hard-to-staff schools. The evidence shows these initiatives often include teacher mentoring, coaching and concessional workloads. In some cases, rewards are built into packages, at times to encourage staffing retention and in other instances to recognise attainment of agreed outcomes or school performance targets.

As a prominent activity under the ITQNP, many systems and sectors are establishing school centres of excellence to strengthen pathways into teaching and to more fully engage school leaders and teachers in the quality agenda. From the evidence, it is apparent that there are variations in the centre of excellence model, arising from jurisdictional priorities and identification of the potential of the centres to impact a broad spectrum of areas in teacher quality.

In some instances, there is a focus on placing highly accomplished and lead teachers within the centres to widen and strengthen the base of instructional leadership at the local level. Another variation in the model sees these teachers working within clusters of schools that relate to the centre. In their work, they facilitate ongoing practice-based professional learning and teacher inquiry. In other variations of the model, the focus is on the provision of extended pre-service practicum, internship and ongoing support for new entrants into teaching.

Within the evidence, there is an indication that employers are working to give performance management processes a more explicit professional context. The emerging profile of the teacher registration authorities and awareness of the implications of the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* are leading to a fuller recognition of the potential role of performance management in the improvement of teacher quality. This would suggest that there is the beginning of a shift from seeing performance management as an instrumental administrative function to one that 'fits' inside the emerging teacher quality agenda. Evidence for this 'fit' is also suggested by instances where reference to relevant student outcomes data occurs in the context of performance management.

### *Classroom practice*

The evidence shows that the SSNPs are acting within National Partnership schools as significant catalysts to address fundamental issues of classroom practice so that student-learning outcomes are improved. Through the SSNPs, jurisdictions are taking advantage of the opportunity provided to engage with schools so that the enabling factors contributing to improved student outcomes are the focus of activity. This focus especially describes the LNNP, and is also prominent in the Low SES NP.

The work being undertaken under the auspices of the SSNPs is leading to the emergence of a national body of evidence about the factors that are critical to quality pedagogy and, therefore, to improved student outcomes. While there is as yet no substantial information arising from evaluation in the jurisdictions, the National Evaluation evidence indicates that the factors include:

- instructional leadership impacting at the classroom level
- placement of supportive expertise alongside the teacher
- integration of research and teacher inquiry with classroom practice
- use of data to inform, review and develop classroom practice
- facilitation of teacher collaboration and reflection to improve practice
- partnership arrangements between schools
- partnerships with higher education working on-site to link practice and professional learning
- access to high order professional learning opportunities, focused especially on attainment of

new and emerging knowledge about pedagogy and assessment

- outcomes-oriented performance management, with regular review of practice.

Within the National Evaluation evidence, there is frequent reference to the increased attention that is being given to the importance of teacher expectation as a prerequisite to student attainment. There is recognition that high expectations need to be set and maintained for all students. The evidence suggests that where high expectations are set, the classroom learning environment will be active and positive and, with careful teacher analysis of the learning and appropriate reaction to that feedback, the classroom will be a place where the aspirations of both the teacher and the learner can be met.

It is clear in the evidence that awareness of the implications arising from international student performance assessment data are challenging numbers of school leaders and teachers. They are recognising that there is a need to increase performance expectations and standards for all students if Australia is to improve its relative international standing. There is also recognition that underperformance arising from low teacher expectations and inadequate response to knowledge about student learning cannot well serve individual students in their future lives, or the national good. Such recognition, perhaps unknowingly, affirms the centrality of the national productivity agenda. This theme is prominent in the school site visit evidence.

*"I think our expectations of these kids have been too low ... it becomes self-fulfilling ... low expectations and low performance reinforce each other ... we are trying to break that cycle ... and create a new culture of learning." Teacher in a site visit school*

In pursuit of increased student performance, the evidence points to a developing interest in the learning tools required to underpin improved student attainment. Within this evidence, there is reference to a more substantial and focused professional conversation within and across National Partnership schools. Such conversations challenge the appropriateness and effectiveness of tools and approaches that have been long applied and relied upon.

A key aspect of this emerging interest is recognition that, alongside more effective learning tools and approaches, there also needs to be a fuller and better repertoire of analytical tools to measure and understand learning issues and assess learning attainments. One of the emerging interests is the application of digital technologies within both pedagogy and diagnostic testing to personalise learning and assessment. Further, there is an indication, although quite limited at this stage, that planned evaluation is being recognised as an intrinsic part of school and system work to build a base of evidence that will inform ongoing improvement in classroom practice.

### *Student engagement*

The evidence indicates instances where the SSNPs are leading to a more explicit focus on issues associated with student engagement within National Partnership schools. In these instances, this focus can be seen especially in the work being undertaken to strengthen student engagement through improved classroom practice. In the Low SES NP in particular, there are examples where participating schools are complementing their efforts to improve classroom practice by addressing a range of areas that underpin and support student engagement.

Work being undertaken by these schools includes accessing community-based expertise, addressing health and hygiene issues, and building family support and connection. Some highly considered work is being done in particular instances under the auspices of the SSNPs to address issues of enrolment, attendance, and behaviour, and to sustain connection across the transition years.

In the evidence, there is commentary that the SSNPs are having value in the area of student engagement in schools in low socio-economic status communities by illuminating the extent to which

much in previous approach and practice has not led to the traction and outcomes that programs were intended to achieve. There is recognition that issues of student engagement in these schools need to be responded to explicitly, including at the individual student level, rather than through generalised initiatives that in reality are additional to core business facilitated by supplementary funding.

*“The Low SES NP is leading us to focus on what needs to occur in classrooms to lift the performance of our students ... my view is that previous programs for disadvantaged schools did little to improve student performance.”* Principal of a site visit school

From the evidence, the following areas are prominent in the activity being undertaken related to student engagement in schools in low socio-economic status communities.

- Schools are supplementing core resources by applying the SSNP funding to the purchase of support resources. They also supplement core staffing by expanding paraprofessional workforce involvement.
- Extended service schools models are being developed in some National Partnership schools as an approach to addressing intractable community-based issues of disengagement by children and young people. The models include those that involve explicit partnership arrangements with agencies and community organisations that co-locate on the school site. Agency co-funding is also a feature of some of these models.
- There is recognition that the likelihood of children and young people remaining engaged in learning is increased where issues of parent and family connection are also addressed. In the area of parental engagement, a range of structured initiatives can be identified, many on school sites. These initiatives include:
  - identifying and connecting with local parents even before the birth of their children, to provide knowledge and to develop parenting skills as first teachers
  - early learning programs that require active parent participation with their children, including speech development programs that increase family capacity to support language growth
  - ongoing school and classroom activities led by parents, such as cultural programs, community gardens and healthy food preparation
  - adult learning situations for parents, including development of skills to connect with and support their children’s learning.

*“The (family and community) centre (co-located on the school site) has tremendous potential ... we have earmarked some of the (National Partnership) funding for a school staffing arrangement that will connect the school and the centre ... down the track, I would like to see a fully integrated model ...”* Principal of a site visit school

A feature of many of the approaches and initiatives is that they are oriented to building parent knowledge and capacity in ways where they feel valued and respected. The work does not lead to dependence.

- There is increasing awareness that the transition points associated with schooling are points of potential disengagement for children, young people and their families. Work is taking place focused on ensuring that the processes and structures are in place around these transition points so that there is maximum support to maintain connection. The transition points where this work is occurring include: from child- or home-care to pre-school; from pre-school to school; from primary to high school; and, from high school to work or further education. As

students move through the years of schooling, work is also being undertaken to address transition issues as they graduate from one Year to the next and into and from the middle years of schooling.

- There are instances in the evidence where work is being undertaken to make the earliest possible identification of those children and young people who are becoming cognitively disconnected from school progress. There is recognition that cognitive disconnection leads to behavioural issues, which in turn can lead to disconnection from school. This approach to identification leads to intervention so that support can be provided as early as possible to address the factors that lead to disengagement.
- Schools are increasingly using data as a basis to monitor student progress and to identify indicators of the need for intervention. This includes use of local demographic data, Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) data in the first year of school, enrolment and attendance data, program participation data, internal diagnostic assessment data and external test data such as NAPLAN. Surveys are also being utilised, including those that gather student and parent views about school engagement and progress. Much of this data collection and analysis is being enabled by quite sophisticated jurisdictional data support and interrogation structures.

*“We were using student data prior to the National Partnership, but what it has done is give us the capacity to engage all staff fully in the processes and to develop their skills to understand the data, and then to make the changes needed in the classroom.”* Principal of a site visit school
- A feature of system and sector approach in many instances is the requirement for National Partnership schools to develop explicit plans in response to situation analyses. These plans set out targets, implementation strategies, measurement approaches, and monitoring and evaluation requirements. The plans are part of an accountability mechanism that is seen as critical to guide and inform effort aimed at addressing issues of student and family engagement with schools and with learning. In part at least, work in this area reflects an appreciation that previous effort was disparate and lacked appropriate accountability for outcomes.

*“We undertook a situational analysis as a requirement for the funding ... the exercise was one of the best things we have ever done ... it provided a clear picture of where our efforts needed to be and resulted in changes to practices in the school and in classrooms.”* Principal of a site visit school
- Some systems and sectors are working with National Partnership schools in low socio-economic status communities to explore the opportunities that arise through the ITQNP to develop flexible staffing arrangements. One aspect is the attraction and retention of high quality staff with the skills and capacities needed to commit to and work effectively in often challenging environments. These schools are developing the staffing and remuneration mix required to build the conditions that will underpin student engagement, and the sustaining of those conditions as core business.
- Some systems and sectors are also working with National Partnership schools in low socio-economic status communities to develop flexible organisational arrangements. These include adjustments to the school operating hours, days, weeks and terms to fit appropriately with local community patterns and needs. They also include arrangements at leadership levels that address community engagement

*“The National Partnership money has allowed us to change school arrangements to suit the community better and improve attendance ... but we are a school, we cannot be expected to solve family and community problems ... we don’t have the resources or the expertise.”* Teacher in a site visit school

issues, enabling site principals to focus on the development of improved classroom instruction and a more engaging and learning-centred school environment.

While the instances are limited, there is evidence for innovation in approach, structure and practice to address issues of student engagement in low socio-economic status communities. Innovation tends to be discernible especially where the focus is on the individual child or young person, not on the organisation. It is this outcomes focus that drives the funding arrangements, the local inter-agency partnerships and the harnessing of local expertise needed to support engagement and learning.

Innovation along such lines extends school responsibility beyond school enrolments, reaching out to all children and young people of compulsory school age within the local community. The approach tends to extend school resourcing and operational models beyond the site of the school. While the school may take responsibility for identification and coordination, responsibility to connect with the young person and to build their engagement is contracted amongst community providers.

The learning that occurs for the student through such innovation is not perceived as an alternative to mainstream. Rather, it is constructed as meaningful learning that is another form of mainstream learning, designed to better suit the young person. The learning provides every prospect of formal attainment of accreditation or qualification. This learning is not additional to core school responsibility. It is core business. As noted in the evidence, the innovative structures that are emerging challenge concepts as to how 'school' should be defined.

### *Closing the gap*

Across the SSNPs, a range of evidence has been gathered about activity and effort in the context of closing the gap for Indigenous students and increasing the representation of Indigenous people in the school education workforce. Under the auspices of the SSNPs, there is a discernible sense of momentum around explicit work to impact the learning outcomes of Indigenous students and to provide students who have capacity, interest and aptitude with flexible pathways into careers in school education.

In particular, the evidence indicates that importance attaches to high expectations and an explicit focus on sustained progress in literacy and numeracy learning, informed by outcomes data set against national benchmarks. Additionally, the valuing and harnessing of local cultural connections are providing a platform for literacy and numeracy learning in a context where self-esteem, pride and identity are maintained. Importantly, expectations are set within the context of the curriculum in which all Australian students learn. Such expectations are seen in these instances as important for all students, including all Indigenous students, as they are the essential underpinning for access to purposeful and inclusive pathways towards a recognised qualification and Year 12 or equivalent attainment.

*"We have some fabulous Indigenous staff who are the key to making and sustaining the connections the school has to have with families and the community ... I can see though that often the demands can be too much ... they'll tell me, their priority has to be the classroom, getting better literacy and numeracy results, they can't do it all. The (National Partnership) funding has been terrific, but if it stops it will be very difficult for us." Principal of a site visit school*

The National Evaluation evidence shows that work in the areas of teacher quality, improved literacy and numeracy learning and increased student engagement is foundational to successfully addressing issues related to the closing the gap agenda. The evidence highlights that each of these areas needs to be intrinsically part of the flexible investments and efforts required for the closing the gap reform objectives to be met.

In the evidence, there are instances where schools, systems and sectors are building on this necessary

foundation through further approaches and practices that are meeting with success. Within these instances, there is a growing sense of belief that previously intractable barriers are better understood. Moreover, the evidence points to a growing belief that such barriers can be more effectively addressed for the benefit of Indigenous children and young people, their families and communities.

The evidence suggests that a number of schools, in partnership with agencies and communities, have addressed what appear to be the critical pre-conditions for capacity to address the closing the gap agenda. Amongst these are ensuring that there is access to a learning pathway to Year 12 or equivalent for all students, with appropriate resourcing to enable flexible provision where required. Another pre-condition that is being addressed by a number of National Partnership schools concerns approaches that guarantee portability of enrolment and the learning program across schools and jurisdictions in response to Indigenous mobility.

In another area that is seen as pre-conditional, there are instances where schools are working with partner agencies to address issues related to enrolment and attendance. While aspects of the work are varied, there is a focus on building family capacity and closely monitoring attendance and engagement patterns. Schools are ensuring the earliest possible identification of indicators of disengagement. Responses give particular priority to the expertise and cultural understandings that reside with Indigenous staff members.

*“Attendance is the biggest issue ... if they’re not at school, they can’t learn ... we have some good local arrangements with agencies and some success stories ... but nobody could be happy with the attendance rates, there are some families that just don’t seem to care or understand why their children should go to school regularly. Many of the excuses are fabrications, and the supportive parents tell you exactly that.”* Principal of a site visit school

Work within the SSNPs is indicating the importance of capacity building rather than creating a function of dependence. There are instances where a strong focus on outcomes for Indigenous students is leading to demonstrable progress, pride in achievement and growth in personal resilience. Additional resources are allocated and sustained, with partnerships formed so that there is an underlying basic capacity for all children and young people to engage in school and successful learning. Where necessary, intervention occurs so that this engagement and learning success become realities.

### *Progress in evaluation effort*

The evidence for evaluation effort under the auspices of the SSNPs at the jurisdictional level indicates a spectrum.

At one end of the spectrum, although not widely represented, there is evidence for the development of comprehensive jurisdictional evaluation plans that are embedded in broader work. Such plans sit alongside the implementation planning and the development of jurisdictional and sectoral support structures to underpin the work of National Partnership schools. Jurisdictional governance structures over-sighting the SSNPs are prominent in these instances. Figure 2 indicates instances of progress in jurisdictions in relation to evaluation effort.

Effort to date in the jurisdictions is principally oriented to analysis of the effectiveness of implementation processes to ensure that the required jurisdictional outputs can be attained within the established time frames. This information is being used to refine processes and to provide evidence of progress in meeting jurisdictional output targets. In this context, the evidence is unambiguous that the SSNPs have encouraged the identification and collection of what could properly be described as a vast array of data. Much of these data are being used to monitor program implementation and progress against output targets.

**Figure 2: Areas of progress in evaluation effort**

In terms of evaluation effort, the evidence for progress in implementation indicates instances where jurisdictions have:

- recognised the importance of evaluation as a key component of their work within the SSNPs
- identified the distinction between monitoring and evaluation, with implications for approaches to measurement of outcomes
- identified the difference between process and input/output evaluation and outcomes-based evaluation to focus findings on higher-order strategic impacts
- developed jurisdictional evaluation frameworks to structure and guide evaluation effort
- planned evaluation in such a way that the effort will address cost-effectiveness decisions and the higher order implications arising from implementation of the SSNPs
- recognised the importance of independent external evaluation, with contract arrangements either in place or being developed.

At this stage in the life cycle of the ITQNP and the Low SES NP, it would not be expected by-and-large that substantial State and Territory evaluation would be completed. In some jurisdictions, plans and contracts for evaluation are in place and work has commenced or is imminent.

The evidence indicates that, in a number of instances monitoring and program evaluation have been undertaken in relation to activity within the LNNP. The implementation period for the LNNP is drawing to a conclusion, and the opportunities for the development and sharing of understandings across the jurisdictions about the reform potential of the approaches and practices implemented through it will inevitably recede. The evidence suggests that the jurisdictions generally could have given greater priority in their evaluative work to gathering and analysing the evidence that would demonstrate the relative cost-effectiveness of the approaches and practices that have been implemented by them. The understandings gained are likely to be critical to supporting systems, sectors and schools as they make decisions about how they can most effectively and efficiently secure the reforms required for longer term impact on student literacy and numeracy outcomes.

### *Identified issues*

The analysis of evidence demonstrates that there is a very extensive body of constructive activity and effort under the auspices of the SSNPs, with significant commitment at all levels. The instrumental value of the activity and effort can be demonstrated through improvements in learning outcomes amongst the targeted groups within National Partnership schools. Value can also be indicated through the impact of approaches and practices intended to improve teacher quality. These include, by way of example, emerging success shown by increased outputs within the ITQNP to address school leadership, teacher quality and staff retention issues in hard-to-staff schools.

Against the intent of the SSNP initiative to achieve improvements in National Partnership schools by stimulating activity and effort and bringing a sharper focus on issues of teacher quality, literacy and numeracy learning and student engagement to improve the learning outcomes of students, the SSNP initiative is a successful one. Such achievements and success notwithstanding, the analysis of the evidence has identified a number of issues, presented in Figure 3 below. In large measure, these issues need to be seen in a positive light. They are national learnings from, and show the value of, the SSNP initiative. In particular, they are learnings about the approaches, structures and practices that can contribute to reform.

In the formative role of the National Evaluation, analysis of the evidence points to the desirability of a more explicit line-of-sight from activity and effort within the SSNPs to the reform objectives of the initiative and to the national productivity agenda. While the SSNPs were only ever designed to make a

contribution, the higher-order value of that contribution requires a clear line-of-sight to the broader reforms.

### Figure 3: Overview of identified issues

From the analysis of activity and evaluation effort, the evidence indicates the need for:

- greater coherence in planning and approach to align activity and effort to reform objectives
- the development of an explicit program logic so that there is a clear line-of-sight to reform
- increased recognition of the synergies across the SSNPs as a means to achieve reform
- broader recognition of the potential reform benefits that arise from jurisdictions linking the SSNPs with their own strategic directions
- monitoring and reporting that focuses on progress towards reform
- measurement and funding processes that identify and reward reform
- leadership to ensure that SSNP funding allocations are focused on capacity development for sustainability and productivity, rather than short-term responses to the deficits created by disadvantage
- a higher level of encouragement of innovative models of service delivery to provide evidence of progress towards and achievement of reform
- structural connection between the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* and work within the SSNPs to achieve whole-of-system quality teacher reform
- a more explicit focus on teacher knowledge of the foundational technical skills and concepts underpinning literacy and numeracy
- greater leverage from improvements in National Partnership schools as a contribution to system-wide reform
- a nationally consistent evaluation framework across the SSNP initiative to inform cost-effectiveness decisions that could change core business to achieve reform.

The identified issues are, in the main, issues linked to design. They suggest implications for the current operation of the SSNPs and for the implementation of work within them. Equally, they also suggest strategic implications that warrant exploration as the implementation of the current SSNPs continues and as possible future national effort is considered. As suggested above, the issues should properly be seen as learnings in a formative sense.

However, the identified issues are also scale and scope issues. Given the scale of the challenges for schools and systems to address the reform agenda, the learnings from the SSNP initiative may have particular relevance in light of the current national Review of Funding for Schooling. It may be, for example, that all school funding should be tied to the achievement of national productivity reform outcomes rather than targeted funding within a proportion of schools.

In the analysis of the higher order implications of the evidence, the key reference point is the national reform needed to create and sustain improvement in the learning outcomes of all Australian students. This is the compelling reference point for the National Evaluation, extending beyond description of activity and effort and beyond the improvements that may arise from that activity and effort within National Partnership schools. While they have a targeted delivery focus around students whose performance is at or below national minimum benchmarks, the SSNPs derive from and contribute to a national reform agenda for all students.



The overall design of the SSNPs accords prominence to identified elements and areas of reform within the participating schools. These elements and areas have been identified on the basis of research and evidence. However, the elements and areas are presented as a list, each couched as a reform in itself. These are largely described as activities or outputs. Because of this, the focus of the Agreements, implementation plans and reporting requirements is on activity and process to achieve the outputs within those schools. Consequently, as shown in the National Evaluation evidence, difficulty is being encountered at all levels to connect the elements and areas in a coherent way to address the fuller reform context into which the SSNPs have been placed as a national initiative.

Repeatedly in the National Evaluation evidence, there is commentary that expresses frustration about the disconnection in the national implementation of the SSNPs between the reform context and the primacy accorded to activity and effort in the different elements. Indeed, the articulation of the elements as 'reforms' appears to be distorting the view about what is needed for reform. Further, the implementation of many of these elements within a discrete number of targeted schools and focused at the lower end of the performance scale serves to reinforce the belief that improvement through activity in identified schools is the only intent of the SSNPs.

Consequently, the line-of-sight from within the SSNPs to reform becomes problematic, limiting capacity to achieve the reforms needed for systems and sectors to address in a sustained way the improved learning outcomes of students whose performance is at or below national minimum benchmarks. Beyond such considerations, the potential contribution of the SSNPs to whole-of-system reform is at risk of being unrealised, thus diminishing the value of the investment.

There is general consensus in the evidence that the elements as set out in the SSNP requirements and represented in the Agreements are all necessary changes. However, for them to be part of and contribute to the broader productivity reform agenda, the elements need to be viewed and implemented together with a range of other organisational, contextual and structural elements not identified in the Agreements. What appears missing in the design is an articulated and prominent program logic framework to ensure that activity and effort within the SSNPs contribute to reform.

The elements and areas as currently presented and implemented may produce change, which in turn may lead to improvement in student learning outcomes in the targeted and selected schools. However, without being tied in a cohesive manner into a reform agenda that is nationally articulated and understood within the SSNPs, the improvements are likely to be limited in locality and time, remaining dependent on continued external funding. The evidence verifies strongly that this is the case.

As work has progressed in the SSNPs, the evidence indicates that there is an emerging appreciation of the potential synergies that exist across them. At the same time, the evidence includes commentary that the initial design work of the SSNPs could have been conceptualised to explicitly take advantage of these synergies. The subsequent operation and monitoring have been counter-productive in this regard as the tendency has been to treat both the SSNPs and each of the elements within them as discrete and separate.

Instances of attempts to implement the SSNPs in an integrated fashion have caused significant reporting issues by blurring the line-of-sight between funding and activity within separate elements. However, integration holds substantial prospect of achieving a line-of-sight between funding, activity and reform. This has not been recognised or valued in the reporting requirements for the SSNPs. In fact, the evidence indicates that the reporting framework for the SSNPs exacerbates the wider design issue by the explicit insistence on reporting of activity and outputs within the discrete elements, rather

than against outcomes contributing to reform.

In endorsing the primacy of the reform agenda and expressing frustration that this primacy is not uppermost in approach to and effort under the auspices of the SSNPs, one National Evaluation strategic-level participant observed:

*... we are on an improvement journey, not a reform journey.*

As stated previously, this is not to say that the SSNPs carry the reform agenda alone. Rather, it is recognition that unless they contribute to reform, the investment in them will not contribute to the intended increase in system-wide productivity that is the genesis and purpose of the SSNPs.

In the dimensions of value, sustainability and leverage, there is commentary in the evidence that the reform value of the SSNPs can only be realised when sustained impacts on student learning outcomes can be demonstrated both in National Partnership schools and at whole-of-system level. While the jurisdictions value the additional funding to target students in schools where there are student outcome performance issues and issues of social disadvantage, views were expressed by participants in the National Evaluation about equity considerations that arise for all students.

An important intent of the SSNPs was that reform be achieved in National Partnership schools so that there would be sustained capacity for improved student learning outcomes for current and future cohorts. There is no evidence to suggest that the intent of the SSNP initiative was to fund activity focused on improvement that would be dependent on the continuation of additional resources. Indeed, one of the intents involved demonstration through the SSNPs of the reforms required more broadly for sustained and system-wide productivity growth.

There is considerable evidence that the fundamental challenge confronting school systems and schools is to improve the performance outcomes of all students, a challenge recognised in a range of important national documents. By way of example, the Discussion Paper for the current national Review of Funding for Schooling stated the following.

*Despite Australia's overall good performance, not all Australian students perform to their full potential. The 2006 results show that between 2003 and 2006, Australian student performance declined in both absolute and relative terms in reading literacy. This decline is evident at all levels of achievement. Our top students are doing less well relative to the top students in other countries. There is still a large number of students who, although above the minimum standard, are not doing well enough in literacy and numeracy and are at risk of falling behind their peers<sup>3</sup>.*

Consistent with the challenge laid out in such documents, there was substantial recognition by participants in the National Evaluation of the broader challenge that surrounds the SSNP initiative. There was considerable awareness of the information about the relative performance of Australian students such as that cited previously, and reinforced in Australian NAPLAN testing. Comment was made that the challenge is inclusive of underperforming students in non-National Partnership schools and

*“Testing results ... highlighted that we were seeing improvements in the ‘lower’ literacy cohorts but not in the ‘average to good’ cohort ... this has implications for classroom practice ... we now see a need for differentiated Reading and Spelling programs and whole-school guided reading which put higher expectations on all students, not just at-risk students.”*  
Teacher at a site visit school

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Government. Review of Funding for Schooling - Discussion Paper and Draft Terms of Reference, 2010, p10

students at the higher end of the performance spectrum.

While there was recognition that such a challenge required a range of responses, comment was made that fundamental teacher knowledge and practice were key areas to be addressed. Within the commentary, one aspect identified was the need for a much more explicit focus in teacher pre-service preparation and in teacher professional learning on the technical foundations and concepts that underpin literacy and numeracy. Although but one aspect, this was a recurring theme in the evidence.

There was identification by participants in the National Evaluation of the imperative and the challenges involved to leverage from the SSNPs to have comparable impacts in all schools for all students. A number of jurisdictions are addressing this issue by providing additional funding to extend initiatives into additional schools and cluster arrangements. However, in the context of the imperative that the jurisdictions identify, such initiatives do not appear sufficient to match the scale of the challenges confronting them to create reform. This is the case even where substantial co-investment combines with SSNP funds.

In fact, the quarantining of effort, including to targeted schools as the recipients of SSNP funding, is seen by a number of participants in the National Evaluation as carrying the risk that the schools will not be able to sustain their activities without additional and ongoing external funding. Unless the SSNPs impact whole-of-system productivity, the National Evaluation evidence indicates that future cohorts of students, including those in the lower proportion of the performance spectrum as represented in the National Partnership schools, are unlikely to have benefits arising from the SSNP investment. Such evidence is consistent with the research literature.

## The national productivity context

The evidence from the National Evaluation presented above needs to be understood in terms of the national context in which the SSNPs are placed. It is clear from the evidence that, while there is a broad and valuable spectrum of activity and effort within the SSNPs, the connection of this activity and effort to the national context and understanding of the reform intent that describes the context are not always apparent.

Over the course of the National Evaluation, there was a recurring theme of an inability to identify the linkage between a plethora of activity, the intended outcomes of the SSNPs, and the national productivity agenda to which they are intended to contribute. As a consequence, capacity across the jurisdictions to focus on and achieve the reform objectives to which the SSNPs are intended to contribute is being reduced. The meaning of such evidence can only be understood when account is taken of the national architecture that sits above the SSNPs and provides their genesis.

### *The national architecture*

The SSNP structure fits within an overall architecture that addresses the national productivity agenda. At the highest level of inter-governmental work, in 2008 the Council of Australian Governments set out the national productivity agenda around key reform elements.

The reform elements are as follows.

1. Boost productivity, workforce participation and geographic mobility
2. Better services for the community
3. Social inclusion
4. Closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage

## 5. Environmental sustainability

This agenda is in parallel with the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians of December 2008. The Declaration includes the following goals.

- Goal 1: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence
- Goal 2: All young Australians become successful learners...

In the area of schooling, the national productivity agenda resulted in all Australian governments agreeing to a common framework for reform in education through the National Education Agreement (NEA) under the auspices of the COAG Reform Council (CRC) in 2009. Under the NEA, and in alignment with the Schools Assistance Act (the Act), governments agreed to work towards national objectives and achievement of outcomes compatible with local circumstances and priorities. The overarching objective of the NEA and the Act is that all Australian school students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to participate effectively in society and employment in a globalised economy.

In response to the national productivity agenda, the Australian Government has focused on three core reform areas:

1. Raising the quality of teaching in all of our schools.
2. Ensuring all students are benefitting from schooling by building strategies based on high expectations of attainment, engagement and transitions for every student, especially in disadvantaged school communities.
3. Improving transparency and accountability of schools and school systems at all levels.

National recurrent funding for education is delivered to all school systems and sectors through the NEA and through the Schools Assistance Act. This funding is in the order of \$43 billion over the quadrennium. A further amount in the order of \$3 billion has been set aside by the Australian Government to support the reform efforts within the NEA, the Act and other funding arrangements. This funding has been allocated to the following components.

- The Australian Curriculum, Accreditation and Reporting Authority (ACARA)
- The Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)
- The Smarter Schools National Partnerships

The funding for AITSL is provided through the ITQNP. In addition, work in other areas, including for example the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA), impacts to support reform in education.

In further support of the national productivity agenda, more recent information reinforces the imperative for reform. A body of information, derived principally from the analysis of international assessments, suggests reform is required to respond to Australia's declining performance relative to other OECD countries.

Figure 4 below sets out in summary form some of the key performance information that further supports the imperative for school education to respond to the national productivity agenda<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> The research paper entitled *Schooling Challenges and Opportunities* (August 2011) by the Nous Group for the Review of Funding for Schooling expands on the issues in detail.

**Figure 4: Issues in Australian school performance**

- \* Student learning outcomes in Australia are very good by international standards but there is evidence of some decline over the last decade.
- \* Australia is among the five OECD countries for which reading literacy performance declined significantly between 2000 and 2009. At the lower end of the reading literacy proficiency scale, 12 per cent of students failed to reach Level 2 in PISA 2000 compared to 14 per cent in PISA 2009 (Thomson *et al.*, 2011).
- \* The PISA 2009 results indicated a fall in test scores in comparison to the PISA in-depth assessment of mathematics in 2003 (OECD, 2010b).... representing a statistically significant decline in mathematical literacy (Thomson *et al.*, 2011).
- \* The variation in performance between high- and low-performing students in Australia was higher than the OECD average in reading and science and similar to that found for the OECD as a whole in mathematics in PISA 2009 (Thomson *et al.*, 2011).
- \* In reading literacy, the gap between students in the highest and lowest socio-economic quartile is equivalent to more than one proficiency level or almost three full years of schooling (Thomson *et al.*, 2011).
- \* The performance of Indigenous students is considerably below the Australian average. ...a difference (that) equates to more than one proficiency level or more than two full years of schooling (Thomson *et al.*, 2011).
- \* Even in those schools drawing students from wealthier areas, underperformance remains a concern. Although low achievers are concentrated in the quartile of schools drawing on the poorest families, the research shows there are actually more low-achieving students spread across the remaining schools. Even in the wealthiest quartile of schools, more than 10 per cent of students are ranked in the bottom 20 per cent of NAPLAN results.

National performance information, now well established, analysed and accepted, provides an unambiguous imperative for broad reform, inclusive of but extending beyond those areas where underperformance has long been an issue. While the SSNPs are intended to contribute to reform in National Partnership schools, the evidence suggests that reform is needed across the full performance spectrum. The evidence from the SSNPs addresses these performance data by indicating that system-wide reform needs to be embedded strongly in quality teaching, transformed literacy and numeracy learning and universally engaged children and young people.

### *The research*

Over the past decade in particular, a substantial amount of national and international research has provided a wealth of understanding about issues related to improvements in system, school, teacher and student performance. This research is widely accepted throughout all jurisdictions as the basis of effort towards performance improvement. Interestingly, participants in the National Evaluation cited aspects of the research frequently as they explored issues related to the SSNPs and their place in national effort. In this regard, the SSNP initiative is providing powerful evidence with implications for future approach and structure to achieve reform in Australian education.

In broad terms, the research provides the following understandings.

- Sustained outcome improvement for all students is possible from any base over at least 6 years.
- The difference between good and poor teaching can amount to two years of student achievement. The impact of poor quality teaching in succession is particularly disastrous.
- Sustained student outcome improvement arises from high quality teaching.
- High quality teaching focuses on the teacher's analysis of and reaction to the learning of the student, how the student takes in the content and skills, applies them in new situations and responds in light of the outcomes of those applications.
- High quality teaching is a minimum standard for all teachers.

- Only whole-of-system reform will bring about sustained improvement for all students by guaranteeing high quality teaching in all classrooms.
- Classroom transformation requires the engagement of teachers as professional practitioners in whole-of-system reform.
- Reform to achieve high quality teaching in all classrooms is underpinned by professional standards, structures and approaches within which teachers are recognised and rewarded for the sustained effectiveness of their professional practice.
- The dimension of instructional leadership is critical to effect and sustain improved teacher practice leading to higher levels of student performance.
- Quality practice in classrooms requires an open and collaborative environment within which teachers work together towards higher levels of performance.
- The culture of classrooms can be transformed by a focus on outcomes for each student, teacher collaboration, coaching by experts, and data-informed and evidence-based practice.
- Sustained teacher inquiry needs to be an essential part of practice to sustain teacher quality.
- Student engagement with learning needs to be monitored, with awareness of and response to the early indicators of cognitive disengagement.
- Student engagement needs to involve extended school responsibility for all children and young people in the community, with flexible learning situations funded as part of an accredited learning pathway.
- Schools need to work in partnership with community agencies to support families as first teachers of their children, increasing parental capacity to ensure their children's engagement in an accredited learning pathway.
- Closing the gap for Indigenous students requires sustained and coordinated effort across schools and partner agencies, with flexibility to address local issues and long-term and cohesively packaged funding guarantees.

The challenge is to apply the understandings arising from the research to address the national productivity agenda in the context of Australian schooling. In meeting the challenge, account needs to be taken of the evidence in the research pointing to the critical delineation between improvement and reform. The national productivity agenda is a reform agenda, requiring sustained productivity increase. It is not an improvement agenda with attached notions of incremental steps within existing approaches, supported by ongoing additional investment.

This broad challenge is as relevant to the SSNPs and to other reform instruments as it is to the whole NEA, the Act and associated school funding arrangements. It is a challenge that to date does not seem to have been met by the SSNPs, in conceptualisation, design, agreement, implementation, reporting or outcomes. The evidence suggests that the challenge as a whole is, in any case, substantially beyond the original conception or capacity of the SSNPs. However, their role included making a contribution to the national productivity agenda. Optimising their capacity to address that aspect of the role is an important consideration in this analysis. Optimising capacity of any future effort towards reform needs to be informed by the findings arising from the analysis.

### Conceptualising a line-of-sight to reform

In terms of line-of-sight to reform, the evidence from the National Evaluation shows a general lack of

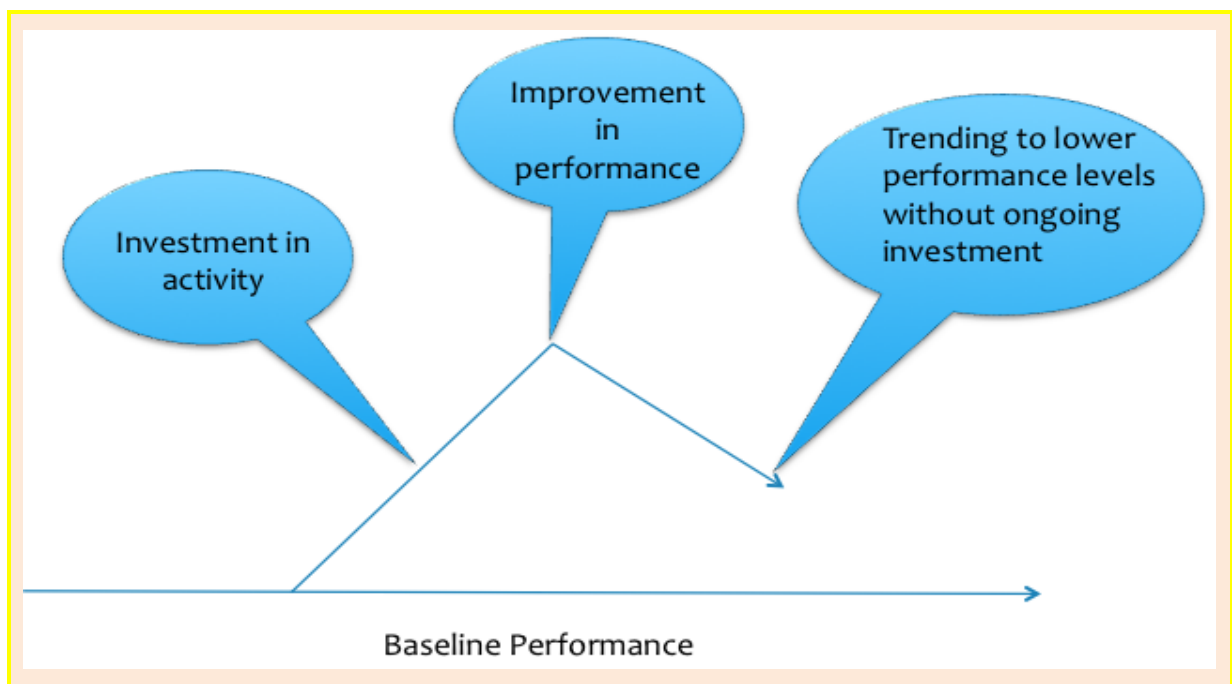
clarity in design and agreement about whether the activity and effort within the SSNPs should be understood as achieving incremental improvement in performance or whether the work that is done should contribute to innovation and improved models of service delivery within and across National Partnership schools.

Conceptualised from the Agreements, the SSNPs are seemingly about improvement in performance. Improvement in performance through additional activity and effort is the focus of implementation plans and of reporting and evaluations in relation to the outputs of those plans. The fillip for improvement is increased investment, both from SSNP funds and from co-investments made by the jurisdictions. Improvement in performance because of increased investment can be equated with an increase in production.

However, conceptualised from the national productivity agenda, which is their genesis, the SSNPs are about a growth in productivity, which requires reform. Sustained and continuous improvement arising from the reform of structures, culture and practice can be equated with increased productivity.

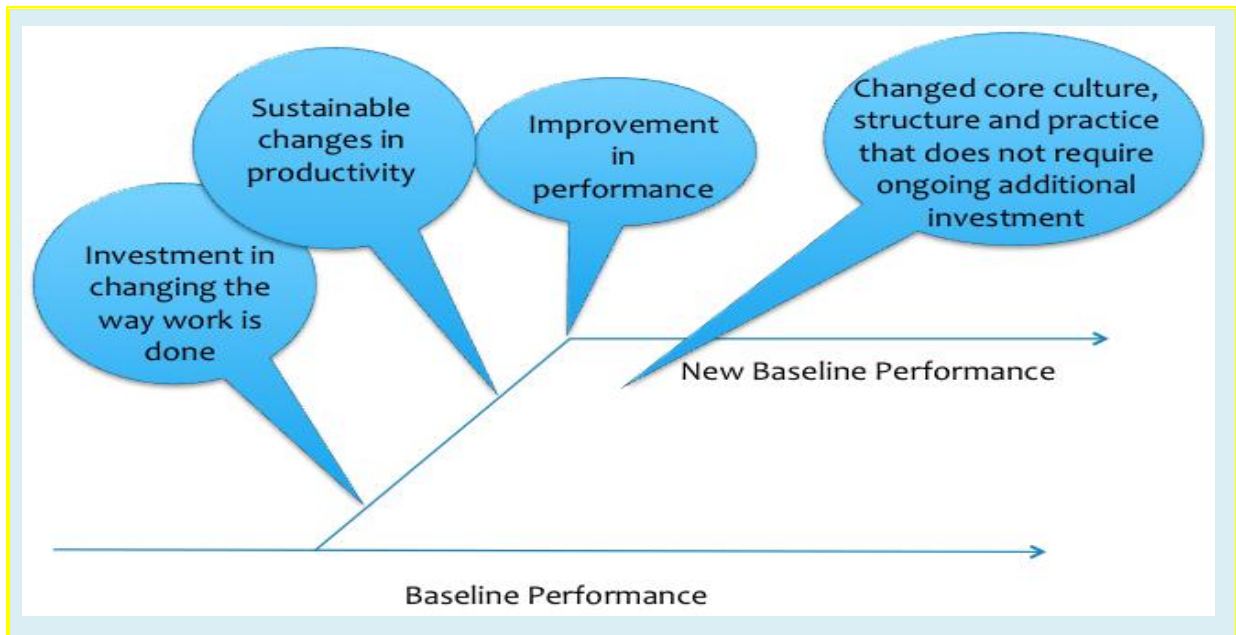
Increased productivity is a very different notion from an increase in production, which demands continued additional funding to maintain the output improvements. The importance of delineating and explaining the two conceptualisations in order to understand the evidence from the National Evaluation cannot be overstated. The following two figures illustrate the delineation between production and productivity increases. They also point to potential consequences for the SSNPs in terms of sustainability of performance and outcome growth.

**Figure 5: The improvement conceptualisation and approach**



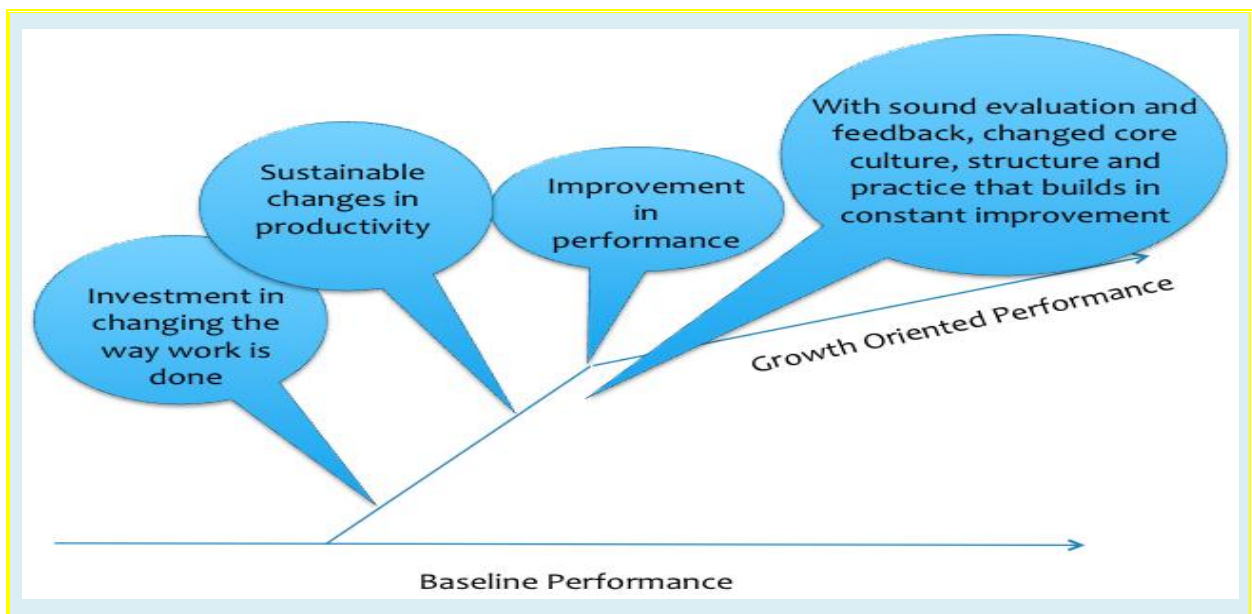
In terms of the evidence from the National Evaluation, activity and effort in the SSNPs is substantially represented in Figure 5 above. Activity and effort in the SSNPs is less substantially represented in Figure 6 below. Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the differences between the conceptualisations of an improvement approach and a productivity approach.

**Figure 6: The productivity conceptualisation and approach**



Drawn from the productivity approach, it is possible to identify a third conceptualisation that has potentially significant implications for work across the SSNPs. In this conceptualisation, the focus is on building-in capacity for sustained growth through a cycle of outcome-oriented evaluation that continuously informs approach and practice.

**Figure 7: Growth oriented performance**



The analysis arising from such a coordinated and integrated evaluation model provides capacity to implement and sustain reform. In this third conceptualisation, formative evaluation is integral to performance rather than summative, process oriented, fragmented and extraneous. While there is some evidence in the National Evaluation for this third conceptualisation emerging, in large measure it is absent.

The conceptualisations that are represented in Figures 6 and 7 inform the construction of a program



logic framework for the SSNPs that provides line-of-sight to reform. From the National Evaluation evidence, such a program logic framework appears, currently, to lack articulation and prominence. Without its explicit placement at the centre of design and agreement, it would seem that success in the SSNPs to operate within a growth-oriented performance conceptualisation that utilises reform to increase productivity occurs, not by design and agreement, but by happenstance.

While the SSNPs are not designed to carry responsibility for whole-of-system reform, they are designed to achieve sustained productivity improvement in the National Partnerships schools. In design, the underpinnings of this sustained productivity improvement would also be extrapolated to contribute to whole-of-system reform. The SSNPs do not appear in general to have yet achieved this sustained productivity improvement in National Partnerships schools. It is likely, from the evidence, that continued additional funding will be required to maintain many of the improvements attained through the activity and effort generated by the SSNPs. There is a continuing theme in the commentary on the part of strategic level participants in the jurisdictions as to how to sustain the improvements in National Partnership schools and to leverage from the SSNP initiative to impact all schools.

One of the arguments put by participants in the National Evaluation was that the design of the SSNPs should have more strongly addressed the areas of leveraging and sustainability, both of which are perceived as critical for reform. In order for leverage and sustainability to be embedded, analysis of the evidence suggests that the SSNPs need to be attached to a program logic framework that links activity and effort to reform. Improvement disconnected from reform is unsustainable. The following section suggests a program logic framework for the SSNPs and explores its possible implications.

## A program logic framework

A program logic framework for the SSNPs needs to be understood in terms of the SSNPs as a component initiative that constitutes the national productivity agenda in relation to school education. Thus, the program logic for the SSNPs both emanates from and contributes to the national productivity agenda. In terms of school education, the COAG agenda connects to the goal of sustained educational outcomes for all students. The importance of this goal is underscored by the OECD data that shows a decline in international competitiveness in the outcomes of Australian school education.

From this goal, the program logic identifies the imperative for reform of Australian schooling. This imperative is consistent with the research that indicates whole-of-system reform is a necessary pre-condition to impact the quality of teacher practice and achieve improved and sustained student learning engagement and outcomes. The SSNPs have been established to contribute to this reform. That contribution is identifiable in the yellow circles within the program logic set out in Figure 8 below.

The research shows that education system reform must engage teachers as professional practitioners, a consideration of greater import than structural change or adjustment. While structural change is important, it is the cultural change in teacher perception and practice that must be at the heart of reform. Thus, the program logic for the SSNPs requires a design that ensures they realise their potential to make a substantial contribution to whole-of-system reform through their impact on the culture of teaching. The SSNPs need to connect effort to reform through work in National Partnership schools and education jurisdictions that affects and builds on reformed teacher perception, engagement and professional practice more broadly.

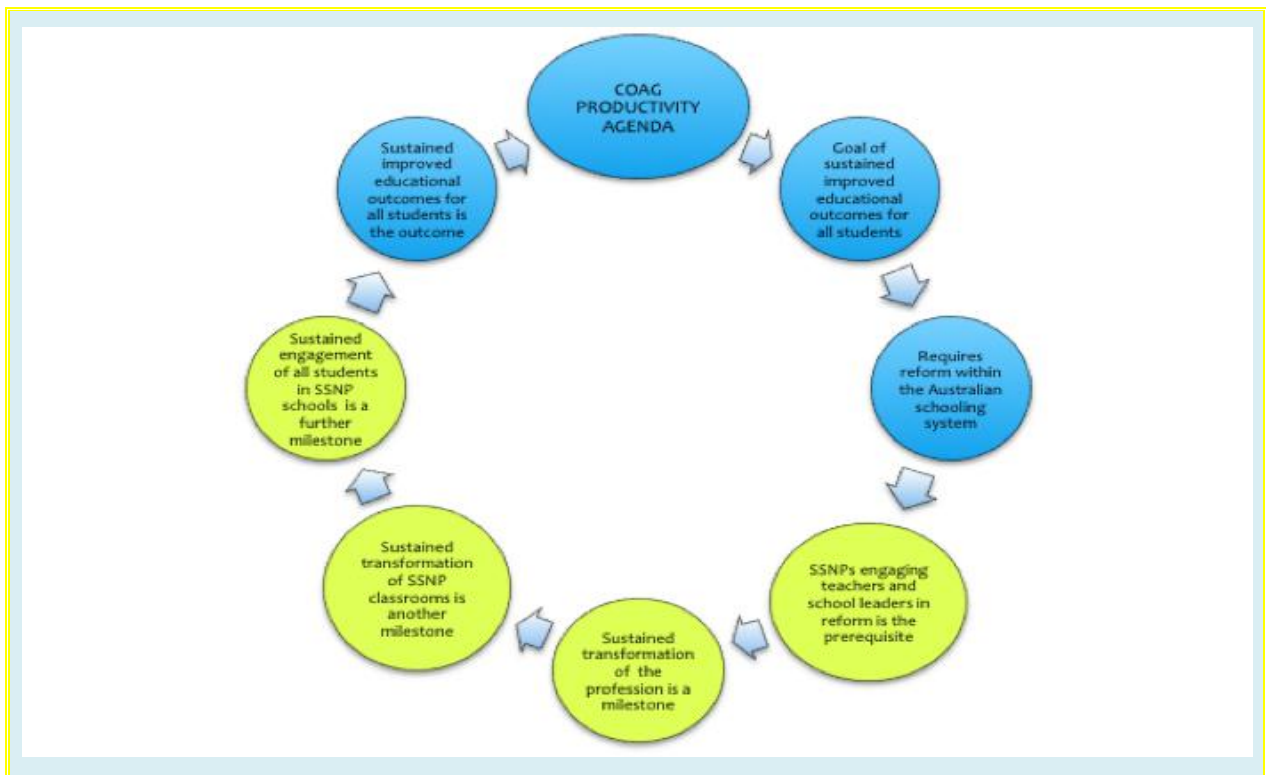
The culture of teaching is embedded in the structures and practices that relate to schooling. When quality teaching sits outside a reform agenda, the structure and culture focus on employment

conditions where quality teaching is a function of employer requirements. In a reform agenda, the quality of teaching is both a professional responsibility and an employer requirement. Building the professional elements of the teaching structure has been the reform responsibility of AITSL. The National Evaluation evidence suggests a program logic, where building the professional structural and cultural elements into schools should be carried forward through the SSNPs or a future equivalent.

In this regard, the broad reform thrust of the ITQNP is connected to and should complement effort in the LNNP, the Low SES NP and the NT CtG NP to attain higher levels of student achievement and engagement in National Partnership schools. This is in addition to the connections that could be established between the SSNPs and work being undertaken by AITSL and ACARA.

The SSNPs were established to achieve and demonstrate the approaches, structures and practices required so that targeted classrooms are transformed into places of quality teaching and learning. Through the place of the SSNPs in the broader program logic, there is potential to leverage from the transformations achieved within classrooms in National Partnership schools to impact on and be sustainable in all classrooms. Realising this potential through the design of the SSNPs would affirm the place of the SSNPs or a future equivalent in contributing to the NEA objectives and those of the Act, and to the national productivity agenda in education.

**Figure 8: The SSNPs in the productivity-oriented program logic framework**



To advance the program logic, the LNNP has a particular place in this regard, especially considering that literacy and numeracy are the prime bases for international comparison of performance. While the first level of focus is to improve student performance in targeted schools, beyond that there are broader implications for literacy and numeracy learning across the full national cohort.

In the program logic, the Low SES NP and the NT CtG NP in particular could contribute to critical issues of student engagement and attainment more broadly. These SSNPs have potential to carry forward understandings about the importance of innovative approach and practice, leading to models of

service delivery that more fully connect and engage those students who find connection and sustained engagement difficult within current structures and approaches.

Placing additional responsibility on schools to address issues in family, community or the wider life of the child or young person has not tended to improve engagement and attainment, especially for those who find the world of schooling alien and alienating. The place, role and responsibility of schools need to be carefully examined in reform to focus on development and capacity building so that appropriate responsibility can be identified and effectively fulfilled, including in community-based partnership arrangements.

Effectively addressing these areas for schools serving low socio-economic status and predominantly Indigenous communities places the SSNPs in a position to directly contribute to the increased productivity intended through the COAG agenda. This will especially be the case where the issues are addressed through the development of innovative structures and new models of service delivery. Again, there is potential from such work within the National Partnership schools to contribute to reform more broadly in all schools and jurisdictions.

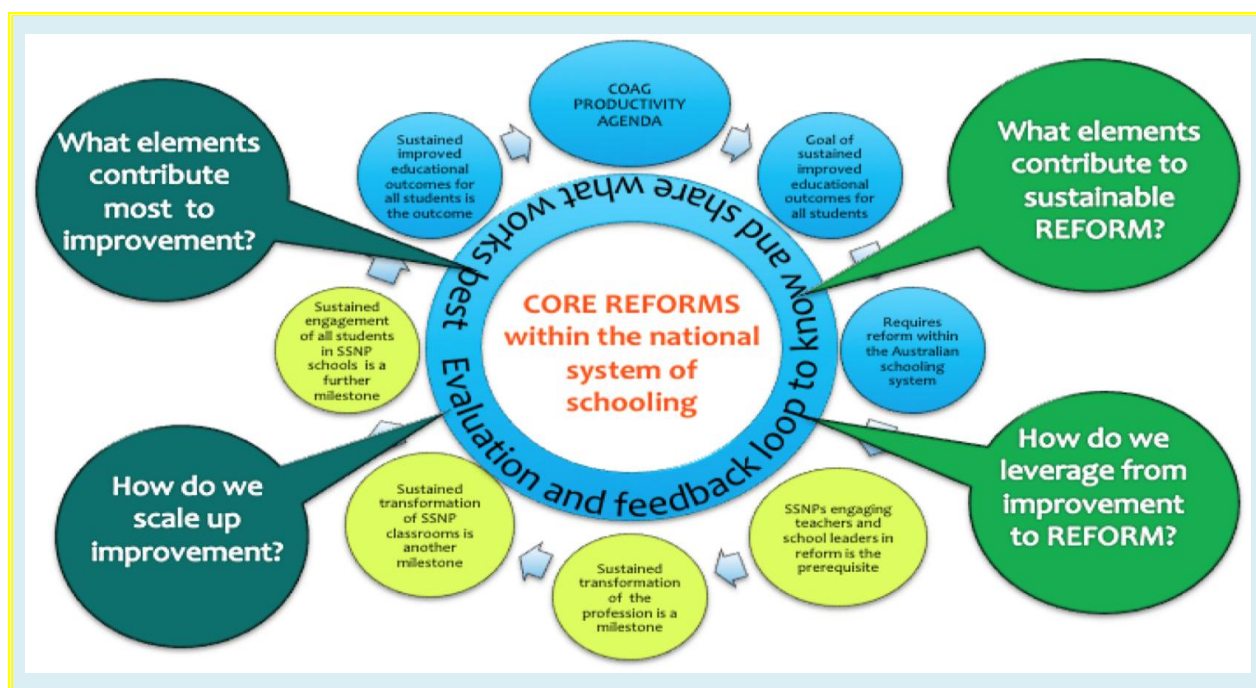
The SSNPs are placed in the suggested overall program logic framework to contribute to the achievement of sustained improved educational outcomes. In this way, the SSNPs as a national initiative could connect to the full spectrum of the national productivity agenda for schooling. They would do this by achieving reform related to teacher quality and, in the context of the National Partnership schools, reform related to classroom practice and student engagement as a basis for improved student outcomes. From the National Partnership schools, there is potential for a highly valuable contribution to the national productivity agenda, both in terms of the targeted schools and through contribution to reform affecting all schools.

The program logic framework suggested in Figure 8 is completed when account is taken of the need for continuous improvement, explored above in relation to growth-oriented performance and demonstrated in Figure 7. The integration of a formative and coordinated evaluation model into the program logic framework would provide the feedback loop that generates capacity for continuous improvement. This lifts the program logic framework to a level that addresses the long-term implications of the national productivity agenda in relation to Australian school education.

Such an approach is integrated into the growth-oriented program logic framework in Figure 9 below, with the yellow circles indicating the contributing place of the SSNPs.

The evidence from the National Evaluation of the SSNPs points to the importance of the integration of evaluation into approach and effort for the intended reforms to be achieved and sustained. For the SSNPs to fully address the program logic, there is a need for a nationally cohesive approach to evaluation across the jurisdictions. In the implementation of the SSNPs by the jurisdictions, the evidence from the National Evaluation suggests explicitness needs to be attached to the place of evaluation so that there can be an emerging base of evidence for decisions that will sustain improvement and embed reform.

Figure 9: The SSNPs in the growth-oriented program logic framework



Analysis of the evidence indicates that approach to evaluation should be systemically planned as a collaborative effort among the jurisdictions, including the Australian Government. Evaluation within the SSNPs should be unambiguously outcomes-oriented and provide a national basis for comparison of effectiveness among approaches, with commentary on contextual caveats and scalability. The analysis of data from evaluation needs to be highly informing of issues associated with comparative cost effectiveness so that decisions about resource reallocations needed to create productivity reform can be based on robust and reliable evidence.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the evidence from the National Evaluation confirms the scale and intrinsic value of activity and effort generated through the SSNPs. In large measure, the activity and effort suggest traction and improvement in National Partnership schools. Additionally, especially through the ITQNP, there is growing recognition across the jurisdictions of the potential to bring a more coherent view to issues of teacher quality, literacy and numeracy learning and student engagement, and to achieve reform that many would regard as long overdue.

It is possible to identify instances where the SSNPs are playing a critical role within jurisdictional effort to bring about fundamental change in structures of schooling, in teacher practice and in student engagement and learning. There is compelling evidence to suggest that the SSNPs in very particular instances are enabling a reform journey to be initiated and potentially sustained. In such instances, the SSNPs are showing the potential power of a program logic that emanates from the national productivity reform agenda.

However, the evidence shows that such instances are far from universal across the SSNPs as a national initiative. Activity and effort, no matter the commitment or the expertise associated with them, cannot be taken as equating to the outcomes and reforms made explicit in the suggested program logic. In fact, there is evidence to indicate that the overwhelming focus on activity and effort is actually distorting the legitimate place of the SSNPs in the suggested program logic.

Moreover, this focus, reinforced by agreement, measurement and reward, is embedding expectations of ongoing additional funding to maintain what is occurring. That this is shown by evidence from the National Evaluation indicates the extent to which the reform possibilities attached to the SSNPs may not be met and the extent to which the suggested program logic may not be addressed in its entirety. Should this be the case, the SSNPs as an instrument would have served at best an improvement agenda in education within National Partnership schools, but not realised their potential to contribute to the national productivity agenda.

The following Chapters of this Report explore the implications of the National Evaluation evidence as presented in this Chapter. The exploration needs to be seen in the context of the broader suggested program logic for the SSNPs. At its core, the conceptualisation developed across the Chapters is a positive one. It is a positive one for each of the current SSNPs and for the schools involved in particular National Partnerships. However, the conceptualisation is also a prospective one, based in the formative remit of the National Evaluation.

Beyond achievement and success to date, there is illumination in the evidence of national potential to leverage from the SSNPs for wider impact. The work undertaken and the rich vein of understandings being gained in the context of the SSNPs have capacity to impact productivity within the targeted schools. They also have potential to influence deeply the directions, quality and outcomes of Australian education, thus contributing to the broader national productivity agenda.

## CHAPTER 2: TEACHER QUALITY<sup>5</sup>

### Introduction

The underpinning importance of work related to teacher quality in Australian education to address the national productivity agenda is strongly featured in the research base. Engaging teachers and school leaders in the development of teacher quality is the foundation for improvements in literacy and numeracy outcomes for all Australian students, but especially for those from low socio-economic status communities and for Indigenous students.

Within the Smarter Schools National Partnerships (SSNPs), the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership (ITQNP) has primary carriage of this work. It constitutes a major national initiative that is intended to contribute, together especially with the work of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), to the reform required for teacher quality in the context of the national productivity agenda.

Paper 8 in the desktop analysis series associated with Phase 1 of the National Evaluation of Activity and Evaluation Effort in the Smarter Schools National Partnerships presents evidence about activity and effort in the ITQNP. Building from the evidence presented in Paper 8, the analysis in this Chapter explores the implications that arise for future work within the ITQNP as it progresses the teacher quality agenda. While the Chapter is part of the analysis of activity and effort within the SSNPs, it also stands alone as the Interim Evaluation of the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership.

The Interim Evaluation of the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership was undertaken concurrently with Phase 1 of the National Evaluation of Activity and Evaluation Effort in the Smarter Schools National Partnership and with the Evaluation of the Quality Teaching and Literacy and Numeracy element of the Northern Territory Closing the Gap National Partnership (NT CtG NP). The evaluations were mutually informing.

Therefore, findings made about the ITQNP need to be seen as complemented by those associated with analysis of evidence about activity and evaluation effort within the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership (LNNP), the National Partnership for Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities (Low SES NP) and the NT CtG NP. Findings about activity and evaluation effort in the LLNP and the Low SES NP are presented elsewhere in this Report. Findings from the evaluation of the NT CtG NP are presented in a separate report.

As is widely recognised across the jurisdictions, issues related to teacher quality run as core themes throughout the SSNPs. The evidence indicates that the ITQNP is the underpinning and enabling National Partnership for each of the SSNPs. As such, work within it needs to be seen in the context of the totality of outcomes across the SSNPs as a national initiative.

Because of the foundational nature of teacher quality in efforts to improve the outcomes of all students, the implications that arise from the Interim Evaluation evidence about the ITQNP are both substantial and consequential. The context into which the ITQNP has been placed is highly complex, reflecting a history of diverse attempts to transform teacher quality with, at best, marginal impact.

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<sup>5</sup> This Chapter, with minor amendments, is also presented separately as the Report of the Interim Evaluation Effort of the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership.

The area is highly contested, characterised by vested and entrenched interests, embedded in culture, legislation, agreements and long-term practice. There is a record of attempted change being captured and subverted, with good intentions lost in implementation. Over the course of the Interim Evaluation, many participants drew attention to the scale and scope of the challenges in teacher quality.

This Interim Evaluation Report reflects the complexity of the environment and the nature of the challenges confronting the ITQNP. The discussion attempts to make meaning of the evidence through a constructed evidence-based conceptual framework that has potential, over the longer term, to inform and guide progress towards the reform intent of the ITQNP. Such a conceptualisation, drawn from the Interim Evaluation evidence, needs to be seen as critically important in understanding the place in, and the potential contribution of, the ITQNP to the teacher quality agenda.

In order to address the fundamental issues of teacher quality confronting ITQNP, the analysis had to move beyond simply answering questions about activity and progress in the various constituent elements. Those questions and those answers, as important as they may be, cannot open the door to understanding the teacher quality agenda and the potential of the ITQNP to carry it forward in the context of the national productivity agenda.

## Background

There is a well-established base of evidence to demonstrate that teacher quality is critical in the achievement and sustaining of high quality learning outcomes for all students. There is a nexus between teacher quality and student achievement. Indeed, the research base is voluminous, with no significant level of contest. Over many years, national and international research has pointed to the teacher effect on students' learning outcomes. Most importantly, the research indicates that investment in teacher quality is cost-effective in terms of securing and maintaining improved student learning outcomes.

The research literature provides an explicit case that policies to improve teacher quality can have a highly significant impact on student outcomes. In this regard, the research affirms the critical importance of a national investment to improve teacher quality as the essential underpinning for higher levels of student performance. Further, the research affirms the enormous potential of national investment in teacher quality to directly impact the productivity of teachers and, consequently, the contribution of teaching to national productivity. The research literature, therefore, provides a powerful base of evidence for the ITQNP and its reform intents in the context of schooling, and in the context of the national productivity agenda.

Commencing some fifteen years ago<sup>6</sup>, researchers have provided a range of quantitative and qualitative evidence about the importance of teacher effectiveness. This research has consistently provided compelling evidence that the classroom teacher can have a significant impact on student learning and achievement.

As but one example of the foundational research relevant to the teacher quality agenda, Darling-Hammond<sup>7</sup> (2000) found that:

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<sup>6</sup> Early researchers in this area include Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Wenglinsky, 2002; McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, & Hamilton, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Darling-Hammond, L., *Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: Review of State Policy Evidence*, Education Policy Analysis Archives, Vol 8, No 1, January 2000.

- poor quality teaching impacts adversely on student outcomes and compounds over time
- the effects of quality teaching on student outcomes are greater than those that arise from student backgrounds
- investment in teacher quality positively impacts the performance levels of students from low socio-economic backgrounds
- teachers need to be well qualified so that they have the foundational skills and knowledge required for effective teaching
- articulated and applied professional standards for teachers contribute to improved student outcomes
- strengthened curriculum provision needs to be accompanied by investment in teacher quality to achieve improved learning outcomes.

More recent research has set out quite explicit understandings about the teacher effect on student outcomes. Rowe (2003) found the following.

*.... whereas students' literacy skills, general academic achievements, attitudes, behaviours and experiences of schooling are influenced by their background and intake characteristics – the magnitude of these effects pale into insignificance compared with class/teacher effects. That is, the quality of teaching and learning provision are by far the most salient influences on students' cognitive, affective, and behavioural outcomes of schooling – regardless of their gender or backgrounds. Indeed, findings from the related local and international evidence-based research indicate that 'what matters most' is quality teachers and teaching, supported by strategic teacher professional development.<sup>8</sup>*

Hattie (2003) set out some explicit and quantified findings about the teacher effect. He also identified major implications for approach to and structures concerned with improving teacher quality. These implications are highly informative in the analysis of the evidence about the ITQNP.

*(Teachers) account for about 30% of the variance (in student performance). It is what teachers know, do, and care about which is very powerful in this learning equation....*

*Expert teachers do differ from experienced teachers – particularly on the way they represent their classrooms, the degree of challenges that they present to students, and most critically, in the depth of processing that their students attain. Students who are taught by expert teachers exhibit an understanding of the concepts targeted in instruction that is more integrated, more coherent, and at a higher level of abstraction than the understanding achieved by other students.*

*These studies have demonstrated the need for a focus on dependably identifying, esteeming and encouraging excellent teachers, wherever they may be. We do have excellent teachers..., but we have a reticence to identify such excellence in the fear that the others could be deemed not-excellent. We work on the absurd assumption that all*

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<sup>8</sup> Rowe, K., *The Importance of Teacher Quality as a Key Determinant of Students' Experiences and Outcomes of Schooling*, ACER: *Improving Learning*. ACER Research Conference, 2003.



*teachers are equal, which is patently not true to any child, any parent, any principal, and known by all teachers. Such an assumption of equality brings all teachers down to the latest press scandal about a teacher, and our profession needs and deserves better than this. Every other profession recognizes and esteems excellence (Queens Counsels, Colleges of Surgeons, Supreme Court Judges) but in teaching we reward primarily by experience irrespective of excellence, we promote the best out of the classroom, and we have few goalposts to aim for in professional development, instead allowing others to define what latest fad, what new gimmick, what new policy will underline the content of professional development.*

*Like expertise in teaching, we need a deeper representation of excellence in teachers, a greater challenge and commitment to recognizing excellence, and a coherent, integrated, high level of deep understanding about teacher expertise<sup>9</sup>.*

The Hattie research and his conclusions point to the centrality of creating teaching as a profession and of providing the structures in which teachers can engage to build the quality of their practice. While much of this in design is the work of AITSL, the analysis from the Interim Evaluation evidence indicates that making use of the structures being developed by AITSL in schools and systems is a key role for the ITQNP. While many of the reform elements of the ITQNP require operationalising, it is in their strategic role that their reform intent truly resides.

Critically, the evidence from the research indicates it is imperative that change occurs in the culture of teaching to create the level of impact to which Hattie refers. This conclusion is strongly confirmed by the analysis of the evidence from the Interim Evaluation. Similarly powerful in its implications, the evidence indicates that the successful addressing of the teacher quality agenda requires cultural change in teaching through the engagement of teachers. The evidence suggests that, without such an engagement-based approach, meaningful reform is likely to be illusory. Consistently in the research, there is reference to the concept of building the professional structures that are required for teaching to have the characteristics and status of a profession. The research is telling that this needs to occur for teacher quality to be embedded and sustained. A focus on operational elements and outputs, no matter how necessary, cannot of itself be equated to a teacher quality agenda and is unlikely to lead to teacher quality reform. In response to the research message, there has been a long history of work in Australian education, nationally and across the States and Territories, to understand and address issues related to teacher quality. There is a range of reviews and inquiries initiated by Australian governments over a number of decades that have sought to identify these issues and to set out areas for policy development and action. Similarly, investments have been made by governments over many years to implement initiatives and strategies intended to improve teacher quality. For example, a 2005 inquiry into the teaching of literacy found the following.

*Highly effective teachers and their professional learning do make a difference in the classroom. It is not so much what students bring with them from their backgrounds, but what they experience on a day-to-day basis in interaction with teachers and other students that matters. Teaching quality has strong effects on children's experiences of*

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<sup>9</sup> Hattie, J., *Teachers Make a Difference: What is the research evidence?* University of Auckland, Australian Council for Educational Research, October 2003.

*schooling, including their attitudes, behaviours and achievement outcomes.*

*Thus there is need for a major focus on teacher quality, and building capacity in teachers towards quality, evidence-based teaching practices that are demonstrably effective in maximising the developmental and learning needs of all children<sup>10</sup>.*

While the quantum of the research base has increased over the past decade or so, there has been no discernible shift in the findings or implications of the research. Nor must it be said, has there been any discernible shift in national capacity to impact deeply on issues of teacher quality, irrespective of the evidence and the effort in response to it over many years. In the Interim Evaluation evidence, there is quite pointed commentary that the relative decline of student performance illuminates ‘national failure’ going back many years in coming to terms with the implications of the teacher quality agenda.

## Key findings

As the Interim Evaluation occurs at the halfway point in the implementation of ITQNP, analysis within it is able to provide formative findings with potential to contribute to future work. These formative findings enable understandings to be gained about the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of work to date across the jurisdictions. As alluded to elsewhere, analysis of evidence from the Interim Evaluation points to the inter-connectedness of the SSNPs and to the potential foundational role of the ITQNP in the context of the reform intents of the SSNP initiative. Therefore, judgements about the traction and impacts of the ITQNP need to be formed both within it and within the broader reform milieu of the SSNPs.

### *Appropriateness*

From the evidence, the facilitation and reward reform elements are seen as appropriate as they each address important operational areas that contribute to quality teaching and school leadership. Appropriateness especially stems from the extent to which the reform elements are oriented to addressing identified issues especially in hard-to-staff schools and those where student performance has been well below the national standards.

The reform elements of the ITQNP are identified by the jurisdictions as appropriate in that they contribute to areas where work is being undertaken in the context of jurisdictional priorities. Amongst these, particular note can be made about the appropriateness of Indigenous education workforce pathways, improved performance management and continuous improvement in schools, and the elements that support the attraction and retention of teachers and school leaders in schools serving disadvantaged and remote communities.

*(The ITQNP) is providing top-up funding that we can use to strengthen work in different areas, so it fits well with some of our priorities, especially for hard-to-staff schools.*

Analysis of the evidence indicates that the ITQNP fits appropriately within the SSNP initiative as it complements and is complemented by SSNPs that address teacher practice in literacy and numeracy, the work of teachers in schools serving low socio-economic status communities, and in closing the gap for Indigenous students. While this complementarity is recognised in the evidence commentary and is

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<sup>10</sup> Department of Education, Science and Training. *Report on the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy*, 2005.

exhibited in some instances, there is considerable potential to harness the alignment of the ITQNP and the other SSNPs more appropriately in order to address the reform intents embedded in the national productivity agenda.

Analysis of the evidence indicates that the overall design of the ITQNP means that the jurisdictions generally regard the various reform elements as discrete and only loosely inter-related. While the design facilitates an operational response, the instrumental elements, seen discretely, do not constitute reform. This is causing frustration at the jurisdictional level where the imperative is identified to transform the culture of teaching and embed reform in competency-based structures, outcome oriented remuneration and quality practice. In some instances, the instrumental orientation of the design is precluding any potential for deep impact on teacher quality beyond achieving greater activity and increased outputs through the additional funding.

*"Our school has been able to recruit a great literacy coach who has helped teachers in classrooms ... When the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership money runs out, we don't know what we can do to keep this going. Cohorts are always changing, and the staff turns over regularly, so the need will always be there. We'll be back where we started."*  
Principal of a site visit school

There is commentary in the Interim Evaluation evidence that the challenges in the administrative and industrial contexts into which the ITQNP is placed have not been appropriately recognised. The evidence indicates that, to increase appropriateness, consideration could be given to structuring the reward concept of the ITQNP so that these challenges can be addressed, rather than rewarding what are primarily activity and output.

The ITQNP carries a particular view about improved pay dispersion to reward quality teaching. In the current culture of teaching, this view is creating considerable angst. Identification of quality teaching is seen as subjective and challenging to the long-held view that all teachers are equal and that reward comes with years of experience. In the absence of objective measures, the view that seeks to identify and reward good teachers on the basis of classroom practice and learning outcomes is regarded as an inappropriate one as to how quality teaching should be recognised and valued. Moreover, such angst has potential to undermine the achievement of the quality teacher reform agenda represented through the ITQNP.

*"If you reward teachers on the basis of the kids' results, no one will teach in a low SES school. I would reward our teachers on the type of things they know and do in the classroom to get the best results. We need a way of measuring that."* Principal of a site visit school

From the evidence, consideration could be given to adjustments within this area of the ITQNP so that there is a focus on how the structures and processes being developed by AITSL can be integrated into schools, systems and jurisdictions as the framework for quality differentiation and reward. The status-based structures and the processes to determine status offer a national approach to objective measurement of teacher quality. Appropriateness could be strongly enhanced if the ITQNP were to focus on replacement of entitlement based on seniority and administrative focus, with remuneration based on classroom-oriented status and position.

*"The school is reliant on the level of support provided by the FTE allocation for mentor teachers and the site manager. Given the significant expectations on mentor teachers and the site manager, we could not continue the positions and a lot of the current work of these people without this funding ..."* Principal of a site visit school

### *Effectiveness*

The evidence for progress to date against the discrete reform elements of the ITQNP suggests operational effectiveness. The jurisdictions are able to demonstrate increased and more diverse activity and effort in the various facilitation reform elements. Many are able to show effectiveness in

progress towards meeting their own output targets relevant to particular reform elements.

The ITQNP is enabling increased effectiveness in particular jurisdictional priority areas. The evidence suggests that this has been the case particularly in relation to new and better pathways into teaching and in relation to the school centres of excellence. The ITQNP is facilitating an extension of effort in these and other areas beyond existing jurisdictional resource allocation. It is acting in some instances as an effective catalyst for new ways of thinking about how to maximise impact, including through devolution of decision-making and partnership arrangements with higher education.

The evidence indicates that the ITQNP is facilitating a number of effective trials and demonstrations within the jurisdictions that are addressing particular situations not well served by current structures and operations. By way of example, trials include the provision of the placement of highly accomplished and lead teachers into particular schools to boost professional support and to strengthen the quality of classroom practice. They also include incentive packages to attract high quality staff and school leaders to particular hard-to-staff schools and to attract high quality graduates from teacher education programs.

*“Our literacy coach came from outside the school. The department selected her and there was no build-up to her arrival – just here she is! Some staff felt threatened. They thought she was an ‘expert’ sent to tell them what they were doing wrong. Others embraced the opportunities she provided. By the end of first term there were only two resistors and by the end of second term they had begun to feel they were missing out on something really valuable.”* Principal of a site visit school

In a number of instances, the trials and demonstrations are bringing clarity to the benefits of a more flexible approach. Interestingly, they are also effective in that they are highlighting the range and the nature of barriers that preclude wider adoption. There is commentary in the Interim Evaluation evidence suggesting that very considerable challenges remain to extend the effective approaches and practices of the trials and demonstrations more broadly.

The evidence suggests that effectiveness is being impacted by a range of factors within the ITQNP and within the contexts into which it is placed. The reform intents of the ITQNP derive from the national productivity agenda. The productivity agenda implies deep change in culture, approach and structure as the basis for sustained and system-wide teacher quality. To determine the effectiveness of the ITQNP necessitates that judgements about it be made with reference to its reform intent, not in reference only to its operational elements.

While there are instances in jurisdictions of progress towards reform by changing culture, approach and structure, at this stage these are few in number. In general, the innovations in structure and practice associated with the ITQNP indicate limited prospect of wider extension. With some notable exceptions, the innovations have been negotiated and quarantined as demonstrations, most often to address particular administrative issues. To date, there has been insufficient addressing of the wider structural, administrative, industrial and legislative blockages that would see reform effectively achieved and embedded. Some participants in the Interim Evaluation expressed the view that the ITQNP would only be effective when it provided a national platform for these blockages to be identified and placed in the public domain, with appropriate support.

*In the industrial context, there are real limits to what we can achieve. We can show progress in different parts of (the ITQNP) but at the end of the day they will do little to improve teacher quality across classrooms. There needs to be a strong focus on how we get teacher quality in every classroom, and how that is guaranteed into the future.*

The evidence suggests that issues of reach and penetration are also impacting the effectiveness of the ITQNP. In the non-government sectors, many of the reform elements are embedded and well systematised. As such, the elements could not be regarded as constituting reform for these sectors.

While particular aspects of the ITQNP may be engaged with, the approach is more by way of supplementing established practice. Consequently, in the vital area of teacher quality, there is only limited carriage through the ITQNP into the non-government sectors. Effectively, the non-government sectors are precluded from having sufficient line-of-sight to the national productivity agenda so that the higher-order issues of teacher quality can be recognised and addressed.

*"We are a private school so most of the teacher quality reforms are either outside our sphere of operation or are already in place. The challenge nationally I think is to strengthen the profession by developing a culture that rewards our best teachers while keeping them in the classroom."* Principal of a site visit school

The issues of reach and penetration, however, apply more broadly. The evidence indicates that, irrespective of the progress being made against the various reform elements, impacts at the classroom level on teacher quality from the ITQNP are fragmented. Indeed, the evidence indicates that relatively few teachers have any engagement with any aspect of the ITQNP or any knowledge of it as a national initiative relevant to their professional lives. Even where teachers are aware of the highly accomplished and lead teacher positions that have been promoted through the ITQNP, the evidence suggests limited understanding of the potential of such roles in teacher quality. This lack of engagement is diminishing substantially the effectiveness of the ITQNP.

Further, progress in the ITQNP to date suggests that there is only the most tentative understanding about the place of the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* in the profession. Equally, the evidence indicates limited engagement with the potential of the standards to contribute to a changed culture of teaching and to reformed professional structures that would impact teacher quality. Yet, the research evidence cited earlier is overwhelming in the extent to which the engagement of teachers is critical to any reform process in teaching. Because the design of the ITQNP has not strategically responded to the implications of this research evidence by engaging the profession, its potential effectiveness is being diminished.

*"I am aware of the national standards but know nothing about how they will be used. I think teachers will only use them if they have value ... in their professional lives. I think most teachers are fed up with things being dumped on them from on-high."* Teacher in a site visit school

To enhance effectiveness, consideration needs to be given to how the ITQNP can build professional engagement so that the full potential of the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* to impact teacher quality and to sustain that impact into the future is realised. The evidence from the Interim Evaluation is compelling that professional engagement provides the legitimate pathway to build teacher quality in all Australian schools. It is around embedding the emerging professional standards and structures into schools and teacher promotion that there is the greatest potential to impact student learning outcomes. It is around demonstrated professional outcomes that the status of the profession can be assured, providing the basis for appropriate professional recognition and reward.

The evidence suggests some issues associated with the effectiveness of the facilitation and reward structure of the ITQNP. The proportional emphasis in funding on reward has tended to limit the facilitation capacity of the jurisdictions to engage with the higher levels of effort needed to address fundamental challenges in the teacher quality agenda. The use of activity as a measure of progress in implementation for reward has reinforced instrumental effort, dislocated from its higher purpose. As such, design around facilitation and reward is tending, however unintentionally, to distort the investment in its line-of-sight to reform. Over time, this distortion will impact on the capacity of the ITQNP to demonstrate effectiveness against its full intents.

### *Efficiency*

The Interim Evaluation evidence indicates that, compared with short-term program contracts, the

ITQNP is an efficient initiative to engage the jurisdictions. The four-year funding period provides certainty to support planning, recruitment and retention of expertise. Importantly, the four-year time span of the ITQNP is perceived as fitting well with jurisdictional strategies in the areas of the reform elements. The capacity provided by the ITQNP for jurisdictions to align the operational areas with jurisdictional strategies is leading to a widely recognised level of efficiency not seen in previous approaches.

The partnership arrangement represented in the ITQNP accords the jurisdictions considerable flexibility to decide on how to address the priority areas. The arrangement also accords the jurisdictions flexibility about where they will direct co-investment contributions. With regards to the reward reforms, the discretion accorded the jurisdictions enabled selections to be made where effort could be maximised for the greatest impact and efficiency.

The evidence indicates that the structural management lines between DEEWR and the jurisdictions have operated efficiently. In the evidence, there is commentary about the extent to which communication is facilitating the sharing of operational information and enabling emerging issues to be addressed. To a considerable extent, the relationships have reflected the partnership concept of the ITQNP, maintaining responsiveness as an aspect of efficiency in management.

In instances where a strong cross-sectoral governance arrangement has been developed for the ITQNP as part of the overall SSNPs initiative, the evidence suggests efficiency gains through cooperative decision-making and planning and the amortization of administration.

*The cross-sectoral arrangements have provided a level of engagement unlike anything seen in the past. They have provided a shared view of implementation across the sectors that was difficult to develop in previous national programs. These arrangements have enabled maximum value for each dollar spent.*

In particular instances, there are also efficiencies through shared implementation, although by-and-large, the evidence suggests potential in this regard could be further realised. There is some commentary in the evidence of instances where non-government sectors feel adversely impacted by a jurisdictional overlay of administrative structures not present in prior approaches to funding dispersal. However, the evidence indicates that the benefits of cross-sectoral collaborations and the efficiencies involved outweigh such considerations.

Evidence from the Interim Evaluation indicates that the structuring of the ITQNP into twelve separate facilitation reforms with an overlay of reward reforms is tending to fragment effort within the jurisdictions. Further, the structure can silo effort within separate elements so that the potential for efficiencies to be gained by identifying their linkages and opportunity for leveraging across them can be difficult to see. In particular, evidence was provided about how difficult it could be to respond efficiently to the suite of elements within the ITQNP where jurisdictions placed responsibility for different elements in both curriculum and human resources areas.

*We made a conscious decision to use the centre of excellence model as the integration point for our investments in teacher quality through the National Partnership. We wanted to avoid a situation where we had different parts of the agenda operating discretely, with no connections. Unless you create connections, things head off on different tangents and because people own the bits, it becomes very hard to see the whole picture and what is being achieved. From our perspective, this integrated approach is working well, with outcomes beyond what would have been possible if we had pursued the different parts separately. If we hadn't taken this*

*approach, it's our belief that the sorts of cultural and structural shifts we are looking for would not have happened. The reform areas (in the ITQNP) are fine, but the design should have given more attention to the linkages.*

The evidence points to inefficiencies associated with changing requirements for activity reporting. On the basis of initial reporting templates and requirements, jurisdictional data systems were established to gather and analyse appropriate data. Changes over time to the templates and reporting requirements have meant rework of data systems or manual collection of data. Efficiency has also been impacted by issues related to retro-fitting reward-oriented measurement structures to elements of the original Agreements. Without data to be placed against the elements, collection, analysis and reporting for reward have been very time-consuming and operationally draining, subsuming resources that could have been used for implementation.

In the Interim Evaluation evidence, there is a substantial level of commentary about the need for an efficient approach to information sharing across the jurisdictions. There is recognition that a national body of understanding about practice to support teacher quality is emerging through the ITQNP, but that potential for jurisdictions to access and harness this knowledge is relatively limited. While there is endorsement of the concept of a national forum, there is clearly demand for a sustained platform within the ITQNP to share higher-order information about achievement and issues, stemming from jurisdictional evaluation.

*"We would like to know more about what other National Partnership schools are doing, even in other States ... we learn about what other schools are doing around here, the closest schools get together fairly regularly and the schools share, which has been great with the National Partnership, but it could be even wider and more than the usual show-and-tell." Teacher in a site visit school*

In terms of appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency overall, the ITQNP is a contributing initiative to the national productivity agenda. In the context of teacher quality, productivity is obtained by raising the overall quality of the profession and by achieving the reforms needed to sustain and continuously build teacher quality. A more productive profession of teaching holds the prospect of a major contribution to greater productivity in the national economy.

However, the evidence from the Interim Evaluation indicates that the reform intents of the ITQNP as they relate to the national productivity agenda are not being realised sufficiently. Very substantially, the investments are investments in increased production. This can be seen in the plethora of activity within the ITQNP and in the orientation to achieve jurisdictional outputs in particular reform elements.

As such, much in approach and practice, as now seen, is unlikely to be sustainable at current levels without additional funding. That this is the case indicates that the ITQNP is largely falling short of the contribution expected from it to productivity. In this regard, there is the risk that it will fall short of the outcomes intended from the investment.

*What will happen when the funding stops? Probably similar to what's happened in the past. Some things will continue on, mainly through programs that weren't really reliant on ITQNP funds anyway and because of good principals, but mostly things will fade away because the dollars are no longer there.*

## Implications

Amongst government efforts to improve the quality of teaching, the ITQNP is unique in the extent to which it is placed within a national reform agenda. This places the ITQNP beyond the improvement orientation that has substantially characterised past approach and practice. The reform intent of the ITQNP is explicit, as is its placement within the wider context of the national productivity agenda. The concept of facilitation and reward within the ITQNP provides a structure without national precedent in

the teacher quality area. It is a structure to achieve reform, not improvement. Moreover, it is a structure to achieve outcomes, beyond the activity and outputs of discrete operational elements.

The uniqueness of the ITQNP is also reflected in the extent to which the investment is not primarily oriented to the provision of professional learning programs and opportunities, as has been largely the case in the past. The ITQNP is focused on the reforms required to build-in professional capacity in schools, highlighted in areas such as recognising highly accomplished and lead teachers and promoting the centre of excellence structure to provide a stronger practice-based entry to the profession. Unlike previous national investment, the ITQNP has explicit linkages to complementary work in other SSNPs, and does not function in isolation. Through these linkages, the SSNP initiative is illuminating issues of teacher quality in the immediate contexts of the professional practice of the teacher, the classroom and the school.

The ITQNP carries a reform intent to impact structures and processes that surround the professional status and work of teachers. As AITSL operates under the auspices of the ITQNP, there is substantial potential for wider work within the ITQNP to carry the National Professional Standards for Teachers into jurisdictions, systems, sectors and schools in ways that will transform key aspects of approach and practice with regards to teacher quality.

*The driver for (the IQTNP) must be the AITSL standards. This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance for Australia to get the whole teacher quality area right, and to stop doing things at the margins.*

As for so much in the area of teacher quality, work in relation to standards of teacher professional practice is not new. For long there have been various teacher standards in Australian jurisdictions and for long there have been teacher registration authorities. For long there have been positions designed to provide classroom-based differentials and support in schools.

However, there is a widely held belief that the structural reforms required in schools and school systems for such work to impact teacher quality have not been realised. The declining performance of our students testifies to this. Work on the supply side of the professional equation – the number, characteristics and quality of teachers – has not been similarly undertaken in the demand side – the responsibility of employers – to impact teacher quality.

*“People are aware of the research, they know that schools have to change and that many things in teaching are going to have to change. There’s a limit to what we can do here, people are running as fast as they can. ... how teaching is structured needs turning on its head if we are going to move forward.”* Principal of a site visit school

The analysis of evidence in the Interim Evaluation indicates that the ITQNP is uniquely placed to connect the supply and demand sides of the teaching profession as a key approach to ensuring and sustaining improvements in teacher quality. By so doing, it would be able to make a potentially critical contribution to ensuring that quality is defined by reference to the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* within the supply side, connected to the demand side by processes and structures that through their design identify, embed, promote, value and reward quality teaching. The reform elements of the IQTNP that guide activity toward jurisdictional output targets would then be connected coherently to contribute to the central intent of improving and sustaining teacher quality. By so doing, the ITQNP could contribute directly to the national productivity agenda.

*“There is no more important work than improving teacher quality. That work has to impact on each teacher, every classroom. We have to sustain the effort, not ‘do’ projects and say ‘that’s done’. Teacher quality work has to be continuous. We have to transform what teaching looks like right across the country, not just in National Partnership schools.”* Principal of a site visit school

While the key findings about appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency above indicate issues with line-of-sight to reform, the evidence from the Interim Evaluation of the ITQNP suggests that a conceptualisation about reform in teacher quality is emerging



from work within it. Potentially, this conceptualisation carries strategic implications for teacher quality in Australia extending beyond progress in the various operationally oriented elements of the ITQNP. Indeed, the evidence suggests that the conceptualisation needs to be carried forward nationally from within the ITQNP so that the value of the investment in it is realised. For the reform intent of the ITQNP to be realised, work needs to be undertaken to embed structures and processes in the structure and culture of the teaching profession that can sustain teacher quality as a hallmark of Australian education. The evidence suggests that without such a conceptualisation as that proposed in the following analysis, the relative decline in the performance of Australia's students may continue.

*We need to step back and think about the real implications of uniform national standards for teachers and principals. How do we make them real for teachers? What has to be done so that the standards drive and support quality teaching? It's no good having standards that teachers don't see any reason to engage with and that don't mean anything for what they're doing in their classrooms with their kids.*

A key relevant issue identified in the evidence previously presented is that it is possible to identify a substantial disconnection between the work being undertaken to build professional standards and accreditation procedures on the one hand and, on the other, the work of the ITQNP to implement the facilitation and reward reform elements set out in the multilateral Agreements. Given the importance of this issue, the following analysis addresses especially the imperative identified in the Interim Evaluation evidence for a coherent view to be established and articulated across the various elements of the ITQNP. Further, the analysis suggests the potential of a conceptualisation based on a program logic that links together the work of AITSL, the ITQNP and the other SSNPs to contribute to the national productivity agenda.

From the Interim Evaluation evidence, the need is confirmed for a substantial transformation in teacher quality and classroom practice if the full intent of the envisaged reform is to be achieved. The evidence suggests the possibility that such reform can be set in place if the structures being established by AITSL are fully utilised in jurisdictions, systems, sectors and schools to shape a quality teaching agenda that impacts at the classroom level. The reforms reside not in the structures being developed by AITSL but in the culture of teaching. The evidence suggests that work to impact this culture is essential for the reform intent of the ITQNP to be realised. For this to occur, change is required that embeds, recognises and rewards classroom-based higher status positions throughout all schools.

*"We are establishing a teaching culture here where teachers are committed to improvement for themselves so that their students can also improve. ... we need a common approach to recognising teachers who have the greatest effects on students' learning and remunerate them accordingly." Principal of a site visit school*

The scale of the transformation required for the quality teacher agenda to be realised implies substantial challenge to the status quo. This implies a challenge to the vested interests of both administrations and unions, as well as to teacher views about what it means to be a professional practitioner. It is unrealistic to expect that work within the ITQNP can be carried to success unless there is full recognition of the potentially limiting environments into which it has been placed.

This is a recurring theme in the Evaluation evidence. While, individual elements may generate increased activity and achieve output targets, unless the challenges are faced and overcome, the reform required for the intent of the ITQNP within the national productivity agenda will be seen as unattained, and unattainable. Should that be the case, the contribution of the ITQNP to improving teacher quality will be regarded, perhaps inevitably, as little advanced on previous activity and effort over many years. Such a view was a recurring theme in the Interim Evaluation evidence.

## Progress in building the national professional structures

Elements of progress in the development of a national professional structure for teaching are apparent from activity to date in the SSNPs collectively. This activity especially sits alongside work undertaken by AITSL. To understand the meaning of this evidence, a critical question needs to be asked. How can current work be attached to the reform intent of the ITQNP as it relates to the national productivity agenda? This question can only be answered by building a conceptualisation that arises from the implications of the Interim Evaluation evidence. The complex and interrelated range of issues involved in this conceptualisation is explored in the following analysis.

The critical evidence from the Interim Evaluation points to a conceptualisation around an emerging separation of the status, quality and recognition elements of the profession of teaching from the employment related elements of tenure, placement and remuneration. Figure 10 below provides a representation of this conceptualisation of the emerging professional structure for teaching, using the lense of the program logic, described in Chapter 1, which provides a line-of-sight to reform.

The basis of the conceptualisation is the notion of a profession. Within a profession, it is imperative that the profession itself, rather than employers, has control over standards, entry and exit, as well as the responsibility for professional learning to maintain currency and quality within the profession. These features are among those that define a profession. Entry to the profession is free to all who can satisfy the standards and criteria for registration. In a profession, there are standards to meet to differentiate quality among professional participants, and procedures in place to facilitate and moderate the attainment of those standards. Similarly, there is clarity about what constitutes the criteria for not meeting the standards, and clear procedures for deregistration or not allowing registration.

*“Look at how much we hear about quality issues in other professions. The practitioners can be fearless in advocating quality and standards. That’s what teaching needs to be like.”* Principal of a site visit school

Building the professional structures is the work of AITSL and the various teacher registration authorities, and it is well advanced. Drawing support across a broad spectrum of government employer, union and association stakeholders, AITSL has managed to progress the development of the structures and commensurate processes well beyond previous attempts.

However, the evidence from the Interim Evaluation indicates that building the structures and processes outside of schools is not sufficient to create reform that will impact on the performance outcomes of our schools. Analysis of the evidence shows that complementary work is needed within school systems, sectors and schools to leverage from the structures being developed to impact teacher quality and increase system productivity. This is potentially the essential work of the ITQNP into the future, supported by the other SSNPs.

Unpacking that complementary work starts with the concept of remuneration. Generally, remuneration in a profession is a function of proven knowledge, skills and currency against the standards, moderated by salary, incentive and reward structures. The assumption, embedded in the research and when applied to teaching, is that the highest levels of current and evidence-based knowledge and skills applied by teachers engaged in an ongoing professional learning inquiry can produce the highest levels of student learning outcomes. Remuneration is further leveraged from the work done, responsibility levels, levels of difficulty, location and perhaps outcomes. It is based on winning a placement in schools, a position that carries with it a salary package commensurate with the status required to obtain the placement, supplemented perhaps with incentive and reward elements.

It would be easy to ‘capture’ this description of remuneration by suggesting that teaching now

provides for such approaches. However, in teaching, remuneration at present is largely a function of initial qualifications, time served and administratively oriented promotion position gained. Teaching is largely captive to a concept of entitlement based on seniority, not remuneration based on competency.

Informed by the program logic, in the definition above, the centrality of classroom-based pedagogical efficacy needs to underpin words such as 'knowledge', 'skills' and 'currency'. It needs to permeate the 'work done', 'responsibility' and 'difficulty'. This implies that current capture by the culture, administration and industrial regulation of teaching needs to be addressed if the program logic is to be served.

Informed by the program logic, differentiation among placements at similar levels can be facilitated by incentive and reward. Incentive could be provided to encourage quality personnel to seek placements in hard-to-staff situations. Reward, on the other hand, could be used to recognise performance outcomes, perhaps identified through externally moderated accreditation procedures. Building on the work of AITSL, establishing such classroom-based differentiation structures broadly across schools is potential work within the ITQNP. However, it is work that to date seems disconnected from the agenda, largely fragmented and inadequate to challenge the widely entrenched administrative and industrial view of entitlement based on seniority in teaching.

*"The national standards open the door to recognising and rewarding high quality teachers but I am fearful the challenges will be too great and too many, and the door will close ..."* Principal of a site visit school

In terms of effort by AITSL, work is well underway on the supply, or left hand, side of Figure 10 below to produce the outcomes described. It is the demand side on the right that is the concern of the ITQNP, providing a conceptualisation that sets out the outcomes needed within schools if the reform effort is to move beyond supply-side structure to impact the demand-side administrative and industrial culture of teaching, and hence teacher quality. However, on the demand side, little other than demonstration and trial of quarantined elements is evident as a result of ITQNP to date, with much that is unlikely to survive past the funding provided.

*"The additional positions we have, the HATs, are making a tremendous difference, ... but when the funding stops so will the positions. While we will be able to keep some things going, we will have to wind back the big impact programs. There are two sides to this. Our students lose out, that's obvious, but I know that teacher morale will drop, and then the cynics here will say 'I told you so'. It just makes things more difficult. The other thing is, I know other principals and schools are watching what is going on here with more than passing interest, they see it as a trial. If this falls over and comes to an end because the funding stops, they'll say what was the point, and what a waste of money, and I'd have to agree with them."* Principal of a site visit school

This is not to deny that there are jurisdictional efforts to bridge the structure-culture gap. However, as shown in the evidence, these efforts are the exception within the ITQNP and rely largely on work done outside of the ITQNP. There is a natural reluctance to disturb the culture embedded in long-entrenched administrative and industrial structures that govern much of teaching, reluctance unlikely to be overcome with the scale of facilitation and reward offered within ITQNP. Nevertheless, if the program logic is to be acknowledged, reform of the scale and scope required to contribute significantly to the national productivity agenda implies substantial bridging of this gap.

**Figure 10: A possible outcomes-based professional framework for reform**

Professional Status, Quality and Recognition			Employment Tenure, Placement and Remuneration	
Standards	Principles	Development	Position/Remuneration	Approach/Support
<b>Principal</b>	Agreements are in place related to Qualifications, Knowledge, Skills, Character checks, References as the basis of registration requirements	Agreements have been reached about professional learning requirements to prove currency and standard of professional knowledge (including benchmarks, descriptors, moderation and assessment)	Total money allocation to staff is determined by treasuries, systems, and/or income of the school  There is universal establishment of substantive or contract class-based positions won on merit, premised on status requirements of the role, plus employer criteria	A framework for evaluation informs analysis of staffing and development needs for each school, which in turn guides staff mix
<b>Lead</b>	Currency of work and professional learning requirements are in place for ongoing status determination	Endorsement processes operate for providers of courses and other professional learning so teachers can address further needs to carry out roles applicable to higher levels of accreditation	Classroom-based status determined promotions positions have credibility and high value, creating the incentive for all teachers to pursue and obtain higher standards of accreditation	In light of school review and evaluation findings, decisions are made by the system/principal to structure roles to suit the context and needs of each school
<b>Highly Accomplished</b>	Processes for regular submission, demonstration and deregistration are operating  There is agreement about certification processes and time frames, with processes to address situations where status requirements can no longer be demonstrated	Submission, assessment and moderation processes for accreditation operate, including training for assessors	Salary levels are negotiated for the various status levels with time-based salary progression within levels	The skills, knowledge, experience and other situation specific requirements are identified and matched to applicants
<b>Proficient</b>	New and better pathways into teaching operate through joint work between employers and universities (including conditional, TFA, permission to teach, Indigenous pathways etc.)	Partnerships have been established with universities for research, knowledge currency and professional learning courses	Major salary progression occurs at each classroom-based status level	School centres of excellence and other practice-oriented structures are linked to universities for practicum and professional learning for all school leaders and teachers
<b>Graduate</b>	Standards and practicum requirements for course accreditation are in place, including longer and better experience in classroom-based practice		Differentiation in remuneration is used to address specific requirements through incentives that are market-based to attract the right skills to particular positions, within the budget allocated to each school that acknowledges differential complexities in the learning requirements of the student cohort	Provision of ongoing at-the-shoulder classroom support for teacher learning inquiry constantly improves instructional knowledge, skills and attributes of all teachers
<b>Pre service</b>			Further reward is based on performance against contracted outcomes, with reward including support to access higher accreditation levels and to stay on in hard-to staff schools  Unsatisfactory performance in the position leads to development support, potential demotion, and possibly contract termination	Performance management and review are based on analysis of the outcomes of the ongoing learning inquiry of each teacher  Teachers strive to attain increased status, taking part in required professional learning and teacher registration authority processes  Principals collaborate in strongly supported and ongoing learning to increase their instructional and leadership capacity and to recruit, organise and allocate their resources to ensure the highest possible instructional standards and outcomes in their school

To explore further the conceptualisation stemming from the program logic, the structural separation shown in Figure 10 implies a clarification of responsibility for teacher supply and demand, with the profession responsible for supply and the employer responsible for demand. Both supply and demand elements have responsibility for teacher quality. Figure 11 below uses the economic analogy to further illustrate the separation in the conceptualisation.

**Figure 11: Possible outcomes for supply, demand and remuneration under a reformed national professional structure for Australian teaching**

Professional Status - Recognition			Employment Placement and Remuneration - Reward	
Standards	Principles	Development	Position/Remuneration	Role/Rationale
<p><b>Supply is a function of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• professional choices and decisions made by member teachers</li> <li>• commercial decisions made by universities, which can be influenced by employers</li> <li>• accreditation and certification regulations and processes implemented by teacher registration authority in consultation with professional bodies, universities, employers, unions and government</li> <li>• support mechanisms set in place by the profession for all members to maintain quality and currency of their professional knowledge and skills</li> <li>• access pathways developed by systems and sectors, and supported by government</li> <li>• registration and deregistration procedures</li> </ul>			<p><b>Demand is a function of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the total resources allocated to schools for human resources, which in turn is influenced by cost benefit perceptions</li> <li>• eligibility as determined by requirements in relation to registration, certification and other employer conditions</li> <li>• differential allocation of salary according to status</li> <li>• differential allocation of incentive according to factors including: location; role; expectations; and, skill and experience requirements</li> <li>• differential allocation of reward based on performance</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Remuneration is a function of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the value of differential contribution (placement according to factors including: location; skills and knowledge needed; level of responsibility; and, market requirements)</li> <li>• subject to industrial negotiation and award agreements</li> <li>• set by the interaction of position, placement and role</li> <li>• accessed through status and selection</li> <li>• determined through a contract between the teacher and the employer</li> <li>• with regular performance review</li> <li>• and contract decisions made by employers, including termination</li> </ul>				

As employers and teachers each have a stake in the interests of the other, there will be considerable interaction between supply and demand, an interaction to be facilitated for the sound working of the kind of quality-oriented, free and open market that underpins a profession. Under a reform approach, it is this interaction that can facilitate and guarantee quality teaching. Within the bounds of established budgets, the market also determines teacher price (remuneration)<sup>11</sup>. To establish a truly informed and quality oriented market structure within the profession, the clarification of responsibility for supply and demand is fundamental. The clarification of responsibility is also necessary for any

<sup>11</sup> In a profession, this market-based economy commands a total level of remuneration commensurate with the perceived public value of the services and outcomes delivered. In the professional model being explained here, there would be every opportunity for teachers to demonstrate additional value of outcomes, which in turn would lead to higher levels of overall remuneration *vis a vis* other forms of work. This is the nexus between recognition of performance and remuneration.

professional structure.

The *National Professional Standards for Teachers* form the basis of the supply side of the market. Once embedded and working effectively, the list of those teachers accredited with attainment of different levels against the standards could provide a universally recognised measure of teacher quality as well the means of differentiating quality among those in the profession. However, the caveat ‘and working effectively’ requires demand-side effort to value and embed the possibilities offered by the supply-side structure. This is where the reform comes up against often-entrenched opposition, entrenchment that will require substantial effort and incentive to overcome.

In the reform model emanating from the program logic, demand is represented through the role of purchase by employers, with teacher placement to best suit the needs of the organisation and its subset, schools. The nexus between demand and supply provides the price, called remuneration. It also provides price differentials based on:

- status, differentiated through attainment of various levels of recognised accomplishment accreditation against the standards
- incentive, for example, for location, length of stay, further qualifications, experience in similar communities or proven success in targeted areas
- reward, for performance against agreed outcomes as determined by transparent and objective measurement approaches such as accreditation.

As conceptualised, the profession has a vested responsibility to maintain and improve the currency and quality of teacher practice. This implies teachers themselves taking responsibility for, utilising and protecting teacher quality by strongly endorsing and participating in the professional learning and attestation processes that lead to recognition of the higher levels of accomplishment.

Employers, who generate the demand for teachers, also have a role in improving the currency and quality of professional practice within their workforce. This is an essential function to maintain and improve system performance. Thus, demand and supply elements of professional learning meet to address teacher quality and performance issues.

On the one hand, as a professional responsibility, teachers need to demonstrate the outcomes of their ongoing professional inquiry and to prove additional instructional competencies to progress through to higher classroom-based status levels. The supply side needs to have structures in place to facilitate and assess the outcomes of this professional learning against the standards. As this is a supply side issue, teachers themselves will have to pay for this. Their universal engagement and participation in these processes is critical to the reform.

On the other hand, teachers need to be provided with highly effective classroom support to maintain their professional skills and knowledge and to implement the most cost-effective practice to produce the highest possible levels of learning outcomes for each of their students. Internal teacher quality support is a system performance issue that is the responsibility of the employers. As a function of demand, employers will have to pay for this.

Figure 12 below illustrates the joint roles of employers and the teacher registration authorities in support of teacher quality within the reform model suggested strongly by the implications of the Interim Evaluation evidence.

Within this conceptualisation, for both the profession and the employers, it is imperative to recognise and promote the status of the profession by creating the instrumental reasons for teachers to

embrace their responsibility to participate in attainment of higher levels of status. Only if there is strong reason within the demand side of teaching to obtain the differential status levels will there be full engagement of teachers in the opportunities offered by the supply-side structure. From the Interim Evaluation evidence, this needs to be achieved if a quality teacher agenda is to be realised for all teachers in all schools.

*The employers just as much as the teacher unions need to re-think the implications of the national standards if they want to give more than lip service to teacher quality. The employers need a whole new approach to how teachers are remunerated and how quality teachers and school leaders are rewarded as they acquire and prove better skills.*

**Figure 12: Possible supply and demand side functions for teacher quality**

**Within the emerging structure, teacher quality is a function on the supply side of:**

- the profession acting as custodian of the professional knowledge base, a responsibility that also involves adding to the knowledge base, verifying its reliability and effectiveness as best practice and promulgating it among all of its members
- the standards, which act as a curriculum for the preparation of teachers and their ongoing development, describing the knowledge and skills expected of teachers at various career stages
- teacher registration authority processes and procedures to support the development of required skills and knowledge at various career stages
- submission, moderation, inspection and accreditation processes to verify attainment of the standards

**Within the emerging structure, teacher quality is a function on the demand side of:**

- a classroom-based, collaborative engagement in ongoing learning to implement the national curriculum
- supported by best current knowledge and strong instructional leadership
- iteratively tried and tested in classrooms, supported by evaluation and feedback
- with efficacy determined by analysis of learning outcomes
- professional supervision and review to ensure role expectations are being met

In this regard, it will be necessary that the demand-side employment structures strongly embrace universal quality differentiation of positions of responsibility for classroom teachers. Such positions would have responsibility for instructional leadership, for coaching, and for leading the teacher inquiry at the heart of quality practice. If this is to be done within the current budget, it implies substantial reallocations, possibly from administrative positions to classroom-based promotion positions. Such a high level reform may require substantially more incentive than is offered or suggested through the ITQNP.

The conceptualisation being explored also implies the provision of sufficient salary and incentive to encourage teachers to attain differential status accreditation and to apply for higher-level classroom-based positions. In addition, it requires careful management within schools to ensure that the status-related positions are effective, valued and rewarded. If the classroom-oriented positions are gained by entitlement based on seniority and rewarded for few differential role requirements, as is the case with many current higher-status classroom-based positions, then it is likely that little will come from the AITSL structures in terms of teacher quality.

Without valuing and rewarding the elements represented by the *National Professional Standards for Teachers*, placing them at the heart of core business to support teacher professional growth, the potential of professional quality and facilitation offered by supply-side work to establish status-based

structures will languish, as has occurred in relation to advanced skills teachers and the like. As such, it is likely that the structure of teaching will remain in its administratively and industrially governed base. Teaching standards and the potential for increased community recognition and remuneration will remain largely out of the hands of teachers. Teachers as a group will remain largely unable to address teacher quality and professional differentiation issues, with employers and industrial groups largely retaining control.

As noted by the OECD in a recent review of evaluation and assessment in Australian school education, what is required is a carefully conceived structure that:

*... would strengthen the incentive for teachers to improve their competencies, and reinforce the matching between teachers' levels of competence and the tasks which need to be performed in schools to improve student learning...*

*As a result, teacher registration could be conceived as career-progression evaluation. It would have as its main purposes holding teachers accountable for their practice, determining advancement in the career, and informing the professional development plan of the teacher.<sup>12</sup>*

There is evidence from the Interim Evaluation that such a structure has potential to take shape in Australian school education, in pursuit of the national productivity agenda and strongly advocated by government. Elements of this agenda are being addressed by AITSL and through the SSNPs. However, it is equally obvious from the evidence that there is a need to see and implement the structure as a cohesive whole so that all elements support each other in the attainment of the national productivity agenda and what the OECD regards as a quality imperative.

The extent and challenge of the reform effort implied in this conceptualisation should not be understated. While the evidence indicates that the national professional structure is emerging, it emanates from a different context to that of other professions, where there is already a professional infrastructure. In other professions such as medicine or engineering or in newer fields such as computer technology, members have greater levels of independence, often operating as 'sole traders', at times in association but not in an employment relationship. The professional structures for these groups have emerged from within the membership, as a response to the interests and needs of individual members.

In contrast, teaching is substantially an administratively- and industrially-based mass-employment function, long subject to the rules of employers and industrial organisations, both of which see their operations as having a 'professional role', and invariably describe them in these terms. Teachers see their professional responsibilities as discharged, moderated and protected by these organisations. Because of their tertiary entry qualifications and specific training, they view themselves as professionals. Few teachers have the view that they themselves should hold responsibilities for professional standards. Their standards are established through their training and experience, which they see as giving them seniority-based entitlements, the only culturally acceptable form of differentiation in the classroom. Such a view reflects concern that, if differentiation were to occur at classroom level, they may be left individually vulnerable in a world of ambiguous, personally determined and largely unattributable student outcomes. Such a view is reinforced as teachers hear external demands for greater transparency, public scrutiny and direct attribution of student outcomes

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<sup>12</sup> OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education – Australia, August 2011, page 10



to them personally, rather than to objectively determined teacher competencies.

As the research literature establishes, engaging teachers in the development and implementation of a professional teaching structure is a vital element of reform. The evidence in the Interim Evaluation indicates that, to date, the engagement of teachers through the ITQNP has been overly focused on activity within discrete elements, rather than enabling teachers to see the reform opportunities for them across the elements. In particular, there appears to be no design capacity to connect work in the various elements to the work of AITSL. Rather, this work is seen as yet another of the elements, with no apparent connection for teachers to the wider work being undertaken within the ITQNP.

*“We know the school receives money from the National Partnership and we know the positions that are National Partnership positions. But what the bigger picture is all about, no, not really.” Teacher in a site visit school*

*I think we’re doing different things through IQTNP that are worthwhile, but I think most teachers would regard them as largely irrelevant to their daily work. The title of the partnership is a bit misleading really.*

The explanation of the reform conceptualisation that runs through the analysis emanates from the program logic that links the SSNPs to the broader national productivity agenda. To further explicate the conceptualisation, the following sections build on the evidence gathered in the Interim Evaluation about supply-side developments and the work of the ITQNP in the demand side. In the latter explication, an analysis of the potential place of each of the current ITQNP reform elements in the cohesive reform agenda is presented.

The purpose of this extended explication is to set out in detail what is occurring and to demonstrate how it might be utilised to achieve the level of reform needed to address the national productivity agenda. Throughout the analysis, the current ITQNP reform elements are embedded in the conceptualisation to indicate that they are important, but not sufficient individually, to constitute reform.

## Supply-side reform

As mentioned above, to address the need for a nationally consistent infrastructure on the supply side, nationally agreed professional structures are being developed by AITSL, in consultation with strategic level stakeholders involved in assuring the quality of Australian teachers. These structures provide nationally agreed accreditation standards that include pre-service course standards, classroom-based standards over four status levels, and standards for principals.

The *National Professional Standards for Teachers*, their descriptors in the form of evidence guides and their benchmarks, are designed to provide the basis for measuring and differentiating the quality of teachers, accrediting their status as classroom practitioners from graduation through to higher levels. They are the curriculum for the professional growth of teachers against which accreditation will occur. To varying extents and within different timelines, teacher registration authorities and employers in all Australian jurisdictions are moving to adopt the standards and their meanings. All Education Ministers have signed off on the standards.

The conceptualisation being presented here indicates that, with sufficient incentive for good practitioners to see value in attaining them, accreditation against these standards could eventually provide the most appropriate and differentiated measure of the quality of Australian teachers. However, there is a great deal of organisational, administrative, legislative and industrial distance to travel before this is possible.

Covering this distance will require both time and incentive in pursuit of an agreed vision throughout the jurisdictions. Once again, the issues will only be addressed effectively through the engagement of teachers as professional practitioners. As is stated in the National Evaluation commentary, the work needs to be done with them, not to them or for them. The *National Professional Standards for Teachers* provide the platform for this engagement as they stand outside administrative and industrial contexts and structures. Facilitation Reform 5 of the ITQNP, '*National Professional Standards for Teachers*', provides the structural opportunity to engage teachers most broadly. It is within this aspect of the work of the ITQNP that critical foundational work can be done to underpin progress towards achieving the teacher quality agenda and thus towards achieving the national productivity agenda.

### *Teacher registration*

Work undertaken by AITSL is supporting the development of a nationally consistent approach to teacher registration based on qualifications, knowledge, skills, character, time-in-practice, hours of professional learning, and in some cases employer references. Critical to these elements is the proven link between the qualifications, knowledge, experience and character as represented in the standards, and the outcomes of students. Payment of fees to teacher registration authorities is a precondition of registration.

The criteria for registration include a three-year degree or better in a related subject, two years of teacher training qualifications, as well as police and character checks. In addition, full registration and subsequent five yearly re-registration will require evidence of 100 days of classroom practice over five years and 500 hours of professional learning over five years. The latter will include 50 per cent of professional learning that is offered by providers endorsed by the various teacher registration authorities and 50 per cent certified as appropriate by the principal.

Registration will not be a single national process but will be guided by nationally agreed principles. While further work is needed to achieve a nationally consistent approach, registration in all jurisdictions will include steps from provisional to full registration. In some jurisdictions and subject to agreements with unions, registration will incorporate a 'permission to teach' or conditional element. This will be based, for example, on non-teaching degree qualifications or lesser teacher education and attainment. Conditional provisions will allow entry to teaching while moving through teacher training at the same time as gaining practical experience on-the-job.

In some jurisdictions, internships that identify and obligate high quality teacher entrants will support this process. The Australian Government supported '*Teach for Australia*' process is along these lines, while other jurisdictions offer 'grow your own' support and final year graduand support. Such demand-side generated work within the ITQNP is being facilitated through supply-side structures and procedures. However, the evidence indicates that moving to full acceptance of such approaches in schools and systems, and embedding them as universal core practice, is yet far from a reality.

Recently agreed, there are to be time-based requirements to move from provisional registration to full registration and from conditional to provisional and then full registration. These provisions and those noted above will allow for new and better ways into teaching, including for those who are highly competent but not teacher trained. They will also provide pathways for Indigenous people and others from particular backgrounds who can leverage from

*"To ensure more Indigenous people have a pathway into teaching, ... we need to develop a model which resources specified on-the-job training days for Indigenous teacher aides, as part of certificated courses, with advanced standing attached. It is unreasonable to expect that accredited training can be done out-of-hours by people who invariably have a lot of pressure on them. Even for those aides who don't want to be teachers, specified and resourced on-site training days should be built into the role. A well trained Indigenous paraprofessional workforce could make an enormous contribution to closing the gap."*  
Principal of a site visit school

accumulating courses and school-based experience to bridge to fully registered teacher status. Provided these structures are more broadly utilised within jurisdictions and schools than is currently the case, they provide the supply-side facilitation of the new and better pathways that are reforms identified in the ITQNP.

Accreditation by teacher registration authorities of providers of professional learning courses will support attainment of standards related to the professional learning requirements for ongoing teacher registration. Courses offered by an endorsed provider are to be related to attainment of aspects of the standards. As mentioned, teachers must do 50 per cent of their professional learning submitted for registration utilising accredited providers. The other 50 per cent of their professional learning can be conferences, in-school action research, and other professional learning activities endorsed by their principal. Partnerships with higher education providers are identified as a reform within the ITQNP.

Evidence indicates that further work is needed to address various practices that tend to subvert, in the demand-side, the intentions of the supply-side developments. For example, practices associated with teachers who do not satisfy registration requirements but who avoid being dismissed by moving among schools need to be resolved. In some circumstances, such teachers have their contract terminated or they are moved on before having their efficiency called in to question. In some cases, they do not have the qualifications or cannot satisfy the professional learning or time-in-work requirements of registration, yet they are seen to hold a useful place in schools. Under current arrangements, such situations can occur for some years before registration requirements force them to either satisfy requirements or be faced with barriers that prevent their employment as teachers.

That said, within the foreseeable future, processes for de-registration will be in place in all jurisdictions, including where teachers do not satisfy any of the ongoing registration requirements as assessed by panels trained and facilitated by the teacher registration authorities. While complementary processes are needed on the demand-side to identify, support and where necessary remove teachers whose performance is below standard, deregistration procedures form an important element in protecting professional quality and integrity.

### *Pre-service requirements*

For pre-service education, there is emerging national consistency of standards and requirements, and emerging work in support of quality practical experience for graduands to reach provisional standards by graduation. Ministers have endorsed new standards and procedures for the accreditation of courses of teacher preparation. The standards comprise the graduate standards and a set of program standards.

What is emerging from the agreements among the stakeholders is that teacher registration authorities are being given responsibility to accredit teacher education courses against the standards. In addition, there is emerging national work between universities and the teacher registration authorities to achieve quality against the standards. A single set of pre-service course standards has been adopted nationally and the process for course accreditation has also been agreed. That said, it is apparent that State and Territory teacher registration authorities will each be responsible for setting up panels and for training their course accreditation panel members.

As a quality practicum is an essential part of the pre-service requirements, partnerships between teacher education authorities and schools or systems to maximise benefits from the practicum are emerging. Many of these involve school centres of excellence, and some models are extended to include combined long term on-the-job opportunities with theory provisions made through after

school visits or online. In this sense, the ITQNP work is complementing the supply-side work on pre-service standards, but there is by no means universal engagement by either schools or teacher education providers that would constitute reform. In the main, at this stage the work involves trial or demonstration.

### *Accreditation and certification*

Both AITSL and the teacher registration authorities are jointly responsible for nationally consistent certification of teachers in attainment of the various higher status levels within classroom teaching. In order to achieve national consistency, work is being undertaken to trial professional development and descriptors so that the scaffolding needed for professional progress can be put in place across jurisdictions.

AITSL is currently partnering with a range of organisations to trial the use of the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* within existing structures and practices. The pilots, which will be undertaken in the latter half of this year, will help to determine what further support is required for implementation of the standards. This work, if undertaken publicly through the structures and processes of Facilitation Reform 5 of the ITQNP, has potential to engage teachers so that national understanding is built within the profession about the opportunities attached to the teacher quality agenda. In particular, the descriptors attached to the standards need to make explicit the practices shown through evidence to be most effective in achieving student learning success in all circumstances.

As for registration, the application of the higher-level accreditation standards and the processes to attain them will be a matter for the jurisdictions under the nationally agreed principles. There is already progress in this area, with some sectors supporting identified teachers to achieve the status and some systems building the higher levels into recently negotiated enterprise bargaining agreements. These are indications in the Interim Evaluation evidence of the demand-side valuing and creating the place for the differential professional standards in schools. However, the evidence indicates that in most cases their existence and continuation are dependent on sustained ITQNP funding.

From the evidence, other jurisdictions have particular issues to address before the higher levels can be implemented. Some are legacy issues, related to former advanced skills teachers and other classroom-based higher salaried positions. Participants in the Interim Evaluation commented that considerable negotiation would be required to address the industrial and award implications of these higher-level positions if they were to be based on status, competency and demonstrable student outcomes rather than largely on entitlement accrued through seniority and experience.

*There would be a lot of work in front of us to negotiate and change structures so that people who have higher status, like highly accomplished, could be entitled to apply for particular positions.*

For the higher-level accreditation, similar approaches to provider endorsement and demonstration of currency of learning will need to be utilised as those required for registration, but against the higher standards. Essential to provide access to the higher levels of teacher status and to standards for principals, these are not yet fully in place.

Further, national support for principals, a role ascribed to leadership by DEEWR, has yet to be implemented. Interestingly, Facilitation Reform 1 of the ITQNP, '*Professional Development and Support for Principals*', could be regarded as a legitimate pathway for high-level instructional leadership support of principals and would orient important national work to the productivity reform agenda.

While there is obvious potential synergy across jurisdictions in what principals need to know and be able to do, how this is to be implemented and by whom is largely yet unclear within ITQNP.

The evidence within the National Evaluation reveals the strong imperative for a concerted and nationally coordinated approach to increase the instructional leadership capacity of Australian school principals. There is commentary in the evidence of the relative deskilling of many principals in this critical area. Many principals attest to a widespread and long-term focus on administrative leadership within centrally controlled and administered resource allocations, with only personally driven development in areas including instructional leadership and school organisation to produce high level student outcomes.

“... generally, I think we’ve taken our eye off the ball as far as school leadership development goes. The system demands on me are always administrative, never instructional. I was involved in the school leadership program run by the old Teaching Australia and it was fantastic – very challenging – but those sorts of national high quality opportunities for leaders and future leaders seem not to be there now.” Principal of a site visit school

The SSNPs overall provide substantial evidence of the benefits to be gained from leadership development that represents a high level of understanding about, especially, literacy and numeracy, data analysis and the pedagogies needed to respond to the findings from the data. Within the instructional leadership context, skills in management, recruitment, resource allocation, teacher engagement and communication focused on the paramount importance of emotional engagement and learning outcomes for all students are developed with purpose and challenge in mind. Likewise, the basis of leadership knowledge is grounded in the central purpose of learning that is at the heart of the school *raison d’etre*.

The work of the former Teaching Australia and the current work of AITSL in the implementation of the *Leading Australia’s Schools* program may provide insight into what is needed in this regard. So too could the *National Professional Standards for Principals* form the focus for instructional leadership development. In parallel, seeing principals come from the ranks of instructional leaders generated through the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* rather than through administrative promotion paths that tend to decrease focus on the classroom over time may enable key capacity building.

Whatever is done into the future, instructional leadership needs to be at the heart of the developmental work. The evidence indicates, however, that it is highly unlikely that such a reform-oriented developmental process for principals could be led from within the current structures and culture controlled by principals. Changing culture requires pressure and support from outside the culture. The evidence indicates that, for reform, this is more the role of an external high-level university research centre or consortium than any current association. Such a consortium needs to have the advice of and involve directly the key researchers such as Fullan, Hattie, *et al* in guiding the reform-oriented development of principals.

For the higher levels of classroom teacher status, national agreement is emerging about rules of procedure to apply the common standards. Under a common process that appears to be emerging, jurisdictional teacher registration authorities will undertake to make judgements against the standards through teacher submission of annotated evidence, attested by referees, with inspection for a day by up to two trained practitioners. Eventually, it is likely that advanced status determination procedures will be paid for by the teacher applicants, although payment by employers could well form part of incentive packages or be reward for performance or length of stay in hard-to-staff situations. While all of this remains subject to negotiation and has implications for industrial negotiations and awards, the Interim Evaluation evidence suggests that supply-side organisational and structural directions are emerging.

As accreditation at higher levels is also subject to five-yearly review, similar processes to de-registration may need to be in place to rescind the accreditation of teachers who can no longer demonstrate that they meet the status requirements. This issue was explored by a number of participants in the Interim Evaluation, with recognition of the challenges involved. Envisaged processes may have ramifications for continuation in a placement, but that would be a matter for employer consideration and would be impacted by present industrial rights. From the evidence, little reform appears to have been undertaken or considered in this area to date.

Overall, from the evidence about supply-side work, it is clear that very substantial activity is progressing nationally under the auspices of AITSL and the jurisdictional teacher registration authorities. However, while AITSL is funded nationally through SSNPs, and its Board members are the very same people who are partners in the SSNPs, the placement of the AITSL work is at best nominal within the SSNPs. Interestingly, Facilitation Reforms 5 and 6 would suggest that the placement connection should be public and prominent within the ITQNP.

Rather, the evidence indicates a discernible measure of disconnection between the work undertaken by AITSL and activity within the ITQNP. When viewed through the lense of the program logic that links the SSNPs to the national productivity agenda, the evidence reveals the imperative for the supply-side structures to be carried through in structure and culture to the demand side. This is a substantial role that has actually been built into the structure of the ITQNP. However, the evidence indicates that a focus should be brought to bear so that the role can be pursued in a way that will realise the reform potential of the ITQNP.

### Demand-side reform

As was noted by participants in the Interim Evaluation, much in State and Territory administration, legislation, enterprise bargaining agreements, industrial awards, structures, capacities and expectations represents a time when teacher status, quality and recognition were inextricably linked through employment conditions to tenure, placement, and remuneration. As canvassed by participants in the Interim Evaluation, for the vast majority of teachers, remuneration is a matter of entitlement earned through time in the job.

*We will be on the road to quality teaching when we disconnect time served and salary. What other profession rewards time served and puts so little value on the quality of professional practice?*

The potential removal of this nexus offers the opportunity to separate responsibility for teacher status from responsibility for remuneration. Such separation of responsibility is essential if differentiation is to be based on other than seniority and subjective judgement. The competency-based structures for teacher differentiation being developed by AITSL provide the opportunity to substitute differentiated competency for seniority to drive teacher quality reform.

At the same time, evidence from the Interim Evaluation suggests that strategic and operational interaction among professional and employer stakeholders, moderated through support structures such as AITSL and teacher registration authorities, can be used to ensure a balance of interests while allowing a market to determine the interaction between status and reward. Such interaction can also foster teacher quality.

Within the reform-oriented conceptualisation suggested by the Interim Evaluation evidence, capitalising on these opportunities within the demand side would give leverage and reform orientation to much of the other reform agenda within the ITQNP. The following section explores the

opportunities for reform in the demand side by continuing the evidence-based conceptualisation explored above. The conceptualisation provides insight into where and how the ITQNP reform elements might be linked to provide leverage for teacher quality reform.

### *Differential remuneration*

The area of differential remuneration was widely explored in the Interim Evaluation evidence. It is clear that the ITQNP has given prominence to this area and is focusing jurisdictional attention at a far higher level than has previously been the case. What is also clear from the evidence is that jurisdictions are working through the opportunities provided by the ITQNP to advance sometimes-preliminary work that has been done. However, the evidence also suggests that the scale and scope of the challenges in this area are considerable, taxing jurisdictional capacity to move beyond trial and demonstration.

*We are starting to see some reform emerging around recognising teacher quality, and the ITQNP has provided a useful national umbrella to stimulate this and get things moving, but the issues are fundamental and any gains will probably be small in the scheme of things. Also, they are substantially State issues, not Commonwealth issues.*

That said, the Interim Evaluation evidence suggests at least the outlines of a national structure through which it may be possible to measure, differentiate and certify teacher competency. With such a structure in place, the evidence indicates employers could be structurally free to focus on how best to address the staffing needs and performance levels of their schools. In this conceptualisation, no longer would teacher status and differentiation be a matter of length of time on-the-job or determined by internal and often subjective processes. No longer would a single classification of classroom teacher provide a ceiling on remuneration while in the classroom, a ceiling that has long been the basis of scale-oriented salary negotiations. No longer would teacher status predicated on automatic time-based scale attainment dictate the total funding allocation to teachers.

The evidence indicates that, if the built-in operational nexus were broken between seniority and remuneration, employers would be able to control their budgets by deciding on the number and remuneration levels they would offer to employ people with the various status accreditation levels. Remuneration would be based largely on attainment of a classroom-based position that carried a professional leadership or support role. To apply for the position, the applicant would be required to have a certain status level, which in turn would be dependent on the independently assessed accreditation of the applicant for the position.

*“We advertised the HAT position, I wanted to go outside the school. He’s had a big impact, in the classroom and on teachers. The message is: ‘a high quality teacher, kept in the classroom, recognised and rewarded’. That’s a powerful message for any teacher”. Principal of a site visit school*

While salary scales at and between different status points are likely to remain subject to negotiation between employers and unions and a function largely of principal-declared efficiency and time in the job, employers would at least have a capacity to identify and distribute the number of classroom-oriented positions to be offered at these status points. Employers could also have further capacity to provide differential remuneration in the form of incentives and rewards and to address market-based issues such as attracting and retaining high quality staff to particular subject areas or locations.

These are reform elements identified in the ITQNP. In many instances, the evidence in the Interim Evaluation shows that these elements are being added to current structures, mostly in trial, and as such are limited or quarantined. The evidence indicates that these ‘add-ons’ are creating concern in Treasuries that they may generate flow-on effects for jurisdictional budgets. Little by way of

substitution between structures and resource allocations is being demonstrated. Participants in the Interim Evaluation made comment that this accounted for the quarantining of demonstration projects by time limitations and by contractual terms.

*The total budget for teacher salary is a matter of the outcomes of employer and union negotiation. The public won't stand for massive increases when our learning outcomes are not great. So it is a budgetary constraint that you cannot reward every teacher who attains a higher status on the national standards, no Treasury will tolerate that. Until teaching becomes a profession and remuneration is set accordingly, the challenge is to reward quality teachers, but contain the costs.*

As alluded to elsewhere, the evidence indicates that there is considerable angst about identification of teachers for reward, an angst stemming from previous subjective procedures that were far from rigorous, with reward for little other than seniority. Without attachment to the evidence-based conceptualisation being explicated here, and especially the prominence it gives to teacher engagement in reform, such angst is likely to continue.

*"The idea that a principal nominates someone or a proportion of teachers to be rewarded, say with bonus payments, is just totally unacceptable. Higher remuneration could only work if there are well established and credible processes that let teachers show their standards of work and their achievements, independently verified. Then it would be fair enough." Teacher in a site visit school*

There is commentary in the Interim Evaluation evidence that the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* need to be linked by employers to positions and remuneration in schools. The view is that, by making this link, teachers will recognise the opportunities that emerge from commitment to higher standards of professional performance. In other words, there would be strong personal motivation to address professional growth and to take responsibility for quality of practice. Moreover, such engagement and responsibility would provide a foundation for continuous improvement in student learning outcomes. The evidence suggests that what is needed most strongly is for systems and sectors to drive the professional levels into schools through the establishment of a differentially remunerated, status-based and classroom-oriented professional structure as the key to 'promotion' in schools.

The operational implications of such an approach to building-in teacher quality need to be understood. Under the conceptualisation, the total remuneration to be paid to teachers would be determined by pre-set Treasury allocation. By substituting such a status-based classroom-oriented professional structure for that currently in schools, the total budget would not be subject to potential 'blow-out' by flow-on effects out of the control of the employers. This would address the challenge raised above by a participant in the Interim Evaluation. The focus of school promotion would shift from administration to instructional leadership. The separation of responsibility for status determination from remuneration would give employers the capacity to allocate differentially within their budgets to address market requirements, location, skill need and other issues related to classroom teachers.

The evidence indicates instances where preliminary work, supported by the ITQNP, is occurring to make the linkage between teacher quality and remuneration. Such work suggests opportunities for extension, potentially informing an overall national approach in which differential remuneration through salary, incentive and reward could be comprehensively utilised to address differential needs among and within schools. From the evidence, the ITQNP is well placed to inform, support and contribute to such a nationally consistent approach.

Under this conceptualisation, and illustrated by instances in the evidence, attracting the highest quality instructional leaders to the most difficult schools could be a matter of base salary plus incentive differentiation. While this may require structural or budget reallocations or increases, these



would be entirely under the control of the employer, or in a devolved situation, the principal. Performance rewards in the form of bonus payments could be built into differential placements.

Facilitation Reform 8 and Reward Reforms 1 to 3 in particular show that the ITQNP is envisaged as impacting significantly in the area where work aligns teacher standards and remuneration to address differential needs of schools. However, the evidence would suggest that their implementation into a structure that finds them foreign tends to limit their impact. In many instances such approaches are only being implemented while the Australian Government pays for them, and are well short of becoming core business. Yet, the evidence indicates considerable endorsement of the intentions of the reform elements as critical to underpinning and sustaining teacher quality. The challenge, articulated in the conceptualisation that runs through analysis of the evidence, is to translate the reform intents into core business, supported by core resource allocations to implement improvement and entrench continuous growth in outcomes.

Trials of elements of this approach within the SSNPs reveal the efficacy of attracting skilled and experienced leaders and staff to enhance school improvement. It is obvious from these trials that differential incentives and rewards are needed to attract the right people and that such approaches are successful in improving learning outcomes. Whether they become embedded without regular top-up from Australian Government funds is a decision to be informed by cost-effectiveness comparisons needed as an essential part of the evaluation effort supporting the new structures. However, both the evidence in the SSNPs as a whole and the evidence-based conceptualisation indicate that they also need to be embedded in school culture and structures so that they are 'the way things are done' in teaching to institute quality improvement where it is most needed.

In further explication of the conceptualisation, increased flexibility for employers to allocate resources to classroom-based positions within budgets without incurring salary-based flow-on would strongly support principal decision making to address identified local needs, while holding the overall budget of the school, the region and the system at a pre-determined level.

*What is the point of giving principals greater autonomy in decision making if it is not to be about teacher quality decisions? (The ITQNP) really needs to make this much clearer, and to support the work in systems to make sure that's what the decisions are about. But you can't put principals out there with this, the teaching structure has to be in place that lets them make the decisions they need to make with confidence.*

Thus, principals could be given the authority to establish the staffing structure they need within their budget, including the number and type of teachers at the various status levels, and the number of non-teaching or more flexible positions they require, to address the needs of their school. This is referenced as Reward Reform 4 in the ITQNP and there is some evidence of adoption of the approach in trials or in targeted schools. The evidence shows that it is also being utilised as an approach within the Low SES NP.

*"I would like increased flexibility to make decisions ... about the two or three key positions that are needed in the context of this school. The real area where we need greater flexibility is with paraprofessional positions. Quality people with a range of backgrounds and talents in these positions could make all the difference in terms of school capacity." Principal of a site visit school*

The evidence suggests that, within their budget, principals could allocate classroom support roles among status levels and reward teachers according to the attainment of outcomes through these roles. Outcomes might include the number of teachers who, through support, coaching, mentoring and tutoring, gain accreditation at a higher status level. Principals could be given the authority within their budget to allocate differential incentives and reward provisions to attract the highest quality teachers possible.

The current budgetary differentials provided among the various types of schools, their location and the comparative difficulties in staffing them set the various budget levels that differentiate among schools. These differentiations are currently designed to provide hard-to-staff schools with the budgets they need to attract staff. Under the conceptualisation being explored, principals could also have the flexibility within their budget to attract the 'right' staff. Moreover, they would have the capacity to support their teachers in the attainment of higher certification levels, a teacher career incentive that would incur no cost to the employer other than that required to support professional learning, a part of core business. This approach addresses the intention of Reward Reform 2, which is concerned with improved reward structures for teachers and leaders who work in disadvantaged, Indigenous, rural/remote and other hard-to-staff schools.

### *Professional learning*

To fully support teacher quality and to address the skill and knowledge needs of their staff, schools have a vital role to play in reforming classroom practice. This reform is needed to embed constant student learning outcome improvement and a reduction in the differential outcomes among identified groups. While these are reforms in the domain of the other SSNPs, and most especially the LNNP, the ITQNP underpins these reforms.

The evidence from Phase 1 of the National Evaluation shows clearly that the SSNPs as a whole have acted as a catalyst to bring a stronger focus on the nexus between quality teaching and student learning outcomes. In the evidence, this can be seen in work to strengthen instructional leadership and coaching in National Partnership schools. Issues of teacher quality are being addressed through models of teacher inquiry, involving increased teacher collaboration and partnerships with higher education. The evidence points to the benefits arising from coaching, tutoring and mentoring that explicitly address issues of quality practice. The SSNPs are contributing to new models of professional learning especially by broadening teacher skills in their classrooms. This can be seen in work done in relation to data-driven decision making and personalised curriculum provision.

*"The 'teacher educator' position funded by the Low SES NP is transforming how we teach so that children from very disadvantaged families can achieve at the highest possible levels. It is the most powerful professional learning we have ever done, it is taking place in our classrooms. Teachers are acquiring skills and knowledge on-the-job. This is the best way to ensure quality teaching." Teacher at a site visit school*

It is within the domain of these practices that issues of teacher quality are most fully engaged with and have the greatest potential impact on learning outcomes. The evidence from the Interim Evaluation and the broader National Evaluation is compelling that reform is needed that will value, support, recognise and reward teacher quality in the context of the classroom. Indeed, this is the overall thrust of the facilitation and reward structure of the ITQNP. However, it must be said on the basis of the evidence that it is a thrust largely being lost in the operationalising of separate reform elements.

Within the conceptualisation arising from analysis of the evidence, there is potential for the ITQNP to bring increased focus on classroom-based career progression accessed via standards-based accreditation. Underpinning standards and progression would be teacher quality produced through professional learning, inquiry and growth. As is noted in the evidence, this would impact the quality of teacher practice in classrooms and concurrently accord teachers due recognition of their professional attainments. Career and remuneration progression, based on higher levels of certification and rewarded while in the classroom, provides a quality-oriented professional approach to remuneration.

### Partnerships with higher education

Facilitation Reform 7 is concerned with joint engagement with higher education providers. The Interim Evaluation indicates instances in the SSNPs of work to build and sustain partnerships between systems, schools and higher education. In the context of the ITQNP, there are instances where work in relation to centres of excellence (Facilitation Reform 9) involves substantially expanded relationships with universities, impacting not only work to develop new and better pathways into teacher (Facilitation Reforms 2 and 3) but to address issues of instructional leadership (Facilitation Reform 1) and continued teacher professional growth (Reward Reform 5).

Such instances point to the potential importance of work within Facilitation Reform 7 and the opportunities to connect that work to a range of reform elements within the ITQNP. That said, such instances are far from universal. Further, the potential of partnerships with higher education to contribute to reform impacting teacher quality more broadly appears not, in general, to be sufficiently recognised or responded to under the implementation of the ITQNP.

The reform area, endorsed by the evidence-based conceptualisation, implies a range of opportunities to impact teacher quality through: outcomes-focused evaluation; action research; data provision and interpretation; identification and communication of best practice emanating from research; and, the promulgation of informed understandings that support teacher quality. The evidence indicates a substantial imperative for schools and systems to partner much more closely with universities, so that the meaning of the reform intent within the ITQNP extends beyond instrumental and incidental situations. Importantly, where such partnerships enable the identification of best and most cost-effective practice, in the context of outcomes-based evaluation, jurisdictions will have access to the critical data they require for resource reallocation decision-making to increase productivity.

*"The partnerships we have with the universities are something we have deliberately cultivated and we have put a lot of time into them. Our teachers are getting a lot out of these relationships. But it works both ways. The university people are learning from us, and it's not just about getting a taste of the real world, it's actually extending their thinking about teacher preparation." Principal of a site visit school*

### The reform role of the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership

Stemming from the constructed program logic that links the SSNPs to reform, Figure 13 below provides a conceptual overview of potential outcomes against each of the ITQNP reforms. The figure builds on the evidence of considerable activity across the jurisdictions as they attempt to address the individual reforms. While different reward reforms have been selected by different jurisdictions, and various approaches to both facilitation and reward reforms have been implemented to suit local contexts, the consolidated national picture is one of commitment and very considerable activity in carrying out their ITQNP Agreements.

*(The ITQNP) is enabling us to drive further into our priority areas and to get the sort of traction that is needed to have impact on schools and how people think. ... we are having the sorts of professional conversations that are needed with school leaders if the groundwork for reform is going to be laid out. The schools are responding to this, the principals see the imperative for different approaches and practices, and more of them are taking the lead. Of course they value the funding but they are also responding to the increased professional expectations of the National Partnerships.*

The evidence shows that the ITQNP has acted as a catalyst for higher levels of energy and input in the various reform areas. The site visit National Partnership schools invariably demonstrated commitment

and high energy levels. There is acknowledgement that the funding provided through the ITQNP has enabled, in a number of instances, expansion of activity to occur within established initiatives. This tends to confirm that the elements listed in the ITQNP have general national consensus. Within the evidence, there is acknowledgement across the jurisdictions that, in general, the elements can be matched with jurisdictional and sectoral priorities, creating the basis for co-resourcing that potentially strengthens jurisdictional, sector and local effort to address priorities.

That said, there remains extensive scope to better leverage from current activity into the more cohesive reform agenda represented in the ITQNP and explored above. The outcomes in Figure 13, extrapolated directly from the Interim Evaluation evidence, represent those potentially derived from this more cohesive and reform-oriented view.

**Figure 13: The potential outcomes of the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership reform elements in the emerging structure**

Facilitation Reforms	Potential outcomes
<b>Facilitation Reform 1: Professional Development and Support for Principals</b>	<p>The principal is responsible to maintain professional accreditation requirements against standards. The teacher registration authority is responsible for provision of opportunities for professional learning and for processes to assess competency and grant accreditation for principals.</p> <p>The employer is responsible for high quality support so that the principals can maintain best practice in instructional leadership for school performance.</p>
<b>Facilitation Reforms 2 and 3: New and Better Pathways into Teaching</b>	<p>New and better pathways into teaching are universally facilitated by teacher registration authorities, with both universities and employers supporting quality and placement. Highly performing people with qualifications other than teaching are invited and facilitated to enter teaching through these pathways. There are strong elements of clinical practice or on-the-job training in these new pathways, involving a joint university/employer delivery model. There is flexibility to move into and out of the profession throughout a career. Permission to teach and conditional placements are expanded elements of entry to the profession.</p>
<b>Facilitation Reform 4: Indigenous Education Workforce Pathways</b>	<p>Learning and accreditation pathways into teaching for Indigenous people are universally facilitated by teacher registration authority and employers, with employers supporting both professional development and placement. Culturally appropriate courses are provided by tertiary partners to facilitate all levels of training related to, for example, community liaison, school support, learning support, assistant teacher and fully trained and registered teacher. Early identification of potentially highly suitable people, mentoring, and tutoring support are some of the features associated with these pathways. Internships, scholarships, living allowances and other stipends are available to facilitate these pathways. In many jurisdictions and sectors, the pathways have been developed to meet the imperative of increasing the number of Indigenous people working in schools.</p>
<b>Facilitation Reform 5: National Professional Standards for Teachers</b>	<p>National professional standards for provisional and graduate teachers have been developed by AITSL in consultation with strategic-level stakeholders. The standards are universally incorporated into teacher registration authority and employer operation. National standards have also been developed and agreed for pre-service courses and for principals. These have been accepted across all jurisdictions and processes are in place to ensure adherence.</p>
<b>Facilitation Reform 6: National Certification of Accomplished and Lead Teachers</b>	<p>National certification standards for accomplished and lead teachers have been developed and agreed through AITSL procedures. Processes for certification have been brokered in consultation with strategic-level stakeholders. The standards are incorporated into teacher registration authority and employer operation. Schools universally have positions that require these advanced levels and remuneration reflects status-based differential payment for the positions. The positions universally address issues of teacher quality, in classrooms and leading to improved student learning outcomes.</p>
<b>Facilitation Reform 7: Joint engagement with higher education providers</b>	<p>Partnership arrangements are in place between teacher registration authority and higher education providers for quality professional learning to facilitate accreditation at the various levels. These higher education providers are endorsed to deliver courses that are recognised for registration requirements.</p> <p>Partnership arrangements are in place between higher education providers and teacher employers to address supply and demand balance. Additionally, arrangements are in place to improve the quality and length of practicum provision. Scholarships are offered to attract and retain high achieving graduands. Across all schools, partnerships with universities support school evaluation, action research, teacher inquiry and the ongoing</p>

Facilitation Reforms	Potential outcomes
	professional development of all teachers. Jurisdictional evaluation incorporates cost-effectiveness data generated through higher education partnerships to inform resource allocation decisions.
<b>Facilitation Reform 8: Quality Placements</b>	<p>Employer/principal decisions about particular staffing and placement requirements of a school are core business. Situational analyses based on school review and evaluation are universally used to identify school staffing needs. New budget structures enable decisions about variations to staffing in relation to status and roles. Decisions are made about flexible resource allocation, including the purchase of non-teaching positions where required as part of the staffing mix.</p> <p>Packages involving differential remuneration, incentive and reward are offered to attract the status levels, skills, experience and competencies needed to address the identified needs. Internships are offered to facilitate entry to teaching, especially in hard-to-staff schools. These are accompanied by mentoring, coaching and concessional workloads.</p>
<b>Facilitation Reform 9: School Centres of Excellence</b>	Systems and sectors embed a range of school centres of excellence to universally strengthen pathways into teaching and to fully engage school leaders and teachers in the quality teaching agenda. The centres have additional staffing placements for highly accomplished and lead teachers, broadening the base of instructional leadership, typically working within clusters of schools.
<b>Facilitation Reform 10: Improved Mobility of the Australian Teaching Workforce</b>	Teacher mobility is strengthened through the work of AITSL, DEEWR, teacher registration authority, universities and employers to free up the national market for teachers. Teacher mobility is facilitated by all jurisdictions adopting the <i>National Professional Standards for Teachers</i> and by consistency in national registration and accreditation procedures. Mobility is also facilitated by the provision of national information about availability of teaching positions and the remuneration packages on offer. Issues related to portability of leave and other entitlements are addressed. Substantive positions are largely replaced by contract placements, with increased levels of permanency of employment to provide security, subject to ongoing registration and satisfactory performance.
<b>Facilitation Reform 11: Improved Quality and Availability of Teacher Workforce Data</b>	<p>AITSL, DEEWR, teacher registration authority, universities and employers each provide supply and demand data for a transparent and readily accessible data structure which facilitates a free national market.</p> <p>The database:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• facilitates greater consistency in the approval of teacher education courses and qualifications across Australasia</li> <li>• provides up-to-date information about teaching qualifications approved by jurisdictions against the <i>Framework for the National Recognition of Approved Pre-service Teacher Education Programs</i></li> <li>• provides accurate information to ATRA organisations to facilitate greater consistency in the assessment of local and overseas teaching qualifications</li> <li>• develops a historical record of teaching qualifications accepted for registration and accreditation purposes</li> <li>• preserves historical information on local teaching qualifications</li> <li>• supports the assessment of applications for registration and accreditation.</li> </ul>
<b>Facilitation Reform 12: Improved Performance Management and Continuous Improvement in Schools</b>	<p>Improved performance management is an employer responsibility and is an area addressed in each of the jurisdictions. Under registration and re-registration requirements, the processes are rigorous, including reference to relevant student performance data. The <i>National Professional Standards for Teachers</i> are inextricably linked into employer performance management processes.</p> <p>There is a sustained focus on continuous school improvement in all schools. Transforming classroom practice is concurrently addressed through transforming school culture, structure and practice. Planned and integrated evaluation and feedback processes are universally implemented to provide understandings about the connections between higher levels of student attainment and engagement, quality teacher practice and school improvement.</p>

Reward Reforms	Potential outcomes
<p><b>Reward Reform 1: Improved Pay Dispersion to Reward Quality Teaching</b></p> <p><b>Reward Reform 2: Improved Reward Structures for Teachers and Leaders who Work in Disadvantaged Indigenous, Rural/Remote and Hard-To-Staff Schools</b></p>	<p>Within the professional structure of teaching that underpins both supply and demand, remuneration is determined by the interaction of teacher status and the value of placement outcomes. Employer or principal decisions about pay dispersion are based on total available budget juxtaposed with school needs to provide the best possible performance oriented staffing mix. Incentive based on location (including remote and hard-to-staff schools) or specific qualities or qualifications, and reward based on demonstration of measureable and agreed outcomes, are integrated into school decision making and budgets.</p>
<p><b>Reward Reform 3: Improved In-School Support for Teachers and Leaders who Work in Disadvantaged, Indigenous, Rural/Remote and Hard-To-Staff Schools</b></p>	<p>In an embedded development approach in all hard-to-staff schools, the following occur.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personalised incentives are provided including, for example, flexible leave provisions, supplementary payments and negotiated flexible working arrangements.</li> <li>• Agreements with various service providers ensure teachers have access to housing, health and dental care, child minding and education, and transport.</li> <li>• Professional incentives provide access to courses and qualifications that are recognised in terms of status-based accreditation and future remuneration.</li> <li>• Partnerships are in place with universities so that there is on-site engagement with current professional knowledge, research and practice for all teachers.</li> <li>• Additional leadership support is provided to address community liaison and connection issues.</li> <li>• Provision of at-the-shoulder in-class support is provided by coaches and other instructional experts.</li> <li>• Training of paraprofessional staff is such that the quality of support, inside and outside the classroom, matches needs.</li> <li>• There is universal recognition within the profession of the special skills and knowledge obtained, expressed through explicit support for higher-level status determination and for higher level teaching and educational leadership positions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reward Reform 4: Increased School-Based Decision Making</b></p>	<p>Across the jurisdictions school-based authority, capacity and decision making characterises effort to improve the quality of schooling.</p> <p>There is extensive investment to ensure that all school leaders, irrespective of context, have and can maintain the knowledge and skills necessary for high quality school-based decision making.</p> <p>All schools, irrespective of system or sector, have capacity to provide the strategic level leadership, engagement and support that is essential to achieve continuous improvement in teacher quality and student learning outcomes.</p> <p>All sectors and systems have capacity to provide strategic level leadership in ways that support schools to achieve continuous improvement in quality teaching and student learning outcomes without compromising their independence and capacity for school-based decision making. This involves universal leveraging from cooperative arrangements between sectors and systems to provide structures, pressure and support.</p>
<p><b>Reward Reform 5: Continual Improvement Program for all Teachers</b></p>	<p>On-site professional learning is based on teacher inquiry into their own practice and collaboratively with their peers. Instructional leaders and higher education personnel provide a classroom-focused approach to professional learning that explicitly addresses quality teacher practice. The approach involves classroom-based and outcome-oriented research projects within which each teacher, their peers, school leaders, coaches and university researchers work collaboratively. In the research design, the focus is typically on identification and understanding of the factors that shape pedagogy to maximise learning improvement.</p> <p>Teachers who engage in planned, structured and consequential inquiry into practice are recognised for their professional competence and attainments through registration and certification procedures. As such professional learning is prominent in the process of continual improvement for all teachers and is incorporated within the professional structures that provide positions for higher levels of teacher competency as determined against the standards..</p> <p>Locally initiated and very active teacher networks support all schools, providing a collaborative process at the local level for sharing, and mutual professional learning. Participation in such networks is a strong indication of teachers exercising professional self-responsibility.</p> <p>Teachers complement site-based and local network professional learning with access to high quality endorsed external courses, forums, conferences and workshops. This access enables them to engage with new concepts</p>

Reward Reforms	Potential outcomes
	<p>and knowledge and to be at the forefront of evidence-based innovation.</p> <p>Such forms of engagement contribute to the regular re-registration process. They also contribute to higher order teacher accreditation.</p>
<p><b>Reward Reform 6: Indigenous Teachers’ and Leaders’ Engagement with Community Members</b></p>	<p>To facilitate the engagement of Indigenous teachers and leaders with community members, there is recognition that the role of instructional leaders can be compromised where expectations are held that they have responsibility to address issues in the wider community that impact on school engagement. There is a range of transformed models of local leadership that provide additional support so that principals can focus on instructional leadership. One model provides an additional and complementary community-oriented leadership structure across schools, taking primary carriage of community engagement work in collaboration with the full spectrum of community agencies and stakeholders. This model strengthens the instructional leadership role of the school principal while at the same time addressing and building the community engagement that contributes to school capacity and learning improvement. The model also ensures connection between the school and the local Indigenous culture, strengthens curriculum relevance and underpins the appropriateness of school response and practice.</p> <p>Another model involves engagement of the community by Indigenous and non-Indigenous school leaders, using flexible school resources to tailor off-site learning programs for identified students whose needs are best addressed through extended provision. Typically, this approach joins community-based agencies and specialists in an explicit focus on the individual child or young person so that they remain connected to a learning pathway. The school exercises responsibility to broker and facilitate the learning program into the community while not necessarily being the provider.</p>

While not by any means universal, aspects of these outcomes can be seen in work associated with the implementation of the ITQNP. For example, work is progressing in relation to Facilitation Reform 11. Two outputs are being developed under it to improve the quality and availability of teaching workforce data to inform workforce planning. The outputs are a National Teaching Workforce Dataset and the Longitudinal Teacher Workforce Study.

The National Teaching Workforce Dataset is intended to:

- be a system for the classification, collection, storage, analysis and reporting of national and jurisdictional data relevant to the Australian teaching workforce
- provide reliable data to monitor and report on workforce trends
- inform decision-making nationally and within and across education jurisdictions and sectors on workforce planning issues, including current and projected supply and demand in the teaching workforce.

A framework for developing the national dataset was produced in 2010. It is currently being constructed, with the initial version anticipated for mid-2012.

The Longitudinal Teacher Workforce Study is intended to improve understanding of the dynamics of the national teaching workforce, employment and career patterns, as well as the impact of and experiences of teacher education at a national level. The Study is tracking new teacher education graduates over 2012 and 2013, collecting data and providing analysis in relation to:

- their career progression from teacher education into, and possible exit from, teaching employment
- the characteristics of their teacher education courses.

This work is being overseen by the Australian Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Senior Officials Committee (AEEYSOC) and is being carried out by the National Teaching Workforce Dataset Working Group. The Working Group comprises representatives from the education systems and sectors, peak national non-government education authorities, ATRA and DEEWR.

In relation to most of the demand-side reforms identified in the ITQNP, there is evidence across the jurisdictions of effort at policy level to develop positions and negotiate change, including within the industrial arena. In some jurisdictions, approval and support have been sought from unions, State and Territory agencies, Treasuries and First Ministers' departments for demonstration projects and exemption-based approaches to explore the efficacy of differential staffing, recruitment and remuneration approaches.

There are instances where jurisdictions have made places for higher status roles, although some sectors have quarantined these to short-term contracts, reliant on SSNP money for any future continuation. Many jurisdictions are anticipating reward funding to facilitate their move further into reform areas that imply budget increases. However, in most cases, there is little evidence of the kinds of evaluation-based cost-effectiveness analyses that would provide the basis for decision-making in relation to reallocation of resources. The general tenor of evidence in relation to activity to achieve the reform elements within ITQNP is that continuing effort will be dependent on ongoing Australian Government funding rather than on internal and evidence-based resource reallocation.

### Measurement of progress towards teacher quality reform

The final element of the conceptualisation associated with the analysis involves measurement of teacher quality. The ITQNP is charged with facilitation and reward reforms that are designed to impact teacher quality. Measuring the extent of this impact is critical to understanding the veracity of work being undertaken and in reporting progress in a critical area of national productivity reform as it relates to school education.

In implementing the ITQNP and in measuring progress, to date the emphasis has been on reporting activity. There is no measure identified in the Agreements or plans that relates directly to teacher quality. Therefore, there is no teacher quality oriented measurement of baseline and improvement on which to prove the efficacy or otherwise of facilitation work or to measure improvement for reward.

*The ITQNP is substantially limited by the absence of nationally agreed measures of teacher quality. How do we prove teacher quality? How do we show gains through work done in ITQNP or any other initiative for that matter?*

To fill this void, there is a tendency to advocate the use of NAPLAN as a measure of teacher quality. This overlooks the obvious set of intervening and mitigating factors that would need to be taken into account before the direct relationship between teacher practice and learning outcomes could be ascribed.

That said, and while its efficacy in this regard may be contested, NAPLAN does provide an agreed instrument for assessing and reporting student progress in literacy and numeracy. In contrast, a sound methodology for assessing teacher quality is yet to be established. In the context of the ITQNP, this has meant that there is no way yet identified to link the reforms being pursued with teacher quality outcomes.

In lieu of an identified measure of teacher quality, the evidence indicates that after-the-event measurement requirements are being negotiated with jurisdictions to identify progress for reward



payments. These include ascribing levels of importance to activity-based sub-points in plans. Retrofitting measurement to agreements and focusing on the minutiae of activity are being used as substitutes for measurement of progress in reforms to ensure teacher quality.

One difficulty in measuring teacher quality is that, without strong reference to the newly approved teacher standards, the elements of teacher quality remain unclear. Moreover, with the recency of the approval of the *National Professional Standards for Teachers*, there are no baseline measurements or attainment levels against the standards to reflect quality. Only recently have jurisdictions begun to use the standards as indicators of status for career progression, and this is not universal. Consequently, there is no realistic and reliable reflection of data in any of the levels above registration, which in any case is largely a given.

Within the AITSL agenda, the professional standards have been developed as benchmarks for teacher quality at four career stages: Graduate; Proficient; Highly Accomplished; and, Lead Teacher. The means of recognising that teachers have attained these standards is yet to be fully determined and implemented. Consequently, within the context of the facilitation and rewards proposition for the ITQNP, it is not clear how current improvements in teacher quality can be measured credibly.

Nevertheless, it is in the standards that teacher quality is embedded. It is likely that future measures of teacher quality will emerge from a broad base of knowledge about attainment by teachers of the standards. As is widely acknowledged, the issues involved in moving forward with the standards as a measure of teacher quality need to be unpacked in some detail so that they can be fully understood. In its initial phase, such work needs to recognise the importance of the relationship between student outcomes and teacher quality.

### *Student outcomes and teacher quality*

From the Interim Evaluation evidence, there is a range of views about what constitutes teacher quality. In one view, the only real test of teacher quality is a teacher's capacity to improve student learning outcomes. However, as participants noted, such a test is not easily applied. There are several reasons for questioning this notion.

The first is the lack of capacity in current assessment structures to report student outcomes from all forms of teaching. While NAPLAN provides nationally consistent reporting of literacy and numeracy outcomes, and the end-of-schooling credentials provide State and Territory level reporting of results for assessing most subject areas, they are not relevant to, for example, creative arts at Year 9, music at Year 7, or computer studies in Year 11. Such approaches to measurement could only apply to teachers of subjects that are externally assessed and at assessment points.

For this reason alone, student outcomes as currently assessed provide, at best, broad indicators of teacher quality at a jurisdictional, school system, school cluster or school level. Many teachers do not have their subjects externally tested until the final year of schooling and even then there is a substantial element of the results that is subject to the judgements of the teachers themselves.

The second and stronger reason for questioning the use of student outcomes to reflect teacher quality concerns the issue of attribution. Even when there is a demonstrable link between the work of an individual teacher and student learning, for example, the Year 5 teacher of a primary class is responsible for the teaching of literacy and numeracy, there are few circumstances where it is possible to directly and wholly attribute improvements in student outcomes to a particular teacher.

Perhaps an instance where the quality of student outcomes may be attributed directly to a particular teacher could be in a small school where the teacher has taught the class continuously over the period

from the base level assessment to the current assessment. Clearly, it is highly likely that the teacher has contributed strongly to any gains in student outcomes over the period, but the actual extent of contribution cannot be measured. It may be, for example, that the children are from homes where there is ample literacy and numeracy support coupled with high expectations and aspirations, complementing the teacher's work.

This difficulty in attributing is not to say that student outcomes should play no part in assessing teacher quality. In fact, student outcomes have a very important role in validating any methodology for assessing teacher quality. Unless the instruments that are developed to measure teacher quality can demonstrate that the approaches used by those teachers appraised as being of the highest quality are capable of achieving the strongest gains in student outcomes, then the instruments lack face validity.

What such a validating approach can provide is a clear link between particular practices that correlate with high student outcomes, practices that rely on teacher knowledge, skills and attributes and the approaches to teaching they employ. It is this proven link between student learning outcomes and effective teacher characteristics, approaches, knowledge, skills, attributes and practices that provides the professional basis for the measurement of teacher quality. As now represented in the *National Professional Standards for Teachers*, these professional criteria provide the practice-validated bases for direct measurement of teacher quality. Within the reform structure of the ITQNP there is scope to advance this work even though the Interim Evaluation evidence suggests that this scope is not generally well recognised.

### *Professional standards and teacher quality*

The *National Professional Standards for Teachers* set out a knowledge and skills base for the initial preparation and continuing development of teachers throughout their career. Unlike standards developed in other countries, where it is common for separate and unrelated standards to be developed for teacher preparation, for teacher registration and for recognition of accomplished teaching, the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* have been conceptualised as a developmental continuum.

The standards have been devised with reference to what has been proven through research to be effective and essential to produce sound learning outcomes for all students. In a sense, they provide a curriculum for developing teachers' knowledge, skills and capacity. They set out what teachers should know and be able to do to produce the highest standard of student learning outcomes at four career stages.

With clear research derived descriptors against the standards, these standards can provide a sound measurement platform for determination of teacher quality. Such determination can be undertaken against the criteria enunciated in the descriptors and elements of the standards. What is needed to facilitate and validate the determination is a process of evidential judgement coupled with a moderation system. This process is currently under development through the AITSL pilot projects.

For graduate teachers and proficient teachers, the instruments and processes for judgement and moderation are generally agreed. AITSL has been responsible for negotiating these instruments and processes. Once agreed by Ministers, teacher registration authorities will be responsible for implementing the arrangements. Work is yet to proceed in regard to assessing teacher quality at the highly accomplished and lead teacher levels. Given progress within the ITQNP in relation to highly accomplished and lead teachers, there is undoubted scope to place such work within the ITQNP.

### *Judging achievement of the standards*

The area of determining and judging teachers' progress against the standards was explored by participants in the Interim Evaluation, with recognition of the administrative and industrial challenges involved. The following discussion explores the evidence in this area.

While it is relatively easy to articulate professional standards and to reach agreement on them, it is much more difficult to articulate valid and reliable processes for assessing teacher quality against the standards. In a sense, there is an inherent contradiction in the relative ease with which teachers are able to assess student outcomes in comparison with the apparent difficulty the profession has in judging teacher quality.

This apparent difficulty does not exist in other professions, as noted by participants in the Interim Evaluation. For example, the medical profession is able to develop its members to a high standard embedded in training, assess high-level competence acknowledged in peer review and recognise their status with few difficulties. Validation of high medical standards comes through their impact in practice. Specialists are able to bring specific high-level knowledge and expertise to their practice. It ought to be no less difficult for the teaching profession.

The difficulty for the teaching profession is that, while it has long established processes and practices for ensuring the quality of teachers entering the profession, the culture of the profession and the practices of employers generally do not incorporate differentiation among classroom teachers on the basis of teacher quality. Most differentiation, as discussed previously, is currently based on length of service, with promotion and additional remuneration a function of administrative efficiency rather than teacher quality *per se*.

Until the emergence of the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* and the emerging approach to registration and accreditation, once trained and past their probationary period, a teacher has been deemed a teacher no matter what their quality. The only time this cultural view is challenged is when a teacher's ongoing 'efficiency' is called into question. Even in these circumstances, few employers are willing to dismiss a teacher on the basis of lack of competence, typically preferring to move them on to other schools or system positions or to facilitate voluntary resignation.

Testament to this observation is the almost total absence nationally of teachers who are de-registered on the basis of incompetence. This fact was noted by a number of strategic-level participants in the Interim Evaluation.

*Teaching will be a quality profession when the quality of each teacher's work is the paramount consideration. High quality will be rewarded, and where practice does not come up to an acceptable standard of competence it will not be tolerated – by the profession, the unions or the employers, or by the public.*

The reality of the current situation is that few teachers are de-registered on quality-related grounds. Almost all teachers who are de-registered are done so on the basis of fitness to teach, arising mainly from child protection or behavioural issues. As was noted in the Interim Evaluation commentary, such issues are matters of culture in teaching more than they are operational considerations.

Embedded in this culture, employers' past practices have also contributed to a lack of focus on teacher quality. Once deemed fit to teach, a teacher can fill any classroom position, including at times outside of their area of curriculum expertise. Issues of teacher quality have been accorded relatively low priority when there is an urgent need to fill a hard-to-staff teaching position. The inclusion of this area as an element in the ITQNP was broadly welcomed.

It was observed during the Interim Evaluation that institutionalised cultural unwillingness to make judgements about teacher quality provides the backdrop or context for the current reform developments. In addition, it is a context that has, over the last twenty years, largely removed external moderation in relation to teacher performance. Performance is deemed satisfactory on the basis of principal judgements, a function often of the teacher's capacity to maintain discipline, their sound team participation, their willingness to carry out additional duties, or even their administrative competency, rather than the quality of their classroom practice. As noted by participants in the Interim Evaluation, few teachers are declared unsatisfactory through this annual review process.

However, the emergence of the national standards and the potential transfer of responsibility for establishment and protection of professional teacher quality from employer and union institutions to the teachers themselves provide an opportunity to place teacher quality at the heart of school system performance. As mentioned previously, the evidence from the Interim Evaluation is clear that the potential of the ITQNP to connect the teacher quality agenda and the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* has yet to be realised. The evidence indicates that achievement of the reforms that can leverage from the ITQNP to a substantial extent will be dependent on this connection being made and sustained. Progressing and embedding the standards in school structures and processes needs to be seen as a critical area for future work under the auspices of the ITQNP and as central its overall reform intents. Without such a base in teacher quality, capacity in the other SSNPs to achieve reform objectives is likely to remain limited.

#### *Future measurement under the standards*

Over the course of the Interim Evaluation, there was considerable exploration of possible future approaches to the measurement of teacher quality. The ITQNP has effectively placed this area at the forefront of jurisdictional thinking as consideration is given to the implications of the *National Professional Standards for Teachers*.

From the commentary, it is apparent that judgements about teacher quality need to have a credible basis in evidence. The commentary indicates that credibility is likely to be strengthened where there is a range of evidence to demonstrate achievement against each standard. As suggested in the commentary, this evidence could include:

- teacher's self-evaluation and analysis of their own practice, including through annotated work samples
- peer review and commentary on teaching practice
- statements by principals and supervisors
- comments from referees
- history of self improvement
- student outcomes
- evaluation and review by external personnel.

Such sources of evidence provide the opportunity to triangulate data in relation to the criteria for accreditation. However, such data do not go to the question of what quality of practice determines whether a teacher meets the standard for accreditation at the level being addressed. Accordingly, there is a need to develop clear understandings of what it means to address each standard at the level required and, in doing so, to bring the profession along with that view. This implies the need for clear, objective, observable and agreed benchmarks against the criteria.

Without objective and observable benchmarks, the assessments will have no more meaning than criteria used in prior attempts to differentiate the profession through the introduction of advanced skills teachers and leading teachers. These attempts faltered, in part at least, because they did not identify high-level practice. Nor did they determine how to objectively identify teachers in their demonstration of that high-level practice.

As a consequence, subjective assessments, seniority, or performance in other than classroom-related tasks formed the basis for differentiation. The teachers who attained the positions were often given relatively menial tasks, administrative responsibilities or organisational roles in relation to professional learning rather than classroom coaching and other instructional leadership roles. The positions were perceived as a means to gain additional remuneration without adding value in terms of improved teacher quality or student learning outcomes. Over time, their function invariably came to have little relation to the original intent. The evidence from the Interim Evaluation is unambiguous that adroit leadership is needed at all levels to embed high quality, consistent and effective response to the *National Professional Standards for Teachers*.

To provide the evidence for and objective means to achieve this leadership, there is a need to determine the benchmarks that will support objective assessment of higher levels of practice. The evidence indicates that work within many of the SSNPs has identified a wide range of teachers who are operating at high levels of practice. These include coaches, mentors, supervisors and other expert teachers working in the LNNP, Low SES NP and NT CtG NP schools.

However, without links to the broader conceptualisation of reform, there is an apparent disconnection between their work and the articulation of performance benchmarks for the higher-level standards.

*“The work of coaches provides an insight into high quality classroom teaching and what it actually means. We should be using these people to get a handle on the parameters of true quality in teaching, they should be seen as a highly valuable resource beyond the schools where they are working.”*  
Principal of a site visit school

The SSNPs together provide an opportunity to bring the knowledge and skills held by these people to bear on the identification of objective benchmarks for the standards in a rigorous and defensible manner. At least one methodology for undertaking this work exists. In brief, the methodology involves applying psychometric techniques to analyses of teachers’ and supervisors’ descriptions of practice. From the analyses, determinations can be made about the levels of performance at the benchmarks through the application of cut-scores.

The possible approach noted above provides one way to demonstrate rigour and objectivity in the determination of benchmarks, giving greater credibility and consistency to assessment processes at the higher levels. Clarity in the level of performance is needed to ensure consistency in the assessment of achievement of standards for the purposes of accreditation at the higher levels.

Under such an approach or similar, into the future it is likely that the number of teachers who have attained the various status levels will be a sound systemic and national indication of teacher quality. However, for now this measure is beyond the horizon of education systems Australia-wide. In itself, developing and implementing such a measurement system may need to become a substantial reform element within the teacher quality agenda. As such, there may be scope within the ITQNP for some initial work to be done in the area in the context of Facilitation Reform 5.

### *Measurement in the reform agenda*

The evidence from the Interim Evaluation is clear that the lack of a credible and nationally endorsed measurement framework of teacher quality is limiting the capacity of the ITQNP to make a substantial

contribution to the teacher quality agenda. And yet, the placement of the ITQNP as a partnership between governments means that it has potential to initiate, guide and structure the national work needed to develop an agreed professional measurement framework for teacher quality, linked to the work of AITSL.

Despite not yet having a measurement system that reflects teacher quality, it is possible from the National Evaluation evidence to design a 'road map' for the ITQNP to make a contribution to the reform outcomes. This road map would identify a set of clear intermediate or contributing outcomes that are essential if the longer-term reform outcomes identified in the evidence-based conceptualisation explored above are to be set in place. Across the Interim Evaluation evidence, there are constant calls for such a road map of contributing outcomes within the ITQNP to guide activity in a structured and coherent way towards achievement of its reform intents.

The current structure of the ITQNP may be unintentionally counter-productive by distorting activity into disconnected elements rather than enabling a view that sees them as interconnected and cohesive. By developing a view of the element inter-relationships and their cohesion, the ITQNP would then have capacity to set out a road map of outcomes towards the intended reform. Indeed, the frameworks developed from the evidence in the Interim Evaluation may provide a starting point for national agreement about such a cohesive and reform-oriented 'road map'.

## Conclusion

Analysis of the evidence from the Interim Evaluation of the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership shows broad endorsement of the need for reform in the area of quality teaching and broad endorsement of national effort to address the teacher quality agenda. The ITQNP is recognised as a significant national instrument, with potential to contribute significantly to the reforms that many regard as vital if Australian students are to attain higher performance against international and national norms. Investment in a national initiative such as the ITQNP, is, moreover, strongly endorsed by the international and national research literature that shows the nexus between teacher quality and improved student learning.

Moreover, in the context of the National Evaluation of the SSNPs, evidence shows that the ITQNP is the underpinning SSNP. Success within it will be foundational to the capacity of the SSNPs as a national initiative to achieve the scope of the reform intents and to contribute to the national productivity agenda.

In terms of appropriateness, the facilitation and reward reform structure of the ITQNP is generally supported across the jurisdictions. However, the evidence suggests that impacts are arising from the emphasis on the reward component compared to the facilitation component, with limitations on capacity to progress toward the higher-order reform outcomes required.

The various reform elements within the structure of the ITQNP are generally seen as appropriate. They substantially align with areas where jurisdictional work is being undertaken to address priorities. Appropriateness also stems from the scope accorded jurisdictions to continue or expand already established strategies and programs. For example, progress is readily discernible in the element area related to the attraction and retention of teachers and school leaders in hard-to-staff schools, where a number of jurisdictions have a background of activity and effort. It is also apparent in the element concerned with the development of Indigenous education workforce pathways.

That said, activity within particular elements of the ITQNP appears as often disconnected and discrete, with limited take-up of integration opportunities focused on reform outcomes. Moreover, within

contained activities, the orientation appears more often to be to improvement rather than to reform. That said, where integration is recognised and is constructed, the potential of the ITQNP appears to be substantial in its reform context.

In relation to effectiveness, the evidence contains instances where trials and demonstrations are indicating the potential for reform through the placement of highly accomplished and lead teachers in National Partnership schools. This work is demonstrating reform potential that arises when there is a focus on making connections between higher levels of professional support at the classroom level, higher quality teacher practice and increased levels of student attainment. Such evidence within the ITQNP suggests that for effective reform in teaching, approach and structures are required that engage teachers as professional practitioners. The evidence is strongly affirming of the ITQNP as the appropriate national initiative within which this engagement can occur.

The evidence shows that there needs to be a stronger linkage between work within the ITQNP and work being undertaken in relation to national standards of teaching and school leadership by AITSL. While this area is a facilitation reform element within the ITQNP, the evidence indicates that there is considerable scope for greater connection and for carriage of the work for higher levels of teacher engagement under the collective auspices of the SSNPs.

The evidence suggests that the ITQNP is enabling activity to be designed and undertaken efficiently. This is especially the case where activity builds on existing work. Additionally, co-investments are contributing to efficiencies. That said, efficiency has been affected by some management-related issues, including changing requirements for activity reporting and the retro-fitting of reward-oriented measurement structures to elements of the original Agreements. Efficiency concerns also arise from evidence that much in activity under the ITQNP will be dependent on continued funding. Such continued investment without substantial achievement of reform intents would not constitute efficiency.

While the emerging professional structure of teaching is both sophisticated and planned on the supply side, the evidence from the Interim Evaluation indicates difficulty among the key stakeholders in linking the structure to the SSNPs in a cohesive manner to contribute to reform. The evidence shows that the demand-side elements are separated in organisation and practice from the supply-side structures being developed. Inevitably, responsibilities in relation to the reform elements are interpreted as though they are discrete. As indicated, while there are exceptional instances, at this stage the level of interaction among the elements is relatively limited.

From Phase 1 of the National Evaluation, few involved in implementation of the SSNPs, including at leadership level, articulate an understanding that links the SSNP activity to major national reform of teacher quality. Where such articulation occurs, frustration is expressed that an opportunity for true reform in the teacher quality domain will pass with only marginal consequence and change.

There is little apparent structural linkage at this stage between the ITQNP and the AITSL reforms and no obvious capacity to link them in joint support of national reform. Moreover, there is considerable frustration among the jurisdictions about the structure of the ITQNP in reference to the relationship between facilitation payments and reward payments. In particular, the focus in measurement of progress on seemingly unrelated and instrumental output-oriented activities that have insufficient articulated line-of-site to cohesive reform is apparent in the evidence as a substantial issue that should be considered in future work.

While a number of highly effective trials and demonstrations have been developed, the evidence indicates that much being done in the ITQNP is being quarantined through discrete one-off

agreements and short-term contracts so that activity may not endure without further funding input. Generally, the demand-side work needed to support and fully utilise the emerging supply-side structuring of the profession is not evident in the ITQNP activity, or in activity in the other SSNPs. For example, the provision of sufficient salary differential and other incentives for good practitioners to aspire to higher classroom status is critical to success in the reform. This should be aligned to the appropriate school-based incorporation of the roles ascribed to the highly accomplished and lead teacher status. Where these revert to administration, line supervision or organisation roles rather than instructional leadership roles, as has happened in other attempts to establish differential classroom-based teacher positions, it is unlikely that they will have the intended reform impact on classroom practice and learning outcomes.

The evidence shows that teacher engagement in the reform of the profession needs to be encouraged by addressing concurrently issues associated with the quality of classroom practice and the processes that identify and reward the professional attainments that characterise continually improved practice. Remuneration through salary, incentive and reward based on status, market responses and differential performance is the means to encourage and acknowledge reform.

Evidence for the Interim Evaluation indicates it is critical that the work undertaken in the ITQNP to achieve the teacher quality reforms engages teachers directly. At the heart of quality teaching needs to be the commitment of all teachers to processes whereby they can demonstrate, against objective standards, the quality of their practice. Through such demonstration, teachers will see their connection to a pathway of professional recognition and reward. The ITQNP is now at a point where consideration should be given to the impetus and future leverage required for this level of professional engagement to be enabled.

There is an emerging base of work being done across the jurisdictions at both the activity and conceptual levels to show that the teacher quality agenda represented in the ITQNP is accorded national endorsement and commitment. At the same time, the complexity of the issues is well understood across the jurisdictions. To a lesser or greater extent, there is a background of fraught experience over a number of years in attempting to challenge long-established practices often entrenched in administrative structures and in industrial agreements.

While endorsement and commitment are apparent, so also is acknowledgement of the range of challenges in jurisdictions that exist in the environment into which the ITQNP has been placed. The national story of teacher quality prior to the ITQNP is telling in the extent to which capture by culturally embedded practice has diminished attempts to effect change. The present landscape is littered with the remnants of that story, with no consequent impact on productivity. The reality of this is witnessed by data showing our declining levels of student performance internationally.

Nevertheless, both the endorsement and the commitment are such that there is unquestionably potential through the SSNPs for the reform agenda to be realised, with recognition of the centrality of work through the ITQNP. A coherent linking of activity to reform will enable a road map to be laid out so that the reform journey can be articulated, understood and undertaken successfully. The evidence is clear that contributing outcome markers are now required so that there is clarity about the direction of the journey and about the essential attainments towards the reform goals.

Critically, these markers need to link the supply and demand sides so that the emerging professional structure, however tentative at this stage, has a legitimate and productive place in all schools. The outcomes frameworks developed from the ITQNP evidence may provide initial insight into the nature of those contributing markers. Through national and system wide pursuit of such markers, the ITQNP is



potentially well placed to lead, support and influence whole-of-system reform of the teaching profession, with quality at its centre. Realising this potential will enable the ITQNP to make a substantial contribution to the national reform agenda in school education.

## CHAPTER 3: CLASSROOM PRACTICE

### Introduction

This Chapter of the Report is based on consideration of evidence gathered in the National Evaluation of the Smarter Schools National Partnerships (SSNPs) in relation to classroom practice to strengthen literacy and numeracy learning. Substantially, the evidence is derived from work being undertaken in the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership (LNNP).

The descriptive account of activity and effort in relation to literacy and numeracy is presented in Paper 7 of the desktop analysis. Elements that relate to measurement in literacy and numeracy are referred to in Paper 4 of the desktop analysis. Evidence of success in the LNNP was presented and discussed in Chapter 1 of this Report.

By way of overview, the evidence indicates that success in the LNNP is associated especially with effort and activity explicitly designed to transform classroom practice to ensure improved student learning outcomes. In the evidence, this transformation is associated with instructional leadership, strong professional support, high expectations and data-informed response to analysis of learning.

A prime intent of the LNNP is to contribute to the improvement of the literacy and numeracy outcomes of all Australian children, with a particular focus on those who are performing at the lower end of the spectrum. The investment represented in the LNNP is a response to a range of information indicating that, while the learning outcomes of Australian students are very good by international standards, there has been some decline over the last decade<sup>13</sup>.

Work undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) shows that Australia is one of five countries in which student reading literacy performance declined between 2000 and 2009. This decline was significant. At the lower end of the reading literacy proficiency scale, 12 per cent of students failed to reach Level 2 in the *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000*, compared to 14 per cent in PISA 2009. The PISA 2009 results also indicated a fall in test scores in comparison to the PISA in-depth assessment of mathematics in 2003, representing a statistically significant decline in mathematical literacy.

In PISA 2009, the variation in performance between high- and low-performing students in Australia was higher than the OECD average in reading and science and similar to that found for the OECD as a whole in mathematics. In reading literacy, the gap between students in the highest and lowest socio-economic quartile is equivalent to more than one proficiency level, or almost three full years of schooling. The performance of Indigenous students is considerably below the Australian average, a difference that equates to more than one proficiency level, or more than two full years of schooling.

When taken together with the most recent NAPLAN data, the PISA data affirm the imperative for national effort to address issues associated with the literacy and numeracy learning outcomes of students in the lower end of the performance spectrum. Analysis of the NAPLAN data has enabled a national identification of concentrations of lower performance at the school level. These and similar earlier data provide an important and ongoing basis for targeting of LNNP money into National Partnership schools. However, while it is clear that additional resources are needed to support those

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<sup>13</sup> The paper *Schooling Challenges and Opportunities, August 2011*, developed by the Nous Group for the national Review of Funding for Schooling provides a comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of the performance and outcomes of Australian schooling.

students at the lower end of the performance scale, relative and absolute declines across the performance spectrum provide compelling evidence of the need to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes across the whole cohort. The LNNP contributes to this imperative.

## A conceptual outcomes framework

As explored in the first Chapter of this Report, analysis of evidence indicates a substantial level of activity and effort to achieve improved literacy and numeracy outcomes of students in National Partnership schools. The National Evaluation evidence shows that there is considerable work being undertaken in schools, supported by systems and sectors, to address issues of classroom practice in literacy and numeracy and to create learning environments within which students will have greater opportunity for success. In many instances, there is evidence for classrooms being transformed by challenges to past practices.

*“The (Literacy and Numeracy) National Partnership is enabling us to think more about how we teach, and the changes we need to make so our students can get more out of their learning. I have been around for a while, and this has been far and away the best thing I have ever seen in schools, all because the focus finally is the classroom.”*  
Teacher in a site visit school

Within the LNNP, the evidence points to success in activity and effort to create the conditions and environments that underpin students progression towards higher levels of performance in literacy and numeracy. Additionally, the implementation of the LNNP is contributing to transformations in teacher practice and is enabling identification in the school context of the link between quality teaching and improved literacy and numeracy learning outcomes. As a national initiative, the LNNP has potential to provide an extensive body of grounded evidence about the approaches and practices needed in all Australian schools for higher levels of student attainment in literacy and numeracy.

*“Our school has moved from a welfare culture to an academic culture. We have moved from poor to good. Now we need to move to great. We can only get there through great classroom practice.”*  
Principal of a site visit school

The National Evaluation evidence suggests that it is possible to identify the key outcomes that contribute to improved student performance in literacy and numeracy learning. Moreover, it is possible to organise these outcomes as a framework so that there is explicitness about the domains and dimensions within which investments should be made. Critically, the evidence suggests that work under the auspices of the SSNPs that relates to the teacher quality agenda constitutes an essential foundation upon which student progression towards higher levels of attainment can be built. At the same time, the evidence suggest that the work needs to be across the full suite of domains and dimensions so that the conditions necessary for learning improvement are created and sustained.

*“This (National) Evaluation must be giving a pretty powerful picture of what works in literacy and numeracy teaching. Publish it, put it out there for all schools, get understandings about ‘what works’ into every school, then there might be some genuine changes that actually make a difference...”* Principal of a site visit school

The identification of these outcomes within the National Evaluation is confirmation of the potential of the SSNPs to create an extensive body of knowledge about classroom practice and student learning. A nationally consistent approach to evaluation within the SSNPs across the jurisdictions would only deepen that knowledge. That such a body of knowledge is emerging under the auspices of the SSNPs points to their potential to make a substantial contribution to the reform of schooling and, by so doing, to the national productivity agenda. The outcomes framework, derived from the evidence provided to the National Evaluation, and shown in Figure 14 below, focuses on the transformation in classroom practice required for improved student outcomes in literacy and numeracy.

**Figure 14: A potential outcomes framework for literacy and numeracy learning**

Domains	Dimensions	Outcomes
Student learning	The learning environment	The classroom is a learning-centred environment where students have a strong sense of belonging, purpose and resilience. Within this environment students build confidence to be engaged and successful learners. Teachers structure their time to know and develop rapport with each of their students on a daily basis. The classroom is structured to encourage students as active and collaborative learners. It provides an extended environment where there are linkages to authentic contexts. The classroom is publically shared and is inclusive of all teachers, students and their parents. The learning environment is characterised by social trust among all who participate in it. All students are expected to be 'citizens of their school', seeing their learning as meaningful and important. They each adopt a serious focus and conscientious approach to both their learning engagement and progress.
	Student attainment	The legitimacy of students' learning derives from the context of the new Australian Curriculum or its jurisdictional equivalent. The highest possible attainment expectations are established and shared on the basis of knowledge about each student's learning potential. These expectations are reinforced so that all students have clarity about the goals and standards they will achieve as they progress through the years of schooling towards Year 12 or equivalent attainment. The expectations, and the support provided to attain them, contribute to all students being able to attain learning outcomes commensurate with national norms in national and international tests.
	Student development	Student learning in literacy and numeracy is constructed so there are continuous platforms for sustained progress. The learning builds from a base of foundational skills and concepts. Where necessary, explicit practice embeds the neural pathways and automaticity necessary for more advanced thinking. The learning is personalised and enables regular application in a variety of literacy and numeracy contexts, including in social discussions that take concepts and meanings to new levels. Students know about and understand their learning, setting monitoring and resetting goals as they take ownership of their progress and attainment. Students participate in a range of literacy and numeracy learning experiences, including learning through and applying digital technologies. As an important aspect of successful literacy and numeracy learning, students develop skills to inquire into, understand and share their learning with others. They have ever-increasing skills to demonstrate and express their literacy and numeracy knowledge, and are able to transform and apply their learning in new contexts.
	Learning analysis	Data collection and analysis are embedded as an integral part of classroom practice, contributing to decisions about classroom practice and learning provision. Through data analysis, teachers personalise the learning in the context of the program of skills and content that derives from the curriculum. Adaptive diagnostic testing occurs at regular intervals, enabling progress in literacy and numeracy learning to be tracked over time. Data collections and analyses are systematic so that practice can be adjusted to ensure that sustained progress from an ever-increasing baseline is occurring for all students. Data analysis enables early identification of interventions that may be required and is the basis for securing appropriate resources. Teachers appropriately and regularly share outcomes data, especially with parents as one of the ways in which they can be engaged in their children's learning.
School leadership	Instructional leadership	Instructional leadership explicitly and actively connects whole-school improvement and classroom transformation to build-in capacity for continuous improvement in literacy and numeracy learning outcomes. Such leadership provides the imprimatur to place literacy and numeracy learning at the heart of the school's purpose and operation. The instructional leader legitimises the strongest possible focus of school resources and effort on effective classroom practice, including building in coaching, mentoring and tutoring arrangements. The instructional leader establishes and maintains high expectations, standards of attainment and continuous improvement in learning outcomes across the school. The instructional leader systematises a whole-school and collaborative approach to analysis of learning outcomes data and ensures that appropriate responses are designed, implemented and resourced.

Domains	Dimensions	Outcomes
	<b>Professional structure</b>	Around the classroom, school leaders build and sustain the professional structures critical to the achievement of the highest possible levels of literacy and numeracy outcomes. These structures include highly accomplished and lead teachers who work collaboratively in classrooms to create learning outcomes improvement. It is through these structures that the quality classroom practices in literacy and numeracy are developed, understood and sustained. It is these structures that connect all classroom practice to the higher-order teacher knowledge and skills required for all students to attain national and international performance benchmarks.
	<b>Performance management</b>	School leaders require all teachers to demonstrate regularly the quality of their classroom practice against the <i>National Professional Standards for Teachers</i> in a process of internal review and moderation. Developmental performance management processes enable teachers to demonstrate growth against standards and how higher levels of classroom practice impact on the learning of their students. Within the developmental approach, teachers have opportunities to learn through peer collaboration within which practice can be explored and extended. Schools also facilitate partnerships with tertiary researchers so that teachers have access to contemporary and emerging knowledge about high quality classroom practice. These partnerships are demonstrated in the classroom and provide opportunity for teachers to participate in action research to evaluate the effectiveness of their practice. The school has a strong culture of coherent teacher inquiry as a key underpinning of professional growth.
	<b>School evaluation</b>	The school has a framework that provides the basis for a regular cycle of evaluation to understand the impact of whole-school approaches and processes on literacy and numeracy outcomes. In addressing the framework, the school works in partnership with higher education or other forms of external support so that the data analyses enable an objective view of meaning. The framework provides for a range of data sources and data collection methodologies, including school climate surveys and stakeholder interviews. Student outcomes data are also analysed so that understandings can be developed about performance trends over time. Analysis of evidence from evaluation enables identification of the higher-order meanings and implications for school approach and classroom practice. Through evaluation, the school has an evidence base to affirm and strengthen effective approach and practice. It also has an evidence base that provides the rationale to challenge and replace practice that is not achieving the outcomes required.
<b>Teacher quality</b>	<b>Teacher engagement</b>	Each teacher exercises professional responsibility for the quality of classroom practice in literacy and numeracy and rapport with their students. They engage with and understand the implications of the research pointing to the size of the teacher effect on student learning outcomes, including in literacy and numeracy. They are also engaged with the implications of the declining performance of Australian students in literacy and numeracy over some years. They recognise the importance of their engagement in the teacher quality agenda to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students. They engage in new professional structures that offer recognition of higher levels of teacher accomplishment to underpin the quality of their classroom practice in literacy and numeracy.
	<b>Teacher knowledge</b>	Each teacher has advanced knowledge and understandings about the structures, relationships and uses embedded in language and number. They connect their knowledge and understandings of language and number with student learning through highly informed classroom practice that produces continuous improvement in learning outcomes for each student. Through their knowledge of language and number, they diagnose students' learning to assure sustained progress towards higher outcome levels. Their knowledge also enables them to identify students who begin to demonstrate cognitive difficulty with language and number understandings. In response, they tailor their practices and identify the additional resources required to ensure the student's cognitive progress in literacy and numeracy learning.

Domains	Dimensions	Outcomes
	Teacher inquiry	Teachers build professional quality into their literacy and numeracy knowledge and understandings by recognising the importance of integrating inquiry into their practice. They especially explore the link between practice and improved student learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy across the spectrum of performance. In their inquiry, teachers apply and test the efficacy of evidence-based approaches in literacy and numeracy teaching. They extend inquiry by working in collaboration with school colleagues, other professionals and researchers to construct knowledge and understandings for improved practice in literacy and numeracy teaching.

As for the other frameworks that have emerged from the National Evaluation evidence, the literacy and numeracy framework provides a potential conceptual road map to address the critical elements underpinning the literacy and numeracy learning of students.

The proposed literacy and numeracy framework should not be considered in isolation. Rather, it belongs within the suite of frameworks suggested by the National Evaluation evidence. As such, it links directly to the evidence-based outcomes frameworks concerned with teacher quality, student engagement, the learning of Indigenous students and evaluation.

## Implications

As represented in the framework above, there are substantial implications in the National Evaluation evidence for the understandings, approaches and practices required for sustained improvement of literacy and numeracy learning outcomes. Linking to the other frameworks in this Report, they include the following.

- There needs to be an absolute commitment by principals and teachers that there is no more important learning than literacy and numeracy learning. School leaders and staff should recognise that this learning needs to underpin, connect to and be integrated into all of the learning that occurs in the classroom. The classroom environment needs to give prominence to literacy and numeracy learning across the curriculum so that there are extended opportunities for students to develop their literacy and numeracy knowledge and to apply it.

*“We know good teachers make a difference. But now we are seeing and discussing the actual things that make the greatest progress for these kids, and extending these across the curriculum. The National Partnership is giving us the capacity to lift literacy progress and learning generally that goes further than anything we did in the past.”* Teacher at a site visit school
- High expectations need to be set by teachers to act as a catalyst for learning growth. In setting and articulating the expectations, no student should be allowed to cognitively disconnect from literacy and numeracy learning growth. Literacy and numeracy learning needs to be organised so that it takes place in an environment that is engaging and challenging, but also supportive to ensure all children and young people are on a pathway to attainment. The learning environment should be structured so that students can have a growing sense of confidence about their progress and success. Both progress and success need to be recognised. There should be a high level of social trust where students understand that challenge is intrinsically part of their learning in literacy and

*“We have always been good at behaviour management and our students and their parents are happy. What we have learned is the need to set higher goals and make sure every one gets there.”* Principal of a site visit school

numeracy. Social trust needs to provide the platform for students to share their learning with others and to develop resilience.

- In all classrooms there needs to be an explicit building of a base of technical skills and concepts that are the foundation of literacy and numeracy. There should be acknowledgement in practice that there is no one model for this base to be developed. Rather, informed by diagnosis, the learning needs to be structured so that, irrespective of the approach, each student has a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy. From this foundation of skills and concepts, students should be able to move through an expanding repertoire of application that provides the challenge for progression to higher outcomes in literacy and numeracy learning. Continuing diagnosis over the years of schooling should identify where intervention and additional resources are required to ensure that the foundational skills and concepts are known and can be used by the student.

*“The teaching has to be highly structured and explicit. These children come from families where nobody reads, where many parents are at best semi-literate, even in their own language. These children bring none of the advantages of children where there is rich language exposure, whatever the home language. Teachers here build knowledge, carefully, step-by-step, focusing on each child, always reinforcing. We assess individual progress over very short intervals, we share data and discuss the best way forward.”*  
Principal of a site visit school
- Structures and processes need to be in place to ensure the fullest possible knowledge that teachers require in the domains of literacy and numeracy, and in the many components that constitute each of them. Teacher knowledge needs to be inclusive of the technical foundations and underpinning concepts of literacy and numeracy. This knowledge needs to be for all teachers across all the years of schooling.

*“Our literacy coach is the key. She has taught us not only about language development but also about the explicit teaching practices we need to address identified learning problems. We learnt about these things in PD courses but it is her work in our classrooms that has helped us to change how we do things.”* Teacher at a site visit school
- Simultaneously, teachers need to undertake work to strengthen and broaden their knowledge of the pedagogies required for sustained improved student learning in literacy and numeracy. Such pedagogies should cover the full gamut, from those that address the foundational learning of skills and concepts to those that provide the higher order extension and application necessary for students to attain outcomes in the upper end of the performance spectrum. These pedagogies need to be for all teachers across all the years of schooling.

*“We have a number of high performing students here ... they have very good literacy skills, and numeracy skills too ... with the NP funding, we have been very careful not to overlook them ... that could easily be done ... I think it could be a trap to focus only on the bottom half or two-thirds, we need the full range of practices to be effective for all children...”* Teacher at a site visit school
- Teacher inquiry should be valued as a means by which the quality of classroom practice can be continuously improved. It is through collaborative inquiry in learning partnerships with other teachers and researchers that teachers extend their knowledge of the effectiveness of current practice. Inquiry provides the essential understandings that teachers require for the further development of their practice.

*“We did it first because we were asked to. Now we do it because it is the only way to be a teacher. We have an open, honest inquiry together around diagnostic data and we accept the advice of those with more expertise. It’s more work but there is also more satisfaction in the progress of the students.”* Teacher at a site visit school

- Approaches need to focus increasingly on the classroom as the place where pedagogical knowledge can best be built and extended. Structures and processes should include highly accomplished teachers and instructional leaders working collaboratively with teachers in and across classrooms. They also need to include partnerships with higher education through which the classroom becomes a shared and active professional learning space, linking teachers and researchers in joint study projects to build knowledge of pedagogy in literacy and numeracy. There is a need for a strong school culture of teacher collaboration, extended into all classrooms, as a key contributor to quality classroom practice.

*“The National Partnership is changing teacher outlook in the school. They are more collaborative, actually getting into each other’s learning spaces, combining learning spaces, being more flexible. We now have a partnership arrangement with some university people ... it hasn’t always been easy, for either side, but what I’m noticing is that conversations around the school are much more professional, more about learning issues ... we have to keep this going ...”* Principal of a site visit school
- Endorsed literacy and numeracy programs are based on extensive research and trialling. They constitute evidence-based tools for teachers. They also contain approaches and practices found to be useful. However, each alone is unlikely to provide the teacher with the capacity to address the full and complex gamut of learning issues in literacy and numeracy. In applying these programs, effectiveness needs to come not from their instrumental value but from the knowledge, skills and capacities of the teacher in applying them to each student. For effective classroom practice in literacy and numeracy, the critical domain should not be programs such as these, but the domain of teacher quality. Because of the complexities involved in the learning of each student, the programs derive their effectiveness from teacher quality rather than the program *per se*.

*“... we have what they call ‘preferred’ literacy programs ... but I find more often than not I’m adjusting the one we use for the grade, and that’s OK ... it’s odd maybe, but I don’t actually learn anything from the program, ... it doesn’t challenge me as the teacher to do things differently ... if it was the only resource I used, I think I’d be treading water ... the best thing we do here is talk to each other and push the boundaries a bit ... I think some of my best teaching comes out of these conversations. That’s what I’ve noticed most since the National Partnership.”* Teacher at a site visit school
- Teachers and schools need to utilise student learning data to inform decision making about approach to and practice in literacy and numeracy. Data analysis needs to measure class and school performance against national and international standards so that there is a public picture and understanding of the impact of teacher practice on student outcomes. Data analysis and sharing of the meanings that arise from the data are needed to limit capacity to ascribe class performance to student background factors. Data-related work needs to illuminate how teacher practice can be developed to increase the impact of the teacher effect on student outcomes in literacy and numeracy.

*“It is the data that allows us to really understand what each student knows or doesn’t know. We have been shown how to understand all the diagnostic data and when we put that with our social and emotional knowledge of the child, we can really personalise their goals and what they do to achieve them. It’s amazing- they can all achieve these ‘stretch’ goals when we know how to really teach them.”* Teacher at a site visit school
- Data analysis should also be used to diagnose learning progress and issues at the individual level so that cognitive progress can be facilitated and supported. Through analysis of student-level data, teachers should identify evidence that can inform decisions about the interventions and resources required to maintain

*“We assess very specific areas every half-term. The teachers meet as a team to discuss the results for each child. We know exactly what the issues are, and we teach to address the issues ... we work together ... the improvement in the children is obvious.”* Teacher at a site visit school



cognitive progress in learning for each student. Analysis of student-level data over time is also needed to track and report progress and to share personalised understandings about the best way forward for each student, including with other teachers, instructional leaders and with parents.

- There needs to be an internalised belief that improved student literacy and numeracy learning outcomes can be achieved, grounded in professional knowledge. Teachers need to have the pedagogical skills to translate this belief into sustained practice. Teacher practice and the resources to support it need to provide an inclusive environment, ensuring that no student is left behind.
- The structures and processes that are underpinning current improvement should be seen as core requirements, sustainable over time and not dependent on continuous additional funding. This may require considerable reallocation of resources, directing some from one area to another that is seen as capable of making a more valuable contribution to learning outcomes. It may mean the identification of additional and differentially allocated resources to ensure progress is obtained and maintained across the performance spectrum.

*"We make no excuses for low level achievement in learning. We have 'no excuse' classrooms. Every child can learn, will learn and will make progress. If home is pretty grim, then we can't do much or anything about that. But in the classroom, that's a different story."*  
Principal of a site visit school

*"Irrespective of students' backgrounds, our school can demonstrate that the (Literacy and Numeracy National) Partnership money is impacting on our students' literacy progress. This is happening because of better classroom practice, raised teacher expectations and a changed whole-school culture that focuses on getting the best out of each student. It would be difficult to address the challenges affecting student performance without these resources into the future."* Principal of a site visit school

One of the issues explored by a number of teachers and principals during the site visit component of the National Evaluation was the connection between literacy learning and numeracy learning, especially in the early years of schooling. The commentary indicated a strongly held view that the 'separation' of the two was artificial and failed to recognise the interaction that needs to be present for success in both. Some participants cited NAPLAN data to illustrate the point, proposing that the implementation of the LNNP in all jurisdictions and sectors should have provided scope for schools to simultaneously address both areas, and that for the early stages of primary schooling it should have been an explicit requirement.

*"If the (LNNP) funding had continued, we would have made numeracy the priority. We can build on what we have done in literacy, but the better approach would have been to address them simultaneously. Another issue is that because literacy has received so much attention, numeracy has been pushed to one side somewhat."* Principal of a site visit school

The school site visit evidence also indicates that the SSNP funding has enabled schools to extend and strengthen effort associated with the integration of digital technologies into learning. The evidence suggests that in both LNNP schools and Low SES NP schools, interactive whiteboards especially are playing an increasingly prominent role in engaging students as active learners and are being used by teachers as an important component of structured learning in literacy and numeracy. More broadly in relation to digital technologies, comment was made by both strategic-level participants and by principals and teachers in site visit schools that into the future there will be a need for increased focus on the implications of digital technologies for students' learning, including their literacy and numeracy learning. Included in the

*"Thanks to the National Partnership I've now got an interactive whiteboard. And thanks to the National Partnership the school has been able to release a teacher who is the literacy coach but who also has great technology skills and is demonstrating how to use the whiteboard."* Teacher in a site visit school

commentary was reference to the imperative for an expanded conceptualisation of literacy learning in Australian schools, extending beyond that currently measured by NAPLAN and other assessments.

Another issue explored during the school site visits was the benefits that have arisen especially for small schools from the National Partnership funding. The observation was made frequently by principals and teachers that, because the resource base in these schools is so limited, there is little capacity for the development of flexible arrangements and structures to address identified learning needs. While the amount of SSNP funding received was typically “small”, it provided considerable scope for the schools to develop arrangements and structures explicitly targeting students’ literacy or numeracy learning.

*“With the Literacy and Numeracy funding I was able to have a 0.2 additional staff, which was allocated to literacy coaching. I have no other way of getting a resource like this, and what we have been able to do is out of all proportion to the extra day ... when the funding stops, so will the position, unfortunately.” Principal of a site visit school*

As for National Partnership schools generally, the funding for small schools has especially been used to impact the areas of classroom pedagogy, teacher collaboration, teacher inquiry and data analysis. As noted by a number of principals of National Partnership site visit schools, substantial benefits have arisen from being able to extend the professional base of the school through use of the funding to employ additional staff or to supplement current part-time positions. In this context, the evidence suggests that the complexity of issues associated with literacy and numeracy learning are exaggerated in small school situations because of the restricted resource base and the capacity limitations. The LNNP has facilitated these schools having the capacity they require to engage with invariably complex issues at an appropriate level.

In the evidence, there is also commentary about whether the time frame for the LNNP has been sufficient to achieve its reform intents. A number of strategic-level participants in the National Evaluation observed that the time frame for the LNNP did not accord with the research evidence indicating that a period of some five to six years was required to achieve systemic schooling reform. In an area with the multi-layered complexities of improving literacy and numeracy outcomes, and developing the structures and arrangements to sustain such improvements, the observation was made that the LNNP should have been designed for a period at least comparable to the Low SES NP.

Similarly, observations were made about whether there has been adequate time for LNNP schools to achieve the contributing outcomes necessary for attainment of the targets. In particular, the short time frame, of some four months, in which NAPLAN was first used as a measure was perceived generally as inappropriate and meaningless in terms of the LNNP investment. As some strategic-level participants in the National Evaluation observed, this has had implications for the credibility of the LNNP as a whole, let alone the use within it of NAPLAN as a measure.

While such implications can be gleaned from analysis of the LNNP evidence in the National Evaluation against the program logic presented in Chapter 1, so too can implications be identified in relation to measurement, facilitation and reward. Like the ITQNP, the LNNP has a reward structure embedded in its design. Exploring the implications of this against the program logic is important to point the way forward in terms of reward for the development of the national infrastructure needed to sustain improved literacy and numeracy student learning outcomes.

Few other areas of evidence revealed so much discussion and anxiety as the areas of measurement and reward in relation to the LNNP. Indeed, there was clear evidence that the measurement framework for the LNNP had distorted effort toward reform. As one strategic-level participant suggested:

*... anything we do at system level to reduce measurement error will do much more to*

*achieve our target than anything we can do in schools...*

This statement alone is sufficient to warrant consideration of the appropriateness and efficacy of the measurement and reward framework in LNNP.

## Measurement in the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership

### *The facilitation - reward proposition*

Underpinning the concept of facilitation and reward payments embodied in the LNNP is the concept that something can be improved, action can be taken to facilitate the improvement, the improvement can be measured, and States and Territories will be rewarded for that improvement.

For the LNNP, the goal is that student outcomes in literacy and numeracy be improved. The National Partnership strategies, activities and initiatives of States and Territories are designed to contribute to improvement in these outcomes amongst students in selected schools and overall. Facilitation payments are made for the activities and initiatives. Reward payments are made for the improvements in literacy and numeracy as measured by negotiated targets. The instrument for measuring that improvement is predominantly NAPLAN and the targets are most commonly presented as changes in NAPLAN results over a common time scale.

In addition to using NAPLAN as the instrument for measuring improvements in literacy and numeracy, States and Territories were afforded the opportunity to include local measure targets. Local measures provided the necessary flexibility for state and territory governments to reflect specific educational performance measurement tools as available in state and territory contexts. It was also included to accord the States and Territories flexibility to direct the focus of reform beyond that of targeted improvements in literacy and numeracy. Examples of local measures used by States and Territories include online self-assessments, staff opinion surveys and state-based reading assessments.

What is most common amongst the National Evaluation evidence in this regard is a questioning of the appropriateness of NAPLAN to provide accurate information about achievements attributable to actions in response to the LNNP. This questioning is particularly apparent in terms of the time scales involved and the target group at the lower end of the performance spectrum.

However, it also pervades evidence about the overall 'fitness for purpose' of using NAPLAN as a measure of progress in work designed to create reform. While NAPLAN is seen widely as one of a possible suite of measures of the ultimate outcome of reform, holding jurisdictions accountable for such an ultimate outcome during the years over which they are building the systems to create the outcome tends to defy agreed logic.

### *Using NAPLAN to measure improvement*

Prior to the development of NAPLAN, comparative literacy and numeracy performance across States and Territories was determined through a relatively contestable process of equating the student outcomes from a range of assessments implemented by jurisdictions. NAPLAN was constructed to provide a common measure of literacy and numeracy achievements in schools across Australia.

Among the key premises underpinning the use of NAPLAN, to inform policy, and in comparative measurement of performance over time and among jurisdictions and schools, are assumptions that the:

- tests are valid and reliable. That is, they assess the reading and numeracy skills taught to students in schools and they are able to do this consistently

- methods for equating the test results over time, that is from one year to the next, are robust. That is, they lead to stable and valid comparisons between achievements over time. In other words, a score of 360 in the Year 5 test one year means the same relative level of achievement as in the equivalent Year 5 test in another year.
- methods for equating the test results across the school years tested provide stable interpretation of results within the bands and levels of the assessment standards framework. That is, a score of 360 in the Year 5 test means the same relative level of achievement as in the equivalent Year 7 test.

Given the high stakes nature of the facilitation-reward model, emerging from the stakeholder interviews with jurisdictions are concerns that the LNNP has been implemented and progress measured without ensuring that all of these premises are met. This is especially the case when the reward targets represent relatively small movements in results of students at the lower end of the performance spectrum within results overall that cannot be controlled finely for measurement errors. The concern is heightened at jurisdictional level when it is understood that the statistical processes used to produce the reported NAPLAN scores impact to distort either end of the performance spectrum more than they do the majority in the middle.

#### Validity and reliability

In relation to the requirement for validity and reliability, achievement in literacy and numeracy arises from teaching and learning against the diverse range of curricula currently being implemented across State and Territory jurisdictions. Although, there are more commonalities than differences in the content of the curriculum, there are nevertheless some minor differences. More significant, however, are differences in the sequencing of content, and in the teaching and learning theory and approaches underpinning the different curricula. Notwithstanding these differences, NAPLAN tests are designed to assess students against nationally agreed *Statements of Learning for English and Mathematics*.

The items to be included in the current tests and consequently aspects of the curricula to be assessed are determined by negotiation and agreement. The prime consideration for selecting test items is not necessarily their efficacy as a test item but agreement across jurisdictions that the item addresses the relevant curriculum.

This process of negotiation does not serve all jurisdictions equally well. For example, one jurisdiction has argued that the reading requirements of the numeracy tests are too high for students with little or no English. The jurisdiction has proposed 'naked' questions, that is questions that have little or no reading component, such as '12 + 13 = ?'. Other jurisdictions have rejected the inclusion of naked questions, arguing that they are of little challenge to the majority of students.

However, given that reading scores are more strongly correlated to numeracy scores than to scores for the writing, spelling or grammar and punctuation aspects of literacy, the question arises as to whether it is 'numeracy' or 'numeracy in a literacy dependent context' that is being assessed. If it is the latter, the tests do not meet the first premise. They strongly disadvantage groups that have low literacy skills, the very students who are the target of much of the effort in

*"Our population is totally Indigenous. Standard Australian English is not their first language. Language at home is basically transactional and doesn't give them the broader base they need to feel comfortable entering Standard Australian English for the first time, compounding other language related issues. This is very different from the situation for refugee and migrant kids. On top of this, they can't engage with speakers from other language backgrounds in the playground, including Standard Australian English speakers. These kids desperately need the additional resource of ESL teachers, but they don't qualify. That is broadening the gap, not closing it. Now can you see what I'm talking about when I talk about our kids and NAPLAN?"* Principal of a site visit school

improving literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Currently, the only common reference points linking NAPLAN tests to curriculum expectations set out in the *Statements of Learning* are the national minimum standards for each of the Years tested. These reference points do not represent a developmental continuum along which individual student progress can be mapped or tracked. It is expected that the introduction and implementation of the new Australian Curriculum will address this weakness by providing common reference points for linking NAPLAN to a clear developmental continuum for students.

However, for now, the use of performance against national minimum standards as an element of the focus for SSNP reward payments tends to disadvantage those jurisdictions that have by far the majority of their students above minimal levels. For these jurisdictions, basing reform-oriented rewards on impacting results of the very small proportion of students who are at or below this level is seen as questionable.

More importantly for reward in the LNNP is the premise that improvements in reading and numeracy measured by NAPLAN have arisen from LNNP activities. Given the relatively short time frame between the implementation of the LNNP activities and the conduct of the test, in some instances in the first year less than four months, it would be difficult to conclude reliably that the improvements being measured were a consequence of the LNNP activities.

Moreover, this is compounded by a general background factor. In any given school community there will always be a multitude of influencing factors at play, such that according causality between improved student outcomes and a particular initiative, such as the LNNP, invariably becomes problematic. That said, analysis by DEEWR of NAPLAN results shows that when compared to non-National Partnership schools with similar characteristics, the LNNP schools overall indicate a higher level of improvement.

While proponents of NAPLAN argue that the equating processes are stable, the relatively small number of items in each test means that, at best, NAPLAN provides a coarse measure of achievement across the target bands for the Year level. Moreover, a number of stakeholders commented that the national minimum standards are a low benchmark. This is not a comment about the skills requirements of the tests. Rather, it is a comment about the test requirements with, for example, students needing to answer as few as 10 per cent of spelling questions correctly to be assessed as meeting the national minimum standard for Spelling. With such little capacity to report on differences in performance at these levels, the tests are not strongly capable of differentiating the performance of students at or below minimum standard.

In the context of the LNNP, these issues mean that there are questions about the capacity of NAPLAN to measure and report small changes in the achievement of the target population. At best, all that can be stated in some cases is that students who are below the national minimum standard cannot do NAPLAN at the level at which they sat.

#### Equating over time and across school Years

In relation to the requirement for equating over time, the high stakes context in which NAPLAN data are being used for reward payments demands a high degree of confidence and certainty in the results between test periods and for students as they progress across levels. This is especially important when significant funds may be allocated or withheld on the basis of relatively small movements in the data.

Improvement in the targets for the LNNP requires reporting performance of targeted schools against four mandated measures, outlined below.

1. Students at or above the national minimum standard (All students) (Reading/Numeracy)
2. Students above the national minimum standard (All students) (Reading/Numeracy)
3. Mean scale score (All students) (Reading/Numeracy)
4. Students at or above the national minimum standard (Indigenous students) (Reading/Numeracy).

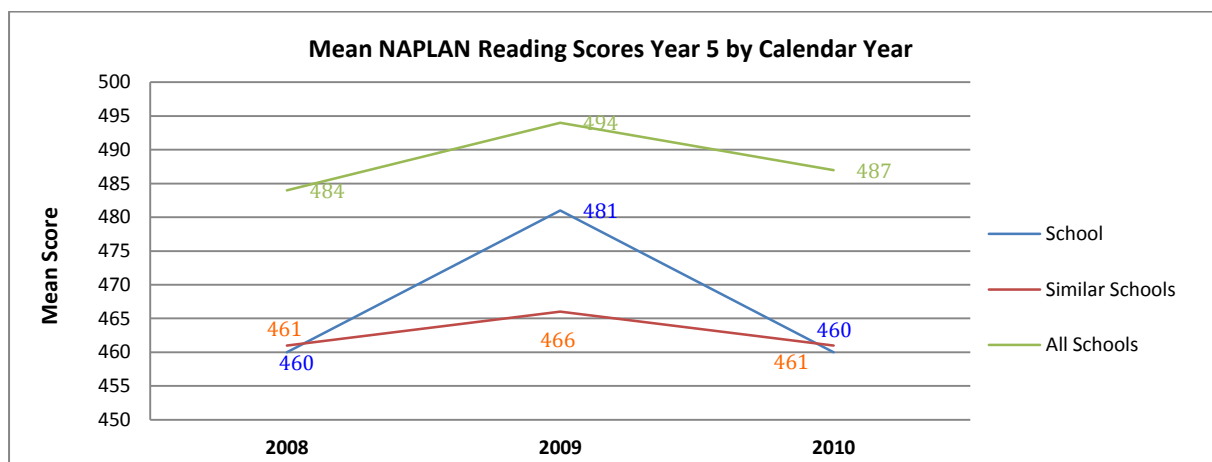
Reporting against these four improvement measures requires certainty about the equating of the scores underpinning the different measurement constructs for Reading and Numeracy across the tests and calendar years established in the targets. The measurement constructs being referred to are: the benchmark for the national minimum standard; the benchmark for students above the national minimum standard; and, the mean score for students in the selected schools in each jurisdiction. The calendar years in question are the base year and the year in which performance is measured.

A number of participants in the National Evaluation expressed doubt about the stability over time of NAPLAN results and in particular the benchmarks for achievement below and above national minimum standards. The following comment in relation to the assessment of targets in one jurisdiction alludes to potential instability in the results across calendar years.

*... expressed concern that targets had been set based on the decline in scores between 2008 and 2009 in almost all domains and year levels. This change in scores could indicate a problem in (the jurisdiction), or it could indicate that NAPLAN results are 'volatile' in this early stage of national testing. The major concern was that (the jurisdiction) appeared to have treated the decline as 'true', so that targets were set based on a 'return' to 2008 levels. (The jurisdiction) had correctly raised the issue of possible inconsistencies in NAPLAN results between 2008 and 2009, but had treated the change in scores as 'real'. If the 2008 scores more accurately reflected the NP schools than the 2009 scores did, then a 'return' to 2008 levels would indicate no improvement by 2011.*

The graph presented in Figure 15 below demonstrates the volatile nature of results from year to year in, as an example, Year 5 Reading. The graph shows mean reading scores for a school, similar schools and all schools.

**Figure 15: A demonstration of the volatility of mean scores over time**



There are two assumptions that could be made from these data. The first is that the cohorts were of differing ability. The second is that the tests results were not stable. Given that the differences across

the years for this test are different from those for other NAPLAN test results, indicating similarity in overall performance between the cohorts, it is more likely that the results were unstable. Yet, despite the potentially volatile nature of NAPLAN results in the early developmental stages of NAPLAN testing, in the LNNP calculations for reward, all changes are being treated as 'real'.

The difference in the order of ten scale points between years needs to be compared with the targets for reward in some jurisdictions, which are in the order of two or three scale points. In the first year of reward payments within the LNNP, seven jurisdictions missed targets associated with Year 5 Reading improvement measures, reflecting in part at least the complexity of issues associated with target setting, the volatility of the measures and the diversity of target setting approaches that were followed.

Further, participants in the National Evaluation suggested that, even where the benchmarks can be made stable because of the statistical techniques that are applied to conform to policy, the scores of students close to the benchmark may vary. It is not known to what extent this would mean the status of students below, at, or above national minimum standard would change if they had done the test in a different year. While the numbers of students impacted may be small overall and make little difference to the proportion of students above and below benchmarks at the national or State and Territory level, in smaller populations with higher proportions of students at or near benchmark, the impact on proportional measures may be statistically significant.

In addition, in assessing LNNP achievements in 2010, confidence levels played no part in the determination of the achievement of improvement targets. This is despite that fact that ACARA reports margins of error at the 90 per cent confidence levels for school and similar school mean scores.

This was a contentious issue for some jurisdictions. As an aspect of the work undertaken to achieve clarity, DEEWR and the COAG Reform Council sought advice on the matter and accepted the point estimate/observed value as the best estimate of the measure. The decision reached was based on arguments about the certainty of results.

Two examples of the margins of error reported in school level results drawn randomly from the *My School* website, based on mean reading scores for Year 3 students in the 2010 tests, are:

- School 1, ICSEA value = 1024, enrolment K-6 = 324:  
School mean = 397, margin of error = 379 – 415. Range of margin of error = 36 scale points  
Similar school mean score = 416, margin of error = 407 – 425. Range of margin of error = 18 scale points  
The mean score of similar schools was based on aggregating data from 57 schools.
- School 2, ICSEA value = 859, enrolment R-10 = 545  
School mean = 365, margin of error = 348 – 382. Range of margin of error = 34 scale points  
Similar school mean score = 355, margin of error = 346 – 364, Range of margin of error = 18 scale points  
The mean score of similar schools was based on aggregating data from 39 schools.

This means that achievement levels for the jurisdictions against their targets were measured with the possibility that the actual results for the schools involved were substantially different from the reported scores for those schools.

In general, over a jurisdiction, the reliability indices are stronger and such errors tend to become benign, each cancelling out the other. However, in small jurisdictions, with small cohorts, this issue may not be as easily dismissed. In research generally, 90 per cent confidence levels are considered to

be at the lower end of certainty amongst results. Moreover, the margin of error increases and hence the reliability of the mean scores decreases with the decreasing size of the sample.

In one jurisdiction, for example, one improvement target based on matched cohorts was calculated from the results of as few as nine students. The statistical reliability of this is at best questionable. In a context where improvements in the mean score or gains of two and three scale points are being sought to earn substantial reward payments, margins of error of the magnitude reported for NAPLAN may need to be examined and taken into account.

These views are consistent with the position taken by ACARA in canvassing the technical aspects of comparing gains across groups and jurisdictions.<sup>14</sup>

*To compare the gains for subgroups, for example male and female students, it is necessary to calculate the difference in the gain and the uncertainty associated with that difference. The uncertainties in the gains are a function of the uncertainties expressed in the tables via the confidence intervals and in the common elements in that uncertainty. ....*

*To compare gains across jurisdictions, the variation between the jurisdictions is compared to the variation that could occur as a result of the uncertainty in the estimates of the gains. The expected variation in the gains is a function of the uncertainties expressed in the tables via the confidence intervals and in the common elements in that uncertainty. Procedures for comparing the observed variability between jurisdictions with variation that could result due to uncertainty in the estimation of the gains will be reported in the NAPLAN 2010 Technical Report.*

However, these issues are no longer relevant to the future of the LNNP as the rubrics and principles for assessing attainment of improvement targets for 2011 have been established. Nonetheless, there is value in the analysis of activity and effort within the LNNP in exploring such issues to provide increased transparency and confidence in any future processes for determination of reward.

Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, under the current procedures with NAPLAN as the measure, there is emerging evidence that both target setting within LNNP and the work to achieve the targets for reward are not always undertaken with long-term systemic improvement of outcomes in mind. There is considerable evidence that the unintended consequence of the approach to reward using NAPLAN as the measure may not be fully supportive of the contribution of the LNNP to long-term reform that underpins its design. While the rubrics and principles may settle the short-term issues, they may do little to enhance and support the whole-of-system reform needed to achieve the long-term intentions of improving literacy and numeracy performance.

## Rewarding reform

The discussion about measurement in the context of reward raises a number of issues about the use of NAPLAN as an outcomes measure for the LNNP. These issues include the stability of results over time, the certainty of results and the impact of the process on the alignment of jurisdictional efforts to the reform-oriented purposes of the LNNP.

The issues do not imply that NAPLAN is not a very significant public resource for judging improvements

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<sup>14</sup> ACARA. National Report for 2010, page 458



in jurisdictional or school performance, especially over the long term. They do, however, suggest that, at this stage of its development and the wide range of concerns identified, questions can be raised about the use of NAPLAN in an environment of high stakes assessment for reform-oriented reward.

The LNNP is designed to address the infrastructure, processes and approaches that are proving insufficient or inadequate to maintain Australia's relative place internationally and indeed our absolute performance levels across the test areas and the performance spectrum. It is designed to identify what works best, the contextual limitations of the processes and how the most effective practices might be scaled up as alternatives to current practice. Through addressing these tasks, the LNNP is to contribute to the national productivity agenda by identifying elements of practice that are clearly leading to improved student performance, with the implicit intent that they become implemented throughout schools to improve and sustain improved outcomes for all students.

In approach, it is clear that facilitation payments are needed to implement and identify the processes that work. Many of these can be identified for implementation from practice and research. Others will emerge from innovation. Jurisdictions need to have money to undertake this work, and the LNNP has proved a generally successful approach to ensuring that such work is well integrated into the developmental operations of National Partnership schools.

However, it is in relation to reform that the National Evaluation evidence indicates the LNNP could more fully realise its potential. Analysis of the evidence indicates opportunities to achieve higher-order reform-oriented outcomes if the LNNP implementation were to have improved line-of-sight to reform.

The program logic for the SSNPs overall indicates that, if reward payments were tied to the achievement of intermediate or contributing outcomes identified on the road to reform, jurisdictions would have both incentive and the reward to tackle the cultural and structural issues that tend to maintain and protect the *status quo* and militate against reform. Provided those intermediate outcomes were shown through evidence to be the best approaches to embedding sustained student outcome improvement in literacy and numeracy, the logical assumption is that they will then in turn contribute to the productivity intent of the national reform agenda.

The LNNP itself has provided the evidence-based framework in Figure 14 above that sets out those intermediate outcomes. That it has done so is testament to the appropriateness of the LNNP and its potential for deep impact at the school level. Across the domains and dimensions of the framework, the intermediate outcomes have proven together in LNNP practice to be essential for literacy and numeracy productivity improvement from all classrooms. The framework that emanates from the evidence may provide a basis to monitor and assess the extent to which such outcomes are achieved and embedded across schools. As such, the outcomes from the evidence may provide a sound basis of measurement and reporting achievement within the LNNP and its contribution to reform. During construction of reform, it is the completion and extent of the building blocks of reform that need to be measured, not the ultimate outcomes of the reform. These ultimate outcomes are for future measurement.

Evaluation of the evidence gathered through an approach that measures such contributing outcomes, coupled perhaps with other approaches to triangulate the data, may provide an appropriate mechanism to make judgements about progress toward reform. By establishing agreed success criteria to be met within each domain and dimension, it may be possible to assess progress towards reform, and to reward jurisdictions accordingly. If the reward element of payment were sufficient, jurisdictions would then have the incentive to undertake the complex and challenging work to move from 'improvement' to 'reform' and be rewarded for their outcomes.

## Conclusion

The evidence is compelling that the LNNP is acting as a major catalyst for effort to strengthen the effectiveness of classroom practice in literacy and numeracy. Across the jurisdictions, the scope and scale of activity under the auspices of the LNNP is substantial. In the National Partnership schools, a variety of strategies intended to improve student outcomes in literacy and numeracy is being deployed. In particular, models involving coaches and tutors are impacting directly at the classroom level by focusing on the pedagogies that all teachers require for success. Moreover, investments to strengthen instructional leadership in schools are highlighting the importance of areas including teacher collaboration, teacher inquiry and partnerships with higher education providers. Through the LNNP, a strong culture of data analysis is emerging, equipping school leaders and teachers with the skills they need to understand and respond to the complex range of factors impacting student performance in literacy and numeracy.

The LNNP is leading to considerable reflection at all levels on what needs to be done to impact deeply on the literacy and numeracy attainments of all students. In particular, the National Evaluation evidence highlights the broad questioning as to why, when so much has been invested by teachers over many years, the outcomes they wish for their students appear not to be stronger. For more than a decade, significant levels of Australian Government and jurisdictional money have been put toward improvement of literacy and numeracy learning outcomes. Yet, over the last decade the outcomes have declined relative to other nations. The most recent NAPLAN data show the decline continues and is absolute, occurring within the Australian schooling cohort.

While selected groups within the cohort are improving and there is improvement in particular aspects, overall there are grounds for concern. The additional funding for improved literacy and numeracy outcomes can be linked to improvements in the schools to which it has been provided. However, the National Evaluation evidence shows that, with exceptions, that improvement will be unlikely to continue without the continuation of ever increasing amounts of additional funding.

At the same time, the LNNP has provided clear and unambiguous evidence about what is needed across domains and dimensions for continuous improvement in literacy and numeracy learning outcomes. The implementation of the learnings from the LNNP in system-wide transformation of classroom practice can provide a clear line-of-sight between effort and reform.

Analysis of student performance shows that, although low achievers are concentrated in the lowest socio-economic quartile of schools, there are actually more low-achieving students across the remaining schools. Even in the highest socio-economic quartile of schools, more than 10 per cent of students are ranked in the bottom 20 per cent of NAPLAN results. By building line-of-sight to reform into the LNNP, or future national effort in the pursuit of the same goals, there is opportunity for increased scope to address this issue for low achieving students across all schools. Capturing the opportunity would also address the full performance spectrum, including at the highest end.

This is the goal identified by the COAG, the NEA, NIRA, the Schools Assistance Act, the Melbourne Declaration and all Australian Education Ministers as being at the heart of effort. The LNNP has provided a potential outcomes road map to pursue this goal. The road map alone is justification for the national investment being made in it. The evidence suggests that it is now timely that this investment be capitalised on to realise the fullest possible potential of the knowledge gained through the LNNP as a contributing instrument in the national reform agenda.

## CHAPTER 4: STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

### Introduction

This Chapter of the Report is based on consideration of evidence gathered in the National Evaluation of the Smarter Schools National Partnerships (SSNPs) in relation to the engagement of students in learning, especially the engagement of children and young people from low socio-economic status communities. Substantially, the evidence is derived from work being undertaken in the National Partnership for Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities (Low SES NP).

The descriptive account of activity and effort in relation to student engagement is presented in Paper 6 of the desktop analysis. Evidence of success in the Low SES NP was presented and discussed in Chapter 1 of this Report. By way of overview, the evidence indicates that success is associated especially with effort and activity designed to engage and sustain children and young people in purposeful learning pathways. Success also is associated with flexible approach and practice that builds capacity.

A primary intent of the SSNPs is to achieve improved learning performance outcomes for students who are impacted by factors of socio-economic disadvantage. These factors are present in communities where average family income is at the lower end of the spectrum and where there is a discernible level of welfare dependence. They are also present in communities where there is a significant proportion of people who typically have a language background other than English. Location is a further factor, especially for remote and very remote communities.

As recognised in the Review of Funding for Schooling<sup>15</sup>, the decline in the comparative performance of Australian students:

*... is partly the result of students from disadvantaged backgrounds performing relatively poorly. Socio-economic factors play a stronger role in determining student outcomes and life chances than they should in Australia.*

*Australian school students in remote locations for example, achieved on average at a level equal to a year-and-a-half lower than students in metropolitan locations in science, reading and mathematics. The proportion of students in very remote areas reaching the benchmarks in literacy and numeracy is lower than the proportion of metropolitan, provincial and remote students achieving these benchmarks.*

*The difference between students from the poorest backgrounds and the richest was, on average, more than two years of schooling in both reading literacy and mathematics. The difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in mathematics and reading literacy was equal to more than two years of schooling.*

*Individual student backgrounds clearly remain a major influence on how students perform at school in Australia. Such inequities are more marked in Australia than in some other countries, such as Finland and Canada.*

One of the major reform priorities of the Australian Government for schooling in Australia is that all students benefit from schooling, especially those from disadvantaged communities. While there is a long record of additional national provision to support students from disadvantaged communities, the

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<sup>15</sup> Review of Funding for Schooling - Discussion Paper and Draft Terms of Reference 2010, page 10

Low SES NP is intended to bring about innovation across targeted schools so that effective approach, structure and practice are embedded in schooling. By so doing, the intent is that sustained capacity be built to underpin higher levels of learning performance.

By enabling students who are impacted adversely by factors of disadvantage to achieve higher levels of learning performance, the intent of the Low SES NP is that activity and effort under its auspices will contribute directly to the national productivity agenda. This intent is to be fulfilled within an approach that reforms schooling in the 1,700 targeted schools so that levels of student engagement in learning are increased and remain strong, and there is increased continuity of learning pathway for all students to Year 12 attainment or its equivalent over the long run.

## A conceptual outcomes framework

As explored in the first Chapter of this Report, analysis of evidence indicates a substantial level of activity and effort to achieve improved outcomes of schooling for children and young people who live in low socio-economic status communities. The National Evaluation evidence suggests a range of approaches and practices among National Partnership schools that are engaging students more fully in schooling and laying the groundwork for improved levels of performance. In these instances, transforming work is emerging which suggests that the efficacy of past practice is being challenged and replaced by new models of service delivery and preparedness for innovation.

The National Evaluation evidence is unambiguous that success in addressing these issues arises where schools identify and fulfil their core responsibility for student learning, and are not distracted by addressing the symptoms of disadvantage as core function. The evidence shows instances where schools in low socio-economic status communities complement, but do not displace, this core responsibility by contributing to partnerships that strengthen community and family capacity.

Importantly, the school sets and maintains high expectations about learning outcomes within the curriculum. These expectations and the support provided for success lead to: increased student aspiration; a heightened and more positive self-identity; increased resilience; and, a greater valuing of learning for a constructive life beyond boundaries that may be constricting. Engagement becomes particularly important because it is foundational to these outcomes.

Obviously, to address the additional requirements for success in targeted schools, ongoing resource allocations beyond the minimum levels are essential. There is simply more, and more complex, work to be done. Importantly, however, there is recognition in the Evaluation evidence that issues of sustainability need to be addressed beyond additional resources and beyond the additional personal efforts of highly committed staff. Success becomes discernible where activity and effort are oriented to change and reform rather than only to producing outputs, even if the outputs

*“There are two areas where work must be done to lift the performance of our students. The first is in the classroom, high quality teachers delivering high quality lessons, high expectations, setting high standards and doing everything to get their students up to higher performance levels. The other area is outside the school, it’s the work that needs to be done in the community and with the families. We can support that, but we’re a school, it’s not the area we’re set up to handle. ... we can contribute to it, but we can’t do it.”*  
Principal of a site visit school

*“Our students do not have the advantage of a family life where they are being challenged to improve themselves and to set the bar always that bit higher. Some have no demands made of them at all, they are left to their own devices. Others face many demands, especially the girls, but they are demands that having nothing to do with getting a good education or aiming for a rewarding career.”* Teacher in a site visit school

*“We are moving to do things differently to give these kids the best possible chances for success at school and in their lives after school. ... even then, there will always be a need for extra resources ... we’ll never have the financial muscle of middle class schools.”* Principal of a site visit school

are improved engagement and learning outcomes.

The evidence from the National Evaluation shows clearly that the focus of the Low SES NP needs to be on the engagement of children and young people in taking responsibility for their learning as the platform for learning success, built on a foundation of explicit instruction and appropriate support. This focus addresses the remit in the Low SES NP initiative for innovation and the development of new models of service delivery, supported by facilitation payments.

The remit is intended to shift activity and effort from an approach that creates and reinforces dependency to an approach that builds and sustains personal capacity and learning outcomes. Repeatedly, over the course of the National Evaluation, participants canvassed the importance of structured, sequenced and regularly assessed learning as essential if students are to develop the knowledge and skills required for progress towards being confident and resilient learners. Such learning is only possible when students attend school regularly and are engaged in their lessons.

As part of the national productivity agenda, the remit of the Low SES NP is not simply to provide additional funding to meet the complex challenges facing schools in disadvantaged communities. This has long been the approach and yet the issues remain unresolved and entrenched. Rather, the Low SES NP provides a remit that requires innovation and evidence-based decision making to change the ways in which schools operate to address student performance issues arising from disadvantage.

As such, the remit requires reform, not maintaining or even improving established practice.

There is evidence of instances where the Low SES NP is contributing to reformed arrangements at the school level. The evidence includes schools joining together in a structured cluster arrangement, whereby resources are maximised and shared, joint programs are developed and implemented, and linkages are created with key community groups and agencies. Commentary includes reference to advantages arising in relation to: broadened teacher knowledge through a wider base of professional engagement; the development of aligned structures so that staff can work in cross-school teams; maximising high-cost resources, including technologies and specialist teaching and paraprofessional staff; and, stronger local advocacy in promoting the importance of school attendance, learning and parental support.

The outcomes framework in Figure 16 below is constructed from evidence in the National Evaluation with implications for the Low SES NP. It focuses on student engagement with learning. As for the other outcomes frameworks that have emerged from the National Evaluation evidence, the engagement framework provides a potential conceptual road map to address the critical elements underpinning the learning of students from low socio-economic status communities.

*“Since the teachers have been working with the coach I’ve noticed they’re breaking up the learning so kids can understand what they are doing, and they’re a lot more confident.” Teachers’ aide in a site visit school*

*“Because the community is so disadvantaged, this school will always need additional resources, we will never redress the enormous disadvantages these kids face unless the resources are available. But I want the staff to see that it’s not just about the resources, it’s about how we use them effectively. In the past there has been a cargo cult mentality about these resources, that has to end. We have to use the resources to ensure quality teaching and greater student gains.” Principal of a site visit school*

*“Most of the NP funding is pooled to support the cluster (of four schools). We are moving to a model where we will operate as an entity in the community. The cluster’s priorities are high quality teaching in every classroom through shared teacher coaches, integrating technology, strong family connections to improve student attendance, and raising parents’ understanding of their role as first teachers. For the future, the cluster wants to be able to contribute more in the 0-5 years, but with new structures, because the educational disadvantage of these kids comes mainly from those years.” Principal of a site visit school*

**Figure 16: A possible outcomes framework for student engagement**

Domains	Dimensions	Outcomes
Student learning	<b>The learning environment</b>	The focus of the learning provision is on each child or young person. The learning environment is open and extended, not necessarily limited to the school site. It is located wherever the child or young person needs it to be and operates so that any alienation from learning is addressed. It is inclusive of those with a stake in the learning progress and wellbeing of all children and young people. For all who engage in this environment, it provides a strong sense of belonging, purpose and opportunity.
	<b>Learning engagement</b>	The approach to learning ensures that students will find it engaging and purposeful, with opportunities included to pursue their interests and talents. The purposes of learning are made explicit and are continuously reinforced as the key to a positive life pathway. The emotional and social wellbeing of the student underpins all relationships, with a focus on ensuring each has a strong belief in their own capabilities and capacities to make good decisions and accomplish their own goals. Where there are indicators of disengagement, including cognitive disconnection, all effort is made to address the issues. The response may include an inclusive flexible provision, including tutoring, mentoring or other structured intervention, as a means to build confidence as a basis for learning success.
	<b>Learning expectations</b>	For each student, there are high expectations against national and international norms and against the standards expressed in the Australian or jurisdictional curriculum. These high expectations are held for all students regardless of prior progress, background or context. The teacher uses all relevant data to understand the approaches and support required for sustained engagement and progress in learning. All necessary provision is arranged to ensure that expectations and challenges necessary for high levels of achievement can be met. The provision ensures that elements that might lead to disconnection do not arise. Student voice is encouraged and respected, with responsibility for learning progress resting firmly on the shoulders of each learner. Student responsibility is strongly guided by mentoring and tutoring, within clear boundaries and expectations so that good decision-making skills are an outcome of exposure to authentic learning situations.
	<b>Learning pathway</b>	Teachers and learning support personnel identify disconnected and disengaging children and young people as early as possible. The school has a case management approach so that personalised work can be undertaken to ensure connection of children or young people who are disconnected or who indicate disconnection from learning. The case manager, by knowing each student in their life and prior learning contexts, establishes rapport and works with them in their personal context to help them address and overcome barriers to connection. An appropriate learning pathway is designed that that leads to attainment and formal recognition.
School	<b>Flexible and additional provision</b>	There is flexible provision in the school budget to attract and retain high quality staff, including through incentive and reward. There is additional provision to make budgetary decisions that will facilitate and support access to all resources necessary to ensure equitable student outcomes relative to the national cohort. The provision can include additional teaching staff, tutors, teacher assistants and special needs staff.
	<b>Transition support</b>	The school develops and implements structures and support around all key transition points where students are especially vulnerable to disengagement. While there is learning continuity, the structures and approaches are personalised, flexible and differentiated. Students are prepared and supported by the school to engage in new forms of learning that provide a base for higher levels of attainment, broader social connection and extended challenge.
	<b>Broadened worldview</b>	School culture, curriculum and provision extend students into a range of contexts beyond their current scope. The role of the school supports growth in personal identity so that there is recognition of the life possibilities that come from sustained commitment to learning. Through provision by the school of a broadened worldview, students develop the values and aspirations required for positive societal connection and for life success.
	<b>Continuous improvement</b>	The school analyses and responds to evidence about each student's attendance, engagement and attainment and implements an evaluation plan to understand the effectiveness of approach and practice, addressing identified implications. The school has a culture of continuous improvement and responds to understandings gained through evaluation to make the transformations required for higher levels of student, school and community success.

Domains	Dimensions	Outcomes
Teaching	Instructional leadership	There is recognition of the centrality of instructional leadership. Selection processes and professional packages enable recruitment and retention of high quality leaders who are oriented to reform and innovation and have the skills and capacity to transform classrooms and learning outcomes. Professional packages maximise continuity, complemented by explicit succession planning. Depending on school size, the structuring of the school leadership team enables division of labour so that there can be a focus on the critical areas impacting the learning outcomes of all students.
	Professional standards	Teachers work within a school professional structure that applies the <i>National Professional Standards for Teachers</i> . There are expectations that these standards will inform teacher practice across all aspects of their work, including through performance management processes. There are also expectations that the professional learning obligations related to these standards will be met, including as a basis for progression to higher levels of professional status, accreditation and remuneration.
	Staff professional development	There is a strong culture of staff professional growth and learning. On-site professional coaching, mentoring and support are provided for all staff. There are structured opportunities to learn collaboratively through inquiry and reflection and to leverage from these opportunities to improve approach and practice. All staff have access to high quality and relevant professional learning and accreditation opportunities.
Family and community	Early years connection	The school works in partnership with other agencies to ensure that families have the understandings and skills so that the early developmental years provide a foundation for future formal learning. The partnership enables parental participation in prior-to-birth programs, early child-rearing and health programs, and other initiatives so that families can take their place as first teachers.
	Family engagement	The school actively engages parents so that they value, understand and participate in their children's learning, especially with regards to literacy and numeracy. Family connections into the school are facilitated and supported through regular engagement, participation in programs and personalised discussions about progress. The cultural knowledge of families is valued and accessed to strengthen the relevance and appeal of school programs. The school develops processes and practices to ensure that families from all backgrounds are included in school life. Where appropriate, the school provides access to community agencies and support by acting as a connecting hub.
	Community partnerships	There is a partnership between schools and community-based agencies, employers and others to strengthen the community infrastructure that guarantees all children and young people are connected to learning. The partnership enables students to participate in engaging, challenging and purposeful initiatives and programs that operate within workplaces and the community in general. Through the partnership, students have access to a visible and wider base of learner role models.

The proposed engagement framework should not be considered in isolation, but rather as linked directly to the frameworks concerned with teacher quality, student learning, the learning of Indigenous students and evaluation. The engagement framework adds a further dimension that has, from the National Evaluation evidence, particular relevance for schools in low socio-economic status communities.

Critically, the outcomes identified within this and the complementary frameworks are outcomes that need to be achieved in schools located in low socio-economic status communities if higher levels of student performance are to be achieved and sustained. In large measure, the engagement framework seen in conjunction with the other frameworks confirms the many references in national documents and in the National Evaluation evidence to the complex and inter-related nature of the challenges facing schools in low socio-economic status communities.

## Implications

As represented in the framework above, there is a number of substantial implications in the National Evaluation evidence for the understandings, approaches and practices required for outcomes to be achieved in schools serving low socio-economic status communities. Building on the other frameworks in this Report, they include the following.

- The evidence indicates that approach and practice need to emanate from an overt school culture of high expectations about student performance. The school should not excuse or justify low levels of student performance on the grounds that they come from low socio-economic status communities. Differentiation in delivery of the curriculum rather than differentiation of the curriculum should be the focus. Attainment of nationally comparable standards and progress are requirements of all Australian students.
- The school needs to offer flexible pathways within the jurisdictional or Australian curriculum, with performance expectations against national and international norms. The evidence shows it is important that each pathway belongs in the mainstream of educational provision, not an alternative. All pathways should lead to Year 12 or equivalent attainment. It is through the legitimacy of such pathways that the student can engage in learning with a sense of belonging, purpose and opportunity.

*“Why can’t they be the head and not the tail? Because mum and dad are in menial work, or unemployed, why does that have to be their heritage?” Teacher in a site visit school*
- The primary focus of activity and effort in schools serving low socio-economic status communities needs to be on the development of the individual child or young person, not on approaches that respond to broadly understood deficits. The evidence is compelling that where the individual child or young person becomes the primary focus of engagement, including funding arrangements that articulate this focus, there is increased scope for connection to learning and for improved learning outcomes to be realised and sustained. Especially for those children and young people who are highly marginalised by their circumstances, there is a need to make and sustain personal connections through which trust can be built. The trusting relationship becomes the first step in connecting the child or young person to a learning pathway.

*“Our focus is the young person and what they need to stay in education. Students are in many different pathways, some are here at school, others are a combination of school and different situations, others don’t actually involve coming all that often to the school campus. But for every one, there is a case manager and we know where they are, any issues and the progress they are making. ... we are saying to them, ‘we will never let you go and we will never let you down’.” Principal of a site visit school*
- The school needs to be provided with capacity to make decisions about the flexible provision and allocation of additional resources so that all students can meet expectations. This implies sustained funding over and above core allocations. It also implies that resource allocations are able to be made locally and flexibly, and not be restricted by adherence to prescribed formulae or externally set acquittal requirements. The purpose of the additional resourcing should be to build student capacity so that engagement in learning can be sustained and

*“This school can’t operate as though it’s no different from anywhere else. The needs of these students are different; their circumstances are very different. We need people here with particular skill sets. We need highly qualified people who will give our students nothing less than the best education possible, anywhere. That has to be our goal. We need to be able to decide whether we’ll have a youth worker, or two, additional counselling support, a skilled person who can be a first step in dealing with the complex mental health and addiction issues many of these young people are facing ...” Principal of a site visit school*



higher levels of performance attained. Where appropriate, the additional funding should facilitate structured intervention so that the child or young person can be connected to learning or their engagement sustained.

- To ensure the sustained engagement of all students, consideration needs to be given to how the school responds to early indicators of cognitive, behavioural or social disconnection. The evidence indicates that a case management approach needs to be implemented to ensure that the disengaging student and, where appropriate, their family, are provided with the support, guidance and connections they need to overcome the identified barriers. The case management approach, however it is structured, needs to be one of the strategies that schools employ to ensure that no child or young person disengages from learning. The evidence also indicates that the flexible and additional resource provision needs to be applied at those points where the evidence indicates disconnection from the learning pathway, and should be sustained for as long as is required for re-engagement with learning.

In many instances, such resource provision may involve paraprofessional staff with specialised skills, including backgrounds in dealing with adolescent mental health issues. This was an area raised forcefully during the school site visits by a number of principals and teachers. Indeed, the view was expressed that into the future it would be desirable to support schools through appropriate resourcing so that they could contribute to broader national effort in the area of adolescent mental health.

- Consideration should be given to flexibility in resource provision so the school budget has capacity to attract and retain high quality teaching staff. The evidence suggests that the budget needs to include capacity for continued school investment in an ongoing cycle of teacher inquiry and staff learning, given imprimatur by instructional leadership. Staff learning should be supported through partnerships the school has with higher education, focused on identifying and implementing evidence-based practice. The school needs to maintain a connection between professional learning and the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* so that teacher quality can be sustained in complex and challenging environments.
- There needs to be local capacity in schools serving low socio-economic status communities to make decisions about the appropriate mix of teaching and paraprofessional staff, and the appropriate mix of staff skills. Importantly, there needs to be capacity in these schools to recruit and appoint high status teachers and paraprofessionals who have attributes, knowledge and skills to work in challenging and complex environments. The evidence indicates that the roles of these teachers and paraprofessionals should involve initiating and leading the changes, innovations and capacity building required for continuous improvement to impact the learning of students and build learning environments around them that will ensure sustained engagement. These teachers and paraprofessional staff should have a prominent role in contributing to school-level evaluation to establish the base of evidence for progress towards sustained outcomes and reform.

*“The critical area is quality teaching. We see the impact of high quality teachers every time they are appointed here. We have to attract the ‘best and brightest’ to schools like this, and do what it takes to keep them there for a reasonable period of time. There will always be churn, and you wouldn’t want them staying too long, they will eventually burn out and perhaps leave teaching altogether. But when you get outstanding teachers and top drawer support staff, everyone can see the difference it makes.”*  
Principal of a site visit school

- In schools serving low socio-economic status communities, there needs to be a focus on sustained school attendance and student engagement in ways that will broaden their worldview. Approach and practice in this regard need to develop students' values bases and expand their life aspirations. At a structural level, such a focus may involve innovation and change so that students in their learning pathways are connected to authentic opportunities in which they can both learn and apply their learning. The evidence shows that this should be one of the ways in which schools serving low socio-economic status communities engage students in learning that they can see as purposeful, especially in the context of expanded life aspirations.

*"We are using part of the National Partnership money to give our students experiences that stretch and challenge them. They live in a world that's cocooned, and all that does is reinforce the very small view they have of themselves. They respond. They see that the world has many different aspects, and we explore how they could make choices at school to take advantage of what's on offer. There are challenges. Quite a lot of parents, often for cultural reasons, are not necessarily supportive, and we try to work through that as best we can." Principal of a site visit school*
- The preparation of teachers needs to ensure that those who enter the profession have the knowledge and capacity to teach in schools serving low socio-economic status communities. Some of the emerging arrangements around centres of excellence under the auspices of the ITQNP are indicating the importance of providing future teachers with sustained opportunities to develop their understandings and skills in a variety of low socio-economic status settings. For example, evidence indicates the importance of teacher preparation in the areas of Indigenous education and teaching students from non-English speaking backgrounds, including sustained practical experience linked to their course work.

*"You cannot hope to teach Indigenous students successfully unless your university training has involved work in Indigenous education, and worthwhile practicum time in schools with significant numbers of Indigenous students. The cost excuse is just unacceptable. New teachers who come here need to be well prepared, they need to have been mentored by experienced teachers, they need to have first-hand experience of schools like this. ... identify the outstanding ones, and guarantee them a job." Principal of a site visit school*
- Schools serving low socio-economic status communities need to work in partnership with community agencies and groups focused on bringing together the expertise that children, young people and families require for engagement in learning to be sustained. In some instances, this may mean schools working in cluster or hub arrangements to maximise the resources and skill base that build capacity. It is through such partnerships that schools can contribute to work undertaken in areas including: cultural connection and inclusivity; preparation and support for students and families around key transition points; and, building parenting capacity in families as first teachers, especially from the early years.

*"The school is working with a couple of community groups, and the funding gives me some time to do this each week. The idea is to get families more aware and involved so that they value and support what the school is doing. While it's slow, we are making progress. The more I understand it though, the more I think the issues really go back to the years before the child starts school. ... we need to be working more with expectant and young mothers, they want the best for their children, we need to show them how." Teacher at a site visit school*

As indicated in a number of the principal and teacher citations from the school site visits, an area explored frequently was the impact on learning progress, especially in literacy, arising from children's backgrounds and experiences prior to commencing school. A number of teachers and principals pointed to the importance of prior-to-school provision in low socio-economic status communities as a key factor in addressing educational disadvantage. One participating principal expressed the issue in the following terms, capturing a widely held

perception.

*We can show the teacher effect in NAPLAN results from Year 3 to Year 5. For many students, the progress can be dramatic. But we know there is always a drag effect from the years prior to commencing school. We need to continue to strengthen what occurs in the classroom, and some truly brilliant work is being done, but more needs to be done to increase the understanding of parents about the critical importance of those years, the years from birth to age 5, for their children, and to support them to develop the outlook and just even very basic skills that will give their children the best possible start for success in school.*

## Conclusion

As for the other SNNPs, the Low SES NP is acting as a catalyst for substantial activity in National Partnership schools. The additional funding is enabling schools to implement strategies and programs that explicitly address disadvantage arising from students' socio-economic backgrounds. In a number of instances, investments are being made in innovative structures designed to strengthen students' engagement in legitimate learning pathways. There is recognition of the importance of building student capacity and resilience, moving away from approaches that encouraged dependence and offered little sense of a clear learning pathway. Community-based partnership models are being explored through which schools can contribute to the work required to address complex contextual issues and to build family commitment to learning as fundamental to a successful life.

In a number of instances, potentially highly informing work is being undertaken that links the Low SES NP to the ITQNP. Schools are being accorded the authority they require to develop staffing structures appropriate to needs. Work is being undertaken to build-in processes through which high quality teachers can be attracted to and retained in schools typically characterised as hard-to-staff. Such work has potential for sustained impact so that the learning outcomes of students from low socio-economic status communities are lifted relative to the total population.

Unlike the LNNP and ITQNP, the Low SES NP has no reward structure. In part, this may be due to issues identified over many years in relation to challenges in measuring progress in such complex and multi-layered school environments. Irrespective of the reasons for the lack of a reward structure, the application of the funding appears in too many instances to be disconnected from the reform intent of the Low SES NP. There is scope for consideration to be given as to how the reform intents of the Low SES NP can be more fully secured, given their potentially central role in addressing the imperatives highlighted in the national and international data insofar as students from low socio-economic status communities are concerned. Within the context of current and possible future work, explicitness about reform intent within the program logic may be seen as an essential 'first step'.

In addressing the engagement and performance agenda for schools that serve low socio-economic status communities, the Low SES NP provides facilitation payments over an extended period of time. This period accords with the research evidence indicating the time frame required for reform to be achieved and embedded. However, the evidence shows that across the Low SES NP, the opportunity provided through it to achieve sustained productivity reform is being subsumed where the facilitation funding is regarded substantially as additional funding, no different from that previously provided over many years to schools serving low socio-economic status communities.

In this regard, the outcomes-based framework suggested above, and derived from the evidence, may provide an entrée for the national work required to ensure that activity and effort within the Low SES

NP is explicitly connected to the original reform intent. As an aspect of this work, consideration could be given to the application of the constructed engagement framework as a possible road map against which progress toward reform is identified and rewarded. By so doing, it is possible that the Low SES NP would be better placed to contribute to the national productivity agenda.

Additionally, and consistent with the implications of the National Evaluation evidence in relation to jurisdiction-level evaluation across the SSNP initiative, consideration could be given to the potential value of a coherent and nationally applied evaluation framework. Such a framework could provide the critical understandings needed for the reform intents of the Low SES NP to be effectively addressed and met. Evaluation conducted within such a framework would provide capacity to identify and understand the approaches and practices that contribute most to the outcomes. From jurisdiction-level effort in evaluation against a national framework, it may then be possible for a coherent and evidence-based national picture to be formed, describing progress in the Low SES NP and its contribution to the national productivity agenda.

## CHAPTER 5: CLOSING THE GAP

### Introduction

This Chapter of the Report is based on consideration of evidence gathered in the National Evaluation of the Smarter Schools National Partnerships (SSNPs) in relation to the education of Indigenous children and young people. The discussion in this Chapter relates to each of the four SSNPs represented in the National Evaluation. The descriptive account of activity and effort in the four SSNPs is presented in Paper 5 of the desktop analysis.

While the evidence from the evaluation of the strategies supporting the Quality Teaching and Literacy and Numeracy element of the Northern Territory Closing the Gap National Partnership (NT CtG NP) is utilised in this analysis, the base of evidence is a broader one. Each of the SSNPs has a focus on effort for Indigenous people, extending to issues related to increasing the number, qualification and level of engagement of Indigenous people in schooling. This focus emanates from the national productivity agenda and is explicitly represented in the goals of halving the gap in Indigenous student performance and Year 12 or equivalent attainment.

In November 2008, all Australian governments committed to the National Indigenous Reform Agreement. The agreement sets out six key targets. They are to:

- *close the gap in life expectancy within a generation;*
- *halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade;*
- *ensure all Indigenous four years olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years;*
- *halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade;*
- *halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020; and*
- *halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.*

The National Education Agreement (NEA) and, for non-government schools, the Schools Assistance Act, include a focus on outcomes for Indigenous students, with a particular focus on improving literacy and numeracy and Year 12 or equivalent attainment. The Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership (LNNP) has a particular focus on Indigenous students. The National Partnership on Improving Teacher Quality (ITQNP) also has an emphasis on building professional pathways for Indigenous people and Indigenous education workers who wish to progress to teaching. Many Indigenous students also benefit from implementation of the National Partnership for Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities (Low SES NP).

*“High quality Indigenous teacher aides are so important. The (National Partnership) funding has let us to do some great capacity building work with them. I think these people are one of the most important keys if we are going to close the gap, both those who stay as aides and the ones who go on to teach.”*  
Teacher at a site visit school

Each of the SSNP Agreements entered into by the States and Territories sets out the activity and effort to be implemented so that the targets related to halving the gap for Indigenous students comparable to non-Indigenous students are addressed. This Chapter considers the extent to which the intents in relation to closing the gap are being met by the SSNPs.

## A conceptual outcomes framework

As explored in the first Chapter of this Report, analysis of evidence indicates a substantial level of activity and effort to achieve improved outcomes of schooling for Indigenous children and young people. The SSNPs have acted as a catalyst to illuminate the imperatives stemming from the COAG agenda and to galvanise action. Importantly, the evidence suggests some emerging understandings about the critical conditions that must be created and sustained if the COAG agenda and targets are to be addressed and met. While over many years there have been wide-ranging activities and a plethora of programs at all levels, the National Evaluation evidence indicates that perhaps too much of what is occurring is disconnected from such understandings.

The National Evaluation evidence indicates that the SSNPs have potential to provide understandings about the conditions and outcomes that can contribute to closing the gap. These are set out in Figure 17 below.

**Figure 17: A possible outcomes framework for closing the gap**

Domains	Dimensions	Outcomes
Student learning	<b>The learning environment</b>	There are high expectations of all students, regardless of ability, background or context. The teacher knows the life context of each student, including their family background, aspirations and prior learning. For all students, there is a personalised approach to learning which engages them by offering a challenging, differentiated and evidence-based program that will meet the requirements of the Australian Curriculum. There is a compulsory and sustained focus on literacy and numeracy in every aspect of the school program, across all years of schooling.
	<b>Student connection</b>	The school works in partnership with agencies and families to resolve any barriers to learning participation faced by Indigenous children and young people. Additional resources are provided to support a capacity-building case management approach focused on the child or young person, so that, irrespective of their particular circumstance, they are enabled to participate in learning. Possible issues associated with transition at the key points of schooling that may lead to disconnection are predicted and addressed. All students have a sense of belonging to the school as a community, and a sense of their own personal agency in positive and constructive interactions with others. They are accepted and included, considerate and responsive.
	<b>Learning success</b>	Every student has access to learning support to ensure an inclusive, continuous and successful learning environment. This includes support in the classroom from assistant teachers and tutors, as well as support from Indigenous liaison officers, youth workers, social workers, health workers and other specialist personnel as required. The monitoring of each student's engagement and progress in learning enables the early identification of issues as a basis for response and any additional provision required.
	<b>Learning outcomes</b>	Learning outcomes for all Indigenous students are benchmarked against national and international cohort performance. Teachers set and continuously review learning outcome targets for each student on the basis of performance data from diagnostic and class assessments as well as from NAPLAN tests. For those whose performance is below the national and international performance benchmarks, all necessary learning support is provided and sustained for them to close that gap. For those who show strong performance against the national and international benchmarks, opportunities are provided for attainment of even higher learning outcomes. There is a commitment to these outcomes as a basis for progression to higher learning and entré into a wider world of challenge and success.
Teaching	<b>Professional standards</b>	Teachers work within a school professional structure that applies the <i>National Professional Standards for Teachers</i> to deliver quality learning programs for all students that will accord with the Australian Curriculum. There are expectations that these standards will be adhered to as teachers engage with Indigenous students, families and communities. There are also expectations that the professional learning obligations related to these standards will be met, including as a basis for progression to higher levels of professional status, accreditation and remuneration.
	<b>Indigenous workforce</b>	The role of Indigenous staff members is valued, active and integral to learning success. Indigenous staff members provide an important role model for young people and are a bridge between school learning

Domains	Dimensions	Outcomes
	<b>development</b>	and local Indigenous culture. Indigenous staff members are invited and supported to undertake approved professional learning and training to increase their skill, knowledge and qualifications base. Multiple and flexible pathways facilitate Indigenous recruitment, capacity building, training and leadership within each school community. Extended support is provided beyond completion of courses of study to ensure continued skill development and maintenance of standards commensurate with role expectations.
	<b>Staff professional development</b>	On-site professional mentoring and support are provided for teachers and other staff who are undertaking additional training and professional learning. Specific time is allocated to enable staff learning requirements to be met. Teachers, assistant teachers, tutors and other paraprofessionals learn from working collaboratively with literacy and numeracy coaches, language and behaviour management specialists, and cultural experts. All staff have access to high quality and relevant professional learning and accreditation opportunities.
	<b>Staff personal support</b>	Personal support is provided to principals and staff to ensure their continued wellbeing. They have access to a personnel liaison officer to address issues in such areas as preferred teacher housing, health and other services, leave and other entitlements, and family education. Personal counselling support is available where required. The school has capacity to respond where pressing personal circumstances necessitate additional support. Support, especially during the early stages of a placement, is planned, proactive and interventionist, with additional resources where required.
<b>School leadership</b>	<b>Leadership capacity</b>	There is recognition by systems and sectors that leadership in schools with a substantial Indigenous population needs to be broadly based and requires appropriate resourcing. The additional provision enables division of labour across school leadership teams so that there can be a structured focus on the critical areas impacting the learning outcomes of Indigenous students. This approach to leadership enables a strong focus on the instructional dimension that needs to be at the forefront for principals to impact student learning outcomes.
	<b>Leader professional development</b>	In recognition of the professional challenges of the Indigenous learning context, school leaders are provided with access to professional mentoring, professional learning opportunities with a special focus on instructional leadership, professional networks, frequent supportive contact with line managers and ready access to university courses and accreditation. In addition, school leaders are given the opportunity to engage with others who are working in similar contexts and with those who are working in school leadership locally.
	<b>Continuous improvement</b>	The principal ensures that the school analyses and responds to evidence about each student's attendance, engagement and attainment. Through consultation, an evaluation plan is developed and implemented so that evidence is gathered systematically to understand the effectiveness of approach and practice. The analysis of and response to this evidence constitutes a cycle of continuous improvement.
<b>School structure and resourcing</b>	<b>School climate</b>	There is an open, safe, inclusive, welcoming and culturally sensitive learning focused environment for all students, teachers and families. An inclusive, quality Indigenous culture program is provided to strengthen students' identity, resilience and self-esteem. The program underpins cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect in the school.
	<b>School structure</b>	Where required, flexible approaches to the school year, school term, school week and school day are adopted to suit the local context. The school has scope to provide an extended structure to offer opportunities that connect students to learning, whether at school or not. The extended structure involves cooperation between the school and community-based agencies and organisations. The structure invites the participation of community members so that there is increased capacity to support learning. The extended structure contributes to student learning through the development of a visible and wider base of learner role models and provides for students to learn through the world of work.
	<b>Flexible provision</b>	The school operates in a devolved model, with capacity to make local budgetary allocations. There is capacity to budget for a staff mix appropriate to identified requirements, covering both teacher and paraprofessional staff. There is capacity to make budgetary decisions that will enable maintenance, capital and technology infrastructure issues to be addressed locally. Additionally, there is flexibility in the budget to enable support to be provided for all school staff to address their individual professional needs, including accessing coaches, mentors and relief teachers as needed.
	<b>Additional provision</b>	In recognition of the additional needs of Indigenous students and the challenges involved in closing the gap, the school is provided with sustained additional capacity so that each student's learning is personalised. The capacity can include additional teaching staff, tutors, teacher assistants and special needs staff. The school is staffed with personnel to conduct home liaison, deliver cultural programs, and provide leadership to interface with the community in cultural connection. Resource provision also

Domains	Dimensions	Outcomes
		recognises the unique needs of those students who return to school after very prolonged periods of absence. This is particularly applicable to older students who may hold a view of their adulthood which conflicts with the requirement to attend school.
Pre conditions for learning success	Access to learning	All Indigenous children and young people have access to school learning as a pathway to Year 12 or equivalent attainment. Resource provision is to a level that will guarantee ready and continuous access, including through flexible, residential or online arrangements as appropriate. Ongoing access is assured, particularly at the key transition points on the learning pathway, including from school to work.
	Governance	The governance of the school focuses strongly on creating and sustaining connections with the community. Through these connections, families and community groups are able to endorse and commit to the work of the school in areas such as attendance, engagement, behaviour, aspirations and attainment. The governance arrangements provide a catalyst for action to address issues impacting on the school capacity to close the gap for all Indigenous students.
	Early years support	The school works in partnership with other agencies to ensure that families have the understandings and skills so that the early developmental years provide a foundation for future formal learning. The partnership enables parental participation in prior-to-birth programs, early child-rearing and health programs, and other initiatives so that families can take their place as first teachers. The partnership ensures access to pre-school provision and works with families to ensure that the value of this provision is maximised. Partnership arrangements ensure a successful transition into the first year of school.
	Family engagement	From the commencement of school, parents are supported to value, understand and engage in their children's literacy and numeracy learning. Family connections into the school are facilitated and supported through regular engagement, participation in programs and personalised discussions about progress. Agency, NGO and Indigenous community liaison staff such as cultural advisers and home liaison officers provide advice and support so that the families can address issues that militate against attendance and engagement. In addition, the school is connected to the community development network dedicated to the achievement of identified outcomes for all families.
	Enrolment and attendance	There are dedicated resources, structures and processes provided by partner agencies that ensure each child or young person of compulsory school age is enrolled at school and attends on every school day. The school complements the work of the partner agencies by providing engaging learning programs, monitoring and verifying attendance, and the timely reporting of any issues regarding attendance to the partner agencies. The school has explicit processes to identify and respond to early indicators that have potential to impact on attendance. The school works with partner agencies to respond to the issues. Sanctions are applied when issues of attendance cannot be resolved otherwise.
	Acceptable absences	The school has explicit and well-communicated expectations of what constitutes acceptable absences, what does not and why. These expectations are consistent with the legal obligations of families to ensure enrolment and attendance. The wellbeing of the child and the continuity of the learning program are the paramount considerations when making decisions about acceptable absence.
	Mobility and portability	There are agreements and processes across schools that address mobility and portability issues. These include portable registration of enrolment between schools and jurisdictions, monitoring of attendance among sites, guaranteed continuity of learning programs and reporting. The agreements and processes also ensure continuous assessment and accumulated accreditation. Particular attention is given to the transfer of information required at the key transition points over the years of schooling.
	Continuity and stability	There is a structured approach to ensure the maximum continuity and stability of principals and staff. Incentive and reward packages are provided that attract, retain and develop high quality staff for periods of at least three years. There is careful selection against specialised criteria, pre-placement preparation, on-site induction and internships, close and ongoing support, mentoring and facilitation of access to professional networks. An aspect of the preparation and support focuses on the development of skills in working effectively with Indigenous staff and engaging effectively with Indigenous communities. The professional expertise that comes from leadership and teaching in these contexts is valued, recognised and rewarded.

The framework suggests a conceptual road map for the SSNPs, with potential to complement other effort in national reform to close the gap for Indigenous students. While the framework is constructed around outcomes for Indigenous students, it is best understood when seen as part of the suite of frameworks contained in this Report that are concerned with teacher quality, classroom practice,



student engagement and evaluation.

## Implications

As represented in the framework above, there are some headline implications in the National Evaluation evidence. Building on the other frameworks in this Report, they include the following.

- The evidence indicates that the approach to closing the gap needs to be overtly focused on capacity development. The approach should ensure explicitly that dependency is not the longer-term outcome. The outcomes are about learning achievement, pride in achievement and personal resilience.
- There need to be expectations that students will achieve against national norms, especially in literacy and numeracy. While the learning context should build from the local Indigenous culture wherever possible, it is important that expectations of students' learning be set unambiguously against the jurisdictional curriculum and, when introduced, the Australian Curriculum. These expectations need to be established from the outset and maintained over the full years of schooling. Neither the learning nor the curriculum should be diminished or compromised. All students should have access to pathways that lead to a nationally comparable qualification.
- To ensure quality learning outcomes for all Indigenous students, the responsibility of the school needs to be clearly delineated and maintained. This responsibility is for student engagement in learning, quality teaching and the achievement of nationally comparable outcomes. While the school may work in partnership with families and community agencies, it should not have primary carriage of wider family, social and community development. Those responsibilities rest elsewhere, provided and resourced to a level that complements the work of the school.
- In recognition in some communities of the scale of the challenges, the complexity of the issues and the lack of appropriate community capacity to address them, where necessary, intervention should focus on lifting base capacity to the level that children and young people require for engagement in school and successful learning.
- The evidence shows that additional investments need to be sustained for as long as it takes to close the gap and to ensure that closure into the future. Effort should be supported by secure and joined-up funding arrangements

*"We have to give students the confidence that they can be successful. The approach begins with small tasks associated with support, with the aides working closely with them, just to have the experience of success. And then we build from there, so that over time the tasks become a bit more demanding with maybe a little less direct support, but it's there if they need it. What we want to see is confidence to 'have a go'. Everything we do is very explicit so that what the students are being asked to do is very clear. We do have high expectations but we also do what is necessary for the students to meet the expectations, including the expectation to be more and more self-reliant as time goes on."* Teacher in a site visit school

*"The NP funding allows us to have a teacher who acts as the interface between the students, the family and the school. (This person) handles the enrolments, makes the introductions, and builds a relationship with the parents so that the family will feel comfortable contacting them. (The person) monitors attendance and deals with mobility issues and connects with the other agencies. We saw that we needed a position to act as a sort of 'half way' meeting point – it has to be a teacher because they need to understand the school and the classroom, but someone who is seen by families and the community to have some space around them, some distance. The benefits have been enormous for the school and for families and the staff would see the position not continuing as a tragedy."* Principal of a site visit school

*"The NP funding at least has some mid-term guarantees ...we need funding continuity, a single bucket, not bits and pieces of money tied to different programs just dropped on us ... that approach will never let us reduce the gap."* Principal of a site visit school

so that it can have the coherence and certainty required to address complex and inter-related issues.

The evidence indicates that a range of well-considered and structured work to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous children and young people is taking place under the auspices of the SSNPs. However, other than through use of NAPLAN as a measure, there is no agreed reference point to provide a national picture of progress within the SSNPs.

In Chapter 3 of this Report, evidence about issues in relation to NAPLAN as a measure within the SSNPs was explored. In terms of closing the gap, NAPLAN and other student focused performance assessments are ultimate measures of success. However, in light of the program logic, effort in the SSNPs to contribute to the infrastructure that will close the gap needs to be informed by a road map of intermediate or contributing outcomes. These intermediate outcomes require a line-of-sight to the reforms necessary to close the gap. They represent the essential building blocks of reform.

To show progress within the SSNPs in the creation of these building blocks, there is a need for capacity to measure achievement at these intermediate outcome points. Moreover, it is important that this be done in a way that will provide a coherent national picture of progress across the SSNPs. The evidence-based outcomes framework in this Chapter could provide a basis for the national work required in the SSNPs to be able to demonstrate the contribution of the initiative towards progress in closing the gap.

Consistent with the program logic, within the SSNPs implementation and evaluation need to be integrated and seen in the context of an iterative feedback and response cycle. The evidence shows that evaluation needs to be extended beyond the monitoring of inputs and outputs. The evidence also indicates that jurisdictional evaluation should extend beyond a focus on assessing current approach and practice, with a view to supporting particular improvements.

To contribute to the reforms associated with closing the gap, within the SSNPs there needs to be capacity to build a national picture of the relative contributions and effectiveness of approach and practice within and across the jurisdictions. Through this capacity, the SSNPs as a national initiative will be able to demonstrate what works best to close the gap for Indigenous children and young people. By so doing, the SSNPs as a component of national effort will be better placed to contribute critical understandings to the national reform agenda. Indeed, this was an important original intent for the SSNPs.

The issue of attendance was the subject of considerable commentary in the context of engagement in learning and in the context of literacy and numeracy attainment, especially by principals and teachers during the school site visits. Invariably, the observation was made that no matter the extent of school progress in making the school and the classroom a more attractive and engaging learning environment and to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes, and no matter the extent of attempts to be inclusive of families and inclusive of the local Indigenous culture, attendance rates overall remain unacceptably low. As such, they compound educational disadvantage arising from other contextual factors.

School leaders and staff, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, very substantially identified the complexity of the causal factors to be so great as to be beyond the capacity of the school alone to resolve. Indeed, many participants in the National Evaluation observed that teachers did not have the skills or the resources to deal with the

*“We are making progress, we’re getting better at understanding the things that work, although I think there should be more sharing of good practice to close the gap. ... there is still a long way to go. Attendance is the major issue that is holding us back. Some of our brightest kids are poor attendees. There is a need for more resources if attendance is going to be tackled. The classrooms here are great, the staff are doing a terrific job. But attendance is a hurdle just too high for us, it’s caught up in a whole lot of family and community attitudes and behaviours. The sanctions aren’t working, often they’re not applied in spite of the evidence.” Principal of a site visit school*

issues, and even that it was improper for them to attempt to do so. As teachers, their focus must be the quality of learning in the classroom. There was generally acknowledgement that short-term “carrots”, often in the way of small rewards, “wear thin” over time and may actually compound the problem by sending a message that the purpose of coming to school is not to learn but to receive a reward, with little if any intrinsic value.

Evidence from the National Evaluation suggests that through the National Partnerships there is now potential to build a range of understandings about the outcomes required in order to close the gap. While the National Evaluation evidence suggests the domains, dimensions and characteristics of these outcomes, it is coordinated evaluation under the auspices of the SSNPs that has the greatest potential to ‘capture’ the breadth and depth of understandings required. While such a finding may have implications for current work under the auspices of the SSNPs, there are also likely to be implications for possible future national effort.

With a rich national base of evidence arising from cohesive and coordinated evaluation effort, there would be capacity to build understandings in quite discrete areas related to improving and sustaining the learning outcomes of Indigenous students. The following, as examples, point to the potential offered by nationally coordinated evaluation under the auspices of the SSNPs in the policy area of closing the gap. The National Evaluation evidence:

- indicates that outcomes in the ‘pre-conditions’ domain are of critical importance in contributing to closing the gap. The SSNPs are pointing to aspects of the approaches, structures and arrangements that appear essential if these outcomes are to be achieved. There is a need to leverage from understandings and emerging structures under the auspices of the SSNPs to consider the reforms required more broadly for the outcomes to be achieved comprehensively.
- suggests the critical importance of paraprofessional work to close the gap in educational outcomes for Indigenous children and young people. The evidence suggests that effort to expand and strengthen pathways into teaching for Indigenous people should be complemented by effort to strengthen paraprofessional capacity so that the teacher-paraprofessional relationship brings to bear the suite of knowledge and skills required for learning engagement and sustained progress, especially in literacy and numeracy. There is a need to more fully understand the circumstances and factors associated with current success in this regard and to work through the broader implications.
- suggests that there is scope for a much more substantial base of knowledge about the approaches and practices that would underpin the capacity of Indigenous students within the upper proportion of the performance spectrum to achieve even higher levels of attainment.

The entitlements of Indigenous students in this proportion of the cohort are as powerful as they are for all students in the upper end of performance. Indeed, these entitlements are just as powerful as they are for Indigenous students across the full performance spectrum. An underlying theme in this regard, represented in the framework and in the program logic, is around performance expectations across the full Indigenous student cohort.

The National Evaluation evidence indicates instances where approach, structure and practice are enabling Indigenous young people, across the full performance spectrum, to meet increased expectations and to achieve improved levels of performance. The work and focus of National Partnership schools where this is occurring should be comprehensively understood,

contributing to the broader knowledge that is required for the national policy imperative of closing the gap to be realised.

## Conclusion

Across the SSNPs, it is possible to identify a national body of evidence with potential to be highly informing of the approaches and practices that can contribute to closing the gap. In particular, work being done to develop new staffing structures and models of service delivery indicate the importance of moving away from approaches and practices that have proven insufficient to close the gap, and that may have exacerbated it.

The outcomes-based framework derived from the evidence in the National Evaluation suggests that there is scope to better structure and implement a line-of-sight from the SSNPs to the closing the gap reform. The intermediate, or contributing, outcomes embedded in the framework potentially provide a nationally consistent measurement basis to assess and report progress in the SSNPs towards that reform.

Moreover, the domains and dimensions in the framework point to the areas in which comparative information is needed from within the jurisdictions to understand the approaches and practices that contribute most to the outcomes that close the gap. In a nationally coherent approach to evaluation across the SSNPs that engages the jurisdictions, evidence gathered about the comparative efficacy of approach and practice leading to achievement of the framework outcomes would have potential to provide critical understandings for future jurisdictional work in closing the gap. At a national level, these understandings could contribute substantial evidence about, and strengthen work related to, the closing the gap reform.

The evidence from the National Evaluation of the SSNPs points to the imperative for structures characterised by high levels of flexibility in resource allocations that have a clear line-of-sight to the learning outcomes of Indigenous students. In the evidence, too often it seems that the line-of-sight is from the funding to the activity, outputs and improvement alone. Funding and reporting within discrete national partnerships further inhibits jurisdictional scope to generate a clear line-of-sight to the reforms needed to close the gap.

The place of the SSNPs in the program logic indicates that their legitimacy and efficacy need to be seen in terms of the contribution made to sustained and continuous improvement in student learning outcomes and schooling attainments. For Indigenous children and young people, the legitimacy and efficacy of the SSNPs within the program logic resides in the extent to which the investment and the effort contributes especially to closing the literacy and numeracy and Year 12 attainment gaps. Beyond the immediate context of the SSNP initiative, determinations about legitimacy and efficacy need also to be seen in the extent to which achievements and understandings arising from the SSNPs contribute to the broader national reform agenda of closing the gap.

## CHAPTER 6: EVALUATION EFFORT<sup>16</sup>

### Introduction

The National Evaluation was asked to undertake an analytical overview of jurisdictions' evaluation effort in relation to the Smarter Schools National Partnerships (SSNPs). The analytical overview is intended to:

- provide a national picture of evaluation effort across the jurisdictions
- identify gaps in current approach and practice in evaluation effort
- provide a way forward to address the gaps.

A detailed national picture of evaluation effort across the jurisdictions is provided as a separate Paper, based on the desktop analysis undertaken as part of Phase 1 of the National Evaluation. The information provided in that Paper informs the discussion in this Report, complemented by other evidence sources.

The following section presents analysis of the evidence about the national picture of approach and practice in evaluation effort. Subsequently, there is commentary on the context in which evaluation within the SSNPs occurs, followed by an exploration of wider potential where jurisdictions have integrated evaluation into work under the auspices of the SSNPs.

From the evidence, an outcomes-oriented evaluation framework is constructed with potential to bring national coherence and consistency to the evaluation efforts of the jurisdictions. This evaluation framework has been developed to conform to the program logic proposed in Chapter 1 of this Report.

### Current approach and practice

Following is a summary of key findings from the National Evaluation evidence, insofar as a national picture of evaluation effort in the SSNP initiative is concerned.

- There is considerable diversity of reference to evaluation in the SSNP Agreements, such that there is no clear or coherent national view about evaluation within the design of the SSNPs. Indeed, in some Agreements there is no explicit reference to evaluation.
- Jurisdictional commentary indicates a diversity of views about the place of evaluation in the implementation of the SSNPs. These views are across a spectrum, from the identification of evaluation as an integral aspect of implementation of the SSNPs to a belief that monitoring to meet reporting requirements is sufficient.
- Documentation and commentary indicates that in most instances there is jurisdictional commitment to investing in some form of evaluation in discrete areas prior to or at the time of the conclusion of particular SSNPs.
- Evaluation planning effort at the jurisdictional and sector level includes instances where comprehensive evaluation plans have been developed, but also instances where no planning

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<sup>16</sup> This Chapter, with minor amendments, is also presented separately as the Report of the Analysis of Evaluation Effort in the Smarter Schools National Partnerships.

work has been undertaken or envisaged.

- In some instances, jurisdictions and sectors identify evaluation already planned in the context of system or sector strategic directions as sufficient to meet the purposes of evaluation of the SSNPs, given the extent of alignment that is perceived between the two.
- Where substantial planning of evaluation has been undertaken, with a comprehensive plan in place, there is potential for jurisdictional evaluation to inform cost-effectiveness decisions and to identify the higher-order implications arising from implementation of the SSNPs.
- Where substantial planning has been undertaken there is potential for jurisdictional evaluation to be outcomes-focused. Additionally, such evaluation has potential to provide understandings about the critical factors contributing to higher-order strategic impacts within the SSNPs. This compares with evaluation effort that is process and input/output focused.
- In some instances, there is jurisdictional recognition of the potential importance of evaluation within the SSNPs for informing future system or sector strategic priorities and directions. In others, however, there appears little recognition of this potential and no obvious current intent to harness it.
- Where jurisdictions have planned for evaluation, work to date has included:
  - dissemination of an evaluation overview to program leaders and to principals of National Partnership schools
  - evaluation of initial implementation activity
  - undertaking of case studies by system or sector personnel, although principally more oriented to monitoring than evaluation
  - the development of evaluation briefs, with contractual arrangements either entered into with external providers or currently being concluded
  - discussions with potential evaluation partners, including universities.
- Given the implementation time frames that are involved, it would not be expected at this stage that major jurisdictional evaluation work in the SSNPs would have been completed. However, with regard to the time frame for the LNNP in particular, it would be expected that summative work would be either explicitly planned to commence shortly or would be underway. While this is the case in some instances, it is not universal.

Most importantly, in light of the diversity of commitment, planning and views about evaluation within the SSNPs, there would appear to be only limited capacity to construct at a future point a national, evidence-based picture arising from jurisdictional evaluation effort. In turn, this may have implications for the capacity of the SSNPs as a national initiative to construct, from jurisdictional evaluation effort, nationally coherent understandings as a contribution to the national productivity agenda.

## The context

The program logic proposed and discussed in Chapter 1 provides the context within which the place of the SSNPs can be viewed as a contributing component initiative related to Australian education to address the national productivity agenda. Only by recognising the placement of the SSNPs in the context of that national productivity agenda can their purpose in a reform context be understood.

Where, for whatever reason, the SSNPs are perceived and implemented in a way that is disconnected from this agenda, the evidence suggests that a degree of inevitability attaches to their focus being no

more than largely quarantined ‘activity’ and ‘effort’. Moreover, when reference is made to the proposed program logic, such disconnection would mean only limited capacity to address appropriately, effectively and efficiently the goal contained in the program logic of “... *sustained improved educational outcomes for all students*”, at least insofar as that goal relates to students in National Partnership schools.

This context is an important one when consideration is given to evaluation effort within the SSNPs. As the program logic framework shows, a continuous evaluation and feedback loop should be central to the SSNP initiative. Evaluation, and the feedback loop, need to be integral to the design and implementation of the SSNPs so that a national base of evidence of practice can be developed from each SSNP and across the SSNPs. This base of evidence has relevance at student, class, school, system, jurisdiction and national levels.

The integration of high quality evaluation into implementation has two particular consequences. First, the evidence suggests that integration contributes to higher quality approach and practice through an informed feedback loop. Second, integration enables analyses to be undertaken so that understandings can be developed about the approaches, structures and practices required to sustain improvement and embed reform. From such evaluative work, built into the SSNPs, there would be substantially increased capacity to demonstrate the contribution of the SSNPs to achievement of “... *sustained improved educational outcomes for all students*”.

The discussion in Chapter 1 related to the dichotomy of improvement and productivity also illuminates the context within which the SSNPs are placed. In brief, for approach and practice in the SSNPs to contribute to the expectations established by the national productivity agenda as it relates to Australian education, jurisdictional work across and in the SSNPs needs to be placed within a productivity and growth-oriented conceptualisation.

As explored in that discussion, the integration into implementation of high quality and outcomes-oriented evaluation is necessary as the basis of choice-oriented decisions about alternative resource allocations. Such decisions are at the centre of achievement of the productivity and sustainability objectives of the SSNPs, essential to embed reform for sustained improvement. Importantly for the context in which the SSNPs operate, it is evaluation at this level that would assure the contribution of the initiative as a whole to the full and continuous cycle of the proposed program logic.

Such considerations suggest the importance of jurisdictions identifying and linking outcomes across the SSNPs, as well as identifying the outcomes for each SSNP. By so doing, there is a lifting of the outcomes to a strategic level where potential is strengthened for evaluation effort in the SSNPs to contribute to and inform a productivity and growth-oriented agenda. While instances of this are limited in current approach and practice, there is sufficient to suggest potential for a greater level of national coalescence than appears to be currently the case.

By way of illustration, it is possible to identify jurisdictional plans where work has led to the identification of overarching outcomes for the SSNPs as a whole. Such outcomes are stated as:

- increasing student engagement in learning pathways
- achieving improved student outcomes
- developing innovative schooling approaches and structures
- strengthening instructional school leadership
- identifying and broadening effective pedagogy

- developing community and family partnerships.

While evaluation around such outcomes has yet to be completed, instances of articulation and placement within jurisdiction evaluation plans indicates capacity for evaluation effort in the SSNPs more broadly to make an important contribution to the national productivity agenda.

The approach indicated through such plans is affirmed by both national and international reference. For example, in a recent review of evaluation and assessment in Australia, the OECD highlighted the importance of articulation between evaluation components and elements within approaches to evaluation.

*The process of developing an effective evaluation and assessment framework should give due attention to: achieving proper articulation between the different evaluation components (e.g. school evaluation and teacher appraisal); warranting (that) the several elements within an evaluation component are sufficiently linked (e.g. teaching standards and teacher appraisal); and ensuring processes are in place to guarantee the consistent application of evaluation and assessment procedures (e.g. consistency of teachers' grades).<sup>17</sup>*

Such a view of evaluation suggests that a multi-dimensional approach, as evidenced in instances of jurisdictional evaluation plans that have been developed as a key aspect of work under the auspices of the SSNP initiative, is necessary for higher-order analysis of evidence to occur. The National Evaluation evidence indicates that conceptualising a multi-dimensional framework against the intended outcomes of the SSNP initiative provides potential for jurisdictions to understand progress and achievements in the context of the reform intents of the SSNPs. The evidence also indicates that the approach provides potential for a national picture to be developed, constructed from a coherent view of the work of the respective jurisdictions. Such an approach extends well beyond the monitoring and reporting of activity and outputs.

## Comprehensive evaluation plans

In instances where jurisdictions have developed comprehensive evaluation plans, such plans have typically been part of the work undertaken to develop the SSNP implementation plans. Thus, the approach suggests recognition from the outset of the SSNP Agreements that implementation and evaluation needed to be closely linked, with an appropriate funding level from within the SSNP and co-investment budget. Implementation and evaluation are perceived as complementary and the relationship as iterative. This is in marked contrast to other approaches where the evidence suggests that evaluation has been attached to the implementation plan only at a later point, or has yet to be attached.

While such evaluation plans vary, they include at least some of the following features:

- identification of evaluation as necessary to understand progress towards and level of success in attaining the reforms, beyond output monitoring
- identification of the areas of strategic importance in which evaluation will occur, linking the

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<sup>17</sup> The Review of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Australia forms part of the OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes, a project conducted between 2009 and 2012 ([www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy](http://www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy)).



SSNPs and the jurisdictional priorities or strategies

- indication of the key areas of research within planned evaluation
- establishment of the key research questions
- identification of the key measures
- identification of the key methodologies to be employed, enabling both qualitative and quantitative data to be gathered and analysed
- commitment to arrangements that involve contracted, external and independent evaluation.

Within such evaluation plans, there can be delineation between jurisdiction-level evaluation work and evaluation responsibilities that will be fulfilled at the sector level. Another approach is to distinguish between evaluation focused on each of the SSNPs and quite specific evaluation work at the program level within a particular SSNP. Additionally, the evaluation plans can point to the responsibilities that exist at the local and school level for evaluative work to be undertaken.

The evaluation plans suggest jurisdictional interest in undertaking evaluation so that maximum value is derived from the synergies and alignments that have been identified across the SSNPs. Thus, in one of the plans there is identification of the outcomes areas that are perceived as linked across the SSNPs.

Interestingly, where such evaluation plans are in place, the evidence shows that there are quite sophisticated governance arrangements for the SSNPs. The arrangements provide a strategic level decision making forum, are cross-sectoral, have been maintained since the inception of the SSNPs and establish a direct line-of-sight to the State or Territory Minister. These arrangements cover: planning; implementation; monitoring; evaluation; and, reporting. From the evidence, it is clear that jurisdictional evaluation commensurate with the high stakes of the SSNPs is intrinsically part of and arises from a high quality governance structure. Equally, it appears that without this structure, the probability of strategically placed, outcomes-oriented evaluation is reduced considerably.

Where developed, evaluation plans appear to be working as a catalyst for well-structured evaluation effort. They are providing a set of explicit purposes for the effort. They have a critical role in focusing the effort towards outcomes and attainment of the reforms, not monitoring. They place a value on the evaluation work to be undertaken because of its whole-of-system contribution. They illuminate the importance of leveraging from work in the SSNPs to achieve whole-of-system outcomes.

Where evaluation of initial implementation has been undertaken and concluded, there has been a strategic evaluation plan in place. Where comprehensive evaluation briefs have been developed, with contractual arrangements in place or imminent, there has been a plan in place. In instances where no such plan is in place, it is difficult to identify in the evidence the catalysts that will generate investment in evaluation. Where such catalysts may exist, too often they appear to be limited to a committed individual or small group, challenged by how to embed evaluation into the core work of the SSNPs.

## A possible evaluation framework

There are several critical aspects of SSNP work that require an element of evaluation. In student outcomes and classroom practice, there is a common emphasis on data analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of learning progress and practice. In performance management and devolution of decision-making, there is an evaluation aspect underlying directions and focus areas. In classroom practice areas, there is implicit formative evaluation built into the work of coaches and instructional leaders. In analysis of the efficacy of processes and approaches commissioned by the various jurisdictions, there is a requirement for evaluation as the basis for data gathering and judgements.

While not part of the ITQNP, evaluation processes are being established as the basis of accreditation of teachers against standards.

In all, work in the national reform agenda requires evaluation to be included at various levels, and be focused on judgements needed for decisions to be made from the student and classroom through schools and sectors to the jurisdictions. Yet, the evidence from the National Evaluation indicates, at best, an *ad hoc* approach to evaluation nationally. At worst, substantial gaps are indicated that could undermine the potential value of the SSNPs in their role to generate a national body of knowledge.

This knowledge could be seminal to: improving the literacy and numeracy outcomes for all Australian students; ensuring that that students from low socio-economic status communities engage in learning pathways to a Year 12 or equivalent attainment; closing the gap for Indigenous students; and, ensuring achievement of reform objectives of the teacher quality agenda.

That said, analysis of the evidence of the planning and work being done among the jurisdictions does enable a conceptualisation to emerge that may provide a coherent national evaluation framework across the SSNPs, shown in Figure 18 below. The constructed framework that emerges from the evidence places the role of ongoing formative evaluation at the centre of the program logic provided in Chapter 1.

Further, it should be noted that the framework aligns closely with that recently proposed by the OECD<sup>18</sup>, which noted the need for an evaluation and assessment framework covering student assessment, teacher appraisal, school evaluation and system evaluation. However, from the National Evaluation evidence, the framework is extended through the addition of two new dimensions.

Consistent with the evidence in relation to improving teacher quality discussed in Chapter 2, one dimension provides clarity about responsibilities for both the supply and demand side of professional teacher quality. Providing an evaluation element in both supply and demand responsibilities acknowledges the separate but interactive roles to be played ‘by the profession for the profession’ in the establishment and maintenance of professional standards, and by the employers for the highest levels of student outcomes performance. The evidence for this dimension is strongly based in the Interim Evaluation of the ITQNP.

The other additional dimension recognises the need for an infrastructure of evaluation as a basis to analyse and share findings and judgements among all jurisdictions. This dimension responds to the National Evaluation evidence suggesting the desirability of a nationally coordinated and agreed approach to evaluation across the SSNPs. This additional dimension recognises the practical reality that the Australian education system is made up of eight jurisdictions and twenty-four systems and sectors, with the Australia Government adding another level of complexity across the system. In a partnership sense, the identification and sharing of evidence-based findings across the jurisdictions strengthens both jurisdictional and national capacity.

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<sup>18</sup> The Review of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: Australia forms part of the OECD Review on Evaluation and Assessment Frameworks for Improving School Outcomes, a project conducted between 2009 and 2012 ([www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy](http://www.oecd.org/edu/evaluationpolicy)).

**Figure 18: A possible outcomes framework for nationally coordinated evaluation**

Dimension	Outcomes
<b>Evaluation of student performance</b>	Assessment and diagnosis of literacy and numeracy outcomes at student, class, school sector, jurisdiction and overall national levels are universally embedded practice. There is a national bank of assessment items against the benchmarks, levels and standards of literacy and numeracy in the national curriculum. Students are able to access the national item bank of literacy and numeracy questions online in an adaptive testing process, with immediate feedback about performance and diagnosis provided to the student and the teacher. Both overall performance analysis and diagnosis of key learning issues in literacy and numeracy are the purposes of the student-level evaluation processes. Data systems are established at school, sector and national levels to gather, clean and analyse student level literacy and numeracy performance records and to provide findings to all levels. While all analysis is based on unit level records, only at school and class level are data identified.
<b>Evaluation of teacher quality</b>	Teachers are regularly assessed against the <i>National Professional Standards for Teachers</i> to establish and maintain their status. For registration, the assessment process involves submission of proof against established criteria, verified by the principal. For accreditation at more advanced status, the assessment process includes an element of external moderation of class practice. Data about the number of teachers across the various standards is published as a national reflection of teacher quality. There is regular evaluation of the standards to ensure they are appropriate, challenging and internationally comparative. There is regular evaluation of the processes of registration and accreditation to ensure they are engaging the profession in continuous improvement of teacher quality to the highest international standards.
<b>Evaluation of best classroom practices</b>	University partnerships are in place to facilitate action research and evaluation that establishes clearly the links between classroom practices and literacy and numeracy learning outcomes. The evaluation process covers all levels and aspects in the national curriculum and judgements are made against the curriculum standards. Effectiveness of approach and practice is established for all levels of the performance spectrum. There is a national clearinghouse of key findings from these evaluations, with an ongoing formative meta-evaluation providing regular and current updates of evidence based best practice to the profession. The best current practices are used as the judgement bases in registration and accreditation, professional learning focuses on teacher skill and knowledge against those practices, and performance management processes ensure they are embedded in all classrooms. Formative evaluation elements are included in each of these aspects.
<b>Teacher practice evaluation</b>	While the profession has evaluation processes for registration and accreditation against professional standards, systems and sectors have evaluation processes to ensure their teachers have the highest levels of skill and knowledge needed to constantly improve literacy and numeracy learning outcomes. The evaluation processes provide an evidence base to ensure high levels of knowledge about literacy and numeracy as well as of effective pedagogical practices across the entire learning range. Through partnerships with higher education and regular involvement of research staff in classrooms, a coordinated evaluation approach is in place to gather and record information about the approaches occurring in classrooms. For teachers, the information contributes to performance management processes. For schools, it becomes part of the school review process. For sectors and systems, it becomes part of the overall performance review process, informing such procedures and professional learning provision and the reallocation of resources to achieve improved student outcome performance. Performance management, school review and system review are intrinsically linked as a coherent evaluation process.
<b>School evaluation</b>	Regular school review and performance management processes are universally in place to assure best practice and ongoing improvement in every school. School evaluation takes into account the student and school-level information provided in each of the evaluation processes noted above. This information is supplemented with other qualitative information from teacher, student and parent surveys and interviews that explore especially issues of student engagement, student learning and classroom practice. School evaluation, supported externally and updated annually, informs the school strategic and action plans, supports resource allocation and reallocation decisions, identifies key staffing needs and underpins school professional development programs.
<b>Partnership evaluation</b>	Each jurisdiction has access to the full range of information arising from the evaluation levels above. As a partnership for reform, key findings from these evaluations are shared nationally in an ongoing national action research approach at organisational level. Supported strongly by an international panel of researchers, the information is analysed and papers developed to inform the changes necessary in culture and structure to reform system and school operation. The aim of this reform is to achieve sustained improvement in literacy and numeracy learning outcomes across the full performance spectrum. National sharing of best practice and cost effectiveness analysis is used as needed to underpin jurisdictional decisions about resource reallocation to embed improvement. This ongoing and grounded process provides an outcomes-oriented base for regular national evaluation of the overall Smarter Schools National Partnerships approach and operation to address the national productivity agenda.

## Implications

Considered against the framework, there is a number of areas in which evaluation within the SSNPs could be strengthened and where identified gaps could perhaps be closed, even at this stage of their implementation. These include the following.

- The program logic suggests the centrality of an evaluation and feedback loop within the SSNPs. There is a need for evaluation to be integrated with implementation of activity so that understandings are continuously gained about progress in fulfilling the program logic. By the jurisdictions ensuring the integration of implementation and evaluation with a reform outcome focus, there will be capacity for a clear line-of-sight from their work to reform. Consequently, this will provide a basis for a national picture to be formed about the extent to which activity and effort within the SSNPs across the jurisdictions contributes to the reform envisaged under the national productivity agenda.
- Consideration should be given to the implications of the National Evaluation evidence suggesting that there is a set of critical outcomes within and across each of the SSNPs. Account should be taken of the recurring theme in the evidence that jurisdictional evaluation would have been strengthened and made more prominent if these outcomes had shaped an agreed outcomes-oriented evaluation framework that all partners worked within.

Account also should be taken of the recurring theme in the evidence that such a framework is needed for national understandings to be formed about the overall contributions of the jurisdictions to the reform intents of the SSNPs. Moreover, without such a framework, the evidence indicates very limited capacity to extrapolate from the activities and efforts of the jurisdictions to a coherent picture of the contribution of the SSNPs to the national productivity agenda.

- In agreements amongst the partners, there should be identification of an explicit place for a nationally coordinated approach to jurisdictional evaluation within the SSNP initiative. Consideration should be given to the work required amongst the partners to develop a coherent and nationally consistent evaluation framework that will guide jurisdictional evaluation effort and provide a context for the gathering and presentation of their evidence and findings with national implications.

The framework above, based on evidence from the National Evaluation, may provide an entrée into this work. As a first step, this could be a brief for a working party of the National Partnerships evaluation sub-group reporting to the National Partnerships Implementation Working Group (NPIWG).

- Consideration needs to be given to the National Evaluation evidence indicating that evaluation effort to date is largely disparate and uncoordinated, arising in large measure from the lack of coherence in how the various elements and components of the SSNPs are perceived at the jurisdictional level. It is true that the National Partnerships were designed with flexibility to empower schools and jurisdictions to develop local solutions and approaches. Nevertheless, 'good works' and a focus on input provisions such as programs without logical and coherent attachment to an outcome framework is likely to be insufficient to move beyond improvement to reform.

That evaluation activity to date generally has been tactical and oriented to monitoring rather than coordinated and strategic has been exacerbated by the activity focus in Agreements,

implementation plans and reporting requirements. In order for evaluation to be effective, there is a need to identify the linkages that would enable a holistic and reform focused perception of the various elements and components.

For example, in the ITQNP there is a need for linkages to be made between evaluation and assessment elements such as performance management, teacher appraisal, school review and the efficacy of professional development activities. Similarly, there is a need to demonstrate a link between evaluation approaches related to teacher quality, efficacy of classroom approaches and practices, and student learning outcomes. At the jurisdiction level, there is a need for greater focus on the critical links between cost-effectiveness evaluation and resource allocation decisions to inform planning to secure the reform intents of the SSNPs.

- Evaluation evidence points to the desirability of work being undertaken by the partners to identify and extend nationally agreed measures of outcomes within the SSNPs. The evidence-based frameworks that have emerged from the National Evaluation have potential to provide a focus for these measures.

Consideration could be given to the development of key nationally agreed measures that the jurisdictions could apply so that, in critical outcome areas of the SSNPs, there could be a consistent picture of progress and impact. Further, such work may enable a richer contextual understanding of the contribution of the SSNPs to national reform than is being provided by current measurement approaches, especially the reliance on NAPLAN.

The evidence in the National Evaluation shows that the design of the SSNPs as a national partnership initiative has taken insufficient account of the potential for jurisdictional evaluation to show a national picture of outcomes. A design focused on activity and effort has acted to limit understanding about the critical importance of coordinated evaluation of outcomes integrated into implementation. As a consequence, the gaps in current or planned effort are so substantial that no confidence can be expressed that the SSNPs have capacity to provide national understandings about the meaning of the outcomes achieved across the jurisdictions.

Consideration of the evidence shows that this need not have been the case. Within the evidence from the National Evaluation, instances can be identified where substantial and sophisticated planning has been undertaken. In these instances, there is potential for jurisdictions to understand progress under the auspices of the SSNPs, the outcomes achieved and the contributions of the SSNPs to reform.

Beyond this immediate jurisdictional value, such work has potential to be highly informing of the national picture both as it relates to the SSNP initiative and to the national productivity agenda. The challenge is to broaden such approaches and structures, perhaps through a nationally coherent evaluation framework. By so doing, there would then be capacity to identify and demonstrate across the jurisdictions the contribution of the SSNPs to reform and the true value of the national investment made through them.

## Conclusion

As indicated in the analysis of the evidence, there is a very considerable diversity across the jurisdictions in approach and practice related to evaluation. At one level, the evidence indicates a plethora of effort, albeit approached in markedly different ways, with practices equally as varied. While within this effort there are instances of what would be broadly recognised as 'evaluation', in other instances what is proposed as 'evaluation' is in fact more akin to monitoring activity. No matter

how enthusiastic or committed is effort around monitoring, such effort cannot be regarded as constituting evaluation.

The issue of a lack of a coherent view about evaluation within the SSNPs is a recurring theme across the evidence. It is not possible to identify across the jurisdictions a coherent view about evaluation in the context of the SSNPs. This lack of coherence is apparent in the various understandings held about requirements and expectations for jurisdictional-level and/or sectoral level evaluation planning and commitment as part of SSNP implementation plans. It is apparent in the differing views held across the jurisdictions about the level and nature of effort that is necessary to account for their outputs and outcomes, with instances where program monitoring is proposed as sufficient. The lack of coherence is apparent also in the evidence where there are instances of uncertainty about whether the cost-effectiveness of the SSNPs at the jurisdictional level will need to be demonstrated, and if so, how this can be done.

The challenges involved in the evidence about evaluation effort are considerable. However, there is sufficient indication within the National Evaluation evidence that, into the future, there is scope to design and embed a comprehensive and nationally consistent approach to evaluation. The evidence suggests that consideration should be given amongst the partners to how this would be established and advanced. For any work that is attached to change in key areas of Australian schooling and is attached to a national productivity agenda involving reform, it is imperative that evaluation provide a central reference point of understanding beyond the monitoring and reporting of activity and outputs.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

### Key findings

As a national initiative to contribute to important and fundamental areas of Australian education, the Smarter Schools National Partnerships (SSNPs) are meeting with success. In this, account should also be taken of their potential through continuing work to build on achievements to date. The evidence is compelling that the national partnership model is an effective one to engage governments in shared endeavour while at the same time according jurisdictions the flexibility they require to fit work under the auspices of the SSNPs with their priorities.

The National Evaluation shows that the SSNPs have generated a substantial level of activity and effort and are extending the work of jurisdictions in critical aspects of Australian schooling. In National Partnership schools, it is possible to identify progress and improvement in areas including classroom practice, student engagement and closing the gap for Indigenous children and young people. Each of the SSNPs is highlighting the central importance of teacher quality, confirming the national imperative for reform attached to the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership (ITQNP). Indeed, across the jurisdictions, there is evidence for recognition of the need for reform in the areas addressed by the SSNPs, with the view expressed that in some critical aspects reform is long overdue.

Analysis of evidence from the National Evaluation points to the need for the development and articulation of an explicit program logic. This program logic needs to place the SSNPs within the context of the national productivity agenda and to provide scope for the clear identification of the intended contributions from the SSNPs to that agenda. Importantly, such a program logic framework would enable a better understanding across the jurisdictions of the reform intents of the SSNPs, lifting focus above improvement through activity and increased output.

When evidence from the National Evaluation is tested against the constructed program logic, it indicates that activity and effort within the SSNPs does not always have sufficient line-of-sight as a basis for contributing to the national productivity agenda. Across the evidence, it is possible to identify a theme that activity and effort within the SSNPs is often narrowly defined and predicated on expectations of ongoing additional funding to maintain what is occurring in National Partnership schools. Such narrow definition, and seeming disconnection from the reform intents of the SSNPs, limits the value of the national investment in them as instruments contributing to reform.

That said, the National Evaluation points to instances and areas of success, indicating progress towards reform. In such instances, the SSNPs are acting as a catalyst for jurisdictions to address the reforms required for sustained impact on student learning outcomes and teacher quality. In these instances, there is an emerging delineation between the notion of improvement and the concept of reform. There is recognition that the reform intents of the SSNPs must drive activity and effort towards reform, rather than seeing activity and effort as ends in themselves. The evidence shows that, in these instances, issues associated with sustainability are prominent. Reform provides the opportunity to develop the structures and processes that will embed ongoing improvement. Such evidence provides the basis for the program logic required to link the SSNPs to the national productivity agenda.

### Teacher quality

The National Evaluation evidence highlights the centrality of teacher quality in each of the SSNPs. There is broad recognition that work within each of the SSNPs can only be truly effective if it

contributes to and is derived from teacher quality. In a very substantial way, therefore, the ITQNP is the facilitating National Partnership for the SSNP initiative as a whole. The attainment of its reform intents will be critical to the capacity of the SSNPs as a national initiative to contribute to the national productivity agenda.

The evidence shows broad endorsement of the various reform elements that constitute the structure of the ITQNP. Both the facilitation and the reward reforms are perceived as appropriately placed within a teacher quality initiative and as providing potential to contribute to and complement jurisdictional work. The evidence shows, in a range of instances, that jurisdictions are taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the ITQNP to build on and extend current strategies and programs. In each of the reform element areas, it is possible to identify considerable activity and, in some cases, substantial progress in terms of outputs.

However, the National Evaluation evidence highlights some fundamental issues that warrant consideration as work continues in the ITQNP and as there continues to be national engagement with the teacher quality agenda. Account should be taken of commentary in the National Evaluation evidence that the design of the ITQNP has potential for a much more coherent view of the reform intents and their line-of-sight to the national productivity agenda. In some instances, jurisdictions are attempting to create this coherence and line-of-sight for themselves, arguing that these should have been intrinsically built into the ITQNP design and should have been articulated nationally through the Agreements.

Account also should be taken of the critical importance of work in relation to standards of professional practice in the context of the teacher quality agenda to which the ITQNP contributes. Indeed, this is one of the facilitation reform areas. However, the evidence suggests that there is very considerable scope to develop and articulate an explicit connection between the work of AITSL in this area and the ITQNP.

This connection needs to be beyond creating, through trial projects, additional teacher positions in a relatively small number of schools. The connection should reflect the power of the research evidence that the engagement of teachers in building professional structures is fundamental to successful reform. The ITQNP provides a potential platform for this engagement, but that potential has yet to be recognised and realised sufficiently. There is scope within the ITQNP to give a greater profile to the potential place of the *National Professional Standards for Teachers* to support a shift from seniority-based remuneration to competency-based remuneration, thus connecting the teacher quality agenda to teacher practice. The potential power of the national imprimatur accorded by the ITQNP should be recognised, given the complex array of administrative and industrial challenges implied by such a move.

Because the ITQNP links with work in the other SSNPs, its potential to impact teacher quality is greater than is perhaps envisaged. By connecting a standards-based approach into work in National Partnerships schools in literacy and numeracy, improving educational outcomes for students from low socio-economic status communities and in closing the gap, it would be possible to demonstrate the connection between professional standards, quality teaching and improved student outcomes. The research literature suggests that this connection is an imperative, as also does evidence from the National Evaluation.

The ITQNP is highlighting emerging work to identify the respective responsibilities of the supply and demand sides of teaching and to connect them around the teacher quality agenda. This work is potentially highly significant in the context of the reform intents of the ITQNP. It is demonstrating in



particular instances that teacher quality can be embedded when structure and remuneration on the demand side align with and utilise the professional standards and processes related to status determination and attainment.

Where this work is occurring, the instrumental facilitation reforms of the ITQNP are essentially being lifted to a strategic level to contribute to whole-of-system reform. In the context of the ITQNP, this strategic approach to teacher quality should be seen as an exemplar dynamic. The approach reflects the research literature showing that embedded teacher quality is achieved through whole-of-system reform, not instrumental and target-oriented activities. While such instances are limited, their emergence from the ITQNP demonstrates its potential to stimulate, build understandings about and carry forward approaches to teacher quality across the jurisdictions that will be truly reforming.

It is important that continuing work in the ITQNP engages with the evidence-based conceptualisation that has emerged from analysis against the program logic of the SSNPs. This conceptualisation could constitute a road map for future work within the ITQNP that brings the various elements together at the critical point of focus, the teacher in the classroom.

## Classroom practice

The National Evaluation evidence shows broad endorsement of the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership (LNNP) as an instrument contributing to the improvement of student literacy and numeracy outcomes, especially in the lower end of the performance spectrum. This endorsement stems in large measure from national awareness of the evidence demonstrating the relative decline in the outcomes of Australian students both nationally and internationally.

The evidence indicates success in impacting classroom practice through stronger instructional leadership, collaboration involving coaches and tutors, partnership arrangements with higher education providers, skill development in the area of data analysis and the promotion of a culture of teacher inquiry. Evidence suggests an increased emphasis on developing teacher capacity for explicit instruction so that all students can acquire and apply foundational skills and knowledge in literacy and numeracy. The concept of automaticity in this foundational learning appears to have increased focus as a consequence of work under the auspices of the LNNP.

In a number of jurisdictions, approach within the LNNP has involved providing access for teachers to a range of endorsed literacy and numeracy programs. A strength of this approach is that teachers are able to base their work around programs developed through a base of evidence and can be confident about the general veracity of their content, methodology and orientation. However, the National Evaluation evidence suggests that such an approach cannot substitute for teacher knowledge and decision-making. Importantly, the evidence indicates that usage of these programs does not always encourage a strong culture of teacher inquiry around classroom practice and does not necessarily contribute to the levels of professional collaboration that underpin quality practice.

The evidence points to a number of considerations arising from the LNNP. These include especially issues associated with sustainability of activity and effort. To a considerable extent, the various approaches involve the provision of additional support for the teacher. Most typically, this additional support is in the form of expert coaches, appointed from within the school staff or recruited to work in school clusters. In other instances, highly accomplished and lead teachers positions have been established to support higher levels of classroom practice.

However, such positions, and the support they provide, are mainly dependent on the additional funding provided through the LNNP. In the evidence, there is acknowledgement that the positions are

unlikely to continue past the life of the LNNP. This evidence reinforces the imperative attached to understandings gained through the ITQNP that higher status positions, directly linked to classroom practice, need to be expanded and embedded in professional classroom structures.

The National Evaluation evidence is clear about what is needed across domains and dimensions for continuous improvement in literacy and numeracy learning outcomes. It is possible to construct this evidence into an outcomes framework to guide approach and practice in support of literacy and numeracy teaching and learning. While this framework can be potentially powerful at the school level, account needs to be taken of the evidence pointing to the system-wide reform that is essential to impact and transform classroom practice for all students.

Moreover, the constructed evidence-based framework for improved literacy and numeracy learning outcomes may provide a basis for a nationally cohesive road map to guide and measure progress towards reform. This should be seen in the context of commentary in the National Evaluation evidence about the distorting impacts of the use of NAPLAN as a measure of progress towards reform. The intermediate outcomes in the road map potentially provide a cohesive set of structural goals at key points in the journey towards reform. Measurement against these goals will enable a national picture to be developed of progress in the work required for the attainment of higher levels of student performance in literacy and numeracy, sustained beyond the current life of the LNNP.

## Student engagement

The National Evaluation evidence shows a high level of valuing of the additional funding provided through the National Partnership for Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities (Low SES NP) that enables schools to address a range of factors impacting the learning outcomes of students. To a considerable extent, the Low SES NP is viewed as a continuation of government commitment represented in previous programs that have supported schools serving low socio-economic status communities.

From the evidence, it is apparent that there is a very substantial level of activity in National Partnership schools to more fully engage students in their learning and to build the approaches and practices that will underpin the connection of children and young people to school and their engagement in learning. Indeed, the area of student engagement is the dominant theme in the National Evaluation evidence for the Low SES NP.

The evidence indicates that the Low SES NP, by its placement alongside other SSNPs, is supporting a focus on issues of student learning in literacy and learning. The evidence in this regard suggests a degree of crossover work between the Low SES NP and the LNNP that is contributing to a range of improved approaches and practices. Similarly, it is clear that work within the ITQNP is having implications for the Low SES NP.

These implications are seen in the importance National Partnership schools attach to quality teaching, classroom practice and attracting and retaining the highest quality staff. In a number of National Partnership schools, innovative work is emerging around constructing a staff mix, covering both professional and paraprofessional positions, which provides greater capacity to engage all students in learning pathways leading to success. There are instances where potentially highly informing work is taking place to develop classroom-oriented staffing structures that build on the status provisions of the professional standards.

Indeed, the centrality of the teacher quality agenda in these schools is evidenced by explicit work in relation to building instructional leadership, strengthening pedagogies so that foundational skills and

concepts in literacy and numeracy are achieved, and promoting the importance of teacher collaboration and inquiry. Additionally, evidence points to schools participating in partnerships with higher education, involving research and evaluation as a basis for data provision to inform response and practice.

The evidence also suggests that, in a number of instances, work within the Low SES NP is enabling the clearer defining of the role of the school in the community. Schools are setting and articulating expectations of enrolment, attendance, engagement and performance commensurate with national norms. By so doing, they are affirming the place of the school as a centre for learning and the place within and from which, pathways to attainment are created and maintained. In this way, the work of these schools is impacting community self-identity and the expectations that are held by families.

Through the Low SES NP there is also emerging work around community-based partnership structures and arrangements that extend responsibility for the wellbeing and connection of children and young people across agencies, groups and families. There are instances where jurisdictions are leveraging from the Low SES NP to build structures and systems around schools that increase their capacity to engage with the community and families in the achievement of improved learning outcomes. These co-located structures and systems include the notion of the school hub, extended service delivery, new educational leadership arrangements and early learning connections. Such work has a broad base of responsibility, including but extending beyond the school through the partnership arrangements.

While there is evidence for success, this is not universal through the National Partnership schools. Consideration could be given to some areas where implications suggest the full potential of the Low SES NP is not being realised. The evidence indicates that, in a number of instances, approach and practice remains deficit-oriented and that the opportunities provided through the Low SES NP to build capacity at the individual student level are neither identified nor responded to. There is also evidence to indicate that activity and effort is little changed from that seen in previous national programs for schools serving low socio-economic status communities.

While improvements can be identified in a number of schools, on the whole, there is little evidence that reform is taking place. Moreover, generally there is little understanding of the reform intent of the Low SES NP and no view about it other than as a source of additional funding. Such evidence suggests the implications that have arisen for jurisdictions and schools through there being no reform-oriented structure in the design of the Low SES NP, limiting capacity within it to create the innovations and new models of service delivery that would increase productivity.

That said, analysis of evidence from the National Evaluation indicates a possible framework of domains, dimensions and outcomes that could inform and guide work within the Low SES NP. The framework may provide an entrée into and an understanding of the outcomes that would constitute the basis of reform. Moreover, the explicitness of the outcomes within the framework may provide an opportunity for understandings to be gained about progress towards meeting the reform objectives. Such a framework, aligned with the other frameworks constructed from the National Evaluation evidence, may contribute to the shift that is needed from a focus on activity and supplementary support, to a focus on capacity building and higher levels of student attainment.

## Closing the gap

Across the SSNPs, there is a considerable diversity of activity and effort directed at closing the gap for Indigenous children and young people. The SSNPs together are providing an important catalyst to give grounded reality to the closing the gap imperative. Within each of the SSNPs, the evidence highlights

an explicit focus on and commitment to work that will connect with, engage and build the learning skills and knowledge of Indigenous students as a basis for improved learning outcomes.

The evidence highlights a diversity of instances in a range of contexts where connection, engagement, increased skills and knowledge and higher levels of attainment are visible and celebrated. Indeed, in these instances, however limited in number they may be, there is a sense of enthusiasm and optimism at levels perhaps not previously seen. While the issues remain daunting in many instances, and while the gap remains a troubling reality, the evidence shows that there are instances where progress is being made. Consequently, where this progress is occurring, there is demonstration of potential for wider success in national effort to close the gap.

The evidence shows that a range of critical factors must be prominent as underpinnings for progress towards closing the gap. Amongst these factors, the evidence suggests that one of the most important is concerned with the expectations that surround Indigenous children and young people. These expectations, articulated and reinforced positively, are that all students can learn within the context of the jurisdictional or the Australian Curriculum and that their learning pathway within that curriculum will be successful. There are expectations that the learning performance of Indigenous students will be commensurate with national norms, as reflected in NAPLAN and Year 12 or equivalent attainment.

These expectations are made legitimate by jurisdictions, schools, teachers and communities, ensuring that they are associated with the structures, processes and resources required so that all Indigenous students can meet them. The evidence indicates that progress in closing the gap is occurring where these expectations are associated with concurrent work to ensure the quality of teacher practice in classrooms, strong instructional leadership, a staffing structure that is well resourced, highly flexible and responsive to local needs, and the provision of sustained professional and personal support to guarantee staff quality and continuity.

In this regard, the importance of reform-oriented work within the ITQNP cannot be underestimated when consideration is given to what is required to close the gap. Similarly, the innovations and reforms within the LNNP and the Low SES NP provide leverage and support within schools to close the gap. However, the innovations and reforms in those SSNPs provide no insight into how the complex issues associated with the school attendance rates of Indigenous children and young people can be impacted, and how that impact can be sustained. While the National Evaluation shows considerable effort is being invested to improve attendance rates, in large measure the evidence also shows that resolution of the issues resides outside the remit of schools and responsibility for it needs to be more widely accorded. Unless it is addressed with greater overall effectiveness than is currently the case, desired national improvements in literacy and numeracy outcomes for Indigenous children and young people, and the policy commitments involved, will inevitably remain illusory.

Evidence from the National Evaluation indicates that, especially in remote Indigenous communities, there are precondition areas within which schools should work in partnership with community agencies for learning connection, engagement and success. These areas include early years support so that the early developmental years provide a foundation for future formal learning and so that families can take their place as first teachers. Another relates to enrolment and attendance, so that resources are directed to ensure that each child or young person of compulsory school age is enrolled at school and attends on every school day.

From the National Evaluation evidence, it is possible to construct a framework of domains, dimensions and outcomes to guide and inform work within the SSNPs to close the gap. This framework needs to be seen as directly connected to the other frameworks that represent the implications of the evidence

from the National Evaluation across each of the SSNPs. As for each of the SSNP outcomes frameworks, the closing the gap outcomes framework provides a potential road map to inform and guide the work required to ensure that the outcomes of Indigenous students move consistently towards the performance norms of all Australian students.

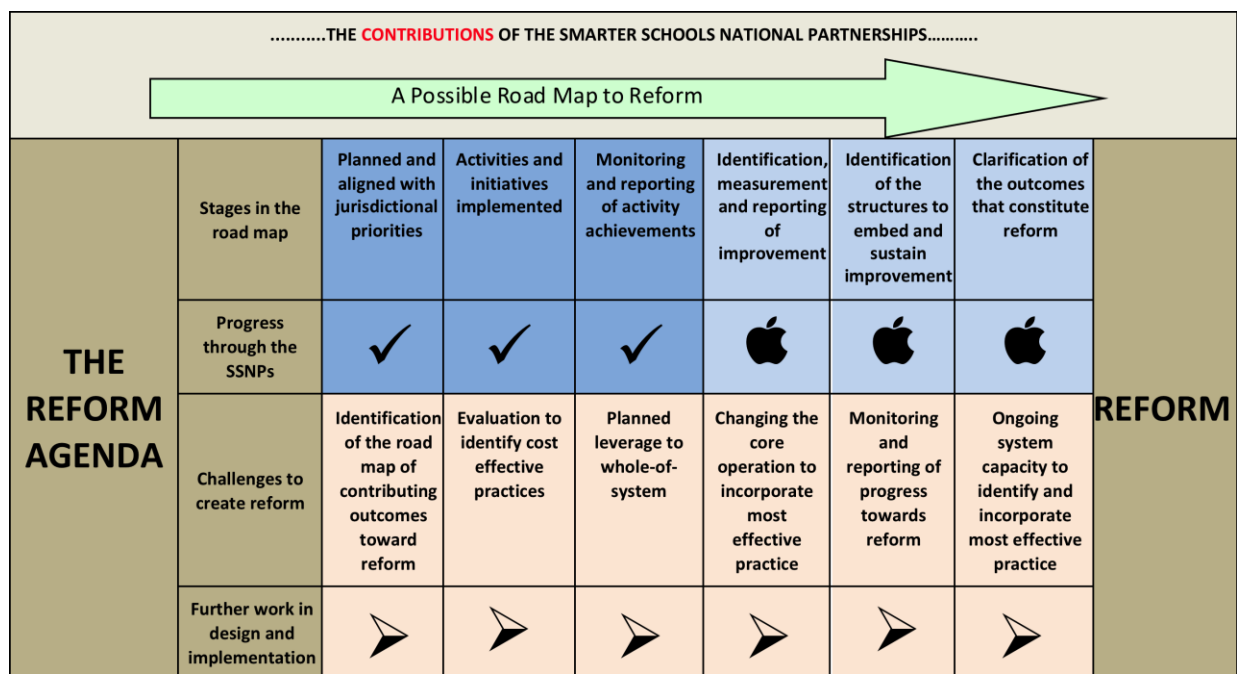
### Evaluation effort

Evidence from the National Evaluation shows that, across the jurisdictions, there is a diversity of approach and practice in relation to evaluation. This applies to both the SSNPs as an overall national initiative and to each of them individually. Approach and practice can be placed on a spectrum, from work that involves comprehensive planning to a view that monitoring of activity and output for reporting purposes is sufficient. Within the SSNPs, it is not possible to identify a nationally coherent view about, or structure for, jurisdiction-level evaluation.

Consequently, consideration could be given to the likelihood that there is limited capacity to develop a nationally coherent, evidence-based and outcomes-focused picture of the contribution of jurisdictional work under the auspices of the SSNPs to the national productivity agenda. Yet, analysis of the evidence from the National Evaluation suggests that even at this stage in the implementation of the SSNPs, it is possible to construct the outline of a nationally coordinated evaluation framework. Such a framework may act as a catalyst to accord jurisdictional evaluation appropriate prominence within the program logic of the SSNPs. Moreover, such a framework may enable the SSNP initiative to identify, from a strong base of evidence, the reform progress made in contributing to the national productivity agenda.

### Road map to reform

**Figure 18: A possible road map to reform**



The SSNPs have been successful in terms of the nature and range of activity and effort that can be demonstrated from the investment. They are acting as a critical catalyst in priority areas of Australian schooling. In jurisdictions and in schools there is a discernible sense of enthusiasm and renewal

emanating from the SSNPs. Across the SSNPs, activity and effort are contributing to increased learning attainments in National Partnership schools.

This level of success is apparent in the ticked boxes in Figure 18 above. It is also apparent in the improvements generated in the next three boxes, and especially in the identification of key areas for reform that would not have been possible prior to the work in the National Partnerships. While shown in the Figure as only partially achieved and not yet explicitly attained, the evidence in the commentary surrounding the National Partnerships is the key source of data to identify the future reforms deemed essential to embed the productivity agenda that will continuously improve the outcomes of all Australian children.

In the light of the reform intents of the SSNPs, there are challenges around how current work can be more explicitly directed at the reform intents across and within the SSNPs. Informed by the implications of the widely endorsed national and international research that underpins the reform intents of the SSNPs, it is timely to strengthen and make more explicit the capacity of the SSNPs to contribute to the national productivity agenda.

An aspect in this regard could be work to develop a nationally coherent approach to address the reform intent of the SSNPs. From the National Evaluation evidence, the multi-layered and interconnected outcomes-based frameworks have potential to contribute to a coherent view of work within the SSNPs, providing a line-of sight to reform. The teacher quality agenda, represented in the ITQNP but extending to each of the SSNPs, provides the potential foundation of coherence for the SSNP initiative as a whole. It is the National Partnership through and from which the critical reform intents of the SSNP initiative as a whole can be achieved to a substantial extent.

The program logic for the SSNPs and the outcomes frameworks that stem from it can build on the distance travelled to date to provide a 'road map' towards achievement of the reform intents of the SSNPs. Together, they show a pathway that articulates the potential contribution of the SSNPs to the national productivity agenda. Such a 'road map' is shown in the 'challenges to create reform' in Figure 18.

From this road map, it is possible to conceptualise the system-wide reform required in Australian education to improve the learning outcomes of all students. Progress and achievement within the SSNPs, considered in the context of their defined contributing brief, points to the potential power of embedded reform to transform productivity across the Australian schooling system and, thereby, contribute to the national productivity agenda.