GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT – EXTERNAL REGULATION OR SCHOOL DRIVEN?

Ian Gamble; AISSA, Adelaide June 2012
School Improvement Elsewhere

- UK Inspection Regimes have increased accountability but have not delivered clear school improvement;
- Inspection targets tend to become ends in themselves.
- Schools become too concerned with ‘second guessing’ what inspectors want.
- Teachers teach to the tests
- A developed school improvement culture has not been successfully developed through inspection alone
Inspection in England

- There are around 2,400 independent schools in England educating roughly 7% of all children.
- Just over half of these schools are members of independent schools associations and are inspected by independent inspectorates, approved by the Department of Education.
Inspection in England

- “There has been a rise in the proportion of schools meeting all the regulations for independent schools. This has increased from 36% in 2009/10 to 45% in 2010/11.”

- “One in eight schools still does not make adequate arrangements for pupils’ welfare, health and safety. This remains a serious concern.”

(Ofsted Annual Report 2011)
The quality of education independent schools is;

- 67% of schools judged good or outstanding.
- 4% judged inadequate
- In over two thirds of independent schools pupils make good progress.
- Teaching was “outstanding” in only 7% – “an indication that in these schools teaching is often well planned but seldom inspiring.”
- Pupils’ behaviour/ethos is a major strength.
A Quality Culture is **NOT** ...

Banging on the Chicken Shed
School Improvement Elsewhere

- Self Review Processes in Europe have developed in many countries (Germany; Netherlands; Scandinavia);
- FOCUS is a key determinant of success. Scatterguns don’t work!
- School leaders need to rise above the day to day to the STRATEGIC and find this challenging
- Effective Leadership and Management of personnel to shared and understood agendas.
- Multiple and divergent Agendas need to be prioritised
System or School Improvement

- Much UK focus on school types and freeing up the system/improving choice/’academic’ rigour
- Academies
- Free Schools
- English Baccalaureate
- Continued reliance on external inspection “raising the bar”
- Less reliance on school based evaluation and improvement.
Academies
Academies 2
Free Schools
A Quality Culture is NOT ...

Requiring Passive Uniformity
Self Review Opportunities

- Some Schools have used Self Review Frameworks to develop their own improvement cultures;

- In the most successful schools the process has been very collegiate;

- Successful developments have raised the quality of professional dialogue significantly;

- Improved priorities for development and shared implementation.
Vision for School Improvement

Enable the best possible outcomes for students/learners;

- Develop an ‘owned culture’ of ongoing improvement at school level;
- Be able to demonstrate the gains.
- Keep it lean and simple
- Make it school wide.
- Develop quality professional dialogue
- Make it evidence based
Elements of School Improvement

- **Improvement** is going forward more successfully

- **Leadership** is concerned with defining the direction toward improvement and inspiring others to participate fully

- **Defining direction** depends on critical reflection

- **Critical reflection** focuses on the current state of development and the evidence

- **Planning** maps the movement forward and benefits
What Are the Potential Benefits of a School Owned Improvement Process?

- Shared language and common understandings
- Bring teachers into the 'bigger picture'
- Self directed
- Culture of no blame
- Keeps schools competitive
- Common direction and understandings
- Collegial vision/focus for leadership
- Celebrate success/identify improvements
WA Principal Consultation

How Will Improvement Be Recognised?

- Academic results
- Pastoral - behaviour & attendance, follow through and evidence
- Culture/ethos more positive
- Staff enthusiasm/motivation/commitment
- School ownership and improvement culture
- Shared whole school priorities
- Strengthened learning culture
- Standing within community, parent involvement, public perception, stakeholder feedback
Some Concerns Were;

- Competitive rather than collaborative
- What resources are required?
- Time
- Will One Framework Fit All Schools?
- Keeping momentum going/ Run Out of Steam
- Will it reduce the creativity of schools
- Do we have the expertise?
- Not making another tick box audit?
- Measuring the inputs require versus the outcomes gained
- Engaging Staff/Commitment
- Does reflection need more time?
- Juggling Big Picture and Immediate Needs
School improvement culture a long term journey

Need to develop YOUR own process and culture of improvement;

Evidence that both process and culture aim to are key determinants of success;

School Owned – if some aspects do not work so well adapt the process to suit the overall aims;
Fundamental Principles

- Schools are organic in nature and individual;
- Building improvement is core business for schools;
- Building capacity to improve is core business for schools;
- Quality professional conversations are vital to success;
- Complex strategic plans are less effective than concise, sharply focused plans;
- Manageable self review is an important determinant of quality;
- Avoid complexity – Keep It Simple (KISS)!
- Develop your school’s own approach but make it central not marginal;
PROFESSIONAL DIALOGUE IS THE KEY TO BUILDING CAPACITY
Review Key Areas
Key Steps and Evidence

- Brainstorm main areas of Evidence
- Look for Outcomes not just inputs and activities
- Canvass Staff, Community, Parents, Students Opinion by Survey/Focus Groups (Triangulate)
- Use existing evidence first – Data; Surveys
- Don’t get bogged down in too much detail
- Consider using sub groups to maintain momentum;
- Who leads the Reviews? Decides the Ratings?
- Be ready for ‘Prevailing Wisdom’ to be challenged
- Don’t take things personally – it’s a team activity ........ even the best schools can improve in some areas.
What Types of Evidence Are Available?

Different types of data

- Staff/Student Questionnaires
- Student Achievement
- School Costs/Resources
- Student Attendance Examination/Test Grades
- Curriculum Information
- Teaching Plans and Records
- Feedback from Parents/Community
Some Qualitative Indicators

- Parents’ Views
- Students’ Views
- Staff Views
- Views of CEO Personnel
- Samples of Quality of Students Work
- Teachers Plans and Records.
- Consistency of Procedures/Policies in Operation
- Degree of Shared Understandings
- Patterns of Complaints/Succeses
- Be Sceptical of Just Accepting the ‘Received Wisdom’
- Observations Recorded – ………….“Learning Walks”
Plan Reviews Each Year

- What are current School Priorities? – Choose reviews to suit;
- Draw up outline 2 to 3 Year Program - not fixed.
- Avoid undue focus on a single area;
- Include heavier and lighter reviews annually;
- Plan short/manageable timescales - keep to them;
- Identify Review Leaders – spread the tasks;
- Work from the evidence already to hand;
- Use existing school meetings and processes;
THREE BASIC QUESTIONS AT THE HEART OF SELF EVALUATION

1. How are we doing?

2. How do we know?

3. What are we going to do now?

The key principle is one of continuous improvement based on a process of self evaluation.
School Review Cycle

Identify Phases

Timescales – not too long!

Deadline Dates

Allow for Slippage

Maintain Impetus

Keep It Focused

End of year review of progress

1 How well are we doing?

2 How do we know? (Evidence)

3 What Do We Need to Do About It?

4 What must we do to make it happen (Plan)?

5 Taking action and reviewing progress

Student achievement

Agreeing objectives and a work and development plan

Monitoring progress in year

Teaching and learning

Identify Phases

Timescales – not too long!

Deadline Dates

Allow for Slippage

Maintain Impetus

Keep It Focused
Things to Avoid in “Improvement”
Avoiding Review Pitfalls

- Not all reviews require equal depth;
- Keep it lean
- If you do get bogged down – Cut and Run.
- Only a minority of Reviews lead to full Improvement Plans
- Keep It “Evidence Led”... not “Opinion Led”
- Triangulate Evidence – not a single source
- Make Links – Reviews are not stand alone
And if the pilot review turns out not quite so positively as we hoped? Don't panic!
But .........Are You Using the FULL Rating Scale?

“And another thing ... I want you to be more assertive! I’m tired of everyone calling you Alexander the Pretty-Good!”
And If A Review Turns Out Not So Positively?.............Don’t Panic!

"Hey! They’re lighting their arrows! ... Can they do that?"
Make the Right Diagnosis before Improving!

"Take some aspirins and if it gets any worse come back and see me."
Some Leaders Lead but…….will others follow?

How Do You Build Ownership?
Ten Main Learnings on School Improvement

- **Reflective Culture** – Ownership and ‘Buy in’

- **Facilitate Improvements** – not just processes and plans;

- **Conversations/Dialogue are the drivers** – ‘shared language and understandings’;

- **‘Develop Quality’** – not just ‘compliance’;
Ten Main Learnings

- **5. Achieving Clearer Focus** – naming the priorities (.....and things which aren’t);

- **6. Identifying Outcomes** – what will a successful development look like?

- **7. Clarity On Everybody’s Roles**; Principal; Staff; Students; Parents; Wider Community
Ten Main Learnings

- **8. Building Capacity and Leadership** – empowering and trusting those doing the reviews and improvement;

- **9. Balancing Internal Improvement and External Validation** – the 80%-20% model;

- **10. Relationships underpin the other 9!** – valuing people and teamwork;
Group Discussions

- Which of the “10 Main Learnings” have the most resonance in your situation?

- Do you want to add to the list?


- What Would Be the Main Features You Would Like to See in A Review Framework?