HIGH EXPECTATIONS, CLOSING THE GAPS

School excellence

School excellence is at the core of all work in public education across NSW and our focus on continuous school improvement. It encompasses all areas of school planning, ongoing self-assessment, reporting and external validation.

The School Excellence Framework supports all NSW public schools by providing a clear description of the key elements of high-quality practice across the three areas: how children learn, how teachers teach and how schools are led.

The School Excellence Framework is based on a review of national and international practice at the system, school and classroom levels, and includes the National School Improvement Tool developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research. It meets an obligation under the Commonwealth National Education Reform Agreement for each state and territory to implement a model of school improvement that includes standards for delivering high-quality education.

Schools develop their own plans by consulting with their communities to create a shared vision. They then self-assess and report annually on their progress using the School Excellence Framework. The framework helps schools make informed and consistent judgements when self-assessing their progress and provides the basis on which schools have their self-assessments validated by an external panel within a five-year cycle.

In 2015, all public schools across the state undertook their first self-assessment using the School Excellence Framework and will report their progress using the framework to their communities. A representative sample of 89 public schools also participated in a pilot of the external validation process. Feedback from the pilot will be used to inform the process for the first cycle of validations of every school across NSW, which will commence in 2016 and be completed in 2020.

Ensuring the safety, welfare and wellbeing of our students

The Wellbeing Framework for Schools was released in May 2015 and takes a strengths-based approach to enhancing student wellbeing. The framework supports schools implementing overall positive approaches to wellbeing, along with more personalised approaches to individual need. A professional learning module on the framework was developed and released to principals to promote the new approach.

The Supported Students, Successful Students initiative was announced in March 2015 and provides a comprehensive package of support for public schools, along with an increased investment of $167 million over four years, to enhance the wellbeing of students in our schools. The initiative includes an additional 236 school counselling positions, scholarships to boost the recruitment of school counselling staff, additional wellbeing funding equivalent to approximately 200 student support officer positions, resources to support healing and wellbeing for Aboriginal students and their families, and support for refugee students who have experienced trauma.

The department has commenced recruitment of school counsellors and the promotion of initial scholarships as part of an initiative to increase the overall number of school counsellors.

The Positive Behaviour for Learning framework helps schools design systems and practices to provide safe, supportive and responsive learning environments in their own local context. In 2015, positive behaviour for learning teams were established within the four educational services teams to support schools implementing the framework. These teams have delivered professional learning modules with 843 schools since July 2015. An information package is available to engage schools in adopting this approach to learning and wellbeing.

Networked Specialist Centres bring together coordinated interagency health and wellbeing services through the expertise of specialist departmental staff, who also work in collaboration with other government and non-government agencies. This service enhances what is already available in schools to support students and their families and forms part of a networked service system. Twenty-one centres have been established in rural, regional and metropolitan NSW.
Our priorities: At school

The department’s Child Wellbeing unit continues to build the capacity of schools to respond to child protection issues. In 2014–15, the unit responded to more than 12,300 contacts. It worked in partnership with health, police, community services and non-government organisations to identify students who were most at risk and coordinated responses across agencies.

Supporting students with disability, learning and behavioural difficulties

More than 90,000 students enrolled in NSW public schools receive additional support or adjustments for learning because of disability. In 2015, every regular school received an equity loading under the Resource Allocation Model. The equity loading for low-level adjustment for disability provides schools with access to a specialist teacher and flexible funding based on need. It enables schools to respond in a timely way to the needs of all students, including those with or without a formal diagnosis of disability. In 2015, $239 million was allocated to schools to support the additional learning needs of students through the equity loading for low-level adjustment for disability.

In 2015, more than 2,700 specialist support classes were provided in regular and special schools, supporting more than 20,000 students. The department provided additional assistance for more than 7,800 students in regular classes through the Integration Funding Support program. More than 62,000 additional students were supported with specialist resources provided to NSW public schools.

The department’s specialist itinerant teachers supported more than 2,300 students with vision or hearing impairment. In addition, the Braille and Large Print Service continues to support more than 450 vision-impaired students.

In 2015, all NSW public schools participated in the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) on School Students with Disability for the first time. This captures the work of teachers in personalising learning and support for students with disability in consultation with their parents and carers. Students are counted in the NCCD where schools have evidence of personalised learning and support being provided. School data about students receiving personalised learning and support was provided by an electronic data recording system, developed specifically for the data collection.

Initiatives under the Every Student, Every School strategy have continued to focus on helping schools meet the needs of their students. In 2015, there has been a strong focus on building the capabilities of teachers in personalised learning and support for students with disability, learning and behaviour difficulties.

During 2015, 12,141 staff completed accredited training on the Disability Standards for Education 2005. More than 66,000 individual courses have been completed by school staff since 2013. These courses aim to strengthen understanding of schools’ obligations towards students with disability, as well as their parents and carers.

The department offers seven specialist tutor-supported online learning courses that address educational support for students with disability. This includes a new course introduced in 2015, which focuses on personalised learning and support for students with disability. More than 4,200 teachers undertook a course in 2015, representing 51,600 accredited training hours. More than 27,600 individual courses have been completed by over 18,000 teachers since their introduction in 2009.

Scholarships for teachers to undertake further tertiary study for students with disability continue to be offered through Every Student, Every School. Since 2012, the department has received 321 applications from teachers and executive teachers. Of these, 108 are current scholars and 119 have completed a master’s degree following sponsorship through this scholarship program.

The Personalised Learning and Support Signposting Tool (PLASST) was released to all NSW public schools to help teachers and school teams support students with additional learning needs. The unique student profile created by the PLASST assists teachers and school teams understand the strengths and needs of individual students. The PLASST student profile has also proven itself as an effective adjunct for conversations with parents and carers.

The department is actively supporting the transition of the specialist disability service system in NSW to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). This includes supporting the NDIS trial in the Hunter Region, the early transition in the Nepean and Blue Mountains that commenced in July 2015 and preparing for the broader transition, which commences in July 2016. The focus of this work is to ensure that schools understand the new system and are able to support students with disability though the transition to the NDIS.
Closing the gap in educational outcomes for Aboriginal students

The NSW Government is committed to closing the education gap between Aboriginal students and all students in NSW. The primary Aboriginal education goal of the department, stated in its Aboriginal Education and Training Policy, is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes to match or better the outcomes of the broader student population.

The department understands that the gap in outcomes between Aboriginal and other students can only be closed by working in genuine partnership with the Aboriginal community and continues to value and uphold its partnership agreement with the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.

In 2015, every public school in NSW with Aboriginal students enrolled received funding through the Aboriginal equity loading under the Resource Allocation Model. This helps support schools to meet the learning needs of their Aboriginal students, providing principals and school communities with the flexibility to develop and fund strategies tailored to suit the specific needs of their students. In 2015, $50 million was allocated to 1,980 public schools to support the learning needs of Aboriginal students.

In 2015, the department continued to implement Norta Norta to support the learning outcomes of Aboriginal students. Under Norta Norta’s National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) component, approximately 753 schools, including eight educational training units in juvenile justice centres, were funded to provide tuition support for 2,494 Aboriginal students. Under Norta Norta’s individual sponsorships component, 4,134 Year 11 and Year 12 Aboriginal students were provided with tutorial assistance. In total, approximately $16 million was provided to schools in 2015.

The department’s collaboration with the Clontarf Foundation continues to support Aboriginal boys through the establishment of a number of Clontarf academies in various locations throughout NSW. These academies aim to improve the education, life skills, wellbeing and employment prospects of participants.

The department continues to work with the Commonwealth and other states and territories to implement national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education initiatives. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy was endorsed in September 2015 and the department’s approach to Aboriginal education is consistent with its principles and priorities.

Connected Communities

Connected Communities is an innovative strategy to improve educational and social outcomes, particularly for Aboriginal students but also for all young people. It has been implemented in 15 schools in some of the most complex and diverse communities in NSW. At each site, Connected Communities schools work in partnership with local Aboriginal leaders and the community, putting schools at the heart of the community by positioning them as community hubs.

In 2015, Taree High School employed an Elder-in-residence who advises teaching staff and the Aboriginal Education Officer on local Biripi perspectives across all subjects. The Toomelah School Adult Learning Centre is now available to community members, for TAFE NSW courses and for the Centacare weekly parent support group. A wellbeing centre, based in Coonamble High School, provides a hub for the community and has led to an annual community wellbeing day, Warranggal.

Connected Communities involves tailoring programs to meet local needs. A school-based Local School Reference Group, chaired by the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, provides advice about
initiatives to strengthen partnerships between staff, students, local Aboriginal leaders and the community. Examples of local initiatives include:

- Wilcannia Central School has a Paakantji language program from preschool to Year 7, which includes trips on country.
- Bourke High School formed a healing team after all staff completed specialised trauma awareness training. Healing lessons are held weekly, attended by staff and students, Elders, community members and outside agencies.
- Coonamble Public School employed a clinical psychologist to work with students, staff and families on grief and loss, trauma and anxiety following concerns by the Local School Reference Group.
- Following extensive consultation and feedback, Moree East Public School trialled earlier starting and finishing times over 12 months to maximise student learning.
- An Education Field Day at Coonamble in September 2015 brought together staff, students and community representatives from all 15 Connected Communities schools and broader afield to share their experiences, showcase their work and discuss joint opportunities for future growth.

Now in its third year, implementation of the strategy has seen a range of improvements in the 15 schools. These include finalisation of school leadership and governance structures, improvements in student behaviour, increased focus on Aboriginal languages and culture in schools, the establishment of schools as service hubs, physical improvements in schools through capital works programs, a focus on early years and more positive transitions to school.

The strategy is being formally evaluated by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation. The 2015 interim evaluation reviewed progress to midpoint in the development of the strategy and found that since 2012, the attendance rate of Aboriginal primary students across Connected Communities schools increased by 2.6 percentage points. Over this period, the gap in attendance between primary students across Connected Communities schools and all primary students across NSW Government schools has closed from 8.9 percentage points to 7.7 percentage points (-1.2 percentage points).

In 2016, the department will focus on extending interagency support for the strategy, broadening the service hub model and the further rollout of the Connected Communities Healing and Wellbeing Model, aimed at bolstering counselling support.

The department will also aim to consolidate services to support teacher wellbeing and increase training and professional development opportunities for local Aboriginal people in community services courses.

**Supporting students learning English as an additional language**

Each year, public schools help to develop the English language proficiency of recently arrived students from language backgrounds other than English by providing English as an additional language or dialect education. In 2015, 1,250 schools received additional resources to support 145,000 students.

In addition, approximately 4,800 students received intensive English support through the New Arrivals Program, intensive English centres and the Intensive English High School.

In 2015, 2,854 refugee students in 396 primary and secondary schools were assisted through specialist teaching support and targeted support programs including homework and tutorial support, mentoring, career and transition support, and work-readiness programs.

More than 2,000 teachers and leaders participated in professional learning courses to help them cater for the needs of students in culturally diverse classrooms. A leadership program for 52 experienced English as an additional language or dialect teachers provided an opportunity for them to deliver professional learning in their schools and teacher networks. This helped increase the capacity of their colleagues to support the language and settlement needs of English language learners.

**Supporting students from rural, remote and disadvantaged communities**

The department has now been implementing the strategies in the Rural and Remote Education: A Blueprint for Action for two years. The blueprint is a detailed plan to improve student learning in rural and remote public schools across NSW.

Aurora College, NSW’s first virtual school, commenced classes in February 2015. The college offers a mix of online and residential school classes to public high school students in rural and remote communities across the state. The school is providing innovative and flexible learning in a whole new context by allowing students to connect locally and learn globally. Aurora students connect with their teachers and classmates in timetabled lessons through a cutting-edge virtual learning environment.
The college offers selective classes in English, mathematics and science to gifted and talented year 7 to 10 students from rural and remote areas across NSW. Application for entry is via the NSW selective high school placement process. The college also gives students in years 11 and 12 in public high schools the opportunity to study subjects not available in their home school. Aurora’s first Year 12 cohort will complete the Higher School Certificate in 2016.

In 2015, a specialist preschool centre in the Sydney metropolitan area provided ongoing professional learning and mentor support for distance education preschool teachers. Through video conferencing and reciprocal visits, teachers observed and were provided with access to quality face-to-face preschool classrooms that demonstrated best practice reflecting the National Early Years Learning Framework.

A Technology and Applied Studies leadership network has been established to provide mentoring and support to teachers in schools. Nineteen experienced leaders completed two days of training. Following this, they supported more than 65 teachers, many of whom are from isolated and rural schools where they are the only teacher in their subject area.

In 2015, the department led Kindergarten to Year 10 Working Mathematically workshops to support teachers in rural and remote locations. More than 150 primary and secondary mathematics teachers from 55 rural and remote schools participated in the workshops, building knowledge of syllabus content and effective teaching strategies.

The department initiated transition projects in mathematics and history, helping schools develop processes for transitioning students from primary to secondary school. The project teams have created strong collegial networks and created and shared quality assessment tasks and teaching programs.

In 2015, in response to the recommendation of the Pratley Review of Agriculture and Training in NSW, the department established seven lighthouse schools for teaching about agriculture and primary industries, providing mentoring and support to teachers and school leaders across NSW.

**Improving basic literacy and numeracy standards**

The Early Action for Success strategy is helping to improve the literacy and numeracy performance of students in the early years of school. In 2015, the number of schools taking part in the strategy increased from 199 to 310, supported by 224 instructional leaders. The schools regularly collect data and monitor student progress against the department’s literacy and numeracy continuums that map the learning development of students. Teachers and instructional leaders work together to tailor programs of learning for each student.

For the 195 schools that have been involved with the initiative for more than 12 months, the proportion of Kindergarten students at the lowest level for reading, comprehension and writing reduced from 57.9 per cent in February 2015 to 4.0 per cent in June 2015. For early number learning, the percentage of Kindergarten students not able to count to 10, identify numbers or count objects reduced from 22.5 per cent to 2.4 per cent over the same period.

In 2015, the department released the Numeracy Skills Framework. Copies were distributed to all primary and secondary schools in NSW, with further support available through the framework’s website. Online professional learning modules were also released to support the initiative.

**Encouraging students to stay in school and transition to further education, training and employment**

In 2015, the department provided $9 million to the Links to Learning Community Grants Program to fund NSW-based, not-for-profit, non-government organisations and local government authorities to deliver targeted projects to school students in years 6 to 11. Projects targeted students who had been identified as being at risk of disengaging with learning and/or leaving school early.

Forty-six funded organisations worked with more than 2,017 partner schools to develop innovative ways to keep students engaged in learning and remain at school. In 2015, the department also supported the seven schools within NSW juvenile justice centres to help young people make a transition, either back into school or to other post-school options.

To ensure that students have access to different avenues for education and training, the department allocated more than $2.76 million for students in years 9 and 10 to undertake vocational education and training courses. In 2015, there were 466 school-based apprentices and 2,636 school-based trainees in public schools across NSW. Trade skills centres, trade training centres and trade schools in more than 340 schools provided students with access to industry-standard training facilities. This encouraged more students to complete their schooling and helped to fill local skills shortages.
In 2015, the NSW Government committed $27 million over four years to fund the coordination of mandatory work placements for more than 40,000 public school students who each year enrol in vocational education and training courses as part of their Higher School Certificate. Procurement of work placement service providers for the next four years was completed in November 2015 in readiness for Term 1, 2016.

The department trained 53 teachers as transition advisers in 2015, bringing the total trained to 375 since 2005. These teachers help at-risk students engage with learning, plan their long-term goals and prepare for their transition from school. The department also allocated $2.9 million to support school-to-work activities and innovative, whole-school initiatives to ensure that students are able to establish the foundations for their future career pathways.

Improving student attendance

At the beginning of 2015, the department released a revised School Attendance Policy to provide more explicit information on school attendance requirements and processes for dealing with unsatisfactory attendance. The new policy and procedures strengthen understanding that attendance issues are often related to student learning and support needs and family issues. The documents provide advice on coordinating services with other agencies to better support children and families.

More than 115 home school liaison officers and Aboriginal student liaison officers received training in 2015 to ensure schools, parents and students receive expert support to resolve chronic non-attendance issues. The evaluation of the Keep Them Safe Child Protection Strategy published in 2015 indicated that the liaison officers were highly valued by schools and contributed to improved school attendance, student progress and attitudes to school.

Since 2011, there have been notable improvements on the attendance rates of students in years 10, 11 and 12, indicating that initiatives introduced following the raising of the school leaving age are having a positive impact.

In response to recommendations in the report, the department prepared reports on the destinations and expectations of school leavers. The 2015 report was published by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation.

The recommendation to undertake a literature review and an evaluation of the quality and appropriateness of career advice provided in government schools is close to completion. The University of Melbourne is expected to deliver the survey work and recommendations for the evaluation in March 2016.

Physical activity in government primary schools

The department has developed and implemented a variety of processes, programs and resources to address the recommendations made by the 2012 Auditor-General’s report, Physical Activity in Government Primary Schools, including:

- introducing a revised Sport and Physical Activity Policy that increases weekly mandatory physical activity for all Kindergarten to Year 10 students from 120 to 150 minutes and ensures each school must have a localised operating manual for sport and physical activity
- developing the NSW Physical Literacy continuum Kindergarten to Year 10, which identifies the knowledge, understandings, skills and attitudes regarded as critical to success in physical activity and maps the development of critical aspects throughout the years of schooling by describing key markers of expected student achievement
- developing the Physically Active Schools website, which provides schools and teachers with resources to implement quality physical activity in schools
- increasing practical and online teacher professional learning in sport and physical activity across NSW.

The department is currently investigating options to report physical activity to parents. This will ensure that all actions associated with the report’s recommendations will have been addressed.
QUALITY TEACHING AND LEADERSHIP

Strengthened initial teacher education

Great Teaching, Inspired Learning (GTIL) is the NSW Government’s plan to improve the quality of teaching in NSW schools. The department is progressively delivering a range of GTIL actions to drive quality, continuous improvement and high standards across all the crucial stages of a teacher’s career – from initial teacher education through to school leadership.

In 2015, the department entered into individual professional experience agreements with NSW-based initial teacher education providers to ensure high-quality professional experience in our schools and greater consistency in the placement process for both schools and universities. The agreements outline the key expectations, roles and responsibilities of initial teacher education providers, the department and NSW public schools in the implementation of professional experience placements.

In addition, 11 professional experience hub schools were established. These schools work with their partner university to develop, demonstrate and share high-quality professional practice. Materials are available to support teachers supervising professional experience placements and these agreements reflect the requirement for professional learning by these teachers.

Attracting and recruiting the highest-quality teachers

In 2015, 6,684 new applicants were approved to teach in NSW public schools and the department filled 3,497 classroom teacher positions. After incentive transfers and Aboriginal employment applicants were appointed, 59.7 per cent of classroom teacher positions were filled by schools using their chosen recruitment method.

In 2015, up to 50 teach.Rural scholarships, 20 cadetships and 20 internships were available under the GTIL reforms to attract the best and brightest into teaching. Forty-three applicants were offered a teach.Rural scholarship, 20 applicants a cadetship and 20 applicants an internship.

Under the Rural and Remote Education initiative, the department offers further incentives to attract and retain teachers and school leaders in hard-to-staff schools. In 2015, 56 classroom teachers, 22 executive staff and six principals were appointed through incentive transfers.

Since the introduction of the Teacher Education Scholarship program in 2002, 1,926 high-quality teachers, including 353 Aboriginal teachers, have been appointed to areas of workforce need. In 2015, 248 new applicants, including 75 Aboriginal students, were awarded a scholarship.

Incentive scholarships aim to attract high-quality graduates in their final year of study. In 2015, the department appointed 11 mathematics, three science (physics) and 11 special education teachers to NSW public schools. In 2015, 61 teachers completed their sponsored training in mathematics, physics, school counselling, special education and teacher librarianship.

In 2015, the NSW Government introduced new initiatives to encourage more students to study mathematics and science at the highest possible level at school. Over the next four years, 320 public school teachers will also have an opportunity to specialise in mathematics and science, increasing the supply of highly trained teachers to schools across NSW. Eighty scholarships are available each year to current teachers to study to become qualified mathematics and science teachers. In 2015, 80 teachers were offered a scholarship, with 49 teachers to retrain in mathematics and 31 to retrain in science.

The NSW Auditor-General’s performance audit, Management of Casual Teachers, examined the department’s effectiveness at managing the supply, availability and performance of casual teachers. Six key recommendations were given in relation to process and system improvements for enlistment and management of casual teachers. Four of these have been actioned and the remaining two are scheduled for implementation by the end of Term 1, 2016.

During 2015, the department implemented the Auditor-General’s recommendation to improve monitoring for a school’s ability to access casual teachers in order to determine whether additional assistance is required. A review of Casual.Direct requests from schools for a casual teacher during 2015 was undertaken and analysed to identify the top 20 metropolitan and regional schools that had a low success rate in filling vacancies.

The report’s recommendation on encouraging schools to provide feedback on the performance of casual teachers will continue in early 2016, with consultation involving the Primary Principals’ Association and the Secondary Principals’ Council. An initial report has been developed identifying schools that are high users of Casual.Direct services and also provide a low response rate to the existing performance feedback process for casual assignments.
Accreditation and professional development for our school teachers and principals

The department remains committed to the professional development of teachers to enhance quality teaching and learning in all NSW public schools. During 2015, the department continued to support improved induction processes and provide beginning teachers and their supervisors with targeted support under the GTIL reforms.

Permanent, casual and temporary teachers are able to access better induction support through Strong Start, Great Teachers, the department’s new online resource that provides a wealth of information to help schools create meaningful induction programs.

The department continued to provide funding for permanently appointed beginning teachers, to allow release from face-to-face teaching and the support of an experienced teacher to provide mentoring support. Release time was used for studies, coaching, mentoring and any other activity that supported professional development and attaining accreditation.

In 2015, $37 million was distributed to schools for beginning teacher support funding, $28 million for first-year payments and $9 million for second-year payments. In addition, temporary beginning teachers continued to be supported by eight teacher mentor positions, four in metropolitan and four in rural locations.

By 2018, all teachers will need to be accredited and will have five years (if employed full-time) or seven years (if part-time or casual) in which to demonstrate maintenance of their accreditation.

To support this, the new Performance and Development Framework for Principals, Executives and Teachers began operating this year, with the first performance and development cycle completed in December 2015. Teachers develop their goals and identify professional learning needs, focusing on achieving or maintaining accreditation against the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

A new website, Teaching Standards in Action, was also developed to provide clear, concise support for the teaching standards, highlighting critical messages and linking teachers to up-to-date, relevant policy information. The website and a suite of registered courses will be accessible by permanent, temporary and casual teachers in 2016.

Under the Quality Teaching, Successful Students initiative, the department will provide an additional staffing allocation for all NSW public schools with primary students enrolled. This will be used to improve the quality of classroom teaching. For example, the resource may be used to support mentoring and coaching for an individual teacher or collaborative practices in a school or across a number of schools. Funding began in Term 3, 2015, for 1,141 schools.

During 2015, the MyPL@Edu professional learning management system recorded 476,167 individual enrolments across 16,662 scheduled events for professional learning.

The NSW Government’s School Leadership Strategy was released this year, bringing together initiatives to identify, develop and support the current and next generation of school leaders in NSW public schools. In 2015, the department’s achievements under this strategy included:

- employing 50 full-time equivalent principals, school leadership to support leadership capacity-building for principals across the state, particularly focusing on school excellence
- delivering the Leadership Pathways online resources to provide professional development support for aspiring and current school leaders
- developing the new NSW Public Schools Leadership and Management Credential, for first-time principals; from 2016, all first-time school principals will be required to complete the credential and will be provided with a coach to support them for the first year of their appointment.
Recognising and sharing excellence in teaching

The department is committed to ensuring that excellence in teaching is recognised and rewarded.

From 2016, a teacher’s salary will be based on accreditation status achieved against the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. These standards identify the professional competence expected of all teachers, who must maintain their accreditation in order to successfully progress through standards-based remuneration. Teachers who achieve Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher accreditation will receive a salary in excess of $100,000. As at 31 December 2015, the department currently has 30 teachers with Highly Accomplished accreditation and 51 teachers with Lead Teacher accreditation.

The Rural and Remote Education initiative reimburses accreditation fees to teachers who spent 75 per cent of their time completing their accreditation in a rural or remote school. Since 2014, three teachers have claimed this reimbursement.

Local Schools, Local Decisions gives principals more opportunities for recognising and rewarding excellence in teaching. Schools may use their flexible resources to create additional executive or teaching positions that support the strategies identified in the school plan.

The department is also committed to ensuring that excellence in teaching is shared.

Under the GTIL reforms, the department has partnered with the University of Newcastle to conduct research on Quality Teaching Rounds in a number of NSW public schools. Twenty-four schools participated in this research to identify ways teachers can learn through observing the practice of others. The data collection was completed in Term 3, 2015, and the final report is being prepared by the university.

ClassMovies and ClassMovies TV provide avenues for schools to share their classroom practice with others. As at the end of 2015, nearly 600 schools have registered to participate, with 134 video documentaries produced and another 63 in production. There have been over 25,700 video views on the department’s ClassMovies TV site. To continue this collaboration, the department’s contract with the documentary provider has been extended to 2018.

Implementing the Australian curriculum

Through the development and delivery of professional learning resources, the department supports the implementation of the new NSW syllabuses for the Australian curriculum in English, mathematics, science and technology, history and geography.

In 2015, this included face-to-face workshops and SyllabusPLUS webinars. More than 4,530 NSW public school teachers have also participated in a range of online modules.

In 2015, the department developed a suite of professional learning and support for the implementation of the new Geography K–10 NSW Syllabus for the Australian curriculum. This includes syllabus familiarisation, courses that develop geographical knowledge and skills, ideas for planning a geographical inquiry classroom, as well as sample geography K–10 teaching and learning sequences developed and reviewed by teachers in a number of communities of schools.

NEW AND BETTER WAYS OF DOING BUSINESS

National Education Reform Agreement

As part of the National Education Reform Agreement, additional funding has been distributed to public and non-government schools in 2015 via a needs-based funding approach. The agreement signed by NSW provided an additional $5 billion between 2014 and 2019. Under the agreement, loadings have been provided to government schools with students who face additional educational disadvantage.

This investment by the NSW and Commonwealth governments will allow the department to extend and accelerate the innovative reforms already underway throughout the state. These include Great Teaching, Inspired Learning; the Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan; Local Schools, Local Decisions; the Rural and Remote Education blueprint; and Connected Communities.

Increasing local decision-making and reforming the way we finance and staff our schools

A key initiative of the NSW Government’s Local Schools, Local Decisions reform is the implementation of the needs-based Resource Allocation Model (RAM) for allocating funding to public schools. Based on identified student and school need, the model is fairer and more transparent.
Components of the Resource Allocation Model explained

1. TARGETED FUNDING

   INDIVIDUAL STUDENT FUNDING

2. EQUITY LOADINGS

   SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND
   ABORIGINAL BACKGROUND
   ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY
   LOW LEVEL ADJUSTMENT FOR DISABILITY

3. BASE SCHOOL ALLOCATION

   LOCATION
   SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES
   CLIMATE
   PER CAPITA FUNDING
   SCHOOL TYPE

The RAM includes a base school allocation, which is the largest component and reflects the core cost of educating each student and school operation. This is supplemented by equity loadings to address student needs in schools, as well as targeted funding for students with more complex learning and support needs. The RAM has been implemented in phases, with targeted funding and half the equity loadings released in 2014.

In 2015, schools received the remaining two of the four equity loadings through the RAM. These four equity loadings provide additional resources to address student need in schools, including support for Aboriginal students, students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, students with low-level disability, and students learning English as an additional language or dialect. Geographically remote or isolated schools also received a location loading in recognition of the additional support needed.

In 2016, the base school allocation will be delivered. The base includes enhanced professional learning funding and a new per capita allocation, enabling greater operational flexibility.

Improving our school facilities and infrastructure

The department continued to improve its teaching and learning environments through capital works and asset acquisition programs. In 2014–15, 12 public school major works projects were completed, with 22 major public school projects ongoing and a further 16 begun. Planning and design work for 41 projects was undertaken under the Commonwealth’s Trade Training Centres Program. Delivery of these will begin during the next financial year. The department also reviewed its asset planning approach to align it with the Department of Planning and Environment’s regions and districts, as well as updated its demographic projects.

The department began planning for major capital works projects announced under the Rebuilding NSW State Infrastructure Strategy 2014. It also began working on a School Assets Strategic Plan in response to the NSW Government’s commitment to invest $1 billion of Rebuilding NSW funds in school infrastructure. This investment will deliver the NSW Government’s Innovative Education, Successful Students package, which is expected to see new and upgraded schools designed as future-focused learning environments.
Planning has commenced on the Secondary Schools Renewal Program, which will improve the amenity and functionality at nearly 60 high schools.

The Educational Facilities Standards and Guidelines were successfully launched and are being used to create facilities able to support learning into the future. As part of the Resource Efficiency Program, energy performance contracts have been entered into for 28 of the least energy efficient public schools in NSW in order to reduce energy consumption. These projects have seen a reduction in energy costs of $550,000 per annum.

**Supporting technology and innovation in learning**

In January 2015, Microsoft Office 365 and Google Apps for Education were made available to all staff and students through their respective portals. This has provided a safe, managed environment where teachers and students can learn collaboratively. The department developed and published online resources and information to support teachers to make effective use of these online learning tools in the classroom.

In 2015, the department began to implement a new library system for all public schools. The Oliver library system will greatly improve the capacity of school libraries and teacher librarians to support effective student learning. More than 750 schools now have the system operating at their school.

The department continues to work with Education Services Australia in providing access to national online services. All staff have access to Scootle, a national resource discovery tool linking to more than 50,000 digital teaching and learning resources. Teachers and students also have access to the Language Learning Space and Improve, high-quality digital tools to support student learning. The department also continued to work closely with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission in the digitisation of its MoneySmart financial literacy resources.

The department continues to evaluate and trial new and emerging technologies and innovation in the classroom. Aurora College has participated in a pilot program using iSee technology to enable students in isolated locations to participate interactively in both the classroom and playground. iSee is a voice and video technology that emulates a face-to-face meeting and supports simultaneous conversations using live webcam videos and high-fidelity spatial audio.

In 2015, the college worked collaboratively with iSee to design three-dimensional immersive Aurora College environments, including a playground and college reception featuring a live video feed to the coordinating office, a lecture theatre, a teachers’ lounge and a multipurpose centre. In these spaces, users are able to move freely and naturally about the environment and engage in conversations with individuals or groups, much like they would in a physical space.

The Futures Learning Unit, which became operational in August 2015, drives innovation in learning and teaching and leveraging flexible learning spaces and technology. A number of professional learning events, including Design Thinking for Leading Learning and Flexible Learning Spaces by Design, have taken place in 2015 to build teacher and principal capacity to transform teaching practice.

The Integrated Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) project provides secondary schools with the opportunity to evaluate teaching and learning practice, with the aim of improving student learning in STEM subjects. Overall, 150 teachers from 28 schools across NSW were involved, with teachers planning and collaborating across faculty areas to develop and implement integrated units of learning across mathematics, science and technology. This project is helping teachers to change the way that science and mathematics are taught, by introducing project and inquiry-based learning. The illustrations of practice will be shared with schools across NSW via a STEM website. Teaching programs, resources and videos will all be made available on this website.

**Improving administrative and information management systems**

The Learning Management and Business Reform (LMBR) program is one of the largest public-sector business reform programs in Australia, with a major technology component at its core. The program’s central aim is to support the NSW Government’s broader reform program and deliver improved educational outcomes and services to school communities.

Now in its final stage, LMBR is preparing to deploy finance, student administration and learning management solutions to nearly 2,000 remaining public schools during 2016 and 2017.
Our priorities: At school

The deployment, training and change management approach developed during 2015 for this implementation incorporates the many lessons learned from earlier deployments. This work is being reviewed and validated by experienced school staff, including staff from the 229 pilot implementation schools.

A number of detailed external program reviews were carried out over the past 18 months. Among these was the NSW Auditor General’s 2014 Report – Performance Audit of the Learning Management and Business Reform Program, which examined the program’s achievements against earlier expectations and provided valuable insights into further improving governance, benefits realisation, risk and program management. The department has actioned all of the audit’s 10 recommendations.

**Identifying productivity in the public sector**

In July 2015 the Acting Auditor General of NSW released a report on productivity in the NSW public sector, Performance Audit – Identifying Productivity in the Public Sector.

The report examined selected areas of government activity, such as primary and secondary school public education, NSW Health, Transport for NSW, the NSW Police Force, the Department of Justice and NSW Treasury, to identify and assess changes in productivity.

During 2015, the department worked towards meeting the recommendations outlined in the report:

- developing a sophisticated, value-added methodology to help measure the effectiveness of schooling in improving the learning outcomes of students that takes into account the context of the school and its students
- reporting the same efficiency trends currently reported in the Report on Government Services (see figures 12 and 13 on page 23 of this report)
- scheduling the evaluation of major programs and initiatives to better measure the quality and effectiveness of investments in education.

The department also noted the recommendation made in relation to assessing and reporting on the return of additional investments in education, such as smaller class sizes. The Class Size Reduction program was comprehensively evaluated when it was implemented in 2004 to 2007 and the department advised the Audit Office that a further evaluation will not be undertaken.

**Purchasing and procurement**

During 2015, the department acted on recommendations from the NSW Auditor General’s 2014 performance audit – Use of Purchasing Cards and Electronic Payment Methods, issued in June 2014. Four recommendations were made for all NSW Government agencies, including the establishment of purchasing card adoption targets and benefits realisation programs, revising policy and procedures and improving data capture for monitoring and reporting. Action has been completed for all four recommendations. Revised policy, guidelines and procedures will be released in early 2016 in conjunction with the implementation of an expense management system to support electronic acquittal of purchasing card transactions.

The Making the Most of Government Purchasing Power – Telecommunications Performance Audit report noted the department is performing above the government benchmark rates in a number of areas. These include managing data services and procuring fixed voice and mobile services. The seven recommendations arising from this report relate to implementation of improvements in procurement and contact management, developing strategic plans for future telecommunications services and improving processes for managing telecommunications expenditure. The department has completed all actions relating to these recommendations. New contractual arrangements for fixed voice and mobile services were finalised during 2015 and work is progressing towards unified communications strategies for the future.