Ensuring teaching quality in NSW public schools

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In accordance with section 38E of the *Public Finance and Audit Act 1983*, I present a report titled **'Ensuring teaching quality in NSW public schools'.**

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Auditor-General
26 September 2019

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Ensuring teaching quality in NSW public schools

Section one

Ensuring teaching quality in NSW public schools

Executive summary

Australian research has shown that quality teaching is the greatest in-school influence on student engagement and outcomes, accounting for 30 per cent of the variance in student performance. An international comparative study of 15-year-old students showed the performance of New South Wales students in reading, mathematics and science has declined between 2006 and 2015.

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards) describe the knowledge, skills and understanding expected of effective teachers at different career stages. Teachers must be accredited against the Standards to be employed in NSW schools. The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) is responsible for ensuring all teachers in NSW schools are accredited. As part of the accreditation process the NSW Department of Education (The Department) assesses whether public school teachers meet proficient accreditation standards and advises NESA of its decisions.

The School Excellence Framework provides a method for the Department to monitor teaching quality at a school level across four elements of effective teaching practice. The Performance and Development Framework provides a method for teachers and their supervisors to monitor and improve teaching quality through setting professional goals to guide their performance and development.

The Department has a strategic goal that every student, every teacher, every leader and every school improves every year. In line with this goal, the Department has a range of strategies targeted to improving teaching quality at different career stages. These include additional resources to support new teachers, a program to support teachers to gain higher-level accreditation, support for principals to manage underperforming teachers, and a professional learning program where teachers observe and discuss each other's practice.

The objective of this audit was to assess the effectiveness of the NSW Department of Education's and the NSW Education Standards Authority's arrangements to ensure teaching quality in NSW public schools. To address this objective, the audit examined whether:

- agencies effectively monitor the quality of teaching in NSW public schools
- strategies to improve the quality of teaching are planned, communicated, implemented and monitored well.

The NSW Education Standards Authority does not oversight principals' decisions to accredit teachers as proficient. This means it is not ensuring minimum standards for teaching quality are consistently met.

NESA does not have a process to ensure principals' decisions to accredit teachers are in line with the Standards. The decision to accredit teachers is one of the main ways to ensure teaching quality. In New South Wales public schools, around 2,200 principals are tasked with making decisions to accredit their teachers as proficient. NESA provides training and guidelines for principals to encourage consistent accreditation decisions but regular turnover of principals makes it difficult to ensure that all principals are adequately supported. NESA has more oversight of provisional and conditional accreditation for beginning teachers, as well as higher-level accreditation for highly effective teachers. That said, there are only limited numbers of teachers with higher-level accreditation across the state.

The Department of Education does not effectively monitor teaching quality at a system level. This makes it difficult to ensure strategies to improve teaching quality are appropriately targeted.

The Department is not collecting sufficient information to monitor teaching quality across the state. No information on teacher assessment against the Performance and Development Framework is collected centrally. Schools self-assess their performance against the School Excellence Framework but this does not assess teaching quality for all teachers. The Department also surveys students about their experiences of teaching quality but schools opt-in to this survey, with 65 per cent of public schools participating in 2018. These factors limit the ability of the Department to target efforts to areas of concern.

We examined five key strategies that support the critical parts of a teacher's career. Most strategies were based on research and consultation, planned, trialled, reviewed and adjusted before wider rollout. Guidance and training is provided to communicate requirements and help schools implement strategies at a local level. Monitoring of strategies implemented at a local level is variable. We identified several instances where Quality Teaching, Successful Students funding was used outside guidelines. Two strategies have not yet been evaluated, which prevents the Department from determining whether they are having the desired impact.

The Performance and Development Framework is not structured in a way that supports principals and supervisors to actively improve teacher performance and teaching quality.

There is limited opportunity for supervisors to set goals, conduct observations of teaching practice, or provide constructive written feedback on a teacher's progress towards achieving their goals under this framework. Guidance on how to use the Standards to construct quality goals, observe teaching practice and provide valuable feedback is also insufficient. The framework focuses on teachers' self-identified development goals but there is no requirement to align these with the Standards. These limitations reduce the ability of supervisors to use this framework to effectively manage teacher performance and improve teaching quality.

The Department manages those teachers formally identified as underperforming through teacher improvement programs. Only 53 of over 66,000 teachers employed by the Department were involved in these programs in 2018. By comparison, a report on inspections conducted in the United Kingdom assessed the quality of teaching as 'inadequate' in three per cent of schools.

1. Key findings

There is no review of principals' decisions to accredit teachers at minimum standards

NESA does not check whether proficient accreditation determinations made by principals are in line with the minimum standards for proficient teaching. This exposes a risk that teachers may be accredited without meeting minimum standards. In mid-2016, an external review recommended NESA develop a risk-based audit program to check determinations, but it has not yet done so.

NESA has greater oversight of higher-level accreditation for highly effective teachers. NESA facilitates a moderating committee to review all higher-level applications, which improves consistency of decisions. The Department can choose to proceed with accreditation despite advice to the contrary from the committee. Between 2012–2016, this occurred for 9 out of 118 decisions.

As of 2018, there were only 102 out of over 66,000 teachers with higher-level accreditation working in NSW public schools. Stakeholders and principals we interviewed told us the length and complexity of the application process deter potential candidates.

The Department does not effectively monitor teaching quality at a system level

While principals are responsible for monitoring the quality of teaching within their school, the Department does not have reliable and complete information to monitor the quality of teaching across the system. The Performance and Development Framework is not implemented in a way that allows for centralised oversight or reporting. Individual plans, observations and reviews are all kept at a school level in various formats which prevents central analysis.

Information collected on teaching quality at a whole of school level through the School Excellence Framework is self-assessed by schools. While self-assessments are validated every five years, the process does not require an actual assessment of teaching quality for all teachers. The 'Tell Them From Me' student and teacher surveys give partial indicators of teaching quality. However, the surveys are optional for schools and rely on self-reported information for teachers. This may bias results and means that survey data must be considered alongside other sources of data.

There are weaknesses in the teacher performance and development process, and insufficient guidance to ensure it is used effectively

The Performance and Development Framework is not being used effectively to manage teacher performance. There is a lack of clear guidance on expectations for constructing quality goals, observing teaching practice and providing effective feedback. The quality of goals, observations and feedback documented in 130 performance and development plans we reviewed varied greatly. For example, some reviews cited a brief informal classroom visit as evidence of observing teaching practice while others gave detailed examples of teacher practice against the Standards.

The Framework itself is weighted towards development at the expense of being a robust tool to observe and improve teaching quality. All goals, observations and feedback included in performance and development plan requires agreement from the teacher, limiting the ability for supervisors to use the framework to target gaps and effectively manage teacher performance.

The external validation process gives principals insight into teaching quality in their school

While principals we interviewed found preparing evidence sets for the external validation process time consuming, it also provided an opportunity to improve their understanding of their school's performance and quality of teaching. Aligning the external validation process with the school planning cycle would allow principals to use the knowledge and feedback gained from the external panel to target strategies to areas identified for improvement.

Strategies to improve teaching quality are informed by consultation, trialled and reviewed before wider implementation, but their overall impact is not evaluated

Strategies to improve teaching quality are based on research and stakeholder feedback. They target support to critical parts of a teacher's career including to: support beginning teachers, address underperformance, identify and reward high-performing teachers, and provide relief time for primary school executives to share their expertise.

We reviewed two programs aimed at identifying high-performing teachers and supporting underperforming teachers. Both were implemented as small scale trials, reviewed, and adjusted before being rolled out further. Monitoring has so far been limited to counting how many principals were provided with support, or how many teachers applied for higher-level accreditation. As the programs are expanded, they should be evaluated to consider the impact on teaching quality.

The $224 million Quality Teaching, Successful Students program has not been evaluated since it began in 2015. Evaluations are needed to compare the relative cost-effectiveness of strategies and target support to strategies providing the best value for money. By comparison, Beginning Teacher Support Funding was evaluated in 2017, leading to changes in the how funding was targeted. The Quality Teaching Rounds professional learning program is also subject to a comprehensive research program in partnership with the University of Newcastle until 2022.

Guidelines support schools to implement strategies to improve teaching quality, but the Department is not monitoring their use of the funding

The Department provides training and guidance for schools to implement its strategies to improve teaching quality. Schools choose how to use funding to support beginning teachers and for the Quality Teaching, Successful Students program. Guidelines and examples help to inform school decisions for this funding. Schools report basic information on how they use funding in their annual reports but this is not monitored by the Department. We identified examples where the use of funding for the Quality Teaching, Successful Students program was inconsistent with guidelines.

The purpose and role of highly accomplished and lead teachers in schools is not clear

The Department has set a goal to increase the number of teachers with higher-level accreditation and is supporting this with a dedicated program. However, it has no current strategies on how to use these teachers effectively to improve teaching quality across the system. There is also no guidance for schools on how to use these teachers at a local level. Having further guidance on the role these teachers play in the system may provide a clearer purpose for expert teachers in improving the quality of teaching practices in their school, or across school networks. Without clear guidance, there is the risk that teachers with higher-level accreditation are underutilised and investment of resources to support this level of accreditation will be wasted.

2. Recommendations

By July 2020, the NSW Education Standards Authority should:

1. work with relevant stakeholders to ensure Teacher Accreditation Authorities receive adequate training before making accreditation decisions

2. review and improve the application and assessment processes for attaining higher-level accreditation, in consultation with NSW and national stakeholders, by:

    a) clarifying the quantity and quality of evidence for higher-level accreditation

    b) reducing duplication throughout the assessment process

3. implement a program of risk-based reviews to provide confidence that proficient level accreditation determinations align with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

By July 2020, the Department of Education should:

4. improve the Performance and Development Framework by:

    a) providing guidance that supports aligning goals, professional development, observations and reviews to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

    b) strengthening the quality of observations of teaching practice and requiring at least one observation to be conducted by a supervisor

    c) providing guidance that supports supervisors and principals to effectively use the framework to improve teacher performance before formal performance management

    d) monitoring implementation of the Framework through collection of de-identified Performance and Development Plans, observations and reviews

5. improve the School Excellence policy by:

    a) clarifying the quantity and quality of evidence required for external validation

    b) requiring tailored written feedback from external validation panels, allowing schools to better use insights for future planning

    c) aligning the external validation process to the school planning and reporting cycle to allow schools to better use the insights gained from the external validation process

6. develop and implement a strategy on how to more effectively use Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers to improve teaching quality across the state

7. evaluate the Quality Teaching, Successful Students program to determine whether it has been implemented in accordance with guidelines and is achieving its intended outcomes.

1. Introduction

1.1　Quality teaching

In 2011, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) developed the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards). The Standards were informed by extensive research and provide a public statement of what is effective teaching practice.

The Standards provide a common language to discuss teaching quality. They describe the knowledge, skills and understanding expected of effective teachers. There are seven teaching standards within the three domains of Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement. The Standards set out what teachers should know and be able to demonstrate at four career stages: Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead.
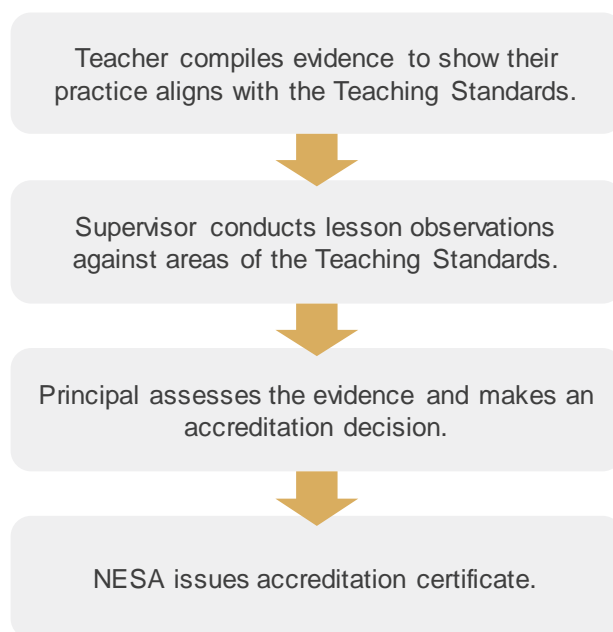
1.2　Accreditation

All teachers must be accredited to teach in NSW schools. Teacher accreditation is the process to assess and recognise whether teachers' practice meets the Standards. The mandatory accreditation of teachers was designed to provide a minimum standard for teaching quality. The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) is responsible for ensuring all teachers in NSW are accredited in line with the Standards.

Prior to commencing all teachers must be accredited at the provisional or conditional level. NESA requires full time provisional teachers to reach the proficient level of accreditation within four years, and full time conditional teachers to reach proficient accreditation within five years. Part-time and casual teachers have longer to attain proficient accreditation, with provisional teachers having up to five years, while conditional have up to six years. The Department expects its teachers to demonstrate practice at the proficient level within two years of full time employment. To be accredited as proficient, a teacher must have completed a NESA-endorsed teaching degree, compile evidence that their practice meets the Standards and have their supervisor assess their teaching practice.

While NESA is responsible for regulating teacher accreditation, accreditation determinations are made by Teacher Accreditation Authorities (TAAs). TAAs are responsible for assessing applications for achieving and maintaining accreditation at the proficient level. Within Department schools, this role is normally fulfilled by the Principal, as shown in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1: Process of gaining proficient accreditation

Teacher compiles evidence to show their practice aligns with the Teaching Standards.

↓

Supervisor conducts lesson observations against areas of the Teaching Standards.

↓

Principal assesses the evidence and makes an accreditation decision.

↓

NESA issues accreditation certificate.

Source: NSW Education Standards Authority.

Teachers are required to maintain their accreditation every five years, or every seven years for part-time or casual teachers. To maintain proficient level accreditation in NSW, teachers must complete 100 hours of professional development over this period, and have their principal declare their teaching practice aligns with the Standards.

The Standards also include higher levels of accreditation, which are voluntary. To gain accreditation at the Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher (HALT) levels, teachers must complete a structured assessment process to demonstrate their practice meets these levels.

The Department has 31 Teaching Quality Advisors across the state to support accreditation. Their role includes providing advice and support to build the capacity of school leaders to implement policy and procedures for the accreditation of teachers.

1.3 Frameworks for monitoring teaching quality

The Department has two main frameworks to assess and monitor teaching quality. The School Excellence Framework is used to monitor teaching quality at a school level, while the Performance and Development Framework is used at an individual teacher level.

School Excellence Framework

The School Excellence Policy aims to assist schools to continuously improve the provision of high-quality educational opportunities for each and every student. This policy provides direction for school planning, annual reporting, and annual self-assessment against the School Excellence Framework (SEF). The SEF defines excellence across three domains of learning, teaching and leading. There are four elements in the teaching domain: effective classroom practice, data skills and use, professional standards and learning and development.

Each year, schools self-assess against the elements of the SEF. Schools are expected to collect evidence to support their self-assessment, which is endorsed by their director. Directors are the direct line manager of the school principal and oversee approximately 20 schools each.

Every five years, the school's self-assessment is externally validated by a panel made up of a Principal School Leadership and fellow principal. The Principal School Leadership is a role that assists school principals to develop healthy and sustainable leadership practices. Schools are

required to produce evidence to justify their self-assessment, which is reviewed by the panel to validate the school's self-assessment.

Performance and Development Framework

The Performance and Development Framework for Principals, Executives and Teachers in NSW Public Schools (PDF), jointly developed with the NSW Teachers Federation, provides a common approach to develop teachers and assess their performance. Under the Framework, each teacher is required to have a Performance and Development Plan (PDP) if they are teaching more than 42 days per year (Exhibit 2).

Teachers, in consultation with their supervisors, set between three and five professional goals for their PDP. Guidance suggests that teachers should consider system and school priorities, personal teaching and career aspirations and accreditation requirements when establishing these goals. The goals of the teacher will guide their professional development throughout the year. In 2018, the Department allocated over $65.2 million in targeted professional development funding for teachers and non-teaching staff.

Under the PDF, teachers conduct the following key activities throughout the year:

- collate evidence on an ongoing basis to demonstrate progress towards their goals
- conduct a self-assessment review to reflect on their practice and progress towards goals
- have informal discussions with their supervisors to get feedback on their progress
- have their teaching observed at least twice by an agreed person and receive feedback.

The PDP cycle concludes with a formal review by the teacher's supervisor. This review assesses the teacher's achievement of their goals. Teachers receive written feedback to inform development of their professional goals in the following year. Teachers can also use this process as evidence for gaining or maintaining accreditation.

Exhibit 2: Performance and development cycle
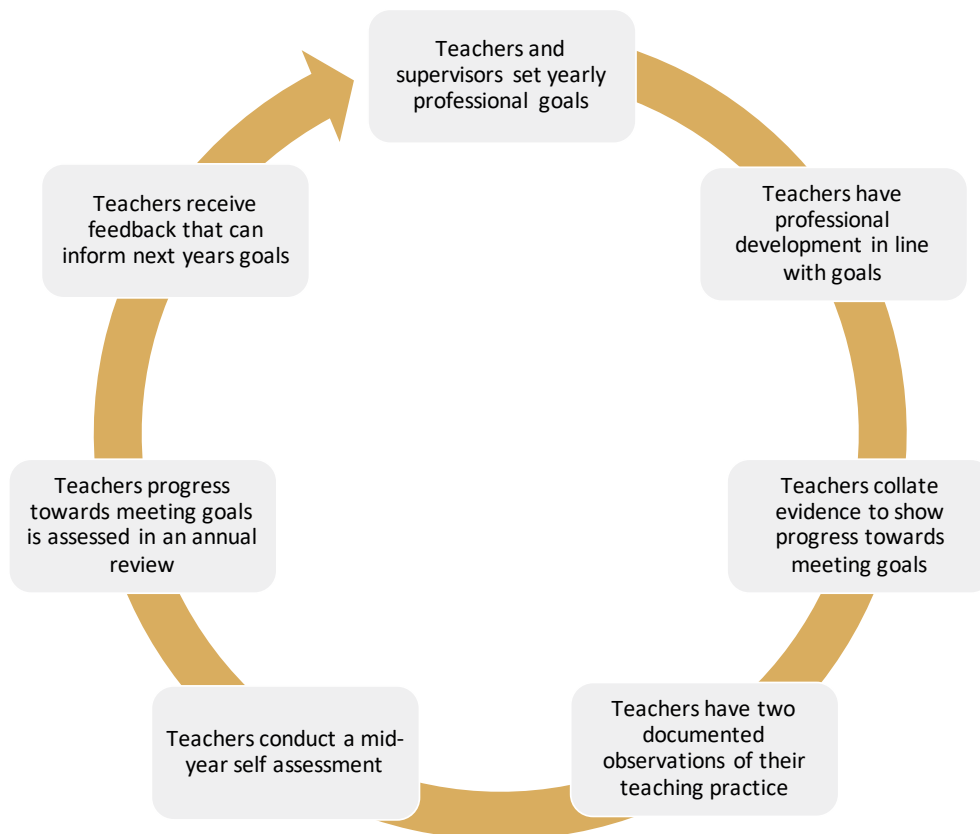
Source: NSW Department of Education.

1.4 Strategies and programs to improve teaching quality

The Department has a strategic goal that 'every student, every teacher, every leader and every school improves every year'. It has five major strategies to improve teaching quality that align with this goal (see Exhibit 3). These include locally administered programs, trial programs for high performing and underperforming teachers, and research-directed professional learning.

Exhibit 3: Strategies and programs to improve teaching quality

Strategy/Program	Background	Funding 2018 ($m)
Quality Teaching, Successful Students	Provides additional staffing allocation to improve the quality of teaching in all NSW public schools with primary students enrolled.	88.0
Beginning Teacher Support Funding	Provides funding to support early career teachers to attain proficient accreditation within two years of permanent placement.	65.5
Mastery of Teaching	Systematically identifies, encourages and supports expert teachers to achieve Highly Accomplished Teacher accreditation.	2.4
Teacher Performance Management and Improvement project	Provides tailored support to school leaders to enhance and improve the performance of all teachers, and address underperformance.	4.0
Quality Teaching Rounds	Involves teachers observing each other's lessons using the NSW Quality Teaching model as a basis for collaborative reflection on classroom practice.	2.4*

* Only includes funding contributed by the Department of Education. The University of Newcastle and a not-for-profit partner are contributing more than $20 million to this program.

Source: NSW Department of Education.

Locally administered programs

The Department has locally administered programs to improve the quality of teaching in primary schools, as well as supporting early career teachers. Under these programs, the Department provides schools with additional funding. In line with the Local Schools, Local Decisions reform, the school principal decides on the best use of the funds within guidelines.

The Quality Teaching, Successful Students (QTSS) program provides additional funding to improve the quality of teaching in all NSW public schools. QTSS funding can be used to provide coaching or additional staff to improve the capabilities of the teacher and allow for the school executive to establish collaborative practices for teachers to co-develop lesson plans and assessment tasks.

The Department provides targeted assistance to early career teachers. The Strong Start, Great Teachers program provides schools with information, advice, and guidance to create school-based induction programs for beginning teachers. A series of online modules also help early career teachers apply for proficient accreditation. Beginning Teacher Support Funding provides schools with additional funding for the induction and professional development of beginning teachers, guided by the Standards, with a focus on supporting the achievement of Proficient accreditation.

Trial programs for high performing and underperforming teachers

The Mastery of Teaching program aims to identify high performing teachers and assist them in applying for Highly Accomplished Teacher accreditation. Teachers are nominated to participate by their principal or director and receive mentoring from existing Highly Accomplished or Lead teachers to prepare their submission for higher-level accreditation. The program aims to increase the number of Highly Accomplished Teachers from around 100 in 2018 to 530 by 2022. Following an initial pilot in 2018, the program was expanded to 20 principal networks in 2019.

The Teacher Performance Management and Improvement (TPMI) project provides support to school leaders to improve the practice of underperforming teachers. Under this project, field officers assist principals to build their competency in dealing with underperforming teachers. The project trial is operating across the state and is funded to 2020.

Research-directed professional learning

The University of Newcastle, in partnership with the Department, developed the NSW Quality Teaching model in 2003. Based on this model, the University developed Quality Teaching Rounds (QTR). The Department has collaborated with the University to implement QTR in public schools across the state. During QTR, teachers observe teaching practice, receive constructive feedback on their own teaching and conduct extended discussions about classroom practice. Feedback is based on 18 elements of quality teaching described in the Quality Teaching model. Since 2014, 1,587 teachers and 629 schools have attended QTR training delivered by the University.

2. Monitoring the quality of teaching in NSW public schools

2.1   Understanding teaching quality

The Department does not communicate a consistent definition of teaching quality

The Department has no single consistently communicated definition of teaching quality, and includes varying descriptions of quality teaching in multiple tools and strategies. This is problematic because clear expectations on quality teaching are needed to inform direct feedback to teachers on classroom practice, as well as to effectively deliver and evaluate strategies that aim to improve teacher performance. Principals we spoke with indicated that they reference the Standards, What Works Best report and the Quality Teaching model when providing feedback on teachers' classroom practice.

We analysed the alignment of four frameworks the Department uses to communicate quality teaching practices with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards) as shown in Exhibit 4. We found a lack of consistency within the Department's own tools and strategies, and between these frameworks and the Standards. For example, the teaching domain in School Excellence Framework does not sufficiently cover the need for teachers to maintain safe learning environments (Standard 4), whereas this is necessary to create conditions to facilitate learning, detailed in the Department's 'What Works Best' report on evidence-based classroom teaching strategies. Reviewing and updating relevant frameworks and guidance to make clear links to the Standards would provide a more consistent message to schools on the Department's expectations for teaching quality.

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Exhibit 4: Alignment with Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

The Standards	Quality Teaching model	School Excellence Framework	What Works Best	Teacher Success Profile
1. Know students and how they learn	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Know the content and how to teach it	✓	✓	✓	✓
3. Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments	✓	⊖	✓	✓
5. Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning	✓	✓	✓	⊖
6. Engage in professional learning	⊖	✓	✓	⊖
7. Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community	⊖	✓	⊖	✓

Note:

✓ = Standards clearly reflected in framework, ⊖ = Standards not clearly reflected in framework.

Analysis of the School Excellence Framework in this table only considers elements expressed in the 'Teaching' domain.
Source: Audit Office analysis.

Student and teacher surveys are used to monitor indicators of teaching quality

The Department uses student and teacher surveys as a source of information to monitor effective teaching and classroom practices. The survey is optional for schools to participate in and relies on self-reported information by students and teachers. This may bias results and means that survey data must be considered alongside other sources of data. The Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) presents insights from this data to the Secretary and Minister annually. CESE also uses the survey data to demonstrate links between effective teaching practices and student outcomes.

The student 'Tell Them From Me' survey captures the views of students on their schooling. In addition to other items, the survey covers three indicators of effective teaching and three indicators of effective classroom practices. Around 65 per cent of schools and 300,000 students participated in the 2018 student survey. The teacher survey captures eight indicators of effective teaching and classroom practices from the perspective of teachers. Around 39 per cent of schools and 20,000 teachers participated in the 2018 teacher survey.

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Exhibit 5 presents four indicators of effective teaching practice from the student survey. It shows that primary school students are more likely to report elements of quality teaching than secondary school students. This is also reflected in the teacher survey where primary school teachers are more likely to report they use quality teaching practices than secondary school teachers.

Exhibit 5: Elements of effective teaching and classroom practice reported by students, 2018
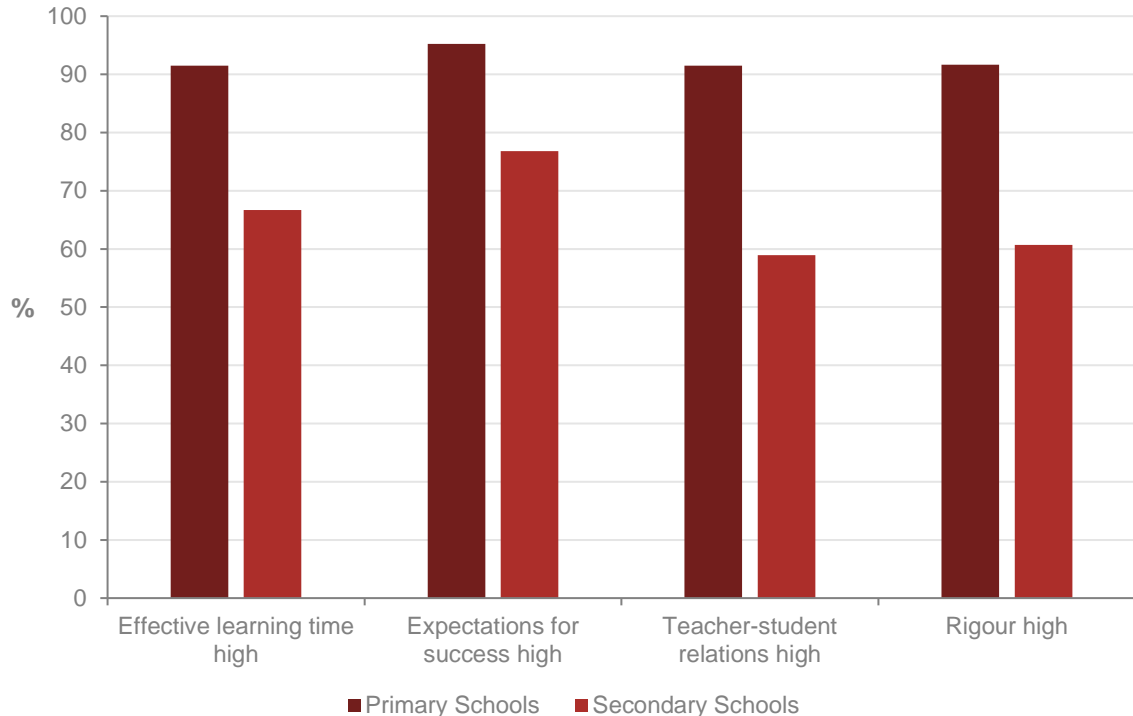
Source: Tell Them From Me student survey, NSW Department of Education 2018.

2.2   Accreditation of teachers

NESA clearly communicates requirements for proficient accreditation

NESA provides clear guidance and training to assist teachers to understand the requirements for attaining proficient accreditation. NESA requires full time provisional teachers to reach proficient level of accreditation within four years, and full time conditional teachers to reach proficient accreditation within five years. The Department expects its teachers to achieve this within two years of full time employment. Proficient level accreditation was designed to provide a minimum standard for teaching quality. NESA's guidance details the level of practice that teachers must demonstrate to be accredited as a proficient teacher. Evidence guides help teachers to gather evidence to demonstrate that their teaching practices align with the Standards. Separate guidance and training is provided for casual and part-time teachers, who have up to six years to gain proficient accreditation.

There is a risk of principals making inconsistent decisions when accrediting teachers

The decision to accredit a teacher as proficient is one of the main gates to ensure teacher quality. For public schools, decisions are made by approximately 2,200 principals. Without appropriate support, there is a risk of inconsistent interpretation of the Standards, and therefore inconsistent decisions. NESA provides training and support to principals to mitigate this risk.

NESA works with the Department to encourage greater consistency of accreditation decisions. NESA provides training and other guidance to improve principals' understanding of the requirements of accreditation. Regular turnover of principals makes it difficult for agencies to ensure that all principals are adequately supported. Many principals we interviewed reported inconsistent standards for making accreditation determinations amongst peer principals.

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NESA has limited oversight of the process to accredit teachers as proficient

NESA's processes do not provide assurance that proficient accreditation determinations are consistent with the Standards. Principals notify NESA when they make an accreditation determination and provide a copy of the application. NESA checks the paperwork is complete and that the documentation is completed by the appropriate person before issuing a certificate. It does not check whether the information within the submission aligns with the Standards.

Prior to 2016, NESA reviewed all accreditation decisions. An independent review recommended it stop reviewing all applications and transition to a risk-based audit program, which it is yet to develop. NESA recently commissioned research to identify what a proficient teacher looks like in practice. It plans to use findings from this research to inform its future risk-based audit program. This program will only allow NESA to provide advice to address inconsistencies in future decisions as it cannot overturn decisions by Teacher Accreditation Authorities.

It was a government policy to automatically recognise all teachers who were employed before 1 October 2004 as meeting the proficient level of accreditation based on their experience. NESA accredited around 60,000 teachers through this process. These teachers were not required to demonstrate their practice aligns with the Standards at the time of accreditation. This increases the importance of this cohort demonstrating their practice continues to meet the Standards in procedures to maintain ongoing accreditation.

Teachers are not required to produce evidence to demonstrate their practice aligns with all standards to maintain accreditation

NESA reduced the amount of documentation teachers are required to submit to maintain proficient accreditation in response to a government mandated review. Teachers were previously required to report how their practice aligns with all of the Standards. The review noted that if schools had a robust performance and development framework then NESA could rely on the principal's assessment of whether their teachers continued to meet the Standards. Since 2018, the teacher's principal now endorses that their practice aligns with the Standards. However, as the current Performance and Development Framework is not consistently implemented in line with the Standards, the ability for principals to reliably make this assessment is compromised (see Section 2.3).

Teachers must complete 100 hours of professional development every five years (or seven years for casual and part-time teachers) but there is no longer a requirement for this to address all Standards. If the Performance and Development Framework is aligned with the Standards, then professional development should be concentrated on relevant elements of the Standards.

Teachers can use compulsory employment requirements such as child protection and first aid training to count towards the required 100 hours of professional learning. While these are important, they do not improve the quality of teaching.

Processes for gaining higher-level accreditation are lengthy and complex

As of 2018, there were only 102 out of 66,487 teachers with higher-level accreditation working in NSW public schools. Stakeholders we interviewed told us the length and complexity of the application process, deter potential candidates.

NESA guidance informs teachers of the higher-level accreditation requirements. This guidance includes evidence guides and process maps for each stage of accreditation. Training is also offered to help applicants become more familiar with the Standards. However, applications for higher-level accreditation that we reviewed exceeded 160 pages, and can take up to three years to complete. Providing clearer guidance on the expected length, and depth of evidence, required to meet these requirements could encourage more teachers to apply for higher-level accreditation.

Applications for higher-level accreditation typically take around 11 weeks to assess. Higher-level accreditation determinations are made by Directors of Educational Leadership (DELs). In public schools candidates develop their application, with the assistance of their principal. Applications are initially assessed by a panel consisting of a DEL and two principals from within the same operational directorate. The DEL is responsible for ensuring the panel does not have any potential conflicts of interest.

Endorsed applications are then forwarded to the Moderating and Consistency Committee (MCC). The MCC is a cross-system panel that makes recommendations on higher-level accreditation to improve consistency across sectors. The MCC review process typically takes two weeks to assess applications and a further two weeks to provide recommendations.

Some stakeholders we consulted had concerns about consistency in the handling of applications, and the amount of feedback provided, by DELs. The DEL makes the final determination, which may or may not align with the MCC's recommendation (See Exhibit 6). Between 2012–2016, eight per cent of higher-level accreditation determinations were made contrary to the MCC's recommendation. Relying on the MCC's assessment could shorten the overall assessment period and provide greater consistency across sectors.

Exhibit 6: Process of attaining higher-level accreditation in a public school

Optional eligibility assessment	• Teachers can complete an online application to self-assess their eligibility. • The principal documents their support for the teacher's application.
Development of application	The application must include: • evidence of how their teaching aligns with Standards • statements from the principal, a fellow teacher, and a mentee detailing how the teacher's practice aligns with the Standards • an external observation of teaching practice by a NESA-appointed observer.
Initial assessment	• When an application is submitted, the Department will form an accreditation panel consisting of a DEL and two principals from a similar geographic region. • The accreditation panel conducts a preliminary assessment of the application. • Supported applications are forwarded to the Moderating and Consistency Committee. Feedback is provided to applicants who were not supported.
Moderation of assessment	• The MCC assesses the application to ensure a consistent and fair application of the Standards across the state. • The MCC provides accreditation advice to the DEL leading the accreditation panel.
Final determination	• The Department's accreditation panel considers the MCC's advice. • The DEL makes a final accreditation decision and notifies NESA.
Processing of determination	• NESA records the decision and provides a certificate to the teacher.

Source: NSW Department of Education and the NSW Education Standards Authority.
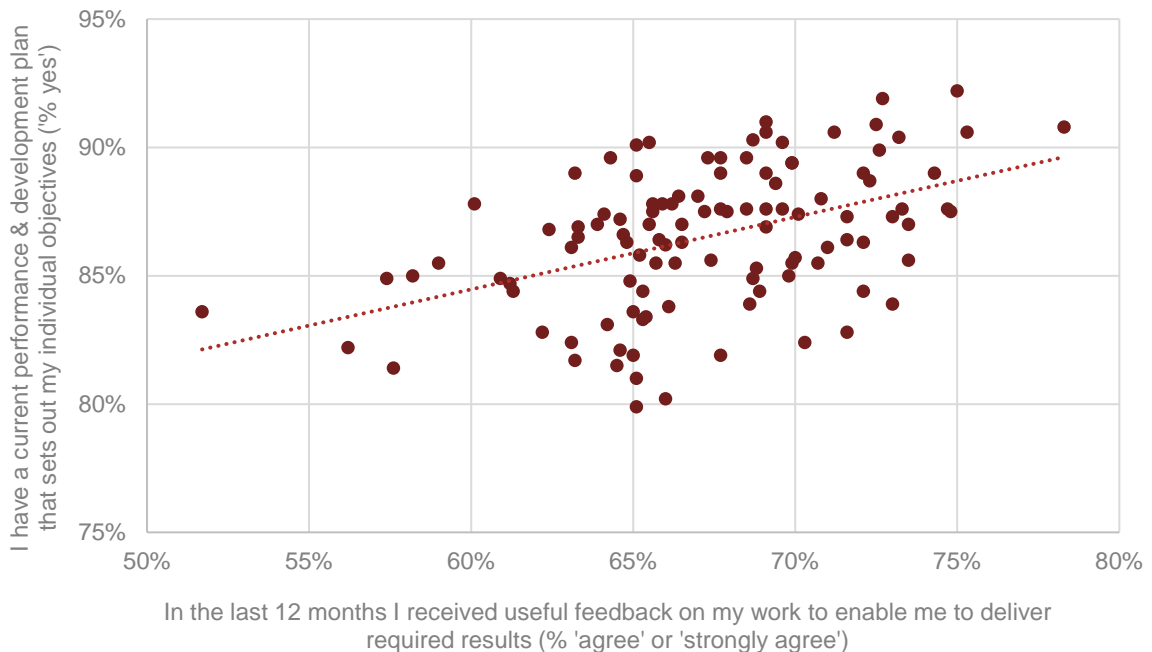
2.3 Performance and Development Framework

No system-wide view of compliance with the Performance and Development Framework

The Department has no central oversight of schools' implementation of the Performance and Development Framework (PDF). Principals are responsible for implementing the PDF in their school. The Department does not monitor whether teachers have a Performance and Development Plan (PDP), receive feedback from lesson observations or formal feedback on their performance. PDPs are stored locally and schools we consulted used a range of methods to store documents from hard copies to collaborative electronic workpapers. This complicates any efforts for central oversight.

The Department could use existing data to target its oversight. Each year, teachers are asked to complete a survey that asks if they have a performance and development plan and if they receive informal and scheduled feedback on performance. In 2018, the proportion of teachers who responded to the survey reported they had a PDP ranged from 80 to 92 per cent across Principal networks. Where teachers reported a performance and development plan, they were more likely to report they received useful feedback to improve their performance (see Exhibit 7).

Exhibit 7: Relationship between teachers having a PDP and receiving useful feedback

In the last 12 months I received useful feedback on my work to enable me to deliver required results (% 'agree' or 'strongly agree')

Note: Each dot on this chart represents one of the 110 Principal networks across NSW.
Source: Audit Office analysis based on the NSW Public Service Commission's People Matter Employee Survey 2018.

Monitoring and reporting on compliance with the basic elements of the PDF could also be used to inform initiatives to improve teaching quality. Several principals we consulted told us they compile teachers' PDP goals to identify common areas for professional development. Similarly, the Department could compile de-identified performance goals to identify system-wide priorities. Using a Human Capital Management system could provide a consistent way to collect and analyse information from PDPs. The NSW Public Service Commission encourages agencies to implement these systems to give greater visibility of workers' capabilities and aspirations.

The Performance and Development Framework relies too heavily on mutual agreement

Most principals we consulted supported the PDF for providing a structure and process to set goals, observe teacher practice and have formal reviews. Under the Framework, teachers collaborate with their supervisors to establish goals, nominate a colleague to observe their teaching practice and agree on annual written feedback on progress towards their goals.

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The requirement for teachers to agree with all goals within their PDP limits the ability of the principal or supervisor to set goals to target areas of greatest individual need. Setting appropriate goals is critical as they form the basis of professional learning, observations, self-assessment and annual review.

Teachers can select who conducts observations and negotiates what will be observed. This introduces risks that underperforming teachers choose peers rather than supervisors to conduct the observation and do not receive effective feedback.

Teachers must also agree to all written feedback. This limits opportunities for robust supervisor feedback to target areas for improvement. Lack of documented feedback on teacher performance can also compromise the ability for principals to commence formal performance improvement programs if necessary.

The Standards should be more clearly reflected in teacher professional goals

The Department does not clearly communicate its expectations for teachers' professional goals or provide any guidance on what effective professional goals look like. Guidance recommends that professional goals should 'consider' the Standards, Department and school priorities. Integrating the Standards into professional goals would help the principal to more reliably declare that teachers practice aligns with the Standards. This is a key element for teachers to maintain accreditation. We assessed a selection of 130 de-identified teacher PDPs from the schools we interviewed as part of the audit. We found that 101 of the 130 PDPs referred to the Standards in at least one of their professional goals. The overall quality of goals in the PDPs we assessed varied greatly. For example, only 48 of the 130 PDPs had goals that were measurable.

Further guidance on observations of teaching practice and effective feedback is needed

Teachers must have two lessons observed as part of the PDF but there is no guidance on effective methods of observation or how to provide effective feedback. Australian research has suggested that effective systems of teacher appraisal and feedback can increase teacher effectiveness by up to 30 per cent. Only 10 of the 130 PDPs we assessed had evidence that two observations were conducted. For PDPs that had evidence of at least one observation, the method and quality of the observations was variable. For example, some used a brief informal classroom visit or a 'partial' lesson observations as evidence.

Of the PDPs we reviewed, meaningful written feedback was more likely in observations of teaching practice that were assessed against the Standards. Strengthening the expectations on the appropriate level and depth of feedback would provide teachers with clearer direction on how they can improve their teaching practice. NESA has guidance on how to conduct observations for teacher accreditation requirements.

A review conducted by the Department in 2018 identified that professional goals and feedback was not strongly linked to the Standards. The integration of the Standards into the PDF is integral to effectively use the PDP to monitor and improve teaching quality.

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One school we consulted demonstrated a good approach to integrating the Standards with the PDF (Exhibit 8).

Exhibit 8 – Integrating the Standards into Performance and Development Framework

Macarthur Girls High School has mapped and aligned the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards) to all plans and frameworks it implements at the school including the School Plan, the School Excellence Framework, the whole school Professional Learning Plan for staff and Executive members and the Performance and Development Framework.

When creating their professional goals in the annual Performance and Development Plan, staff refer to the School Plan, their Faculty Plan and their personal career goals. As the School Plan and subsequent Faculty Plans are mapped to the Standards staff's goals therefore reflect this alignment.

All staff are observed at least twice annually and nominate 2-3 standards they would like to focus on. The observer describes the teaching and learning activities that occurred and evaluates the teacher's classroom practice in relation to the identified standard descriptors.

As part of the Performance and Development Plan process, all teachers collect evidence to demonstrate their progress towards achieving their goals. As each teacher's goals are informed by the School Plan and Faculty Plan; the evidence collected may also provide evidence towards the attainment of key improvement measures in the School Plan and inform the annual SEF self-assessment. Staff may also use this evidence as part of their accreditation and maintenance process.

Source: Audit Office analysis based on information from Macarthur Girls High School 2019.

2.4 Managing underperforming and unsatisfactory teachers

The number of teachers with identified underperformance and unsatisfactory performance is low

The number of teachers formally identified as underperforming or unsatisfactory in NSW public schools is low. The Performance and Development Framework is not being implemented in a way to allow principals to reliably identify underperforming teachers (see section 2.3). In 2018, only 43 per cent of teachers who responded to a state-wide survey agreed that their manager appropriately deals with employees who perform poorly. In 2018, only 53 (or 0.1 per cent) of teachers were formally identified as underperforming or unsatisfactory. By comparison, a report on school inspections conducted in the United Kingdom assessed teaching quality in three per cent of schools as 'inadequate'.

Teachers are classified as underperforming when their supervisor identifies they are experiencing difficulty with their teaching performance and are put on a performance improvement program. If after this process, the teacher's practice does not align with the Standards, the teacher can be declared unsatisfactory. In 2018, only 29 teachers were either dismissed or resigned as part of a formal action taken based on concerns of poor teaching quality.

Some principals are not confident in managing underperforming teachers

A recent survey found that most aspiring principals were concerned about their capacity to manage underperforming teachers. Principals are responsible for managing the performance of their teachers. The Department's Employee Performance and Conduct (EPAC) directorate has recently established a program aimed at building the capacity of principals to allow them to confidently manage underperforming teachers (see Chapter 3).

Past experiences can make principals reluctant to undertake formal performance management. Several principals we interviewed recalled instances where teachers submitted bullying and harassment claims after being informed their practice is below standard. These principals reported that this provided grounds for the teacher to take leave, disrupted classes and affected staff morale.

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EPAC has improved its process for managing underperforming and unsatisfactory teachers

The Department recently streamlined its process for managing underperforming and unsatisfactory teachers. It updated its Teacher Improvement Plan, allowing continual assessment of progress towards meeting the Standards. Under the plan, teachers have up to ten weeks to improve their teaching practice. Principals can conduct assessments throughout this period to provide additional support and ensure the goals are met by the end of the assessment period.

The Department provides resources and training for principals to use when addressing underperformance. These resources support principals to have meaningful performance conversations, reliably assess teacher performance, and implement the performance management processes in line with policies and legislation. Principals we consulted who have used the revised process appreciated the improvements and felt better supported throughout the performance management process.

2.5   School Excellence Framework

The Department assists schools to conduct their self-assessments

Schools are expected to gather and reflect on evidence when self-assessing their performance. The Department provides guidelines to help schools conduct annual self-assessments against the School Excellence Framework (SEF). The Department also provides training, and survey tools, to capture student, parent and teacher feedback to inform school self-assessments. Principals we consulted generally understood the framework and the expectations of the self-assessment process.

Directors of Educational Leadership (DELs) can use the SEF process to monitor teaching quality across their network of schools. DELs endorse each self-assessment and must satisfy themselves that the self-assessment accurately represents the school's performance. DELs we consulted told us they discussed any concerns with the principal prior to endorsement.

Schools reported that preparing an evidence set for external validation is onerous

Schools we interviewed reported they found preparing evidence sets for external validation onerous. Each school's self-assessment against the SEF is externally validated every five years to promote greater consistency. Schools produce an annotated evidence set to justify their self-assessment.

Most principals we interviewed told us that before beginning the process they were unaware of the depth of evidence required to support each assessment, as well as the appropriate length of the submission. Most principals also chose to heavily involve their school executive in compiling and annotating evidence, in some cases this was at the expense of their regular teaching and management duties. Some principals we interviewed reported they spent over 120 hours to prepare the evidence set. Clearer communication of the expectations of the depth of evidence required could reduce the workload of schools in preparing for the external validation process.

The Department could maximise the value of the external validation process for schools

Principals we interviewed reported that although it took significant resources, they found the external validation process useful in improving their understanding of their school's performance and quality of teaching. The value of the external validation process could be improved by the external panel providing additional written feedback to schools and aligning the external validation process with the school planning cycle.

During the final stages of external validation, the panel meets with the school's executive to discuss their findings. Most principals we interviewed found these discussions added value. The process is completed with a short, standardised letter listing the panel's overall assessment. More detailed written feedback would allow the school to reflect on the panel's observations and provide an input to inform future school planning.

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Aligning the external validation process with the school planning cycle would allow principals to use the knowledge and feedback gained through this process to inform their school plan. By preparing the evidence set, Principals must source data to demonstrate the school's performance. This gives a clear understanding of the areas of improvement. Principals could then use feedback from the external panel to develop strategies to improve performance in these key areas. Aligning the two processes may increase the value of external validation and produce stronger school plans.

Information collected from the SEF informs strategies to improve teaching quality

The Secretary is provided with an annual overview of the performance of schools in many areas including teaching quality. Each year, CESE produces a report that summarises the results from schools' self-assessments against the SEF as well as the results from external validation. These reports are used to inform strategies to address areas for improvement on a state-wide level. Recent reports have highlighted that the use of data within schools to monitor student development and target effective teaching strategies is an area for improvement (Exhibit 9).

Exhibit 9: School Excellence Framework – 2018 school self-assessments – teaching domain

■ Working towards delivering (%) ■ Delivering (%) ■ Sustaining and Growing (%) ■ Excelling (%)
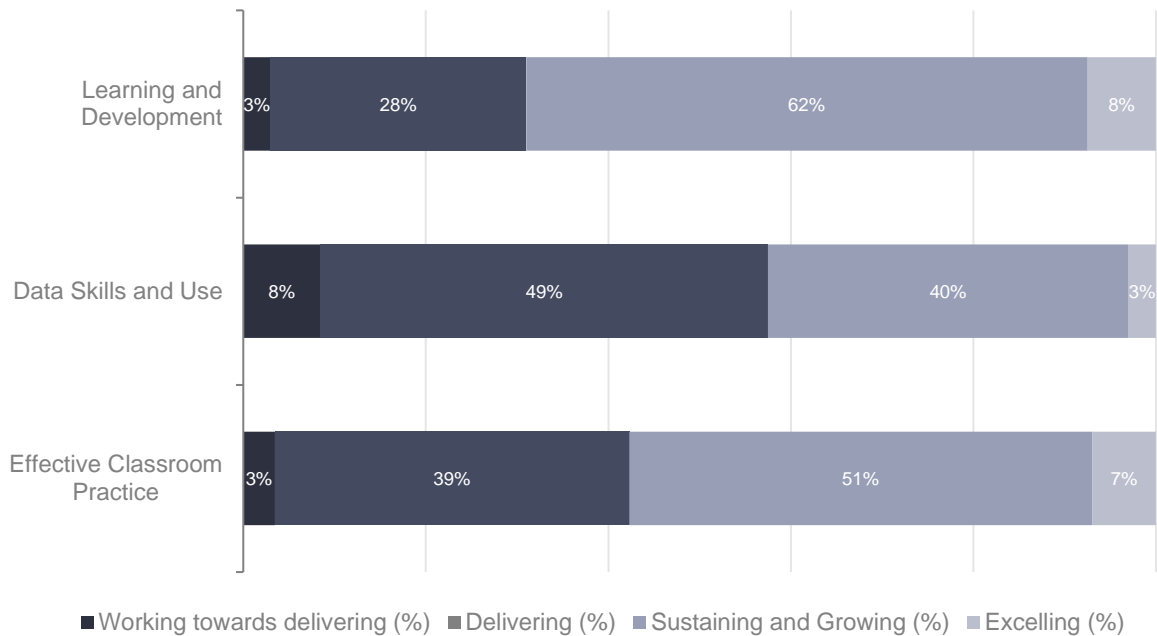
Source: NSW Department of Education 2019.

To address this gap, the Department developed training and guidance to better equip schools with the skills and knowledge for the effective use of data. Since 2016, over 70 per cent of NSW public schools have had at least one teacher participate in this training.

The Department provides schools with access to a set of surveys (Tell Them From Me) to allow them to formally collect feedback from students, parents and teachers on their experiences. Over 1,000 staff from over 420 schools have participated in training to assist them to use this data to improve teaching practice or for school planning.

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3. Strategies to improve teaching quality

3.1   Locally administered strategies

Programs are consistent with evidence on the benefits of mentoring and coaching

The Quality Teaching, Successful Students program was informed by the Department's Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation's (CESE) research into high performing education systems. This research identified the importance of collaborative practices in improving teaching quality, and the role school leaders play in facilitating this culture. QTSS was announced as a government election commitment in 2015, providing $224 million over four years to 'train and support primary school teachers to become mentors to others'.

Beginning Teacher Support Funding is consistent with a CESE review of academic literature and feedback from stakeholder consultation. The review found that effective induction programs use trained expert mentors and provide direct coaching time. Submissions and comments made in response to a discussion paper consistently raised that beginning teachers should have access to a quality induction program, reduced teaching loads and support from trained mentors.

The Great Teaching, Inspired Learning Blueprint for Action committed that all beginning teachers would receive high quality support in their first year of teaching. Teacher mentors would be given access to specific training and flexibility in their teaching responsibilities to support classroom observation and provide structured feedback to early career teachers.

Programs have identified objectives but have not set key performance indicators or targets

The objective of the Quality Teaching, Successful Students program is to ensure all primary students benefit from high quality teaching and learning practices that best meets their needs. Beginning Teachers Support Funding is provided to support beginning teachers' induction and professional development guided by the Standards. There are no key performance indicators or targets attached to either of these programs, which reduces effective monitoring of progress towards the objectives of the programs.

Accountability for use of funding is limited to school annual reports

Schools report on the use of Beginning Teacher Support Funding and Quality Teaching, Successful Students funding in their annual reports. This form of reporting helps show the school community how funding is being used. But the lack of central monitoring means that there is no review of whether funding is being used in line with program guidelines.

We reviewed how 30 schools reported their use of Beginning Teacher Support Funding in their annual reports and found that all schools' reported use of funding was in line with guidelines. A policy document outlines that this funding should be used in accordance with four conditions:

- beginning teachers have reduced responsibilities or teaching loads
- beginning teachers are provided with ongoing feedback and support
- teacher mentors have access to specific training and flexibility in their teaching responsibilities to support classroom observation and provide structured feedback
- beginning teachers have access to professional learning on several nominated areas.

We also reviewed how 30 schools reported their use of Quality Teaching, Successful Students funding. One school had no explanation for how funding was used. We assessed that a further five schools' reported use of funding as outside of guidelines.

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These schools used funding to:

- support students with specific learning needs
- support the school through an external validation process
- provide relief time for teachers to update student, parent and teacher surveys
- purchase and implement a student diagnostic assessment
- implement filmmaking and coding programs.

Quality Teaching, Successful Students program guidance notes that strategies to enhance professional practice funded through the program must be evidence-based and focused on improving the quality of teaching. Guidelines note that funding can be used to:

- provide release time for a school executive to establish collaborative teaching practices
- provide release time for a school executive to establish mentoring practices to help an individual teacher with a specific issue such as classroom management
- employ a specialist in an area where teachers need support, such as literacy or numeracy
- support teachers with accreditation or the performance and development framework.

Evaluation has been conducted on only one of the two strategies

The Department identified a key measure of success for the Quality Teaching, Successful Students program as improved student learning outcomes. We were not provided with evidence that the QTSS program has been reviewed or evaluated since its introduction in 2015 to determine whether it is realising this intended outcome.

In 2017, CESE evaluated the use of Beginning Teacher Support Funding. The evaluation found that not all teachers were receiving release time and mentoring allocations in full, suggesting that the policy had not been fully implemented as intended. It also found that teachers with two years or less experience scored lower than more experienced teachers on the measured drivers of student learning, confirming that the program is appropriately targeting them for support.

The evaluation surveyed principals who suggested better targeting of funding, improving communication of guidelines, and more professional support for mentors. The Department responded to the evaluation by updating policies, improving communication to funding recipients, and developing case studies to showcase good practice. From 2017, funding was extended to support beginning teachers on temporary one-year contracts who have yet to be accredited at proficient level. CESE has flagged further evaluations to be conducted as more data became available.

3.2 Programs for high-performing and underperforming teachers

Programs aim to improve identification of high performing and underperforming teachers but are only reaching a small number of teachers at this stage

The Mastery of Teaching program aims to increase the number and effective use of Highly Accomplished Teachers. Of more than 66,000 teachers in NSW public schools, only 102 are accredited at the Highly Accomplished or Lead Teacher (HALT) level. The program provides mentoring to teachers currently demonstrating expert teaching practice who wish to apply for higher-level accreditation.

The Teacher Performance Management and Improvement (TPMI) project supports principals in managing teacher performance. Out of 49,000 permanent and over 39,000 casual and temporary teachers, 53 were involved in teacher improvement programs in 2018. The program provides hands-on support and guidance in managing teacher underperformance and improvement.

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Pilot programs are backed by evidence and consultation

The Mastery of Teaching program was informed by research showing that high-performing education systems systematically identify expert teachers and deliberately organise the sharing of their expertise among teachers within and across schools. The Department also surveyed its existing cohort of HALTs to inform the design of the program. The survey identified:

- access to support from existing HALTs is unequal across the state
- the self-selection application process may discourage some teachers from applying
- there are misconceptions about the intensive nature of the accreditation process.

The TPMI project used research from the principal workload study, school leadership strategy, and a survey of aspiring principals to inform its approach. It found that existing principals reported time barriers and the perceived length of the process as key reasons for not managing underperforming teachers. Aspiring principals reported a lack of confidence and capability in this area.

Pilot programs have identified objectives and set KPIs to determine success

The objective of the Mastery of Teaching program is to increase the number of Highly Accomplished Teachers by using school leaders to identify teachers currently demonstrating expert practice and using existing HALT teachers to support identified teachers through accreditation. The program originally set a key performance indicator of increasing the number of teachers to an average of 10 in each of the Department's 110 networks by 2022.

The objective of the TPMI trial is to support principals to enhance the quality of teaching through better performance and development practices, and address teacher underperformance as part of a high-performance school culture. The TPMI identified nine goals under two main areas to:

- improve teacher performance and development, management and improvement processes
- increase school leaders' willingness and confidence to engage in these processes.

Trials are supported by training and guidelines for implementation

The Department provided clear information to directors and principals in the 20 networks selected for the Mastery of Teaching program trial. Information packs described the purpose and process of the program. Checklists and forms assist directors, principals, and existing HALTs through their respective parts of the process. Guidelines help a state-wide panel make consistent judgements to select supported candidates.

Several directors and principals we interviewed told us they participated in or were setting up alternate arrangements to support aspiring HALT teachers. This creates a potential for inconsistent advice and duplication of effort across networks without sharing of good practice.

TPMI project teams gave 124 presentations at principal network meetings and professional learning events up to October 2018. Presentations showed research on the impacts of underperforming teachers, links between performance development and performance improvement, responsibilities of principals and supervisors, and links to further resources. In a review of the project, principals gave positive feedback on the resources, templates and other tools to help guide professional conversations and document processes.

Mid-point reviews and evaluations were conducted to inform further rollout of trials

The Department reviewed the pilot of the Mastery of Teaching program in 2018. Lessons learned from the review included the need for:

- more support for directors, principals and teachers to understand the stages of the teaching standards, accreditation and their link to in-school performance and development programs
- increased reliability of judgements about the teaching practice of nominated teachers
- more effective ways to better match observers to nominated teachers.

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CESE evaluated the TPMI trial in October 2018. The evaluation found that two-thirds of principals who participated showed increased willingness and/or confidence to manage and improve teacher performance. The number of improvement programs implemented during the trial in participating areas was higher than in previous years and in out-of-trial areas.

Face-to-face contact was considered critical to the success of the program as it allowed for more efficient communication when working with complex issues. Other aspects of the trial that were also highly valued included the expertise, knowledge and guidance provided by the field team.

Pace of expansion may cause issues in resourcing and consistent implementation

The original Mastery of Teaching project plan was overambitious given the low number of existing HALT teachers. In May 2018, the original plan targeted support for 1,110 new Highly Accomplished teachers by 2022. At June 2019, the target was halved to a total of 530 Highly Accomplished Teachers. The Department had identified 75 nominated teachers and 35 observers and coaches for 2019. The pace of expansion is still highly dependent on the availability of existing HALTs to observe and coach.

TPMI supported only 17 per cent of schools in trial areas in 2018. The program evaluation recommended that communication should be improved but noted that further resources may be needed if more schools sought support. TPMI improved its communication when it expanded to all areas of the State in 2019. Field officers' caseloads should be monitored to ensure TPMI can continue to provide shoulder-to-shoulder support. which was considered essential to its success.

Trial programs need to be monitored and adapted where necessary during wider rollout

The initial project plan for the Mastery of Teaching did not schedule any further reviews past the pilot stage. Effective evaluation requires planning in the early stages of a program design.

The project also aimed to 'create authentic in-school roles and a new career pathway for teachers who wish to stay in the classroom and impact on the practice of their colleagues'. Future evaluation should consider how Highly Accomplished teachers supported by this program are sharing their expertise and improving the quality of teaching in their schools. It should also compare how Lead Teachers are being used, who are not currently targeted by the program.

The Department advised that the TPMI trial has been scheduled for further evaluation in 2020. A limitation of the initial trial evaluation was that much of the data focusing on the impact of the trial was based on participants' perceptions, and thus subjective. Future evaluations should assess whether supported schools have built capacity to address teacher underperformance without intensive TPMI support. The role of the Director, Education Leadership could be an alternate way to support principals in managing and improving teacher performance.

3.3   Quality Teaching Rounds

A university partnership helped to establish a firm research base for the program

Quality Teaching Rounds (QTR) extends on research about the effectiveness of 'instructional rounds' and 'professional learning communities'. Instructional rounds require all participants to take turns in sharing their practice providing a common experience as a basis for analysis and discussion. Professional learning communities require ongoing commitment to a group which allows for development of trust and respect.

QTR combines these approaches with the Quality Teaching model. Developed by the University of Newcastle (the University) and the Department in 2003, the model provides a tool to systematically analyse lesson quality. The associated coding scales were informed by research into elements of effective teaching.

Objectives and key performance indicators are shared with the University

The objective of QTR as stated by the University is to improve the quality of teaching in ways that teachers experience as supportive and positive, rather than subjecting teachers to intensified levels of accountability and performance review.

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The Department strongly endorses this model of teacher professional development and supports schools with funding, training and online resources. Key performance indicators include the number of teachers trained, number of schools scaling QTR and qualitative feedback from schools. Participating in QTR is a local school decision.

Guidance material helps support consistent implementation but is dated

Guidance material to help teachers implement the Quality Teaching model is dated (2006) and does not reference contemporary policies or procedures. The guide has broken links to supporting resources, and does not reference the Performance and Development Framework, the Standards or professional accreditation. The discussion paper introducing the Quality Teaching model is also dated (2003). The paper references educational research from the 1990s as the most recent available.

A website developed by the Department and University provides further practical guidance for schools to implement QTR, including on:

- planning for casual relief at the start of each school term or year
- producing a timetable for the rounds (an example of a full day timetable is provided)
- forming Professional Learning Communities and choosing an approach to facilitation.

The Department has established an online community of practice for QTR participants to share good practice, ask questions and support colleagues. It should monitor this communication channel to ensure schools are provided with consistent advice.

Department has funded teachers to attend training and take part in the research trial

The University, in partnership with the Department, provides professional learning to teachers to train them to conduct Quality Teaching Rounds within their school. Training is offered across the State which provides further opportunities for a wide range of schools to participate. Since 2014, 1,587 teachers and 629 schools have participated in QTR training delivered by the University.

In 2019, the Department waived the workshop fee of $500 per participant for two teachers per school and contributed up to $2000 per school to contribute to casual relief. The University provides schools with additional funding of up $20,000 to take part in its research trial.

Some schools are adapting how they implement the program to reduce costs

Several schools we interviewed told us they had sent teachers to be trained but could not implement QTR in their schools due to the ongoing costs. These costs are typically to provide relief time for four days per teacher per year for ongoing implementation of QTR.

Other schools we interviewed told us they had taken elements of the framework and adapted it to reduce costs. For example, some reduced the number of teachers in a round to three. The Department's guidance is that a round should consist of between four to six teachers.

The University identifies eight essential features of implementing QTR. The University assessed whether schools were conducting QTR in compliance with these eight features in a trial. It found all participating schools met at least five elements but that effects on teaching quality were stronger for schools that met six or more of the elements.

Randomised controlled trial evaluation is being used to identify program outcomes

The Department, in partnership with the University, funded a randomised controlled trial of QTR in 2014–2015. This method of evaluation gives greater assurance of impact. Participating in QTR was found to significantly improve the quality of teaching and teaching morale in a diverse range of schools.

The trial involved 12 primary and 12 secondary schools which were randomly allocated to one of two 'intervention' groups or a waitlist 'control' group. 192 teachers' lessons were observed at baseline, post-intervention and after 12 months to determine impact on classroom practice.

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The University is conducting further research on the program up to 2022 in a larger sample of schools. This research will use NAPLAN and Progressive Achievement Tests to determine impact on student outcomes. It will also investigate the sustainability of the effects on students and teachers, scalability, and how to support small and remote schools through a digital form of QTR.

3.4   Executive Priority Project – Teaching Quality

Executive Priority Project provides an overview of activities across the Department

The Executive Priority Project – Teaching Quality aims to provide a single point of oversight, coordination and accountability for work related to improving teaching quality in public schools. Cross-divisional project working groups provide subject matter expertise and support executive sponsors to align workstreams across the program. Seven workstreams cover most elements of the lifecycle of a teacher including: pre-service recruitment and attraction, early career teachers, expert teachers, teacher performance and development, and professional learning.

The structure of the Executive Priority Project may help align the work of different areas of the Department. Divisions of the Department are expected to produce delivery plans for each initiative under the Executive Priority Project. Resourcing is largely drawn from within business units and this creates risks to deliver work involving significant changes.

Executive focus may help progress work on traditionally difficult areas more quickly

Executive representation on steering committees and buy-in to the project may help address difficult, longstanding issues. For example, one workstream is tasked with developing an alternate career pathway for expert teachers. The project has identified that the skills of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers are not being fully utilised as intended. Only 27 HALTs accredited in NSW who are employed by the Department are currently working in classroom teacher positions. A survey conducted in March 2019 found that most HALTs are in leadership positions but don't feel their skills in instructional leadership, mentoring, coaching and leading professional learning are adequately leveraged.

This workstream has developed a concept paper and is working with Human Resources to explore new role descriptions, salary scales and planned release time to spread the expertise of HALTs across the system. The descriptions of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher practice in the Standards could be used to guide potential roles and responsibilities.

Another workstream is focused on improving performance and development and teacher improvement practices. This includes updating templates and development of new resources.

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Section two

Appendices

Appendix one – Response from agencies

NSW GOVERNMENT | Education

Ms Margaret Crawford
Auditor-General of NSW
Level 19, Darling Park Tower 2
201 Sussex Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

DGL19/585

Dear Ms Crawford

Thank you for your letter of 28 August 2019 providing a copy of the *New South Wales – General's Performance Audit – Ensuring teaching quality in NSW public schools* report and seeking a response from the Department of Education (Your ref: D191841/PA6637). I am pleased to provide you with an Education Cluster response to the report.

It is evident the audit recommendations presented in the report are clearly aligned with the strategic plans of the Department of Education and NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA).

The Department of Education Strategic Plan 2018-2022 includes the goal that every student, every teacher, every leader and every school improves every year; to enable us to achieve this goal, we have made Improving Teaching Quality one of the five key priorities for the Department.

The Department and NESA have jointly prepared a response which reflects the position of both agencies, supporting all seven (7) recommendations. The consolidated response is reflected in the table attached together with detailed commentary linked to each recommendation.

I want to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the input you and your office have added in supporting this important body of work. Further to this, I would like to acknowledge officers from across the Education Cluster who have contributed to this activity.

Yours sincerely

Mark Scott AO
SECRETARY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

September 2019

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Response to Recommendations

	Recommendation	Response	Comments
1.	Work with relevant stakeholders to ensure Teacher Accreditation Authorities receive adequate training before making accreditation decisions.	Support	**Supporting Proficient Teacher accreditation decisions** NESA is currently conducting research that aims to identify a minimum benchmark for Proficient Teacher. Establishment of a valid and reliable benchmark for Proficient Teacher practice will underpin strategies aimed at supporting TAAs across NSW to make consistent accreditation decisions. NESA will use findings from the research to • Communicate a consistent definition of teaching quality at the Proficient Teacher level of the Standards • produce resources that support the development of a common understanding of what Proficient Teacher practice looks like across the profession • inform criteria for conducting risk-based audits of TAAs' Proficient Teacher accreditation decisions. Online support materials are also under development for implementation from November 2019 that provide more guidance for principals, TAAs and supervisors on making valid, reliable and consistent judgements about practice at Proficient Teacher. These resources will be updated, as necessary, based on findings from the Proficient Teacher judgements research. The Department of Education supports NESA's research to identify a minimum benchmark for Proficient Teacher accreditation. The Department has provided principal and supervisor nominees to NESA to participate in this research. The Department supports NESA's provision of training of External Assessors, TAA (AIL) personnel and MCC members. Currently, the Department has commenced training of the first cohort of 150 Directors, Educational Leadership and Principals across all six operational directorates in the nationally recognised Assessor Training Program (ATP).

Education Cluster Response – Performance Audit – Ensuring Teaching Quality in NSW Public Schools

	Recommendation	Response	Comments
			Supporting Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher accreditation decisions NESA has developed a tailored, NSW version of AITSL's Assessor Training Program (ATP) which is currently being delivered across systems and sectors in NSW to improve cross-sectoral consistency. The training involves a comprehensive online module followed by a face-to-face training session for External Assessors, TAA (AIL) personnel and MCC members. Completion of the ATP online module and the face-to-face session is mandatory for all agents in the assessment and decision-making process for higher-level accreditation including. • External Assessors allocated to conduct observations of applicants as part of the higher-level application and assessment process • members of the MCC responsible for moderating judgements and providing TAAs (AIL) with advice and recommendations about accreditation • TAA (AIL) personnel responsible for assessing applications and making decisions about accreditation at the higher levels. The ATP aims to improve the consistency, validity and reliability of accreditation decisions for Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher. The ATP is designed to provide assessors with: • a deep understanding of the Standards for Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher • a comprehensive understanding of national teacher certification, with particular emphasis on the role of assessors • skills in making valid and consistent judgements about evidence of practice against the Standards for Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher • the capability to undertake informed observations of teaching practice • guidance on engaging in effective communications with fellow assessors.

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NSW Auditor-General's Report to Parliament | Ensuring teaching quality in NSW public schools | Appendix one – Response from agencies

	Recommendation	Response	Comments
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	Recommendation	Response	Comments
			applicants, principals, referees and others during the assessment process.
2.	Review and improve the application and assessment processes for attaining higher-level accreditation, in consultation with NSW and national stakeholders, by a) clarifying the quantity and quality of evidence for higher-level accreditation b) reducing duplication throughout the assessment process	Support	NESA has been working on strategies to clarify requirements and expectations about the amount of evidence required of applicants for higher- level accreditation, reduce duplication and processing times and improve alignment between NSW and national certification processes. In response to the Auditor-General's recommendation, NESA will revise higher-level application requirements and the processes for moderation by the MCC in consultation with key stakeholders. NESA's revised application process will: • clarify and communicate evidence requirements for applicants • improve alignment with national certification processes • reduce duplication in the assessment process • be more developmental in nature by increasing opportunities for support and feedback to applicants throughout the process. The Department of Education welcomes the proposed revision and will work with NESA to ensure this supports our shared commitment to increase the number of teachers accredited as Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher in NSW.
3.	Implement a program of risk-based reviews to provide confidence that proficient level accreditation determinations align with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.	Support	The Department and NESA want to ensure that the public can have confidence that proficient level accreditation determinations align with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. The agencies will work together to ensure there is moderation of decisions made by TMs and that TAAs are actively accessing the guidance and support available to them. NESA's internal process for auditing Proficient Teacher and maintenance of accreditation decisions is under development. A pilot is planned to begin in late 2019 that aims to review the extent to which the revised policies for Proficient Teacher and maintenance are meeting their objectives. To inform NESA's longer-term Proficient Teacher audit process, a valid and reliable benchmark for Proficient Teacher practice needs to be established and agreed to by

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	Recommendation	Response	Comments
			the profession. NESA is currently conducting research that aims to identify a minimum benchmark for Proficient Teacher.
4	improve the Performance and Development Framework by: a) providing guidance that supports aligning goals, professional development, observations and reviews to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers b) strengthening the quality of observations of teaching practice and requiring at least one observation to be conducted by a supervisor c) providing guidance that supports supervisors and principals to effectively use the framework to improve teacher performance before formal performance management d) monitoring implementation of the Framework through collection of de-identified Performance and Development Plans, observations and reviews	Support	The Department is committed to ensuring the Performance and Development process for teachers supports the ongoing improvement of student outcomes through continuous development of a skilled, effective and professional teaching workforce. Within the Executive Priority Program for Improving Teaching Quality we are aiming to deliver in early 2020 (subject to consultation) a – Refined Performance and Development Plan (PDP) template clearly linked to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards) to support accreditation processes, with agreement of the NSW Teachers Federation. – Relaunch of the Performance and Development Framework for Principals, Executives and Teachers via a consolidated suite of e-learning tools and a face-to-face format to support and build supervisor and principal capabilities in managing performance and development. The revised Framework will clarify the requirement for observation and the Department will propose the requirement for at least one observation to be conducted by a supervisor, subject to consultation with relevant stakeholders. There already exist a number of templates for observation of teaching, linked to Instructional Rounds, Quality Teaching Rounds, Accreditation and Improvement programs. The development of an observation template to support the performance and development process will be explored. We will further consider and consult on the appropriate mechanism for monitoring of how the Framework is being applied in schools, including plans, observations and feedback to teachers, in order to support the Department in refining our guidance and targeting our professional development of teachers and supervisors.
5	Improve the School Excellence policy by: a) clarifying the quantity and quality of evidence required for external validation b) requiring tailored written feedback from external validation panels, allowing	Support	School Planning, including self-assessment against the School Excellence Framework and the use of external validation, is an important part of ensuring every school improves every year. Refinements to this process are being implemented as part of the Executive Priority Program Improving Schools and Student Outcomes: a) Work has commenced with Directors, Educational Leadership (DELs) and CESE to build contextualised, authentic, self-assessment processes to address

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	Recommendation	Response	Comments
	schools to better use insights for future planning c) aligning the external validation process to the school planning and reporting cycle to allow schools to better use the insights gained from the external validation process		the perceived onerous task of creating evidence sets. Further support will be developed by gathering sample evidence sets from schools undertaking external validation in 2019, to support system understanding of the quantity and quality of evidence required. The Department places a stronger focus on analysis rather than annotation when undertaking self-assessment, i.e. identifying evidence of impact/change rather than activity/process quality, and drawing conclusions and future directions based on these evidence sets. b) The external validation panel process is currently being reviewed as part of the Executive Priority Project workstream on School Excellence. This includes strengthening the external validation process to support and inform school planning. c) The Improving School and Student Outcomes Steering Committee has endorsed a move to a 4-year planning cycle, aligning the external validation cycle with the school planning cycle. Roll out of the new model will commence with schools undertaking external validation in 2020. The rolling school planning cycle will commence for all schools in 2021, in line with the new school planning cycle
6.	Develop and implement a strategy on how to more effectively use Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers to improve teaching quality across the state	Support	There is an important role for skilled and experienced teachers to work with colleagues leading professional learning communities within and across schools. Many of our teachers already take on these additional responsibilities voluntarily or as part of a leadership role in schools, but this is ad hoc rather than systematic. To provide greater capacity for leadership of teaching and learning, the Department will scope and consult on options for career pathways that would recognise and reward expert teachers who remain in the classroom and work with other teachers to improve their practice. This would be parallel to the traditional school leadership pathway, with opportunities for movement between. Research shows, and the Department agrees, that HALTs demonstrate high levels of teaching efficacy and engage in practices that demonstrate leadership of teaching and learning. Our Mastery of Teaching program, which will support our goal of increasing the numbers of Highly Accomplished teachers state-wide, already focuses on spreading quality teaching practice and driving school improvement. The early expansion of this program is in rural, remote and regional settings where there are few or no existing HALTs

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	Recommendation	Response	Comments
			Consideration of school-based roles for 'expert teachers' will build upon and seek to deploy more systematically this small but growing cohort of teachers with higher levels of accreditation.
7	Evaluate the Quality Teaching, Successful Students program to determine whether it has been implemented in accordance with guidelines and is achieving its intended outcomes.	Support	Principals are supported by the Schools Strategic Resourcing Unit (SSRU) to make evidence based decisions and have the flexibility to determine how best to use their Quality Teaching, Successful Student (QTSS) staffing resource allocation. Principals are required to outline the proposed use of the allocation in their school plan and report on implementation and impact.
			The SSRU is developing strategies to support schools to strategically use their allocation and to measure the impact on student learning outcomes. The impact of the initiative can be enhanced when combined with flexible funding to focus on improving the quality of teaching
			There needs to be a strengthening of accountability around the impact of use of the QTSS allocation, particularly now it is recurrent funding. It is timely to consider what has been achieved and if the methodology that drives the allocation to schools is meeting needs of schools, including specialist settings.
			SSRU will work with CESE to initiate an evaluation of the initiative. As part of this, the Department will consider whether to introduce an additional allocation to support secondary based staff to increase teacher quality in all public schools, as QTSS is currently only available to support primary based staff.

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Appendix two – About the audit

Audit objective

This audit assessed the effectiveness of the NSW Department of Education's and NSW Education Standards Authority's arrangements to ensure teaching quality in NSW public schools.

Audit criteria

We addressed the audit objective through the following audit questions and criteria.

1. Do agencies effectively monitor the quality of teaching in NSW public schools?
    a) Agencies have clearly defined indicators of teaching quality.
    b) Agencies consistently assess, monitor and report on teaching quality.
    c) Agencies collect and analyse data to monitor trends in teaching quality across NSW.

2. Are strategies to improve the quality of teaching planned, communicated, implemented and monitored well?
    a) Effective planning was undertaken for the implementation and delivery of strategies to improve teaching quality.
    b) Strategies are implemented in accordance with their guidelines
    c) Agencies regularly monitor, evaluate and report on the effectiveness of strategies to improve teaching quality.

Audit scope and focus

In assessing the criteria, we focused on the following aspects.

1. Arrangements to monitor teaching quality, including:
    a) performance and Development Framework for Principals, Executives and Teachers in NSW Public Schools
    b) School Excellence Framework
    c) teacher accreditation at proficient and higher levels
    d) management of unsatisfactory teacher performance.

2. Strategies to improve teaching quality, improving:
    a) Strong Start, Great Teachers
    b) Quality Teaching, Successful Students
    c) Quality Teaching Rounds
    d) Mastery of Teaching program
    e) Teacher Performance Management and Improvement project
    f) Executive Priority Project - Teaching Quality.

Audit exclusions

The audit did not assess:

*   the regulation or accreditation of initial teacher education courses
*   accreditation of professional development courses
*   early childhood education or schools for specific purposes
*   the school leadership institute and strategy
*   merits of government policy objectives.

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Audit approach

Our procedures included:

1. interviewing staff from the audited agencies
2. interviewing 14 principals from a selection of primary and secondary schools.
3. reviewing documents relevant to strategies and other monitoring arrangements:
    a) Planning documents for strategies
    b) Program guidelines and communication materials
    c) School Excellence Framework evidence sets and external validations
    d) School Plans and Annual Reports
    e) Performance and Development Plans
    f) Program reviews and evaluations.

4. analysing data from sources including:
    a) School Excellence Framework self-assessments and external validations
    b) People Matter Employee Survey
    c) Tell Them From Me Surveys
    d) Teacher accreditation decisions.

The audit approach was complemented by quality assurance processes within the Audit Office to ensure compliance with professional standards.

Audit methodology

Our performance audit methodology is designed to satisfy Australian Audit Standard ASAE 3500 Performance Engagements and other professional standards. The standards require the audit team to comply with relevant ethical requirements and plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance and draw a conclusion on the audit objective. Our processes have also been designed to comply with requirements specified in the *Public Finance and Audit Act 1983* and the *Local Government Act 1993*.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation and assistance provided by the audited agencies throughout the audit. We also thank the school principals we selected and other stakeholders who met with us to discuss the audit.

Audit cost

The estimated cost of the audit, including travel and overheads, is $330,000.

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Appendix three – Performance auditing

What are performance audits?

Performance audits determine whether State or local government entities carry out their activities effectively, and do so economically and efficiently and in compliance with all relevant laws.

The activities examined by a performance audit may include a government program, all or part of an audited entity, or more than one entity. They can also consider particular issues which affect the whole public sector and/or the whole local government sector. They cannot question the merits of government policy objectives.

The -Auditor-General's mandate to undertake performance audits is set out in section 38B of the *Public Finance and Audit Act 1983* for State government entities, and in section 421D of the *Local Government Act 1993* for local government entities.

Why do we conduct performance audits?

Performance audits provide independent assurance to the NSW Parliament and the public.

Through their recommendations, performance audits seek to improve the value for money the community receives from government services.

Performance audits are selected at the discretion of the -Auditor-General who seeks input from parliamentarians, State and local government entities, other interested stakeholders and Audit Office research.

How are performance audits selected?

When selecting and scoping topics, we aim to choose topics that reflect the interests of parliament in holding the government to account. Performance audits are selected at the discretion of the -Auditor-General based on our own research, suggestions from the public, and consultation with parliamentarians, agency heads and key government stakeholders. Our three-year performance audit program is published on the website and is reviewed annually to ensure it continues to address significant issues of interest to parliament, aligns with government priorities, and reflects contemporary thinking on public sector management. Our program is sufficiently flexible to allow us to respond readily to any emerging issues.

What happens during the phases of a performance audit?

Performance audits have three key phases: planning, fieldwork and report writing.

During the planning phase, the audit team develops an understanding of the audit topic and responsible entities and defines the objective and scope of the audit.

The planning phase also identifies the audit criteria. These are standards of performance against which the audited entity, program or activities are assessed. Criteria may be based on relevant legislation, internal policies and procedures, industry standards, best practice, government targets, benchmarks or published guidelines.

At the completion of fieldwork, the audit team meets with management representatives to discuss all significant matters arising out of the audit. Following this, a draft performance audit report is prepared.

The audit team then meets with management representatives to check that facts presented in the draft report are accurate and to seek input in developing practical recommendations on areas of improvement.

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A final report is then provided to the head of the audited entity who is invited to formally respond to the report. The report presented to the NSW Parliament includes any response from the head of the audited entity. The relevant minister and the Treasurer are also provided with a copy of the final report. In performance audits that involve multiple entities, there may be responses from more than one audited entity or from a nominated coordinating entity.

Who checks to see if recommendations have been implemented?

After the report is presented to the NSW Parliament, it is usual for the entity's audit committee to monitor progress with the implementation of recommendations.

In addition, it is the practice of Parliament's Public Accounts Committee to conduct reviews or hold inquiries into matters raised in performance audit reports. The reviews and inquiries are usually held 12 months after the report received by the NSW Parliament. These reports are available on the NSW Parliament website.

Who audits the auditors?

Our performance audits are subject to internal and external quality reviews against relevant Australian and international standards.

The Public Accounts Committee appoints an independent reviewer to report on compliance with auditing practices and standards every four years. The reviewer's report is presented to the NSW Parliament and available on its website.

Periodic peer reviews by other Audit Offices test our activities against relevant standards and better practice.

Each audit is subject to internal review prior to its release.

Who pays for performance audits?

No fee is charged for performance audits. Our performance audit services are funded by the NSW Parliament.

Further information and copies of reports

For further information, including copies of performance audit reports and a list of audits currently in-progress, please see our website www.audit.nsw.gov.au or contact us on 9275 7100.

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OUR VISION

Our insights inform and challenge government to improve outcomes for citizens.

OUR PURPOSE

To help parliament hold government accountable for its use of public resources.

OUR VALUES

Purpose – we have an impact, are accountable, and work as a team.

People – we trust and respect others and have a balanced approach to work.

Professionalism – we are recognised for our independence and integrity and the value we deliver.

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