aitsl Australian Institute
for Teaching and
School Leadership
Limited

New role,
new vision

A school leader's guide

Contents

This guide for school leaders has been produced in collaboration with Nous Group, an Australian management consulting firm that works with public, private and not for profit education agencies and institutions to improve educational outcomes. It includes a framework for interpersonal behaviours related to leadership, as well as supporting research, tools and references.

This icon indicates a link to a resource

Introduction

The Leadership Scenarios

Principals have a key role to play in making a difference to the lives of young people and to society. However, they work in a challenging and changing environment; they are unlikely to succeed unless they are well prepared and understand their role.

The Leadership Scenarios are a series of videos, each with a framework, guide and list of resources for developing practice. They have been designed to assist new principals in understanding and dealing with the challenges they may face in their new role and appreciate how their work relates to the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (the Standard) and the Leadership Profiles.

The Standard is a public statement that sets out what principals are expected to know, understand and do to succeed in their work. It is represented as an interdependent and integrated model that recognises three leadership requirements that a principal draws upon within the five areas of professional practice.
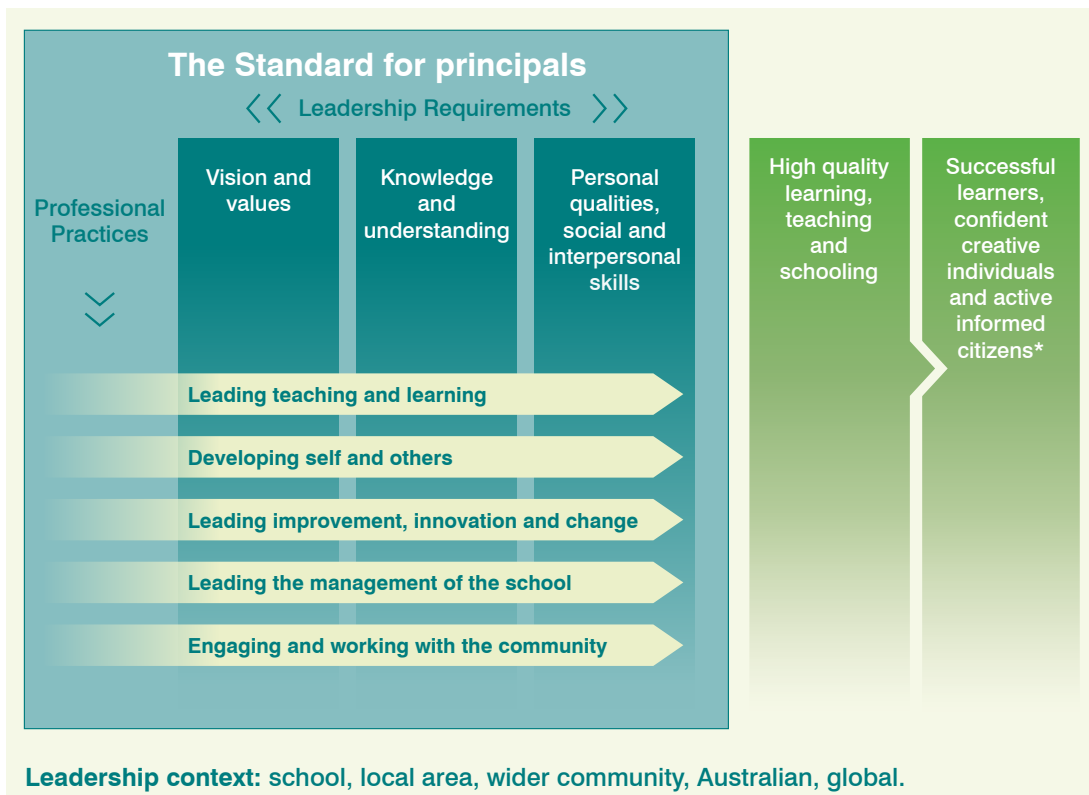

Figure 1: The Australian Professional Standard for Principals

Source: Australian Professional Standard for Principals, AITSL (2014)

New role, new vision

New role, new vision, focuses on the development and implementation of an updated or new vision and values for the school, in particular:

- understanding the school context and personal values

- collaborating to review the vision and values

- aligning vision and actions

- reflecting, recognising and refreshing.

Importance of a clear direction for the school

Clarity around a school's vision and values inspires, aligns and guides behaviours and decision making. It unites all members of the school community to work towards a common purpose. It brings both commitment and coherence to the day-to-day work of the school, providing a depth of understanding about what is most important and why.

- Vision includes ambitious, long-term goals for the school, and a vivid, engaging and specific description of an achievable future world in which the school will operate.

- Values are the essential and enduring tenets of the school – the 'non-negotiables'.

Many school leaders will inherit their vision and values. New school leaders may want to make these their own and recalibrate the school's direction in a way that reflects their personal style and priorities. To do this well, it is important to honour the history of the school as well as to build momentum for further improvement.

Testing the school's direction requires leaders to know their school's context. Informed judgement and good relationships should help school leaders choose the right pace for their context. The degree of urgency will depend on the needs of the school.

The best vision is built with the school community. This collaborative process is more complex and takes longer, but it results in a vision that is easier to understand and more inspiring.

'Today, vision is a familiar concept, but when you look carefully you find that most 'visions' are one person's (or group's) vision imposed on an organisation. Such visions, at best, command compliance – not commitment. A shared vision is a vision that many people are truly committed to, because it reflects their own personal vision.'

Source: Peter Senge (1990, p. 206-207)

Many highly effective schools revisit their vision on a regular basis. Employers often specify three or four year cycles to ensure relevance to the current school and wider context. Keeping in touch with environmental or contextual changes can help school leaders to identify the signals that suggest a review of the school's vision might be necessary.

The *New role, new vision* framework overleaf outlines four steps to developing an inspiring vision. In an ideal situation all four steps would be carried out, but there will be instances where immediate action is required and a new school leader should prioritise accordingly. Instances will also occur where a school leader will need to return to or repeat specific steps.

New role, new relationships school leader's guide

Leadership scenarios

New role, new vision

A framework for developing an inspiring vision and school culture

1 Understand school context and personal values

2 Collaborate to review vision and values

3 Align vision and action
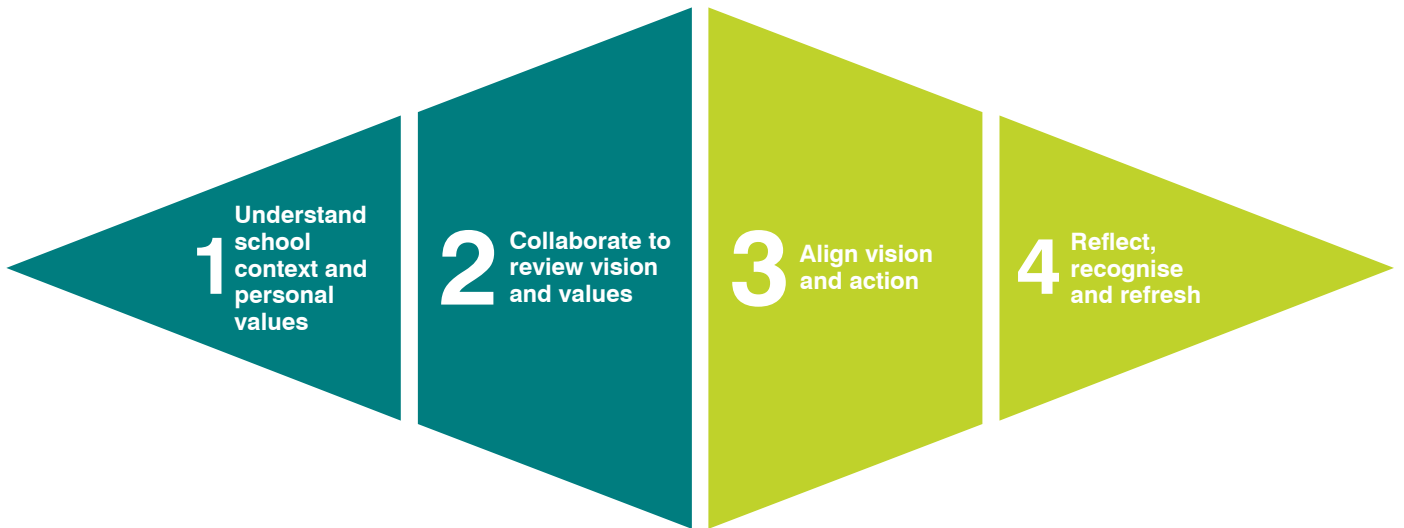
4 Reflect, recognise and refresh

Figure 2: 'New role, new vision' framework

Step 1

Understand school context and personal values

Understanding the school's specific context is integral for new school leaders when creating a clear direction for the future. The school's history, culture and past successes and challenges have shaped its current vision and values. In addition, a school leader's own personal experiences and values will affect how they perceive the school and shape the type of vision and values required to deliver success.

Understanding current and future context

Each school leader must understand where their school is coming from and what it is aiming to achieve. A clear direction is evidenced by a school's vision that is aligned with its current and future context. The direction should also be underpinned by a deep understanding of the needs and expectations of the school's students, families and community.

Both qualitative and quantitative data help a new leader understand past performance and future trajectory against the vision and values. Quantitative sources can include student achievement and attendance data, financial records, family survey results, changing demographic needs and rates of staff turnover.

Qualitative data should be drawn from the school community to build a rich picture of the school culture and context. School leaders can ask staff, students, families and the broader community questions such as:

- What are the school's current vision and values?

- How is the vision articulated, monitored and sustained?

- How are the vision and values reflected in daily school life?

- What do community members value about this school?

Responses to these questions should help school leaders develop a much better sense of their school to determine whether the vision and values resonate as well as inform performance. Throughout these discussions and analysis, school leaders must constantly test their developing perception of the school's current and future context against the overarching goal of best outcomes for students and staff.

Articulating personal values and understanding their importance

A school leader's own experience and beliefs shape their unique approach to leadership and will shape the school's vision and values. Understanding how personal values are related to and crossover with the school's context will help to ensure alignment and enable success.

> 'Don't rush the vision statement; doing so leads to scepticism, stress, and distrust, which will lead to a statement that will eventually be ignored.'
>
> _____
>
> Source: Gabriel & Farmer (2009, p. 47)

> 'Visions are not one size fits all. Each change has different objectives, stakeholders, challenges and opportunities. To deliver the best results with the least waste, investment in developing a vision should be tightly targeted at which is required to deliver the overall goal.'
>
> _____
>
> Source: Nous Group (2016a, p. 1)

School leaders should consider their personal beliefs about:

- **Moral purpose:** Why do I do what I do? What is the purpose of education?

- **Philosophy:** What do I believe about the best way to improve student outcomes and experience?

- **Priorities:** How will different demands be prioritised? Will types of school or program initiatives take precedence over others?

- **Risk preferences:** Are there things to rule out because of the risks involved? Are there benefits in being less risk-averse?

The Standard and the Leadership Profiles outline how school leaders are expected to translate vision and values into their day-to-day practice. The Interactive Leadership Profiles provide school leaders with resources for professional growth. These resources relate to a school leader's own, and their school's, vision and values.

AITSL's Interactive Leadership Profiles

Step 2

Collaborate to review vision and values

Completing Step 1 will provide school leaders with a good sense of how much change is required. There are several other environmental triggers that may also suggest change is required. These can include:

- a decline in school performance, student outcomes or satisfaction

- failure to deliver on the school's annual strategy or plan

- significant school growth or decline

- changes in government or policy

- school, education sector or departmental structural, or strategic shifts

- disruption in environment (e.g. technology, work practices, new teaching methods).

> 'Visions are exhilarating. They create the spark, the excitement that lifts the organisation out of the mundane.'
>
> Source: Senge (1990, p. 194)

Determining the degree of change required

School leaders must consider whether they need to reinforce, refresh, reframe or redevelop the school's vision. This judgement will drive the next steps required.

Reframe

Direction does not match but community needs and wants are being met. School leaders should adopt successful activities but orient the direction to better match community feedback.

Reinforce

Direction matches and is achieving community needs and wants. School leaders should sustain effort and continue the trajectory.

Redevelop

Direction does not match and will not achieve community needs and wants. School leaders should take a first principles approach to developing new vision, mission and values.

Refresh

Direction almost matches and will achieve a few community needs and wants. School leaders should adopt the most successful elements and tweak the direction as appropriate.

Achieves community needs and wants (y-axis)

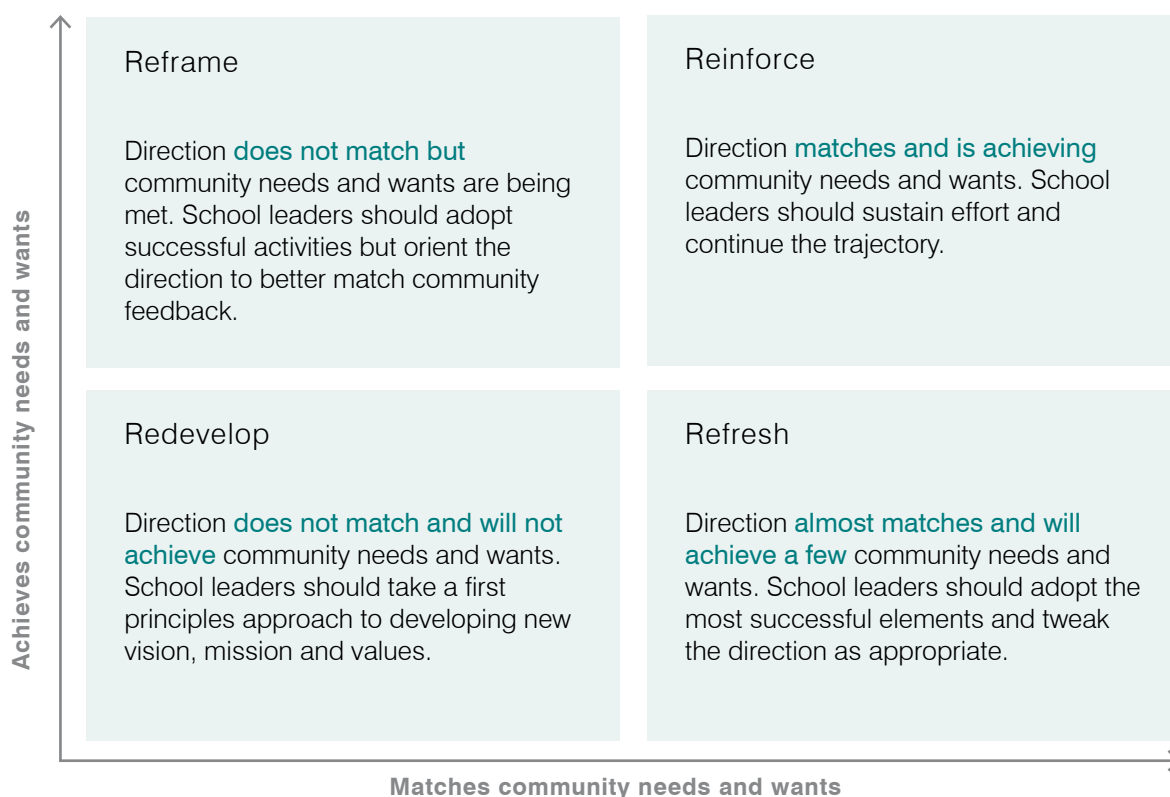*Matches community needs and wants* (x-axis)

Figure 3: Reinforce, refresh, reframe or redevelop

Changing the vision and values

School leaders must remain open about the possibilities for the school's new vision and values. While the understanding from Step 1 should inform this process, it shouldn't limit it. The following process outlines three stages school leaders should follow.

Engage broadly across the school system to gather input

The greatest buy-in for redevelopment of the school's vision and values occurs when the school community is authentically engaged throughout the development process. This engagement should take into account the full range of school community, giving students, families, staff and wider community members a greater sense of ownership and investment in the school's future.

There are a range of techniques school leaders can use to engage with different groups:

- For staff: use a staff survey, staff meetings and focused discussions

- For students: use interactive techniques, such as a visual wall, where students can develop drawings to portray their vision for the school

- For families and the school community: use surveys, existing parent committees and facilitated discussion sessions with the school leadership team.

The types of questions school leaders should ask in this stage are more future-focused than those used during Step 1 and could include the following:

- What does the ideal version of the school look like?

- What should the school be focused on for the next 2-3 years?

- What may challenge the school vision and values?

- How receptive is the school community to a change in the school's direction?

Convene an inclusive group to develop criteria and ideate possibilities

School leaders can convene a representative group to integrate insights from the broader consultation process. This group might include members of the leadership team, social influencers, family members, staff and student representatives (depending on the size of the school).

This step requires the development of an agreed list of criteria which will be used to develop and test potential vision and values statements. Use a working session to bring together the group to brainstorm ideas to shape the school's vision and values. Once several options have been developed, test each option against the agreed criteria. The evaluation of options will help to ensure that the new vision and values resonate and reinforce support for the vision that is agreed.

Design thinking comes of age

Vision, leadership and change

How to write a mission statement

Agree on future vision and values

After the group has agreed on a draft vision and values, they can test it with a broader group of stakeholders. Ensure that it is tested with a sample of students, families, staff and community representatives. Widespread agreement on the school's direction, in particular by the leadership team, increases the chance of it having a real and lasting impact for the community.

Changes to the school's vision and values may bring some disagreement, even though the engagement process is intentionally inclusive. A strong focus on buy-in and consistent messaging from leaders and social influencers will help to champion changes. Early identification of these "change champions" is paramount.

Finally, school leaders must remember to use their judgement for tough calls. Leadership requires courage and willingness to make difficult decisions. The school community will look to the school leader's behaviour and decisiveness when the need arises.

'Identifying with an entity larger than oneself, expands the self, with powerful consequences. Enlarged identity and commitment are the social glue that enable large organisations to cohere.'

Source: Fullan (2008, p. 49)

AITSL Interactive Leadership Profiles – vision and values

Step 3

Align vision and action

A change in direction will have implications for the different elements of a school's day-to-day operation. Successful implementation requires that all these elements are aligned with the vision. Communication is also crucial for turning a vision into action.

Assessing alignment and planning for implementation

Successful implementation requires that practices, procedures and structures across the school are optimised for pursuing the new direction. For example, the strategic plan, performance and development cycle, and professional learning should all align with the school's vision. Listening to feedback will help to identify where the implementation process can be improved and where obstacles may arise. School leaders need to be agile and pragmatic. Implementation should be a consistent and iterative approach.

Leaders can mobilise their influence and authority to deliver on the vision and values in seven key ways (Nous Group, 2016a).

'Moral purpose and sustained performance of an organisation are mutually dependent. Leaders in a culture of change realise this.'

Source: Fullan (2001, p. 28)

Leadership commitment

Engage the leadership team to inspire the community about the school's direction. This can be done by:

- clarifying expectations and holding leaders to account for modelling behaviours

- encouraging leaders to actively consult with staff about the values and behaviours

- encouraging leaders to communicate with staff about impact

- seeking commitment from leaders to drive cultural change.

What's modelled

Attitudes and behaviours

Make clear what attitudes and behaviours are desired to encourage people to hold themselves and others to account. Clear and regular communication creates a shared understanding of the vision, values and culture.

What's expected

Workforce capability

Who's equipped

Ensure all staff are equipped with the capabilities that enable them to support implementation of the new vision and values. This personal development should focus on different groups in the school, from formal leaders through to the broader workforce.

- **Formal leaders** set expectations on how to behave; staff will be guided by what they say, do, recognise and prioritise.

- **Informal leaders**, such as influential and respected staff members, are critical in complementing the work of formal leaders. Staff often look to informal leaders for direction on how to behave or react to the new environment.

- **Broader workforce** development is worth the effort as it ensures consistency in behaviours across the school and sets the same standard throughout the school.

Recognition and consequences

What's reinforced

Recognise and reinforce behaviour that supports the school's vision and values and addresses poor behaviours. Clear responsibility and accountability is crucial to success, but agreed values and behaviours must be meaningfully reinforced through recognition and consequences. This can be done by:

- **holding people to account for** their behaviour to champion relevant projects and adopt new ways of working

- **checking on progress** regularly to ensure it is on track and the desired rate of change is occurring

- **recognising and celebrating** when members of the school community demonstrate agreed behaviours.

Practices and procedures

What's habitual

Ensure that policies, practices and procedures are aligned to the school's direction to instil habitual behaviours. Daily routines then support the school's direction.

Underpinning structures

What enables

Ensure that school leadership structures, the physical layout and digital investment enables the vision and values. No matter how much effort school leaders and other staff devote to implement change, if the enabling structures - like governance, technology, facilities and timetables - at the school are not aligned to the new direction, no change will occur.

Measurement and evolution

School leaders should create a process to measure and report on progress that delivers early insights into the success of the implementation approach. This enables the school to explore what went well and what improvements to make in the future.

What's measured

The five dysfunctions of a team

School culture

The change

Communicate the vision and values convincingly

Successful communication is necessary regardless of the degree of change to the vision and values. When it comes to implementation, school leaders should invest time and resources on developing a convincing story around them.

School leaders should also tailor their communication approach according to the needs of different members of the school community. For example:

- **staff** can be reached through regular meetings, emails and face-to-face conversations

- **students** can be reached via teachers, school assemblies and internal communication

- **families** can be reached through formal and informal communication channels

- **governing bodies** can be reached through formal communication channels

- **local community** can be reached through newsletters or bulletins, and by inviting them to public events at the school such as fetes or open days.

Incorporating the vision and values into induction processes for new staff, new pupils and new parents is another effective way to ensure all school community members understand what is expected of them. This should be followed up by demonstrating the right culture through decision making and holding people to account for their behaviour through performance and development processes.

Step 4

Reflect, recognise and refresh

School life is busy. Maintaining the momentum of a new or updated vision ensures the school is always moving in the right direction. Identifying what changes are working and what needs more support, then modifying the implementation approach is crucial to sustaining progress.

Reflection and celebration of success is a proven way to reinforce support for the vision and values. Planning for quick wins provides milestones for people to compare progress against and provides evidence that the new direction is worth the effort.

Formal and informal leaders should regularly communicate how the implementation of the new vision and values is going. This helps to maintain trust in the process. Informal communication practices and behaviours can work, but given that frequent, timely, accurate communication is critical to embedding a new direction, school leaders often find formal communication most useful. The school community must remain aware of how the school is progressing, how new information will change the school's approach to its vision and values, and how their contribution might need to change.

'Is the motivating force one which is focused in a way which serves the shared values of the school community, or is it aimed at serving personal ends and priorities? To what extent is the focus a shared one? Reflection on the issues raised by these questions provides an opportunity for school principals and their school communities to clarify their value position and examine the motivating force which inspires them.'

Source: Dimmox (2008, p. 108)

References and suggested reading

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