Chapter 4

A More Responsive System
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A MORE RESPONSIVE SYSTEM

Public education has serviced NSW and the Australian nation very well indeed for over 150 years but it is now time for some radical changes and for some serious rethinking.

(School staff meeting)

The role of the NSW Department of Education and Training is to deliver high quality education and training, from early childhood education through to post-compulsory education and training. The Department meets the learning needs of children, young people and adults, and addresses training needs in industry. In providing its services, the Department is required to manage the resources made available to it by Government, meet Government priorities and operate within legislative expectations.

Society has widening expectations of education. The changing needs of parents, the impact of the rapid expansion of technology on the learning process and competition, particularly through the expansion of the non-government school systems, are all contributing to reshaping the educational landscape. Public education cannot rely on current systems to support teaching and learning but must continually reassess and adapt.

It is self evident that innovative schools, able to evolve and adapt to local and contemporary needs and pressures, are in the public interest. However there are significant questions in the public’s mind, and indeed among many of our principals, teachers and academics, about the Department’s capacity to support positive change in schools.
ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

The culture of any organisation sums up the relationships between the people who work in or are clients of the organisation, the way they think and pride themselves on what the organisation does and how it operates, its value systems and directions. Culture also contributes to employee work satisfaction, morale and commitment to corporate goals.

DEVELOPING A POSITIVE CULTURE

‘Them and Us’

Respondents expressed major concerns about the culture of the Department which is seen by many as overly bureaucratic, authoritarian and lacking connection to the field.

Management needs to talk and listen to staff. Management needs to communicate better with staff. (School staff meeting)

… DET culture is ‘them and us’. ‘Them’ – head office bureaucracy … those not involved in face to face dealings with students. [Administrators should] spend some time in classrooms. This together with some flexible and innovative thinking may help create a more united Department. (Personal submission)

The Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW argues that: the DET needs to evolve from a highly centralised, mechanistic bureaucracy towards becoming a learning community. The Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW has adopted the Senge (1990) model of a learning community as being an organisation where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.

For my entire teaching career it has been them and us and has no relationship to schools as the DET is administered by rules, formulas and faceless clerks. (School principal)

The Department needs to ensure, from the top down that the organisation’s culture is focused on their core business of providing quality education for kids … (SEA community)

There were many comments about the system being rule bound and administered by people out of touch. The issue of ‘connection’ between schools and people in authority was frequently raised, with teachers reporting that they felt many decision-makers did not know enough about schools and how they operate.

The feeling and volume of such comments indicate a major need to address this perception. The sheer size of the system has also been seen by many as an inhibitor to innovation.

Bureaucracy supporting schools is the rhetoric but in reality the DET bureaucracy is driving schools. (Regional principals’ meeting)

It is the size of the system, combined with a top down bureaucratic management model which inhibits risk taking and responsiveness. Principals argue that such a system cannot sufficiently address and provide creative solutions to localised problems. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

Some schools commented on the reasons why the Department has, in their eyes, become distanced and authoritarian in its processes. Some have seen this as a product of the industrial disputation that frequently occurs with the NSW Teachers Federation whom they see equally carries the responsibility for inflexible approaches.
NSW DET and the NSW Teachers Federation are two monolithic entities that have for many decades obstructed any serious reform to NSW public education. Both have in past decades provided a valuable service in maintaining a statewide system with a commitment to equity but both are dinosaurs in the current market oriented educational context. Jointly they obstruct any sensible, rapid response to local needs, through mind-boggling bureaucratic paralysis in the case of DET and a lemming like ideological blindness in the case of the NSW TF.

(School principal)

Riordan, in describing new models of schooling in NSW public education, states:

*If a culture of innovation and local responsiveness is to further develop … then the successful local changes … should be closely studied with a view to identifying and removing unnecessary obstacles to further innovation.* (Riordan, 2005: 247-248)

Schools expressed a common view that decisions are made that do not involve them but impact significantly on their operations. They feel that things are done to them and they do not know what to expect.

*Right hand must know what left hand is doing eg volume of unannounced documentation.* (Regional principals’ meeting)

Many respondents expressed the desire to have a greater professional say in the direction of their school to better meet local community needs.

**The Department’s Policies**

This view of a ‘top down’ management style was reinforced by comments in relation to the Department’s policies. Many respondents objected strongly to both the volume and content of policy statements. Principals reported frequent, lengthy and excessively detailed paper-based policy that gave little room for schools’ discretion.

Many principals spoke of the need for a ‘policy framework’ that gave schools an opportunity to meet system requirements but allowed them to adapt to local circumstances. Requests for a more measured approach to policy change linked to more effective use of modern technology to communicate changes were frequent.

The Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW stated:

*By developing a clearly stated set of expectations for schools, similar to those proposed in the implementation of the ‘Time to Teach, Time to Learn Review for Assessment and Reporting to Parents’; the DET could provide a framework for action that encourages freedom to act within limits.*

The Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW also noted that core entitlements should not be threatened by any such framework and cited the School Student Enrolment Policy as being one where variation could disadvantage some children.
A Coherent Vision

Many comments referred to the need for a coherent vision and statement of purpose for public education, backed by the commitment of both Government and the Department. There was a clear view that decisions were often ‘issues’ driven without apparent consistency. Some suggest there is a need to develop a common mission statement, through consultation, with agreed and shared goals.

A view expressed by many respondents is that the Commonwealth Government is making it deliberately hard for Public Schools to get funds ( Principals’ meeting). Respondents called for a government commitment both morally and financially to public education. (Personal submission)

Underlying many comments was a mistrust of the system and a feeling by many staff members that they, as well as public education, were not valued. Many respondents sought public affirmation:

A culture in which politicians and senior managers openly champion public education is desperately needed. (School staff member)

From the responses, it is clear that many would support a more responsive and nimble bureaucracy, well connected to and respected by schools and communities; and a system of schools that can adapt and change to meet local needs.

Supporting Local Decision-Making

The theme of giving schools a capacity to shape themselves while operating within statewide requirements was frequently mentioned and appears as a fundamental issue for public education in the future.

It is clear that respondents believe that the operating systems within the Department are top down and excessively bureaucratic. They stated that the current operating environment works against innovation and evolution. They wanted to see greater flexibility and local decision-making. Respondents also said that if schools are given responsibility for more local decision-making then accountability systems and resources would need to be put in place to ensure effective management based on educational needs.

Fullan made the following comment:

... intelligent accountability involves balancing state-wide requirements with school and district-wide self-appraisal. There needs to be some degree of devolution to allow necessary flexibility at the local level which should operate within and be connected to state priorities. A one size fits orientation does not work … (Fullan, 2005: 232)

The Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW echoes this view:

All teachers and all students are not the same, all boys and all girls are not the same, and so generalisations about the nature of schools, staff and students need to be tempered by the realisation that one size does not fit all. However, it is important to have a standardised set of minimum expectations. (Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW)
Local decision-making is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 and later in this chapter.

**Getting Connected**

Respondents stated that state office personnel were often remote and unaware of the special needs of schools and some suggested ways in which this might be improved:

> Head office needs to stay in contact with teachers in schools - perhaps regional school reps could be selected by peers for a limited term so head office have continuous input from different teachers in different schools. (School community group)

The Department's communications systems were frequently questioned. While a communications review is proceeding, there is a strong feeling that new technologies should be used more effectively and that schools should not be overwhelmed with information.

> We receive endless emails, the same information by fax and sometimes again by mail. There needs to be a central site that ensures all information sent and requested … is relevant to the education of students … (School principal)

Respondents also expressed concern that the Department is a “politicised bureaucracy” and this has impacted on education planning and delivery:

> As education has become increasingly politicised over the years, government departments have become focussed on addressing perceived concerns quickly, and on managing community expectations. Thus the focus shifts from long term planning to short term solutions to perceived problems. (State office staff member)

The issues of broad inclusion in decision making and the building of professional networks were frequently mentioned with respondents wanting a balance between autonomy and systemic responsibility. Networks that ensure regular dialogue between TAFE and schools, between primary and secondary schools and between parents and teachers were strongly valued by respondents.

**IN SUMMARY**

There was little doubt that many respondents were critical of the current culture of the Department of Education and Training. In essence there was a strong desire to allow schools to grow and shape themselves to better meet local needs. A top down system does not give people the capacity to grow nor does it allow principals to build local confidence to the degree that they could.

A recently published monograph by the OECD, *What Makes School Systems Perform*, found that in high performing systems there was *typically a division between a central state that defines broad objectives and monitors outcomes, and local governance and control over school processes* (OECD, 2004b:16). Many respondents expressed the desire to meet local needs in the context of a statewide framework of curriculum, defined responsibilities and clear accountabilities.

One response emphasised the importance of government support:
In the context of creating large scale, sustainable reform to build a more responsive public education system, Fullan (2005) has proposed renewal of the tri-level relationship between school, district and state. Fullan’s model includes:

- schools reaching out to community and each other, forming learning communities
- districts with strong leaders able to drive reform and build lateral capacity between schools and with external partners
- a degree of devolution to allow flexibility at the local level, operating within and connected to state priorities.

This model places a mutual responsibility on players at each level to be more engaged with, and more able to influence, the other two levels. This model promotes networking within and between levels and is the antithesis of ‘us and them’.

In the NSW context, Fullan suggests the following combination:

Some devolution of authority to local schools with respect to operational issues … within a framework of state priorities…supported and monitored by districts and regions … schools need to learn from each other … Thus devolution does not mean school isolation. State and regional strategies, and commitments of local schools must include working with other schools to learn how to maximize improvement. (Fullan, 2005: 234)

Progress will be made … when all three levels realise that they need each other, and begin to experience the benefits of interacting in new ways. … The idea is to break with the status quo, create new momentum and then build on it … capacity begets capacity. More can be accomplished with less effort because collective effort and ingenuity gets stronger. For the first time in the history of educational reform, we have an opportunity and possibility of changing the entire system for the better. (Fullan, 2005: 235)

Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis (2005), who evaluated the highly successful Priority Action Schools Program (PASP), support productive networking and have seen it in action to bring about improved student outcomes and improved organisational culture.

The PASP experience shows us that networking as a means of developing knowledge building schools needs to be purposeful … one group of nearby primary schools … established itself as a collective to meet on a regular basis with an academic partner to share and discuss issues and challenges they faced – many of which were shared as consequences of social conditions of disadvantage common across their district. In this case, schools’ and teachers’ familiarity with each other’s contexts assisted and encouraged them in their discussions. (Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis, 2005: 180)
Parents have been clear that although they want to be involved at school many see available time to engage in school-based activities as a major problem. Many believe their capacity for sustained engagement, including through the traditional P&C organisation, is limited. They have as a result raised issues about effective school/parent communication and expectations.

As a parent, I want to be consulted, informed and valued but I do not want to come home from work and be another teacher for my own children and I do not want to have unrealistic expectations placed on me. (Parent)

Many parents have expressed the view that unambiguous and regular communication about their child's progress is their critical concern. They are also anxious about the tendency for schools to use education jargon.

Please ensure the use of jargon is decreased! The culture/mindset of DET shorthand speak and acronyms are a

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS ENHANCING LEARNING

The most accurate predictors of student achievement in school are ... the extent to which a student's family is able to 1) create a home environment which encourages learning; 2) communicate high yet reasonable expectations for their child’s achievement and future career; and 3) become involved in the child’s education at the school and in the community.

(National PTA, 2000; in Charter Friends National Network, 2000.)

Student outcomes are critically dependant on parental and family factors. Value systems, social growth and maturity, resilience, self esteem and sound judgement are driven substantially by family experiences. Stronger partnerships between the school, its teachers and the parent self-evidently make a positive contribution to student learning. As society changes, its expectations of schools change. In their effort to promote effective partnerships with parents and carers, schools are faced with a new and evolving social reality.

Since the quality of parenting is such an important factor in a child’s success at school, there are questions about how schools can best work with parents in contributing to their children's education. Children from families that find it difficult to provide a stable and caring environment are most at risk:

Outcomes for students are clearly maximised when there is a genuine partnership between school and home. They are additionally enhanced when students see that the goals of school and home are closely aligned when it comes to the learning and well being of students. (Secondary Principals’ Council)

The quality of parenting in the early years of a child's development needs a special focus. The Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW described parents as the first teachers of their children and asserted that the needs of individual students can only be addressed by participation and empowerment of parents and students and by the active partnership of informed parents, teachers and students.

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We believe that there should be open and transparent communications between classroom teachers, students and parents, so problems and issues are addressed quickly. All schools should implement a reliable form of two way communication to be shared and signed off by parents on a regular basis ... The goal is to ensure that parents, students and teachers regularly communicate so they all have a good understanding of the learning outcomes, progress, difficulties or areas of concern in a timely manner. (P&C meeting)
substantial barrier to parents; jargon excludes casual interest and requires effort to overcome. Even if parents can translate the code, they can find it difficult to understand the implications and consequences of particular schoolie speak. Schools and staff need to learn how to communicate in an effective manner; this also means actually listening to parents’ concerns before telling them how DET does things. (P&C meeting).

Many parents sought a more comprehensive use of modern communication technologies and strategies. This includes the creation of school websites, group email systems, email capacity between teachers and parents, focused information nights (for example literacy strategies for parents), and plain language invitations, newsletters, reports and presentations. While many schools have embraced some or all of these, it is clear from comments that schools and their communities would benefit from reassessing their communications strategies.

Although some countries and other systems have structures such as school boards, there was no strong view expressed that parental roles in school governance should change significantly nor that a new form of organisation for community involvement in NSW public schools was necessary.

To support parental involvement the NSW Primary Principals’ Association suggested a statement of principles reflecting best practice, exemplary ideas and guiding notions. There was a strong view that any framework supporting and contributing to the development of partnerships between parents and schools should be basic and flexible, giving individual schools the opportunity to implement systems that suited local needs within overarching requirements.

The Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW believes there is a need for a state wide policy framework to ensure consistency of inclusion of parents, carers and the community in decision making. Such a framework must be flexible to the needs of individual schools.

The Catholic Education Commission in reflecting on its own circumstances supports this view by stating a statewide policy to achieve consistency should be in the form of general guidelines and communities should be given the responsibility for deciding the manner in which they wish to be involved in decision making.

Some parents have expressed the view that schools need to be clear about their expectations of parents. A clarification of mutual obligations, possibly even contracts between parents and the school, is required. The NSW Secondary Principals’ Council felt that this was a particular issue for some children who came from challenged backgrounds where some parents expected schools to be able to do “all things for all people.”

In the Companion Paper on rural education, Letts et al said:

Overcoming issues of low attendance, poor retention rates and below average student outcomes requires the community to play an active and decision-making role in rural and remote schools. For example, Indigenous students’ attitude towards schooling and perceptions of their current and future prospects have...
improved where Indigenous parents, carers and the community have been involved in the school. (HREOC, 2000; cited in Letts et al, 2005: 240)

Some respondents wanted much greater local input into value statements and school procedures, rather than the adoption of systemic positions. They felt this would give a greater sense of commitment and a sense of ownership by the school community. Some respondents suggested that parent surveys and evaluations could contribute to a review of schools’ partnership processes in consultation with their communities.

The role of the P&C was frequently mentioned:

P&Cs should exist in all schools and this should be the place that provides a forum for parents and citizens of the local school communities to discuss issues relating to the school and advise the principal in any matters relating to the school. (Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW)

One respondent, however, stated parent participation is a domain of the middle classes (Regional staff meeting).

Respondents felt that one of the less recognised community assets is the volunteer and/or mentor. With Australia’s ageing population there is a growing capacity to increase volunteer engagement in schools. Volunteers or mentors could work as tutors, specialists in particular curriculum areas based on their career experiences, coaches and advisors. Respondents recommended incentives that could assist volunteers including tax breaks or some similar form of recognition.

There is a view expressed by respondents that learning as a partnership should involve a range of community assets. In addition to parents, these included local industries, facilities and organisations, with all schools needing a culture of extending themselves out to such groups.

Industry needs to provide places for work placement for students and nurture and develop local population … Industries need to work with schools and support cooperative ventures such as VET subjects and work placement. (School staff member)

There is little doubt that many respondents were excited to develop the concept of the school as a community hub. Some described the school as the cement that binds the community. Some positively described school parenting classes, joint school community projects, ‘adopt a school’ projects by community groups and/or significant community members and school mentoring programs.

The role of the school in rural communities is particularly important.

The significance of the relationship between the rural school and the community cannot be underestimated … Partnership between the school and community would ideally ensure the future success of rural education and rural student outcomes. Rural and remote education entails schooling from the bush in addition to the more commonly understood schooling far the bush. Rural schools are often positive focal places in rural communities where a spirit of action and empowerment, learning and togetherness is espoused and enacted. (Letts et al, 2005: 240)
Partnerships with other government agencies were seen as particularly important. Early diagnosis of disabilities and timely intervention strategies were highly valued. Respondents praised Families First, Better Futures, Macarthur Team Work Project in Schools, Schools as Community Centres and similar programs and sought their expansion.

The NSW Department of Community Services supports initiatives:

… that promote schools as community centres and which endeavour to incorporate children and families into the wider school community. This can assist in reducing social isolation particularly for families newly arrived to an area and promote the school as a vital element within any community.

The capacity of preschools, sited within a school, and with across agency involvement would assist in early intervention activities and parenting support, particularly in needy communities. The Schools as Community Centres program funded through Families First provides a good model of this concept.

Early intervention is common sense. It aims to nip a problem in the bud to strengthen families and communities. (Fiona Stanley, SMH, 15 March 2005). This issue is highlighted in Chapter Two, in the Early Childhood Years section.

Respondents emphasised the important role of the principal in ascertaining community views and opinions. The Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW believes that:

… further professional development of the understanding, attitude and knowledge needed by school principals in how a P&C Association works, its constitution, rules and structures as well as their role in relation to P&C associations is urgently needed.

Dinham and Bhindi in their companion paper to this report stated:

Principals of schools where outstanding sites were identified exhibited a keen awareness of the wider environment and a positive attitude towards engaging with it. They place a high priority on good communications and relationships with external stakeholders. (Dinham and Bhindi, 2005: 169)

The Priority Action Schools Program is a recent good example of the involvement of parents in school-based decision-making. This program gave substantial funding to schools and required community involvement in planning. This capacity to shape educational provision in partnership empowered schools and communities and fostered genuine engagement.

IN SUMMARY

Riordan suggests that schools of the future should become social and educational centres of communities and builders of social capital at the local communities they serve.

In this future, communities will regard their schools as community centres and valuable community resources. In order to achieve this goal it is likely that there will need to be a further shift in resources and authority from State offices and toward school regions and to schools themselves in order that they may better be able to respond to and work with their communities. (Riordan, 2005: 243)
The concept of a full service school, adequately resourced with across agency personnel based in the school, would help build the school as the logical centre of the community and also build an effective partnership with parents for a more efficient delivery of service.

Respondents who wrote about building better partnerships between schools and communities generally focused on acting in the best interests of students. The idea of students as partners, rather than students as clients, is gaining currency with interest groups and in academic circles.

Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis (2005) support the engagement of students as partners in both their own learning and as participants in a learning community.

... in order to begin to engage in ... teacher professional learning within a knowledge-building school there is no better place to start than with the students themselves. How curious it is that consulting students is often an afterthought rather than the beginning point ... they are rarely consulted about what happens in their classrooms, in the playground and more generally in the ways in which the purposes of schooling are discussed ... it is essential for the development of the knowledge building school to consult with its students, treating them as partners in learning and knowledge about the conditions for good learning to occur ... (Groundwater-Smith and Kemmis, 2005: 181)

Community involvement and partnerships across a range of community and government agencies continue to offer great opportunities to enhance the life opportunities of children. It is clear that building conditions to promote and enhance this involvement needs to be a continuing component of our schools and system in the future. At the same time, the Department's processes need to adapt to school communities' changing capacities and expectations.

The final word on this topic should come from the Federation of P&Cs' Association of NSW which stated:

Parent and student participation in genuine decision making can only occur when partnerships are recognised as complementary activities to the ‘real work of schools’, rather than as a set of competing interests. The existing power structures of schools mean that education is done to students rather than with students, where curriculum is not negotiated and where authenticity and connectedness to the community is an afterthought. The work of the Priority Action Schools Programme has had a great success in modifying school culture towards an empowerment based model. A similar model could be employed to address systemic change issues.
MEETING LOCAL NEEDS

If we are going to compete on a level playing field with non-government schools we need, I believe, the capacity to be far more responsive and flexible in matching teachers and their skills to the specific needs of each school and its individual programs.

(School staff member)

HOW SCHOOLS ARE STAFFED

What is happening in other places

In other Australian states and territories, there has been a general shift towards local selection of teachers based on merit. For example, the Western Australian public education system is phasing in local selection of classroom teachers, with up to 50% of positions to be filled in this way by the end of 2006. Victorian and Tasmanian public education systems undertake the most merit-based selection.

Non-government school systems choose their own staff, some within an overarching framework:

Any staffing formula is a blunt instrument which promotes conformity rather than local equity. Schools are not equal or homogenous. The alternative used in non-government systems is to use guidelines as an indicator which allows the principal to see staff as a resource. This permits the school to manage staff levels relative to operating costs. Class sizes then become a local rather than a central decision. This has worked quite satisfactorily in Catholic diocesan schools for many years, though some schools remain difficult to staff fully. (Catholic Education Commission)

The report Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers (OECD, 2004a) draws on the results of a major study of teacher policy conducted over 2002-2004 in collaboration with 25 countries, including Australia. Concerns raised by participating representatives included whether students in disadvantaged areas have the quality teachers they need.

The report also states that systems which focus on selecting the best suited candidate for each position, such as exist in Canada, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, will often recruit from a wide range of sources, including varying age groups and from other careers. While such systems may also experience difficulties such as attracting enough teachers in subject shortfall areas of mathematics, science and ICT, the report also poses solutions. These include the following:

- Because local managers play such a critical role in personnel management, and tailoring school programmes to meet local needs, such countries also need to place comparatively greater emphasis on the selection and training of principals and other school leaders.
- … schools in disadvantaged or unpopular locations need to be provided with significantly more resources to enable them to compete for quality teachers …
- … there needs to be much more differentiation in salaries and working conditions in order to attract the types of teachers that are in short supply. Uniform salaries and conditions are likely to result in an over-supply of some types of teachers, and shortages of others. (OECD, 2004a: 10)

How NSW Public Schools are Staffed

The staffing of NSW public schools takes place on a centralised, system wide basis. The filling of classroom teacher, executive and principal vacancies is in accordance with a Staffing Agreement between the Department and the NSW Teachers Federation. The number and type of teachers allocated to a school, including executives, classroom teachers and specialist staff, are in accordance with centrally determined, enrolment-based formulae. The appointment of teachers is supported by a computerised staffing system which holds encoded details of vacant positions and available applicants and matches applicants to vacancies.
Recent changes to the Teaching Service Act 1980 provide for appointment on merit to senior positions from applicants outside the NSW Teaching Service. This Act also provides for annual performance reviews for principals.

A new Staffing Agreement came into force for three years from term two 2005. It maintains all current provisions for priority transfers for all teaching staff and service transfers for classroom teachers and includes 300 classroom teacher positions each year being advertised for filling through merit selection.

The new Agreement provides a balance between providing principals with more flexibility in choosing their staff, with procedures that ensure all schools throughout NSW are staffed with quality teachers. The agreement provides:

- capacity for a principal to choose for a selection panel to be provided with up to five applicants from the employment list. This enables schools to select the employment applicant who best meets their needs. The principal also continues to have the capacity to request the School Staffing Unit to make the appointment from the employment list;
- schools in all regions with opportunities to select teachers through the Permanent Employment Program (PEP);
- improved processes, including strengthened staffing codes and an expression of interest process for the selection of teachers under the executive mobility and merit selection from within current principals scheme. The executive mobility process now includes the capacity for selection panels to not recommend any applicant for appointment. These processes ensure that the teacher selected under these schemes meets the specific needs of the school.

The documentation to accompany the Staffing Agreement notes that as a result of amendments to the Teaching Service Act 1980, both current NSW DET employees and persons not currently employed by the DET may apply for vacant positions which are to be filled by merit selection following advertisement.

Since 1992, the Department has implemented an Incentives Scheme to assist with staffing isolated rural schools. Incentives include priority for transfer following the minimum service requirement; additional training and development days; rental subsidies; and enhanced leave provisions. An annual retention benefit of $5,000 gross is paid to teachers in 40 of the most isolated schools who remain beyond the minimum service requirement. Also, a range of locality allowances is available for teachers in identified schools. The option to apply for a priority transfer after a minimum period of service has been a popular aspect of the Incentives Scheme, with about 150 priority transfers effected each year.

**Local solutions**

Responses indicated that, by and large, school communities were keen for greater flexibility in the staffing and resourcing of schools and wanted opportunities for schools to choose their own staff. There was a strongly held view that the ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to school staff allocation needs to be abandoned if NSW public schools are to meet local needs.

*Principals should be in a position to employ the people most suited to their school - as in the private school system. To continue to consider the entire workforce of teachers to be equally skilled and suited to any school type is nonsense. Teachers would then have greater encouragement to continue to update their skills.* (Parent)

*We have to balance the FAIRNESS of a statewide transfer system with the opportunity for schools to select locally teachers that match their skills needs. This balance may DIFFER according to the staffing problems of the school, (e.g. Ballina may be happy with 90% local and 10% system staffing, while Brewarrina may need 10% local and 90% system, with
HEAPS of INCENTIVES). There are needs here that don’t match. Kids needs/teachers needs/school & system needs. (School staff member)

At the same time, some respondents, generally teachers, wanted no change to the current system. A number of respondents cited an article from the Teachers Federation journal *Education* (22 November 2004), entitled *Futures Project – Developing a submission*:

The NSW Government is responsible for staffing the statewide public education system. His responsibility should not be abrogated by devolution. The statewide transfer system has the capacity to meet genuine school needs by closely matching the qualifications, skills and expertise of teachers with the vacant position. The statewide staffing system and its centrepiece, a system of transfers, is the essential element in ensuring the appointment of teachers in every school across the state and therefore a curriculum guarantee for all students. (School meeting group)

Those who wanted no change to the system were particularly concerned with the issue of hard-to-staff schools, which is discussed below. It was clear that respondents were not aware that advertised positions have generally been those which could not be filled through internal transfer mechanisms, and most of these are in hard-to-staff locations. Other reasons given for maintaining the current system included:

- concern about the role of principals in selecting staff (see Chapter 3)
- the wish to preserve the transfer rights of teachers.

In their Companion Paper, Letts et al stated that location and context define the culture and needs of schools:

> The ‘situated’ aspect of this concept signals that place matters, and that far from being a unitary site for education, place and context create different dynamics that call for differentiated approaches and responses – from the school level to the system level. (Letts et al, 2005: 237)

Some respondents wanted to increase schools’ control over staff selection and appointment while operating within a statewide framework. The NSW Secondary Principals’ Council made the following recommendation:

> That DET negotiate with the NSWTF staffing arrangements, within a centralised state-wide staffing model and in consultation with the SPC, that enable the local selection of a proportion of the school’s staffing entitlement in both teaching and support roles. (Secondary Principals Council)

The Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW supported a degree of flexibility but cautioned against “excessive” flexibility. It also expressed frustration at having little say in who gets appointed to a school:

> … there continues to be considerable disquiet about staffing processes, where locally determined selection of staff is rarely allowed, and community input is disenfranchised. (Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW)
A large number of respondents proposed different resource allocation models to enable a greatly increased capacity for schools to meet the needs of their students and said this should be a priority.

Some respondents expressed a view that schools should have total control over staff selection and saw this as critical to meeting local needs. Some made comparisons with the way the Department allocates staff to schools and methods used by other systems.

Some respondents advocated the capacity to vary their staff allocation by accessing the monetary equivalent and using it to pay for different types of staff.

Other respondents expressed a wish for a school to be provided with a total salaries budget as determined by the staffing formula, and for principals, in consultation with the school community, to determine the composition of staff, to meet the needs of the students at the school.

Many respondents made a distinct link between the capacity for schools to choose their own staff and the benefits of this. Benefits mentioned included improved student outcomes and achievement of synergies, made possible by strong team work.

Principals should be able to choose their staff on ‘merit’. They should have the right to choose suitable people who will enhance the culture of the school and fit in as part of the existing team. Sending people who are unsuitable, to schools who do not want them, is detrimental to both students and staff. A good school culture is a hard fought reward and the Principal of the school should have the right to protect that culture. (School staff meeting)

Schools need the ultimate say in who teaches at their schools. A principal knows the local area and the local people and giving them the ability to recruit allows the Principal to build an effective team. All appointments should be made on merit. (Personal submission)

Many respondents expressed a tension between accountability for student outcomes and the inability to select staff to best meet student needs.

One of the most frustrating issues for principals is to be on the one hand totally accountable for everything related to his or her school while on the other hand not being given the responsibility or control over what is THE most vital element – staffing. As I look … to the Victorian system, the comparison is stark. (School staff member)

The issue of the alignment of increased responsibility and increased accountability is discussed in Chapter 3 on Leadership.

**Meeting the Needs of Hard-to-Staff Schools**

In Britain, teachers in inner London schools are paid 20% more than other teachers. Principals in inner London schools are also paid significantly more than other principals (Labour, 2005).
Some respondents suggested specific proportions of staff be selected locally, while expressing a view that the centralised staffing system assists hard-to-staff schools.

We need to also guarantee that hard to staff schools will still have quality teachers for their students. Perhaps this is best achieved by allowing 90% of schools to locally select staff and maintain central or regional appointments for the other 10%. Alternatively, we could allow all schools to appoint up to 90% of positions, some using incentive payments and maintain a pool of positions for central placement. We must move beyond the rigidity and low degree of ownership and incentive that exists in our current procedures. While we can expect the usual level of doom saying and intimidation from the union, we must not be defeated by this. (State office staff member)

In spite of the statewide transfer system and a range of incentives, demographic data indicate that teacher turnover in western NSW (ie Western NSW and New England Regions), in terms of total transfers and transfers out of the region, is higher than anywhere else in the State, followed by South Western Sydney Region. The mean age of both classroom teachers and executives in South Western Sydney Region is the lowest of the ten regions, with classroom teachers and executives in Western NSW Region being the second lowest.

This supports the respondents’ view that consideration should be given to extending the concept of incentives and initiatives to attract and retain teachers particularly in difficult to staff locations.

Some respondents favoured an expansion of available incentives to attract and retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools. These included additional salary, laptops, cheap housing loans, access to child care and other forms of family support, smaller class sizes and additional time off.

Some respondents focused on incentives related to training and career development, such as support for additional study, career path management through training plans and promotional opportunities, and training for relevant skills development including behaviour management and upskilling to keep up with the demands of teaching today.

Accelerated progression through the incremental scale; additional increments for difficult to staff locations; additional employer super contributions; salary packaging for a range of items [related to] disadvantaged areas. (Staff office staff member)

Other ideas included improved induction for beginning teachers into both hard-to-staff schools and the system as a whole, followed by mentoring and professional support through effective networking.

Some said that local selection, coupled with monetary or other incentives such as transfer after a specified period, tax breaks, smaller class sizes and better resourcing of disadvantaged schools would be powerful in attracting and retaining the best staff.

Many respondents saw additional resourcing in a wide range of forms as the best way to attract and retain teachers in schools in disadvantaged areas.
More financial incentives; … more support staff …; increased funding …; reduced teacher load …; increased professional development. (School staff meeting)

A large number of responses suggested improved recruitment strategies to target schools in hard-to-staff locations. Suggestions included:

- expanding pathways into teaching so that recruitment would take place from a larger pool
- ‘growing your own’ teachers, that is encouraging local young people (especially Aboriginal people) into teaching
- reintroducing bonded scholarships
- staffing schools on an area basis and providing opportunities for rotation
- strengthening partnerships between schools and communities
- allowing schools to choose their own teachers, including the permanent appointment of casual teachers.

Other respondents commented on the issue of retaining good casuals in their schools:

We all have outstanding casuals that we would like to keep / have at our school but under this system there is NO WAY we can get them. (School staff meeting)

More effective recruitment of new graduates was seen as a key strategy:

We need to target pre-graduate students and offer them employment … up to 12 months before graduation. … We cannot continue to see the brain drain go to the private schools. (School staff member)

Others suggested that positive promotion of hard-to-staff schools should be used to break down any misconceptions about working in particular areas as a solution to attracting and retaining experienced teachers.

Maybe we need a really intensified marketing of the innovative programs and results being achieved in the south western and western suburbs coupled with some incentives to get more experienced teachers to come out here. (School staff member)

A number of respondents suggested that effective teachers would be attracted to schools which were traditionally difficult to staff if they were set up as models of innovation, quality teaching and quality leadership.

Some staff favoured provision of distance education in place of keeping open very small, isolated schools which use a high level of staffing resources compared with the number of students enrolled.

A far superior level of education could be provided to the students of these schools through a combination of satellite technology, distance education and tutor support … Part of the existing facility could be maintained as a learning centre, supported by one full time teacher, as a tutor/ facilitator. The learning centre could be equipped with the latest technology
… the facility [could also be used] for community education programs … (State office staff member)

Some NSW universities frame their pre-service teacher education in terms of preparing teachers to teach in particular locations. Charles Sturt University is revising core teacher education subjects to foreground issues related to the importance of place, learning to “read” place, multi-age pedagogies, and providing place-based experiences (Letts et al, 2005: 238) related to rural and remote locations. In so doing, university staff have examined from the teacher’s point of view living in rural and remote locations and its impact on teacher retention.

Social inclusion and involvement - the way the individual teacher contributes to, and manages living in, a rural and remote community, and their adjustments to their highly visual public role (the ‘fishbowl’ syndrome) - directly influences overall satisfaction, professionalism and retention. (Letts et al, 2005: 240)

Schools Reshaping and Reorganising to Meet Local Needs

The reform initiatives of six high performing education systems have been examined by the OECD (OECD, 2004b). A common feature of these high performing education systems is:

There has been an overall move towards decentralisation, but this has not meant the central state disengaging from an interest in educational outcomes. (OECD, 2004b: 16)

Features of the reforms include:

- Canada: increased parental involvement
- France: consolidation of initial teacher training with a stronger practical orientation
- Netherlands: government decision-making on basic framework for education, while schools manage personnel policy and finances
- Sweden: increase in local authorities’ ability to allocate resources as they see fit
- England: establishment of specialist schools. By allowing secondary schools to take on special characteristics and encouraging links with outside bodies including companies and community organisations, the aim is to strengthen these schools as organisations and allow them to thrive as places of learning
- Finland: improving cooperation between schools and the world of work and establishing standards in pre-service and in-service teacher training.

In his Companion Paper, Riordan provides an historical insight into the development of comprehensive schools in NSW. He argues that:

… standard provision was ‘invented’ at a time when community opinion was in favour of assimilation of difference and that variation of school types and educational programs within the public system might now better reflect the … diversity of the population [multicultural, gifted and talented students, students with special needs] … (Riordan, 2005: 4)

Riordan outlines the range of relatively recent successful alternative models of schooling in NSW, including collegiate groups and their links with TAFE NSW and universities. He also attributes part of their success to wide ranging community involvement, including local industry. He sees these alternative models of schooling as:

… the beginnings of a move from public education as comprehensive schools to public education as a comprehensive system of schools. Recent successes in public schooling both in NSW and elsewhere have been evident where schools have responded to the specific educational needs of increasingly diverse learners and communities. (ibid: 7)
Reshaping schools

Some respondents wanted to see schools reshaped, for example by establishing campuses with a junior school, a middle school and a senior school, and having improved transition between primary and high school.

A structure of campuses for: preschool to Year 4; Year 5 to Year 8; Year 9 – Year 12 would allow for the segregation of students at significant stages of their development and provision of more age specific student welfare programs. (State office staff member)

A number of NSW public schools have been established outside the traditional models of Kindergarten - Year 6 primary schools; Year 7 - Year 12 high schools; or Kindergarten to Year 12 central schools catering for smaller numbers of students in non-coastal rural locations. These include:

- six community schools catering for students from Kindergarten – Year 12, using a range of different models
- eleven multi-campus colleges consisting of a number of junior campuses (Years 7-10) and usually one senior campus (Years 11 - 12) working together as a single entity across a number of sites.

In addition, some multi-campus colleges are co-located with TAFE NSW and university campuses. Many respondents saw great potential for achieving greater synergy through schools and TAFE, working together in productive partnerships:

A collaborative and cooperative culture … between schools and TAFE to underpin the effective use of resources … staff members teaching across TAFE and schools … [shared] resources … schools and TAFE reviewing schedules to ensure optimum access for students undertaking studies in both environments. (State office staff meeting)

The NSW Teachers Federation expressed their support for retaining comprehensive high schools. Their submission quotes the Vinson Report as follows:

In considering structural arrangements for public secondary education, in general, Year 7-12 high schools … should be considered the norm, and any departure from this form, such as selective and specialist schools and multi-campus colleges, should be based on cogent and explicit justification of the values and evidence supporting the change.

Flexible Work Practices

Some respondents favoured renewed and flexible work practices, such as extensions to the school day and more flexible timetabling, as well as an expansion in the modes of delivery, such as distance education and summer schools, as ways of increasing access to education for all students and better meeting their learning needs.

The Teachers Award provides for some flexibility in high school organisation. Provisions include the capacity to vary school hours for the purpose of delivery of vocational education and training to students in Years 11 and 12; teaching outside normal school hours...
for Years 7 to 10; and provision of alternative work organisation with the concurrence of the majority of staff. However, the restrictive nature of the Teachers’ Award and its impact on schools’ and TAFE’s capacity to deliver flexible and responsive services was noted by a number of respondents:

*The current teachers’ award restricts organisational flexibility – there is a need to ensure that any industrial agreements are appropriate to the organisation’s goals and are flexible enough to enable achievement of those goals.* (TAFE staff meeting)

Some respondents suggested solutions with implications beyond the school and saw the advantages of a strong public education system within which schools could operate in partnership. They said that principals of different schools should work together for the good of the students.

Other respondents wanted to see a whole of government approach to issues, particularly in remote locations, where schools could work with, for example, Centrelink, NSW Health and TAFE NSW to support students better within and beyond the school.

Some respondents foresaw major changes in the future for both teachers and schools:

*Teachers, in the knowledge society, will need to tolerate higher levels of ambiguity, complexity and potential conflict. They also need to cope with information overload and constantly changing skill requirements.* (Industry meeting)

*Flexibility - will schools be as they are? Will schools cease and learning become home centred (using computers) and social skills weekly?* (School staff member)

The Review of Aboriginal Education made a number of recommendations concerned with reshaping and reorganising schools, with the goal of better meeting student needs. Recommendation 16 of the Review of Aboriginal Education 2003-2004 states:

*That targeted schools … (for example, those with 60% of Aboriginal students) may, through consultation and agreement with their communities, and through support by DET in negotiating new industrial instruments to protect the working conditions of employees, be classified as Community Schools …* (NSW AECG and NSW DET, 2004)

Features of these community schools would include:

- capacity to reconfigure their resources in more flexible ways than is currently possible
- determination of their own operating times (for example extended school days and different operating hours)
- interagency involvement and support.

Recommendation 17 of the Review of Aboriginal Education 2003-2004 states:

*That a number of innovative secondary education programs be developed … that provide greater flexibility in the use of resources and staffing structures in specific schools to better meet Aboriginal student needs and aspirations …* (NSW AECG and NSW DET, 2004)
IN SUMMARY

Respondents had divergent views on how much decision-making should take place at the local school and community level, particularly with respect to staffing resources. Many respondents, including teachers, principals and parents, said that schools and their communities must have at least some say about which teachers are appointed.

Within statewide frameworks, and having regard to the special needs of hard-to-staff schools, the selection of staff for their capacity to deliver quality student outcomes in a challenging environment, within a locally driven school culture, would maximise schools’ capacity to support students and value staff.

It is clear from submissions that there is a recognised need for a more responsive service provision than currently exists in our schools. There is a capacity for the Department to build on its successes of more joined up services, for example the co-location of schools and TAFE to achieve a smooth transition between school and post-school options.

Many submissions reflect this need and point to a readiness to explore some other models. While there is no plan for far-reaching changes to the current models of primary and secondary schooling, the Department needs to provide those school communities which see a need for a variation in current structures with support to try something different, such as the piloting of middle schools or greater flexibility in school hours. Such variations, carefully monitored for their effectiveness, in consultation with school communities, could provide a rich base for furthering productive change to meet the diverse needs of students and their communities.
PREPARING TEACHERS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THEIR STUDENTS AND COMMUNITIES

It is imperative that the elements and stages of teacher competencies ... refer to knowledge and skills related to teaching all students in the typical class. Today, the typical class includes Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students, students with special education needs, students from non-English speaking backgrounds, students with challenging behaviours and students with challenges in literacy. (Family Advocacy)

Meeting the widely differing needs, aspirations and learning styles of students in NSW public schools has implications for teacher education and qualification requirements, teacher induction and ongoing training and development, school organisation and allocation of resources, including teachers.

Academic qualification requirements for teaching in NSW public schools include prescribed mandatory levels of university study in a particular subject area or areas. They have been developed in consultation with the NSW Teachers Federation, principals’ groups, the Department’s curriculum consultants and teachers’ professional associations. These groups have traditionally seen a correlation between the capacity to teach to a high standard and academic teaching qualifications.

The NSW Secondary Principals’ Council, in relation to pre-service teacher education, stated in its submission:

In order for teachers to meet the needs of 21st century learners, thorough preservice preparation is needed coupled with continuous learning throughout their teaching careers. The preparation must include our culture of valuing diversity. An extensive knowledge of diverse needs of learners is essential, as are the techniques to respond to and meet these needs. The preparation must include extensive time in several school settings.

Many respondents echoed this view. They said that teacher education needs to include more professional experience or practicum, to take place in a range of schools including non-coastal rural, schools for specific purposes, and schools in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. Longer periods of practical experience, such as one-term-long internships, were also favoured.

Respondents also stated that pre-service teacher education should provide practical experience teaching students with different learning needs and styles, including gifted and talented students, classes which integrate students with special learning needs, Aboriginal students and multi-age classes.
A large number of respondents also said that pre-service teacher education should equip students to meet the challenges of the real life situations they are likely to encounter in the classroom. They wanted better training in behaviour management and in identifying and teaching students with mental health issues such as depression and attention deficit disorder.

Some respondents advocated targeting people from diverse backgrounds and providing them with scholarships to undertake teacher training.

Many respondents wrote about the changing nature of teaching and the need to prepare current and future teachers for the knowledge society of the future. A common theme in these responses was the need for teachers to be able to access technology and training in its use to enhance student learning. A large number of respondents also wanted the role of teachers to encompass teaching students how to be successful lifelong learners and how to gain research skills. They also wanted teachers to support students to manage their own learning.

*Teachers need to become facilitators of knowledge acquisition for students and to teach them the skills to critically evaluate information and to develop the skills to apply their knowledge to new situations and to use it to solve problems. Students need to be aware that knowledge is ever changing and we are all becoming lifelong learners.* (School staff member)

Respondents stated that teachers needed to be capable of preparing students for a society and an economy in which they will be expected to be self-directed learners, able and motivated to learning over a lifetime.

*Teaching in a knowledge society is far removed from passing on a body of knowledge … encourage students to inquire, reflect, create and test ideas.* (State office staff meeting)

Many respondents advocated strengthening and making more productive the partnerships between the Department and universities to ensure that teacher education is relevant to NSW public schools and well connected to school needs.

*As the largest employer of teacher education graduates in NSW the Department needs to exert more pressure on universities to ensure that both the theoretical and practical experiences in preservice teacher education: prepare graduates for the realities of classroom teaching; are focused around best practice models being espoused by the system; reflect changes occurring in teaching both locally and globally; and give graduates the skills and flexibility to move into a more performance driven and accountable profession.* (State office staff meeting)

Teacher education programs in NSW universities differ widely. They may take the form of an integrated program of content and teacher education, or they may consist of a one to two year program of teacher education completed following a suitable undergraduate degree. The length and nature of in-school professional experience also varies. Some programs include a term-long internship, under...
which the teacher education student teaches without a supervising teacher being present at all times.

Teacher education programs in NSW universities generally prepare a teacher to become either a primary or a secondary teacher by including either a primary or secondary teaching ‘method’. In 2004, Charles Sturt University (Albury-Wodonga Campus) commenced offering the Bachelor of Education (K-12 Middle Schooling) under which teachers will qualify to teach in both primary and secondary schools.

The University of Western Sydney has put forward a proposal for a teacher education program for students studying to become secondary teachers of mathematics, science, technological and applied studies and English/English as a Second Language, through a professional partnership with the Department in South Western Sydney. The aim of this program would be to develop teachers to work in hard-to-staff schools. A selected group of teacher education students would train under the program.

The program would be co-delivered in a small number of schools using school-based and academic expertise. It would include professional development available for the student teachers and also for early service teachers, mentoring teachers and experienced teachers. Through this partnership, these schools would have the potential to become innovative teaching and learning centres with the capacity to attract and retain quality teachers and students.

Some respondents suggested that to increase the connectivity between teacher education programs and school needs, universities should ensure that their teacher education programs are designed to enable graduate teachers to meet the professional teaching standards in the Institute of Teachers’ framework.

The professional teaching standards developed by the Institute of Teachers provide a means of measuring relevant competencies beyond formal academic qualifications. The professional teaching standards include the ability to form positive relationships with students and community members, knowledge of subject content and how to teach that content to students. These standards therefore complement more flexible pathways into teaching, for example recognition of prior learning, as they provide a credible way to describe and acknowledge quality teaching.

**DEALING WITH INEFFECTIVE TEACHERS**

Public education is massively damaged by the very small number of ineffective teachers we have in schools. They generate massive parental complaints and great angst for principals and executive. The current … process is both cumbersome and finicky in detail, allowing the ineffective staff to seek support of the Teachers Federation over process, often trivial, and thus further damaging the school and public education. (School principal)

**Current Procedures**

The Department’s procedures for managing teachers experiencing difficulties with their teaching performance have been developed in
consultation with the Teachers Federation. The procedures involve a ten week support program to assist the teacher to improve their performance. This period can be extended if the teacher takes sick leave or applies for workers compensation.

The procedures involve regular meetings between the executive or principal managing the process and the teacher experiencing difficulties, and extensive documentation. During the meetings, the teacher may request the presence of a support person, who is often a representative of the Teachers Federation.

At the end of the ten week program, if the teacher’s performance has shown some but not enough improvement, they may participate in a further six week program. If the teacher has shown no improvement, following an independent review of the process, the Department may commence disciplinary action, which may result in dismissal, and the teacher may be removed from the school. The further management of the teacher is generally time consuming and resource intensive, due to possible lengthy appeals and action in the Industrial Relations Commission.

A Preventative Approach and Early Intervention

A large number of respondents suggested a preventative approach to dealing with ineffective teachers, through assisting them to develop into effective teachers in the first place. They stated that teachers need increased support to undertake ongoing training, especially in the effective use of technology. They also suggested increasing retention of young teachers through mentor support in the early years and reduced teaching loads for beginning teachers.

Many respondents favoured early recognition of and intervention for ineffective teachers. Some said that better support early in a teacher’s career could prevent a teacher from becoming ineffective. Ideas included school-based mentoring and training in how to be an effective teacher. The OECD report (OECD, 2004a) advocates induction as the first step in the career-long professional development continuum.

Others favoured testing of candidates’ suitability to teach before they commenced training, and universities taking more responsibility for identifying teacher education students unlikely to succeed as teachers.

Others suggested that the centrally imposed staffing model, with its limited accountability for a teacher’s effectiveness, was contributing to the issue of ineffective teachers:

The problem is simply that those who make the initial decision [of selection for employment] are in no way accountable for the consequences of their decision. The problem is simply transferred to the school which receives the appointed teacher. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

It was also suggested that teachers should be provided with career counselling at particular stages of their career to assist them to change careers if this is what they want.

Respondents made a link between the system responses made by the Department, in the form of complex procedures for dealing with
Ineffective teachers need to be identified and removed from the system – they are discouraging to teachers that try hard to be good teachers and lower the professional profile of teachers. (School staff member)

Other suggestions for enhancing teacher effectiveness included paid professional development outside school time to reduce disruption to student learning; paid study leave; succession planning in light of an ageing workforce; collaborative development; and more teamwork and sharing of resources in schools for greater efficiency.

RECOGNISING AND REWARDING QUALITY TEACHING

Teachers should be awarded by the students. If the teachers knew the students appreciate them it would be a big enough reward. (SEA student meeting)

Under current practices, outstanding achievements by teachers and schools may be acknowledged by a range of awards, for which recipients are nominated or self nominate. These include TAFE Quality Awards, the Minister’s and Australian College of Educators’ Quality Teaching Awards, The Director-General’s School Achievement Award and a range of Premier’s Scholarships for Teachers. These awards are prestigious and high profile. Submissions provided a rich source of ideas on a greatly expanded system for rewarding, recognising and supporting effective teachers.

Excellent teachers are also greatly appreciated by parents who are sufficiently involved as school community members to observe their work.

Effective teachers stand out like a lighthouse. They are respected by students, their peers and parents. They need to be given an opportunity to have their say in curriculum development, rather than being told by bureaucrats … how they should be teaching and what they should be teaching. Effective teachers need to be given … higher pay levels. Teaching is probably the most important job within a civilised society. We should be rewarding great teachers, they are assisting families create our future. (School P & C meeting)

Teachers and school community members wanted the public education system, including governments, to provide them with recognition and appropriate rewards. In addition, respondents wanted to ensure that ineffective teachers are dealt with promptly via simple procedures so that students’ learning is not disrupted and valuable staff time is not wasted.

A large number of respondents expressed the view that rewards for good teachers are intrinsic to the role of teaching and tangible on a daily basis.

Teachers should not be singled out for reward. It is important for teachers to realise they are part of a team. (Parent)

Effective teachers must be trained from the university level, recognised at the recruitment level, endorsed intelligently at the retraining level supported with time, funds and opportunities at the beginning level and nurtured throughout their careers. (School community group meeting)

Need to increase staff status and morale. Someone to promote positive aspects of the teaching profession in the media and the community. DET’s silence is deafening when teachers are under attack. (School staff meeting)

Effective teachers should be recompensed. The idea that one size fits all does nothing to attract quality people to the profession. (School staff member)
support of their peers and the trust of their supervisors: they can find fulfillment through working in a collaborative environment, not one that pits them one against another.

(Industry member)

A large number of teachers expressed the need to feel valued and supported by the Department, their colleagues and the community. Suggestions included letters of thanks from their principal, staff awards and positive media stories.

Good, effective teachers do not need monetary rewards. They need to feel valued. They derive a huge level of satisfaction from the successes of their students. They need to feel appreciated. This does not have to be Big Deal. It could simply be a GENUINE comment of thanks from someone representing the Department. Too often, good teachers become disillusioned because they feel like a cog in the whole process. They do not need a mass produced statement of thanks from the Director General. This is meaningless and promotes cynicism … Teachers are human - they just like some positive acknowledgment of what they’ve done … I’ve worked for nearly 30 years with the NSW DET - I’ve never had any letter of thanks.

(School staff member)

Some teachers stated that appropriate rewards might also include the opportunity for permanent employment for effective casual teachers and opportunities for promotion.

Many respondents wanted monetary rewards such as performance pay or acceleration on the incremental salary scale.

As a school principal … the single factor which we must never dilute or underestimate, is the quality of the teacher. What incentive is there, apart from personal satisfaction, for teachers to continuously strive to improve their pedagogy and student results? I am quite fed up with my best teachers only receiving the same pay as those who put in a minimal effort only.

(School principal)

School and TAFE teachers’ salaries and conditions are determined by industrial awards and agreements. Currently, there is little scope for the recognition of individual performance.

A number of possible payment-based rewards for individual teachers were suggested:

- knowledge/skills based salaries schedules
- additional payment for extra school activities
- additional payment for additional responsibilities
- additional payment for relevant postgraduate study
- salary increases for achieving higher levels of Institute of Teachers certification
- school based performance award bonuses, and
- accelerated progression along incremental scales based on performance.

Some respondents suggested opportunities to work in industry, increased pay attached to ‘mentor status’ in return for assisting other teachers to become more effective; and a means of providing
There should be opportunity to encourage effective teachers to remain as teachers by providing a parallel development path and pay rates to those that go into management positions. (TAFE staff member)

Paid study leave, particularly for overseas research, could be considered as a reward for effective teachers. (State office staff meeting)

genuine rewards, equivalent to promotion, for effective teachers willing to remain in the classroom.

The NSW Secondary Principals’ Council stated its opposition to differential salaries based on student outcomes. However, it favoured specific rewards for good performance, in return for the highly performing teacher passing on skills:

The SPC believes that recognition and reward which involves teaching load and/or salary should be linked with additional roles and responsibilities, for example mentoring other teachers, mentoring students, classroom and school improvement in learning and more. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

IN SUMMARY

The OECD report (OECD, 1994a) states that the most important factor influencing student achievement and which can be addressed by policy-makers is teacher quality. While research shows a positive correlation between student performance measured by standardised tests and teacher qualifications, experience, academic ability and subject matter knowledge, this correlation is not as high as might be expected. Studies agree that there are important aspects of teacher quality that are not captured by measurable indicators and which can be vital to student learning. These include:

- the ability to convey ideas in clear and convincing ways
- ability to create effective learning environments for different types of students
- ability to foster productive teacher-student relationships
- enthusiasm and creativity and
- ability to work effectively with colleagues and parents (OECD, 2004a: 3).

These qualities, which are reflected in the Institute of Teachers professional teaching standards framework, may be developed in a range of ways, including various work and life experiences, and by becoming a focus in teacher education programs.

According to research conducted by the NSW Commission for Children and Young People, involving approximately 120 people aged from four to 19, young people’s unanimous view is:

the ability to establish and maintain quality relationships with kids [is a] characteristic of ‘good teachers’ and … a critical quality lacking in … ‘bad teachers’.

The Commission recommends that:

preservice teacher training should include developmental experiences for trainees in developing and refining this critical competency. (NSW Commission for Children and Young People)

The research indicates that the most effective ways of ensuring that teachers are providing excellent teaching and learning experiences for students revolve around a holistic approach to teacher development. The building and maintenance of appropriate knowledge and skills for effective teaching and meeting school needs must commence at the pre-service stage, and continue throughout the teacher’s career.

The OECD sums this up as follows:

Key ingredients in a teacher quality agenda could include more attention to the criteria for selection both into initial teacher education and teaching employment, on-going evaluation throughout the teaching career to identify areas for improvement, recognising and rewarding effective teaching, and ensuring that teachers have the resources and support they need to meet high expectations. … teachers are highly motivated by the intrinsic benefits of teaching – working with children and young people, helping them to develop, and making a contribution to society … system structures and school workplaces need to ensure that teachers are able to focus on these tasks. (OECD, 2004a: 10)
Regardless of the pathway by which knowledge and skills required for quality teaching are gained, they need to be built upon in a positive school environment which provides appropriate induction and mentor support to beginning teachers.

This is supported in the OECD report (OECD, 2004a). It recommends that major policy priorities should include forging stronger connections between teachers’ initial education, selection and professional development. The report also supports the introduction of more flexible employment options, opening up possibilities for external recruitment and more school-based decision-making.

A review of teacher qualification requirements is timely. The following statement in the submission from a Departmental officer suggests that current, restrictive academic requirements for teaching with the Department may be detrimental to getting the best people to teach in our schools:

_We need to critically consider our current qualification frameworks to determine whether they really meet the needs of contemporary schooling and indeed whether they restrict access to teaching for people with qualifications, skills and life experiences required to bring about some of the shifts required to enhance provision of public education and training._ (State office staff member)
INTRODUCTION
The provision of high quality, modern school infrastructure is one of the most contentious issues facing Government. The cost of improving or building new capital infrastructure is huge. The Government has spent large amounts of money, for example $517m in the last ten years, on 64 new or replacement schools and $1.75bn on maintaining schools and TAFE buildings. However, many said this was not enough.

There is great variability in the quality of the 2247 buildings owned by the Department. The new schools on the Department’s register are extremely well designed and built and greatly valued by teachers, students and their communities. However, there are still criticisms relating to maintenance, the use of demountable accommodation and buildings that do not meet health and safety standards and educational needs.

THE PHYSICAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND ITS MAINTENANCE
Many respondents stated that the design of facilities strongly influenced the quality of the learning environment:

… students still continue to achieve, the teachers still care but it could be so much better if the physical environment was up to standard. (School staff member)

All students and staff within the public education system are entitled to learn and work in an attractive, properly functioning and well resourced and maintained learning environment. Quality teaching and learning occurs when supported by quality resources. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council).

Respondents said that the design of modern facilities met expectations, and were acknowledged as being of high standard. Respondents also commented that many older permanent buildings were very suitable, roomy and well insulated learning spaces. While expensive to maintain, the Department’s efforts to refurbish those facilities of historic and heritage value were applauded.

However, many respondents stated that there was a wide range in the standard of facilities and infrastructure across the public education system:

[Our school] was built in 1912 for 600 students and it now needs to cater for 1200 students … students need to cross from one side of the school grounds to the other to reach the toilets. (School P&C meeting)

Many public schools present with shabby buildings, badly cleaned and poorly maintained. Public school ambience is further hindered by ugly asphalted playgrounds with cracks
and trip hazards and haphazard landscaping. (NSW Primary Principals’ Association)

Some respondents called on the Department to have a long-term, stable capital works program:

NSW school communities are given few assurances about funding for improving schools, other than through the erratic joint funding program. … NSW schools … need assurance, well in advance, about funding for improving their amenity and infrastructure. (NSW Secondary Principals’ Council)

Respondents called for economies in capital works costs and more creative uses of existing facilities to extend the value of each dollar spent:

If our buildings are of a standard that would be acceptable to community groups then there is potential for use of school facilities outside of school hours and some scope for partial cost recovery. (Personal submission).

Respondents also suggested that community partnerships should be extended and enriched. These partnerships, it was reported, could involve sharing available facilities and the cost of construction of new buildings with other education providers, industry, business and community groups:

There needs to be a concerted effort to share facilities. This would increase usage of scarce resources. Schools could house adult education programs, public libraries, computer training facilities and public meeting rooms … (NSW Primary Principals’ Association)

Create community hubs in conjunction with local Councils and other human services providers in local developments on a ‘shared cost’ basis. (State office staff meeting)

Other, less tangible dimensions – for example, the positive ambience of a classroom, the feeling of a welcoming, open school climate, or a college culture of industriousness and standards – were also mentioned by some respondents as important aspects of learning environments:

The school environment should be pleasant for children. They should look forward to being there, not just learning there. (School P&C meeting)

QUALITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Improving Physical Appearance and Maintenance

Respondents noted the importance of how a school or college was presented:

The physical presentation of a school is critical in attracting enrolments and maintaining school morale and image in the wider community … A well maintained school has an impact on ...
the attitude of the community towards that school. (School staff meeting)

The physical state of a school is one effective predictor of school achievement. (Vinson, cited in NSW Teachers Federation submission)

The majority of respondents highlighted great differences in the quality of facilities across the State, and problems in keeping pace with maintenance demands:

Public schools need to look good – many are not attractive to the students, staff or community. As we are constantly being reminded, we operate in a competitive market, and many public schools are hamstrung by public perception based solely on the appearance of the school, rather than the excellent work going on inside. (School principal)

Clean up the mess and back log attached to the old Properties department. Stop ‘band-aiding’ and undertake real maintenance and school improvement to sites [to] meet OHS standards. (School staff meeting)

Respondents also highlighted concerns that maintenance and cleanliness standards were deteriorating; and the need for new strategies to stretch available funds:

… Much of our building stock is outdated, poorly designed and does not meet the needs of a modern forward looking education system. Nor does it meet the aspirations of increasingly affluent and ambitious parents … There needs to be a ‘taking stock’ of this situation, legislation amended to facilitate a rational approach and process of engaging with school communities, outsourcing to private industry the redevelopment of the buildings/facilities for communities of schools, and a promotional campaign outlining new opportunities … (DET staff member)

The ongoing need to maintain an increasing stock of facilities was viewed by respondents as an expensive, although necessary, responsibility. Respondents suggested the mothballing of some facilities, with minimum associated maintenance; and securing sponsorship from private sources, but keeping the philosophy “public ownership for the public good”.

Respondents also saw need to shorten contract lead times in tendering for all maintenance (and minor capital works) by introducing more local responsibility and control:

[we should] provide schools with monetary flexibility to build and maintain specialist rooms, equipment, heating and cooling that is relevant to their school community and location. (School staff meeting)

It would be advantageous for rural schools to use local contractors to undertake all maintenance jobs – it would improve response time, cost effectiveness, [take advantage of] local knowledge and history and be more competitive. (School staff meeting)
Specific differences among respondents included attitudes to the Department’s Privately Financed Project (PFP), and debate on the advantages and disadvantages of ‘outside’ groups’ after hours access to school and college facilities:

_The Privately Financed Project (PFP) is an innovative approach and it is important to explore the options._ (State office staff)

_In order to ensure equity throughout the state funding must be centrally administered and not delivered through PFP._ (School staff meeting)

Respondents also mentioned the need for principals to have greater discretion in the management of schools’ infrastructure and the allocation of resources:

_Schools [should] have more control over maintenance contractors … negotiating directly with individual contractors rather than waiting weeks to go through the pro group …_ (School community meeting)

**Better Utilisation of Sites and Facilities**

Some respondents saw duplication of particular buildings and services across schools and TAFE colleges as wasteful. This raised the important question of joint use, and practices to encourage staff working across secondary schools and TAFE:

_‘Break down the differentiation between high school and TAFE provision i.e., TAFE by night, school by day. Timetable for ‘day school’ and ‘night IAFE’ usage in the same buildings with a cohort of school teachers and a cohort of TAFE teachers using the same buildings [and] allow teachers to move freely between school and TAFE facilities._ (State office staff meeting)

Calls were also made for more creative uses of facilities - better utilisation of co-located sites, of libraries, halls, gymnasiums, and of other learning spaces - as well as for cleverer approaches to use of buildings out of hours:

_The infrastructure must not be seen as having a limited use as a school, a IAFE, or even a university. The site has multiple uses. An education facility is only one of these uses._ (State office staff member)

_Allow more community use of [excess] sites i.e. establish preschools on site – very successful for [our] school which allows for a smooth transition from preschool to school …_ (School community meeting)

To achieve efficiencies and to promote the concept of community-focused education, respondents suggested that there should be more ready usage by other educational, government, community and industry groups of schools and colleges:

_IAFE managed businesses, which utilise students, teachers and industry partners… Business tenants should be indicative of the local business activity with established IAFE links e.g., motor vehicle maintenance, business/ professional services, website management/ design, personal services, restaurants, cafes._ (Bankstown City Council meeting)
Other respondents highlighted a need to provide greater access for students to non-government sites:

- TAFE could lease buildings from developers and other organisations which would minimise maintenance and refurbishment costs. (TAFE staff member)

Respondents stated that facilities which were no longer needed should be disposed of as soon as possible. They suggested alternatives to selling, including leasing, shared use, or philanthropic gestures such as donating to local community organisations. It was also suggested that such properties should be used for other public purposes and not sold to the private sector.

### Design effectiveness of major capital works

Some respondents commented favourably on the design and standards of many newer schools and colleges. It was noted that such standards were what was expected for the education of all of our young people, as well as boosting community confidence in public education:

- Public schools need to have learning environments comparable to the better private schools. Learning environments must provide equal access to technology, culture and expertise regardless of the geographic, demographic or economic circumstances of the students. (School staff member)

A number of respondents outlined their views on the best learning environments:

- [for a sustainable future we need]...safe and challenging environments that promote learning i.e. students learn more when the physical environment is supporting their learning. …. bright and colourful where the students have ownership of the visual stimuli. …. an innovative environment, reflecting yet leading society. (School staff meeting)

- Future schools will have to be prepared for a future which is technology based. Future schools will be places for students to come to so they can be looked after as they facilitate their own learning ... Rooms with work stations will prevail ... students will have access to 'lessons' on a 24 hours/7days a week basis from anywhere in the world. (Parent)

- My favoured learning environment for learning in the secondary schools at least is the college set up where 2 or more year 7-10 schools send their students on to a senior campus for 11-12. While I know not all teachers favour it, there is no doubt in the mind of most parents that it is MUCH BETTER FOR STUDENTS. I hope that DEE is understands that students are the whole raison d’etre. (UnitingCare Burnside)

They stated that the best design capitalised on flexible learning spaces, exploited opportunities for outdoor learning, and was environmentally sensitive:

- Outdoor areas need to be well-maintained and attractive … suitably resourced to support classroom curriculum eg. environmental areas, sport areas … (School community meeting)
Environments that can be reassigned or resized to meet the current needs of the school population. Moveable wall partitioning, mobile wet area modules. (Parent)

Design enhancements to promote sustainability (natural solar heating and cooling as alternatives to air conditioning, refurbishing of old rather than building of new) were also commented upon:

Schools to be environmentally sustainable – tanks for water, grey water recycling, solar panels, etc. This would encourage student understanding of environmental issues and also provide a healthy and sustainable school environment. (School P&C meeting)

Other respondents saw a need for broader flexibility in building code standards:

[There is] need for greater flexibility in statewide building code for schools … [lack of flexibility] has limited the benefits that have flowed from the school/TAFE [sharing of facilities]. (Joint school TAFE meeting)

[We have] been involved in the production of the current facilities standards for new schools. These standards provide generally safe and comfortable surroundings for students and teachers, but are largely based on current learning and teaching practices, or business-as-usual. Some flexibility has been built into these standards, but the probability is that this flexibility will prove to be inadequate … (Federation of P&Cs’ Association of NSW)

Building design should use passive solar principles to be more energy efficient and provide role models for sustainable living. Australia has an admirable knowledge resource base in these areas which must be utilised. We cannot afford to continue developing schools (or other buildings) which do not acknowledge our environmental conditions. (Kidsafe)

… it is particularly important for young (K-6) students who need to feel safe and secure … to have a high degree of ownership of their grounds and facilities. (P&C meeting)

IN SUMMARY

There is clear recognition that access to quality learning facilities is a vital factor in boosting the learning outcomes of students, in raising community perceptions about the standards of school or college, and in lifting the morale of staff. In short, an attractive, well designed and constructed physical environment for learning will directly support better student outcomes and community confidence in our public education system.

Over recent decades, successive governments and the Department of Education and Training have faced, and responded to, marked pressures in developing and maintaining school and college infrastructure. Some major successes - against a background of demographic, economic and curriculum change - are evident in building design, in some maintenance and refurbishment projects and in particular strategies to access other major sources of funds.

The consultation process drew out four common major areas:

- redressing, as a longer term program, the disparities in the physical conditions, security, and occupational health and safety standards across schools and colleges
- better managing existing assets, including more efficient utilisation of underused facilities and disposal of surplus sites and more effective ways to conduct maintenance programs
- expanding the design options for major works, particularly to provide variations in codes to adapt to local situations and circumstances, and to promote sustainability
- broadening the pool of funds available to move forward major capital works construction timelines, including, for example, accessing sponsorship, levies on property developers and shared enterprises.

Finally, respondents raised the importance of sustainability of our learning environments for the future use of our school and TAFE students.
References


