

REIMAGINING EDUCATION IN QUEENSLAND'S STATE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

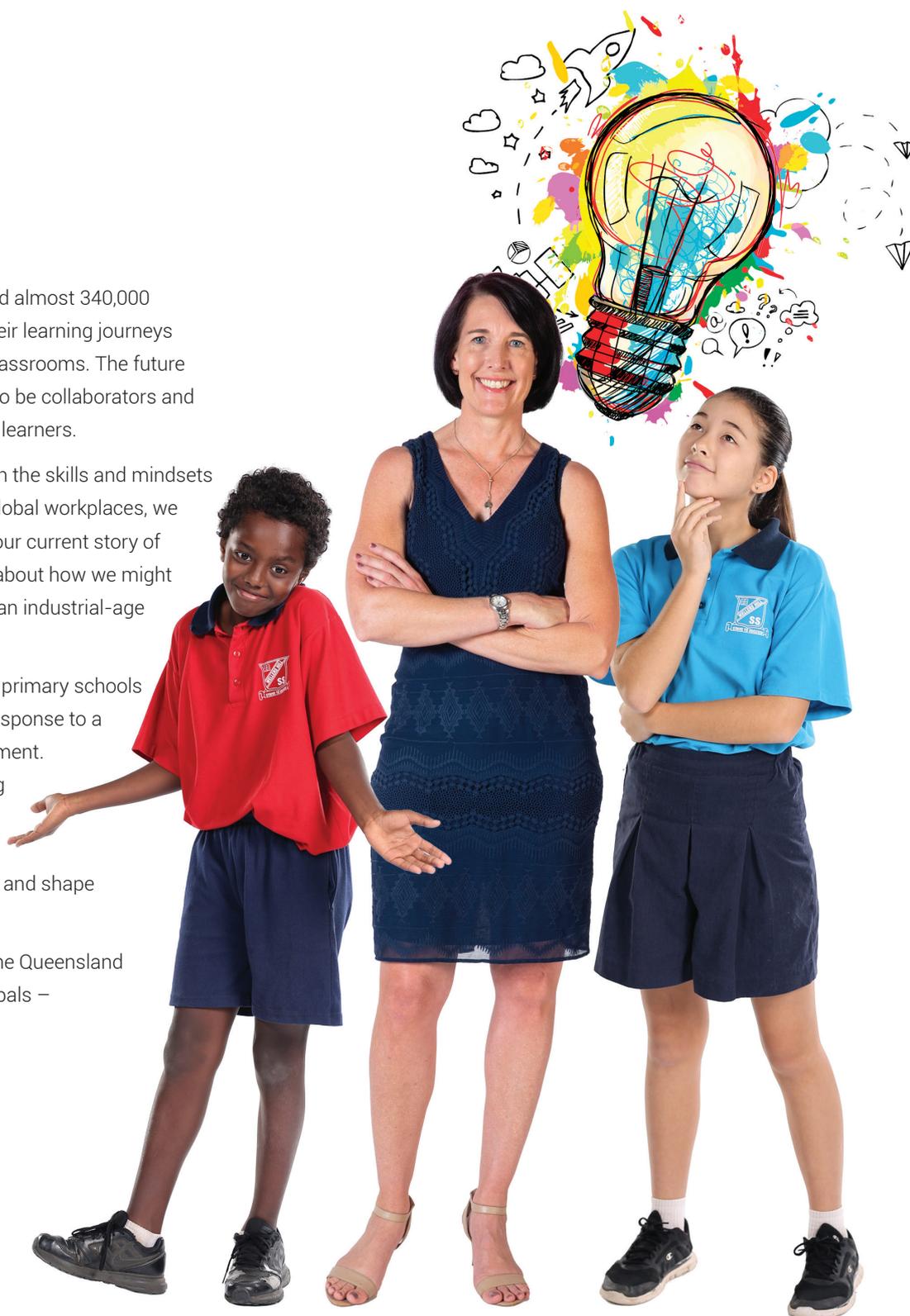
Every school day in Queensland almost 340,000 primary students continue their learning journeys in over 13,000 state school classrooms. The future they prepare for will require them to be collaborators and empathisers, creators and lifelong learners.

If we are to equip our students with the skills and mindsets to thrive in increasingly complex global workplaces, we must recognise the limitations of our current story of schooling. It is time to be curious about how we might create a new paradigm to replace an industrial-age model of education.

The leaders of Queensland's state primary schools have a pivotal role to play in this response to a challenging and changing environment. They guide the exemplary teaching delivered every school day in our classrooms and playgrounds and are uniquely placed to identify and shape future trends and policy.

Their professional association – the Queensland Association of State School Principals – is determined to lead this work.

It is time to reimagine schooling.





A NEW STORY OF SCHOOLING

State primary schools embrace the responsibility to provide children with the academic and social foundations to discover and fulfil their potential. Our educators transform lives; their impact is evidenced in Australia's economic prosperity and social cohesion.

In our school communities, each child's identity and culture are celebrated; personal responsibility is encouraged and expected; and resilience built. Children, in their foundational school years, explore their sense of right and wrong, form independent relationships, and begin to understand themselves as contributing members of the local and wider community.

Primary school classrooms are characterised by enthusiasm and inspiration, collaboration and engagement, curiosity and discovery. Here, our children acquire the knowledge and skills to become lifelong learners.

State primary school teachers use a rich set of skills and capabilities to balance the need for explicit teaching with innovative ways to elicit cooperation, problem-solving and self-directed learning. Our school leaders are passionate and talented educators determined to deliver exceptional outcomes for their school communities.

Too often, they are hindered by a system that, in the drive for improvement, places highest value on narrowly focused standardised test scores, school comparisons and accountability measures. What is currently deemed important in schools perhaps is not. Educator Carol Black has observed: 'Collecting data on human learning based on children's behaviour in school is like collecting data on killer whales based on their behaviour at Sea World'.

A different story of schooling might allow us to deliver the outcomes we say we want for all our students. School leaders would have the **flexibility** to meet the unique needs of their communities, the necessary resources to effect **equity**, the **agility** to shape changing circumstances, and the space to nurture the **mindsets** that prepare all learners – leaders, teachers and students – to engage and be curious, as we create a meaningful future together.

FLEXIBILITY

Each of Queensland's 920 state primary schools serves a community unique in its geography, cultural fabric and socioeconomic advantage. To best respond to the specific contexts of their settings, school leaders require the flexibility, time and space to innovate on the traditional structures and approaches of schooling. The day-to-day work of our school leaders is increasingly focused on accountabilities and low-level bureaucratic processes which detract from their real work: leading teaching and learning.

THE WORK | To enable every state primary school leader to respond to the unique learning needs of their community will require:

- ◆ System supported flexibility to innovate in every aspect of primary schooling.
- ◆ Certainty of future school funding, indexed to inflation and delivered to the school gate, to facilitate effective forward planning, consultation and budgeting at the school level.
- ◆ Every state primary school to have access to fully funded Head of Department – Curriculum positions. This role will complement leading of learning by the principal and will further develop the skills of the profession.
- ◆ Fit for purpose 21st century learning spaces that foster collaboration, teamwork and the development of 'soft skills'. This includes consideration of the design of indoor and outdoor spaces, connection to the natural environment, and connectivity. It is necessary for 'new builds' and when existing facilities and infrastructure are upgraded.
- ◆ Increased administrative support in primary schools.



EQUITY

Equitable schooling is the unequal treatment of some learners to ensure every learner has an equal chance for success. Equity of outcomes is underpinned by the capacity for the school leader to apply human and financial resources based upon need. Those who require the greatest assistance – our disadvantaged and vulnerable children – are concentrated in Queensland's state school system and require the highest levels of funding. Where students require support from beyond the classroom, collaboration across multi-disciplinary agencies is essential.

It is also necessary to recognise that although the foundation learning delivered in primary schools is critical, in Australia the primary years, in particular Years 3 to 6, remain the lowest funded per capita of all compulsory year levels.

THE WORK | To provide differentiated support to enable all children to experience success and personal wellbeing will require:

- ◆ Federal and state governments to deliver 100% of the Schooling Resource Standard – this is the minimum level of public funding a school requires to meet its students' educational needs.
- ◆ A comprehensive suite of wrap-around services available within primary schools to meet each child's intellectual, physical, emotional and social needs. This includes regular access to speech and occupational therapists, mental health workers, family liaison staff, doctors and in-school police officers, and increased numbers of guidance officers.
- ◆ Fully funded roles in every state primary school to coordinate multi-agency professionals to deliver support to students.
- ◆ Replacement of the existing combined sector threshold table – used to determine school resources and school leader remuneration – with a model that authentically acknowledges the complexity of the work of primary school leaders and creates an effective and more equitable promotional pathway.



AGILITY

We live in an increasingly complex and ambiguous world. The adoption of 'agile' practices – that have their foundation in fast iterative learning cycles – can enable students, educators and system leaders to respond with innovation and speed to changing circumstances. Four critical elements are required: a purpose that is clear and meaningful; trust that creates the safety to risk failure; experimentation that is always supported; and a commitment to deliver new value quickly. These conditions are necessary at the system level and within schools.

The agency of the profession in achieving these outcomes is essential. In the same way that intentional collaboration generates and facilitates the application of new knowledge, the sharing of solutions within and across schools improves student outcomes and the wellbeing of staff by reducing the volume of the work and the sense of isolation.

THE WORK | To support primary school leaders to respond to ever-changing conditions and elicit positive learning outcomes for their communities, staff and students will require:

- ◆ A commitment to limit detailed prescriptive planning at the policy level and within our schools. This acknowledges that change processes that could once be viewed as simple, logical and linear are not applicable to the increasingly complex and 'wicked' problems that more often confront schools and their leaders.
- ◆ The system to trust the teaching profession and to value their expertise. Strengthened consultation prior to as well as during policy formulation would ensure students and schools are placed at the centre of all decisions.
- ◆ Partnerships with the profession to determine and deliver exceptional professional learning opportunities for our educators.
- ◆ A continued focus to make our schools safe and respectful places for all stakeholders, including a public awareness raising campaign that violence in schools is never appropriate, and a long-term infrastructure plan to upgrade the safety of our existing facilities. More than 50% of school leaders have experienced verbal or physical threats; over 40% have been the subject of actual physical violence.





MINDSETS

Leadership mindsets are vitally important in the change process. Finding innovative solutions for complex problems requires leaders who can unlearn (let go of practices no longer fit for purpose) and relearn, be curious, resist the urge for 'quick fixes', and accept that failure is an opportunity. They must have a growth mindset.

School leaders must also recognise they can no longer do this work alone. The Australian Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey reveals that rising workloads and responsibilities have had a significant impact on school leader wellbeing. Better decisions are made and wellbeing outcomes for school leaders and teachers are enhanced where there is genuine collaboration.

Until we widen the measure of success in school beyond academic attainment, many students will exit the system either not knowing what their skill sets are or believing they are failures. Student agency – a voice and often, choice – in learning, is a powerful tool to effect this change.

THE WORK | To encourage school leaders and the system to work collaboratively to model and foster in schools the mindsets necessary for the 21st century will require:

- ◆ The system to provide the conditions (including fully funded access to Heads of Department – Curriculum, flexible staffing, and increased non-contact time in primary schools) to enable teachers as a regular part of their work to collaborate and contribute to professional learning communities to improve learning outcomes for students.
- ◆ A continued focus by the system to declutter the curriculum, to create the space in which opportunities for increased student voice can be shaped.
- ◆ School and student success to be gauged by more than the narrow measure provided by a systemic test such as NAPLAN.
- ◆ Continued collaboration between the system and professional associations to deliver the initiatives contained within the Principal Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- ◆ Supervisors at school and system level to encourage and support innovation and recognise that failure is a necessary part of experimentation.

A CALL TO ACTION

The real work of school leaders – leading learning – requires the personnel, policy conditions, and resources to ensure that every child reaches their potential. It demands that students and teachers have high expectations, and that our communities value and respect the vital role of primary schools.

In a Think Piece subtitled 'How leading from the middle has the power to transform education systems', educators Steve Munby and Michael Fullan confirm the critical role professional associations can play in change agendas.

This advocacy document serves to spark a dialogue within and between the education, political and wider communities. Ultimately, it is intended to ignite a movement that will elevate primary school education to a position where Queensland's state school students are prepared to lead Australia's future.



ABOUT QASSP

QASSP is the Queensland Association of State School Principals. Our members are the leaders of state primary schools in Queensland. Together, we strive to achieve our vision of 'Outstanding leaders; world-class schools'.

In turn, QASSP offers its 1350 members collegiality and service, advocacy on the issues that make a difference, and learning opportunities to strengthen the profession.



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A hand is shown from the bottom left, holding a glowing white lightbulb. The background is dark blue with several other unlit lightbulbs scattered around. The overall lighting is a cool blue tone.

REIMAGINING EDUCATION IN QUEENSLAND'S STATE PRIMARY SCHOOLS A NEW NARRATIVE – WHITE PAPER

Dr David Turner

'The future belongs to a very different kind of person with a very different kind of mind – creators and empathisers, pattern recognisers and meaning makers' (Pink, 2006).

The narrative of primary schooling is a relatively consistent and resilient story. Despite rhetoric about change, we continue to deliver an industrial age model of learning. In the social construct of our schools, educators batch children by age, follow a uniform year level curriculum, assess and grade, prepare for high stakes tests, and strive to complete the requisite paperwork accurately and on time.

If we pay attention to our instincts though, we recognise schools as they were designed cannot deliver the deep and powerful learning that we now say is necessary if our children are to thrive in an uncertain future. Educator Carol Black's observation that 'Collecting data on human learning based on children's behaviour in school is like collecting data on killer whales based on their behaviour at Sea World', resonates.

Recent efforts to improve schooling outcomes have typically been driven by externally imposed strategies that focus on teaching, measure performance and look for efficiencies and effectiveness in process. However, the significant investment in this approach to school improvement has not produced the desired outcomes. It is apparent that improving 'results' in terms of what is measured, and therefore deemed important, is merely tinkering with a system that, if not already, is becoming obsolete.

A new story of primary schooling is needed. One where joy of learning is celebrated and each learner's potential is unleashed. While there are some indications as to what this 'new narrative' of education might look like, the details are still emerging. This white paper is intended to begin a conversation about how we might collectively reimagine schooling, so that we may encourage the creators and empathisers, pattern recognisers and meaning makers.

THE WORKING PARTY

Every third year, QASSP – the Queensland Association of State School Principals – prepares a document to inform the advocacy undertaken on behalf of members. QASSP is the largest professional association of school leaders in Queensland and the second largest in Australia. Its 1350 members are served by 45 branches across the state and a 12-member staff headquartered in Brisbane.

The QASSP executive and 13 advocacy subcommittees liaise with senior staff in the Queensland Department of Education. The purpose is to improve educational outcomes for the almost 340,000 children who attend our state primary schools, their families and communities. The Association's objects, contained in its constitution, include: promote and *strengthen the profession of educational leadership*; and identify and *shape future trends and policy* in education (emphasis added) (QASSP, 2020).

Early in 2020, recognition that the past several iterations of its advocacy documents have contained the same (unmet) recommendations, led QASSP to approach the creation of its latest document in a different way. A working party consisting of the President and four members of Management Committee undertook a five-month process under the banner of 'The New Narrative'. The issues uncovered and the foundation to address them is expressed as 'Reimagining Education in Queensland's State Primary Schools'.

QASSP is the voice of state primary school leaders in Queensland and is determined to lead the response to a challenging and changing environment so that schools might equip our students to thrive in their local and the global village.

WHY A 'NEW' NARRATIVE?

Human beings are literally hardwired for narratives. For millennia, stories have bound communities, transferred traditions and built culture. Our world is shaped by stories and they are fundamental to change processes. The 'narrative

has been observed to be central to the policy process – constituting public policy instruments, persuading decision makers and the public, and shaping all stages of the policy process' (Crow & Jones, 2018).

What makes a story powerful is not necessarily facts, but how it creates meaning in the hearts and minds of the listeners. 'Therefore, the obstacle to convincing people is often not what they don't yet know but actually what they already do know. In other words, people's existing assumptions and beliefs can act as narrative filters to prevent them from hearing social change messages' (Reinsborough & Canning, 2009).

This is particularly important in an area such as education because of the inertia inherent in large social systems. Challenging and confronting dominant norms, values and beliefs around schooling and devising alternative futures is not a simple task. If we are to change the narrative and reframe the discourse of primary education, 'we must not only be savvy about the language we choose but also find new sources of eloquence and leadership' (Heller, 2019). This is a role school leaders and their professional associations are uniquely positioned to fill.

The following pages briefly examine the ways in which our world is changing, the skill sets necessary to respond, the dominant approaches to educational improvement, and the emerging necessary approaches. The purpose of primary school education is then defined and four themes explored which will begin to frame a new narrative to reimagine primary schooling.

RESPONDING TO A WORLD THAT IS CHANGING IN COMPLEX WAYS

We live in an increasingly complex and ambiguous world. Three aspects of this complexity underpin the call for action presented in this white paper: exponential technological advances, societal division driven by political ideologies and inequities across many measures, and the impact of climate change. While it is acknowledged there are variations

Narratives are powerful ways to bind communities and build cultures.

Educators have a pivotal role to play in our collective response to a changing world.

Large systems require new approaches to enact change.

and nuances to how these issues could be expressed, and others that might have been explored, the point to be made is that education systems and educators have a pivotal role to play in our collective response. Each of these three aspects is explained to frame the context for a new narrative for primary schooling.

While many believe the human presence in the classroom cannot be replaced, it is apparent emerging technologies will transform, if not disrupt the work of teachers and school leaders. Artificial intelligence, virtual reality and augmented reality, blockchain, robotics, 3D printing, brain-computer interfaces, and the Internet of Things are changing our world in ways that are shocking, in both the positive and negative sense.

Emerging technologies have yet to disrupt schooling.

The technology driven disruption that, for example ride sharing and online shopping have caused in their respective industries, has not yet been experienced in schools, for two reasons. The first is that to this point, schools have not attracted sustained corporate interest perhaps due to a perceived lower profit potential than other industries. Schooling is predominantly 'not for profit' and the power of the status quo, cemented by government and industrial regulation, curbs investment in alternative ways to work.

The power of the status quo also forms the basis of the second reason. Investment in technology in schools has predominantly resulted in 'substitution' of existing classroom practices. Examples include the electronic whiteboard replacing the whiteboard, or a student using PowerPoint to present learning, in place of a handmade poster. The increasingly transformative levels expressed in the SAMR Model (Puentedura, 2012), from 'substitution' to 'augmentation', 'modification' and 'redefinition' are less evident in our classrooms. An example of 'modification' would see students present their learning to an audience outside the school, for instance via a podcast or video. Meanwhile, the significant investment in schools in hardware and software and the subsequent provision of professional learning and technical support has broadly speaking failed to deliver measurable improvement, or indeed student satisfaction or engagement (Kelley, et al., 2020; Yeigh, et al., 2020; Willis, et al., 2019).

It is also evident that technologically savvy educators working in well-equipped classrooms fails to address the issue of a gap between those who have access to devices and the internet, and those who do not. The challenge to deliver learning during the coronavirus global pandemic highlighted this.

The widening digital divide is indicative of increasing inequity across many societal measures including economic, health, and educational outcomes. Some of these are exacerbated by our political systems, the echo chambers created by social media, the increasingly uneven distribution of wealth and the consequences of colonial histories on First Nations peoples. The resulting political divide is causing conflict and social disruption, including within what were considered, until recently, stable communities and nations.

There is also an increasing consciousness of pressing existential changes impacting our world. Climate change is triggering more severe weather events, rising sea levels, droughts, and intense bushfires, all with the potential to displace populations and threaten global food security. UNESCO identifies education about climate change as crucial to the response (2015b, 2019). Acknowledgment of and action to address the issue has been shown to lessen anxiety about climate change and restore faith in a viable future, however it must be recognised that our educators and students occupy an environment of escalating risk and uncertainty.

The aforesaid levers are 'exponential', meaning their impact is rapid and increasing. Although schools appear to be well positioned to contribute to the response, what to teach and how to support our educators to deliver this learning is unclear. In the following section we identify some of the skill sets necessary to respond.

Social and economic divisions are widening in many communities.

We inhabit an environment of risk, uncertainty and rapid change.

THE NECESSARY SKILL SETS

'Future-proofing our students so that they will have the skills to negotiate and thrive in increasingly complex global workplaces is a challenge for all educators' (Milligan, Luo, Hassim & Johnston, 2020).

The *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Council of Australian Governments Education Council, 2019) announces a vision for a world class education system where 'every student must develop strong literacy and numeracy skills in their earliest years of schooling, and go on to develop broad and deep knowledge across a range of curriculum areas'. The statement continues:

'However, our education system must do more than this – it must also prepare young people to thrive in a time of rapid social and technological change, and complex environmental, social and economic challenges ... They need to deal with information abundance, and navigate questions of trust and authenticity. They need flexibility, resilience, creativity, and the ability and drive to keep on learning throughout their lives' (Council of Australian Governments Education Council, 2019, p.2).

In *Every student succeeding – State Schools Improvement Strategy 2020-2024*, the Queensland Department of Education states: 'We are inspiring creativity, critical thinking and building resilience in every student to confidently embrace the opportunities and challenges life brings' (Department of Education, 2020).

There is then, general agreement regarding the necessity to equip students with certain core competencies such as collaboration, digital literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Despite the best efforts of our educators, who are altruistic enough to attempt to deliver them, it is arguable whether these types of outcomes can be achieved within the existing industrial age schooling paradigm. While the Australian Curriculum addresses the 'general capabilities' – the so-called 21st century skills, sometimes identified as

'transversal skills' (UNESCO, 2015a) – our school systems continue to place highest value on reading levels, test scores, school comparisons and accountability measures. The rhetoric does not match the implementation of policy.

While it is acknowledged that it is difficult for large systems – including government school systems – to translate policy into practice, school leader professional associations can play an important role in assisting to close this gap. They can also highlight inconsistencies in the educational rhetoric at the policy level as well as the reality of the workplace pressures school leaders are exposed to.

For example, the command and control practices presented as 'improvement' and 'accountability' agendas by school system supervisors have been replaced in more responsive, agile industries where developing high levels of trust underpins organisational outcomes. In studies of employee motivation, particularly of those engaged in complex work such as teaching children and leading schools, autonomy, mastery and purpose have been identified as powerful motivators for change and improvement (Pink, 2009). The evidence indicates that since the mid-1980s, developing educator capability through external accountability measures has not achieved the desired results (Hattie, 2015; Munby & Fullan, 2015; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). One area of concern – the way our schools and school leaders have been impacted by the drive for school improvement – will now be explored.

The rhetoric does not match the implementation of policy.

Accountability measures are not the best way to drive school improvement.

THE DOMINANT APPROACHES TO IMPROVING EDUCATION

Education system improvement is a universal focus for governments; education has the power to transform individual lives and to ensure a nation's economic prosperity and social cohesion (Council of Australian Governments Education Council, 2019, p.2). The dominant approach to education improvement is based on the assumption that our current system of schooling, through more focused and efficient work, can deliver what is necessary. The improvement measure

There is consensus that schools must equip students with '21st century skills' and general agreement on what these are.

(and driver) has generally been a standardised test. In Australia this is the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), currently under review after ten years in use, and the subject of heated debate.

Standardised testing has failed to deliver education system improvement.

As in the United States, which has five decades of standardised data demonstrating little improvement (Hanushek, 2016), the gains in Australia have been less than encouraging (Thomson et al., 2018). Australia's declining performance in PISA comparisons (the international program that measures the ability of 15-year-olds' to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges), extensively discussed in the media, has also been interpreted as a concerning data set (Thomson et al., 2018).

A second issue in the approach to school improvement is the overreliance on what has become influential educational research, particularly that which is based on the calculation and ranking of effect sizes (for example Hattie, 2009; Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001). This defining of 'what works' is retrospective – often probing evidence collected over decades – and, for the most part uses standardised test scores to calculate impact. (See Simpson, 2017 for criticism of the use of effect size measures in education).

Practice-led research as well as research-led practice is required.

Although valuable to consider, such rear-view mirror practice (necessarily focused on test scores) should not be central to education improvement efforts and particularly in times of rapid change. What needs to complement this type of research is acknowledgement that viable and effective solutions can be found when practitioners generate knowledge through inquiry in their particular context (Turner, 2019). In effect, this means employing practice-led research as well as research-led practice.

The mindset that drives an approach to school improvement underpinned by standardised tests is also evident in the adoption of other imposed accountability measures. School audits and reviews, the argument for 'transparency' and 'school choice' evidenced in the establishment of the

'My School' website, are examples of imposed, external mechanisms intended to drive improvement. The observation here is that the creative thinking and innovation that we say we want our students to exhibit, has not yet been applied in schooling or school leadership. The approaches we might utilise in our primary schools are examined in the following section.

THE EMERGING NECESSARY APPROACHES

Where cutting edge industries have found success, three approaches are evident. Firstly, a culture driven by clarity of purpose, rather than detailed strategy, is a key driver. Secondly, there is a bias for action – a closing of the gap between knowing and doing. That is, getting started, perpetually learning and quickly responding to challenges is a better approach than the perfect execution of a plan. Finally, clarity of purpose and quick learning are leveraged off high levels of trust, collaboration and networking. Each of these approaches will now be explored.

The quote 'Culture eats strategy for breakfast' is attributed to management consultant Peter Drucker. His point – that a powerful and empowering culture is a surer route to organisational success than strategy – is perhaps more relevant today than ever. Research supports the value clarity of purpose brings to high performing organisations, school systems and individual schools (Sinek, 2017; Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009).

The latest trends in management literature suggest the three to five-year strategic plan is obsolete, as the complexities of a rapidly changing external environment render the assumptions used to inform its development incorrect even before leaders begin to enact them (Mintzberg & Laasch, 2020). Carucci (2017) reports that 67% of well-designed strategies fail; Scott (2007) warns us that no plan survives its collision with reality.

As important as 'awareness' that a complex issue exists is the need for a response. This 'doing' addresses the gap between being conscious and interested and actually responding

Clarity of purpose, rather than detailed strategy, drives success.

in meaningful ways. The 'knowing–doing gap' has been discussed in the literature for two decades (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2001) and is now a pressing issue in areas including schooling.

The first two approaches – clarity of purpose and quick learning by doing – are leveraged off the third: harnessing networks, partnerships and collaboration. Learning together, the co-construction of knowledge important at the local level, and the building of trust are fundamental to thrive in a complex and dynamic environment.

The importance of purpose, fast contextualised learning and collaboration are evidenced in the success of educators in the Canadian province of British Columbia. The province was identified as a high performing jurisdiction in a report that profiled participation in voluntary, self-organising, purpose driven networks that use an inquiry approach to improve student outcomes (Jensen, Sonnemann, Roberts-Hull & Hunter, 2016). It is noteworthy that the Canadian education system does not focus on standardised test scores, and that educators in British Columbia use cycles of learning that focus on a positive student impact (Timperley, Kaser & Halbert, 2014). Canada's Networks of Inquiry and

Indigenous Education (now an international movement with a presence in Queensland) invites teachers and school leaders to 'leave their roles at the door' to collaborate for the benefit of students.

Innovative approaches often precede government or system policy. There is a risk, when a large bureaucratic system moves to implement innovative approaches, that established mindsets will distort the fidelity of the innovation. This is because system actors often revert to established mental models and, as a result, are ineffective in bringing about change.

This does not prevent individual primary school leaders from taking the initiative to drive forward-thinking agendas independently, or through involvement in networks and professional collaboration. This is evidenced in applying inquiry-based (Smith, 2019) or agile approaches in school

communities, considering emerging knowledge in the brain sciences including trauma-informed practices (Donovan, 2019), and work to increase student (and teacher) voice. Instances of intentional collaboration in Queensland include the Networks of Inquiry and Indigenous Education and the Curiosity and Powerful Learning network.

THE PURPOSE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION

'Get purpose right and teachers can begin to let go of the reins of control. They can begin to unleash the potentials for their students. They can become co-learners in a dynamic learning community' (Morrison, Fluke and Cunningham, 2020).

Learning is inherently fun. There is an intrinsic satisfaction in play, in experiencing the 'Eureka moment', and in the process of creating. This is obvious in the early years of life although the current narrative about primary schooling does not highlight this. Animals born with innate knowledge of what is required to survive, are not observed 'having fun'. The turtle breaks free from its eggshell, scurries to the water and gets on with 'living'. There is nothing for the turtle to learn. Conversely the kitten or puppy engages in play, explores and observes and this is obviously an enjoyable undertaking. Our children require the same developmental experience: of learning from their environment and those around them.

Learning should bring joy, discovery and curiosity.

The primary school classroom should be characterised by enjoyment, engagement, discovery and curiosity. Young children experience wonder and excitement, take risks, sometimes succeed and sometimes fail. In their primary school years, the child also navigates the transition from family to wider community as they take increasing responsibility and become more independent learners.

The Department of Education's vision is *'Every Student Succeeding'*. The *State Schools Improvement Strategy 2020-2024* outlines two priorities to achieve this vision:

- ◆ Success and wellbeing for all children and students through each stage of learning in an inclusive education system.
- ◆ Continuous improvement in teaching, learning and assessment of the Queensland Kindergarten Learning

Clarity of purpose and quick learning is leveraged off high levels of trust, collaboration and networking.

Guideline, the Australian Curriculum and the senior syllabuses.

The intent in the strategy is clear and it is expected all state primary school teachers and leaders will be committed to deliver on these public education priorities. A focus on 'success', 'wellbeing' and 'improvement' are undisputable but are also broad conceptions that provide opportunity for deeper consideration.

Compelling research demonstrates that the success of young people in school and beyond is strongly connected to healthy social and emotional development. A recent study concluded that:

'Students who have a sense of belonging and purpose, who can work well with classmates and peers to solve problems, who can plan and set goals, and who can persevere through challenges – in addition to being literate, numerate, and versed in scientific concepts and ideas – are more likely to maximize their opportunities and reach their full potential' (Jones & Kahn, 2017).

Considering the range of issues outlined above, the working party determined that: **'The purpose of primary school education is to engage the diverse range of learners so they can live a life of choice in an ever-changing world'**.

There are three points to be made here:

1. The phrase 'diverse range of learners' signals the need for differentiated and effective work from primary school educators to ensure literacy and numeracy foundation skills are laid for all *and* that cultural backgrounds, individual gifts, talents and interests are also recognised as important, valued and promoted.
2. A 'life of choice' expands narrow academic outcomes and broadens thinking to value other human attributes and endeavours, including empathy, cooperation, creative pursuits and the mindsets necessary to thrive.
3. An 'ever-changing world' acknowledges that primary school leaders, and those they serve, inhabit and work in an environment that has been described as volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA).

Primary schools are foundational to subsequent educational outcomes and therefore ultimately the social and economic performance of the state and nation. As well as being nurturing, supportive and friendly places to learn, primary

schools must be recognised as essential contributors to a viable and sustainable future – the foundation to learning and life success. In other words, excellent primary school education provides the basis for all subsequent learning and greater success in later life.

FOUR EMERGENT THEMES

In clarifying this purpose four themes emerged from the working party's deliberations: flexibility, equity, agility and mindsets. Each of these will now be explored in detail in terms of how they present in, and have implications for, the purpose of primary schooling. It is acknowledged that these are not discrete ideas and there are areas of intersection.

FLEXIBILITY

The theme of 'flexibility' emerges from two main ideas in primary schooling settings: the need for the principal to lead learning in their individual community, and the resourcing that enables them to do this work.

Each of Queensland's 920 state primary schools plays an important role in a unique community. The size, geography, cultural diversity and economic performance of each of these communities impacts in unique ways on the work of the primary school leader. While each school is part of the public system, and as such can take advantage of the benefits a strong and aligned system offer, state primary school leaders lead education in their individual communities and to do this require flexibility, and some level of autonomy. A 'one-size-fits-all' approach by the system in relation to policy, resourcing, curriculum mandates, and human resource allocations inhibits the quality of outcomes for learners.

To best respond to the specific contexts of their community, school leaders require the flexibility to innovate on the traditional structures and approaches of schooling. This facilitates innovation over such things as how children are grouped, the pedagogical approaches utilised, curriculum



A 'one-size-fits-all' approach inhibits the principal from leading learning in their community.

implementation, the design of physical spaces, the deployment of human resources, professional learning agendas and the networks and partnerships established. However, it requires school leaders to have the time and space to lead, and not be handicapped by imposed bureaucratic processes and accountabilities.

The resourcing levels provided must therefore enable primary school leaders to deliver the educational leadership their students, staff and community require and deserve. Increased direct to school funding could enable this, as well as targeted human resources, in particular middle leadership capacity, thus ensuring all principals are well supported to prepare their students for a successful future.

The benefits of the system should serve the school leader, not restrict them to time consuming administrative processes. Expending effort on low-level bureaucratic tasks due to a lack of capacity in the primary school interferes with the school leader being able to identify the 'right work' and do the 'work right'.

Our learning spaces also need to be fit for purpose to enable the required flexibility for the types of learning, interaction, wellbeing and collaboration required to develop future skills. The design of indoor and outdoor spaces, connectivity, and connection to the natural environment must be considered. This is necessary for 'new builds' and especially important in the upgrading of existing facilities and infrastructure.

EQUITY

The *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Council of Australian Governments Education Council, 2019) charges educators with 'supporting every student to be the very best they can be, no matter where they live or what kind of learning challenges they may face' (Council of Australian Governments Education, 2019. p.2).

Queensland's diversity brings complexity for the school leader. It is the second most decentralised Australian state, with 51.4% of the population living outside the greater Brisbane area. Four per cent of its population identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander – almost 200,000 people.



Over one million Queenslanders were born overseas, 21.6% of the population. As at July 2020 Queensland had the highest unemployment rate in Australia at 8.8%. In August 2019, prior to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, Queensland's youth unemployment was 13.6%. The 2018 Australian Early Development Census results indicate that 25.9% of Queensland students are developmentally vulnerable in one or more of the early childhood development domains and 13.9% are developmentally vulnerable in two or more domains. These levels are second only to the Northern Territory and well above national averages. In Queensland, the majority of disadvantaged students are in the classrooms of state schools.

Equity requires unequal treatment of some to ensure each learner acquires the necessary educational foundation. Genuine needs-based resourcing is essential for school leaders to effectively differentiate support to ensure student success for all. The original Review of Funding for Schools (Department of Education and Training, 2011) outlined the rationale and set the agenda for needs-based funding in Australia.

Queensland's state schools are funded below the Schooling Resource Standard determined to be the minimum level of public funding a school requires to meet its students' needs. It is also necessary to recognise that although the foundation learning delivered in primary schools is critical, in Australia the primary years, in particular Years 3 to 6, remain the lowest funded per capita of all compulsory year levels.

The ongoing and significant disadvantage in First Nations peoples globally continues to be evident in Australia. The impact of British colonisation, and the results of past policy and practices on the Indigenous population impacts the educational, economic and health outcomes of these peoples.

A greater appreciation for and understanding of Indigenous way of knowing is being increasingly observed in some schools, with positive outcomes for all learners.

The richness of Queensland's diversity is also a cause for celebration although too often difference becomes a point for dispute or conflict. There is a role for schools to play in

To innovate, school leaders must benefit from being part of a large system, not be restricted by it.

To achieve equitable outcomes for students, primary schools require genuine needs-based resourcing.

building respect for the individual within a community and to enable the community to capitalise on the benefits of individual differences, whether of race, culture, ability, age or gender (Ogrutan, Machidon & Dinu, 2019).

AGILITY

'The future always comes too fast and in the wrong order' (Toffler, 1998).

New approaches to the way school leaders work in increasingly complex times must be developed and adopted. What has worked in the past – meticulous planning and execution of that plan, including monitoring against targets and benchmarks – has become insufficient and problematic.

While change processes could once be viewed as simple, logical and linear, Breakspear (2017) suggests this is now only applicable with some 'complicated problems', for example developing a timetable, and not 'complex problems', such as educating during a pandemic. These problems need a different type of

approach – 'models of simple, sequential improvement moving from analysis, to planning to implementation and then evaluation are bound to frustrate' in these situations (Breakspear, 2017). Morrison, Fluke and Cunningham concur:

'The problem is, when the challenge is very complex, we tend to get stuck. We can't act because we are not able to figure out how to develop a plan. So we don't move. We know change is needed, but we are left only with a vague hope that someone else, in the future, can create the change that is needed' (Morrison, Fluke & Cunningham, 2020, p.121).

What is also evident in the research about problem solving in schools, is often the move from identifying the problem to solving it happens too quickly. This 'quick fix' approach is sometimes neither effective nor quick, resulting in multiple attempts to solve the situation and becoming a time waster that leads to cynicism and burnout (Robinson, 2017). Practices that allow for learning about the problem, and considering new understandings as they come to light, are necessary.

One approach gaining attention in the educational community comes from the 'agile' practices of the software development industry. Morrison, Fluke and Cunningham (2020) suggest that for agile practices to be effective, four critical elements must be present in the school: a purpose that is clear and meaningful; trust that creates the safety for team members to risk failure; experimentation that is always supported; and a commitment to deliver new value quickly.

Individual schools and the education system will be better able to respond when they adopt agile cultures and practices that include fast iterative learning cycles and an acceptance there may be the need to quickly respond to unexpected challenges. These approaches exhibit a bias to action and ongoing learning, whether termed 'agile' (Breakspear et al., 2017; Morrison, Fluke & Cunningham, 2020), 'growth' (Dweck, 2017), 'inquiry' (Smith, 2019; Timperley, Kaser & Halbert, 2014), or 'infinite' (Sinek, 2019).

There are implications for the ways we grow the capability of the profession that need to be explored. To build the elements Morrison, Fluke and Cunningham (2020) suggest are required, professional learning will need to be designed to address agile practices, the associated mindsets as well as the best teaching and learning approaches to employ.

In seeking to build the capability of school leaders, the key message for government is not to aim to provide all professional learning inputs from the centre, but rather to act as a platform. Education systems must recognise they cannot provide the quality, range and scale of capacity-building activities that are needed to shift leadership learning across a jurisdiction. Instead, governments must act to help other stakeholders to coordinate activities; connect leaders and aspiring leaders with opportunities; and align the system in ways that enable and motivate effective leadership at all levels (Breakspear et al., 2017, p.ix).



Agile practices include fast iterative learning cycles and allow responses to unexpected challenges.

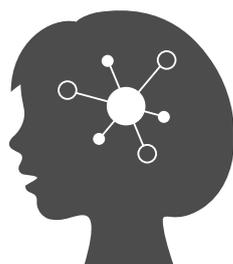
MINDSETS

Primary schooling is concerned with young children's learning and their care. Robinson (2018) suggests the prevailing mental

School improvement driven by small gains in effectiveness and efficiency are insufficient.

models applied to schooling represent a type of 'cultural amnesia' of what we know about learning. In essence, he suggests the drive for efficiency and effectiveness has obstructed excellent school leaders and excellent teachers from achieving quality outcomes for children. The recent focus on a narrow set of indicators has arguably diminished concern for learning across a range of important areas, and care for the primary school child.

Leadership mindsets therefore matter because any assumed certainty in the way we approach change in schools has the potential to reinstate old solutions. The leader's mental models are vitally important when working within changing external environments. The implication is that school leaders have to be prepared to unlearn (that is, let go of practices no longer fit for purpose) and relearn to counter the 'cultural amnesia' Robinson says is impacting students. The skills necessary to thrive in complex and changing times also require a particular mindset that is open, curious and agile and cannot easily be developed with the mindsets of industrial model schooling.



Developing these necessary mindsets in children is crucial. The *OECD Learning Framework 2030* (OECD, 2018) highlights the need for learners to exercise agency in their own education and throughout life. To enable agency, the paper asserts that educators must recognise not only learner individuality but also the wider set of factors that influence their learning, including wellbeing. Thriving in this uncertain, complex and volatile world requires particular skills and mindsets that will move students toward curiosity and a love of learning (Miller, Baird & Kinder, 2020).

Developing new mindsets about learning, unlearning and relearning are necessary.

The OECD framework describes the complexity of the world children are entering and the skills and attitudes needed, including the balancing of conflicting ideas:

'In a world characterised by inequities, the imperative to reconcile diverse perspectives and interests, in local settings with sometimes global implications, will require young people to become adept at handling tensions, dilemmas and trade-offs, for example, balancing equity and freedom, autonomy and community, innovation and continuity, and efficiency and the democratic process. ... In a world of interdependency and conflict, people will successfully secure their own well-being and that of their families and their communities only by developing the capacity to understand the needs and desires of others' (OECD, 2018, p.5).

Studies point to the importance of acknowledging and developing student mindsets for learning, and teacher mindsets for teaching (Boaler, 2015; Dweck, 2017). Zeng, Hou and Peng (2016) found that primary school students

with a growth mindset (based on the belief learning and intelligence can be developed) have better psychological wellbeing and are more likely to engage more deeply in schoolwork and later learning.

Another idea to be accepted about the mindsets we bring to leadership is that the individual school leader can no longer do this work alone.

The role is too complex, changes too quickly and presents school leaders with too many demands for the individual to effectively respond. Principals must recognise and accept that collaboration, cooperation and co-learning are fundamental to successful schooling. Further, collaboration with diverse groups within a community means that there is better possibility to recognise patterns and find solutions to the complex problems as they present.

The current demands on the primary school leader's time impacts upon their personal wellbeing (Riley, 2017). The evidence is clear that principals' workload demands have a number of negative effects on a range of wellbeing measures including psychological distress, sleep patterns and general health. Importantly, there is also evidence that in schools where higher levels of social capital exist, there are measurable benefits for principal wellbeing (Riley, 2017).

ACTIONING THE FOUR THEMES

The working party determined that, to deepen the efficacy of primary school leaders, the Queensland Association of State School Principals will advocate for the resources and conditions:

- ◆ To enable every state primary school leader to respond with **flexibility** to the unique learning needs of their community.
- ◆ To provide differentiated support to enable all children to experience **equity** of success and personal wellbeing.
- ◆ To support primary school leaders to respond to ever-changing circumstances with **agility** and elicit positive learning outcomes for their communities, staff and students.
- ◆ To encourage school leaders and the system to work collaboratively to model and foster in schools the **mindsets** necessary for the 21st century.

The supports and challenges to informed and responsive action will be briefly discussed in the final section of the white paper.

THE SUPPORTS

The working party considered what is currently in place that would support primary school leaders to reimagine primary schooling. In any learning-focused professional organisation, human and social capital are fundamental (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015). For QASSP this is the membership, the relationships between members, and the relationships they build with the education community including Department of Education senior officers, that will facilitate a changed narrative about primary schooling.

Important historical change can be delivered by a small group of committed individuals.

Some of these relationships have been established through existing Association structures, including the advocacy subcommittees but also through the personal connections and shared histories of system leaders and school leaders. Direct representation to politicians by the leadership of the professional association is also valuable.

It is worthy of comment that some of the greatest changes in history were a result of a few like-minded individuals committed to a powerful purpose. A new and aligned narrative about primary schools told consistently and with passion by 1350 educational leaders across the state, will be compelling for government and policy makers.

THE CHALLENGES

Our world is complex; known and unknown influences have the potential to disrupt. The coronavirus pandemic and attendant attention and energy drain the response has had on teachers and school leaders may challenge their preparedness to engage in this work. In the medium-term, the economic implications post-pandemic and potential impact on school resources may provide an altered set of circumstances. In addition, issues including the effects of climate change, social disruption and potential trade disputes impacting industries and therefore communities, cannot be ruled out.

The general mindset about primary schooling also provides a challenge to changing the narrative. Recent enterprise bargaining outcomes for primary school leaders in Queensland have failed to rectify or change a system where assessment of school complexity is based upon human and financial resources per student. This has in turn had a negative impact on pay scales for primary school principals and on the attractiveness of the role to aspirant school leaders.

Beyond the mindset necessary to reimagine primary schooling there are also challenges in building the necessary capabilities that would be required of school leaders. Robinson (2017) suggests there are three: using knowledge, solving complex problems, and building relational trust. A new narrative of schooling would necessitate an alignment with professional learning activities offered by the system and professional associations.

The necessary leadership capabilities require alignment of system actors – including professional associations.

A CALL TO ACTION

This white paper forms the basis for a new QASSP advocacy document titled *Reimagining Education in Queensland's State Primary Schools*. It is also the platform for the 'narrative' that will be articulated to the Association's partner stakeholders in education, choices about professional learning made available to members, and the services offered to them.

Steve Munby and Michael Fullan in a Think Piece subtitled 'How leading from the middle has the power to transform education systems' (The Education Development Trust, 2016) confirmed the critical role professional associations can play in change agendas. They suggest education systems around the world should give greater thought to the untapped potential for 'meso-level' activity aligned to and supporting policy implementation. It is noted that the *State Schools Improvement Strategy 2020-2024*

does not recognise the potential in partnering with the largest professional association of school leaders in this state.

It is anticipated this paper and the companion advocacy document, will spark dialogue between QASSP members and with the education, political and wider communities. Ultimately it is intended to ignite a movement that will elevate primary school education to a position where

Queensland's state school students are prepared to lead Australia's future.

For a list of references, email david@qassp.org.au

This white paper is based on research by a working party consisting of Leslie Single, Sue Clark, Debbie Hansen, Jeff Jones and Michael Zeuschner.

There is untapped potential in the meso-level engagement of principals' associations.

