Creating a high performing School
What the research says on how our best performing schools come out on top

Courtesy of AITSL
Some common data

In all schools, relatively high levels of literacy, numeracy and VCE outcomes are paralleled by:

- Low absenteeism
- High staff opinion, especially of student motivation
- High student opinion of teaching and learning variables
- Relatively high real retention in the secondary colleges
What we found - common themes

- Each case study is unique — reflective of local circumstances and strategic responses
- Each case study had lots of replicable strategies and ideas
- A set of common themes supported by educational research
What we found – 10 lessons

1. Strong leadership that is shared, stable, strategic and sustained over time
2. High levels of expectation and teacher efficacy
3. Ensuring an orderly but supportive learning environment
4. A focus on what matters most
5. Building teaching and leadership expertise
6. Structured teaching to ensure all students succeed
7. Using data to drive improvement
8. A staff culture of sharing and responsibility
9. Initiatives tailored to the direction of the school
10. Engender pride in the school
10 lessons were identified which identify the key success factors; but these lessons, which inevitably overlap, were of two different sorts

- Those which constitute preconditions for substantial improvement
- Those which enable the schools to sustain improvement over time
Preconditions for improvement

- Strategies which must be in place for improvement to take hold
- Generally the starting point for improvement efforts in the schools
- Where they do not exist, they may require external intervention or support
Lesson 1

Precondition 1
Strong leadership that is shared, stable, strategic and sustained over time

‘I know of no improving school that doesn’t have a principal who is good at leading improvement’ — Michael Fullan

The precondition of the preconditions
Precondition 1
Strong leadership that is shared, stable and sustained over time

- Leadership with a clear vision and direction for the school with a capacity to influence others – strong purpose sustained over time
- Leadership is developed, shared and spread through the school. Principal as the leader of leaders.
- The leadership is highly strategic – relentless but realistic
- Though teaching is the key, leaders establish the conditions for high quality teaching
Precondition 2
High levels of expectation and teacher efficacy

- High expectations — challenge the argument ‘you cannot expect more from these kids’
- Higher aims and targets than matching equivalent schools
- High expectations for students flows through to staff and promotion of teacher efficacy — we can make a difference for the students we teach
- Linked to leaders expectations of teachers and teachers expectations of each other — high level of internal accountability.
Precondition 3
Ensuring an orderly learning environment where every student is well known

- A fundamental precondition for improved teaching and learning, and subsequent improvement in student outcomes
- The starting point for improvement in each case
- A key mechanism for getting teacher consistency
- The basis for further united action in the school
- The mirror image of the situation in under-performing schools
Lesson 4

Precondition 4
A focus on what matters most

- Relatively few priorities focused on core things students need
- A clear sense of how to prioritise and put first things first (in the context of the school)
- Reflects the importance of leadership (strategic leadership)
- Importance of difference with school effectiveness models – it does matter what you do first.
Some quick wins from these schools

The orderly learning environment in every case (uniform, punctuality, etc.) and school appearance

- The observation room
- Work Ethic Committee

Underpins relentless implementation
Sustaining improvement

Six key interrelated strategies that:

- Build on the preconditions for improvement
- Sustain ongoing improvement momentum beyond the initial successes achieved
Lesson 5

Building teaching and leadership expertise

- Work to build teacher capacity around the core priorities
- Develop leadership skills, especially of middle level leaders responsible for leading a variety of areas and PLTs
- Recruit expertise where needed and utilise the full range of capacities already in place
- Expect that expertise is used to best effect and develop a process for giving feedback on performance
Structure teaching to ensure all students succeed

- All of the schools adopt a structured approach to teaching
- They work to improve their understanding of teaching strategies that work and demonstrate a relatively sophisticated understanding of how students learn
- Structured and explicit teaching approaches are supported by assessment regimes that ensure students are well known and their needs are being met
- Puts a premium on instructional leadership
Lesson 7

Using data to drive improvement

- Sharing and using data to analyse school and student performance and then drive improvement
- Supplement the rich array of required data with additional sources of evidence to provide a comprehensive picture of student performance and individual student needs
- Using data to shift the focus from inference to evidence
Lesson 8

A culture of sharing and responsibility

- High levels of staff collegiality and mutual support, with structures in place to help teachers share and learn
- Active PLTs and an expectation that teaching and learning programs are documented and shared

- The high degree of sharing provides a means of turning individual into collective teacher efficacy.
Lesson 9

Tailoring initiatives to the direction of the school

- The schools all ensure that broader systemic or government initiatives are integrated with the overall directions and priorities that are set. (e.g. *Performance & development culture*)
- Principals as ‘meaning makers’ or ‘coherence makers’
- The most valued initiatives in this context are those which reinforce the direction the school was headed, but add some extra impetus and rigour
Lesson 10

Engender pride in the school

- All take pride in their buildings and grounds as well as the work the students produce

- This reflects a general expectation that everything is of high quality in the school
Many of the lessons are no surprise and reflect the findings of research.

Their value really comes through identifying a distinction between preconditions for improvement and other factors related to sustaining momentum. This has implications for how schools might approach improvement.

The successes of these schools were not achieved overnight. A stable and consistent leadership team worked on their strategic approach for a significant number of years.