

# Creating a high performing School

What the research says on how our best performing schools come out on top



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for Teaching and  
School Leadership  
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# 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 — Two sorts

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*

# Lesson 1

## 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



# Lesson 2

## 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.

# Lesson 3

## 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

## 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

# Lesson 6

## Lesson 6

### 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

## 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

## 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

## 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

## 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

# Conclusion

- 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