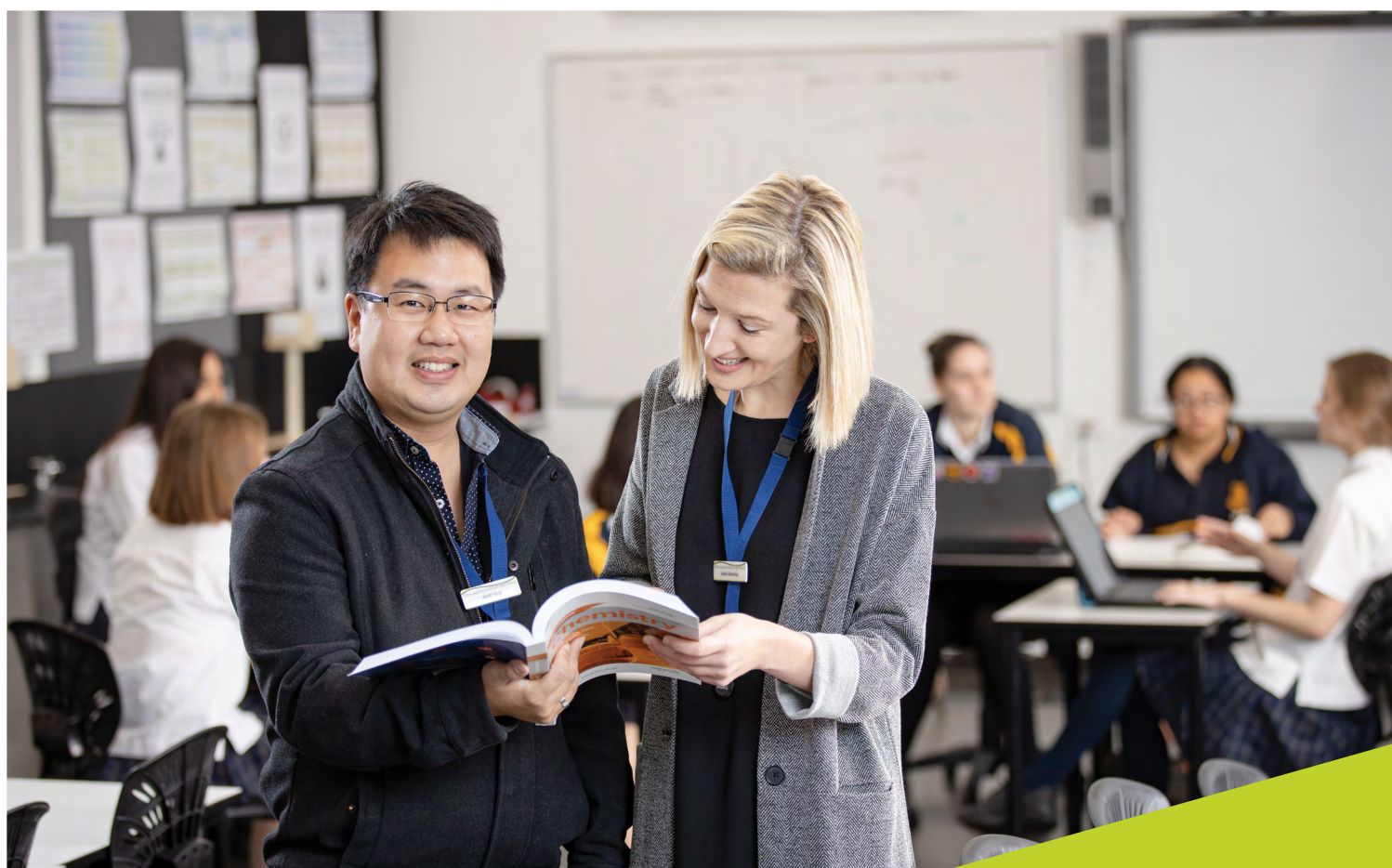# Leading for impact

Australian guidelines for school leadership development

Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land, sea country and waterways from across Australia. We honour and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future.

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Preface

When it comes to the progress and achievement of young learners, school leadership matters.

Strong evidence exists that leadership which focuses on improving teaching and learning has a significant impact on student achievement. This impact is amplified in schools in challenging circumstances. This is also the case when leading teaching and learning is widely distributed so there is a shared responsibility for improving the quality of teaching across a school.

For Australia to achieve its goal of making sure all young Australians become successful learners and achieve excellent outcomes, it is essential that leaders in all jurisdictions and at every level of school leadership are properly equipped to have the maximum impact on teaching and learning. School leadership development has to be a national priority in education.

Leading for impact: Australian guidelines for school leadership development (the Guidelines) sets out evidence-based guidance to support a nationally coherent and standards-based approach to leadership development in all jurisdictions and schools.

Summary of key messages

The following key messages recognise that strong school leadership at all levels is important and, as part of this, that principalship is a distinct role that requires specific preparation and support.

Leadership development

School leadership that focuses primarily on improving teaching quality has the greatest impact on learner outcomes. Developing the capacity to lead teaching and learning effectively is crucial to the future success of any school leader.

Viewing talent from a broad perspective and creating an extensive pool of culturally and demographically diverse people interested in all levels of school leadership contributes to increased leadership capacity. This approach recognises that leadership attributes are not fixed, can be developed over time, and will result in greater uptake of leadership roles.

When principals, along with their leadership team, understand and value their role in leadership development, they become key enablers to finding and developing future leaders. They should be supported to prioritise the development of leadership within and beyond their schools. To make sure this happens, current principals and school leaders should be provided with targeted professional learning experiences, and the expectation for leadership development should be built into their performance and development goals.

Principal preparation

The most effective principal preparation programs and experiences are those which:

- deepen pedagogical expertise

- increase capacity to lead teaching and learning to have a positive impact on student outcomes

- strengthen interpersonal skills

- develop management and leadership skills, including business and strategic acumen.

Effective recruitment and selection processes gather high-quality information through well-designed and targeted recruitment activities. They place emphasis on actual behaviours and actions demonstrating application of personal qualities and impact on teaching and learning, rather than qualifications and perceptions of personal qualities that are not substantiated by evidence.

Support in the principal role should be ongoing and start with comprehensive induction. Development should build opportunities for all principals to continually update their leadership and management skills and strengthen networks through collaboration with peers and the wider community.

The leadership pool

Active steps are needed to increase equality and diversity within the leadership pool. Implementing purposeful strategies and using multiple and objective methods will find individuals who may not have identified themselves as a future leader or potential principal, but who have a valuable contribution to make in leadership.

Introduction

Why is high-quality school leadership important?

High-quality school leadership is pivotal to delivering the best outcomes for young Australians. School leaders make the greatest impact on the progress and achievement of learners by using their educational expertise and management skills to focus the efforts of everyone in the school on improving the quality of teaching and learning. They do this in fast-changing and increasingly complex circumstances, understanding that the strong foundations of a great education are critical for preparing today's learners for the world of tomorrow. Regardless of the setting, these leaders know that teachers need the expertise to understand how their students learn and how to help them make the next steps in their learning.

Leadership that enables teachers to practise in a culture of professional learning and growth, where they work with others to develop and share expertise, creates the best conditions in which young Australians can thrive and achieve. In practice, this involves:

- establishing goals and expectations and involving staff and others in the process
- strategic allocation of resources to make teaching goals a priority
- planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum
- promoting and participating in both formal and informal teacher learning and development
- ensuring an orderly and supportive environment to protect time for teaching and learning (Robinson, 2007).

'The more leaders focus their influence, their learning, and their relationships with teachers on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their likely influence on student outcomes.'

– Robinson, 2008

What is high-quality school leadership?

High-quality school leadership is outlined in the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Leadership Profiles* (the Principal Standard) and the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (the Teacher Standards) at the Highly Accomplished and Lead career stages. Both Standards recognise that **high-quality school leadership is the practice of positively influencing individual and collective teaching expertise in a professional learning culture to secure a strong rate of progress for all learners.**

High-quality school leadership can be demonstrated by individuals at all levels of a school, including those in formal leadership positions, such as assistant principals or curriculum leaders, and those without a formally defined role.

School leaders and principals

Effective school leaders are the people in schools who create the conditions for others to understand their impact on student outcomes and continually improve their teaching practice. They can do this as individuals but they have greater influence when operating within cohesive leadership teams, and when they draw on both the Principal Standard and Teacher Standards in developing the required skills and attributes.

Principals are school leaders with a distinct leadership role that is broad, complex and evolving. This breadth and complexity is captured in the descriptions of behaviours at increasing levels of proficiency across five Professional Practices in the Leadership Profiles (the Profiles):

- Leading teaching and learning

- Developing self and others

- Leading improvement, innovation and change

- Leading the management of the school

- Engaging and working with the community.

Principals have significant responsibility for ensuring high-quality teaching and learning and continuous progress for all learners. **Effective principals use their educational expertise and management skills to create a school culture in which staff are able to focus on understanding their impact and improving their practice, so that all learners make progress and achieve.**

How can the Guidelines help develop high-quality school leadership?

This document builds on the *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders* (the Charter) and the *Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework* (the Framework). It is designed as a guide to help jurisdictions, principals and other school leaders enhance current approaches to develop and strengthen school leadership across the nation and is presented in two sections.

Section 1 – Leadership development	Section 2 – Principal preparation
Focuses on developing leadership capacity more broadly	Focuses on the specific role preparation required for principalship
Describes how to develop and sustain school leadership at all levels	Acknowledges the distinct role of the school Principal within the broader leadership of a school
Recognises leadership emerges and develops when a range of opportunities to lead and high-quality professional learning experiences are provided	Outlines how to prepare individuals for this position and provide ongoing development following appointment to the role

Collectively, the Guidelines support a coherent and strategic approach to the development of school leadership across Australia and an equitable, standards-based professional learning experience for school leaders at all levels. They recognise that working across both the Teacher Standards and Principal Standard is important for reflecting on and improving leadership practice, and that leadership pathways are diverse and no less valuable if they don't lead to principalship.

Leadership development

What is needed to build a leadership development strategy and culture?

Effective development is best when strategic priorities and actions for leadership growth:

- recognise the richness of Australian school contexts and community cultures

- are future-focused and clearly communicated across a jurisdiction or school

- support the jurisdiction's or school's overall education goals and equity and diversity targets

- address challenges in sustaining an effective leadership workforce.

Establishing these priorities is the first important step in finding and developing future leaders. Ongoing review will ensure they retain relevance and currency as circumstances change. The world that young Australians are being prepared for is advancing at an ever-increasing rate, so leadership in schools needs to keep pace. Strategic priorities should be communicated to all members of the jurisdiction, network or school to elevate the importance of leadership development, increase its profile and ensure that leaders are prepared for the future.

An effective leadership development strategy focuses on increasing the quantity, quality and diversity of future leaders for all school leadership roles and in all geographical locations, from rural and remote to metropolitan. Diversity in leadership teams correlates with improved performance and contributes to increased innovation and more creative approaches to problem-solving. Embedding strategies to find future leaders in under-represented groups – including women, people with a disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – within systemic identification processes will achieve greater equality and improve diversity. These strategies should support individuals to retain their cultural identity and value the contribution it makes to leadership.

Successful implementation of a leadership strategy depends on culture. Culture describes the way that people behave and significantly influences who will step up and lead, whether in an informal or formal capacity. Deliberately developing a culture that encourages every individual to consider themselves as a leader and participate in leadership activities is critical. Early development of a leadership identity increases the likelihood of an individual taking up a leadership position in the future. Supportive and regular opportunities to engage in leadership should be provided in a safe-to-fail environment, so more teachers form a view that they can and, more importantly, want to lead.

What are the best ways to identify future leaders?

Viewing talent from a broad perspective and creating a diverse and extensive pool of people interested in all levels of school leadership is integral to growing leadership capacity across a jurisdiction or school. This approach reflects contemporary practice and recognises that leadership attributes are not fixed, but can be developed over time with targeted professional learning experiences and the proper support. It moves away from focusing on individuals as 'hero' leaders towards fostering collective and collaborative leadership capacity. This strengthens leadership and ensures all those with aspirations to lead in the future are supported to set targeted development goals and develop from early in their careers.

Recommendations

1	2	3
Establish a leadership development strategy and communicate its priorities to all members of the jurisdiction, network or school.	Implement purposeful strategies and use multiple and objective methods to find future leaders.	Create a culture that encourages every individual to develop a leadership identity.

What are the capabilities needed for leadership in schools?

The Principal Standard and the Teacher Standards at the Highly Accomplished and Lead career stages detail what effective school leaders should know, understand and do at a range of career stages. Both recognise the breadth and complexity of school leadership, and are important resources when considering the leadership capabilities required at different career stages and across different contexts.

Although leadership is multi-faceted and includes a strong focus on management, there are other capabilities that are also particularly important. School leadership that focuses primarily on improving teaching quality has the greatest impact on learner outcomes. Leading teaching and learning effectively is crucial to the future success of any school leader. Potential leaders should be provided with support to develop the pedagogical expertise this requires, as well as the skills needed to lift the performance of colleagues, from early in their career. This will enable them to contribute effectively to understanding the impact of teaching on learners' progress and building a culture of learning across the school.

High-performing leaders consistently demonstrate sophisticated personal and interpersonal qualities, including:

- self-awareness and personal wellbeing

- self-management, including emotional intelligence, empathy and resilience

- social awareness

- relationship management.

They apply these qualities and skills to understand and respond to culture and community, develop strong relationships, inspire and challenge others, and manage difficult situations and conversations. The development of future leaders should emphasise the growth of these skills over time and from early in their careers.

Recommendations

1	2
Use the Teacher Standards at the Highly Accomplished and Lead career stages and the Principal Standard to establish the leadership capabilities required at all levels of school leadership.	Prioritise leading teaching and learning, personal qualities and interpersonal skills, alongside management skills, in the leadership capabilities required.

What are the best ways to develop future leaders?

High-quality professional learning matched to capability and school and community context is important for developing the behaviour of future school leaders. By providing opportunities to lead, professional learning and time to act on feedback can be provided in context. Learning should take place in a culture where individuals are expected to be reflective and active learners, and where there are performance and development processes that provide them with frequent, constructive feedback and support to improve their leadership.

Professional learning is most effective when it is:

- relevant and evidence-informed so it links closely to the individual's learning needs and the jurisdiction's or school's goals and initiatives

- collaborative so individuals are connected with colleagues beyond their school, and provided with access to the required expertise and structured processes to test ideas and challenge current practice

- future focused so individuals develop the adaptability to respond to new and unexpected challenges, and a shared responsibility to solve problems and make a positive difference.

The Charter and the Framework describe the culture and processes for effective collaboration and professional growth. These should be implemented in all Australian schools. Effective leadership development is a career-long process that involves a range of professional learning activities. Extended experiences that involve learning within the context of work allow individuals to practise and refine their skills in real situations and receive ongoing feedback. These experiences contribute most effectively to sustained behaviour change and should be factored into the ongoing development of future leaders. Other experiences that focus primarily on acquiring new knowledge must be balanced with opportunities to translate that knowledge into practice.

When diverse and extensive professional learning experiences are complemented with access to relevant and timely advice and support from colleagues, mentors and coaches, growth is accelerated. Networks foster social capital across the jurisdiction or school, and provide structures for individuals to seek help from others. Establishing networks should be deliberate and a core element of professional learning.

Recommendations

1	**2**	**3**
Implement the *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders* and the *Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework*.	Provide extended experiences that involve learning within the context of work and the provision of ongoing feedback.	Establish networks to support leadership development.

What role do principals play in leadership development?

The pathways to leadership are varied and principals play an important role in supporting teachers on their journey. This role is outlined in the Principal Standard, which sets the expectation that principals will support all staff to build their leadership capacity. This begins with principals understanding their position as a role model for emerging leaders and aspiring principals. The role of principal brings enormous reward and satisfaction, and it is important that colleagues have the opportunity to see the role in the best light possible.

When principals, along with their leadership team, understand and value their role in leadership development, they are key enablers to finding and developing future leaders. They should be supported to prioritise the development of leadership within and beyond their schools, and build the capacity to carry out this important work. To make sure this happens, current principals and school leaders should be provided with targeted professional learning experiences to build knowledge and skills in leadership development strategies, and the expectation for leadership development should be built into their performance and development goals.

Effective jurisdictions and schools make the most of their workforce and give successful leaders scope to use their expertise to lead professional and organisational development. Explicit, formalised roles for expert current and retired principals, as well as other school leaders, should be established to support a shared responsibility for the development of future leaders. Examples of these are:

- helping to design, deliver and assess professional learning for future leaders
- assessing future leaders' readiness for promotion
- participating in the recruitment of principals
- mentoring and coaching future leaders
- supervising and supporting a future leader's participation in an internship/secondment
- taking on system or network leadership responsibilities
- sharing advice and expertise in system/sector publications.

Principals who engage and develop potential leaders are more effective in attracting and retaining individuals to leadership positions. This involves using leadership knowledge and expertise to structure professional conversations with future leaders. The positive effects of targeted, purposeful and systematic coaching on career development are well recognised, with those who receive coaching more likely to set goals for their development, seek ideas for improvement, act on feedback from colleagues and supervisors, and improve their performance. Coaching is a skill and comprehensive training should be provided to help principals develop the capacity to do it effectively.

Recommendations

1	**2**	**3**
Provide principals with targeted professional learning to build the capacity to prioritise leadership development within and beyond their school.	Build the expectation for leadership development into principals' performance and development goals.	Establish explicit, formalised roles to harness the expertise of highly skilled and accomplished current and retired principals to support leadership development. This should include coaching roles.

How can success be measured?

It is important that leadership development activities are evaluated for impact and that findings are used to inform future strategic directions. Successful jurisdictions and schools are increasingly using data and metrics to track and report on leadership development achievements, and to inform decision-making on future actions and investments.

By collectively identifying and articulating the objectives of leadership development strategies before implementation, jurisdictions and schools can identify appropriate metrics and measurement methods, track progress over time, and assess success. Building on success and addressing areas for development as a key focus for ongoing review and implementation will improve provision of leadership development.

Recommendations

1	**2**
Articulate the leadership development strategy's objectives and identify appropriate metrics and measurement methods.	Track progress over time, assess success and continually improve provision in response to findings.

Preparation and development for the principal role

How can future principals be identified?

Principal preparation should build on a jurisdiction's or school's broader leadership development strategies and activities, and continue to match learning to an individual's career stage, capabilities and contexts. By providing regular and diverse opportunities to engage in leadership, those individuals with a particular aptitude and interest in principalship will emerge. It is important that these emerging leaders are identified and provided with clear career pathways, strong preparatory experiences and ongoing support.

Clear career pathways through middle and senior leadership positions help retain emerging leaders in the profession and motivate them to pursue future leadership opportunities. When formal leadership roles are fully integrated with, and underpinned by, broader professional learning and performance and development processes, emerging leaders have the necessary structures to reflect on their progress along the career pathway. Informal leadership roles also provide platforms for developing aspiring principals.

When a range of formal and informal methods and data are used to identify potential principals, it offers a more comprehensive picture of their leadership potential. A key resource in this process should be the expertise of serving principals, and jurisdictions and employers should support them to understand their critical role in the principal preparation process and develop the necessary knowledge and skills to recognise potential.

This work can be supplemented with other approaches such as:

- assessment centres
- 360-degree feedback tools
- self-reflection tools and activities
- activities designed to recognise leadership potential
- internal assessments as part of performance and development processes
- psychometric assessment tools.

Implementing purposeful strategies and using multiple, objective methods helps to find eligible candidates who may not have identified themselves as a potential principal and increases equality and diversity within the aspirant pool.

Recommendations

1

Implement purposeful strategies, and use both formal and informal, and multiple, objective methods to identify a diverse group of emerging leaders with a particular aptitude and interest in principalship.

2

Develop principals' understanding of their critical role in principal preparation and their expertise to support identification of future principals.

3

Provide clear career pathways to principalship.

What preparation do aspiring principals need?

Educational research continues to shape new thinking for what works best for learners, technological advances are shaping educational directions, and the cultural diversity of school communities is increasing. As a result, the role of school principal in Australia is complex and evolving. By developing a disposition for learning, a broad range of skills and the confidence and aptitude to apply them with impact, aspiring and new principals will be better prepared to keep pace with trends and new research, and respond effectively to culturally diverse communities. This helps to develop principals who are agile, informed and successful in the role.

The aim of principal preparation must be to ensure a supply of suitably qualified and skilled applicants to meet demand. Preparation should be comprehensive, aligned to the expectations set out in the Principal Standard, and ensure quality professional learning experiences are available to all those ready to undertake them so that aspiring principals are ready to step into principalship and begin their ongoing development in the role.

Formal leadership preparation programs provide a discrete, time-bound experience that can be factored into a full-time workload, and an opportunity for participants to step out of their role and reflect on their next step along the professional pathway. These programs are most effective when they are evidence-informed and align with the Principal Standard and the jurisdiction's or school's broader education strategy. They should accommodate the existing knowledge and skills of participants, using this as the starting point for learning.

Principal preparation programs should allow participants to apply theory in the context of their work and demonstrate transfer of learning into current or future contexts. Establishing partnerships between jurisdictions and schools and principal preparation program providers helps to align participants' learning with the actual needs of the jurisdiction and context.

Evaluating your Principal Preparation Programs: A Practical Guide sets out an evidence-based approach to assessing the impact of such initiatives. The guide supports the evaluation of impact of principal preparation programs and can assist with the continual improvement of provision.

Programs are just one approach to principal preparation. Internships, shadowing and acting principal roles, where substantial support is provided, also offer valuable principal preparation experiences that provide the opportunity for highly relevant, job-embedded professional learning.

All principal preparation programs and experiences should:

- deepen pedagogical expertise

- increase capacity to lead teaching and learning to have a positive impact on student outcomes

- strengthen interpersonal skills

- develop management and leadership skills, including business and strategic acumen.

Formal and explicit processes to assess readiness for the principal role that are based on demonstrated leadership, rather than age, length of time in the profession or progression through formal leadership positions, support the professional development of aspiring principals. These processes might include the achievement of a qualification, credential or certification.

In all cases they should:

- recognise and promote expertise in high-quality school leadership

- provide an opportunity for aspiring principals to understand, experience, reflect on and develop their leadership practice

- provide assurance that potential candidates have been involved in a range of preparation experiences, have demonstrated impact on student learning outcomes, and are suitably equipped for the principal role.

Recommendations

1	2	3
Ensure all principal preparation experiences and programs are evidence informed and align with the Principal Standard and the criteria outlined above.	Evaluate all principal preparation experiences and programs for impact and use findings to continually improve provision.	Implement formal and explicit processes to assess readiness for the principal role.

What does the effective recruitment and selection of principals look like?

Recruitment and selection to principalship needs to attract a diverse range of applicants who meet the expectations set out in the Principal Standard and the needs of a school. Deliberate and strategic approaches to recruitment planning help to best match a candidate's skillset to a leadership position. Innovative approaches to recruitment that go beyond the traditional written application and interview provide a more comprehensive assessment of leadership capacity. Approaches should include processes to target applicants from under-represented groups to achieve the broadest possible pool of suitable potential candidates.

Ensuring members of the recruitment and selection panel are equipped with the necessary knowledge and understanding to evaluate each applicant objectively and contribute to an informed selection is equally important. Experts that understand and can represent the community and school's needs, appreciate the desired leadership competencies, as well as principles of equality and diversity, are best placed to serve on selection panels. This requires training for panel members in key areas, including the expectations set out in the Principal Standard and awareness of unconscious bias.

The recruitment and selection panel needs high-quality information about each candidate, which is gathered through well-designed and targeted recruitment activities. Rather than relying solely on qualifications and perceptions of personal qualities that are not substantiated by evidence, emphasis is placed on actual behaviours and actions demonstrating application of personal qualities and impact on teaching and learning.

Such activities may include:

- competency-based questions and tasks that focus on whether a candidate has the capabilities to be an effective principal

- critical incident questions and tasks that focus on a critical situation, which offer the opportunity to demonstrate the required capabilities

- a requirement to deliver a presentation, under explicit conditions and time limits, to help demonstrate the ability to develop and communicate a clear vision and message

- observation of leadership in action and on site, or simulated through task-based activities

- behavioural interview questions that focus on descriptions of past behaviour, which are likely to give an indication of capacity.

In each case, the activities should reflect the dynamic nature of the principal role and involve internal and external situations and stakeholders. Responses should be evaluated against agreed criteria in order to minimise any bias in interpretation.

Recommendations

1	**2**	**3**
Include processes to target under-represented groups in the recruitment and selection of principals.	Provide training for panel members to ensure they are equipped to evaluate each applicant objectively.	Design and implement targeted recruitment activities that place emphasis on actual behaviours and actions demonstrating application of personal qualities and impact on teaching and learning.

How can principals be supported and developed in the role?

Effective induction provides newly-appointed principals with theoretical and practical knowledge to shape their early experience in the role. The process goes beyond clarifying rules, regulations, processes and expectations to providing an introduction to school culture, community and relationship-building. It should be embedded in daily practice, occur over an extended period of time, give consideration to context, and focus on skill development and inquiry into practice. It should align with processes for ongoing, standards-based performance and development, and provide access to networks and relationships with system professionals and line managers.

All principals need to continually update their skills and knowledge. Cultivating a learning mindset is a priority for the ongoing development of effective principals. Newly-appointed and experienced principals alike, must have meaningful and effective adult learning experiences that:

- are linked to school improvement processes and student learning needs

- are differentiated based on individual needs assessments

- provide ongoing opportunities for feedback and reflection, as well as time to action next steps

- offer guided learning through action research, job-embedded learning and intentional practice.

These experiences might include:

- mentoring and coaching provided by suitably qualified/trained individuals

- working with network colleagues to address a shared problem or challenge

- attending professional learning seminars and workshops

- participating in formal executive leadership programs

- undertaking growth-based performance appraisal and professional development planning.

When induction and ongoing development are based on the Principal Standard, school leadership expectations are clear and strong guidance can be provided for new and experienced leaders.

Recommendations

1	2	3
Implement comprehensive principal induction that meets the criteria outlined above.	Provide ongoing effective adult learning experiences that meet the criteria outlined above for new and experienced principals.	Align induction and ongoing development with the Principal Standard.

Evidence base

AITSL has drawn on the following evidence base to develop this policy:

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