

Road-testing the new National Professional Standard for Principals

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School leadership is recognised as a vital factor in improving school effectiveness and student achievement. All teachers exercise leadership although as teachers become more experienced and adept it is likely that their leadership involvement and influence will increase beyond the classroom, across the school and even further.

While all teachers exercise leadership, some teachers will seek appointment to formal positions of responsibility in schools. Standards such as those for Highly Accomplished Teachers and Lead Teachers contain leadership aspects. However there is also a need to consider standards for principals, who play vital roles in creating the conditions where teachers can teach and students can learn (Dinham, 2008). Increasingly, while principals continue to perform a variety of managerial roles, they are seen to be most effective where they place major emphasis on

School leaders who focus on students' achievement and instructional strategies are the most effective ... It is leaders who place more attention on teaching and focused achievement domains... who have the higher effects. (Hattie, 2009: 83)

instructional leadership, i.e., teaching and learning:

Professional standards for school principals can play key roles in aiding reflection and self-development, formulating suitable professional learning experiences, attracting and selecting suitable candidates for positions of responsibility and assessing the effectiveness of school leaders. Standards also articulate the values, knowledge and practices of school leaders to the wider community.

One of the challenges in writing a standard for principals is to capture the sheer diversity of the contexts in which Australian principals operate – from teaching principals to those heading multi-campus schools, low to high SES, low to high NESB, urban to regional to isolated, struggling to successful schools, government to other systems to independent schools.

Nevertheless, the above has not deterred Australia's developers of standards. Quite the reverse in fact. When ACER conducted a mapping and consolidation of Australian leadership/principal standards for DEEWR in 2009, we examined more than sixty extant standards and frameworks currently being used for a variety of purposes. Like others, we concluded that given developments in Australia such as national testing and national curriculum, the time was ripe for a national standard for principals to accompany national standards for teachers at a number of key career stages, and national accreditation of teacher

education courses, developments we had advocated previously in a report for the Business Council of Australia (Dinham, Ingvarson & Kleinhenz, 2008).

AITSL commenced work on the development of the National Professional Standard for Principals in early 2010. This work was led by Dame Professor Patricia Collarbone, an acknowledged expert in the field. AITSL established an external expert steering group to guide and support this work and there has been an intensive and extensive process of research, drafting, critical review and feedback from organisations and jurisdictions across Australia. A feature of this work to date has been the universal support for the initiative from across all sectors.

This process now enters a critical and exciting stage with the piloting or 'road-testing' of the Standard. A series of projects across Australia will be funded and undertaken in the first half of 2011. These will take place in a variety of contexts and the exposure draft of the Standard will be applied to a range of intended purposes, the common feature of which will be use of the Standard with principals and aspiring principals. Three key questions relate to the authenticity, usefulness and value adding of the Standard. In short, does it work?

Findings from the various projects will be shared with the Australian educational community in 2011 and will inform further work on the Standard. Through this process, it is envisaged that Australia will have a true National Professional Standard for Principals which will provide an effective framework for professional learning, reflection on practice and which will inform practices to attract, prepare and develop effective principals to lead Australia's schools in the 21st Century.

References

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- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible Learning - A Synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. London: Routledge

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