

SUMMARY OF APPROACHES TO GOVERNMENT SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY IN AUSTRALIAN STATES AND TERRITORIES

(October 2006)

This summary paper presents the major features of approaches to government school accountability in Australian states and territories. For a more detailed account reference should be made to the *Overview of Approaches to School Accountability, Improvement and Review* paper.

All government schools in Australian states and territories have a school accountability process in place and the underlying principles of school accountability are very similar. There is flexibility within each state and territory approach to school accountability to accommodate a range of schools and school populations.

Terminology is noticeably different, however, the common elements established in Australian government school accountability processes include:

- School accountability framework
- School plan
- School self-assessment
- Annual school report
- School review

Cuttance (2005:5) concludes that 'most systems allow schools flexibility in how they present school plans – a guided approach rather than prescription is the norm.' Schools in South Australia (SA) use a template format for their site plan. Tasmanian schools use a template to produce their Partnership Agreement however their School Improvement Plan (SIP) is school determined. Non-mandated templates for the School Plan are available in SA and Victoria. Differences are evident in the extent to which parents and the community are involved in school planning.

Different school self-assessment tools and rating scales are used to measure a school's performance. All states would be using their population based testing programs for the purpose of assisting school self evaluation. In some states such as Victoria tools for parents and teacher surveys are mandated as part of the review process. Victoria has recently introduced a mandated template for school self-evaluation and SA is piloting a self review template in 2007.

Only Western Australian (WA) and Australian Capital Territory (ACT) schools, after undertaking a school self-assessment determine a judgement about their performance, ACT – five point scale (Aspiring, Developing, Functioning, Achieving and Excelling), WA – (Effective/ in need of intervention and support).

Schools in Tasmania, New South Wales (NSW), ACT and Northern Territory (NT) conform to a mandated template for their annual report. A report template is available in SA and Victoria but is not mandated for schools to use. Currently, WA and Queensland have flexibility when producing annual reports however the report does reflect the guideline requirements outlined in their respective accountability frameworks.

School review cycles vary. Two yearly – WA; three yearly – ACT, NT, Queensland and SA; four yearly – Tasmania and Victoria. During their cycle WA is the only state to base its review on cumulative visits from the district directors.

The ACT has an external review process in place and SA and NT are moving towards this model.

Victoria has a differential review model based in the performance of schools. Reviews may be either negotiated, continuous or diagnostic. The continuous and diagnostic reviews involve accredited external school reviewers.

In NSW the internal reviews are linked to evidence which suggests attention may be required. Within Queensland a review by exception is also a part of the internal process.

A number of states now allow external accreditations to be undertaken by organisations such as the Council of Internationally Accredited Schools (CIAS).

At this point in time WA, SA, NT and Tasmania are undergoing reviews of their school accountability processes.

Western Australia

The intended outcomes of the WA school accountability framework relate to: manageable processes; school ownership and continuous improvement; and local and wider community confidence.

The framework has four major components: schools plan, schools self-assess, schools produce a school report, district directors review schools.

School plans are produced in partnership with the school council. The format of the plan is flexible.

Schools self-assess on an annual basis in relation to student outcomes and school effectiveness. The review is based on the eight key outcomes outlined in the School Review Framework: improving student performance; teaching and learning; learning environment; leadership; management of staff; finance and physical resources; relationships with the community; and the school response to the strategic directions in the Plan for Government Schools 2004 – 2007. Effective schools engage in self-assessment and improvement processes to improve student performance. At the completion of the self-assessment process, schools make a judgement that they are either Effective or in need of intervention and support.

The school report, written annually, provides the school community with information about the school's performance. Broad requirements to be included in the report are specified in the framework.

The school review is undertaken by the district director and provides an independent verification of a school's analysis of its performance and practice; and advice on strategies for improvement. The school review is based on ongoing professional interactions between the district director and the school over a two year cycle rather than a one off event.

The school accountability framework is currently under review.

South Australia

A new framework for school improvement and accountability is currently under development. Standards, self review, improvement planning, external review, intervention and support; and performance reporting are the key elements included in the framework. The document *DECS School/ Preschool Improvement and Accountability Framework, Draft for Discussion, May 2006* provides details of the proposed framework.

Schools will produce a three year site learning plan which is in a template format and an annual operational plan. The plan will be approved by the governing council and endorsed by the district director. It will then be updated annually as part of the site's evaluation and review process. A non-mandated template is currently being developed for school planning.

Schools will be required to monitor their performance using a range of system and school based performance indicators.

Self review will be an essential component of the new framework, occurring annually. The self review is based on nine principles: focus on learning; think systematically; share leadership; attend to culture; listen and respond; make data count; set direction; target resources; and continuously improve. Schools will be supported with this component of the framework using the self review tool which is currently under development. In 2007 selected SA schools will pilot the tool, with a view to the tool being mandated for schools to use in 2008.

An annual report will be required and a proforma report is available. The use of the report proforma is not mandatory for schools.

An external review of school performance will be undertaken. The first step in this process will be the analysis of centrally held student performance data to create a comprehensive overview of the organisation's performance. Schools will then be identified for external review. Selection will be influenced by performance information, local or corporate requests and/ or accreditation in a particular focus area of specialisation. External reviews will have a strong diagnostic focus to direct ongoing improvement (DECS, 2006). SA schools involved in the external CIAS accreditation program, currently large high schools, will be exempt.

The level of intervention and support for each reviewed school is dependent upon the school's particular circumstance and identified areas for development. The Department of Education and Children's Services will provide the necessary systemic support.

Northern Territory

The *DEET School Planning and Accountability Framework* is the means for bringing together school planning, assessment, evaluation and reporting to provide visible and objective evidence of current school performance and the strategies for building improved learning opportunities.

The school plan is developed by the staff and school council on an annual/ biannual basis in alignment with the framework.

Schools assess their performance against objectives and performance indicators set in their strategic plans.

All schools complete the mandated School Annual Report on line. The annual report is a template and guidelines are provided. This report is the main instrument for providing school performance information. The report is aligned to seven core elements: targeted student outcomes; key stakeholder perceptions/ expectations; staff performance; staff development; school policy and procedures; governance; and school strategic plans.

External school reviews are not part of the current Department of Employment, Education and Training policy however a three yearly cycle of external validation is proposed. The process for the external review is yet to be determined.

Tasmania

The *School Improvement Review Guide 2004* is currently under review and Tasmanian schools will be moving to a new school improvement review cycle in term 3, 2006. Presently the key

principles of the Guide include: focus on teaching and learning; evidence-based reflection; explicit requirements; accountability; and clear responsibility.

A Partnership Agreement via a template format must be finalised by the end of the first year of the review cycle. A School Improvement Plan is developed in the second year of the review cycle. The format of the plan is determined by each school.

Evidence-based reflection is based on mandated surveys and audits; and a range of data gathered by schools from a variety of sources. This leads to a review of the School Improvement Plan in the third and fourth years of the cycle.

A system template is provided for the annual report which includes details of targets set, progress towards achieving the targets, student achievement, participation and access. A negotiated review plan is prepared by the principal in collaboration with the Branch Director in the year prior to the school review.

Victoria

The *Accountability and Improvement Framework for Victorian Government Schools 2007* includes a four year planning and review cycle and an annual cycle of implementation and reporting. The planning for the four year School Strategic Plan is supported by a series of Annual Implementation Plans based on student outcomes, operations and practice; and resources. The Annual Implementation Plans operationalise the key improvement strategies of the School Strategic Plan. A template is available for schools to use.

Schools collect and monitor their progress across a range of student achievement and school management performance data and provide this to the Department. The Department produces a School Level Report based on school performance data. This report provides the key source of performance data across the accountability framework.

All schools must undertake school self-evaluation. A self-evaluation report template is mandated. Surveys for teachers and parents are mandated elements of the self-evaluation. A year 5 – 7 student survey is also available but is not mandated. The self-evaluation report is forwarded to regional, central office; and the school reviewer.

Following the school self-evaluation the school undertakes review. A differential model of school review is in place and the level of the review – negotiated, continuous or diagnostic, is based on the performance of a school. Regional directors determine the type of review a school will undergo. Negotiated reviews involve a 'critical friend', while continuous improvement and diagnostic reviews are undertaken by accredited school reviewers.

The annual report to the school community summarises progress made by the school against the School Strategic Plan and the Annual Implementation Plan. A template is available for schools to use.

The intention of the move to the provision of templates for components of the Accountability and Improvement Framework is the belief that school discussion will become more focussed and enhanced.

New South Wales

New South Wales has ten regions and within each region the director has a significant degree of autonomy.

In each region there are between two to five School Development Officers (SDO's). The SDO's role involves a wide range of activities that include school reviews undertaken as part of the *New South Wales Department of Education and Training School Development Policy 2004*.

Four elements are included in the school accountability and development model for NSW government schools:

- Annual school self–evaluation
- Annual school reporting
- School reviews; and
- Systemic monitoring and reporting

The principal, staff and parent representatives participate in the self-evaluation process. The process includes reporting of progress in achieving both state wide and school priorities, assessing strengths and weaknesses and determining improvement targets and priorities. Schools are supported with the self-evaluation process by district office and school improvement staff. Every school produces an annual report within a set framework and a template is available from the Education Department. There is an annual cycle for the school plan, self-evaluation and the school report.

A school review occurs when there is evidence to suggest attention may be required. School reviews are not part of a mandatory cycle. There are three degrees of reviews:

- Educational Support Team (lowest review level) – to assist schools develop a program within the school.
- School Program Review – to assist schools improve a program within the school.
- School Management Review – to assist the school to improve its management.

The school review is always focussed (eg: student welfare, a department in a secondary school, literacy in a primary school). Generally the evidence that leads to a review comes from the testing programs. Student welfare based reviews come from data such as suspensions, attendance, incidents and complaints.

The size of the review team varies though it is usually three to four members which include the SDO and specialist personnel. School reviews are conducted for three to five days.

School reviews of this nature have been undertaken for several years in NSW, with approximately eighty across the system yearly, though very few were conducted in the period when the ten regions were first introduced. The review program is gaining momentum though it is dependent on the support and priority given by each regional director.

Australian Capital Territory

The *School Improvement Framework - Guidelines for School Improvement (2004)* identifies the core business of schools: learning and achievement. The four dimensions included in the framework are: Learning and Teaching; Student Environment; Leadership and Management; and Community Involvement. The framework supports schools with monitoring student achievement; measuring school domains; making judgements about the reliability and validity of these measures against a five point rating scale; and planning for improvement.

Planning, assessment and reporting occur annually. The Tool for Self Assessment of School Domains and the Curriculum Self Assessment Tool resource are used to support the assessment process. The school improvement cycle is three years and external validation occurs in the third year of the cycle. An external panel makes judgements about school performance and progress towards, and achievement of, identified targets in the school plan.

The School Board has responsibility for preparation of the School Board Annual Report which is presented in a standard template format. The report is provided to parents, school staff and the Chief Executive Officer.

Queensland

The *School Improvement and Accountability Framework 2002* provides the integrated framework for Education Queensland schools to achieve and sustain the vision of *QSE 2010*. The objectives are learning, schools, workforce, school services and portfolio relationships.

The framework incorporates a three year school review cycle which requires a triennial school review and strategic planning overview cycle. An annual School Planning Overview or Partnership Agreement is developed in consultation with the school community.

The triennial school review cycle entails self-assessment of the school's performance against outcomes, performance indicators and targets. The school self-assessment provides evidence and information about the achievements of the school over the past three years. The process requires that school self-assessment and the planning documentation are verified by the Executive Director (Schools). A Review by Exception, an internal process, may be undertaken in response to significant and changing circumstances; and if there is uncertainty about the school's direction and achievements.

As from May 2006, schools in Queensland that successfully gain accreditation through the external CIAS program are exempt from the triennial school review.

Schools produce an annual report which is based on the guidelines of the framework. From mid 2006 the report must be available on the school website.

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APPENDIX OVERVIEW OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESSES IN AUSTRALIAN STATES AND TERRITORIES (October 2006)

		WA	SA	NT	TAS	VIC	NSW	ACT	QLD
Accountability Framework		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
School Plan	School Determined	•	• (Template available)	•	• SIP	• (Template available)	•	•	•
	Mandated Template		• Site Plan		• Partnership Agreement				
School Self-Assessment/Review	School Determined Tools	•	•	•	•	•	•		•
	System Mandated Tools				• Best Practice Indicators • Surveys	• Surveys		• School Domains • Curriculum	
	Mandated Template format		• Self Review Tool (2008)			• Self Evaluation Template (2007)			
Annual School Report	School Determined – guidelines from Education Department	•	•			•			•
	Template Format		• Not mandated	•	•	• Not mandated	•	•	
Review	System / Internal	•			•	• Negotiated	• Selected		•
	External		•	•		• Continuous Diagnostic		•	