

# Middle-leadership literature review and document analysis

Exploring middle leaders' profession and practice

May 2023



**Middle Leaders**

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# Executive summary

## Background

In 2022, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) was contracted by the Queensland Department of Education to develop, validate, trial and establish Professional Standards for Middle Leaders in Australian schools.

The aim of establishing these standards is to provide clarity for middle leaders on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to thrive and work effectively as a middle leader to facilitate improvement in student progress and achievement. The new standards will facilitate current middle leaders to reflect on their ways of working, provide a vision for their career development, and support educational organisations in attracting, developing and retaining quality teachers with leadership aspirations and potential.

In the first half of 2023, AITSL conducted a systematic literature review and document analysis to inform AITSL's development of the draft Professional Standards for Middle Leaders.

## Purpose

The purpose of this document was to conduct a thorough review of national and international literature relating to middle leadership – both theory-based and original research. To ensure a thorough review of relevant literature, this systematic search began with peer-reviewed articles and then broadened to include relevant grey literature, such as professional standards, professional development programs, position descriptions and policy documents from government bodies and institutions.

## Method

A systematic literature search was conducted using defined key terms in several academic databases to identify articles relating to middle leadership in education, both nationally and internationally. Additional searches were also conducted for literature relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander middle leaders in Australian education, and middle leadership in both early childhood and special education settings. While much literature was identified in relation to middle leaders in education more generally, the more targeted searches for key populations produced articles about leadership, but fewer articles specific to middle leadership.

The search then included snowball sampling (Simkus, 2023) and purposive sampling (R. Robinson, 2014) to ensure thorough coverage of included literature. Online searches were also used to identify key resources, for example relevant professional standards, professional development programs and position descriptions, as was a direct email request to national and international educational bodies for middle leadership documentation.

## Key Findings

### Middle leadership is a balancing act

Most middle leaders are highly experienced educators who continue to hold classroom teaching responsibilities alongside their middle leadership role. AITSL's research suggests that at least 90% of

middle leaders are classroom teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2021a).

Effective middle leaders manage up, lead down and influence sideways (Dinham & Scott, 2000; Leithwood, 2016). To be effective they need to:

- lead learning collaboratively and manage policy and processes well
- set high expectations for students and staff
- work with their team and work with the senior executive
- implement and improve collective teaching practice
- develop a safe, inclusive culture and challenge established norms
- develop leadership dispositions and deep pedagogical knowledge and skills to enable their work.

While this balancing act can be challenging, it also places middle leaders in a unique position within the school structure in that they are able to act as ‘translators’ to connect the various elements to the school hierarchy (Nehez et al., 2022).

### **Middle leaders are critical to improving teaching and learning**

Middle leaders not only manage the administrative requirements of their role, but move beyond them to focus on leading teaching and learning (Dinham, 2007; Farchi & Tubin, 2019; White, 2000).

As a middle leader in education, credibility relies on high-level teaching and learning expertise (Nehez et al., 2022), supported by strong competence and knowledge. Being a good teacher is not only essential for being appointed as a middle leader, but also for being able to influence as a leader once appointed in the role (Busher, 2005).

Middle leaders are well positioned to encourage innovation (Willis et al., 2022), lead improvement, provide mentoring support, and improve collective practice. They ensure their school makes the most of new technologies, best practices, and other resources to support student success (Buchanan et al., 2022).

Middle leaders are essential in reviewing student data, using it to inform instruction and make choices about student support, which ultimately improves student outcomes (Boyd, 2022; Buchanan et al., 2022). Effective middle leaders undertake systematic use of student data to inform instructional improvements and improve consistency across student cohorts (Leithwood, 2016).

### **Middle leaders undertake diverse roles in vastly differing contexts**

There is currently no commonly shared or agreed upon definition of middle leadership in Australia. Middle leaders undertake a diversity of roles in vastly differing contexts from small remote schools to bustling inner-city schools with multiple campuses.

This has implications for the development of a set of standards that aim to capture the *core* leadership knowledge, skills and disposition while catering to a multiplicity of roles, responsibilities, and contexts.

Middle leadership can be conceptualised according to a development continuum, with middle leadership shifting according to two axes – *sphere of influence* (within which the leader’s responsibilities will differ) and *preparedness* (which influences the leader’s capabilities and associated proficiency).



Despite their differing contexts, to be effective, middle leaders *must* have the strong support of senior leaders (De Nobile, 2018; Lipscombe & Tindall-Ford, 2021), and exist in a culture founded on the importance of students, their learning, and their wellbeing (Leithwood, 2016).

#### Four themes emerged that underpin effective middle leadership practice

The following four themes emerged from the literature review which could inform the development of the draft Professional Standards for Middle Leaders:

1. Effective middle leaders possess certain *dispositions* and *knowledge and skills* that underpin their practice. These are enablers that help middle leaders *do their work well*.
2. As we would expect, a clear focus from the literature was, *of course*, heavily on teaching and learning. For middle leaders, this relates to both *implementing* excellent teaching and *improving* teaching and learning.
3. Cultural responsiveness and respect are of critical importance to effective teaching and learning. The United States' Professional Standards for Educational Leaders and New Zealand's Educational Leadership Capability Framework both provide useful guidance on how culturally responsive practice could be reflected in the new draft Standards.
4. Finally, it is necessary for middle leaders to *lead management* – both for teachers and for the school. Management skills often need to be learned on the job and were almost non-existent in the professional development programs we examined that were targeted to middle leaders in education.

# 1. Introduction

**School leaders have long been recognised as one of the most important factors in educational organisations (Dinham, 2007; Farchi & Tubin, 2019; Fleming, 2014; Leithwood, 2016; Leithwood et al., 2006, 2008). They are responsible for maintaining and improving schools' performance (Grootenboer et al., 2020) by influencing core features of successful schooling, including: school culture (e.g. fostering inclusive practice for both students and staff); student, staff and community engagement; strategic direction; and student and staff retention (Grissom et al., 2021; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2006).**

Many teachers work in the zone between the classroom and the most senior levels of school leadership (Fleming, 2014; Grootenboer et al., 2015; Gurr & Drysdale, 2012a). The teachers who traverse this space are called *middle leaders* and they play a key role in improving the quality of teaching and its impact on student learning progress and achievement (Dinham, 2007; Highfield & Rubie-Davies, 2022).

Middle leaders typically hold both management and leadership responsibilities (Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009; Gurr & Drysdale, 2012b; Lipscombe et al., 2020) and are often identified for middle leadership based on the strength of their teaching expertise (School Leadership Institute (SLI), 2023). While middle leaders usually continue to teach in the classroom (De Nobile & Boffa, 2014; Lipscombe et al., 2020), with the most recently available report from the Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD) initiative indicating that at least 90% of middle leaders hold face-to-face teaching roles (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2021a). They may also lead curricula, implement school-wide policies and initiatives (for example student health and wellbeing initiatives) or be responsible for managing and supporting the use of educational technology and other resources (Lipscombe et al., 2020).

Although middle leadership traditionally also includes line-managing other teachers (Ashmore & Clay, 2016; Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009; Brown, Boyle, et al., 2000; Wise & Bennett, 2003), a growing array of middle leadership positions do not involve managing staff. Instead, middle leaders are increasingly sharing responsibility for supporting the strategic direction of their school; leading student-based programs (e.g. mental health and wellbeing); setting goals and objectives for their area(s) of responsibility; managing budgets and resources; and supporting the development of teachers and other staff through activities such as coaching or mentoring (Brown, Rutherford, et al., 2000). As such, it is less a question of whether middle leadership matters and more a question of what makes an *effective* middle leader (Farchi & Tubin, 2019).

Professional standards play an important role in raising the profile of middle leaders in Australian education. Importantly, they also provide a shared language around what it means to be a high-performing middle leader and the associated skills, competencies, attributes and practices required in this role (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013). As there is no commonly shared expectation for middle leadership capabilities, skills, attributes or practices at a national level, Australian middle leaders inform their practice and development through the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Teacher Standards) (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2011) and the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (Principal Standard) (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2014).

To formalise the role of middle leaders and represent their role in Australian education, the Queensland Department of Education contracted AITSL to develop, validate, trial and establish Professional Standards for Middle Leaders. The standards will describe professional capabilities, outlining the skills, attributes and practices required to thrive and work effectively as a middle leader. Professional standards provide a tool that facilitates reflection on ways of working, as well as a vision for career development. This will support educational organisations in attracting, developing and retaining quality teachers with leadership aspirations and potential (Dinham, 2007).

A thorough review of literature forms an essential foundation when developing scales or instruments (Boateng et al., 2018). As such, the present systematic literature review informs the draft Professional Standards for Middle Leaders, developed by AITSL in 2023 with a view to publication in 2024.

## 1.1 Key terms

*Middle leaders* in this context are defined based on the extensive review of literature from international and national sources, including the three Australian education sectors (government, Catholic and independent) across the eight Australian states and territories. *Leadership* is defined as the act of or ability to mobilise others 'in pursuit of a goal' (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). *Middle leaders* are qualified teachers who hold recognised management and leadership responsibilities within schools or early childhood settings, usually in addition to their teaching responsibilities (Grootenboer et al., 2020). They operate in the zone between teacher and principal in schools' leadership structure (Fleming, 2014; Grootenboer et al., 2015), and therefore hold responsibilities that move beyond those of a teacher and are less than that of a principal (Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009; Gurr, 2023a; Gurr & Drysdale, 2012b). They act as a 'bridge' between the classroom and practices of administrators and senior leaders (Busher et al., 2007; De Nobile, 2018; Grootenboer et al., 2019, 2020; White, 2000).

The terms *principal* or *centre director* are used here to refer to the most senior leader(s) of a school or early childhood setting and may also include the second in charge, depending on jurisdiction and context. These roles are sometimes referred to in this review as *the most senior leaders*, which aligns with terminology used elsewhere (Busher, 2005).

*Deputy principals* (in some jurisdictions called *assistant* or *vice principals*) are sometimes considered to be part of the most senior leadership group (together with principals) (Gurr, 2023b; Gurr & Drysdale, 2012a), but can also be considered as middle leaders, both nationally (Cranston, 2009) and internationally (Professional Development Service for Teachers, 2023). The literature indicates that both may be true, depending on school context, which influences the leadership role. In particular, this relates to the division between strategic leadership (which is typical of the principal role) and managerial or less-significant leadership roles (De Nobile, 2018) that focus more heavily on administration (which is more typical of the middle leadership role) (De Nobile & Ridden, 2014; Grootenboer et al., 2020). In many cases, the most senior leaders of a school may perform dual functions of principal *and* middle leader, depending on the school context (De Nobile, 2018; Grootenboer et al., 2020).

Common middle leader position titles differ depending on the jurisdiction and sector. They can include (but are not limited to) those shown in:

Table 1: Common middle leader position titles (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2022b)

Jurisdiction	Formal middle leadership titles in employment agreements	Commonly used middle leadership titles in schools
<b>Queensland</b>	Head of special education Head of department Head of curriculum Literacy/numeracy/pedagogy coach	Year level coordinator Learning area leader Curriculum leader Program leader Pastoral leader Dean of teaching and learning Head of senior school Head of junior school Information technology manager Director of performing arts Director of sport
<b>Australian Capital Territory</b>	Executive teacher Executive teacher (professional practice)	Director Associate Director
<b>New South Wales</b>	Assistant principal Assistant principal, curriculum and instruction Head teacher	Director of enrolments Dean of students Dean of teaching and learning Curriculum leader Head of primary Head of secondary Subject coordinator Stage coordinator Wellbeing coach Leader of learning
<b>Northern Territory</b>	Senior teacher	Head of senior years Head of house
<b>South Australia</b>	Leader	Coordinator Faculty leader

Jurisdiction	Formal middle leadership titles in employment agreements	Commonly used middle leadership titles in schools
		Head of curriculum area Senior leader Senior school leader
<b>Tasmania</b>	Advanced skills teacher	Head of senior school Head of middle school Head of junior school Head of faculty Dean of students Program director Head of learning
<b>Victoria</b>	Leading teacher Learning specialist	Literacy/numeracy specialist Year level coordinator Year level leader Curriculum coordinator Curriculum leader Subject area coordinator Dean of subject/curriculum area Student services leader
<b>Western Australia</b>	Senior teacher Level 3 classroom teacher Head of learning area	Head of senior school Head of junior school Head of department Head of subject/curriculum area/learning area

For the purposes of this review, unless specified otherwise, when *education* is used it relates to schools and early childhood settings in which qualified teachers work. It does not include higher education or further education (for example, vocational education and training).

*Professional standards* define the nature of work and development required for a particular profession (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2017). They inform recruitment, hiring and development practice and may also underpin government policy or certification (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Standards should be measurable – outlining observable practices and capabilities, reflecting the expectations for middle leaders' performance and impact.

*Competencies, skills, attributes and practices* are referred to many times throughout this document. While these terms are related, they differ in nuance. *Competencies* relate to having the aptitude, behaviours and knowledge *to be able* to do something (Merriam-Webster, 2023b). *Skills* are defined as learned abilities to *apply one's knowledge* to do something (Merriam-Webster, 2023d). *Attributes* relate to leadership attributes, which are *the inner characteristics* that facilitate effective leadership (Merriam-Webster, 2023a). *Practice* is *being proficient* in doing something, enacting a procedure, or applying an idea or method (Merriam-Webster, 2023c). *Dispositions* are also discussed at several points throughout this review. Dispositions relate to someone's prevailing tendencies, including how they act in certain situations (Merriam-Webster, 2023e).

Finally, where individuals have been cited in this text, they are referred to either by name or by the gender-neutral pronouns of *they/them/theirs*.

## 2. Method

**A systematic literature review provides the structure underpinning an objective information search and ensures a consistent approach to sourcing and reviewing existing literature (Pickering, 2017). This technique helps to mitigate any researcher bias and results in a more comprehensive, reliable exploration of relevant sources (Torres-Carrión et al., 2018). The review can also be – in large part – reproduced, because this type of review requires researchers to document clear parameters for including or excluding literature. This section details the method employed to identify relevant literature for this review, including the document analysis component. In doing so, it defines the purpose and scope of the literature sourced, and describes the systematic search process.**

Specifically, the purpose of this systematic literature review is to provide a foundation for developing professional standards for Australian middle leaders by:

1. defining the characteristics and context of Australian middle leaders
2. locating and analysing relevant existing literature, including middle leadership standards
3. reviewing and summarising key models and frameworks relating to middle leadership in education
4. identifying middle leadership competencies, skills, attributes and practices
5. investigating how First Nations cultures and inclusion as leaders is incorporated in existing standards and how this influences practice
6. investigating how student and staff wellbeing, culture, inclusion and engagement are represented in existing standards and how this influences practice
7. identifying professional-development resources for middle leaders
8. summarising the roles and responsibilities currently required of Australian middle leaders
9. investigating key policy documents as they apply to middle leadership in Australian education.

While the core of this review was formed by reviewing the literature identified through the systematic literature review and associated search processes, at times relevant literature from the field has been used to extend and corroborate findings. In these cases, the literature is used as supporting documentation, rather than the core focus of the review. As such, several references appear in the bibliography of this review, but are not captured in the summary tables presented in Appendix 2 (starting page 147) and Appendix 3 (starting page 157).

### 2.1 Scope

This systematic literature review synthesises 58 peer-reviewed articles, together with 46 other relevant academic and grey literature resources. The review also incorporates a document analysis of privately sourced and publicly available information, and a scan of international and national current middle leader practices. These analyses are presented here, facilitating an evidence-based approach to drafting the Professional Standards for Middle Leaders.

While related, deep analysis of the roles of teachers and the most senior levels of leadership (for example, principals or centre directors) is out of scope for this review, as is investigating the full scope and appropriateness of professional standards published for these groups. However, as these groups are closely related to middle leadership, this review will touch on the Teacher and Principal Standards in Australia in ways that serve to establish the role, scope and potential inclusions for middle leadership standards.

Furthermore, as the present literature review has been conducted to inform AITSL's drafting of Professional Standards for Middle Leaders in education, it does not focus on methodologies of papers so much as their findings. These have been synthesised into competencies, skills, attributes and practices that contribute to effective middle leadership.

It is also important to acknowledge certain gaps in the existing literature. Although the search conducted as part of this review specifically investigated middle leadership in education for special education, early childhood education, and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – as leaders, teachers and learners – there were limited resources available on these topics. As such, resources relating to educational leadership were instead reviewed for these groups.

Finally, the literature included in this review was all published in English. As such, there may well be unidentified research or literature published in languages other than English that were not able to be included in this analysis. This is likely to have restricted the available literature and policy documentation from countries included in the search parameters detailed below, but for which English is not a dominant language (e.g. Estonia, Finland, South Korea, Japan and Poland). However, where English-based literature was identified from these countries, it has been included in this review.

## 2.2 The systematic search process

The search for this analysis incorporated peer-reviewed and grey literature. The review began with a predefined search of specified databases to gather academic literature and identified other relevant resources using several methods, the sampling techniques of which are detailed in this section.

Initially, a literature search was conducted according to a systematic search for literature to establish a pool of relevant articles, books and other resources. The search focused on literature published between January 2023 (the time of the literature search) and January 2000, due to the advancement of technology and its widespread adoption since that date.

Further parameters for the search required literature to be published in English by reputable sources (e.g. governments, research-based institutes or centres, registered educational institutions), and limited to schools and/or early childhood settings (excluding higher education).

Due to the link between effective leadership and positive results in teaching and learning (Busher, 2005; Gurr & Drysdale, 2020), the search also focused on literature originating from the nine countries<sup>1</sup> that rank above Australia in all three of the reading, maths and science rankings published by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)<sup>2</sup> (Schleicher, 2018). An exception to this parameter was the inclusion of the United States, due to the prevalence of research published in this field by American scholars (De Nobile, 2021; Gurr, 2023b).

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<sup>1</sup> Canada, United Kingdom, New Zealand, Singapore, Estonia, Finland, South Korea, Japan and Poland.

<sup>2</sup> Excluding Chinese states and territories due to governmental privacy requirements in these countries that render relevant organisations unlikely to participate in information sharing for this project.



## Database searches, snowball & purposive sampling

The initial searches were conducted according to the above criteria in four databases: AEI (Informit), Education Research Complete, ERIC (EBSCO) and the British Education Index, using several key terms to form Boolean searches<sup>3</sup>:

- All fields: middle leader(s), middle leadership, lead teacher, subject leaders, middle manager
- Subject: educational leadership, beginning principals, senior teachers, department heads OR teacher leadership
- All fields: subject leaders, head of department, department heads, middle manager, middle management, teacher leader, senior teacher OR master teacher
- Key words: middle leadership, middle leader, subject leader OR head of department AND (school OR early childhood), AND Australia
- Key words: leadership AND (middle leaders, lead teacher OR middle manager)
- Key words: leadership AND (middle leadership, middle leader, subject leader OR head of department).

The resulting literature was appraised based on titles and abstracts, duplicates removed and results documented in line with the 2023 PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021). The articles were then sourced for retrieval, sorted by topic and prioritised according to the most relevant content.

Literature was also gathered using snowball sampling. The bibliographies of relevant literature were also used to inform this snowball sampling, based on the key terms used for the Boolean database searches, and were included where appropriate. Purposive sampling was also employed, which included articles identified through recommendation from policy specialists, as well as theses or similar documents published through accredited educational organisations. At times, this included literature published before January 2000, which was appraised and included where considered relevant to the project.

As the literature identified already through the search process was largely silent on the topics of First Nations peoples, early-childhood education and special education, a search was also conducted for literature relating specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander middle leadership, early childhood settings and special education. In each case, the common *key words* search was used, with differentiating search terms:

- Key words: middle leadership (middle leader OR middle leadership OR lead teacher OR subject leaders OR school leader OR head of department OR middle manager) AND
- Key words:
  - Australia(n) (First Nations OR Aboriginal OR Torres Strait Islander OR Indigenous)
  - early childhood (kindergarten OR kinder OR preschool OR early childhood OR child care OR childcare OR day care OR daycare OR playgroups)
  - disability education OR special education OR special education.

The search for literature about First Nations middle leaders did not identify any articles specific to middle leadership; however, the search was expanded to include the more generalised term *educational leadership* and several articles were identified and incorporated as a result of this search.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that Boolean search logic has been simplified for the purpose of clear reporting.

A purposive sampling technique was also used, with articles being recommended by education specialists through the AITSL network.

Several articles were identified in relation to early childhood settings; however, only one article met the inclusion criteria based on location (an article from Massachusetts). Therefore, several articles originating from Israel, Norway, China and Sweden were reviewed and included in search results, to ensure as much representation as possible for this group in the face of little other available literature.

In terms of articles relating to special education – meaning students living with disabilities – only five articles were identified as suitable, all of which were reviewed and incorporated into this review where appropriate.

### **Email requests**

As educational institutions often provide staff with resources that are not available on public-facing sites, AITSL contacted representatives from key organisations both nationally and internationally (in line with the countries of focus specified in this search methodology) via email, seeking middle leadership-related resources that applied to teachers of learners aged three to the last years of secondary education. Email recipients were asked to provide any available grey literature, for example: role descriptions; policies or guidelines; frameworks or standards relating to the skills, attributes, practices and expectations required of middle leaders; reviews of practice; strategic initiatives or programs; and/or content outlines of targeted professional development courses or programs.

Nationally, emails invited input from the government, independent and Catholic education sectors across all Australian states and territories. Internationally, education departments (or equivalent) were invited to contribute, as were relevant organisations, in part utilising AITSL's existing international network. In terms of literature from the United States, priority was given to seeking documentation from the following states:

- Massachusetts, Texas, North Carolina and Vermont, due to their status as the highest four states in mathematics, based on 8th grade adjusted National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2011 and 2013 scores
- Minnesota, as it ranked in the top four states for mathematics, based on 4th grade adjusted NAEP 2011 and 2013 scores
- New Jersey, as it ranked in the top four states for reading, based on 8th grade adjusted NAEP 2011 and 2013 scores
- Florida and Maryland, as they ranked in the top four states for reading, based on 4th grade adjusted NAEP 2011 and 2013 scores (Carnoy et al., 2015).

### **Online searches**

Online searches were also conducted to identify key sources, where appropriate. For example, as only a few professional development programs were identified through the email requests, an online search was conducted to identify additional professional development programs for middle leaders in education. Several programs were identified through Google, using search terms (*professional development AND education OR school*) AND (*middle leader OR middle leadership OR middle manager*).

Furthermore, middle leader position descriptions were received from around Australia via return email; however, not all jurisdictions and sectors were represented in the sample. As such, additional searches were conducted, through seek.com, Catholic education commissions or Diocesan offices, and government education department websites to ensure a representative sample.

As this review investigates middle leadership from many angles, the search results and analysis techniques are combined with the respective sections to promote clear, cohesive reporting of the literature. The next section begins this analysis by introducing middle leadership in Australia and the characteristics of Australian middle leaders.

# 3. Characteristics of middle leadership in Australia

**This section introduces middle leaders and middle leadership. It unpacks the features of their role and their place in the leadership hierarchy. It then moves to document the known characteristics of Australian middle leaders and examines the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the classroom, in leadership and in the school community.**

An existing professional standard that caters to middle leaders defines effective formal leadership in schools as that which ‘develops strategies, structures and systems to ensure that the school is working effectively towards [achieving] its vision’ (Welsh Government, 2019). Considering that all levels of leadership in schools and early childhood settings influence core aspects of schools and centres – such as culture, student wellbeing and student achievement – it is useful to first examine what separates middle leaders from the most senior leaders they work alongside.

Middle leaders are teachers who typically hold management and leadership responsibilities within schools or early childhood settings, in addition to their classroom teaching responsibilities (De Nobile & Boffa, 2014; Grootenboer et al., 2020, 2021; Lipscombe et al., 2020). In terms of roles and responsibilities, middle leaders are overwhelmingly both classroom teachers and leaders (De Nobile & Boffa, 2014; Grootenboer et al., 2020). According to the Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD), in 2021 at least 90% of middle leaders held face-to-face teaching roles (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2021a), with 86% of middle leaders teaching 10 hours or more per week according to the 2022 data (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2023)<sup>4</sup>. As such, they are well positioned to understand the core business of schooling – student learning and associated outcomes (Grootenboer et al., 2020). In addition to classroom teaching, many middle leaders hold line-management duties (Ashmore & Clay, 2016; Wise & Bennett, 2003). Mechanisms such as feedback, performance and development processes, professional development planning, and mentoring new staff enable middle leaders to affect change in the classroom and impact on the quality of teaching around their school.

Research into middle leaders suggests that, while principals have significant influence on strategic direction and school culture (Grootenboer et al., 2020), they influence teaching and learning indirectly (Leithwood et al., 2008). Due to their influence on teachers, effective principals may exert influence on students to a similar magnitude than that of a similarly effective teacher (Grissom et al., 2021). It is therefore logical that middle leaders can be hugely influential, due to their capacity to directly influence teaching and learning (because they usually hold teaching roles in addition to leadership responsibilities) and also because of their role in leading groups of teachers. Middle leaders have the potential to be very powerful members of the leadership hierarchy because they play a crucial role in supporting teachers, improving student achievement, and fostering a positive school culture, meaning that they directly influence both school staff and students (Boyd, 2022). As such, middle leaders

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<sup>4</sup> Jurisdiction-based data not available at time of writing

fundamentally differ from principals and require specific resources relating to roles, function and requirements to optimise performance within their educational setting (Grootenboer et al., 2020).

While the scope of middle leaders varies greatly, it is useful to consider the types of roles that usually constitute middle leadership. Studies of middle leadership literature have found that due to differences in jurisdictions and sectors, middle leadership in schools can be difficult to define (De Nobile et al., 2020). Work earlier in the millennium found that middle leadership was largely related to subject leadership (Bennett et al., 2003, 2007); however, more recently others have suggested that middle leaders are responsible for a broader scope than that of subject leadership (Lipscombe et al., 2021). Currently, it is common for middle leaders to fill such roles as head of department, line manager (Brown, Rutherford, et al., 2000), head of curriculum, head of student welfare or head of a year level (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012a). Middle leaders sometimes lead several of these areas and usually balance extensive responsibilities within their educational setting (Brown, Rutherford, et al., 2000). In order to understand the proposed scope of middle leaders *in situ*, the present review analysed an extensive subset of position descriptions, which can be found in this text under *Roles & responsibilities of Australian middle leaders*.

In terms of hierarchy, middle leaders connect teaching staff and the most senior school leaders (Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009; De Nobile, 2018) and can form the pathway from teaching toward becoming a school principal. In the literature, the term *middle manager* was popular in research published between 1999 – 2005. However, by 2008 the term was largely supplanted by *middle leader* and *teacher leader*, which are considered distinct groups by some (Gurr, 2023b) and similar – at times even interchangeable – by others (De Nobile, 2018, 2021).

For the purposes of this review, teacher leaders are experienced teachers who may take on informal roles, such as mentoring less-experienced teachers (De Nobile, 2018) to improve teaching quality, and whose influence therefore extends beyond the classroom into the school more broadly (NSW Department of Education, 2020). It is therefore possible that teacher leaders may appear on the middle leadership continuum (elaborated on under section seven), perhaps as *aspirational* middle leaders. Simultaneously, teacher leaders are likely to demonstrate practice in line with the *Highly Accomplished teacher* or *Lead teacher* stages of their career under the Teacher Standards in Australia.

As shown in section one, middle leaders hold many position titles (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2022b; Farchi & Tubin, 2019). Considering the variation in terminology, in this review *middle leadership* is described not by position title, but by scope of responsibility. This aligns with the findings of an Australian-based review of existing leadership standards for educators, which found that – despite the context being critically important in applying the standards – when looking beyond the specifics of roles and responsibilities, the core leadership skills required shared many commonalities, irrespective of context (Boyd, 2022).

This review now explores the unique characteristics of middle leadership in Australia and what is known about the profile of middle leaders in Australian education.

### 3.1 Australian middle leaders

Australia's history and location render it unique – culturally, demographically and geographically. Busher, Hammersley-Fletcher and Turner (2007) note that, while much middle leader literature examines *what* middle leaders do (their role descriptions and their characteristics), fewer focus on the *why* of leadership as a middle leader, a question that requires a more nuanced view of institutional, social and political contexts. This review now introduces the characteristics and features of middle

leadership in Australia, including First Nations leaders and leadership in education by way of establishing demography aspects of the Australian middle leadership context.

Although middle leaders make up a substantial proportion of the teaching workforce in Australia, their characteristics are only partly known. Recent nationwide estimates suggest that 19% of Australia's teacher workforce hold middle leadership responsibilities (excluding principals and deputy principals) – 17% of respondents in Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia; 24% of respondents in the Australian Capital Territory; 22% of respondents in the Northern Territory; 18% of respondents in South Australia; 20% of respondents in Tasmania; and 28% of respondents in Victoria (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2022a). The New South Wales (NSW) Government estimates that there are approximately 10,000 middle leaders working as assistant principals and head teachers in government schools in New South Wales alone (NSW Government, 2022). The increasing focus on middle leadership by organisations that collect national data about the teaching workforce (such as AITSL) will result in more complete middle leader workforce data over the coming months and years. However, combining the information currently known about Australian middle leaders with the distinctive features of Australia's teaching workforce can go some way to informing a potential profile of middle leaders in Australia.

The average middle leader first entered the teaching profession approximately 22 years ago and worked as a classroom teacher for an average (mean) of 11 years before becoming a middle leader (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2021a). One survey of educators holding formal middle leadership roles in government schools in New South Wales supported this estimate, indicating that 71% of middle leaders have at least 10 years of teaching experience (Lipscombe et al., 2020).

In terms of gender, while 78% of Australia's teaching workforce are women, only 67% of middle leaders are women (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2021a), perhaps reflecting the rate at which men are promoted to middle leadership roles – an average (mean) of 1.9 years earlier than women.

The majority of Australian middle leaders are employed full-time, but middle leaders are more likely to work part-time than principals (20% and 4%, respectively) (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2021a). Non-principal leaders also report more face-to-face teaching time than principals (16.6 hours and 5.5 hours, respectively), but less than classroom teachers who do not have middle leadership responsibilities (25.5 hours) (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2021a). This is unsurprising, given that middle leaders usually continue to teach, but are afforded release time to fulfil their leadership responsibilities (release time varies based on their role in the school; the school leadership preferences; and the jurisdiction, system and sector).

This review now introduces a core aspect of leading in Australian schools – embracing the knowledge of and elevating the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our schooling system (State of Queensland (Department of Education), 2022).

### 3.2 First Nations Australian middle leaders

The cultural demographics of Australian teachers vary depending on the state or territory, as well as the local community and specific school. Nationally, 4% of the Australian population identifies as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2021), with 75% of this population living in three states – Queensland (28%), New South Wales (35%) and Western Australia (12%). While 6.2% of students in Australian schools identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022), there are differences in representation around Australia. For example, data from 2021 indicates that 38% of all years 7–12 students in the Northern



Territory identify as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, followed by 8.1% in Queensland and 6.2% in New South Wales<sup>5</sup> (Australian Government: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: National Indigenous Australians Agency, 2021). Meanwhile, estimates suggest that only 2% of registered teachers identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2019). The last available data on the proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander leaders was collected in 2013, where only approximately 1% of both teachers and leaders identified as being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (McKenzie et al., 2014).

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in the education sector appears to be growing, perhaps as a result of targeted recruitment, tailored professional development programs, a greater focus on culturally responsive teaching practices, and programs such as the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI) (Buckskin, 2016). Research conducted by MATSITI – an initiative aimed at increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in teaching positions – found that due to recruitment and higher levels of Indigenous identification, the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in deputy principal roles increased from 2% to 7% in the years between 2012 and 2015 (Buckskin, 2016).

The Australian Education Senior Officials Committee (AESOC) (2006) distinguishes between *leadership in Indigenous education* and *Indigenous leadership in education*. *Leadership in Indigenous education* relates to leaders' willingness and ability to 'challenge educators, Indigenous students and communities about the pursuit of better outcomes for Indigenous children in schools'. *Indigenous leadership in education* relates to Indigenous people leading schools, working to improve outcomes for First Nations students and implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy.

In terms of both teaching and leadership, teachers who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent play a critical role in linking student learning with local First Nations languages, cultures and communities (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2021b). This can be particularly important, because many Indigenous students speak 'Aboriginal English, a creole, one or more Indigenous languages or any combination of these' as their first language, rather than 'standard' Australian English (Australian Education Senior Officials Committee (AESOC), 2006). For example, in Queensland, 50 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are spoken, 20 of which are being used as first languages (The State of Queensland, 2022).

Research in the Northern Territory has identified that the ways in which Indigenous educators – in this example, the Yolŋu people of Arnhem Land – 'enter, progress and complete an initial teacher education qualification (ITE)... differed markedly from the individual achievement approach' represented in existing national resources for Australian teachers or Australian teacher education (Bat & Shore, 2013). For example, rather than focusing solely on individual academic achievement, First Nations educators emphasise the importance of community and traditional knowledges in their teachings.

In Gunbalanya in the Northern Territory, for example, an adult education program delivered by First Nations teachers to Aboriginal educators was redesigned to represent holistic competency as the desired outcome, rather than trying to measure competencies based on a series of essential components relating to a specific aspect of each competency. This enabled the adult students to each approach the task in different ways, with the focus being on 'a well thought out and expressed idea', rather than the more rigid approach initially required by the program design (Bulliwana et al., 2019).

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<sup>5</sup> Data from other jurisdictions was not published.

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (Education Council, 2019), signed by all Australian Ministers for Education, represents the commitment of all Australian educational jurisdictions to First Nations peoples and culture. It states:

*Through education, we are committed to ensuring that all students learn about the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to seeing all young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples thrive in their education and all facets of life... We entrust Australia's educators and education leaders with delivering the goals in this Declaration, and educators in particular need to be supported appropriately as they play their part...*

Frawley et al. (2010) recognise the evolution of a 'both ways' concept, an approach that centres on the mutual respect that must be present to enable knowledges to be shared interculturally, producing self-determining student outcomes for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous peoples (Bat & Shore, 2013).

Whilst many elements of 'both ways' education are resonant of general good teaching practice, it is the focus on the students' identity formation that creates the space not only for the use of language in learning but also recognition of the role learning on Country plays in Aboriginal lives (Bulliwana et al., 2019). This approach to leadership recognises and values the contributions and perspectives of First Nations Australians and is a positive step towards reconciliation and healing.

To further understand the focus of key middle leadership resources, the analysis now shifts focus to investigate the existing Australian professional standards and international professional standards that cater to middle leaders in education.



## 4. Professional standards

**To examine the existing standards that influence middle leaders in Australian education, this section introduces the two current Australian standards, as well as international professional standards that cater to middle leaders in education.**

Professional standards are particularly important because they make explicit the competencies, skills, attributes, and practices required for effective leadership in different contexts and at different career stages. Establishing guidelines that support effective leadership is critical to improving student success – one meta-analysis quantifying the influence of effectiveness in principals found that replacing a below-average principal (e.g. at the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile of effectiveness) with an above-average principal (e.g. at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of effectiveness) would result in primary school students receiving the equivalent of an additional 2.9 months of learning in maths and 2.7 months of learning in reading per year (Grissom et al., 2021).

Professional standards also raise the profile of professionalism in the education sector, and provide a resource for structuring professional practice, gauging professional competencies, and planning professional development and progression. They formalise effective practice and establish a common language that can be used across the sector (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2011). They also enable thinking to shift from a sole focus on student outcomes to the research-based practices that support leaders in achieving these outcomes.

Not only do professional standards reflect best practice, but they also reflect social and cultural priorities (Grissom et al., 2021). For example, literature published since 2011 has increasingly focused on the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education; inclusive education (e.g. disability, and social and cultural diversity); and wellbeing for both students and teachers (Elliott et al., 2020) in Australian education. In line with Royal Commissions into social issues such as mental health (State of Victoria, Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health & System, 2021) and people living with disabilities (Australian Government, 2023), Australian education policy has increased the focus on these areas (Australian Government Department of Education, 2020; Department of Education Victoria, 2023), as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in education (Education Council, 2019). Professional standards articulate how education and educators can enact and uphold focus areas in line with shifting governmental policy. By articulating professional values that inform practice, standards can therefore establish a commitment to 'cognitive, social and emotional growth and wellbeing' (General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC Scotland), 2021)

### 4.1 Developing effective professional standards

As useful as standards can appear on paper, they must be adopted and embedded in order to be effective (Murphy et al., 2017). A report investigating the theoretical underpinnings and applications of New Zealand's Standards for Teaching suggests that a complete set of standards must include 1) indications of desired knowledge and practice, and 2) the ability to be used as 'measures' of performance (Kleinhenz & Ingvarson, 2007). It must therefore be possible for end-users to assess themselves against the standards (Jackson & Nietschke, 2018) and provide a framework against which professional learning can be structured (Kleinhenz & Ingvarson, 2007).

Various factors contribute to whether standards become adopted and embedded. This can include professional learning associated with the standards or accreditation (Kleinhenz & Ingvarson, 2007). Furthermore, to be impactful, standards must be perceived as valid by those who use them. Valid standards need to be carefully considered for generalisability across school settings, locations, cultural groups, and socioeconomic statuses (Jackson & Nietschke, 2018). They must also be anchored to external variables that enable comparisons beyond (but including) student learning outcome data, and plan ahead to ensure they remain applicable in the longer term, for example taking into consideration factors such as government policy changes (Jackson & Nietschke, 2018).

## 4.2 Australian professional standards

Resources that provide scaffolding around the middle leadership role can include professional standards, policies, frameworks, formalised education and professional development (both formal and informal). In many ways professional standards are the linchpin of these resources, encouraging quality and consistency in professional practice; providing clear expectations; defining the competencies, skills, attributes and practices required at different stages of career progression; and providing a common language for which to discuss these aspects of middle leadership across the education sector. They also inform recruitment to support schools in selecting the candidate with the most valuable experience (General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC Scotland), 2021). Considering that middle leaders are often underutilised (Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009) (discussed further under section six), resources that offer clear, detailed and ambitious standards for middle leaders in education therefore afford great potential impact.

The resources that exist for middle leaders rest on one fundamental tenet – leadership can be learned, assessed and improved (Murphy et al., 2006). As such, professional standards do not necessarily always only reflect current practice. They can also be aspirational, providing goalposts for future practice and challenging the profession to improve practice (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015).

To understand the required scope of middle leadership standards in the Australian context, it is valuable to first examine the existing Australian professional standards. There are currently two professional standards for Australian teachers: the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2011) and the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2014). Each of these Standards support Australian teachers and school leaders by providing public statements about the competencies, skills, attributes and practices educational professionals need to be effective in their roles.

### **Australian Professional Standard for Principals**

As middle leaders are usually both leaders *and* teachers, both Standards will be introduced here. This section also provides an opportunity to highlight the correlations between these two resources that can then be used as a point of comparison to guide the analysis presented in the rest of this review.

The Australian Professional Standard for Principals – hereafter in this review referred to as the Principal Standard (in Australia) – is an integrated model that distinguishes between:

1. the qualities necessary for school leadership
2. the functional areas of schools that require leadership (Ingvarson, 2013).

They articulate three *leadership requirements* that a principal draws on in their practice, within five areas of *professional practice*. The Principal Standard is underpinned by the tenet that the most

effective leaders see self-learning as central to their professional lives. It describes what principals are required to know, understand and do to succeed in their work, and provides a tool that supports school leaders in promoting excellent teaching that produces excellent student learning.

The Principal Standard challenges school leaders to question the status quo and seek continuous improvement. It envisions that our most senior school leaders are central to achieving the educational goals that were established in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (Australia), 2008), which include:

1. a global economy and society
2. an inclusive Australia
3. celebrating the uniqueness of each school within its community.

They can therefore be used to guide self-reflection and professional growth, while also providing a resource for selecting professional learning programs, recruiting suitable staff, developing talent, forming succession plans and structuring performance reviews.

The Principal Standard provides a model against which principals can match their knowledge, qualities, experiences and skills to determine their strengths and areas for development. It acknowledges that all good leaders share common qualities and capabilities, and it is how a principal combines these qualities and capabilities that establish the extent of their effectiveness. As such, the Principal Standard is based on three *leadership requirements* – vision and values; knowledge and understanding; and personal qualities, social and interpersonal skills.

The leadership requirements are enacted through five key *professional practices*:

- 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.

They also relate to *leadership emphasis*, factors that depend on a principal's career stage, capability and context: 1) operational, 2) relational, 3) strategic and 4) systemic. Figure 1 shows a diagram of each of the leadership lenses and the associated focus areas.

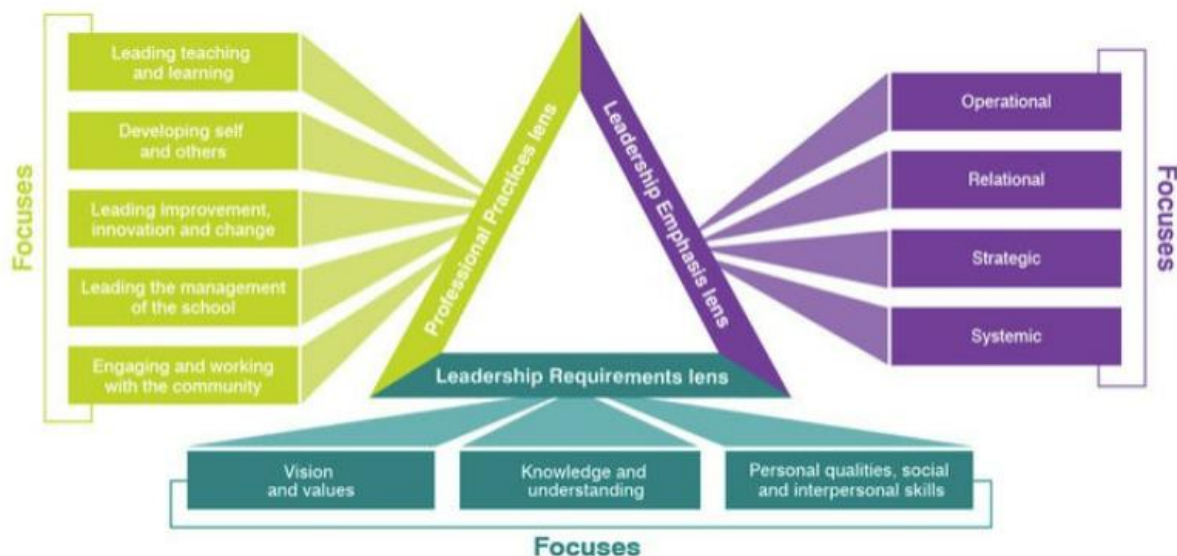


Figure 1: The leadership lenses and focuses of the Australian Professional Standard for Principals

The Principal Standard provides a set of 80 leadership action statements organised in terms of increasing proficiency. These statements describe the work of principals at all levels of experience and have been designed to be applicable for principals across Australia, irrespective of context. Principals use the Standard by selecting a focus area from one of three lenses shown in the diagram in Figure 1, each of which is now discussed.

The light green section on the left of the diagram represents the five *professional practices*. Each of these includes *leadership profiles* (not shown in Figure 1) that detail the developmental pathway of a principal's increasing proficiency, which progresses from operational through to systemic, in line with the leadership emphasis lens (discussed below). The *profiles* are a set of leadership actions that effective principals implement as they progress to higher levels of proficiency. Principals and aspiring principals can use the profiles to help them grow and develop as school leaders.

At the bottom of the diagram are the three *leadership requirements* for effective leadership. The leadership requirements lens organises the same set of statements from the leadership profiles, this time to describe the Principal Standard's three leadership requirements at increasing levels of proficiency. As the focuses of these requirements are less explicit than those implied by the professional practices, the three focuses of this lens are expanded upon in Table 2.

Table 2: Aspects of each leadership requirement focus from the Australian Professional Standard for Principals

Vision & values	Knowledge & understanding	Personal qualities, social & interpersonal skills
<b>Ethical practice</b>	Understand and apply leadership and management theory	Emotional intelligence
<b>Commitment to learning and student growth</b>		Empathy
<b>Democratic values</b>	Lead innovation in pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and reporting, and student wellbeing	Resilience
<b>Lifelong learning</b>		Personal wellbeing
<b>Serve the community</b>		Ethical practice
<b>Strategic vision</b>		Social skills
		Manage conflict

Vision & values	Knowledge & understanding	Personal qualities, social & interpersonal skills
<b>School culture</b>	Understand national policies and legislation	Build trust
<b>Celebrate traditions</b>	Child safety and health	Positive environment (school and community)
<b>Positive ethos</b>	Human resource management	Define challenges
<b>High standards</b>	Financial management	Seek positive solutions
<b>Respect</b>	Accountability	Collaborate
<b>Inspire and motivate</b>	Serve community	Evidence-informed decision-making
<b>Integrity</b>	Serve society	Clear communication
<b>Moral purpose</b>	Strategic practice improvements	Negotiate
<b>Model desired behaviours</b>	Collaboration with governing bodies	Advocate
	Lead strategically	Listen
	Lead operations	Coaching
		Give and receive feedback
		Social, political and local awareness
		Network
		Influence

Finally, the *leadership emphasis* lens (shown in purple on the right of the diagram) enables principals to reflect on their leadership style and factors that influence it. In many cases, people who are new to the principal role may focus more on the operational style of leadership and more experienced principals may focus more on the systemic style. However, this is not always the case, because the unique context of any school requires its leaders respond to a dynamic combination of circumstances by selecting the most suitable leadership emphasis for any phase or situation. Table 3 expands on the leadership emphasis focuses specified under the Principal Standard. Principals are likely to use a combination of focuses, with some guiding practice more heavily than others, depending on the setting.

Table 3: Aspects of each leadership emphasis focus, from the Australian Professional Standard for Principals

Operational	Relational	Strategic	Systemic
<b>Communications</b>	Consultation	Relational	Building networks
<b>Organisation</b>	Feedback	Organisational	Collaborating
<b>Resource management</b>	Relationships (internal and external)	Management	Systemic connections
	Shared culture and vision	Effecting and monitoring change	Influencing
		Achieve goals	

In terms of cultural responsiveness, the Principal Standard articulates the importance of including Indigenous, multicultural and multi-faith communities, across metropolitan, rural, regional and remote Australia. This includes principals' responsibilities to work with members of the school community to ensure a knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' traditional rights, beliefs and culture.

The Principal Standard also emphasises the principal's role in student, staff and self-wellbeing – they enhance student wellbeing by collaborating with networks and the community; they support staff wellbeing by watching for signs of stress and taking steps to address it; and they guard self-wellbeing by nourishing their own wellbeing, enabling them to remain resilient, emotionally intelligent and empathetic leaders, and manage the complexity of their roles.

The Principal Standard has also been adapted and extended by the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership (Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership, 2023), to include *leadership dispositions*. This is discussed later in this review (in relation to *Middle leadership theory*).

### **Australian Professional Standards for Teachers**

To conceptualise the breadth of the middle leader role, it is useful to now explore the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers – hereafter referred to in this review as the Teacher Standards (in Australia) – which describe what teachers are expected to know and be able to do. This is especially important because the Teacher Standards support professional growth and development for the teachers who develop into Australian middle leaders.

The Teacher Standards were established in 2011 to support integrity and accountability across the profession. The Teacher Standards are based on four levels of teaching proficiency referred to as career stages – Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead – and comprise of 107 statements under seven Standards according to three domains: *professional knowledge* (know students and how they learn; know the content and how to teach it), *professional practice* (plan for and implement effective teaching and learning; create and maintain supporting and safe learning environments; assess, provide feedback and report on student learning) and *professional engagement* (engage in professional learning; engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community). Unlike the Principal Standard, against which principals map themselves, the Teacher Standards underpin teacher registration and certification in Australia and include levels of competency that must be met, particularly in relation to Graduate teachers and Proficient teachers.

In the higher career stages of the Teacher Standards, *Lead teachers* and potentially *Highly Accomplished teachers* may already be employed in middle leadership positions. As such, there is some overlap between the practices employed by middle leaders and those practices outlined within the higher levels of the Teacher Standards, examples of which include *leading teaching and learning* (including developing curriculum and sharing knowledge as an expert teacher) and *leading professional learning* (for example, coaching or mentoring colleagues).

Cultural responsiveness is represented in both Standard 1 (know students and how they learn) and Standard 2 (know the content and how to teach it). Standard 1 includes a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It requires teachers to: demonstrate broad knowledge, design and implement teaching strategies, provide advice and support to colleagues, and develop teaching programs, all intended to support equitable and ongoing participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Standard 2, meanwhile, promotes reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians. It requires teachers to understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages at varying levels of responsibility, depending on career stage.



The Teacher Standards also emphasise students' wellbeing as a necessary part of maintaining student safety, which underpins effective learning. Practice in this area includes describing appropriate context-specific strategies (Graduate level); ensuring wellbeing within the school's context (Proficient level); initiating and taking responsibility for implementing wellbeing (Highly Accomplished level); and evaluating the effectiveness of wellbeing policies and assisting colleagues to update their practices (Lead level). Teachers' roles in supporting children's wellbeing by engaging with parents and carers also forms a key part of engaging with colleagues, parents and carers, and the community.

### **Research on existing Australian professional standards**

Since the existing Teacher Standards were established in 2011, Elliott et al. (2020) have conducted an 'environmental scan' of new literature in the field, with the goal of understanding core influences on Australian teachers and how these were represented in the Teacher Standards. The report identified 11 topics that had gained increasing purchase in the industry between 2011 and 2020:

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education
2. digital technologies in education
3. early childhood education and care
4. general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities
5. inclusive education, including:
  - a. social/cultural diversity
  - b. learners with disability
  - c. gifted and talented learners
6. learning progress, including assessment
7. parent/carer-school partnerships
8. pedagogy
9. professional learning
10. student wellbeing
11. teacher wellbeing.

They found that these factors have become increasingly influential in teachers' practice and, therefore, the skills and knowledge teachers employed in their work. As such, they suggested that future standards (or iterations of standards) should increase the focus on these themes in order to support the evolving education sector (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2014).

Dally and Dempsey (2015) also reviewed the Teacher Standards through the lens of Australian state and federal policies for inclusive education, and the needs of students experiencing disability. They proposed amendments to increase inclusivity and provide teachers with the required knowledge and capabilities for successfully educating every student in their classroom.

In total, they retained several original descriptors, suggested additional modifications to existing descriptors and proposed the addition of several new descriptors (e.g. a new focus area of *Accessible instructional material* was accompanied by the descriptor: *Review programs and teaching practices and make adjustments, where necessary, to ensure that learning activities and content are accessible and appropriate for students with additional needs*). They also suggested that using language that aligns with inclusivity policies, such as replacing *individualised instruction* with *personalised learning*, would increase inclusivity in practice (Dally & Dempsey, 2015).

## Middle leadership & existing Australian standards

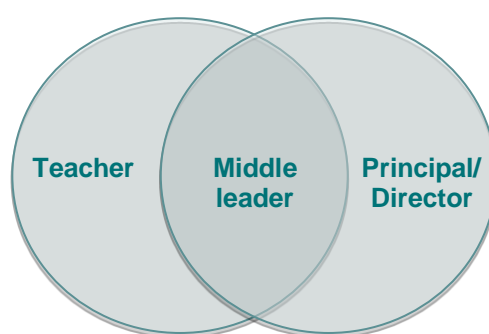
When considering the role of middle leaders in Australian schools, it is important to contextualise middle leaders in relation to these existing standards. While the Principal Standard provides an aspirational focus for leadership development, it does not provide a clear pathway of the competencies, skills, attributes and practices required for aspirational and less senior leadership (De Nobile et al., 2020). There is therefore a need for a leadership standard that provides explicit guidance as to the requirements of school leadership at varying levels and reflects a development continuum toward the most senior leadership levels in education.

*Whilst [the Principal] Standards may benefit deputy principals to some extent, we know that middle leaders experience leadership very differently to principals. The scope of their authority is limited, they experience a conflict of classroom and administrative responsibilities, and they carry out a significant intermediary role between senior leadership and classroom teachers (De Nobile, 2018; Fleming, 2014; Grootenboer, 2018). It is the nature of this intermediary role and the sphere of influence that it exerts that needs greater understanding (De Nobile et al., 2020).*

Considering their position as both teachers and leaders, middle leaders could be seen as operating under aspects of both the Principal Standard and the Teacher Standards (De Nobile et al., 2020), with spheres of influence extending further beyond the classroom as the middle leader progresses. This duality inherent in the middle leadership role suggests two key domains for middle leaders – *leading learning* and *leading within the school*. This also provides a perspective for conceptualising much of the following synthesis in this review.

It can also be useful to consider the intersection between these two areas of responsibility (De Nobile et al., 2020) to conceptualise the middle leader as informed by both Standards in their professional practice (shown in

Figure 2). While this suggests middle leaders use both sets of Standards, the unique focus of a middle leader requires the Standards to adapt based on how these Standards function in practice.



*Figure 2: Conceptualising the middle leader at the intersection of teaching and leading*

A report commissioned by AITSL and conducted by Macquarie University (De Nobile et al., 2020) summarised their findings under four overarching leadership domains that should be prioritised in non-principal school leadership – *teaching and learning; building relationships; strategy and operations*. These have been used to guide a thematic alignment of the Principal Standard and Teacher Standards, which is shown in Table 4. The alignments between the two sets of Standards will be further developed over the course of this systematic review and document analysis.



Table 4: Synergies between the Teacher Standards and the Principal Standard

De Nobile et al.'s (2020) domains	Teacher Standards	Principal Standard
<b>Leading teaching and learning</b>	1 Know students and how they learn	1 Lead teaching and learning
	2 Know the content and how to teach it	
	3 Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning	
<b>Building relationships</b>	4 Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments	5 Engaging and working with the community (internally)
<b>Strategy</b>	5 Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning	2 Developing self and others
	6 Engage in professional learning	
<b>Building relationships</b>	7 Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community	5 Engaging and working with the community (internally and externally)
<b>Strategy</b>		3 Leading improvement, innovation and change
<b>Operations</b>		4 Leading the management of the school
<b>Building relationships</b>		Leadership requirements

Table 4 shows clear conceptual alignment between the Principal Standard and the Teacher Standards. The correlation between Teacher Standards 5 and 6 and *developing self and others* is indicative of the hybrid role of middle leaders – while teachers are most responsible for student development and principals are most responsible for staff development, middle leaders straddle those areas and must include this dual focus in their planning and practice. Likewise, middle leaders' roles could be seen as building relationships and actively liaising within the school's community, both internally and externally (De Nobile et al., 2020). This therefore includes a focus on shaping and fostering the community for students and colleagues, as well as for parents/carers and the community. This balancing act is explored further in relation to effective middle leadership.

### 4.3 International professional standards for middle leaders

Since 2000, several professional standards have been developed for teachers at various stages of their careers. In conducting a review of existing standards for principals, or school leaders more generally, Boyd (2022) found that irrespective of the system the standard was developed within, the standards shared clear similarities. They suggest that, while the context influences the way the standards are applied, the core skills, competencies, attributes and practices required remained comparable.

At the time of writing, only one international standard specific to middle leaders in education exists. The Standard for Middle Leadership was published in 2021 (General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC Scotland), 2021) and was established as ‘an aspirational professional standard for Scotland’s teachers’ (General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC Scotland), 2021). This middle leadership standard outlines the knowledge, skills and dispositions that middle leaders are expected to possess and demonstrate in order to be effective in their roles.

The document specifies three standards: *being a teacher in Scotland*; *professional knowledge and understanding*; and *professional skills and abilities*. Each standard has several focus areas, some of which include sub-focus areas. Standard one (shown in Table 5) is structured differently to standards two and three (shown in Table 6) and is therefore presented separately.

*Table 5: Standard 1, the Standard for Middle Leadership (General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC Scotland), 2021)*

Standard	Focus area	Descriptor summary
<b>1 Being a teacher in Scotland</b>	1.1 Professional values	Embody social justice, trust and respect, and integrity
	1.2 Professional commitment	Commit to a lifelong ethos of ethical teaching and learning, informed by the professional values
	1.3 Standard of middle leadership	Practice collegiality and building leadership capacity in others; work for a sustainable and equitable world; engage with a wide network to further learning and capability, especially for colleagues

Table 6: Standards 2 & 3, the Standard for Middle Leadership (General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC Scotland), 2021)

Standard	Focus area	Descriptor summary
<b>2 Professional knowledge and understanding</b>	2.1 Curriculum, pedagogy, leadership and strategic vision	<p>2.1.1 Understand how to develop and demonstrate a strategic vision</p> <p>2.1.2 Have knowledge and understanding of political, economic, sociological, technological, legal and environmental trends and developments to enhance positive outcomes for all learners</p> <p>2.1.3 Have an enhanced and critically informed understanding of curriculum</p> <p>2.1.4 Have knowledge and understanding of leadership and management related to your context</p>
	2.2 Professional responsibilities	<p>2.2.1 Understand and demonstrate political insight</p> <p>2.2.2 Understand and demonstrate self-awareness and inspire and motivate others</p> <p>2.2.3 Judge wisely and decide appropriately</p> <p>2.2.4 Communicate effectively</p>
<b>3 Professional skills and abilities</b>	3.1 Curriculum, pedagogy, leadership and strategic vision	<p>3.1.1 Support the design and provision of a curriculum informed by theoretical principles of curriculum design and purposes of education</p> <p>3.1.2 Enable and sustain a coherent approach to the development and improvement of curriculum practices (including pedagogy and assessment) in line with agreed strategic and operational priorities</p> <p>3.1.3 Enable and sustain processes which actively promote professional dialogue, critical reflection and collegial practice as a way of evaluating and enhancing curriculum practices (including pedagogy and assessment practices) and wellbeing</p>
	3.2 The learning context	<p>3.2.1 Lead and support the vision, values, ethos and aims of the learning community with colleagues, learners, parents/carers and families and wider community</p> <p>3.2.2 Encourage and facilitate learner participation in planning and deciding about their own learning and the wider decision-making within the learning community</p> <p>3.2.3 Lead individual and collegial activities to help establish, enable and sustain trusting relationships with parents/carers and families</p>

Standard	Focus area	Descriptor summary
		3.2.4 Help promote and support partnership working with colleagues, parents/carers and families, other professionals and agencies to support the rights and wellbeing of every learner
	3.3 Professional learning	3.3.1 Lead and promote a culture of career-long professional learning which builds and sustains individual and team capacity and supports identified and agreed priorities 3.3.2 Enable and sustain approaches and processes which support colleagues to engage in critically reflective practice as an integral part of career-long professional learning
	3.4 Self-evaluation	3.4.1 Develop and sustain a range of inclusive and supportive relationships, processes and practices which promote a culture of self-evaluation in line with agreed strategic and operational priorities 3.4.2 Develop and sustain the effective use of a wide range of robust and credible information to support and inform decisions and improvements across the school and learning community in line with agreed strategic and operational priorities 3.4.3 Collaborate with colleagues, learners, parents/carers and families and the wider learning community in identifying, agreeing and implementing improvement priorities 3.4.4 Utilise and support systems for ongoing monitoring and review of the school and learning community improvement agenda
	3.5 Resources	3.5.1 Make best operational use of all available resources in line with identified strategic and operational priorities, ensuring and maintaining a clear focus on the interests of learners 3.5.2 Work within the structure of employment legislation, national and local agreements and policies governing employment in line with identified strategic and operational priorities

While the Scottish Professional Standard is the only known standard specifically for middle leaders, there are two further international standards that cater to all levels of school leadership (rather than just principals) and thus apply to middle leaders. The Welsh professional standards are introduced now, followed by the United States' standards. As each of the standards introduced in this section are uniquely structured, it is most appropriate to present their content in terms of the extent to which they align with the overarching themes that have emerged as part of this analysis. This tabular analysis is shown in Table 9.

In Wales, the Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership were published in 2019 and are intended for use by practising teachers and formal leaders (Welsh Government, 2019). The standards are underpinned by the values and dispositions shown in Figure 3 and include five professional standards, which are shown in Figure 4.

The six values and dispositions articulate the underlying aspects of teaching and leadership that apply to all parts of professional practice.

- *Professional entitlement* relates to the teacher's right to be part of a school that aims not only to teach, but to teach well.
- Teachers are compelled to infuse all areas of school and student life with *Welsh language and culture*.
- The *rights of learners* requires every teacher to establish and maintain high expectations of each student and an ongoing commitment to student achievement.
- Teachers must also emphasise and reinforce *literacy, numeracy and digital competence* throughout all areas of learning.
- Teachers should maintain the mindset of *professional learners* and embracing career-long development.
- *The system role* indicates the importance of every teacher in promoting a culture of education and achievement in Wales.



Figure 3: Overarching values and dispositions from the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching & Leadership (Welsh Government, 2019)

Overlaying these values and dispositions, each standard has several focus areas that extend their scope and clarify their meaning. For teachers in leadership roles, the standards include:

- maintaining accountability for *pedagogy*, in terms of standard, wellbeing and progress
- demonstrating *leadership* so that all levels of the school (learners, colleagues and the wider community) realise the vision for pedagogy
- elevating the value of impactful *professional learning*
- encouraging coherent, actionable *innovation*
- facilitating *collaboration* to support effective pedagogy.



Figure 4: Professional Standards for Teaching & Leadership (Welsh Government, 2019)

The focus areas for each standard are shown in Table 7. As the standard with the broadest influence, *pedagogy* comprises of three parts, which are also reflected in the table: *refining teaching*, *advancing learning* and *influencing learners*. The correlations between this standard and the Principal Standard in Australia are apparent and will be further explored, below.

Table 7: Standards and associated descriptors from the Welsh Professional Standards for Teaching & Leadership (Welsh Government, 2019)

Standard	Focus areas
<b>Pedagogy, refining teaching</b>	Promoting the pedagogic vision for 2025 Sustaining highly effective teaching Ensuring that strategy and infrastructure are fit for purpose Creating the effective and inclusive learning environment Advancing pedagogic approaches Listening to learners
<b>Pedagogy, advancing learning</b>	Promoting Welsh language and culture Ensuring the four purposes for learners Exploiting subject disciplines in areas of learning

Standard	Focus areas
	Driving real life, authentic contexts Using cross-curricular themes
<b>Pedagogy, influencing learners</b>	Accepting accountability for outcomes and learner wellbeing Ensuring and protecting learner entitlement Monitoring and evaluating impact Reporting on effectiveness
<b>Leadership</b>	Promoting teaching and leadership in Wales Exercising corporate responsibility in all colleagues Empowering others Delegation and empowerment Supporting other settings
<b>Professional learning</b>	Wider reading and research outlooks Professional networks and communities Supporting growth and system-wide leadership Supporting growth in others Continuing professional learning for all staff
<b>Innovation</b>	Towards 2025 Developing new techniques Seeking and extending best practice Evaluating the impact of changes in practice
<b>Collaboration</b>	Seeking advice and support Sustaining a collaborative culture Working productively with external agencies Engaging with the widest school community Enabling continuous improvement

The final standards introduced here are from the United States. The ISLLC Standards for School Leaders were published in 1996 and most recently refined as the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders in 2015 (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). These standards provide leadership practices that encourage school leaders to stretch themselves professionally, striving for constant individual and school improvement. While they cater primarily to school leaders with administrative roles (the domain of many middle leaders), they are intended to be adaptable and useful for other educational leadership contexts. Despite this, the standards acknowledge that they are limited because they omit research that informs the adaptability of these standards into different school leadership contexts.

The United States standards aim to be 'foundational to all levels of educational leadership'. They are intended to be relevant to leaders at all career stages and call for future research into how their application will vary depending on where leaders are in their careers. Interestingly, while the

introduction to the standards articulates the audience as principals and assistant principals, the kinds of functional tasks included in the standards apply to include functions such as teacher evaluation, which is characteristic of middle leadership responsibilities. These standards include 10 interdependent domains, which each form one standard:

1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values
2. Ethics and Professional Norms
3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness
4. Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
5. Community of Care and Support for Students
6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel
7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff
8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community
9. Operations and Management
10. School Improvement

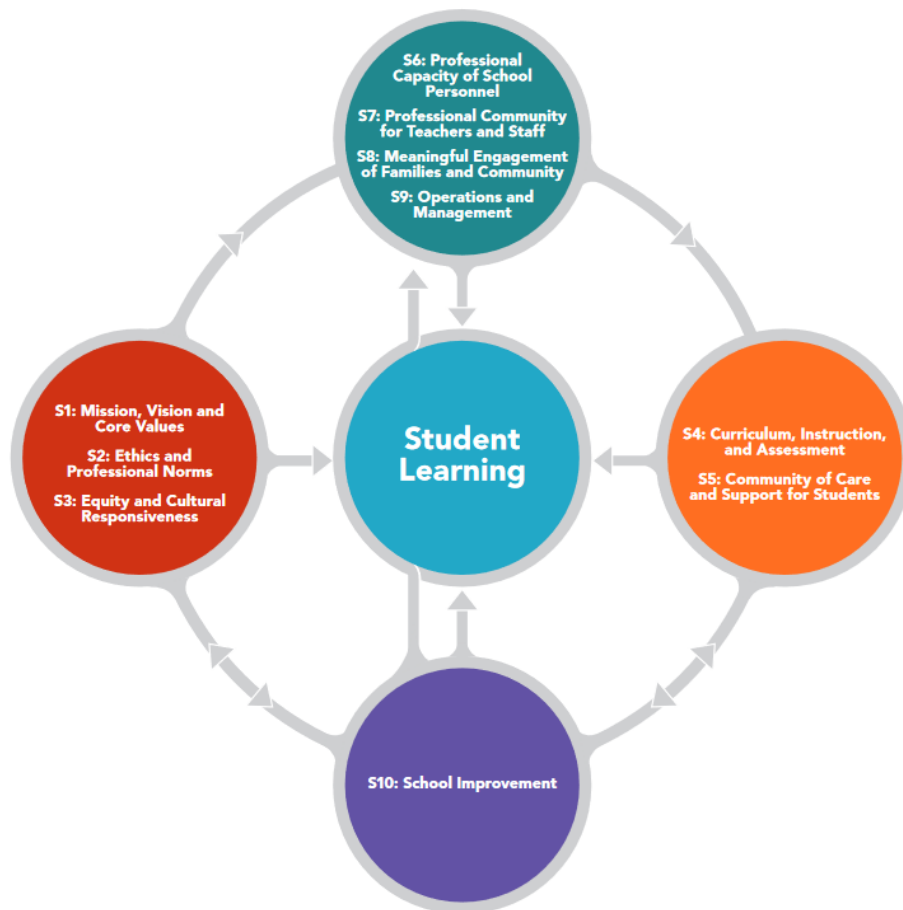


Figure 5: Relationship of school leadership work to student learning (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015)

These domains are *clustered* into three groups (shown also in Figure 5) as follows:

- Cluster one: *curriculum, instruction and assessment*; and *community of care and support for students*



- Cluster two: *professional capacity of school personnel; professional community for teachers and staff; meaningful engagement of families and community; and operations and management*
- Cluster three: *mission, vision and core values; ethics and professional norms; and equity and cultural responsiveness.*

The domain of *school improvement* shown in purple in Figure 5 affects all clusters, which together reflect a theory of how educational leader practice influences student achievement.

Each standard contains between six and 12 descriptors that specify the competencies, skills, attributes and practices associated with each standard. A summary of these descriptors and their associated standards is shown in Table 8.

*Table 8: Standards & summary of associated descriptors, United States Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015)*

Standard	Themes
<b>1 Mission, vision and core values</b>	Develop educational mission; achieve vision for the school Using data to develop and promote a vision for the school Develop students in line with instructional and organisational practices Foreground child-centred education, high expectations, equity, inclusion, social justice, openness, caring, trust and continuous improvement Adapt school ethos in line with shifting context and student needs Model and share school's mission, vision, values within community
<b>2 Ethics and professional norms</b>	Act ethically and morally in: personal conduct, relationships, decision-making, allocating resources and leadership Promote integrity, fairness, transparency, trust, collaboration, perseverance, learning and continuous improvement Focus on students and be accountable for their learning outcomes Promote democracy, individual freedom and responsibility, equity, social justice, community and diversity Implement strong interpersonal skills, social-emotional insight and embrace cultural diversity
<b>3 Equity and cultural responsiveness</b>	Ensure fair, respectful and culturally appropriate relationships with students in interactions, decision-making and practice Recognise and leverage student diversity in teaching and learning Provide equitable student access to teachers, opportunities, supports and resources Ensure policies are positive, fair and unbiased Ensure any misconduct measures are positive, fair and unbiased Confront institutional biases associated with student marginalisation, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status

Standard	Themes
	<p>Prepare students to live productively in a diverse cultural and global society</p>
<p><b>4 Curriculum, instruction and assessment</b></p>	<p>Implement coherent curriculum, instruction and assessment in line with school mission, vision and values</p> <p>Maintain high expectations for student learning</p> <p>Promote academic success, love of learning and healthy sense of self</p> <p>Promote effective, responsive pedagogy appropriate to children’s learning and development needs</p> <p>Ensure instructional practice that is intellectually challenging, authentic to student experiences, recognises student strengths, and is differentiated and personalised</p> <p>Engage technology effectively</p> <p>Employ valid and appropriate assessments</p> <p>Use assessment data appropriately to monitor and improve student learning</p>
<p><b>5 Community of care and support for students</b></p>	<p>Build and maintain a positive, engaging, safe, caring, and healthy environment that meets the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of each student</p> <p>Ensure each student is known, accepted, valued, trusted, respected, catered for and encouraged to be active and responsible in the school community</p> <p>Provide coherent academic and social supports, services, extracurricular activities and accommodations that meet the diverse needs of each student</p> <p>Support positive social and emotional development based on adult-student, student-peer, and school-community relationships that value learning</p> <p>Infuse the learning environment with the cultures and languages of the school community</p>
<p><b>6 Professional capacity of school personnel</b></p>	<p>Recruit, hire, support, develop, and retain effective and caring teachers and staff</p> <p>Plan for and manage staff turnover and succession, including inducting and mentoring new personnel</p> <p>Develop appropriate and differentiated opportunities to grow teacher professional knowledge, skills and practice</p> <p>Foster collective teacher development aligned with meeting the needs of each student</p> <p>Deliver actionable and constructive feedback about instruction and professional practice</p> <p>Empower and motivate teachers and staff for continuous improvement toward achieve excellent professional practice</p>

Standard	Themes
	<p>Develop capacity and opportunities for leadership for teachers and others in community</p> <p>Promote health, wellbeing and work-life balance for self and others</p>
<p><b>7 Professional community for teachers and staff</b></p>	<p>Promote accountability for effective professional development, practice and student learning</p> <p>Maintain collective responsibility for meeting students' academic, social, emotional, and physical needs</p> <p>Commit to educating the whole child</p> <p>Maintain high expectations for professional work and equitable practice</p> <p>Ensure open communication, collaboration and collective efficacy</p> <p>Promote open, caring, trusting and productive professional relationships</p> <p>Embed internal professional development and other opportunities</p> <p>Facilitate collaborative improvement through collegial feedback and regularly examining practice</p>
<p><b>8 Meaningful engagement of families and community</b></p>	<p>Be approachable, accessible and welcoming</p> <p>Sustain positive, collaborative and productive relationships</p> <p>Engage in regular, two-way communication about school, students, needs, problems and accomplishments</p> <p>Develop positive relationships with the community, interacting regularly to understand strengths and needs and engage resources for the school</p> <p>Create means for partnering with families to support students in and out of school</p> <p>Understand, value, and employ the community's cultural, social, intellectual, and political resources</p> <p>Position the school as a resource for families and the community</p> <p>Advocate for the school and district, and for education as central to student needs</p> <p>Advocate publicly for the needs and priorities of students, families, and the community.</p> <p>Build and sustain productive partnerships with public and private sectors to promote school improvement and student learning.</p>
<p><b>9 Operations and management</b></p>	<p>Manage and monitor operations and administrative systems</p> <p>Strategically manage staff resources and scheduling to optimise their professional capacity</p> <p>Seek, acquire, and manage fiscal, physical, and other resources</p> <p>Act as ethical, accountable steward of the school's monetary and nonmonetary resources, including effective budgeting and accounting</p> <p>Protect teachers' and other staff members' work and learning from disruption.</p> <p>Employ technology to improve operations and management.</p> <p>Use data effectively</p>

Standard	Themes
	<p>Promote knowledge and compliance with local, state, and federal laws, rights, policies, and regulations</p> <p>Partner with other schools to help manage enrolments, share quality curriculum and instruction</p> <p>Ensure productive relationships with central office and school board</p> <p>Use effective systems for fair and equitable management of conflict among students, faculty and staff, leaders, families, and community</p> <p>Manage governance processes and internal and external politics toward achieving the school's mission and vision</p>
<p><b>10 School improvement</b></p>	<p>Prioritise school efficacy for each student, teacher and staff and family</p> <p>Continuously improve vision, fulfill the mission, and promote the schools' core values</p> <p>Promote readiness, knowledge and imperative for improvement among school and community, instilling mutual commitment and accountability</p> <p>Promote evidence-based inquiry, learning, strategic goal setting, planning, implementation, and evaluation</p> <p>Implement situationally-appropriate strategies and approaches for improvement</p> <p>Assess and develop colleagues' capacity to assess the value of emerging educational trends and current research and apply these appropriately</p> <p>Develop and manage technology and systems for data collection, management, analysis and use, including reporting requirements and school priorities around planning, implementation, monitoring, feedback, and evaluation</p> <p>Adopt a systems perspective and promote coherence among improvement efforts</p> <p>Provide support, encouragement and open communication through uncertainty, risk, competing initiatives, and politics of change</p> <p>Promote inquiry, experimentation and innovation among colleagues and encourage initiating and implementing improvement</p>

In terms of culture, equity and supporting diversity in students and staff, the Scottish standards remain silent on these issues. A clearer focus on culture is evident in the Welsh standards, in relation to sustaining and respecting Welsh language and culture. The Welsh standards, however, do not mention other types of culture, diversity, equity or inclusion. Conversely, when the United States' standards superseded the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards in 2015, they included a stronger focus on ethics, inquiry and culturally-responsive schooling (Murphy et al., 2017). Equity is embedded in these standards and elevated particularly through standard three, *equity and cultural responsiveness*.

When considered in the context of the present analysis, it is useful to reflect on whether (and how) each of the three standards introduced here align with the two overarching domains suggested in the comparison of the Principal Standard and Teacher Standards in Australia, in recognition of middle

leaders' dual accountabilities to both the classroom (as a teacher) and the school as a whole (as a leader) – *leading learning* and *leading within the school*. Table 9 extends the analysis conducted in Table 4, comparing the three international standards introduced in this section with the Principal Standard in Australia.

Table 9: Alignment between Principal Standard in Australia and international professional standards that cater to middle leaders, by domains of leading learning and leading within the school

Overarching domain	Principal Standard in Australia	Scotland	Wales	United States
<b>Both</b>	Leadership requirements (leadership skills, professional knowledge and leadership attributes)	Being a teacher in Scotland (professional values, professional commitment, standard of middle leadership) Professional responsibilities (Professional knowledge and understanding)	Values and dispositions Leadership	
<b>Leading learning</b>	Leading teaching and learning Developing self and others Engaging and working with the community (internally)	Professional responsibilities (curriculum, pedagogy, leadership and strategic vision) Professional skills and abilities (curriculum, pedagogy, leadership and strategic vision) Curriculum, pedagogy, leadership and strategic vision (professional learning) Curriculum, pedagogy, leadership and strategic vision (self-evaluation)	Pedagogy, refining teaching Pedagogy, advancing learning Pedagogy, influencing learners Professional learning Collaboration Leadership	Cluster 2: Professional capacity of school personnel Cluster 1: Community of care and support for students Cluster 2: Professional community for teachers and staff Cluster 3: Equity and cultural responsiveness
<b>Leading within the school</b>	Leading improvement, innovation and change	The learning context: professional skills and abilities	Innovation	Cluster 3: Mission, vision and core values School improvement

Overarching domain	Principal Standard in Australia	Scotland	Wales	United States
	<p>Leading the management of the school</p> <p>Engaging and working with the community (externally)</p>	<p>Curriculum, pedagogy, leadership and strategic vision (resources)</p>		<p>Cluster 2: Operations and management</p> <p>Cluster 2: Meaningful engagement of families and community</p> <p>Cluster 3: Ethics and professional norms</p>



Applying this lens to the themes that have emerged throughout this analysis and their application to the Principal Standard and Teacher Standards in Australia, the separation conducted in Table 10 facilitates a more direct comparison of the overarching themes from each of the standards, again applying De Nobile et al.'s (2020) four overarching domains.

*Table 10: Thematic comparison of Teacher Standards and Principal Standard in Australia and international professional standards that cater to middle leaders, by domains of leading learning and leading within the school*

De Nobile et al.'s (2020) domains	Standard	Australia	Scotland	Wales	United States
<b>Leading learning</b>					
<b>Leading teaching and learning</b>	<b>Leading teaching and learning</b>	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Developing self and others</b>	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Building relationships</b>	<b>Engaging and working with the community</b>	Y	Y (learning context)	Y (collaboration, leadership)	Y
<b>Building relationships</b>	<b>Creating and maintaining supportive and safe (learning) environments (for staff and students)</b>	Y		Y (Welsh culture)	Y
<b>Leading within the school</b>					
<b>Building relationships</b>	<b>Leadership requirements</b>				Y
	<b>Leadership skills and knowledge</b>	Y	Y	Y	
	<b>Leadership attributes</b>	Y	Y (standard 1)	Y	
<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Leading improvement, innovation and change</b>	Y	Y (improvement)	Y	Y
<b>Operations</b>	<b>Leading the management of the school</b>	Y	Y (resources)		Y

De Nobile (2020) observed that countries that share strong cultural links, for example Australia, Scotland and Wales, tend to produce analogous standards and demonstrate broadly similar structure and professional continuums. While there were clear similarities in the structures of the Standards in Australia and the Scottish and Welsh standards, the United States standards aligned most clearly with the Standards in Australia, thematically.

In terms of the Scottish and Welsh standards, *leading the management of the school* (including responsibilities such as operations and planning) was almost entirely absent from both the Scottish and Welsh standards. Differences in *creating and maintaining a safe learning environment* were also apparent. Considering middle leaders' dual focus on students and staff in terms of these standards, it became clear that, in the middle leadership context, this standard extends beyond students to include staff. In terms of how this manifests in the Standards in Australia, it is evidenced through requirements such as cultural competence, and embracing all aspects of students' diversity and identity. Surprisingly, this was entirely absent from the Scottish standards and, while the Welsh standards emphasised the imperative for school leaders to infuse all aspects of their work with the Welsh culture, the Welsh standards remained equally silent on supporting other kinds of diversity.

Although the standards from the United States were structured very differently to the Australian, Scottish and Welsh standards, this standard offered the fullest coverage of the Australian themes. The organisation of the United States standards facilitated many of the standards (which were separate but interrelated in the Australian, Scottish and Welsh standards) being included as recurring topics that flowed throughout the United States standards. An example of this relates to the responsibility for cultural responsiveness and embracing diversity and identity, which appears in seven of the 10 standards (standards one, two, three, five, seven, eight and nine) in different ways, such as prioritising equity, inclusion, fairness, diversity and safe environments for 'the whole child'.

It was also clear from this analysis that what has been termed *leadership requirements* in the Principal Standard in Australia (including *leadership skills and knowledge*, and *leadership attributes*) underpinned each of the standards examined here. This was explicit in the United States document, which describes standards as 'a guiding force in supporting leaders to identify and develop specific knowledge, skills, dispositions and other characteristics required of educational leaders to achieve student success in school' (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015).

While there are many similarities between the Principal Standard in Australia and the international standards analysed here, there were some differences. In particular, two themes were prioritised more strongly in the United States' standards than they are in the Principal Standard in Australia – *ethics and professional norms* and *ensuring a community of care and support for students*. Including these at the highest levels of the standards raises the profile and importance of these aspects in educational leadership practice.

The next section undertakes a 360-degree analysis of the current academic and grey literature identified as part of the systematic search conducted for this review. It begins by examining eight existing systematic literature reviews in relation to the current project, before presenting seminal theoretical models and frameworks as they relate to middle leadership in education. It then addresses effective middle leadership, and key influences on middle leaders and their work.

# 5. Middle leadership reviews, models and frameworks

**There is merit to the argument that leadership and management skills are transferrable across business types; that running an effective and efficient organisation requires the same core skills, irrespective of context. There are clear commonalities in skillsets and competencies, for example managing budgets, resourcing and staffing. However, there is strong rationale for considering educational leadership as a distinct discipline, primarily centring on educational leaders' focus on facilitating, fostering and delivering quality teaching and learning. As such, educational leaders require specific competencies, skills, attributes and practices that are not common to more general leadership and management operation (V. Robinson, 2023).**

The implication of this distinction is that in many cases leaders of educational institutions are not, therefore, recruited from a pool of qualified non-education business experts, but instead recruited from the education sector (or internally), often based on teaching expertise and leadership potential (V. Robinson, 2023). For this reason, the following discussion of middle leadership literature focuses specifically on *educational* leadership, the associated theory and influences underpinning this important field. The literature addressing the competencies, skills, attributes and practices associated with effective middle leadership will be discussed separately, in section 6.

The resources analysed for this section of the review includes both peer-reviewed and grey literature. These articles were initially coded as either theoretical or original research, then analysed thematically. This resulted in 71 theory-based articles, books and documents (presented in Appendix 2) and 31 original research-based articles, books and documents (presented in Appendix 3). These articles were coded using an inductive approach to grounded theory until thematic saturation was achieved. This enabled comparison of the key themes, assessment of the validity across sources and refinement where necessary.

As there are numerous previous literature reviews, this section begins by summarising and comparing these valuable syntheses of existing literature. It then presents several models that each conceptualise middle leadership differently, before introducing seminal theoretical frameworks and analysing these in terms of similarities and differences. Finally, this section presents the policy frameworks returned in response to the direct emails seeking policy documentation.

## 5.1 Previous literature reviews

There is substantial existing research on middle leadership in educational contexts (Gurr, 2023b). Considering the importance and profile of this topic, it is unsurprising that there have been numerous reviews of this literature conducted to date. Eight of these previous reviews are included in this section, introduced according to a thematic analysis, rather than sequentially based on publication date.

De Nobile's review of 252 research articles published in English between 1990 and 2017 (De Nobile, 2018)<sup>6</sup>, found that 234 of the identified articles (80% of the sample) originated from three countries – Australia (26%), the United Kingdom (42%) and the United States (12%). Likewise, in analysing their sample of 147 peer-reviewed journal articles (beginning from the late 1990s), Tang et al. (2022) also identified this geographical homogeneity, noting the limited middle leadership research originating from 'outside of Anglo-American societies'.

This trend was also identified in the literature reviewed as part of this analysis (detailed in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3), of which 94% of the 102 studies (N = 96) originated from these three countries: Australia (N = 58), the United Kingdom (N = 25 – United Kingdom specific, N = 4; England specific, N = 14; Scotland specific, N = 3; Wales specific, N = 4) and the United States (N = 12), with the remaining studies primarily originating from Canada (N = 9) and New Zealand (N = 8)<sup>7</sup>.

In terms of key findings, De Nobile (2018) also identified a peak in middle leadership research between 2006 and 2008, which they attributed to the increasing trend of decentralised decision-making that has been seen in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States. This increased authority and scope for schools was also reflected by Gurr (2023b) in their review of middle leadership reviews for the *International Encyclopedia of Education*, which found that middle leaders are increasingly managing broader role scopes and increasingly leading whole-of-school initiatives.

There have also been several tensions that characterise the role of middle leaders in schools. Both reviews by Gurr (2023b) and Bennett et al. (2003) identified the difficulty faced in navigating relationships with teachers who are both colleagues and direct reports. The competition between the demands of supervising staff – and the associated management responsibilities – and collaborating with staff resulted in middle leaders feeling somewhat trapped between hierarchical management structures and a 'professional rhetoric of collegiality' that characterised the middle leadership role (Bennett et al., 2007).

An associated duality was also identified in Bennett et al.'s (2003) review, which was extended in a second (unpublished) study in 2005 (Bennett et al., 2007). This analysis of 252 empirical articles on middle leaders in secondary schools, published between 1988 and 2005, highlighted the balancing role that middle leaders play in managing competing expectations from their teams and more senior leadership. This resulted in challenges for middle leaders in meeting the needs of both their department and their broader school.

Busher et al.'s (2007) review contended that social and political contexts exert influence on middle leaders that must not be ignored. They found that middle leaders could only be understood as members of communities and should not therefore be considered outside of the ever-present pressures between their own agency – including the decisions they make based on their vision and values – and the systems and structures that bind them – including organisational and political expectations and norms. As such, middle leadership policy and practice must be underpinned by this nuanced environment of competing demands.

In Leithwood's (2016) review of 42 studies of the role of secondary department heads over almost 30 years – mostly from the UK (38%) and the US (38%), they concluded that middle leaders' ability to effectively conduct their roles was less dependent on contextual differences between countries than the direct influences of internal and external factors, for example school culture or government

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<sup>6</sup> Also reported in 2021 (De Nobile, 2021)

<sup>7</sup> These figures reflect either the focus of the research or the country of origin. Several papers focused on the literature more generally (N = 4) and some focused on multiple countries, meaning this tally differs from the total number of studies included in this review

regulations (Leithwood, 2016 cited in Gurr 2023). They ultimately concluded that middle leaders are a largely underutilised resource.

Interestingly, Harris et al.'s (2019) review, which examined 49 articles from 2003 to 2017 on middle leadership in schools published since Bennett's reviews (2003, 2007), suggested that, while more countries than ever before were researching middle leadership in education, the research was often concerned with 'leadership actions, behaviours and characteristics', rather than the supporting theory that underpins middle leadership and the contextual influences on middle leaders. Their review highlights the need for middle leadership theory and associated models to support policies and frameworks, for example professional standards for middle leaders.

A further finding from Leithwood (2016) related to an internal factor that heavily influenced the middle leadership function – principals' expectations, both *from the leader* and also *from the role*. Gurr and Drysdale's (2020) analysis of eight doctoral theses and several related articles, also found that middle leaders could be more effective if they had greater support from principals, in particular relating to decision-making, delegating, clearer role descriptions and boundaries, and more time away from management tasks (which produce limited benefit) to focus on leadership tasks (which produce greater impact). As with other reviews summarised here, Gurr and Drysdale found that middle leaders were often characterised by unrealised potential, in this case due to shifting role expectations.

One final review, by Lipscombe et al. (2021), found great variability in the roles and scope of middle leaders and concluded that middle leaders are therefore best understood in context. Their analysis of 35 articles about middle leadership in schools (published between 2006 and 2020, sourced from 14 countries) focused on how middle leaders are defined, their responsibilities and the influence of professional development on their practice. In analysing this literature, they found that middle leaders have great potential to influence key aspects of schools, including team cultures, teacher practice and development, school improvement, and teaching and learning.

A key finding of the Lipscombe, Tindall-Ford and Lamanna (2021) study was that none of the research relating to middle leadership impact included students' views or data. As such, they suggest caution in relation to claims about middle leaders' influence on students and student outcomes. Furthermore, their review of literature relating to professional development for middle leaders in schools identified that current offerings do not adequately equip middle leaders for the complexity of their positions.

Lastly, of the literature reviews discussed here, two produced theoretical contributions to the field that are included here: Gurr and Drysdale (2020) proposed a set of four beliefs and seven leadership propositions that stemmed from the authors' extensive work in the field. These are discussed in relation to effective middle leadership, below. Secondly, De Nobile's (2021) extensive review resulted in the development of the Middle Leadership in Schools Model (mLiS), which is discussed under models later in this section (also, see Figure 7).

In summary, previous reviews of middle leadership research have highlighted that middle leaders in schools are often underutilised resources who would benefit from greater principal support, including clear role boundaries and expectations (Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009). They operate in an environment of conflicting priorities and expectations, including between:

1. their team and more senior leaders
2. management and leadership
3. their role as colleagues vs managers
4. personal agency and hierarchy/systems.

Conceptually, these dualities highlight the tension between the two domains proposed in the analysis of the Australian professional standards – the role as a teacher and the associated *leading teaching and learning*, and the role as a school leader and the associated *leading within the school*.

These reviews also emphasise the importance of considering each middle leader in terms of their context and community, both external and internal. As such, resources produced to support middle leaders in education must consider middle leadership holistically, including providing clarity and guidance that can be applied to middle leaders who work in diverse contexts with varying scope and responsibilities.

The value of the present systematic literature review lies in its synthesis of middle leadership literature, with a view to informing the core practices, skills and competencies required for effective middle leadership. This review fills a gap in the literature by aligning these aspects with key themes that inform the drafting of Australia's first Professional Standards for Middle Leaders and combining the analysis of several other middle leadership-related resources, such as professional standards, professional development programs and position descriptions.

This analysis now introduces several middle leadership theories and models that have been developed by scholars, unpacking them to identify commonalities that can inform the draft Professional Standards for Middle Leaders in Australia.

## 5.2 Middle leadership theory

Leadership in schools has been increasingly recognised by researchers as a rich and complex function. Research into middle leaders has gained increasing attention since approximately 1990 (De Nobile, 2018). As identified in Harris et al.'s (2019) review, a theoretical underpinning provides essential foundation, scaffolding and context to support the 'doing' that will be included in the draft Professional Standards for Middle Leaders. This section therefore begins by discussing middle leadership theory in terms of models and frameworks, before exploring what shapes middle leaders and influences their work, which is addressed in the following section.

One caveat must be highlighted before considering the following analysis. When applying the current research base to the Australian context, an evident limitation is the education settings chosen for conducting the research. Bennett et al. (2003) identified in their literature review that most middle leader research is conducted in secondary schools, rather than primary schools. This same trend was also identified in the present review. Furthermore, these studies consistently investigated middle leadership in settings where there were teachers who had a clear middle leadership role – most commonly heads of department.

This limits the analysis for several reasons. Firstly, secondary schools are usually larger than primary schools (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2021a; Grootenboer et al., 2020). This not only produces a different set of challenges for middle leaders, but also implies enough staff to warrant an official leadership hierarchy that includes a clear band of middle leaders. As 22% of Australian schools (2,114 in total) include ten teachers or fewer (discussed further in Appendix 1), this overlooks a large cohort of Australian schools and their associated middle leaders, which especially affects Queensland (20%, 427 schools), New South Wales (41%, 867 schools) and Victoria (18%, 377 schools).

It also omits the rich experience of middle leaders in smaller school contexts and early childhood settings, which would provide much essential information about middle leadership in Australian education. Primary and secondary schools, and early childhood settings (for example stand-alone kindergartens) present very different contexts for middle leaders – younger students require very



different pastoral care than older students, the classes are generally smaller at primary schools, the schools or settings themselves are generally smaller and, as such, the number of staff engaged in primary schools and early childhood settings is usually smaller than that of secondary schools in Australia and internationally (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2021a; Busher et al., 2007). Leadership in primary schools and early childhood settings therefore often has fewer layers of hierarchy and require leaders to take on a broader spectrum of leadership roles (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013). Meanwhile, leaders in secondary schools are likely to have greater opportunity to delegate and distribute leadership responsibilities successfully (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013).

Interestingly, none of the studies analysed as part of this review addressed the potential or actual variation between secondary schools and other contexts, including early childhood settings or specialist, virtual (online) and camp schools. As noted in previous work (Farchi & Tubin, 2019), the research may therefore be limited in terms of generalisability.

Furthermore, career growth and maximising impact on learners is as important in early childhood education as it is in primary and secondary teaching. There is limited literature that investigates both early childhood education and higher levels of schooling, such as primary. In the articles identified in the search for this review, the authors were silent on whether (or how) the leadership practices in preschool or kindergarten differ from those employed in other levels of schooling (Nehez et al., 2022; Ritz & Sherf, 2022).

### **Middle leadership models & frameworks**

Researchers have developed several models and frameworks to enrich theoretical understandings of middle leadership in education. These resources enable researchers, policy makers and education professionals to move beyond functional descriptions of middle leadership, providing a rich, multifaceted approach to the dynamic context of middle leaders in education. According to the School Leadership Institute, their framework supports ‘teacher retention, build[s] positive school cultures, and improv[es] system capacity and enabl[es] excellent school leaders to fill positions’ (School Leadership Institute (SLI), 2021). Furthermore, these models provide an essential point of reference for formulating holistic and useful standards that support effective middle leadership in schools and early childhood settings.

In terms of leadership style, a recurring term in the middle leadership literature from the past decade is *distributed leadership*. Distributed leadership relies on functional working relationships. These can be developed through shared values and trust, which facilitates a sense of community within the middle leaders’ remit and beyond, into the school and broader community (Leithwood et al., 2006). While this form of leadership offers many advantages, it is not immune from breakdown. The personalities of individuals within this system are naturally linked to their leadership style. As such, an individual’s personality may influence their leadership and, in some cases, can limit the benefits of this model of leadership compared to more coercive models (Allix, 2000 cited in Busher 2005).

Distributed leadership is the dominant paradigm for current styles of educational leadership in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States and represents a move away from autocratic styles of leading, to a more shared power structure (Busher, 2005; V. Robinson et al., 2009). It has been defined as ‘a pattern of conjoint personal and situational influence of employees which is exerted by the leader, by team members, and by the organisational management’ (Konradt, 2011). This leadership method not only applies to the school-based level – where principals share leadership more evenly between staff than previously – but also between governing bodies, which have also moved toward decentralised decision-making (Bryant, 2019; De Nobile, 2018, 2021).



To better understand how middle leadership works in practice, this section introduces three models: the Middle Leadership in Schools Model (De Nobile, 2018), the Curriculum Areas Middle Managers Model (White, 2000) and the Successful School Leadership Model (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011). Seven frameworks are also included and analysed according to a common coding frame first proposed by Hitt and Tucker (2016).

## Models

### Curriculum Area Middle Managers (CAMMs) model

An early model, the Curriculum Area Middle Managers (CAMMs) model (White, 2000), is shown in Figure 6. It focuses on the responsibilities and scope of middle leadership in terms of leading curriculum areas. White highlights the important role middle leaders play by straddling both leadership and management responsibilities, even when staff management is not part of the middle leader's role. They describe curriculum area middle managers as 1) instructional and curriculum leaders, and 2) learning area architects, who also manage administration responsibilities.

While this model indicates that curriculum area middle managers should foster a team environment where people feel motivated and valued, there is little else by way of cultural responsiveness, mental health and wellbeing, or inclusion, for either staff or students.

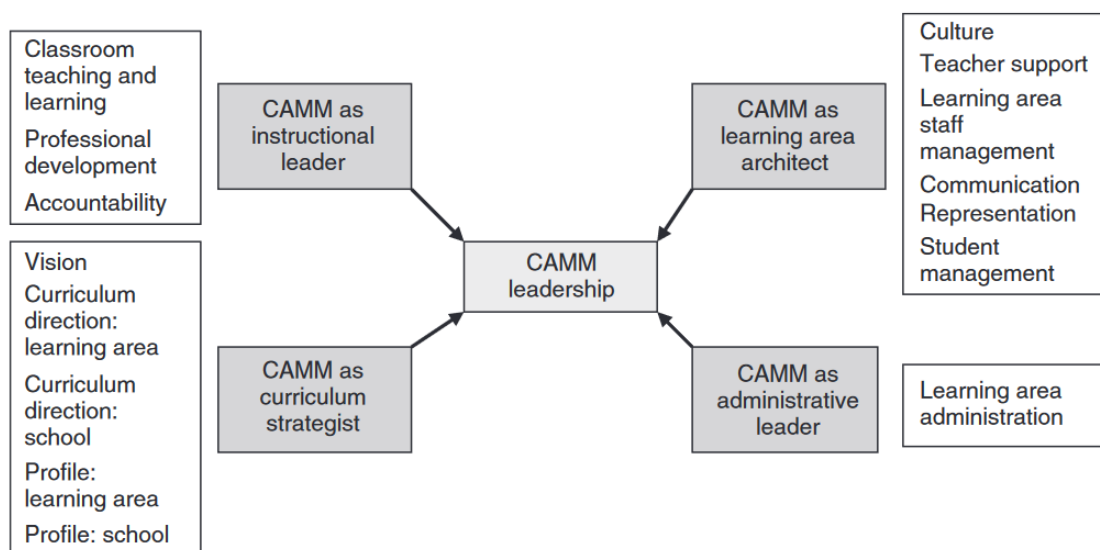


Figure 6: Curriculum Area Middle Managers model (White, 2000)

The model proposes that middle leaders who hold leadership responsibilities at the curriculum area level usually hold four different leadership roles (White, 2000). They operate as *instructional leaders*, with responsibility for classroom teaching and learning, professional development, and accountability. They also work as *learning area architects*, with responsibility for culture, teacher support, learning area staff management, communication, representation and student management. Often, they become *curriculum strategists*, with responsibility for vision-setting and curriculum direction. Lastly, they are *administrative leaders*, which captures more traditional managerial administrative responsibilities, such as budgeting, documenting, and resourcing (White, 2001).

This model is useful in terms of conceptualising the varying forces acting on middle leaders and demarcating the responsibilities associated with each; however, it potentially underrepresents the extensive management-related tasks and administration demands on this group of middle leaders. Many scholars, including White (2000), have emphasised the challenges reported by middle leaders in prioritising the leadership of teaching and learning in the face of vast management responsibilities,

such as implementing systems and processes, and administration (Dinham, 2007; Farchi & Tubin, 2019; Fitzgerald, 2009). As such, it is useful to consider White’s model in conjunction with those also presented in this section.

### Middle Leadership in Schools model

De Nobile’s (2021) Middle Leadership in Schools Model (mLiS) (shown in Figure 7) aims to capture the influences on a broader range of middle leaders than White’s model. The mLiS model resulted from De Nobile’s extensive systematic literature review (discussed earlier) and demonstrates the interrelation between middle leadership practices and responsibilities, distinguishing between *what* middle leaders do and *how* they do it (De Nobile, 2018).

The model offers a useful visual representation of the supports middle leaders require to create positive influence on their area of responsibility, as well as the school more broadly (De Nobile, 2018). It focuses on three key themes – *roles*, *inputs* and *outputs*.

Like White (2000), De Nobile also divides the most common middle leadership roles according to *managing* and *leading*. The *managing* roles relate to the organisation and running of the school – student-focused activities, administrative processes and organisational tasks. Leading roles, on the other hand, relate to motivating people and improving practice (Grootenboer et al., 2021) through supervision, developing staff and implementing strategy. This model could be seen to provide a more balanced representation of the tension between management and leadership within the middle leadership function in schools.

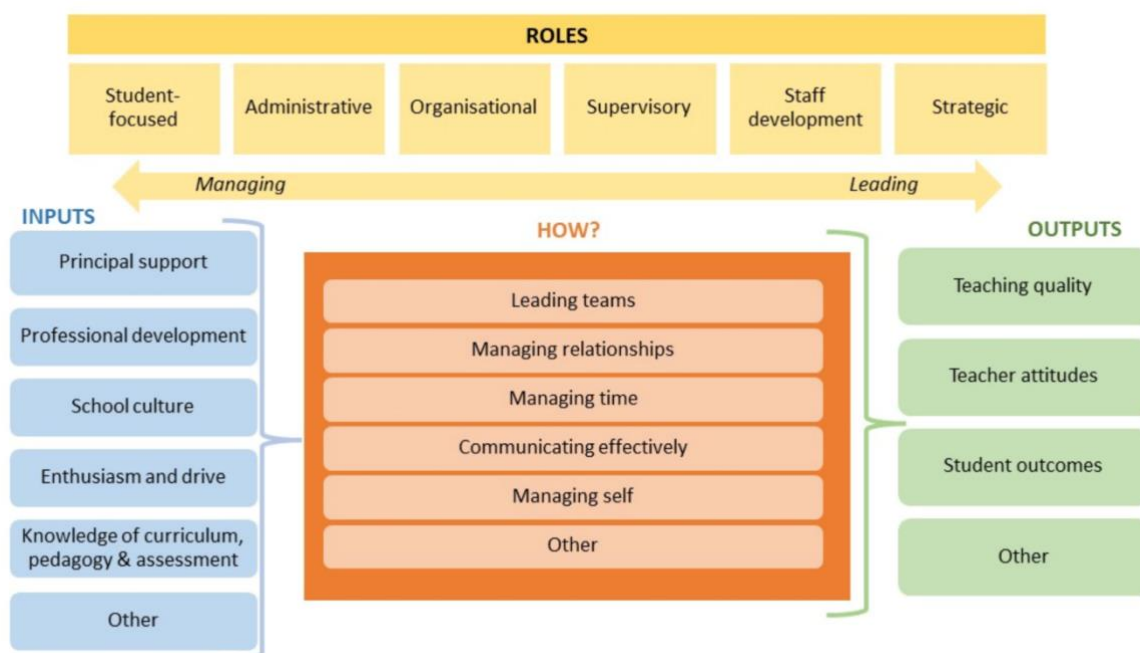


Figure 7: The Middle Leadership in Schools model (mLiS) (De Nobile, 2018)

The mLiS model highlights the various strategies middle leaders use to be effective in their work (shown by the *how*): leading teams, managing relationships, managing time, communicating effectively and managing self. When middle leaders are properly supported in their roles by five key factors (inputs) – principal support; professional development; school culture; enthusiasm and drive; and knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment – middle leaders can produce positive and lasting impact on areas such as teaching quality, teacher attitudes, and student outcomes (outputs).

## Successful School Leadership model

The most recent model, shown in Figure 8, aims to capture influences on and aspects of successful school leadership (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011). This model depicts organisational and personal domains that form the basis of successful leaders in educational contexts, across three stages – teachers, middle leaders and principals.

One useful aspect of this model is the representation of the hierarchical layers of education and their interrelation with each other, and ultimately on student outcomes. This model suggests that teachers impact level one, middle leaders impact levels one (mostly) and two (partly) and successful school leadership at the principal level exerts indirect impact on teaching and learning, with a focus on levels two and three (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012a, 2020).

It is also useful to think of the pressures on a) teachers, who are closest to students, b) middle leaders, who are nestled between teachers and principals, and c) principals, who are furthest from students, yet influence the entire ecosystem.

In terms of influence, Gurr and Drysdale draw on their extensive research into middle leaders over several decades to suggest there is little evidence of middle leaders engaging with community or organisational capacity building (at level two), or focusing on the district and system (at level three) (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012a).

Gurr and Drysdale state that for middle leaders to be more effective, they need to be involved more in the level two elements of encouraging personal professional growth (personal); enhancing teacher collaboration and practice (professional); facilitating a supporting organisational learning environment (organisational); and enhancing relationships with parents and the wider community (community). They cited the Teacher Standards in Australia (AITSL, 2011) as central to supporting more holistic practice in leading teachers across all three levels, with a main focus on levels one and two.

This model is designed to allow school leaders to interact according to their school's particular context. It promotes student outcomes as moving beyond the traditional measure of academic achievement, to a more authentic outcomes, which include social competencies and personal growth. However, it omits cultural responsiveness, diversity and wellbeing, focusing instead on school culture and people.

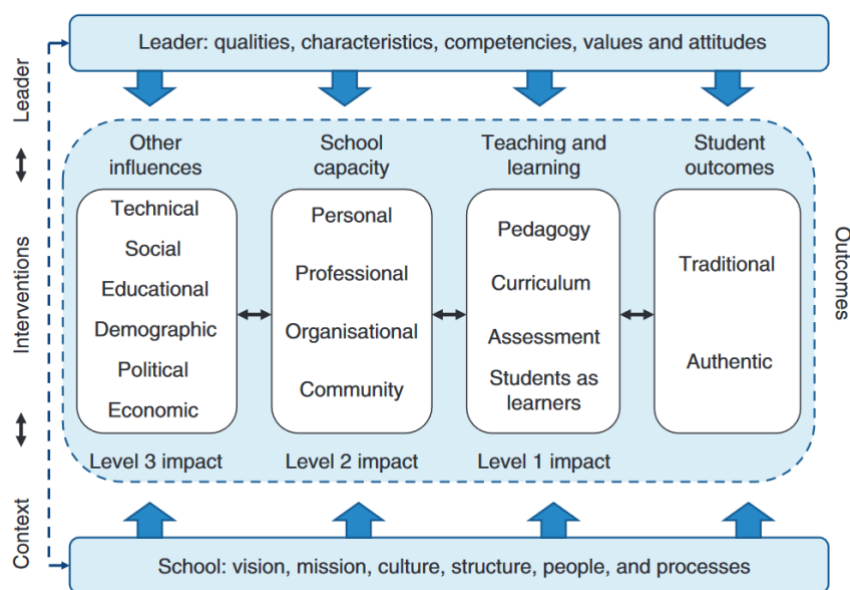


Figure 8: Successful School Leadership model (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011)

In summary, the three models included here provide complementary perspectives on middle leadership in schools that align with current Australian standards. White's model is particularly useful in conceptualising the aspects of expert teaching practice and leadership required of middle leaders in education. It aligns most clearly with two themes that appear in the Principal Standard in Australia: *leading teaching and learning* (as the primary focus) and a focus on administration, which aligns with *leading management*.

De Nobile's model examines the more functional aspects of middle leadership, including the key factors required as a middle leader. Its focus on outputs emphasises the results of effective middle leadership: teaching quality, teacher attitudes and student outcomes. As with the findings of previous systematic reviews, this model emphasises the essential role of principals in facilitating successful middle leadership and the ongoing tension between management and leadership. As with White's model, there are key aspects that align with the Principal Standard, for example, the inputs of professional development (*developing self and others*); enthusiasm and drive (*leadership requirements*); and knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (*leading teaching and learning*).

Further to this, Gurr and Drysdale's model expands again to include contextual aspects that influence leadership. In doing so, it describes several essential levels of impact. *Leadership requirements* again feature in this model, specified as qualities, characteristics, competencies, values and attitudes.

These models differed somewhat from the Principal Standard in that they focused less on factors that are prominent in the Australian standards, such as wellbeing, engagement, culture, and diversity and inclusion.

These correlations with themes from the Australian standards offer further evidence that the themes can be extrapolated for the middle leadership context to form a theoretical foundation to analysis of middle leadership literature throughout this review.

## Frameworks

This section introduces seven frameworks identified as part of the systematic search conducted for this review. They are now each presented below, in order of publication, before being analysed at the end of this section, using a coding frame and structure formulated by Hitt and Tucker (2016) for this very purpose.

### Essential Supports Framework

The Essential Supports Framework aims to capture the essential supports and contextual resources required to improve schools (Sebring et al., 2006). It was produced based on research conducted on Chicago public primary schools between 1990 and 1996, in response to a leadership reform that took place in 1988 with varying levels of success across the sector. As such, it enabled the authors to investigate the recipe for successful school leadership based on the principals who brought different skills and experience when implementing the reform.

The framework is founded on five essential supports:

1. *Leadership acting as a catalyst for change*: leadership that is inclusive and also focuses on both instruction and strategy
2. *Parent community ties*: including parents continues learning at home
3. *Professional capacity of faculty and staff*: skills, capabilities and dispositions, including ongoing commitment to learning and growth, both individually and as a community

4. *Student-centred learning climate*: safe, orderly classroom where students feel motivated, supported and strive for high achievement
5. *Ambitious, coherent instruction*: the most direct influencing factor.

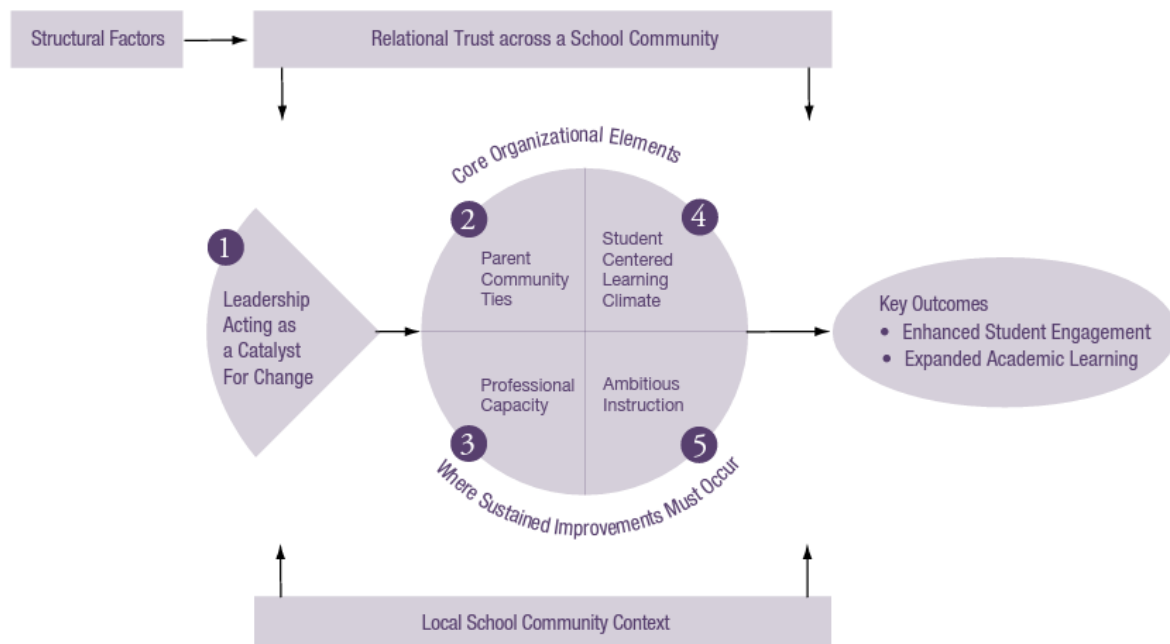


Figure 9: A Framework of Essential Supports and Contextual Resources for School Improvement (Sebring et al., 2006)

This framework is underpinned by a study that measured student outcomes based on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, which measures both reading and maths. The findings of the study were conclusive:

*... schools strong in most of the essential supports were at least ten times more likely than schools weak in most of the supports to show substantial gains in both reading and mathematics. These schools also were very unlikely to stagnate. In contrast, not a single school that was weak in most of the supports showed substantial improvements in mathematics. Schools demonstrating weakness on most of the core indicators were four to five times more likely to stagnate than schools with strong overall organizational capacity scores (Sebring et al., 2006).*

In terms of the domains and practices captured by each of these first three frameworks, a study synthesising and comparing these resources will be introduced at the end of this section, as it provides a basis for analysing each of the frameworks discussed in this section.

### Learning-centred Leadership Framework

Learning-centred Leadership Framework emerged from a report developed by Murphy et al. (2006), which investigated the research on learning-centred leadership. Similar to the domains discussed earlier in this review (*leading learning* and *leading within the school*), Murphy et al. see leader behaviours as influencing both the classroom level and the school level. The authors identified several 'macro-level' core findings, which preceded their work in developing the model:

- leadership matters
- in difficult times leadership matters even more

- in periods of significant organisational transition, leadership is the major controllable factor in explaining organisational performance
- instructionally focused and change-oriented leadership are especially effective frames for education
- team leadership offers promise for enhancing organisational performance.

Based on these premises, they proposed a framework for leadership (shown in Figure 10), which can be read from left to right and shows the relationship to and influence of leaders in education.

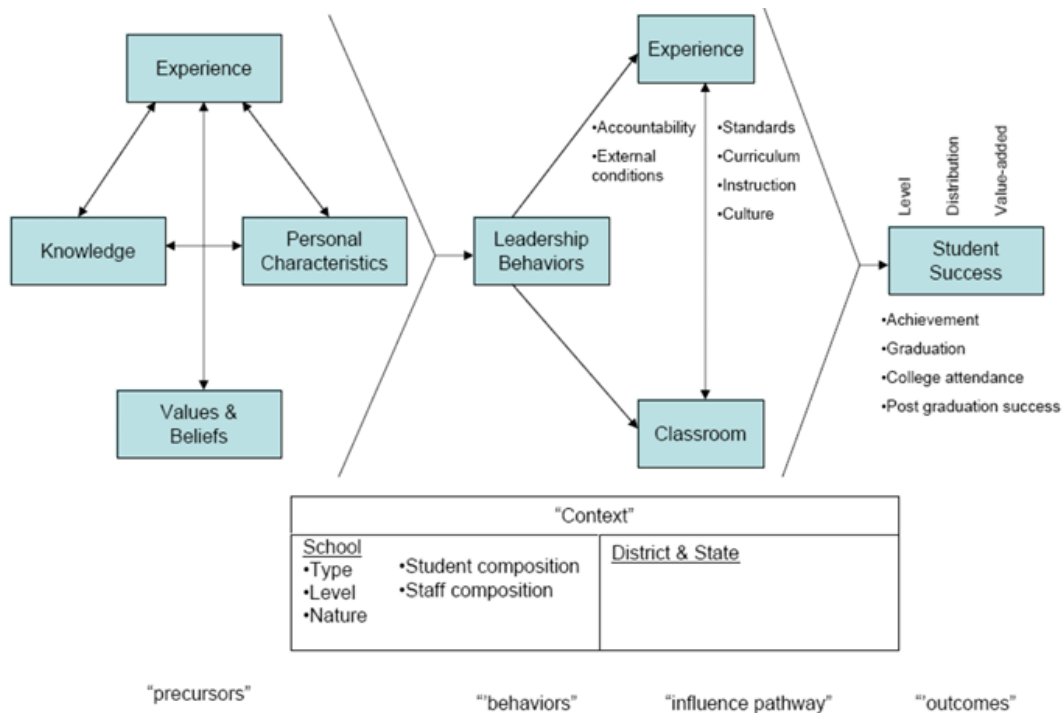


Figure 10: Learning-centred Leadership Framework (Murphy et al., 2006)

Beginning with the precursors to leadership success, the left-hand side emphasises the four conditions that influence the leadership behaviours in the centre of the model: *leaders' experiences*, *knowledge*, *personal characteristics* (e.g. need to succeed, energy level), and *values and beliefs* (e.g. beliefs around hierarchy and power distribution). It proposes that the 'influence pathway' then leads to student outcomes, which can be assessed over time in terms of school achievement in the present (grades, graduation rates) and in the future (college attendance, post-graduation success).

This framework will be analysed and summarised at the end of this section, together with the other frameworks included here.

### Developmental Learning Framework for School Leaders

The Developmental Learning Framework for School Leaders (Department of Education Victoria, 2007) was published to complement the Office of School Education's 2006 Learning to Lead Effective Schools strategy. This resource is intended to be relevant to both teachers and leaders in schools and promotes a distributed leadership approach to school leadership.

The framework includes three parts: leadership domains, capabilities and profiles. The *leadership domains* represent five different types of leadership: technical, human, cultural, educational and symbolic, each of which require three *leadership capabilities*:



- *Technical leadership* relates to management capacity and involves strategically optimising financial, human and physical resources.
  - Thinks and plans strategically
  - Aligns resources with desired outcomes
  - Holds self and others to account
- *Human leadership* includes fostering safe, inclusive learning based on respectful relationships with staff, students, parents and other stakeholders.
  - Advocates for all students
  - Develops relationships
  - Develops individual and collective capacity
- *Educational leadership* relates to a critical understanding of school improvement processes and their implications for high-quality teaching and learning.
  - Shapes pedagogy
  - Focuses on achievement
  - Promotes inquiry and reflection
- *Symbolic leadership* rests on modelling values and behaviours for the school and community, including sustainable professional learning.
  - Develops and manages self
  - Aligns actions with shared values
  - Creates and shares knowledge
- *Cultural leadership* demonstrates the characteristics of effective schools, leading with vision and values with a view to the sustainable future of the school.
  - Shapes the future
  - Develops a unique school culture
  - Sustains partnerships and networks

Finally, each domain includes a developmental continuum that represents the *leadership profiles*, each with up to five levels of proficiency, intended to support leaders in schools as they progress through their careers.

The core competencies, skills, attributes and practices included in this framework will be discussed at the end of this section and contrasted with those identified in the other frameworks.

### Ontario Leadership Framework

In Canada, the Ontario Leadership Framework (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013) is a Canadian resource that supports all levels of school leadership, including aspiring leaders. The tool also acts to support leadership recruitment, development and selection processes for Canadian schools (Boyd, 2022).

It is underpinned by principles of leadership excellence and whole-of-school inclusion, with the aim of producing a positive and effective school culture founded on 'caring, safe, respectful and engaging learning environments'. The framework provides a 'roadmap' for organisations to improve leadership capacity and includes tools to support leaders in developing and refining their leadership skills, in particular by applying advanced leadership concepts.



It is also described as ‘contingent’, meaning that it is intended to be interpreted and enacted in a variety of contexts, in which leaders are required to use professional judgement to adapt or omit certain leadership practices, depending on the context of their school. As context is inherently dynamic, leaders are expected to return to the framework to interpret and apply its principles in appropriate and effective ways according to the shifting nature of their workplace.

In terms of content, the framework has five core leadership capacities based on five domains, which can be adapted according to context, for example depending on school sector. The leadership capacities include: *setting goals, aligning resources with priorities, promoting collaborative learning cultures, using data and engaging in courageous conversations* and the supporting leadership domains include: *setting direction, building relationships and developing people, developing the organisation to support desired practices, improving the instructional program, and securing accountability.*

In the same way that *leadership requirements* underpin the Principal Standard in Australia, these domains intersect with three *personal leadership resources* that enable leaders to enact the leadership practices – *cognitive* (problem-solving expertise; knowledge about school and classroom conditions with direct effects on student learning; systems thinking), *social* (perceive and manage emotions; act in emotionally appropriate ways), and *psychological* (optimism; self-efficacy; resilience and proactivity).

A report from 2013 compared the Ontario Leadership Framework with the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (Ingvarson, 2013) and found that the domains between the two were both similar and different. Ingvarson formulated the comparison shown in Table 11 and concluded that the two frameworks were similar in terms of content and structure, but that the Ontario Leadership Framework more emphasised ‘setting directions and developing a shared vision’, compared with the Principal Standard, which more emphasised ‘building links with the school’s wider community’.

*Table 11: Comparison of the Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Ontario Leadership Framework, taken from (Ingvarson, 2013)*

Australian Professional Standard for Principals	Ontario Leadership Framework
<p><b>1. Leading teaching and learning</b> Principals create a positive culture of challenge and support, enabling effective teaching that promotes enthusiastic, independent learners, committed to lifelong learning.</p>	<p><b>Setting Directions</b> The principal builds a shared vision, fosters the acceptance of group goals and sets and communicates high performance expectations</p>
<p><b>2. Developing self and others</b> Principals work with and through others to build a professional learning community that is focused on the continuous improvement of teaching and learning.</p>	<p><b>Building Relationships and Developing People</b> The principal strives to foster genuine trusting relationships with students, staff, families and communities, guided by a sense of mutual respect. The principal affirms and empowers others to work in the best interests of all students.</p>

## Australian Professional Standard for Principals

## Ontario Leadership Framework

### 3. Leading improvement, innovation and change

**Principals work with others to produce and implement clear, evidence-based improvement plans and policies for the development of the school and its facilities.**

### Developing the Organisation to Sustain Desired Practices

The principal builds collaborative cultures, structures the organisation for success, and connects the school to its wider environment.

### 4. Leading the management of the school

**Principals use a range of data management methods and technologies to ensure that the school's resources and staff are efficiently organised and managed to provide an effective and safe learning environment as well as value for money.**

### Leading the Instructional Program

The principal sets high expectations for learning outcomes and monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of instruction. The principal manages the school effectively so that everyone can focus on teaching and learning.

### 5. Engaging and working with the community

**Principals embrace inclusion and help build a culture of high expectations that takes account of the richness and diversity of the school's wider community and the education systems and sectors.**

### Securing Accountability

The principal is responsible for creating conditions for student success and is accountable to students, parents, the community, supervisors and to the board for ensuring that students benefit from a high quality education. The principal is specifically accountable for the goals set out in the school improvement plan.

The Ontario Leadership Framework also includes an additional framework, which is shown in Figure 11. This is referred to as the School Effectiveness Framework and is intended as a resource to further support school improvement and student success. It is included here due to the correlation between the Principal Standard in Australia and the six themes (identified in the grey circle): *assessment for, as and of learning; school and classroom leadership student engagement; curriculum, teaching and learning; pathways planning and programming; and home, school and community partnerships.*

The overarching framework (the Ontario Leadership Framework) has been analysed by previous scholars and is discussed further below, together with the other six frameworks presented in this section.

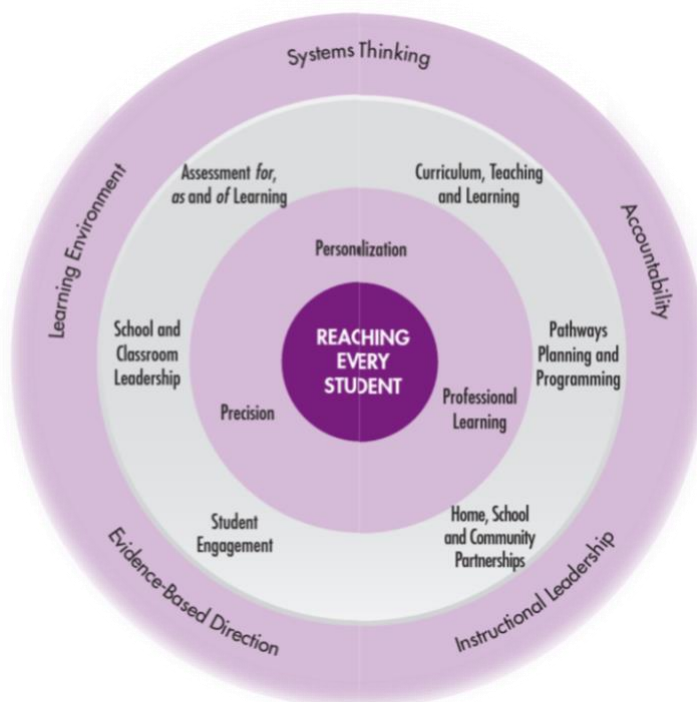


Figure 11: K-12 School Effectiveness Framework (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013)

### Teacher Leader Competency Framework

A further resource from the United States is the Teacher Leader Competency Framework (Leading Educators, 2014), which recognises that teachers are often promoted to leadership roles due to their expertise in teaching and learning; however, these skills are not necessarily those required to lead adults effectively. It therefore outlines the components required to improve the influence and leadership capacity of teacher leaders in schools.

Figure 12 shows the four competencies required for leading, supported by underlying core values. The core values included in the framework are *equity*, *service*, *community*, *growth* and *results*. *Equity* 'challenges historical and current inequity' and relates to believing that all students, irrespective of circumstance, can master rigorous subject matter. Recent research into leadership in the United States has emphasised the importance of equity and accountability, highlighting examples of where data can reveal cases of strategic teacher resourcing that reinforces systemic student disadvantage, rather than acting to overcome it (e.g. by assigning high-performing teachers to more advantaged students, rather than allocating high-achieving teachers to low-achieving students, a move intended to increase disadvantaged student outcomes) (Grissom et al., 2021). *Service* means commitment to understanding the views of others and prioritising students. *Community* includes celebrating and challenging colleagues, amplifying impact through connection with colleagues. *Growth* refers to developing self and others, being accepting of limitations and committed to improving, and actively leveraging strengths within teams. Lastly, *results* requires accountability and a dedication to achieving goals in line with uncompromising, high expectations.

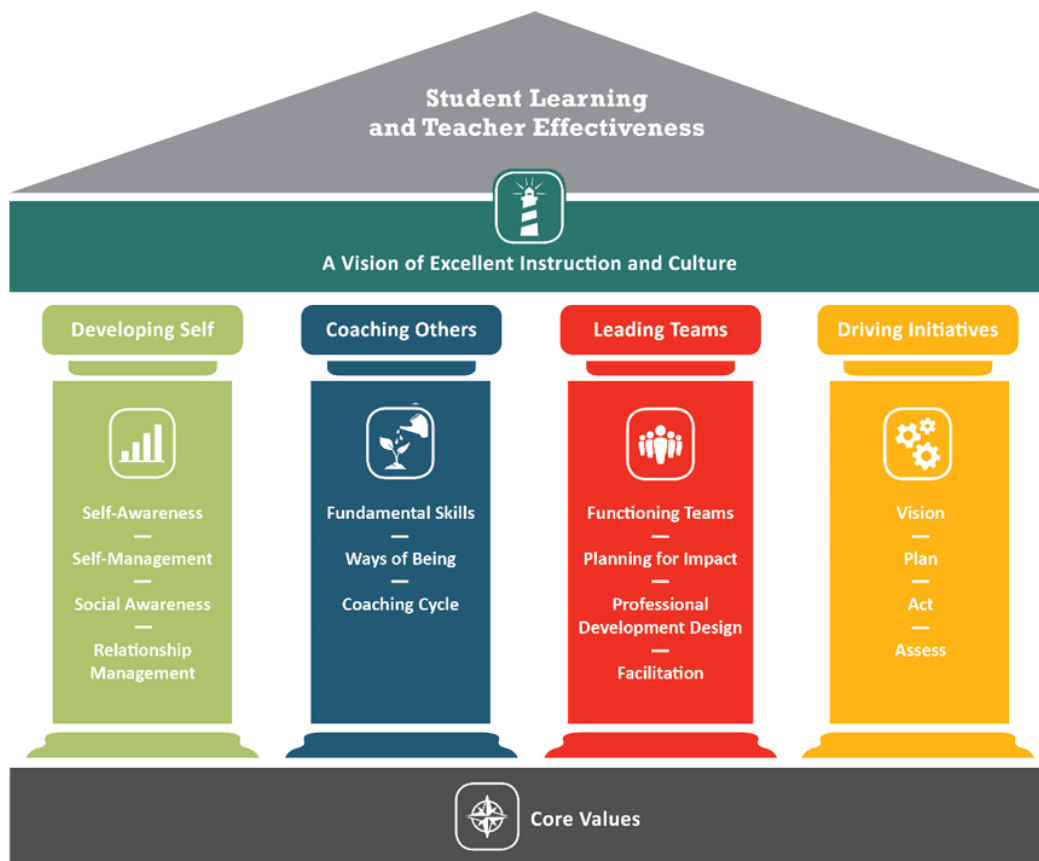


Figure 12: Teacher Leader Competency Framework (Leading Educators, 2014)

The four pillars of the framework each have several focus areas and associated behaviours.

- *Developing self*: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management
- *Coaching others*: foundational skills (coaching relationship, listening, powerful questioning), ways of being (facilitative and directive coaching styles), coaching cycle (reflection, action planning, implementation)
- *Leading teams*: foundations of functioning teams (team culture, team communication, team structures), planning for and measuring impact (team goals, long-term planning, assessment), professional development and meeting design, facilitation (session delivery)
- *Driving initiatives*: vision, plan, act, and assess.

As with the others also introduced in this section, this framework is revisited in terms of the domains and descriptors, below.

### Educational Leadership Capability Framework

Commissioned by the Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) developed the Educational Leadership Framework (Wylie & McKinley, 2018).

*[The framework establishes a] set of core capabilities... intended to provide high-level guidelines for leadership development based on shared understandings of what leadership in different spheres of influence looks like in practice; in early childhood education services, kura<sup>8</sup> and schools.*

The framework includes nine distinct but not entirely separate educational leadership capabilities:

- Building and sustaining high trust relationships
- Ensuring culturally responsive practice and understanding of Aotearoa New Zealand's cultural heritage, using Te Tiriti o Waitangi as the foundation
- Building and sustaining collective leadership and professional community
- Strategically thinking and planning
- Evaluating practices in relation to outcomes
- Adept management of resources to sustain and achieve vision and goals
- Attending to their own learning as leaders and their own wellbeing
- Embodying the organisation's values and moral purpose, optimism, agency, and resilience
- Contributing to the development and wellbeing of education beyond their organisation.

To provide guidance on how the educational leadership capabilities can be applied in different 'leadership spheres', the framework includes three steps on the continuum (listed here from most junior to most senior): *expert teacher, leadership of curriculum or initiative; leading teams; and leading organisations*. These are also described in the framework as the spheres of: 'organisational leadership, team or middle leadership, and for expert teachers and those who take responsibility for a particular initiative'.

As with the other frameworks introduced here, this framework will be synthesised and analysed at the end of this section.

### **Academy Leadership Excellence Framework**

The Academy Leadership Excellence Framework is intended to extend the Principal Standard in Australia by adapting the domains and distinguishing capabilities and dispositions (characteristics) required for excellent leadership (Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership, 2023). The framework caters to leaders in both formal and informal positions and enables leadership that is responsive to the variety of contexts experienced by teachers leading within the Australian schooling system.

The foundation of the framework is the five domains proposed in the Principal Standard. However, they have been adapted slightly by the Academy to describe *what* leaders need to know to enact effective school leadership. These adapted five domains can be seen in Figure 13, together with the three capabilities (*using relevant knowledge, solving complex problems and building relational trust*) and four dispositions (*open-mindedness, interpersonal courage, empathy and perseverance*) that, together, indicate *how* to demonstrate excellence in leadership.

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<sup>8</sup> State-based schools taught in te reo Māori where the teaching follows the Māori-medium curriculum, learning and teaching (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2022)

The three capabilities and four dispositions differ from the AITSL standard by making a clear distinction between leadership skills and knowledge (capabilities) and leadership character (dispositions) (Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership, 2023).

## The Academy Leadership Excellence Framework

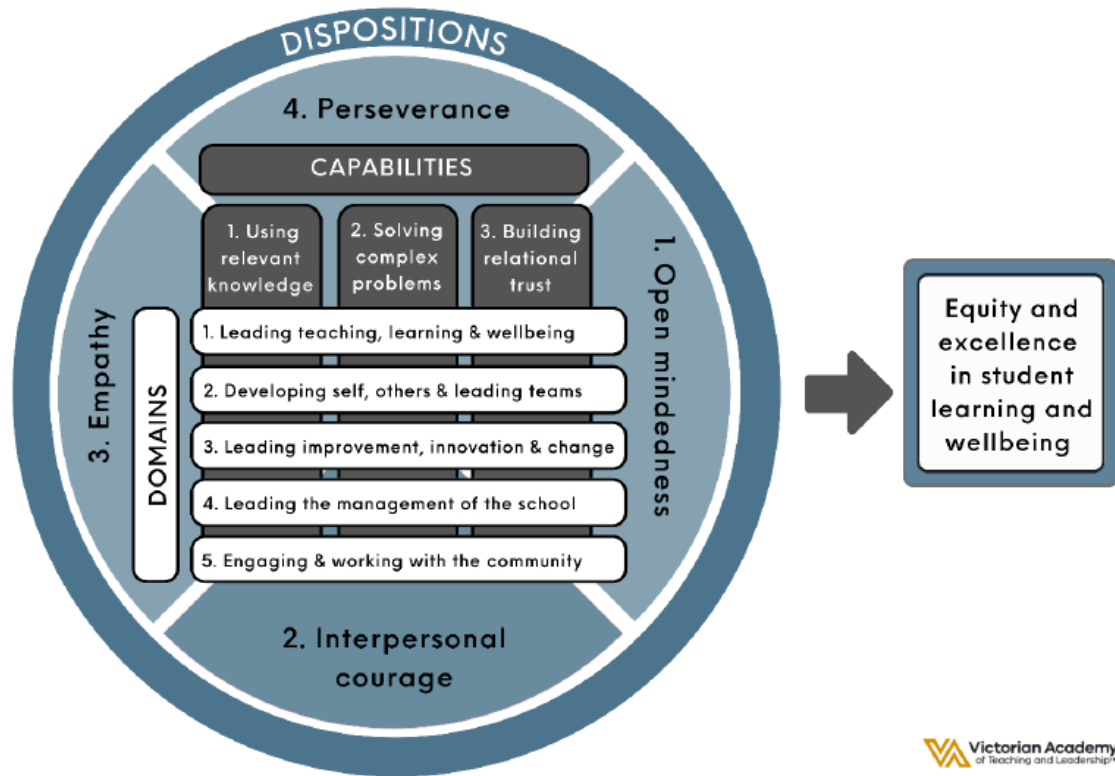


Figure 13: The Academy Leadership Excellence Framework (Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership, 2023)

Together with the other six frameworks introduced in this section, the domains and dimensions of this model will now be analysed using a coding system produced by Hitt and Tucker (2016).

### Framework overview & analysis

While each of the seven frameworks included in the discussion above are underpinned by extensive research, the boundaries of the research tend to differ depending on the leadership lens applied by each author. Furthermore, as each was published at different times over almost two decades, the body of research available to each author varied. As such, understanding, unpacking and synthesising the information contained in each of these frameworks is an ambitious task.

Fortunately, Hitt and Tucker (2016) recognised this challenge and conducted an analysis of three seminal educational leadership frameworks, each of which are presented above – the Ontario Leadership Framework, Learning-centred Leadership Framework and Essential Supports Framework. This analysis can be seen in Table 12. The present analysis expands on their work, using their proposed domains and associated competencies to analyse and align the inclusions and approaches from each of the seven frameworks.

Hitt and Tucker's method involved listing the separate practices from each framework, enabling them to be compared and contrasted. While they integrated conceptually related practices to avoid

duplication (for example *leading instruction* and *facilitating instruction* were combined into *developing and monitoring instructional program*), they did not remove any items. This resulted in a systematic coding frame of 28 identified practices, grouped under five proposed domains.

The criteria for establishing the domains was: each needed to be present in all three of the frameworks, and the domains must either influence student achievement (albeit indirectly) by leveraging organisational context, or focus on the leadership processes and routines associated with teaching.

The resulting five domains were established as essential areas of leadership practice:

1. establishing and conveying the vision
2. facilitating a high-quality learning experience for students
3. building professional capacity
4. creating a supportive organisation for learning
5. connecting with external partners.

As each of these are supported by the research included in the systematic literature review undertaken as part of this study, they are expanded upon here, in brief.

*Establishing and conveying the vision* refers to having purpose and the ability to progress toward (and achieve) that purpose. It includes setting goals and establishing high expectations, which provides a sense of clarity and intention for teams to invest in, based on common objectives.

*Facilitating a high-quality learning experience for students* refers to maintaining a focus on the core function of the school, which is high-quality curriculum, instruction and assessment (Hitt & Tucker, 2016), as well as the associated planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and curriculum both vertically and horizontally (V. Robinson et al., 2008). Teachers are also likely to be more accepting of leaders (and their associated influence) who demonstrate excellence in these areas.

*Building professional capacity* refers to engaging teachers through development and also developing one's own abilities (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). A key aspect of this domain is that instructional learning and professional development provides learning for both the leader and other teachers (V. Robinson et al., 2008). This strengthens teaching and learning and improves student outcomes. It is also critical to establishing and maintaining oneself as an instructional leader, which is the foundation of credibility and legitimacy as a school leader (Nehez et al., 2022).

*Creating a supportive organisation for learning* refers to the affective conditions required for professional success. It centres on building positive relationships based on trust and requires leaders to simultaneously foster a sense of caring for the individual, which both supports wellbeing and benefits the organisation.

*Leaders who strive to model this relationship building with their faculties may not only see enhanced performance, but may also perpetuate what it is they hope to see in classroom interactions between teachers and students (Ostroff, Kinicki, & Tamkins, 2003). Although the substance of demonstrating concern for the well-being of their faculty looks different than in a classroom, it is when people sense that they are recognised and supported as valuable individuals by leaders that they may become committed to organisational objectives (Hitt & Tucker, 2016).*

*Connecting with external partners* refers to 'anchoring the school in the community' by encouraging parents, carers and other external parties to participate. Effectively engaging these members of the community has been shown to increase student achievement and wellbeing (Sebring et al., 2006).



Table 12: Unified model of effective leader practices (Hitt & Tucker, 2016)

Domains & dimensions	Essential Supports Framework	Learning-centred Leadership Framework	Developmental Learning Framework for School Leaders	Ontario Leadership Framework	Teacher Leader Competency Framework	Educational Leadership Capability Framework	Academy Leadership Excellence Framework
<b>Establishing and conveying the vision</b>							
Creating, articulating, and stewarding shared mission and vision	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Implementing vision by setting goals and performance expectations		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Modelling aspirational and ethical practices		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Communicating broadly the state of the vision <i>(and need for change)</i>			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Promoting use of data for continual improvement		Y	Y		Y	Y	Y
Tending to external accountability <i>(community and governmental)</i>		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<i>Taking a systems approach to decision-making</i>	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Facilitating a high-quality learning experience for students</b>							
Maintaining safety and orderliness	Y		Y			Y	Y

Domains & dimensions	Essential Supports Framework	Learning-centred Leadership Framework	Developmental Learning Framework for School Leaders	Ontario Leadership Framework	Teacher Leader Competency Framework	Educational Leadership Capability Framework	Academy Leadership Excellence Framework
Personalising the environment to reflect students' backgrounds	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Developing and monitoring curricula program	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y
Developing and monitoring instructional program	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Developing and monitoring assessment program		Y	Y		Y	Y	Y
<b>Building professional capacity</b>							
Selecting faculty and staff for the right fit	Y	Y		Y			
Providing an individualised consideration		Y	Y	Y	Y		Y
Building trusting relationships <i>(at all levels of the school and community)</i>	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Providing opportunities to learn for whole faculty, including leaders	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Domains & dimensions	Essential Supports Framework	Learning-centred Leadership Framework	Developmental Learning Framework for School Leaders	Ontario Leadership Framework	Teacher Leader Competency Framework	Educational Leadership Capability Framework	Academy Leadership Excellence Framework
Supporting, buffering and recognising staff		Y	Y	Y			
Engendering responsibility for promoting learning	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Creating communities of practice	Y	Y					
<i>Fostering reciprocal accountability</i>		Y	Y	Y	Y		Y
<i>Committing to ongoing personal and professional development</i>		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<i>Delivering supportive feedback, both positive and constructive</i>		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
<i>Developing and maintaining specialist knowledge of inclusiveness and equitable practice</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<i>Increasing expertise and sharing that knowledge</i>			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Creating a supportive organisation for learning</b>							
Acquiring and allocating resources strategically for mission and vision	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Domains & dimensions	Essential Supports Framework	Learning-centred Leadership Framework	Developmental Learning Framework for School Leaders	Ontario Leadership Framework	Teacher Leader Competency Framework	Educational Leadership Capability Framework	Academy Leadership Excellence Framework
Considering context to maximise organisational functioning	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y
Building collaborative processes for decision-making	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Sharing and distributing leadership	Y		Y	Y		Y	
Tending to and building on diversity ( <i>including culturally appropriate curricula</i> )	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y
Maintaining ambitious and high expectations and standards	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y
Strengthening and optimising school culture	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
<i>Promoting and maintaining student, staff and own health and wellbeing</i>	Y		Y	Y		Y	Y
<b>Management</b>							
<i>Conducting operational and management tasks</i>		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Domains & dimensions	Essential Supports Framework	Learning-centred Leadership Framework	Developmental Learning Framework for School Leaders	Ontario Leadership Framework	Teacher Leader Competency Framework	Educational Leadership Capability Framework	Academy Leadership Excellence Framework
<i>Conducting operational people management (recruitment, performance management etc.)</i>				Y	Y	Y	Y
<i>Sharing information</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y			
<b>Connecting with external partners</b>							
<b>Building productive relationships with families and external partners in the community</b>		Y	Y	Y		Y	Y
<b>Engaging families and community in collaborative processes to strengthen student learning</b>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<b>Anchoring schools in the community</b>	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	
<i>Maintaining network of external partners to enrich and improve student outcomes and school community</i>	Y		Y	Y		Y	Y

Hitt and Tucker's coding frame provides an ideal structure to enable a more direct comparison of domains and dimensions across the seven frameworks introduced above (four of which were not included in Hitt and Tucker's analysis, but are included as part of the present analysis). The coding frame, including domains and associated practices identified by Hitt and Tucker, is presented in Table 12, together with the coding for the additional four frameworks. One domain (*management*) and several other additions were made to the table as part of the present analysis, which are reflected in the table by *italic text*.

In terms of findings, this analysis indicated that across the seven frameworks, *establishing and conveying the vision* and *facilitating a high-quality learning experience* were the most strongly represented domains. The descriptors under *establishing and conveying the vision* appeared in a median of six frameworks each (range: five to seven frameworks per descriptor). This suggests a strong focus on mission, vision, performance, accountability and decision-making, and emphasises the leader's role in modelling desirable behaviours and ethical practices.

Meanwhile, the representation of the descriptors relating to *facilitating a high-quality learning experience for students* was mixed. Some descriptors appeared in four frameworks and others appeared in all seven frameworks. *Personalising the environment to reflect students' backgrounds* was represented in all seven frameworks, while *maintaining safety and orderliness* was only found in four. *Developing and monitoring of curricula and the instructional program* appeared more frequently (five frameworks) than *developing and monitoring the assessment program* (four frameworks).

Under *building professional capacity*, the representation of each descriptor varied considerably. For example, *providing opportunities to learn for the whole faculty, including leaders; engendering responsibility for promoting learning; and developing and maintaining specialist knowledge of inclusiveness and equitable practice* featured in every framework. Meanwhile, several descriptors appeared in fewer than half of the frameworks – *creating communities of practice* (two frameworks); *supporting, buffering and recognising staff* (three frameworks) and *selecting faculty and staff for the right fit* (three frameworks). There was reasonably strong representation for *accountability, appreciating the uniqueness of individuals in approaches, developing self, fostering trust, and developing others through feedback and through sharing one's own expertise*.

With the exception of three descriptors, *creating a supportive organisation for learning* was strongly represented. Strategically and equitably *allocating resources, and building collaborative processes for decision-making* appeared in all seven of the frameworks. Meanwhile, *adapting to context, embracing diversity, setting high expectations and contributing to school culture, focusing on student wellbeing* were all found in either five or six of the frameworks. This signals the emphasis on organisations supporting the ultimate goal of student learning.

In terms of *management* – the added domain – *conducting operational and management tasks* appeared in six frameworks, while the other two descriptors – *conducting operational people management (recruitment, performance management etc.)* and *sharing information* – were less-strongly represented (four frameworks each). Despite this, they remain notable as they appeared in more than half of the frameworks.

The final domain, *connecting with external partners*, was a clear theme in each of the frameworks. The most common descriptors were *engaging families and other community members to support more holistic student learning* and *building strong, positive relationships with external stakeholders*. *Ensuring schools are anchored in the community, both in terms of drawing on community context and becoming important to the community* also featured in five frameworks, as did *networking with external partners to improve the resources and knowledge flowing to the school*.

Something further that became evident through the above analysis was the synergy between the domains identified by Hitt and Tucker and the Principal Standard in Australia. This relationship is shown in Table 13. Several of the domains relate directly to the Principal Standard, with *leading improvement, innovation and change* broadly related to two of the domains identified by Hitt and Tucker (see Table 13), with themes of *advocacy and support* connected with *creating a supportive organisation for learning and leading*, and *context and strategy* connected with *establishing and conveying the vision*.

A notable absence in Hitt and Tucker's analysis was the domain relating to *management*, which was instead woven through several aspects of the original coding frame (for example *selecting faculty for the right fit* and *allocating resources strategically*). During the present analysis, this domain was added out of necessity, as this was the most logical way to accommodate the descriptors emerging thematically from the framework coding.

Table 13: Alignment between Hitt and Tucker (2006) domains and the Principal Standard

Hitt and Tucker domains	Principal Standard domains
<b>Facilitating a high-quality learning experience for students</b>	Leading teaching and learning
<b>Building professional capacity</b>	Developing self and others
<b>Creating a supportive organisation for learning</b>	Engaging and working with the community (internally) - focus on advocacy and support
<b>Establishing and conveying the vision</b>	Leading improvement, innovation and change - focus on leading with context and strategy
	Management
<b>Connecting with external partners</b>	Engaging and working with the community (externally)

While many descriptors under Hitt and Tucker's five domains were identifiable in the frameworks, there were many 'soft skills' that appear to be overlooked in the coding frame shown in Table 12. For example, New Zealand's Educational Leadership Capability Framework included a strong focus on culture, identity and sense of belonging, listing emotional intelligence, self-awareness, moral purpose, optimism, agency, resilience, thoughtful risk-taking, knowledge, problem-solving, trust, empathy and emotional investment as important aspects of leadership (Wylie & McKinley, 2018). The Victorian-based Academy Leadership Excellence Framework included open-mindedness, interpersonal courage, empathy, perseverance, integrity, patience, conscientiousness, curiosity, kindness, fairness and optimism as key aspects of excellent school leadership (Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership, 2023). The Teacher Leader Competency Framework called for self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, working diligently, reflecting on values, renewing energy, celebrating colleagues, offering genuine praise, apologising when appropriate, including people and willingly identifying personal limitations (Leading Educators, 2014). And, finally, the Victorian Developmental Learning Framework for School Leaders articulated a focus on community, proactively addressing



issues, adopting collective responsibility, increasing acceptance, and ensuring all members of the community feel valued (Department of Education Victoria, 2007).

Together, these provide strong rationale for including *leadership requirements* (in terms of *leadership skills and knowledge* and *leadership attributes*) as a domain for effective school leadership.

Finally, the New Zealand Educational Leadership Capability Framework provides an example of how First Nations people and heritage can be acknowledged, honoured and integrated, with Māori language and culture inbuilt throughout the document. The second educational leadership capability also elevates the commitment of all New Zealanders to Māori communities, culture and customs, calling for 'culturally responsive practice and understanding of Aotearoa New Zealand's cultural heritage, using Te Tiriti o Waitangi<sup>9</sup> as the foundation'. In particular, it requires leaders to 'take responsibility for ensuring that all learners know and can honour [New Zealand's] cultural heritage' (Wylie & McKinley, 2018). Authentically integrating First Nations peoples and culture within documents such as this positions Indigenous education as integral (rather than peripheral) to mainstream education, which is essential to ensuring Indigenous education is 'built in' to mainstream education, rather than 'bolted on' to the system as a whole (Australian Education Senior Officials Committee (AESOC), 2006).

### 5.3 Policy frameworks for middle leaders across Australia

To investigate how leadership requirements of middle leaders were described and fostered by different systems, a review of policies provided by Australian jurisdictions and sectors in response to the email request for documentation was undertaken. These documents were grey literature from state education departments, independent schools' governance bodies, and Catholic education offices, covering a wide range of perspectives on what middle leadership looks like in Australia. The documents gave insights into the organisational structures in which middle leaders operate, including employment and selection and recruitment procedures.

#### Defining levels of middle leadership in policy documentation

The way middle leadership is recognised, defined, and categorised varies somewhat across jurisdictions. However, it was often conceptualised within the scope of the Teacher Standards and Principal Standard in Australia. This section examines some examples of how different jurisdictions approach the scope of middle leadership within their policy frameworks.

The Australian Capital Territory Education Directorate distinguishes between three levels of school leaders, with Levels B and C commensurate with middle leadership. Applicants to school leader positions are required to demonstrate capabilities that are described in the *School Leader Capability Framework* (n.d.). The Australian Capital Territory Education Directorate's classification profiles for school leaders, which guide recruitment of school leaders, outline requirements that relate to developing and achieving whole-school goals, managing resources, leading and coordinating curriculum development and delivery, assessment and reporting and program evaluation, establishing positive relationships, developing self and others, and promoting values.

The classification of middle leadership in Catholic education and Diocese offices in Queensland is guided by the *Catholic Employing Authorities Single Enterprise Collective Agreement – Diocesan Schools of Queensland 2019 – 2023* (Catholic Employing Authorities, 2019). In the Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools, middle leadership roles cannot be shared with principal or assistant

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<sup>9</sup> The Treaty of Waitangi

principal leadership roles, excepting where schools are small. A certain portion of middle leadership roles are specifically dedicated to a pastoral care role. While guided by the enterprise agreement, there is discretion to refine middle leadership to specific school contexts. For example, the Townsville Catholic Education Office is undertaking a 2023 Review of Middle Leadership Structure (Diocese of Townsville Catholic Education, 2023b), involving a participatory, consultative process to determine the detailed structure of middle leadership.

The New South Wales Department of Education has done comprehensive work around the role of middle leaders in New South Wales public schools and has recently released a *Middle Leaders Overview* in February 2023 (New South Wales Department of Education, 2023). The New South Wales Department of Education School Leadership Institute's Middle Leader Induction provides an orientation into the role of middle leadership for newly appointed, first-time or long-term relieving assistant principals and head teachers. The New South Wales Department of Education has developed a comprehensive 'role description' for middle leaders. This role description provides certainty and consistency for assistant principals and head teachers about their role and outlines their key accountabilities as middle leaders in New South Wales public schools.

In Tasmanian Catholic schools, a scan of school organisation charts reinforced the critical position that middle leaders occupy between the principal and other secondary school staff with line management often organised as follows:

- Deputy Principals have line management responsibility for Heads of House
- Heads of House manage tutors and staff responsible for pastoral care of students
- Directors of Curriculum and Directors of Pedagogy line manage Heads of Faculty
- Heads of Faculty line manage subject teachers (Catholic Education Tasmania, n.d.).

Teachers in Catholic primary schools in Tasmania are generally organised into *teaching and learning teams* by stage/year levels, led by team leaders. Student Support and Wellbeing Coordinators work across the school and provide expertise to teaching and learning teams (Catholic Education Tasmania, 2023a).

From the United States, the Maryland Department of Education reported that middle leaders are teachers who model exemplary practice and tend to hold roles such as leading subject areas or discipline-specific coaching (for example literacy). Recent strategic changes in the state through the Blueprint for Maryland's Future set out a plan for attracting and retaining quality teachers, including a 'new career ladder and incentives for National Board Certified Teachers', which will help support teacher leaders in moving toward middle and senior leadership (Maryland State Department of Education, 2023).

## **Policy frameworks across Australia**

A number of states and territories have policy documentation relating to middle leadership across different sectors (government, independent and Catholic). These are usually articulated in frameworks either specifically for middle leadership, or more commonly, within broader leadership frameworks encompassing teachers, middle leaders, and deputy principals/principals. This section outlines examples from different jurisdictions.

The Australian Capital Territory Education Directorate's School Leader Capability Framework (n.d.) is structured on the five professional practices in the Principal Standard, with different requirements specified for school leaders at different levels of employment. Australian Capital Territory School Leaders at Level A (Principal, Senior Director, Principal Project Officer) are responsible for ensuring current research informs teaching and learning.

The descriptors under each professional practice in the Australian Capital Territory School Leader Capability Framework are grouped under the following headings:

- *Leading teaching and learning* (pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and reporting)
- *Developing self and others* (self-awareness, reflective practice and capacity building)
- *Leading improvement, innovation and change* (decision-making, culture and future focused)
- *Leading the management of the school* (planning and managing and accountability)
- *Engaging and working with the community* (engagement, community partnerships and learning communities).

In Queensland, the Toowoomba Catholic Schools' Leadership Framework (Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools, n.d.) describes leadership capabilities as the 'qualities, attitudes, dispositions and observed behaviours foundational to leadership in Toowoomba Catholic Schools'. The Leadership Framework is used as part of the Toowoomba Catholic Schools' annual performance and development review cycle for middle leaders to identify leadership capabilities or dimensions for further development. The Toowoomba Catholic Schools leadership capabilities are analogous to the Leadership Requirements in the Principal Standard and the document acknowledges selective utilisation of other elements from the Principal Standard.

The Leadership Framework calls for leaders skilled in:

- *thinking clearly* (sourcing information, evaluating analytically, thinking creatively, seeing the whole)
- *engaging others* (being authentic, listening & understanding, influencing others, fostering relationships)
- *leading and inspiring* (clarifying purpose & direction, nurturing spiritual & religious growth, developing others, optimising performance)
- *delivering outcomes* (achieving results, co-creating success, adapting to change, making a difference).

The Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools stipulates that middle leader roles support the principal and employees in enhancing the engagement, learning progress and achievement of students. Middle leaders in Toowoomba Catholic primary schools may hold teaching positions other than classroom teacher (e.g. Learning Support Teacher or Teacher/Librarian). While this may mean that *some* middle leaders may not be directly responsible for leading other teachers to improve pedagogy, assessment and curriculum, *all* middle leader appointments in the Diocese of Toowoomba are focused on enhancing student engagement, learning progress and achievement. This distinguishes between *leading* and *enhancing* and the broader focus on 'student engagement, learning progress and achievement' rather than 'teaching and learning' may be helpful concepts for the development of standards that apply to a diverse range of middle leadership roles and school contexts.

The Toowoomba Catholic Schools' Leadership Framework addresses the differing roles of school leaders by distinguishing between religious leaders, educative leaders, staff and community leaders, organisational leaders, and strategic leaders, suggesting some dimensions apply to some school leader roles but not necessarily all. It is notable that strategic leaders promote and facilitate appropriate change.

The Independent Schools Queensland 2022-2023 Middle Leaders Program Workbook (Independent Schools Queensland, 2022) identifies and references their program to the Teacher Standards and the Principal Standard. The document defines a middle leader as someone leading a group of individuals from one place to another place.

For the purpose of the program, Independent Schools Queensland identifies a middle leader as a teaching staff member who has a position of added responsibility, and leads a team of people. This leadership may be highly structured (such as a Year Level Coordinator or Head of Department) or project-based (such as Middle School Digital Safety and Citizenship), but in either case the presumption is that the leader is 'responsible for something' and is 'actually leading someone'.

The Tasmanian Department for Education, Children and Young People's Seven Characteristics of High Impact Leadership Teams (Tasmanian Government Department of Education, n.d.) supports leadership teams in schools and describes the actions that school leaders take to build high-impact leadership teams. According to the Tasmanian framework, high-impact leadership teams build trusting relationships, make a difference, harness diverse teams with a shared vision, cultivate a learning and feedback culture, are empowered to have an impact, integrate evidence-informed leadership practices, have role clarity and build the leadership pipeline.

While the framework does not use the terminology 'disposition', it does describe numerous factors that effective leaders require that align with 'dispositions' as used throughout this review and analysis – openness, authenticity, adaptiveness, confidence, responsiveness, flexibility and reflectiveness. In terms of the different beliefs and capabilities for effective school leaders, these include:

- The required **beliefs** of school leaders are that 'relationships are foundational to student learning and school improvement', that 'student and school improvement is not the domain of any one person' and that 'education can make a difference'.
- The required **capabilities** of school leaders include developing strong and authentic relationships, collaborative practice and co-design; creating a culture of high expectations; and using evidence to support action, professional dialogue and improvements in teaching and learning.

Both the Australian Capital Territory School Leader Capability Framework and the Toowoomba Catholic Schools Leadership Framework describe only the leadership aspects of school leader roles and exclude teaching responsibilities. The Australian Capital Territory document presents a continuum from middle leadership to principalship. They create a shared leadership identity and capabilities that apply to both middle leadership and senior leadership.

Together, the models, frameworks and policies presented in this section provide theoretical underpinning of middle leadership, the systems middle leaders exist within, and the requirements that facilitate strong middle leadership practice. This review now progresses to expand on the practical aspects of effective middle leadership in Australian schools, and the associated competencies, skills, attributes and practices represented in the literature.

## 6. Effective middle leadership: The balancing act

**For many leaders in education, finding the balance between completing the dozens of administrative tasks and managing various functional requirements and deadlines can be challenging (Fitzgerald, 2009). The Institute for Education Leadership writes, ‘leadership often remains an abstract concept, even for those in leadership positions’ (2013). It therefore becomes important to establish the core aspects of effective leadership. This section synthesises the literature identified in the systematic literature search, extending the theoretical analysis according to the domains that have recurred so far in this review.**

Effective middle leadership has been measured in several ways in the literature. An effective school has been defined based on the percentage of students who reach graduation or matriculation (Farchi & Tubin, 2019). It has also been defined based on ‘student achievement’, according to the criteria of organisations such as government departments<sup>10</sup> (Dinham, 2007). To make matters even more complex for middle leaders, within schools, effective middle leadership often differs depending on whether it is defined by principals or by the colleagues of middle leaders (Heng & Marsh, 2009). Despite this ambiguity, there are numerous competencies, skills, attributes and practices that appear in the literature, which are presented here.

According to the Ontario Leadership Framework (2013), authority and trust are the foundations of effective leadership. It states:

*Leadership is... the exercise of influence on organisational members and other stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organisation’s vision and goals. Leadership is “successful” when it makes significant and positive contributions to the progress of the organisation, and is ethical (supportive and facilitative rather than persuasive, manipulative or coercive).*

This includes the moral imperative for leadership in schools to more fully support student mental health and wellbeing. Part of this relates to reducing inequity by effectively resolving school-based problems that contribute to inequity and developing the positive, respectful relationships that underpin teachers’ ability to address these issues within their classroom (Patuawa et al., 2022).

There are several themes that have originated from the literature already cited in this review. The duality of middle leadership, relating to the division of middle leaders’ focus between the classroom – being a teacher, leading teachers and developing curriculum – and leading within the school – being a manager, strategist and integrating school vision and values (Busher, 2005). The dichotomy of *leading learning* (or leading teaching) and *leading within the school* underpins these tensions (Lipscombe et al., 2020); two domains that have guided much of the discussion around middle

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<sup>10</sup> This can include factors such as ‘developing fully the talents of all students’, achieving high levels of knowledge through a balanced curriculum and being ‘socially just’ (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 1999)

leaders' responsibilities in this review, including the analysis of international standards for middle leaders in education – *leading teaching and learning* and *leading within the school*.

*Leading learning* is the more localised approach of teacher, manager, colleague, personal agency and needs of a team, while *leading within the school* is the broader, systemic approach of leader, manager, systems and the needs of senior managers. Grootenboer et al. (2021) describe this as navigating 1) teaching and leading, 2) time and resources and 3) bridging and brokering.

The synthesis of previous literature reviews also highlighted this tension, between teacher and leader (Busher, 2005); manager and leader (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012a); and colleague and manager (Bennett et al., 2003, 2007) – all while juggling the competing messages around personal agency compared to systems (Busher, 2005); and the needs of a team and those of senior managers (Bennett et al., 2003, 2007). However, while this balancing act can be challenging, it also places middle leaders in a unique position within the school structure in that they are able to act as 'translators' to connect the various elements to the school hierarchy (Nehez et al., 2022).

'Compared to other leaders, such as principals and external consultants, [middle leaders] are closer to the classroom, they are mostly more skilled in teaching activities, and they are more aware of the teacher culture and how to strategically deal with it. On the other hand, this advantage can also be a disadvantage; they [may be] too close to the classroom to see the problems, they are perhaps not skilled in teaching activities in relation to different subjects, and they are themselves part of the teacher culture that might require change.' (Nehez et al., 2022)

Many middle leaders report feeling unclear about their role, especially around the division between their scope as teachers and administrators, which can lead to stress and inefficiency (Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009). This has also been reflected in research relating to middle leaders in early childhood settings (Moshel & Berkovich, 2020). Middle leaders may feel conflicted because they are – at the same time – *both* teachers *and* administrators, yet *neither* fully (Brown, Rutherford, et al., 2000). As such, middle leaders may find they are 'distracted' by less impactful tasks rather than focusing on their 'core' function. Having said that, undertaking daily activities to 'make the day go smoothly' is a core function of some middle leaders, especially in early childhood settings (Lund, 2021).

In terms of some pressures First Nations teachers and leaders may face in Australian education, Frawley and Fasoli's (2012) Linking Worlds project investigated First Nations educational leadership in remote settings, with the goal of framing the distinct 'worlds' within which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational leaders operate, as well as determining the skills, knowledge and attributes needed to be effective leaders. The study confirmed that the role of a First Nations education leader is multifaceted and complex, often in ways that do not apply to non-Indigenous leaders. For example, First Nations education leaders are expected to understand educational, management and administration policies that are necessary in the day-to-day operation of a school, and also serve as the source of 'all things Indigenous' in the school setting (Frawley et al., 2010). First Nations educational leaders are also expected to be well-balanced and upstanding members of their communities, and able to assume a variety of cultural roles and responsibilities, while listening to and learning from others, being humble, remembering who they are, and being confident in their own identity (Frawley et al., 2010).

Not only can Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and education leaders face professional pressures not experienced by their non-First Nations colleagues, but they are also likely to support community development in ways that differ from non-First Nations environments, for example playing integral roles in imparting language, culture, customs and law, both in their role as *teacher* and



*community teacher* (Bat & Shore, 2013). An Aboriginal teacher working and teaching in their home community may have other responsibilities that extend far beyond the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers; holding education and cultural roles within the community that extend far beyond the school gates (Bat & Shore, 2013).

In considering 25 years of research, Gurr and Drysdale (2020) developed seven *leadership propositions* for middle leaders in education. These propositions closely align with the themes that have emerged so far in this review, correlations that can be found in Table 14.

*Table 14: Correlation between Gurr and Drysdale's seven leadership propositions for middle leaders & the middle leadership themes emerging from this review*

<b>Gurr and Drysdale (2020) middle leadership themes</b>	<b>Alignment with the Principal Standard</b>
Educational leadership is about improving teaching and learning	Leading teaching and learning
Leadership is about developing people	Developing self and others
Leadership is about setting direction	Leading improvement, innovation and change
Leadership is about developing organisations	Leading management
Leadership responds to the broader context	Engaging the community
Leadership starts from within	Leadership requirements (Leadership attributes)
Leadership is about influencing others	Leadership requirements (Leadership skills and knowledge)

These themes are now explored further in the next section, which explores evidence-based middle leadership practices under each of these topics. This section presents a thematic analysis and, as such, many of these competencies, skills, attributes and practices can comfortably fit under more than one domain. The following analysis is therefore open to interpretation and this section is likely to facilitate a welcome discussion, as individual judgements vary as to the boundaries of each domain.



## 6.1 Leading teaching & learning

Successful leaders are credible leaders (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012a). As a middle leader in education, credibility relies on high-level teaching and learning expertise (Nehez et al., 2022), supported by strong competence and knowledge. As such, being a good teacher is not only essential for being appointed as a middle leader, but also for being able to influence as a leader once appointed in the role (Busher, 2005).

Leithwood's (2016) systematic review found that department head leadership has a greater influence on student learning than whole-school factors and school leader influences. However, middle leaders face several competing priorities as part of their function in the school ecosystem. Research into middle leadership in Victorian schools suggests that leading from the middle involves high levels of ambiguity that reach beyond the dualities already discussed in this section. For example, teachers with curriculum or subject leadership responsibilities have reported both limited opportunities to lead, and doubt about their ability to influence teaching and learning in their educational context (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012a).

Bennett et al. suggests that middle leaders may feel limited in their ability to lead teaching and learning due to potential impacts on relationships with teaching colleagues (Bennett et al., 2003). Despite demonstrating excellent teaching practice, many middle leaders feel reluctant to review colleagues' teaching through classroom observations, feeling this was intrusive and could be seen as a breach of trust on the middle leader's part (Bennett et al., 2003). This again raises the duality of the middle leadership role and the associated pressures when operating as colleague and manager.

Time demands can also present an issue to effective middle leadership. Middle leaders often balance significant teaching loads with line management of other staff, as well as leadership roles in teaching and learning (Dinham, 2007). Middle leaders with pedagogical leadership responsibilities are often also required to implement and monitor quality improvement processes and conduct analyses of student data to understand and evaluate the effectiveness of learning programs (Grootenboer, 2018). As such, middle leaders need to be aware of new standards and best practice, and also understand how these can be integrated into their school's day-to-day teaching and learning processes.

There is evidence to suggest that a general focus on leading, supporting and developing teaching and learning is less impactful than explicit instructional leadership and strategic improvement (Cotter, 2011; White, 2000). As such, while management forms an important part of the leadership role, effective middle leaders who move beyond the administrative requirements of management and its associated tasks to focus the majority of their time on leading teaching and learning will demonstrate greater positive influence (Dinham, 2007; Farchi & Tubin, 2019; White, 2000). Leithwood et al. (2020) suggest that successful school leaders can improve the instructional program by: staffing the instructional program; providing instructional support; monitoring student learning and school improvement progress, and – critically – buffering staff from distractions to their instructional work.

Collaborative problem-solving has also been linked to educational leadership efficiency and improvement (Patuawa et al., 2021, 2022). One study found that by increasing educational leaders' knowledge of how to solve complex problems in collaboration with their teachers, teachers' ratings of their middle leaders' effectiveness increased, professional relationships strengthened, and – most importantly – students' reading performance improved (Patuawa et al., 2022).

Middle leaders are well positioned to encourage innovation (Willis et al., 2022) and can implement effective leadership in teaching and learning by taking active leadership over teaching and learning improvement, providing mentoring support by sharing knowledge, clarifying questions and improving collective practice. They are also well placed to ensure their school makes the most of new

technologies, best practices, and other resources to support student success i.e., pastoral care (Buchanan et al., 2022).

As school leaders play a role in inclusive vision and practice, they require a deep pedagogical knowledge of students' developmental milestones, allowing them to differentiate curriculum into personalised learning for students of different levels, abilities and needs (Garner & Forbes, 2013). The systematic use of student data to inform instructional improvements also fosters effective middle leadership (Leithwood, 2016).

Middle leaders also require cultural responsiveness and a commitment to intercultural education. This is evidenced through feedback from Yolŋu parents and their communities in the Northern Territory about the importance of equipping Yolŋu students with both Western and Yolŋu teachings. This includes ensuring that Yolŋu culture is the grounding context within which Western education is embedded, reframing the curriculum in ways that respect and embed Yolŋu knowledge, traditions and practices (Bat & Shore, 2013).

Finally, to be effective, middle leaders *must* have the strong support of senior leaders (De Nobile, 2018; Lipscombe & Tindall-Ford, 2021), and exist in a culture founded on the importance of students, their learning, and their wellbeing (Leithwood, 2016).

## 6.2 Developing self & others

Professional learning and development opportunities can also help middle leaders prepare for the challenges of middle leadership and grow in their role over time. Middle leaders must generally identify their own professional learning needs (Farchi & Tubin, 2019) and may engage in professional learning through a variety of means. More structured activities include professional development events such as workshops and conferences, while on-the-job learning opportunities often involve collaborative learning from peers.

According to the Australian Teacher Workforce Data (ATWD), the amount of professional learning educators undertake increases with seniority. Middle leaders report spending more time engaged in professional learning activities over the course of a year (46.3 hours) than teachers with leadership responsibilities (42.6 hours) and classroom teachers (38.7 hours). However, this is considerably less than the amount of time principals (73.4 hours) and deputy principals (55.6 hours) report spending engaged in professional learning (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2021a).

Leithwood et al. (2020) suggest that successful school leaders *build relationships and develop people* through these five specific leadership practices that are grounded in the current available literature:

- stimulate growth in the professional capacities of staff
- provide support and demonstrate consideration for individual staff members
- model the school's values and practices
- build trusting relationships with and among staff, students and parents
- establish productive working relationships with teacher federation representatives.

Although middle leaders report that their professional development experience is valuable, their perceptions are slightly lower than principals' (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2021a). Specifically, they are less likely than principals to agree that: their professional learning was aligned to their own professional development needs (81% vs 89%); that it was aligned to the needs of their education setting (88% vs 92%); that they have had opportunities to implement

what they had learned (78% vs 88%); and that they have had opportunities to reflect on or evaluate the impact their professional learning has had on learners (61% vs 82%) (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2021a). Middle leaders also report a wide range of professional learning needs that often remain unmet (Dinham, 2007).

Managing up, leading down and influencing sideways are central to effective middle leaders (De Nobile et al., 2020; Dinham & Scott, 2000; Leithwood, 2016). Leaders in the middle zone who play linking roles between teachers and more senior leaders report high levels of organisational stress and low levels of professional satisfaction (Dinham & Scott, 2002). They require deep, positive interpersonal relationships, which can be challenging to maintain under the demands of the role (Dinham, 2007). They must quickly and effectively build relationships with more senior levels of school leadership, while also inspiring, supporting and directing teams who rely on them (Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009). Depending on the context, middle leaders may face additional pressures specific to their sector. For example, in Catholic schools middle leaders must not only be leaders of teaching and learning, but must also be able to interpret and apply the Gospel message, finding the balance between conserving tradition and adapting to the contemporary needs of students (Buchanan et al., 2022). As such, professional development is critical in both providing the expertise many middle leaders require to succeed in their role and also supporting middle leaders in forming networks for sharing knowledge with other teachers in similar roles.

### 6.3 Leading improvement, innovation & change

The Principal Standard professional practice of *leading improvement, innovation and change* was surprisingly under-represented in middle leadership literature. Interestingly, while leading change was the second most common theme in the professional development programs analysed as part of this review, middle leaders' roles as change-makers were only highlighted in one<sup>11</sup> of the articles captured as part of the systematic search.

Instead, there is much emphasis on the complexity of middle leadership, with the function and pressures on each middle leader being dependent on the responsibilities and scope of their role and school context (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012a). The most senior leaders of schools are often responsible for setting strategic direction and driving change. With their ability to influence schools both horizontally and vertically (Dinham & Scott, 2000; Leithwood, 2016), it then falls to middle leaders to implement these initiatives within the organisation (Dinham, 2007), reinforcing and advocating for initiatives around the school to ensure they become embedded as new practices (Leading Educators, 2014).

Robinson (2023) identified setting goals and expectations as a critical aspect of educational leadership. This included a focus on incorporating vision and mission into goals statements, with a constant view to supporting deeper learning. Setting ambitious goals is simultaneously desirable and undesirable. In setting ambitious goals, leaders will need to bridge the gap between current levels and the desired outcome. However, ambitious goals require effective leadership to mobilise staff behind them. For example, supporting deeper learning may be desired, but if teachers have difficulty in achieving successful learning outcomes with students, they may not commit to this goal. It is the leader's responsibility to help set learning goals that can support teachers in reaching the ultimate goal (V. Robinson, 2023).

Leithwood et al. (2020) described several requirements aligned with *setting direction and developing the organisation to support desired practices*. To set directions, leaders should:

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<sup>11</sup> Collier et al. (2002)

- build a shared vision
- identify specific, shared, short-term goals
- create high-performance expectations
- communicate the vision and goals.

Developing the organisation to support desired practices requires leaders to:

- build collaborative culture and distribute leadership
- structure the organisation to facilitate collaboration
- build productive relationships with families and communities
- connect the school to its wider environment
- maintain a safe and healthy school environment
- allocate resources in support of the school's vision and goals.

Middle leaders are also essential in reviewing student data, using it to direct instruction, and making choices about student support, which will ultimately improve student accomplishment (Boyd, 2022; Buchanan et al., 2022), with the view to providing every student with access to the tools and chances they need to achieve.

## 6.4 Leading management

As discussed at many points in this review, the tension between leading and managing is particularly pertinent to the middle leadership role (Bryant, 2019). Leadership can be considered as actions that influence others; resulting from vision, values and strategic direction. These actions often aim to motivate people and achieve a combination of improvement, change or innovation. Meanwhile, management includes tasks that keep an organisation running (De Nobile, 2018) and facilitate stability (Bryant, 2019), for example record keeping, budgeting, resourcing, and reviewing staff operations and performance.

One study of 26 Australian middle leaders from both government and non-government secondary schools found that the most prominent workload element was administrative requirements (22 respondents)<sup>12</sup>, closely followed by following up students for discipline, conflict resolution or other matters (Collier et al., 2002). This is also supported by the most recent data published through the ATWD, in which middle leaders reported how they spend their time – 64% reported spending 10 or more hours per week on administrative tasks and 60% reported spending 10 hours or more per week on 'student interactions' (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2022a). While these aspects of school life consume much of middle leaders' time, they tend to be more locally focused, rather than whole-of-school focused. As such, a key challenge for principals and directors becomes how to engage and empower those in middle leadership positions to dedicate more time on initiatives that benefit the school more holistically (Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009).

Sergiovanni (1984) coined the term *technical leadership*, which relates to educational leaders' abilities to ensure both their school and their area of responsibility run smoothly and efficiently. For middle leaders, this includes technical aspects of management, such as duties that may include staff

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<sup>12</sup> This was considered a more prominent time commitment even than teaching, which was listed by 21 respondents.

onboarding, managing staff development, and other areas of documentation and information that need to be organised, reported and updated (Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009).

Middle leadership also includes a balancing act of practice and performance (Busher, 2005). Dinham (2007) found that Heads of Department viewed formal planning and preparation for their role negatively, and tended to invest little time on those tasks. Paradoxically, they also reported that one of the most difficult aspects of their jobs was the time pressure associated with performing all aspects of their role and reported that their teaching quality suffered due to the demand of their responsibilities as middle managers. As such, developing these key management skills would improve the function of this aspect of their role, enabling more time to be spent on the more impactful area of leading learning.

With the administrative tasks associated with management being an essential part of middle leadership, middle leaders also focus on administration of the school (White, 2000, 2001) and many of these serve an important role in terms of ensuring strategic, fair and equitable resource allocation (Dinham, 2007). Middle leadership skills are particularly important in schools because they enhance the efficiency of teachers (Lipscombe et al., 2021; Willis et al., 2022), Managing these aspects of the school efficiently, frees teachers to improve their instructional techniques and better serve the needs of their students, thanks to the support and resources that middle leaders can offer.

In terms of the resources middle leaders manage, these include infrastructure and financial resources, which must be allocated equitably among staff and also among students. There are also the human resources of knowledge and time – knowledge must be shared equitably with colleagues (Busher, 2005) and time must be managed equitably as a resource both for staff and for students. In allocating resources strategically and equitably, middle leaders positively influence student outcomes (Dinham, 2007).

The National School Improvement Tool (Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), 2016) emphasises the importance of using data to inform practice, monitoring the effectiveness of both practices and efforts to meet established targets.

Another core aspect of ensuring areas of responsibility run smoothly is monitoring progress toward targets, both individually and collectively. This action also protects students and staff from attracting negative attention from more senior levels of leadership (Busher, 2005).

## 6.5 Engaging the community

While middle leaders must develop a network of industry links to support themselves and their school (Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009), Gurr and Drysdale (2012a) suggest there is little evidence to suggest that middle leaders engage with community or organisational capacity building, or influence the school district and system. As such, the way in which middle leaders engage with the community must reflect the requirements of their role.

The needs and expectations of the community differ depending on the community within which a school exists (Trimmer et al., 2021). In communities that differ in cultural background to school leadership, reaching decisions requires greater consultation and input from the community (Trimmer & Dixon, 2023).

For example, it is necessary for First Nations and non-Indigenous educators to work together to become *intercultural leaders*, to achieve positive student outcomes for both First Nations and non-First Nations students (Frawley et al., 2010). This can be achieved through culturally appropriate strategies for consultation and connection; in Napranum, an Aboriginal community on Western Cape

York in remote far north Queensland, mothers of preschool children reported that family-school partnerships had been established and sustained when:

*... equal value and respect were accorded to them as key participants in... a 'yarning space'... The space was not so much a physical location as a positioning or sociocultural strategy for communicating across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Fluckiger et al., 2012).*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities regard their educational leaders as strong advocates for children and the community (in terms of education) and also vital sources of support for community members dealing with other issues and challenges (Frawley et al., 2010). As such, this kind of externally-focused engagement with the community is more likely to be required of middle leaders working with First Nations peoples. Having said that, in order to support the school or early education setting to connect with First Nations perspectives, there is a need to establish connections with First Nations community (even in schools where there is not a large First Nations student population). Middle leaders in all contexts are typically responsible for students' behavioural needs and wellbeing, and therefore must engage with the school community outside of the school, which may also include advocating for and promoting the school's vision and values (Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009).

One Queensland-based study of teachers and middle leaders in an independent senior school posited that the focus of teaching had shifted to include an ethical imperative to be 'caring' in their practice. The author argues that for the ethic of caring to be adopted and embedded, it needs to be reflected not only in teachers' practice, but also in approaches and attitudes to pastoral care. The study examined teachers' and middle leaders' abilities to implement changes to pastoral care structures around their school and found that middle leaders would be better able to enact ethical leadership in their areas of responsibility if communication was more open with more senior leaders. The teachers and middle leaders reported feeling that their authority to make decisions was limited and could be improved through increased participation in decision-making and the associated processes (Chittenden, 2004).

Dinham's (2007) middle leadership study in a New South Wales government school compared heads of department and principals, finding that the principals held more formalised, influential roles around the community, while the middle leaders' roles were, instead, internally focused. In this role of influencing the internal school community, middle leaders hold enormous influence, with the potential to build school culture, play connecting roles around the school, and therefore render themselves essential in developing a common purpose and encouraging collaboration (Dinham, 2007). For example, middle leaders tend to serve as a liaison between administrators and teachers. In doing so, they help to communicate expectations and address concerns, thereby bridging the gap that exists between these two groups (Boyd, 2022; Willis et al., 2022).

There are also differences between what principals expect of middle leaders and what middle leaders expect of themselves. One study reported that, 'senior staff expect middle leaders to become involved in the wider whole-school context, but many are reluctant to do so, preferring to see themselves as departmental advocates (Bennett et al., 2003).

This ongoing tension has been recognised throughout this review. Middle leaders need to become advocates for those both above and below them in the leadership hierarchy, advocating for their team to the leaders above them, while also advocating for school-wide priorities to those below them. Middle leaders are therefore ideally placed to act as advocates for the staff and students who are directly influenced by their leadership (Busher, 2005; Dinham, 2007) and, in doing so, can be instrumental in school culture, promoting collaboration, encouraging professional development, and



supporting a healthy work-life balance for teachers (Lipscombe et al., 2021; Tlali & Matete, 2021; Willis et al., 2022).

## 6.6 Leadership requirements

A recurring theme throughout this analysis has been the leadership requirements of middle leaders. These have naturally emerged into two groups – *leadership skills and knowledge* and *leadership attributes*. In aiming to extend the Principal Standard for both formal and informal leadership positions, the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership (2023) also identified these distinctions, writing:

*The three capabilities and four dispositions differ from the AITSL standard by making a clear distinction between leadership skills and knowledge (capabilities) and leadership character (dispositions).*

Busher's (2005) UK-based study of six middle leaders in secondary schools in England investigated participants' professional identities and how they were constructed. Unsurprisingly, the values that middle leaders carried with them into their work life were the result of several influences, including their upbringing, their own educational experiences and influential teachers from their education at school or university. As is also evidenced through the focus on *leadership requirements* (skills, knowledge and attributes) featured in the professional development programs, innate qualities would seem to play an important part in middle leadership (Dinham, 2007). As such, while professional development is essential to developing those core practices, personal development is just as important.

Successful leadership is developed through collaboration, teamwork and hands-on experience supported by strong personal and professional networks (Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2011). In looking at what made successful principals, Gurr and Drysdale (2012a) found that principals from the US and Denmark rated 'a strong and supportive mentor, a high level of personal motivation, and a love of learning' as essential factors in their success as leaders. This could therefore also be considered a central aspect of middle leaders' responsibilities for *developing self*.

Furthermore, the attitude of leaders in a school are integral to a school's approach to inclusivity, both as a workplace and as an educational institution (Garner & Forbes, 2013). One survey respondent in Garner and Forbes' study stated:

*'Negative personal attitudes to disability and diversity are very difficult to overcome. School Administrators who reflect these attitudes can "infect" a whole school community with negativity.'*

Achieving success in middle leadership also requires the more senior leaders (especially the principal) to expect high performance from middle leaders and – most importantly – middle leaders themselves must exhibit personal aptitude and the capacity to perform in middle leadership roles (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012a). There are examples in the research of middle leaders operating without the skills, experience or mindsets to be successful in their roles (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012a). In these situations, it is almost impossible to effectively lead. Alkire (1993 cited in Brown et al. 2000) wrote, poignantly:

*'A principal quickly learns that if any change is to occur, it must be done through influence, not control.'*



Influencing is a core aspect of middle leaders' roles. They are uniquely positioned to gather knowledge about colleagues and students as part of their role and utilise this to positively influence school culture. When using this knowledge, the decisions middle leaders make around when and how to exert influence have the potential to be either positive or negative (Busher, 2005). As power dynamics tend to be asymmetrical between middle leaders and those who report to them (either directly or indirectly, e.g.: in the case of those delivering the learning program designed by a middle leader), the work of middle leaders is inherently value laden (Busher, 2005). Not only must middle leaders operate under their own values, but they must also manage the values of their colleagues; students; students' parents, carers or guardians; and their community (Busher, 2005). As such, the personal attributes of a leader are core to middle leaders' success.

Gurr and Drysdale (2020) articulated four beliefs informed by their work in the field: 1) all students can learn; 2) all schools can be good schools; 3) leadership is the driver for both of these factors; and 4) individuals can develop the skills, capacities and behaviours to be excellent leaders. In turn, these beliefs and connection to the purpose of education feed other pivotal attributes, such as authenticity, which is an indicator of success across Heads of Department from diverse demographics (Dinham, 2007).

Earlier research on middle leadership has suggested that successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of core leadership practices and behaviours (Leithwood et al., 2008) and 'a small handful of personal traits explains a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness' (Leithwood et al., 2006), including improving the instructional program; building relationships and developing people; setting directions; and redesigning the organisation to support desired practices (Leithwood et al., 2020). What sets some leaders apart from others is the key personal qualities and capabilities, which can account for significant variation in leadership effectiveness (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2014; Leithwood et al., 2006).

However, more recent research has suggested that several personal leadership resources – derived in part from the Ontario Leadership Framework (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013) – are likely to be more influential, considering the research into the leadership traits of education leaders has been limited (Leithwood et al., 2020). These include cognitive resources (problem-solving expertise, domain-specific knowledge and systems thinking), social resources (perceiving emotions, managing emotions and acting in emotionally appropriate ways) and psychological resources (optimism, self-efficacy, resilience and proactivity) (Leithwood et al., 2020). The influence of these resources is wide-reaching – one study of conversations between primary school middle leaders and teachers found that students' persistent underachievement in reading was likely influenced by middle leaders' infrequent conversations and ineffective collaborative problem-solving during discussions with teachers about target students' performance and needs (Patuawa et al., 2021).

The Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership (2023) reports that leaders' connection to the moral purpose of their role is essential motivation for setting high expectations in professional practice. This includes the personal connection to positive student outcomes, such as preparing them for their future lives, equipping them with the skills and drive to lead with confidence, fostering a sense of self that promotes independent thought and action, as well as developing impulse control.

As middle leaders usually either manage other staff or work in a position of influence over a subject area or program, negotiation and persuasion skills, as well as emotional intelligence are essential to effective middle leadership (Busher, 2005). This includes the ability to interact positively with colleagues from diverse backgrounds and convince them to adapt best practice and similar ways of working to improve the function of the school (Busher, 2005).

As middle leaders play key roles in the operation of teaching teams and schoolwide initiatives, clear communication is critical (Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009). Other key attributes include: an attitude of

'humanity' that underpins professionalism and practice (Dinham, 2007), open-mindedness (Leithwood et al., 2008), empathy (Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership, 2023), self-awareness, including the ability to identify which situations offer higher and lower levels of difficulty (Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership, 2023), flexibility and willingness to learn from others (Leithwood et al., 2008), and the ability to build and maintain high levels of trust (Dinham, 2007).

These leadership requirements relate to developmental aspects of middle leadership that change according to career stage and the associated level of mastery required based on the responsibilities of middle leadership roles. However, while there is potential for middle leaders to positively influence the school and school community (potentially even more than the principal themselves), middle leaders are often under-utilised (Brooks & Cavanagh, 2009). Drafting Professional Standards for Middle Leaders will help to address this challenge by supporting educators around Australia in elevating and optimising the critical role of middle leaders in the schooling ecosystem.

## 7. The middle leadership continuum

Gurr and Drysdale (2012b) define middle leaders in schools as requiring at least one promotion before they begin to consider taking on a principal role. This definition may be problematic, because it assumes that middle leaders operate in educational settings that are large enough to support multiple levels of leadership. As expanded upon in Appendix 1, around 25% of schools in Australia have fewer than 10 staff. In smaller settings such as these, principals are likely to hold responsibilities that might be considered within scope for middle leaders in larger school contexts. If one promotion is required before achieving principalship, it also suggests a gap *between* middle leadership and principals, rather than a continuum that includes the classroom and also the most senior level of leadership.

Leithwood et al. (2008) suggest there is a basic set of leadership practices employed by successful leaders in schools, but what changes is their applicability to various work contexts. This may enable the phases of middle leadership to be considered on a development continuum, with middle leadership shifting according to two axes – the leader’s responsibilities differ depending on their *sphere of influence* and the leader’s capabilities differ depending on their *preparedness* and associated proficiency in middle leadership roles (NSW Department of Education, 2020).

The Macquarie University (De Nobile et al., 2020) report found that leadership practice at different positions on the middle leadership continuum emphasise different leadership domains (*teaching and learning, building relationships, strategy and operations*, introduced in the section beginning page 25). In conceptualising middle leadership as the zone between preparing for middle leadership responsibilities and taking on principal-level responsibilities, De Nobile et al. found significant differences between the expected behaviours of non-principal school leaders and proposed a classification of *emergent, middle and senior* leaders. They described overlap between Highly Accomplished or Lead teachers that placed them on the middle leadership continuum as emergent leaders.

This is consistent with recent research that suggests teacher leadership is a key component of school reform and successful school leadership. For example, work conducted by the New South Wales Department of Education under the School Leadership Continuum represents a development pathway from teacher to middle leader. The stages described could be considered as *aspiring* (shown as a teacher leader who is preparing for middle leadership) and – to use De Nobile et al.’s terminology – *emergent*.

Figure 14 shows the School Leadership Continuum (NSW Department of Education, 2020), which demonstrates three stages of formal leadership within schools based on *context and sphere of influence*, as well as *leadership capabilities* – middle leaders, senior leaders and principals. For the purposes of the present literature review, the *senior leaders* represented on this continuum could be considered *senior middle leaders* based on De Nobile et al.’s terminology.

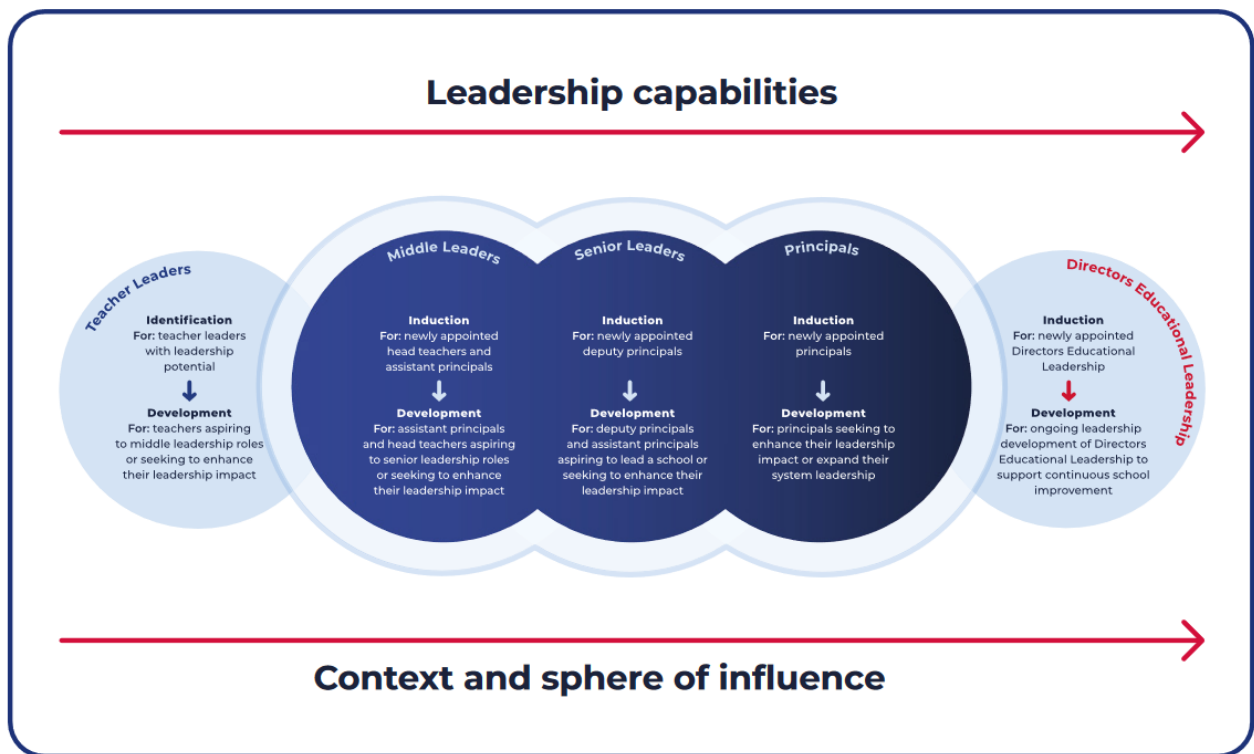


Figure 14: The School Leadership Continuum (NSW Department of Education, 2020)

An alternative approach has been implemented in New Zealand's Educational Leadership Capability Framework (Wylie & McKinley, 2018), which integrates school leadership onto a continuum that reflects what 'educational leadership capabilities' look like in 'different leadership spheres'. There are three segments on this continuum: 1) *expert teacher, leadership of curriculum or initiative*; 2) *leading teams*; and 3) *leading organisations*.

While these three spheres are not officially defined, the spheres of influence can be discerned from each focus area's descriptors. The *expert teacher, leadership of curriculum or initiative* context includes interacting with partners within and beyond the organisation, with a focus on curriculum or pedagogical experts, for example. The *leading teams* context includes within and beyond the organisation in terms of particular areas or initiatives and the *leading organisations* context includes stakeholders beyond the organisation.

## 8. Professional development

**Professional development has been identified as pivotal to middle leaders' success (Gurr, 2023b) and is an important part of developing, maintaining and refining leadership abilities and skills. As such, this section collates and analyses professional development programs designed for middle leaders in education.**

Professional development can take several forms. It can be gained through reflection on professional practice, through explicit instruction about practice, through collaborative groups or networks (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2006) and through external programs. Although there is limited research available on the topic of professional development for middle leaders in educational settings and their developmental needs (Bennett et al., 2003), commercial professional development initiatives have expanded rapidly (Berg et al., 2013). These programs provide valuable insight into the perceived needs of middle leaders and how professional development providers attempt to meet these needs. As such, this section examines a subset of the many professional development programs that offer professional direction to this important cohort.

One seminal study in this area is a systematic literature review conducted by Lipscombe et al. (2021), in which the authors examined the professional development needs of middle leaders and the associated opportunities available to them. Consistent with the findings already established as part of this present literature review, Lipscombe et al. emphasised the diversity of the middle leader role across schools and contexts. They contend that leading in this space requires the skills, competencies, attributes and practices included in professional development programs to be adaptable to a variety of environments depending on the middle leader's working situation.

Grootenboer, Edwards-Groves and Ronnerman's (2020) research into the field of middle leadership in education led them to conclude that middle leaders are often offered little professional development. They contend that the most effective professional development for middle leaders is school-based, shaped according to the context of the students, staff and school community.

Professional development for middle leaders can be both formal and informal, as well as internal and external. For example, the School Leadership Identification Framework developed by the New South Wales Department of Education's School Leadership Institute for New South Wales public schools (School Leadership Institute (SLI), 2021) aims to motivate and develop teacher leaders who have the potential for middle leadership, and support them in reaching the skills required to step into middle leadership roles. Despite the positioning of this resource as a 'framework', in practice it is a process of development for aspiring middle leaders that pairs teacher leaders with senior mentors who provide guidance and demonstrate leadership skills to prepare the mentee for middle leadership.

This mentoring process forms one part of a plethora of professional development programs available for middle leaders in education. The purpose of this section is to present an analysis of formal professional development programs available to middle leaders in order to understand the focus of professional development available for middle leaders.

There are also numerous formal professional development programs for middle leaders in education. In addition to the School Leadership Identification Framework, the systematic search conducted as part of this review identified 31 programs that offer development for middle leaders. For each of these programs, all publicly available collateral (website content, pamphlets etc.) – or all collateral provided

in response to the direct emails – was collated and analysed. The working assumption underpinning this analysis is that the available program information faithfully represents the program content.

This section now presents an analysis of 19 formal professional development programs that met the inclusion criteria of five or more codable pieces of information. These programs catered to middle leaders around Australia (10 programs), the United Kingdom (seven programs) and the United States (two programs). Appendix 4 shows the complete list of identified professional development programs (both included and excluded), as well as their country of origin, Australian state (where state-specific), provider and target audience.

The course characteristics varied markedly. Some programs lasted hours, while others lasted two years; some were delivered online and others face-to-face. Of the Australian programs, six were state-specific and four were appropriate for participants from around Australia. Programs that met the inclusion threshold were identified from four states: Queensland (one program), New South Wales (one program), Tasmania (two programs) and Victoria (two programs). Other Australian states and territories are understood to offer relevant professional development programs, however did not meet the threshold for inclusion based on publicly-available information. The four Australia-wide programs that met the inclusion criteria of five or more codable pieces of information were developed by the National Excellence in School Leadership Institute (NESLI), the Australian Council for Educational Leaders (ACEL), and the Stronger Smarter Institute (refer to Appendix 4: Details of identified professional development programs for details).

In terms of prospective participants, 17 of the total identified programs catered to all levels of middle leadership and others catered to specific levels. Of programs that catered to all levels of middle leadership (16 programs), some used general terms such as ‘current middle leaders’ to describe their audience, while others tended to describe their target market using terminology such as combinations of aspiring, emerging, new, current, existing or experienced middle leaders.

Of programs that identified specific levels, these included aspiring (three programs – two programs for aspiring middle leaders only), new (three programs – two for new middle leaders only), new/newly-appointed/first time (six programs – two for this group only), established/experienced (six programs – zero for this group only) and advanced (five programs – zero for this group only). The coding was conducted using an inductive approach to grounded theory. Once the coding frame was established, the items were grouped thematically. Topics that featured three times or fewer in the sample are included for the sake of completeness, but are specified as weak themes by the denotation of ‘three programs or fewer’.

## 8.1 Core themes

Lipscombe et al.'s (2021) systematic review suggested that professional development for middle leaders in schools should focus on:

- *leading teaching, learning and curriculum*
- *management*
- *capacity building* (individual, professional, organisational and community-based).

These key domains were used in the initial coding of the development programs, with varying levels of representation. While each of these domains featured in the analysis, *capacity building* was by far the most common and diverse category.

### Leading teaching and learning

This domain emerged as a clear theme (9% of topics), which also aligned with the position description analysis. This also directly relates to the Principal Standard: *leading teaching and learning*. The competencies, skills, attributes and practices relating to this theme were surprisingly sparse. Eight programs (33%) mentioned 'improve learning' or 'improve teaching' as a general theme, however specific details around achieving this goal were primarily mentioned only in relation to evaluating teaching and learning quality (four programs, 17%); and leading, developing and innovating curriculum (four programs, 17%). Other factors, such as encouraging reflective teaching practice; leading authentic, meaningful assessment; improving assessment accessibility; evaluating curriculum; engaging students; understanding own learning style and teaching practice; and leading prayer and liturgy, featured in three programs or fewer.

### Management

*Management* (which aligns with the Principal Standard: *management of the school*) was surprisingly sparse in the programs (4% of topics) and had the weakest representation of all the standards. Only managing resources effectively, for example staff and school assets, featured in several programs (four, 17%). Other aspects of this standard received little attention, with budgeting effectively, managing finances, acting as quality assurance, creating systems and structures, conducting effective meetings, workforce planning, managing complaints, recruiting and managing staff, and clarifying roles within teams each covered in only three programs or fewer.

### Capacity building

*Capacity building* (individual, professional, organisational and community-based) was by far the most common domain, perhaps because it loosely aligns with the three remaining professional practices in the Principal Standard:

- *individual and professional* relates to *developing self and others*
- *organisational* relates to *leading improvement, innovation and change*
- *community-based* relates to *engaging and working with the community*.

These themes also aligned with those identified in the position description analysis, although the quantity and detail differed somewhat to the middle leader requirements specified in the position descriptions. This alignment supports the validity of the continuum and thematic groupings and provides an ideal base for comparison between the two sets of data. As such, the analysis is structured according to the emergent themes and associated sub-categories.



Regarding *developing self and others* (10% of topics), several programs focused on middle leaders investing in self-development (four programs, 17%) and staff development (five programs, 21%). This included a focus on either coaching and developing staff as a leader (nine programs, 38%) or establishing coaching for oneself by a senior mentor (seven programs, 29%). Evaluating oneself, thriving as a middle leader, developing a personal career pathway and using feedback to improve staff learning were included in the published materials, each of which appeared in three programs or fewer.

*Leading improvement, innovation and change* (21% of topics) featured in the materials and thematically aligned with contextual awareness and strategic decision-making. The whole-school approach included understanding and navigating school culture and values (five programs, 21%); understanding school context and supporting school direction (for example, religion or socioeconomic) (five programs, 21%); and developing a school/system-wide approach and exerting influence in this sphere (five programs, 21%). The change management and innovation sub-category related to culture-orientated practice and strategic direction. In line with previous research (Lipscombe et al., 2020), facilitating and leading change (including understanding models of change) were the second-most popular topic overall, appearing in 15 programs (63%). Ten programs (42%) featured improving evidence-based, strategic decision-making, which was often complemented by improvement or action planning (eight programs, 33%) or planning strategically (seven programs, 29%), and managing and leading change, including responses to it, was covered in four programs (21%), as was being open to new ways of working (i.e. thinking with innovation and creativity). Leading with vision (five programs, 21%) was not a strong theme and was only aligned with employing design thinking, which was mentioned by three programs or fewer. Understanding legislation and policy featured in around one quarter of programs, with familiarity with professional standards and accountabilities to organisations such as unions featuring in six programs (25%) and knowledge of department policies/governance featuring in four (17%). Surprisingly, understanding and managing legal obligations, including child safety, was covered in three programs or fewer.

*Engaging and working with the community* (8% of topics) was somewhat better-represented, with clearer themes of *promoting a culture of advocacy and support* (both internally and externally) emerging. This included student wellbeing (four programs, 17%), fostering inclusivity (four programs, 17%) and, most strongly, staff wellbeing – for example, facilitating positive team culture (nine programs, 38%), supporting teachers (four programs, 17%) and managing others' emotions and developing safe psychological spaces (four programs, 17%). Promoting equity (both staff and student), engaging with the community (e.g. special interest groups), understanding the role of parents, improving student agency, and teaching with cultural responsiveness to promote positive identities (for example, cultural) featured only in three programs or fewer.

## **Leadership requirements**

The remaining theme related to *leadership requirements*, with 37% of the content relating to *leadership skills and knowledge* and 10% focused on *leadership attributes and qualities*. The programs focused heavily on *leadership skills and knowledge*, with more than one third of all identified skills, competencies, attributes or practices coded to this category (141 out of 383). The programs promoted key aspects of *performance management*, including motivating and engaging staff (11 programs, 46%); maximising staff performance (10 programs, 42%); managing up, down and across (five programs, 21%); and evaluating performance (five programs, 21%). Building a culture of accountability and managing conflict were each promoted as part of 17% of programs (four programs), while understanding self and others' roles in teams, and understanding effective line management were each mentioned in three programs or fewer. The most common aspects of *teamwork and collaboration* were: managing difficult conversations and delivering feedback (14 programs, 58%); building and leading effective teams (11 programs, 46%); building and maintaining

trust (five programs, 21%); and fostering collaboration (five programs, 21%). Building a culture of consultation and being a team player each appeared in three programs or fewer. Finally, *personal leadership characteristics* – the most popular sub-category in the analysis – included: understanding leadership and leadership styles (13 programs, 54%); developing clear, effective communication and interpersonal skills (11 programs, 46%); influencing others (seven programs, 29%); building influence through emotional intelligence (five programs, 21%); understanding middle leadership practices (five programs, 21%); and developing mindfulness and reflection (four programs, 17%). As with the other sub-categories, there were several aspects that were mentioned in three programs or fewer: improving negotiation skills; leading ethically; leading with authenticity; leading with curiosity; developing critical thinking; learning to prioritise; working efficiently; and listening.

The *leadership knowledge and attributes* sub-categories included *personal leadership characteristics*; and *ethical values and school values*. Deepening self-awareness, in particular in relation to personal leadership style and how beliefs and values influence leadership, was the most common topic under *personal leadership characteristics*, being mentioned by 19 programs (79%). The related characteristic, deepening sense of self, featured in five programs (21%) and building resilience was mentioned in three programs or fewer. Meanwhile, leading with core values, principles and beliefs (10 programs, 42%) was the most common aspect of *ethical values and school values*, with extending one's moral purpose to educate effectively appearing in three programs or fewer.

In summary, professional development tended to align with the Principal Standard in Australia, but to varying degrees of representation. *Leadership requirements* was by far the most strongly represented professional practice of the Principal Standard, followed by *leading improvement, innovation and change*, which – in terms of middle leadership – was more focused on *contextual awareness and strategic decision-making*. Lipscombe et al. (2020) also found that *collaboration, change and influence* were strongly represented, while core management skills such as managing underperformance and navigating difficult conversations were underrepresented.

Despite the importance of *leading teaching and learning* for middle leaders, highlighted by Lipscombe et al.'s (2021) recommendations for middle leader professional development, this was addressed only through vague statements, where the marketing materials claimed a program would 'improve learning' or 'improve teaching', without specifying how this might be achieved. Considering Lipscombe et al.'s (2021) recommendations, a similarly unexpected absence was any focus on management skills. As might be expected, the most effective professional learning for middle leaders is structured and highly relevant to their role (Bryant and Walker, 2022). As such, this exclusion is particularly surprising considering the great need that is likely to be exhibited by middle leaders, considering that they are promoted based on their teaching expertise, rather than their knowledge of management or leadership practices.

As such, currently available professional development programs are unlikely to meet the needs of middle leaders in Australian education (Lipscombe et al., 2021). The content covered in these programs should therefore be considered in this context and used with caution when applying this information to the draft Professional Standards for Middle Leaders. Conversely, once published, the Professional Standards for Middle Leaders are likely to inform Australian professional development programs, enabling the program offering to more closely align with the expectations and needs of middle leaders in Australian education.

## 8.2 Performance, development & professional learning

In addition to the coded professional development programs discussed in this literature review, a scan of grey literature policy documents revealed other examples of professional development tools

available to middle leaders in Australian schools. **Error! Reference source not found.** describes some examples of policies related to professional development of middle leaders across Australia.

Table 15: Examples of professional development for middle leaders, by Australian jurisdiction

Jurisdiction	Sector	Description
Queensland	Government	<p>The Queensland Department of Education maintains a performance and development agreement. Queensland Government employees are required to continually improve all aspects of their performance under the Public Sector Act 2022.</p> <p>Personnel are required to schedule regular conversations and help their employee meet and exceed their performance and development goals as part of the related positive management practices. All employees must complete a performance and development agreement which utilises a Competency Compass tool for employees to reflect on practice and identify areas for growth.</p> <p>A Competency Compass tool has been developed for leaders to reflect on practice and identify areas for growth (Queensland Government, n.d.).</p>
	Independent	<p>Independent Schools Queensland runs a series of professional development webinars targeted at middle leaders and those aspiring to be middle leaders called <i>The Middle Leaders Program</i> with an accompanying <i>2022-2023 Middle Leaders Program Guidebook</i> (Queensland Independent Schools, 2022) which acknowledges the pivotal role that middle leaders play in schools and aims to support existing and emerging middle leaders to successfully navigate the complexities of the role. Senior leaders are also invited to find whether some of the content is relevant to their roles. The webinars are linked directly to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (illustrating the gap that exists between the Teacher Standards and Principal Standard) nominated as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6.2 Engage in professional learning and improve practice</li> <li>• 6.3 Engage with colleagues and improve practice</li> <li>• 6.4 Apply professional learning and improve student learning</li> </ul> <p>The webinars cover the following topics:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Developing people: Building trust and learning together</i></li> <li>2. <i>Developing teams: Leading meetings</i></li> <li>3. <i>Leading difficult conversations</i></li> </ol>
	Catholic	<p>The Townsville Catholic Education Office has a <i>Leading from Within – Middle Leadership Program</i> (Diocese of Townsville Catholic Education, 2023a), a professional development program designed for middle leaders in conjunction with The Brown Collective. The program aims to support and develop the leadership skills of middle leaders within the Townsville Catholic Education Office, enabling</p>

Jurisdiction	Sector	Description
		<p>them to lead with confidence and effectiveness within their respective schools and departments.</p> <p>The program consists of a series of workshops and coaching sessions that cover a range of topics relevant to middle leadership:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The self-reflective professional (self-paced)</li> <li>2. Developing leadership density within a school</li> <li>3. Leadership learning challenge; coaching and peer mentoring</li> <li>4. Program recall; leadership learning challenge presentation.</li> </ol> <p>The target group for the program is teachers who have positions of responsibility in addition to a classroom teaching program and/or high-performing classroom teachers aspiring to or being encouraged to undertake leadership roles within their individual school settings. The program provides an opportunity for individuals to self-reflect about their leadership capabilities, to make a contribution to the shared direction of their school and the broader system.</p>
<b>Australian Capital Territory</b>	Government	<p>The Australian Capital Territory's 2023 Aspiring Leaders Development Program (Australian Capital Territory Education Directorate, 2023), whilst aimed at future school principals also provides insights into leadership capabilities esteemed by the Australian Capital Territory's Education Directorate. This program is delivered over four terms and emphasises student-centred leadership, cultural integrity, awareness of others, virtuous educational leadership, inspiring performance and reducing change for improvement. Participants in the Australian Capital Territory's Aspiring Leaders Development Program also complete an action learning project throughout the year and submit portfolios for assessment.</p>
	Independent	<p>The Association of Independent Schools of the Australian Capital Territory runs a variety of targeted professional learning courses and seminars (Association of Independent Schools of the ACT, 2023). Specific courses related to middle leader include Professional Development for School Executive Teams (0.5-day program) which explores and articulates what wellbeing means and the impact that it has on performance and engagement with a focus on staff wellbeing and applying emotional intelligence in daily interactions and decision-making. The Association also contracts coaching experts to facilitate Communities of Practice sessions facilitated by Dr Mark Dowley.</p>
<b>Tasmania</b>	Catholic	<p>Catholic Education Tasmania provides support and development to middle leaders through an Aspiring Leaders program (Catholic Education Tasmania, 2023b) which provides multiple leadership development days over a two-year period. Catholic Education Tasmania also encourages schools to develop their middle leaders as coaches using programs delivered by professional learning</p>

Jurisdiction	Sector	Description
		providers such as Growth Coaching International and other tools such as Reflective Practice. Middle leaders in the Tasmanian Catholic system are also encouraged to undertake postgraduate studies in educational leadership
<b>Western Australia</b>	Government	The Western Australia Department of Education's Leadership Institute provides professional learning programs for teachers and school leaders to meet the continuing challenges of school improvement and to provide better learning opportunities for students. Professional learning offerings for middle leaders are divided into either a relational/strategic focus or a technical/operational focus. Programs that emphasise relational/strategic leadership capabilities focus largely on whole-school improvement (with no mention of innovation or change).
	Independent	The Association of independent Schools Western Australia survey (Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia, 2023) of staff about their professional development opportunities and offerings illustrates that professional development is school based with the use of a variety of tools. Some schools have self-reflection tools teachers use to reflect on practice whilst others develop their own personal instruments including peer mentoring and self-reflection activities.
<b>South Australia</b>	Government	The Department for Education in South Australia has a Middle Leadership Development program (Orbis Exemplary Learning, 2023) that is a targeted, evidence-informed professional learning program that has been co-designed with South Australian educators, Orbis and BTS Spark. The program supports staff to build the skills and knowledge required to step into their first people leadership role. It is specifically designed to develop capability to lead school improvement through a combination of masterclasses, workshops, group and 1:1 coaching, assessment tools and online learning to create a seamless and engaging learning experience. The program runs over 8 months and comprises 5 modules: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand self as a leader</li> <li>• Model educational leadership</li> <li>• Lead change and improvement</li> <li>• Build a strong culture</li> <li>• Build capability in others.</li> </ul>
	Catholic	Catholic Education South Australia contracts an external provider to run Teacher Leadership Seminars (Grift Education, 2020) for practising and aspiring middle leaders in schools. Grift Education aims to improve schools' capacity to improve and believes that this rests on the shoulders of effective teacher leaders whose roles

Jurisdiction	Sector	Description
<b>New South Wales</b>	Independent	<p>extend well beyond the classroom. Gavin Grift leads teacher leaders, including new leaders, through a process of self-discovery as they grapple with the demands of teaching and leading within schools. Teachers enrol in a two-to-three day professional learning experience to learn how to lead meaningful collaboration, provide feedback to peers and overcome the complexities of leading both colleagues and students at the same time.</p> <p>The Association of Independent Schools New South Wales delivers middle leadership professional learning through a <i>Middle Leaders Program</i> (Association of Independent Schools of NSW (AINSW), 2023) – consisting of two consecutive face-to-face days followed by a third day approx. 4-6 weeks later. The course focuses on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is leadership in an educational context and specifically as a middle leader</li> <li>• Leading with purpose</li> <li>• Understanding self as a leader</li> <li>• Leading others</li> <li>• Communication for leadership</li> <li>• Values-centred leadership</li> <li>• Leading change</li> </ul> <p><i>Advanced Middle Leaders</i> is a two-day face-to-face program separated by approx. 6 weeks run at Association of Independent Schools New South Wales for middle leaders who have completed the Middle Leaders Program, or the school-based Leading from the Middle program. The focus of this program is more on systems leadership.</p> <p><i>Leading from the Middle</i> is a school-based program that includes middle leaders' teams in one or several schools. The five-day program can start at any time and usually starts with two consecutive days followed by one professional learning day per term. As part of this program, the participants undertake a school-based change initiative within their sphere of influence and fitting within their school's strategic plan. Days 3 and 4 include time for them to work on and receive feedback and input about these school-based initiatives. The last day of the program is a presentation of each of their change initiatives and the learnings along the way.</p>

The next section introduces the roles and responsibilities of middle leadership, and what defines Australian middle leadership. The results focus on core areas of responsibility and the associated formal requirements when applying for middle leadership roles. This analysis helps to establish the scope of middle leaders in Australian schools as the basis for the Professional Standards for Middle Leaders. It then discusses the middle leadership continuum and changing contexts that influence professional scope and progression in middle leadership.



## 9. Roles & responsibilities of Australian middle leaders

Middle leaders engage in a variety of practices that reflect the diversity of middle leadership roles and responsibilities. This section unpacks the requirements of middle leaders according to position descriptions provided by Australian jurisdictions and sectors in response to an email request for documentation relating to middle leadership, and a subsequent Seek (seek.com.au) search for middle leadership positions across Australia. This analysis includes 101 position descriptions containing 2,426 skills, competencies, attributes and/or practices, which were coded using a deductive approach that aligned with the five *Professional Practices*, and the *Leadership Requirements* described in the *Principal Standard*.

Position descriptions drawn from all jurisdictions and sectors were coded against the coding frame of the six domains (five professional practice domains and the leadership requirements). Table 16: includes several examples of practices that appeared in the position descriptions from jurisdictions across Australia.

*Table 16: Australian position descriptions – examples of skills, competencies, attributes and practices that align with the Principal Standard*

	Government	Catholic	Independent
<b>Leading teaching and learning</b>	Successful teaching experience with capacity to initiate improvement in teaching, learning and classroom practice (NSW)	A well-articulated vision of contemporary pedagogical approaches (WA)	Remain abreast of current research and contemporary education theory to ensure that all teachers remain 'cutting edge' in their practice (ACT)
<b>Developing self and others</b>	Demonstrated ability to support others to reflect on their practice and facilitate school-based professional learning (VIC)	Maintains a Professional Growth Plan that includes strategies for skilling in the various accountabilities of the role description and supports professional development goals and career path planning (WA)	Implementing a coherent and connected academic teacher coaching model across various sections of the School (NT)



	Government	Catholic	Independent
<b>Leading improvement, innovation and change</b>	Leading and managing the implementation of whole-school improvement initiatives related to the school strategic plan and school priorities (VIC)	Ability to work independently, use initiative and develop innovative programs within a school context (SA)	Ability to provide dynamic and pro-active educational leadership in a coeducational environment with the capacity to provide innovation in education (TAS)
<b>Leading management</b>	Typically manages the budget, and may be consulted regarding the staffing and facilities, relating to the area of designated responsibility within the framework of the school's strategic plan, policies and budget (SA)	Exercises good stewardship of College resources (WA)	Able to oversee the day to day running of the Junior School, ensuring that effective and efficient systems are in place to support teaching, learning, operations, pastoral care, and events (NSW)
<b>Engaging and working with the community</b>	Fosters links within and beyond the school to exchange ideas and resources (ACT)	Implement a proactive approach based on restorative principles that supports positive relationships within the College community (NT)	Actively encourage and promote opportunities for a diverse range of students to have authentic leadership experiences (VIC)
<b>Leadership requirements</b>	<p>Demonstrated high-level capabilities in self-organisation, adaptability, initiative, innovation, together with a high degree of motivation to improve outcomes for students. (TAS)</p> <p>Provides collaborative leadership for the ongoing development of students in the senior school and positive culture that promotes the school values of responsibility,</p>	<p>Encourage and empower others to take responsibility for participative planning and implementation (ACT)</p> <p>Sound knowledge of and commitment to our Catholic faith and mission in Catholic education (NSW)</p>	<p>Strong interpersonal skills and ability to work effectively in a dynamic team (NT)</p> <p>Creating and demonstrating personal vision, giving expression to the philosophy and strategy of the College (TAS)</p>

Government	Catholic	Independent
respect, resilience and learning for all students (SA)		

There were 46 requirements that were not codable into the six domains. These primarily involved having teacher/formal qualifications such as “An appropriate level of professional qualification both formal and informal and/or relevant experience” or low-level requirements related to school administrative function such as “Wear name badge and staff ID at all times”. The requirements were not coded into any domain. Some competencies or practices listed were multi-barrelled and therefore could have been coded in more than one domain. In these cases, an on-balance judgment was utilised to determine the most appropriate domain to code the practice/competency.

There was little-to-no explicit mention of First Nations people, including any requirements for teaching with cultural responsiveness both for curriculum and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students or colleagues. Throughout this analysis and coding, there were only two mentions and these related to First Nations students. The one exception to this was a position description from the Northern Territory for an Indigenous Students Coordinator. Likewise, disability and inclusion was mentioned only three times, one occurrence in New South Wales (independent school), one in Tasmania (Catholic school) and one in Victoria (independent school).

Position descriptions from Queensland were considered as a case study to expand the coding frame into relevant themes emerging within the six domains, as will be described in the following section. As such, 55 position descriptions from Queensland were analysed against the coding frame, compared with 46 position descriptions that represented all other jurisdictions and sectors across Australia.

Overall, the six domains did not statistically vary (chi-squared statistic not significant) between the Queensland position descriptions and the other sectors and jurisdictions from around Australia (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). Similarly, the descriptors outlining the competencies or practices tended to be consistent between the Queensland sample and other jurisdictions, indicating that the Queensland thematic findings are likely representative of middle leaders around the country.

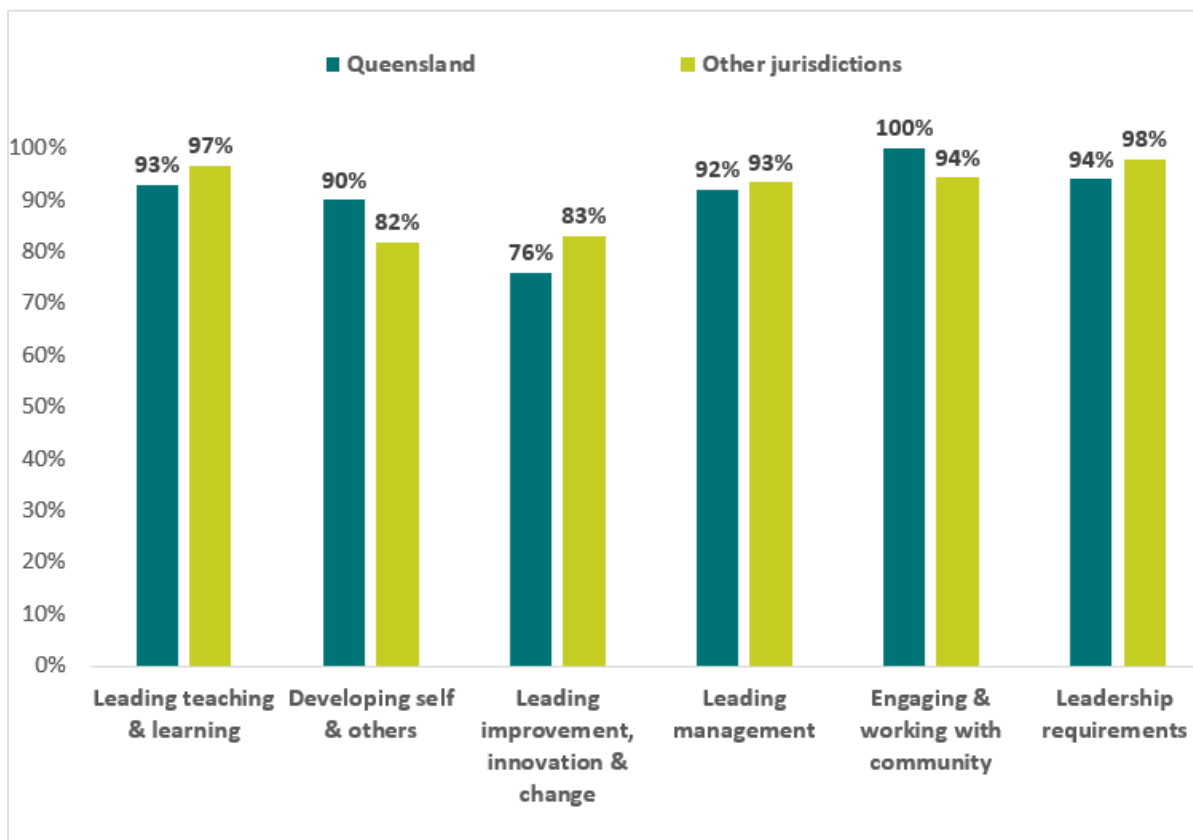


Figure 15: Percentage of analysed position descriptions featuring Principal Standard key domains

## 9.1 Thematic analysis of position descriptions: Queensland case study

**This section describes the findings from the position description analysis of 55 position descriptions of middle leaders' roles in government, independent and Catholic schools working in primary, secondary and combined schools in Queensland. Stand-alone early childhood centres were not present in this analysis as no examples of position descriptions were provided by return email or found on Seek during the search period.**

Both the government and Catholic sectors relied on a common understanding of middle leader roles and, as such, patterns were clearly established, in part by the State School Teachers' Certified Agreement (The State of Queensland (Department of Education), 2022) for the government sector and by the Catholic Employing Authorities Single Enterprise Collective Agreement (Diocesan Schools of Queensland 2019-2023, 2019) for the Catholic sector. While enterprise agreements exist for different school systems within the independent sector – for example the Queensland Anglican Schools Enterprise Agreement (Queensland Anglican Schools Enterprise Agreement, 2018) and the Queensland Lutheran Schools Single Enterprise Agreement 2020 (Lutheran Education Queensland, 2020) – no collective enterprise agreement exists for independent schools and it was therefore unclear whether this sector had a common, formal definition of middle leadership. Despite this, similar themes in the skills, competencies, attributes and practices recurred across all three sectors.

Of the 55 position descriptions analysed, 1,088 skills, competencies, attributes and practices required of a middle leader were listed in the documentation. These were coded using the five professional practices of the Principal Standard and leadership requirements. A thematic analysis was then

undertaken to ascertain how closely the skills, competencies, attributes and practices aligned with the Principal Standard. While there were many similarities (and each professional practice of the Principal Standard was clearly represented), as might be expected considering middle leaders bridge the divide between teachers and the most senior leaders, there were differences between the Principal Standard and the middle leadership position descriptions.

### Leading teaching & learning

Nearly all position descriptions included aspects of *leading teaching and learning* in their requirements for middle leaders (100% government, 81% Catholic, 92% independent and 92.5% total across all sectors), examples of which are shown in **Error! Reference source not found.** Of the 1,088 skills, competencies, attributes and practices identified under the Queensland analysis, *leading teaching and learning* constituted 21% (24% government, 18% Catholic, and 20% independent) and four main themes emerged:

- vision and planning for improved educational outcomes
- implementation, evaluation and improvement
- student academic progress
- research and expertise.

There was also clear representation of the seven Teacher Standards. These included an additional focus on leading planning of teaching and learning, and utilising professional knowledge to lead and support teachers.

Table 17: Leading teaching and learning examples from Queensland position descriptions, by sector

	Government	Catholic	Independent
<b>Vision and planning for improved educational outcomes</b>	<p>Demonstrated capacity to provide curriculum leadership leading to the achievement of quality learning outcomes for all students</p> <p>Provide professional expertise, leadership and support to school communities and networks in the development and implementation of plans, programs, and procedures to assist students in achieving positive educational, developmental and lifelong learning outcomes</p>	<p>Work with the Principal and Leadership Team in establishing, implementing and reviewing teaching and learning programs within the school's strategic directions</p> <p>Leading the overall coordination of designated curriculum areas taught in the school</p> <p>Assist the Principal to develop and implement high quality learning and teaching programs</p>	<p>Support, in close consultation with Curriculum Leaders, the development of outstanding curriculum programs, resources, learning experiences and teaching practices consistent with the School's Vision and Values</p> <p>Develop, plan, implement and evaluate curriculum and teaching plans with lessons designed to meet the educational standards of the school's young people</p>

	Government	Catholic	Independent
	Focus on educational leadership, participating in delivering the vision of State Schools Division		Demonstrated capacity to provide curriculum leadership leading to the achievement of quality learning outcomes for all students.
<b>Implementation, evaluation and improvement</b>	<p>Lead and model pedagogical reform/development activities, resulting in improved pedagogical or literacy and numeracy outcomes for students</p> <p>Lead the development, implementation and review of teaching and learning strategies in targeted programs aligned to priorities</p>	<p>Coordination of assessment, moderation and reporting programs, and the keeping of appropriate records</p> <p>Coordinating the program's evaluation and review</p> <p>Facilitate effective pedagogy</p> <p>Support appropriate assessment, reporting and evaluation processes</p> <p>Success as a classroom teacher</p>	<p>Teach classes as required, modelling excellence in teaching practice</p> <p>Ensure a planning process exists in all subjects, which documents a set of learning experiences and diagnostic, formative and summative assessment</p> <p>Oversee all the quality assurance processes required for implementation of Year 11 and 12 subjects</p>
<b>Student academic progress</b>	Collaborating with the Head of Campus to further develop curriculum offerings in response to monitoring and reviewing student progress and needs	<p>Support high expectations and standards and the systematic monitoring of student learning</p> <p>Supervising the quality of student learning through analysis of student performance data and addressing areas of concern through appropriate interventions.</p>	<p>Be passionate about facilitating and supporting student education pathways</p> <p>Monitor performance of cohorts and individuals in every subject in the Faculty</p>
<b>Research and expertise</b>	*	Keeping abreast of developments within the area of responsibility through on-going	A high level of pedagogical expertise in a classroom context and knowledge of andragogy

Government	Catholic	Independent
	<p>professional reading and research, and providing for the professional learning of staff in line with these developments</p> <p>The application of contemporary learning and teaching research and data analysis to classroom practice through whole-school professional development</p> <p>Ability to analyse school curriculum data to determine areas of success and areas for improvement and to develop plans to address these</p>	<p>is expected as well as the ability to build trusting relationships</p> <p>An understanding of the pedagogical and contemporary approaches to literacy and numeracy to equip students with the skills to navigate the fast-paced evolving world their generation will contribute to</p>

\* No representation present in data

## Developing self & others

Almost all position descriptions included requirements relating to *developing self and others* (100% government, 87.5% Catholic, 77% independent and 91% total), examples of which are presented in **Error! Reference source not found.** Of the 1,088 skills, competencies, attributes and practices listed, *developing self and others* constituted 9% (12% government, 13% Catholic and 6% independent) and the themes were clearly divided into *developing self* and *developing others*.

Both the higher career stages of the Teacher Standards and the Principal Standard emphasise the importance of personal professional development and of developing others. As such, the coding for middle leadership roles reflects the interplay between the two. As far as the position description analysis, middle leaders included aspects of both implementing established professional development for teachers, as well as leading and shaping professional development within the school.

Table 18: Developing self and others examples from Queensland position descriptions, by sector

	Government	Catholic	Independent
<b>Developing self</b>	Participate in relevant professional development, and prepare and implement professional	Professional activity through membership of professional associations	Committing to personal and professional growth including leadership development

	Government	Catholic	Independent
	and personal skill development programs and in service activities for administrators, teachers and parents.  Actively participate in lifelong learning and ongoing professional development	and on-going professional development  Contribute to a culture of reflection, self-review and improvement	Actively participating in required and appropriate professional development  Exhibit ongoing professional growth on a personal level and for the benefit of the school community
<b>Developing others</b>	Build leadership capacity by providing teachers with professional development and by promoting evidence-based communities of practice  Develop teacher capability and provide professional development that is needs based and provides on-going support for teachers  Provide professional development to the school and cluster in relation to teaching priorities/programs of the school	Providing professional development and monitoring improvement of teachers' professional practice in areas of identified need in conjunction with Senior Leadership  Providing for the induction of beginning teachers and their on-going mentoring programs in collaboration with Senior Leadership personnel and other Curriculum Leaders	Encourage and provide opportunities for all teachers to enhance teaching and learning through building school's capacity  Experience in harnessing the experience of the teaching team and developing a results-focused and collaborative culture  Demonstrate skills of leading the professional development of educators through formal and informal strategies

## Leading improvement, innovation & change

Approximately three quarters of the Queensland position descriptions included *leading improvement, innovation and change* requirements (100% government, 37.5% Catholic, 77% independent, and 76% total across all sectors). Of the 1,088 skills, competencies, attributes and practices listed, *leading improvement, innovation and change* constituted 11% (19% government, 2% Catholic and 8% independent).

There were four themes that emerged in *leading improvement, innovation and change*, examples of which are presented in **Error! Reference source not found.:**

- a whole-of-school approach
- change management and innovation
- leading with strategy



- promoting school reputation.

These themes varied and, in some cases, could also have applied to other domains of the Principal Standard. For example, the examples coded to *promoting school reputation* could also align with *leading management*. Similarly, *whole-of-school approach* and *leading with strategy* could align conceptually with *leadership requirements*.

It was also clear that the language relating to *change management and innovation* tended to be non-specific and difficult to quantify (e.g. 'be futures oriented').

Table 19: Leading improvement, innovation and change examples from Queensland position descriptions, by sector

	Government	Catholic	Independent
<b>Whole-of-school approach</b>	Capacity to provide leadership that enables the effective delivery of whole-of-school educational programs and services that support the inclusion of all students  Assume a lead role within the school leadership team with the development and implementation of strategies relating to targets relevant to each school location	Ability to analyse whole school educational data to determine areas of success and areas for improvement and to develop plans to address these	*
<b>Change management and innovation</b>	Be futures oriented and strategic  Capacity for leading and managing change within the school environment and school community	*	Demonstrated change management and school improvement skills  Demonstrated creative and innovative learning design skills that focus on personalisation, engagement, and mastery and the ability to inspire others to grow their skills in these areas

	Government	Catholic	Independent
<b>Leading with strategy</b>	Capacity to use strategic thinking and analytical skills to influence the educational agenda for state schooling  Work collaboratively with teachers and provide experience to Heads of Program positions by identifying resources and strategies to deliver outcomes	*	Promote and integrate the School's strategic principles and goals into an annual operational plan and on-going programs  Proven strategic vision and capacity to set goals, build a common approach and deliver quality outcomes, ideally in an educational setting
<b>Promoting school reputation</b>	*	*	Be involved in the direct promotion of the School  Representing the public face of the Senior School at public events and school functions with the appropriate presentation and manner

\* No representation present in data, however left in as was a theme identified in other jurisdictions

## Leading management

More than 90% of Queensland position descriptions included *leading management* requirements (100% government, 87.5% Catholic, 84.5% independent, and 92.5% total across all sectors). Of the 1,088 coded items, *leading management* constituted 10% (7.5% government, 11% Catholic, and 20% independent), examples of which are shown in **Error! Reference source not found..** Key themes related to:

- overseeing administration and operations
- managing programs and projects
- managing resources
- understanding legislation and policy.

Table 20: Leading management examples from Queensland position descriptions, by sector

	Government	Catholic	Independent
<b>Overseeing administration and operations</b>	<p>Balance the ethical issues of privacy and confidentiality for each student with the appropriateness of sharing information with others and maintain a comprehensive and professional record keeping system that complies with policy and legal requirements of parental and legal access to official records.</p> <p>Operational organisation including the scheduling of classes through the daily timetable.</p>	<p>Assist in the enrolment process in line with appropriate policy and resources</p> <p>Organising pastoral activities for the group including camps, retreats, etc. and assisting with the organisation by other personnel of activities which enhance the informal curriculum</p>	<p>Organise Academic Assemblies (including Honours Assemblies) and manage the allocation of Academic Pockets</p> <p>Management of activities associated with teaching e.g. Academic Progress Meetings (Years 6-12), text issues, schedules for competitions, meetings, assessment, stationery requirements and reporting</p> <p>Prepare Teacher Duty roster and supervisions associated with tests and external assessment and mock block in liaison with the Daily Organiser</p>
<b>Managing programs and projects</b>	<p>Capacity to develop and implement student support programs and services for students with high support needs that reflect best practice and that align with departmental policies and procedures</p> <p>Lead and support specific projects within the school community to operationalise the development, implementation and evaluation of the</p>	<p>Ability to coordinate and manage</p> <p>Coordinating the designated program in the school</p>	<p>Management of the Senior School reporting program</p> <p>Being an effective administrator and program manager, including attention to detail in communication with colleagues, students and parents</p> <p>Excellent organisational and time management skills and experience in managing complex</p>

	Government	Catholic	Independent
	initiative at the school level		projects within a school environment.
<b>Managing resources</b>	<p>Manage resources to achieve goals</p> <p>Capacity to manage effectively human, financial and physical resources to deliver high quality outcomes</p> <p>Demonstrated competency and capacity to effectively manage the use of resources to identify needs and opportunities and to develop innovative education practice</p>	<p>Managing financial and material resources within the area of responsibility including formulating of budgets and expending allocated funds</p> <p>Advocate for effective human, financial and material resourcing within the allocated curriculum component of the school budget</p> <p>Develop, maintain and supervise the curriculum budget</p>	<p>Manage human, financial and capital resources prudently and in keeping with College procedures and policies</p> <p>Make recommendations for the purchasing of resources and manage allocated budgets</p> <p>Maintain fiscal accountability including preparation of budget submissions</p>
<b>Understanding legislation and policy</b>	<p>Understand the legislation and policies that impact on schooling</p> <p>Consequently, to be able to make informed decisions quickly and effectively, a good knowledge of school policies, procedures and activities is essential.</p>	<p>Coordinating the development of work program(s) according to national, state and local requirements</p>	<p>Be informed of responsibilities in relation to student protection, including but not limited to, attending all mandatory Student Protection training and being familiar with relevant school policies</p> <p>Follow all legislative requirements and school policies relating to student protection</p> <p>Understanding of legislative requirements as they related to child protection, privacy, and WHS</p>

## Engaging & working with the community

All position descriptions included aspects of *engaging and working with the community* and examples can be found in **Error! Reference source not found.** Of the 1,088 skills, competencies, attributes and practices coded, *engaging and working with the community* constituted 21.5% (20% government, 21.5% Catholic, and 23% independent). Five themes emerged in the coding for this topic:

- student wellbeing
- staff and student wellbeing
- working with parents
- engaging with the community
- promoting inclusivity and diversity.

While staff wellbeing is coded to *developing others* by the Principal Standard, student wellbeing is coded within *engaging and working with community*. According to the Principal Standard descriptor for *engaging and working with community*, leaders “create an ethos of respect taking account of the spiritual, moral, social and physical health and wellbeing of students”. Middle leadership requirements containing both staff and student wellbeing programs were coded within this domain as per the examples in the table.

Table 21: Engaging and working with the community examples from Queensland position descriptions, by sector

	Government	Catholic	Independent
<b>Student wellbeing</b>	<p>Collaboratively negotiate, develop and implement programs for students that have a focus on preventative and early intervention strategies; are responsive to identified personal, social, emotional and educational needs; and aim to foster resilience and personal skills development.</p> <p>Advocate, provide counselling, psychoeducational assessment and individual student support, recommendations and advice to students, teachers and parents concerning educational,</p>	<p>Coordinating the pastoral care of the designated group of students</p> <p>Empathy with young people and an ability to relate positively with them</p> <p>Monitoring the behaviour of the student group in accord with the school's behaviour management policy and procedures</p> <p>Monitoring the holistic development of students through observing their academic, social, spiritual and physical well-being, and</p>	<p>Proven ability to organise, motivate and relate to young people</p> <p>Actively encouraging the development of each student's special talents and skills as individuals, to enhance their ability to reach their maximum potential for God</p> <p>Ensure student wellbeing is an integral part of all student learning and development activities</p> <p>Have high expectations for what students are capable of, both academically and behaviourally</p>

	Government	Catholic	Independent
	behavioural, career development, mental health and family issues.	addressing areas of concern through appropriate interventions	Have a clear focus on student learning and well-being in and beyond the classroom.
<b>Staff and student wellbeing</b>	<p>Coordinate wellbeing programs and strategies designed to enhance staff and student wellbeing</p> <p>Initiate, develop, maintain and promote effective multiagency and multidisciplinary networks that coordinate a holistic response to complex educational issues and student and staff wellbeing issues</p>	Pastoral care of staff engaged in the designated area(s) of curriculum responsibility	*
<b>Working with parents/carers</b>	Work as part of a multidisciplinary team and facilitate effective working relationships and partnerships with parents, school personnel and external support agencies in order to provide a comprehensive support, case management and referral service that optimises students' access and engagement in educational programs.	<p>Regularly communicating with stakeholders (students, parents, school personnel) to affirm student growth and to collaborate in addressing issues of concern</p> <p>Develop partnerships and ensure appropriate communication with parents</p>	<p>Supervise the provision of information to parents about faith, engagement, wellbeing, and achievement matters in a timely and effective manner</p> <p>Facilitates meetings, and where necessary meet with parents to help resolve issues that arise in the support of a holistic Secondary education</p>
<b>Engaging with the community</b>	Develop and implement community engagement strategies and programs with other organisations, local businesses and	Regularly communicating with stakeholders about issues of legitimate interest and/or concern	<p>Strengthening community partnerships</p> <p>Assist with marketing opportunities as they pertain to promoting</p>

	Government	Catholic	Independent
	not for profit organisations	Engage in processes to build community	your subjects to students, parents, prospective families, and the community  Networking in the local business community to communicate the schools careers engagement programme and feedback to the school the various opportunities for students of the school
<b>Promoting inclusivity and diversity</b>	Embed socially just practices in daily school life	Promote preferential options for the poor and marginalised  Support opportunities for Christian community service and social justice  Develop programs, in conjunction with Learning Support staff, that provide effective assistance to students with specific educational needs  Ensure that inclusive practice is enacted through all teaching and learning	Experience and a passion for working with disengaged youth  Ideally have experience with students with social-emotional challenges and knowledge of the senior school system  Ensure the support of students with individual additional needs  Being patient in dealing with students of differing abilities

\* No representation present in data

### Leadership requirements

Nearly all position descriptions included examples of *leadership requirements* (96% government, 100% Catholic, 92% independent, and 96% total across all sectors), shown in **Error! Reference source not found.** Of the 1,088 coded skills, knowledge, attributes and practices listed, *leadership requirements* constituted 24% (11.5% government, 15% Catholic, and 11% independent).

Key themes that emerged included:



- personal leadership characteristics
- leadership skills
- ethical values and a mission/ethos/faith driven perspective of leadership
- teamwork and collaboration
- performance management.

Arguably, performance management could relate to *leading management*.

Table 22: Leadership requirements examples from Queensland position descriptions, by sector

	Government	Catholic	Independent
<b>Personal leadership characteristics</b>	Capacity to use strategic thinking and analytical skills to contribute to educational outcomes at the school level	Capacity to use strategic thinking and analytical skills to contribute to educational outcomes at the school level	<p>A deep knowledge of yourself as a leader and your values, strengths, and areas for growth and how they impact others</p> <p>Personal capacities to effectively lead staff including the ability to enhance staff wellbeing, effectively use change management strategies, and engage in collaborative reflection, learning and action</p> <p>Key to be self-motivated but also inspire and motivate young people to dream about future possibilities</p>
<b>Leadership skills</b>	*	Leadership potential - appropriate levels of vision, initiative, organisational and communication skill and ability to accept responsibility	<p>Initiative, creativity, and adaptability and be able to work autonomously and as part of a Team</p> <p>Strong leadership and interpersonal skills and proven ability to lead</p>

	Government	Catholic	Independent
		Leadership capacity - a broad vision that extends beyond subject boundaries, initiative, perseverance, acceptance of responsibility, effective organisational skill, ability to communicate appropriately and ability to foster cooperation and collegiality	and serve a team to achieve and succeed desired outcome  Demonstrated qualities of confidence, flexibility, teamwork, resilience, and perseverance to grow the capacity of an effective learning community will also be expected
<b>Teamwork and collaboration</b>	<p>Work with other leaders to prioritise the teaching of programs within the school's curriculum framework</p> <p>This role necessitates intentional collaboration and consultation between fellow Heads of Year, Guidance Officer, Heads of Department, School Based Youth Health Nurse, Chaplain, and Deputy Principals and an ability and willingness to operate as part of a team within the Wellbeing Hub</p> <p>Demonstrated strong interpersonal skills and the capacity to develop and sustain productive relationships within and beyond the school community</p>	<p>Engaging in professional discourse with staff on an individual and departmental basis through regular meetings</p> <p>Collaborating with other Curriculum Leaders, teaching staff and appropriate Senior Leadership personnel to review curriculum frameworks and plan future directions</p> <p>Work in close collaboration with other leadership team members to form an effective team</p>	<p>Proven interpersonal qualities and skills necessary for collaboration and cooperation with the School Council, members of staff, parents, students and other members of the school community</p> <p>Collaborate with other members of the school leadership team on curriculum matters</p> <p>A team player who is respectful to colleagues</p> <p>Leading cooperatively</p>

	Government	Catholic	Independent
<b>Performance management**</b>	<p>Set high standards for student and staff performance</p> <p>Setting high standards for staff performance and ensuring school priorities articulated in the Annual Improvement Plan and WMETC Action Plans are implemented</p> <p>Line management of teaching staff, including vocational trainers</p>	<p>Supervision of teachers engaged in the area(s) of curriculum responsibility</p> <p>Managing the performance of teaching staff through on-going professional discourse, facilitation of reflective teaching practice, and formal and informal goal-setting and appraisal (Note cross over with Developing self and others)</p> <p>Supervision of teachers engaged in pastoral care within the area of pastoral responsibility</p>	<p>Evaluate and develop teacher and aide performance</p> <p>Lead and foster a collaborative, high performing, service oriented and multi-disciplinary team</p> <p>Manage underperformance, misconduct, and behavioural breaches within the department and consult with Human Resources as relevant</p>
<b>Ethical values and mission/ ethos/faith/ vision driven perspective of leadership</b>	<p>Demonstrated capacity to develop and maintain an organisational culture based on ethical professional and personal behaviours and corporate values</p>	<p>Understanding of and support for the ethos and mission of the school</p> <p>A clear vision of and support for the school's mission and its underlying values and ethos</p> <p>Coordinating the work of staff engaged in the holistic development of the designated group of students in the light of the values and ethos of the school</p>	<p>Capacity to provide Christian Leadership to all members of the College community</p> <p>Be committed to Christian leadership through vision, service and action</p> <p>Be a committed Christian, comfortable with sharing your faith</p>

\* No representation present in data

\*\* Performance management could also apply to leading management

# 10. Conclusion

This systematic literature review and document analysis collected, analysed, and synthesised national and international literature relating to middle leadership. It presented a detailed discussion of middle leaders, including the key characteristics of Australian middle leaders and contextual factors affecting Australian middle leadership. It investigated a wide range of theory-based and original research based on a systematic search for peer-reviewed and grey literature. In doing so, it synthesised relevant national and international professional standards, previous systematic literature reviews, key theoretical models and frameworks, professional development programs, position descriptions and policy documents from government bodies and institutions, with the aim of providing insights into the professional competencies, skills, attributes and practices required to thrive and work effectively as a middle leader.

The findings indicate that middle leadership differs from principal leadership. The key domains from the Principal Standard were evident throughout this analysis, although slightly adapted: *leading teaching and learning*; *developing self and others*; *leading improvement*; *leading management*; *working with the community*; and *leadership requirements* (consisting of both *leadership skills and knowledge* and *leadership attributes*). While these domains are relevant to middle leaders, their content, context and application differs, especially for First Nations middle leaders.

Middle leaders are more likely to focus on engaging the internal school community, as well as the external one, and less likely to be able to lead innovation and change across the school. They also face several challenges that are unique to their location in the leadership hierarchy, including the need to operate in an environment of conflicting priorities and expectations, characterised by the tension between *leading learning* and *leading within the school*.

This review and analysis builds on the available literature relating to middle leaders in Australian education, by extending and contextualising the middle leadership role based on various analyses, grounded in theory and practice. It hopes to provide a valuable, informative foundation for the draft of the Australian Professional Standards for Middle Leaders.

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# Appendices

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## 10.1 Appendix 1: Contextual factors affecting Australian middle leaders

While middle leaders require a vast toolkit of skills in leading from the middle, the ability to adapt this skillset and the judgement to select an appropriate technique in response to the situation cannot be underestimated. Dinham et al. (2013, cited in Boyd, 2022) described the context of a school as ‘...unique and of critical importance. The size of the school, the age of students, its traditions, location and other community factors mean that the standard must be applicable to the diverse nature of Australian schools’. This is supported by Lipscombe et al. (2021), who argue that middle leadership should be conceptualised as a social construct that changes depending on both the individual and the context.

For example, school size plays an important role in leadership, influencing leadership structure, actions and priorities (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2006). A large school will, necessarily, require a more distributed leadership model (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2006). School performance and student outcomes are also likely to influence school priorities and how leaders discharge their duties; a school that is producing poor student outcomes will necessarily be concerned with different focuses than a school with well-performing students (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2006).

Likewise, middle leaders must be able to adapt processes and procedures where necessary to suit individual and community requirements. For example, rigid bureaucratic structures can be inappropriate for First Nations leaders in school settings, and school leadership needs to be flexible while being context-bound; understanding and recognising intercultural processes will aid in the advancement of First Nations teachers to middle leadership (Frawley et al., 2010).

Early childhood settings require different application of leadership skills. Teachers in this sector need to demonstrate close, reciprocal relationships with children and families; collaborate closely and teach as part of a team; engage with working groups; support children in transitioning smoothly between years (including into school); and develop and implement learning programs that cater to children who attend the service full time, as well as those who attend part time (Mulhearn, 2018).

The early childhood sector in Australia also uses several key terms that are distinct from schooling at other years, several of which can be found in **Error! Reference source not found.**

*Table 23: Key terms and definitions from early childhood settings (Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) & Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), n.d.)*

Key term	Definition
Agency	Being able to make choices and decisions, to influence events and to have an impact on one's world
Co-construct	Learning takes place as children interact with educators and other children as they work together in partnership
Curriculum	All the interactions, experiences, activities, routines, and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children's learning and development

Key term	Definition
<b>Intentional teaching</b>	Involves educators being deliberate, purposeful, and thoughtful in their decisions and actions. Intentional teaching is the opposite of teaching by rote
<b>Learning</b>	A natural process of exploration that children engage in from birth as they expand their intellectual, physical, social, emotional, and creative capacities. Early learning is closely linked to early development
<b>Pedagogy</b>	Early childhood educators' professional practice, especially those aspects that involve building and nurturing relationships, curriculum decision-making, teaching and learning
<b>Pedagogies</b>	Practices that are intended to promote children's learning
<b>Play-based learning</b>	A context for learning through which children organise and make sense of their social worlds, as they engage actively with people, objects and representations
<b>Transitions</b>	The process of moving between home and childhood setting, between a range of different early childhood settings, or from childhood to full-time school
<b>Active learning environment</b>	An active learning environment in which children are encouraged to explore and interact with the environment to construct meaning and knowledge through their experiences, social interactions and negotiations with others. In an active learning environment, educators play a crucial role of encouraging children to discover deeper meaning and make connections among ideas and between concepts, processes and representations
<b>Dispositions for learning</b>	Enduring habits of mind and actions, and tendencies to respond in characteristic ways to situations, for example, maintaining an optimistic outlook, being willing to persevere, approaching new experiences with confidence

In order to adapt fully and appropriately to varying contexts, several environmental components must be in place. As cited in Lipscombe et al. (2021), factors including (but not limited to): principal support (Farchi & Tubin, 2019; Hirsh & Bergmo-Prvulovic, 2019; Javadi et al., 2017; Lipscombe et al., 2020); school culture and relationships (Grootenboer et al., 2015; Irvine & Brundrett, 2016; Leithwood, 2016);

teacher collaboration (Lipscombe et al., 2020); professional trust (Edwards-Groves et al., 2016); and teaching and learning reforms (Bryant, 2019) heavily influence middle leaders' context, and their associated ability to lead rather than manage.

While middle leaders' roles and contexts vary greatly, they are crucial in enacting change in schools (Collier et al., 2002). In particular, their ability to play key linking roles between teachers and the most senior levels of school leadership render them uniquely positioned to facilitate a culture of collaboration that leads to improved teaching and learning, positively influencing both teachers' work and student outcomes (Gurr, 2023b).

### Characteristics of Australian schools

**The characteristics of Australian schools provide valuable information about middle leadership, as they directly influence the requirements of effective leadership and the way in which resources, such as standards, are applied by each middle leader. This section presents the key characteristics of Australian schools, including school sectors, locations and sizes.**

*[The context for school leadership is]... unique and of critical importance. The size of the school, the age of students, its traditions, location and other community factors mean that the standard must be applicable to the diverse nature of Australian schools' (Dinham et al., 2013 cited in Boyd 2022).*

In terms of sector, 62% of Australia's schools are government-run, 18% are Catholic and 19% are independent. As might be expected, schools' location – which varies considerably depending on the state or territory – influences middle leadership context.

The Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) divides Australia into five levels of geographic remoteness - Major Cities, Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote (**Error! Reference source not found.**). These classifications are calculated using road distances between localities and service centres of different sizes.

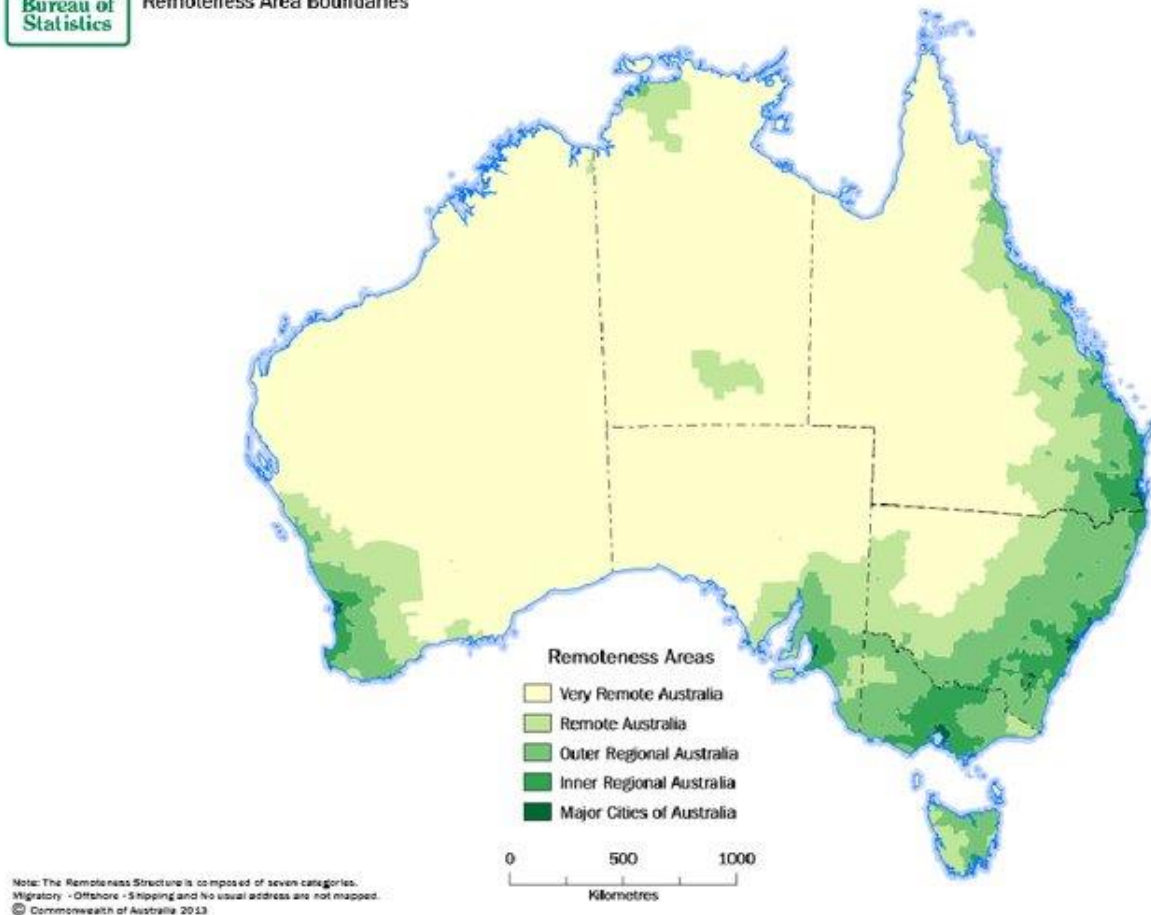


Figure 16: ABS remoteness structure map of Australia (ABS, 2011)

According to the 2021 ACARA data for government, independent and Catholic schools in Australia (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2021b), at a national level, 54% of schools are located in major cities, 24% in inner regions, 15% in outer regions and 6% in either remote or very remote locations.

At the state and territory level, in Queensland, 42% of schools are in major cities, and in Tasmania and the Northern Territory, no schools are located in major cities. Schools are less disparate in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia, where approximately 60% of schools are located in major cities. In the ACT, 99% of schools are located in a major city (Canberra).

In Queensland, 26% of schools are classified as inner regional, 22% as outer regional and 9% as either remote or very remote. Tasmania's schools are mainly inner regional (60%) or outer regional (35%), with only 4% classified as remote or very remote. Meanwhile, 47% of schools in the Northern Territory are classified as very remote, 21% as remote and 33% as outer regional (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2021a). This information is also presented in **Error! Reference source not found.**

With regard to major cities, Victoria and New South Wales share similar location profiles, with inner regional schools comprising 30% and 25%, respectively, and outer regional schools comprising 9% and 13%, respectively. Very few schools in these states are considered remote or very remote.

South Australia and Western Australia also share similar location profiles, with 16% and 10% of schools, respectively, classified as inner regional, 22% and 12%, respectively, classified as outer regional, and 9% and 15%, respectively, classified as either remote or very remote.

These figures are particularly important when considering inequities in student outcomes, especially for students from lower sociodemographic profiles (Hare, 2022b), who are estimated to demonstrate as much as a five-year gap in educational achievement by year nine, compared to their wealthier counterparts (Hare, 2022a). Considering that differences in educational achievement also exist for First Nations' students, and rural and regional students, the fact that 45% of Australian student enrolments are in regional or remote areas is hugely significant.

Table 24: Australian schools' location data, by percentage & school count\*

Jurisdiction	Major city	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote	Very remote
<b>Queensland</b>	42% (758)	26% (469)	22% (395)	5% (90)	4% (78)
<b>ACT</b>	99% (135)	1% (1)	-	-	-
<b>New South Wales</b>	60% (1882)	26% (810)	13% (422)	2% (48)	1% (16)
<b>Northern Territory</b>	-	-	33% (63)	21% (40)	47% (90)
<b>South Australia</b>	58% (414)	16% (113)	20% (141)	4% (28)	3% (24)
<b>Tasmania</b>	60% (157)	36% (93)	3% (9)	1% (3)	-
<b>Victoria</b>	60% (1373)	30% (688)	9% (215)	0.2% (5)	-
<b>Western Australia</b>	62% (697)	10% (115)	12% (135)	7% (83)	8% (89)
<b>National average (mean)</b>	54%	24%	15%	3%	3%

\* Percentage tally may not add to 100% due to rounding

It stands to reason that the larger a school is in terms of student enrolments, the higher the number of middle leaders (Stokes & Brunzell, 2019). In Australia, secondary schools, combined schools and special schools have a higher proportion of leaders than primary schools, which is partly explained by 1) the tendency for secondary schools in particular to be larger than primary schools and 2) the greater need for faculty leaders or heads of department in secondary schools due to a wider offering of subject specialisations (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2021a).

The below graph shows the national teaching staff distribution within states and territories (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2021b). Queensland teachers represent 22% of the national total, and 18% work in Western Australia and South Australia, and Tasmania. Meanwhile, more than half of Australia's 336,408 teaching staff work in either Victoria or New South Wales. The Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory together account for the remaining 5%.

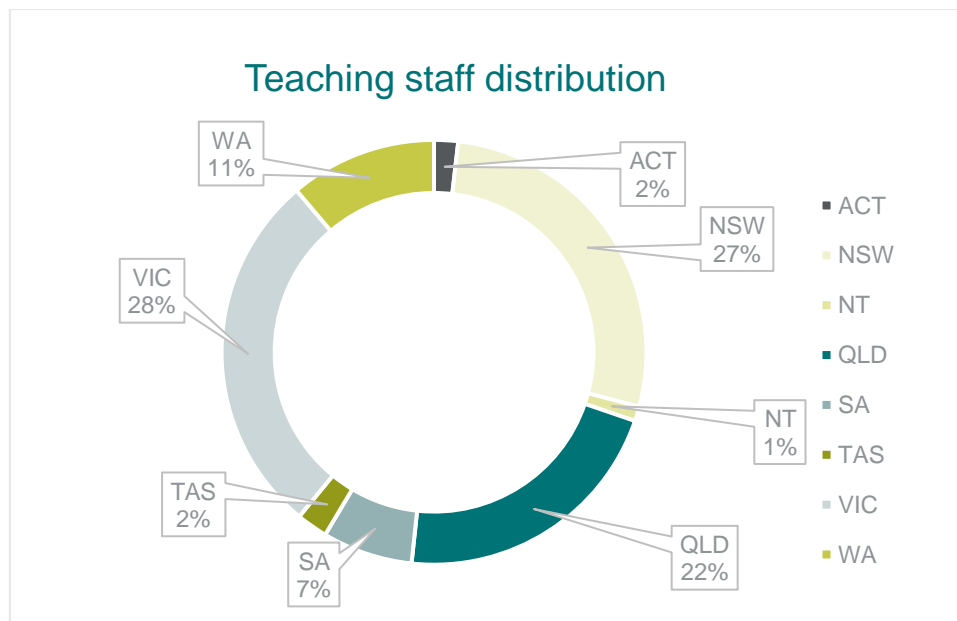


Figure 17: National teaching staff distribution by states and territories

The size of schools around the country in terms of teaching staff and student enrolments is shown in **Error! Reference source not found..** The data shows that primary schools tend to have a greater student to staff ratio, while combined and special schools tend to have lower ratio of students to staff.

The average (mean) size of schools around the country can be considered in terms of teaching staff numbers and student enrolments, which based on the ACARA data tended to be:

- In primary schools:
  - average teachers range from 17 per school in New South Wales to 29 per school in the Australian Capital Territory
  - average enrolments range from 251 per school in Tasmania to 377 per school in the Australian Capital Territory.
- In secondary schools:
  - average teachers range from 46 per school in Northern Territory to 83 per school in Victoria
  - average enrolments range from 512 per school in Northern Territory to 917 per school in Queensland.
- In combined schools:
  - average teachers range from 13 per school in Northern Territory to 93 per school in Victoria
  - average enrolments range from 125 per school in Northern Territory to 1026 per school in the Australian Capital Territory.
- In special schools:
  - average teachers range from 11 per school in New South Wales to 32 per school in Victoria
  - average enrolments range from 66 per school in New South Wales to 155 per school in Victoria.



Table 25: Australian school sizes (percentage of teachers and student enrolments), by school type & jurisdiction

Jurisdiction		Primary	Secondary	Combined	Special	Average (mean)
<b>Queensland</b>	Teachers	41%	30%	26%	3%	21%
	Enrolments	43%	29%	25%	1%	22%
<b>ACT</b>	Teachers	40%	29%	29%	2%	2%
	Enrolments	43%	28%	29%	1%	2%
<b>New South Wales</b>	Teachers	40%	36%	22%	3%	27%
	Enrolments	49%	33%	17%	1%	31%
<b>Northern Territory</b>	Teachers	32%	27%	37%	4%	1%
	Enrolments	39%	28%	32%	2%	1%
<b>South Australia</b>	Teachers	40%	23%	36%	2%	7%
	Enrolments	44%	22%	34%	1%	7%
<b>Tasmania</b>	Teachers	41%	29%	29%	2%	2%
	Enrolments	45%	29%	25%	1%	2%
<b>Victoria</b>	Teachers	41%	31%	24%	4%	28%
	Enrolments	46%	31%	22%	2%	25%
<b>Western Australia</b>	Teachers	43%	27%	25%	4%	11%
	Enrolments	48%	31%	22%	2%	11%
<b>National average (mean)</b>	Teachers	41%	31%	25%	3%	100%
	Enrolments	46%	30%	22%	1%	100%

These figures provide valuable context about schools around Australia; however, a hidden statistic in these results is the number of small schools – 22% percent of schools in Australia have 10 staff or fewer (2,114 out of 9,679). These schools are largely based in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria (79%, 1,671 schools) and 80% of these schools are primary schools (1,718 out of 2,114). Furthermore, this represents 28% of all Australian primary schools.

In terms of what this means for middle leadership practice, it suggests that almost one quarter of Australian teachers work in environments that will have fewer distinct layers of hierarchy and these are heavily skewed toward primary schools. This suggests, therefore, that both principals and teachers in these contexts may be required to take on responsibilities that, in larger schools, would be delegated to middle leaders.

## 10.2 Appendix 2: Theory-based literature (including reviews) analysed for this review

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publishing journal/ organisation	Document type	Country of focus/origin
<b>Allix, Nicholas</b>	2000	Transformational Leadership: Democratic or Despotic?	Educational Management and Administration	Journal article	Australia *
<b>Ashmore, James &amp; Clay, Caroline</b>	2016	The New Middle Leader's Handbook	John Catt Educational Ltd.	Book	United Kingdom*
<b>Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)</b>	2018	One Teaching Profession: Teacher Registration in Australia	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)	Report	Australia
<b>Australian Education Senior Officials Committee (AESOC)</b>	2006	Australian directions in indigenous education 2005-2008	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (Australia)	Document	Australia
<b>Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)</b>	2011	Australian Professional Standards for Teachers	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)	Document	Australia
<b>Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)</b>	2014	Australian Professional Standard for Principals	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)	Document	Australia

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publishing journal/ organisation	Document type	Country of focus/origin
<b>Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)</b>	2022	Middle Leadership in Australian Schools.	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)	Article	Australia
<b>Bat, Melodie, &amp; Shore, Sue</b>	2013	More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative; Listening differently: An exploration of grey literature about Aboriginal teacher education in the Top End of the Northern Territory	Charles Darwin University	Report	Australia
<b>Bennett, Nigel, et al.</b>	2003	The role and purpose of middle leaders in schools	National College for School Leadership	Report	Several (UK, Aus, US, Canada+)
<b>Bennett, Nigel, et al.</b>	2007	Understandings of Middle Leadership in Secondary Schools: A Review of Empirical Research	School Leadership & Management	Journal article	Several
<b>Berg, Jill; Cynthia Carver; &amp; Melinda Mangin</b>	2013	Teacher Leader Model Standards: Implications for Preparation, Policy, and Practice	Journal of Research on Leadership	Journal article	United States*
<b>Boateng, Godfred, et al.</b>	2018	Best Practices for Developing and Validating Scales for Health, Social, and Behavioral Research: A Primer	Frontiers in Public Health	Journal article	United States & Canada*
<b>Buchanan, Michael</b>	2018	Sustaining School Based Religious Education Leadership	Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education	Journal article	Australia

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publishing journal/ organisation	Document type	Country of focus/origin
<b>Buchanan, Michael; Branson, Christopher &amp; Marra, Maureen</b>	2022	Bringing purpose and peace-of-mind to the role of a Catholic school middle leader	British Journal of Religious Education	Journal article	Australia
<b>Buckskin, Peter</b>	2016	More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSI): Final Report	University of South Australia	Report	Australia
<b>Busher, High; Hammersley-Fletcher, Linda &amp; Turner, Chris</b>	2007	Making sense of middle leadership: community, power and practice	School Leadership and Management	Journal article	England & Wales
<b>Cranston, Neil</b>	2009	Middle-Level School Leaders: Understanding Their Roles and Aspirations in Australian School Leadership Today	Australian Academic Press	Book	Australia*
<b>De Nobile, John</b>	2018	Towards a theoretical model of middle leadership in schools	School Leadership & Management	Journal article	Australia*
<b>De Nobile, John</b>	2021	Researching middle leadership in schools: The state of the art	International Studies in Educational Administration	Journal article	Australia
<b>De Nobile, John &amp; Boffa, Stefan</b>	2015	The changing role of the primary coordinator in Catholic schools	Independent Education	Journal article	Australia
<b>De Nobile, John &amp; Ridden, Phil</b>	2014	Middle leaders in schools: Who are they and what do they do?	Australian Educational Leader	Journal article	Australia

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publishing journal/ organisation	Document type	Country of focus/origin
<b>De Nobile, John et al.</b>	2020	Non-Principal Leadership: An Investigation of Roles, Knowledge, Skills and Capabilities of Middle and Senior Leaders in Australian Schools	Macquarie University	Report	Australia
<b>Department of Education, State of Queensland</b>	2022	Equity and excellence: Realising the potential of every student.	Department of Education, State of Queensland	Document	Australia
<b>Department of Education Victoria</b>	2007	The Developmental Learning Framework for School Leaders	Department of Education Victoria	Report	Australia
<b>Dinham, Stephen et al.</b>	2013	The Development, Endorsement and Adoption of a National Standard for Principals in Australia	Educational Management Administration & Leadership	Journal article	Australia
<b>Drysdale, Lawrie &amp; Gurr, David</b>	2011	The Theory and Practice of Successful School Leadership in Australia	School Leadership and Management	Journal article	Australia
<b>Elliot, Kerry et al.</b>	2020	Environmental scan: Topical areas to inform a future review of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers	Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)	Document	Australia
<b>English Department for Education</b>	2020	Headteachers' Standards 2020	English Department for Education	Document	England
<b>Fleming, Peter</b>	2014	Successful Middle Leadership in Secondary Schools	Routledge	Book	United Kingdom*

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publishing journal/ organisation	Document type	Country of focus/origin
<b>Frawley, Jack &amp; Fasoli, Lyn</b>	2012	Working together: intercultural leadership capabilities for both-ways education	School Leadership & Management	Journal article	Australia
<b>General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC Scotland)</b>	2021	The Standard for Middle Leadership	General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC Scotland)	Document	Scotland
<b>General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC Scotland)</b>	2021	The Standard for Middle Leadership	General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC Scotland)	Document	Scotland
<b>Grootenboer, Peter</b>	2018	The Practices of School Middle Leadership: Leading Professional Learning	Springer, Singapore	Book	Various
<b>Grootenboer, Peter et al.</b>	2021	Middle Leaders Are Not Just Principals-in-Waiting	Australian Educational Leader	Journal article	Australia
<b>Grootenboer, Peter; Edwards-Groves, Christine; &amp; Ronnerman, Karin</b>	2020	Middle leadership in schools: A practical guide for leading and learning	Routledge	Book	Australia
<b>Grootenboer, Peter; Edwards-Groves, Christine; &amp; Ronnerman, Karin</b>	2019	Understanding Middle Leadership: Practices and Policies	School Leadership & Management	Editorial	Various
<b>Gurr, David</b>	2023	A review of research on middle leaders in schools	The University of Melbourne	Encyclopedia article	Australia*

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publishing journal/ organisation	Document type	Country of focus/origin
<b>Gurr, David &amp; Drysdale, Lawrie</b>	2012	Middle-level secondary school leaders	Journal of Educational Administration	Journal Article	Australia
<b>Gurr, David &amp; Drysdale, Lawrie</b>	2020	School leadership that matters	Leading & Managing	Journal Article	Australia
<b>Gurr, David &amp; Drysdale, Lawrie</b>	2012	Tensions and Dilemmas in Leading Australia's Schools	School Leadership & Management	Journal article	Australia
<b>Hammersley-Fletcher, Linda &amp; Strain, Michael</b>	2011	Power, Agency and Middle Leadership in English Primary Schools	British Educational Research Journal	Journal article	England
<b>Harris, Alma et al.</b>	2019	Middle Leaders and Middle Leadership in Schools: Exploring the Knowledge Base (2003–2017)	School Leadership & Management	Journal article	Various
<b>Hitt, Dallas &amp; Tucker, Pamela</b>	2016	Systematic Review of Key Leader Practices Found to Influence Student Achievement: A Unified Framework	Review of Educational Research	Journal article	United States*
<b>Ingvarson, Lawrence</b>	2013	A Review of Victoria's Developmental Learning Framework for School Leaders	Australian Council for Educational Research	Report	Australia
<b>Leading Educators</b>	2014	Teacher Leader Competency Framework	Leading Educators	Document	United States
<b>Leithwood, Kenneth</b>	2016	Department-Head Leadership for School Improvement	Leadership and Policy in Schools	Journal article	Canada*



Author(s)	Year	Title	Publishing journal/ organisation	Document type	Country of focus/origin
<b>Leithwood, Kenneth; Harris, Alma, &amp; Hopkins, David</b>	2008	Seven strong claims about successful school leadership	School Leadership and Management	Journal Article	Australia
<b>Leithwood, Kenneth &amp; Riehl, Carolyn</b>	2005	What We Know about Successful School Leadership, in A New Agenda: Directions for Research on Educational Leadership	Teachers College Press	Book chapter	Canada, United States*
<b>Leithwood, Kenneth et al.</b>	2006	Seven Strong Claims About Successful School Leadership	National College for School Leadership	Report	Canada, Wales, England*
<b>Leithwood, Kenneth et al.</b>	2020	Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited	School Leadership & Management	Journal article	Canada, Wales, England*
<b>Lipscombe, Kylie &amp; Tindall-Ford, Sharon</b>	2021	Middle leadership: A partnership in teaching and learning	Australian Educational Leader	Journal article	Australia
<b>Lipscombe, Kylie et al.</b>	2020	Middle Leading in Australian Schools: Professional Standards, Positions, and Professional Development	School Leadership & Management	Journal article	Australia
<b>Lipscombe, Kylie; Tindall-Ford, Sharon &amp; Lamanna, Jodi</b>	2021	School Middle Leadership: A Systematic Review	Educational Management Administration & Leadership	Journal article	Various
<b>Murphy, Joseph et al.</b>	2006	Learning-Centered Leadership: A Conceptual Foundation	Learning Sciences Institute.	Report	United States

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publishing journal/ organisation	Document type	Country of focus/origin
<b>National Policy Board for Educational Administration</b>	2015	Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL)	National Policy Board for Educational Administration	Document	United States
<b>Nehez, Jaana et al.</b>	2022	Middle Leaders Translating Knowledge about Improvement: Making Change in the School and Preschool Organisation	Journal of Educational Change	Journal Article	Sweden
<b>NSW Department of Education</b>	2020	School Leadership Identification Framework: Review of the Literature	NSW Department of Education School Leadership Institute	Document	Australia
<b>Pavlopoulos, Eleni</b>	2021	How to Make a Difference as a Middle Leader	Management in Education	Article	England
<b>Robinson, Viviane</b>	2023	What is distinctive about educational leadership?	International Encyclopedia of Education	Encyclopedia article	Several (New Zealand, Victoria, California, Ontario, England, Scotland, Norway)
<b>Robinson, Viviane</b>	2023	What Is Distinctive about Educational Leadership?	International Encyclopedia of Education	Encyclopedia article	New Zealand*
<b>Robinson, Viviane; Hohepa, Margie &amp; Lloyd, Claire</b>	2009	School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (BES)	New Zealand Ministry of Education	Report	New Zealand

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publishing journal/ organisation	Document type	Country of focus/origin
<b>Robinson, Viviane; Lloyd, Claire &amp; Rowe, Kenneth</b>	2008	The Impact of Leadership on Student Outcomes: An Analysis of the Differential Effects of Leadership Types	Educational Administration Quarterly	Journal article	New Zealand*
<b>School Leadership Institute (SLI)</b>	2021	School Leadership Identification Framework	NSW Department of Education	Document	Australia
<b>Sebring, Penny et al.</b>	2006	The Essential Supports for School Improvement	Consortium on Chicago School Research	Report	United States
<b>Sergiovanni, Thomas</b>	1984	Leadership and excellence in schooling	Educational Leadership	Journal Article	United States*
<b>The Institute for Education Leadership</b>	2013	The Ontario Leadership Framework	The Institute for Education Leadership	Document	Canada
<b>Trimmer, Karen; Dixon, Roselyn &amp; Guenther, John</b>	2021	School leadership and Aboriginal student outcomes: Systematic Review	Asia Pacific Journal of Education	Journal Article	Australia
<b>Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership</b>	2023	The Academy Leadership Excellence Framework	State of Victoria	Document	Australia
<b>Welsh Government</b>	2019	Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership	Welsh Government	Document	Wales

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publishing journal/ organisation	Document type	Country of focus/origin
<b>White, Peter</b>	2000	Curriculum Area Middle Managers in Victorian Secondary Schools: An Unmapped Region	Post-Script, The University of Melbourne	Journal article	Australia
<b>Wylie, Cathy &amp; McKinley, Sheridan</b>	2018	Educational Leadership Capability Framework	New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER)	Document	New Zealand

\* As country of focus was not relevant, country of origin referenced instead

### 10.3 Appendix 3: Original research literature analysed for this review

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publishing journal/ organisation	University affiliation	Country of study	Methods	Number of participants	Number of schools
<b>Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)</b>	2021	Australian Teacher Workforce Data: National Teacher Workforce Characteristics Report (AITSL)	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)	n/a	Australia	Survey	17,970	n/a
<b>Boyd, Raymond</b>	2022	Standards for Public Primary School Principals in Western Australia. An Analysis of Their Origins, Their Evolution, and Recent Related Policy Developments	The University of Western Australia	The University of Western Australia	Australia	Document analysis, interviews	n/a	n/a
<b>Brooks, Zoe &amp; Cavanagh, Rob</b>	2009	An examination of middle leadership in Western Australian secondary schools	AARE 2009 International education research conference	Curtin University of Technology	Australia	Document analysis, interviews	12	3
<b>Brown, Marie; Boyle, Bill &amp; Boyle, Trudy</b>	2000	The shared management role of the heads of	Research in Education	University of Manchester	England	Interviews	6	11

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publishing journal/ organisation	University affiliation	Country of study	Methods	Number of participants	Number of schools
<b>Brown, Marie; Rutherford, Desmond &amp; Boyle, Bill</b>	2000	Leadership for School Improvement: The Role of the Head of Department in UK Secondary Schools	School Effectiveness and School Improvement		United Kingdom	Interviews	32	n/a
<b>Bryant, Darren</b>	2019	Conditions That Support Middle Leaders' Work in Organisational and System Leadership: Hong Kong Case Studies	School Leadership and Management		Hong Kong	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>Buchanan, Michael</b>	2018	Sustaining school based religious education leadership	Discourse and Communication for Sustainable Education	Australian Catholic University	Australia	Interviews	37	n/a
<b>Busher, Hugh</b>	2005	Being a middle leader: exploring professional identities	School Leadership and Management	University of Leicester	England	Interviews/ observation	6	4
<b>Busher, Hugh; Hammersley-</b>	2007	Making sense of middle leadership:	School Leadership and Management	Liverpool John Moores University,	United Kingdom	n/a	n/a	n/a

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publishing journal/ organisation	University affiliation	Country of study	Methods	Number of participants	Number of schools
<b>Fletcher, Linda &amp; Turner, Chris</b>		Community, power and practice		Swansea Institute of Higher Education				
<b>Collier, John et al.</b>	2002	Perceptions and Reality of the Work of the Secondary Head of Department	Leadership in Schools	University of Western Sydney	Australia	Interviews	26	n/a
<b>Cotter, Michelle</b>	2011	Examination of the Leadership Expectations of Curriculum Coordinators in the Archdiocese of Melbourne – a Case Study Approach	The University of Melbourne	The University of Melbourne	Australia	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>Dinham, Stephen</b>	2007	The secondary Head of Department and the achievement of exceptional student outcomes	Journal of Educational Administration	University of Wollongong	Australia	Lesson observations , interviews, document analysis	n/a	38
<b>Dinham, Stephen &amp; Scott, Catherine</b>	2002	Pressure points: school executive and educational change	Journal of Educational Enquiry	The University of Melbourne	Australia, New Zealand,	Survey	2600	n/a



Author(s)	Year	Title	Publishing journal/ organisation	University affiliation	Country of study	Methods	Number of participants	Number of schools
<b>Dinham, Stephen &amp; Scott, Catherine</b>	2000	Moving into the Third, Outer Domain of Teacher Satisfaction	Journal of Educational Administration	The University of Melbourne	England, United States Australia, New Zealand, England	Survey	2000	n/a
<b>Edwards-Groves, Christine; Grootenboer, Peter &amp; Ronnerman, Karin</b>	2016	Facilitating a Culture of Relational Trust in School-Based Action Research: Recognising the Role of Middle Leaders	Educational Action Research	Charles Sturt University; Griffith University; University of Gothenburg	Australia, Sweden	Interviews	34	n/a
<b>Farchi, Talmor &amp; Tubin, Dorit</b>	2019	Middle leaders in successful and less successful schools	School Leadership and Management	Ben Gurion University of the Negev	Israel	Multi-case study, interviews, observations, document analysis	12	n/a
<b>Fitzgerald, Tanya</b>	2006	Walking between Two Worlds: Indigenous Women and Educational Leadership	Educational Management Administration & Leadership	Unitec Institute of Technology	Australia, New Zealand, Canada	n/a	n/a	n/a

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publishing journal/ organisation	University affiliation	Country of study	Methods	Number of participants	Number of schools
<b>Frawley, Jack et al.</b>	2010	The Linking Worlds Research Project: Identifying Intercultural Educational Leadership Capabilities	Leading & Managing	Australian Catholic University; Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education	Australia	Interviews	n/a	n/a
<b>Grice, Christine</b>	2019	007 Spies, surveillance and pedagogical middle leadership: for the good of the empire of education	Journal of Educational Administration & History		Australia	Interviews	10	n/a
<b>Grootenboer, Peter &amp; Edwards-Groves, Christine</b>	2021	Conceptualising five dimensions of relational trust: implications for middle leadership	School Leadership & Management		Australia	Interviews, research synthesis	n/a	n/a
<b>Grootenboer, Peter; Edwards-Groves, Christine &amp; Ronnerman, Karin</b>	2015	Leading Practice Development: Voices from the Middle	Professional Development in Education	Griffith University; Charles Sturt University; University of Gothenburg	Australia, Sweden	Interviews	22	n/a

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publishing journal/ organisation	University affiliation	Country of study	Methods	Number of participants	Number of schools
<b>Heng, Mary Anne &amp; Marsh, Colin</b>	2009	Understanding Middle Leaders: A Closer Look at Middle Leadership in Primary Schools in Singapore	Educational Studies	Curtin University of Technology, Australia	Singapore	Focus groups	12	n/a
<b>Irvine, Paul &amp; Brundrett, Mark</b>	2016	Middle Leadership and Its Challenges: A Case Study in the Secondary Independent Sector	Management in Education	Moore's University	England	Interviews	25	n/a
<b>Keane, William</b>	2010	Case Studies in Learning Area Leadership in Catholic Secondary Schools in Melbourne, Australia	The University of Melbourne	The University of Melbourne	Australia	Case study	n/a	n/a
<b>Lipscombe, Kylie; Tindall- Ford; &amp; Grootenboer, Peter</b>	2019	Middle leading and influence in two Australian schools	Educational Management, Administration & Leadership	University of Woolongong	Australia	n/a	n/a	n/a
<b>McKenzie et al.</b>	2014	SiAS 2013 main report	Australian Government Department of Education	n/a	Australia	Literature	n/a	n/a

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publishing journal/ organisation	University affiliation	Country of study	Methods	Number of participants	Number of schools
<b>Rhodes, Christopher &amp; Brundrett, Mark</b>	2006	The Identification, Development, Succession and Retention of Leadership Talent in Contextually Different Primary Schools: A Case Study Located within the English West Midlands	School Leadership & Management	University of Birmingham, University of Manchester	England	Interviews	24	n/a
<b>Tlali, Tebello &amp; Matete, Ntjoetso</b>	2021	The Challenges Faced by Heads of Departments in Selected Lesotho High Schools	School Leadership & Management	National University of Lesotho	Lesotho	Interviews, focus groups	n/a	n/a
<b>White, Peter</b>	2001	The leadership of curriculum area middle managers in Victorian government secondary schools	Leading & Managing		Australia	Interviews	46	n/a
<b>Willis, Jill et al.</b>	2022	Recognising the impact of highly accomplished and lead teachers	The Australian Educational Researcher	Independent Schools Queensland	Australia	Portfolio analysis, interviews, survey	33	n/a

Author(s)	Year	Title	Publishing journal/ organisation	University affiliation	Country of study	Methods	Number of participants	Number of schools
<b>Wise, Christine &amp; Bennett, Nigel</b>	2003	The Future Role of Middle Leaders in Secondary Schools: A Survey of Middle Leaders in Secondary Schools in England	National College for School Leadership	National College for School Leadership	England	Survey	n/a	n/a

## 10.4 Appendix 4: Details of identified professional development programs

Program name	Country of origin	Australian state (where state-specific)	Provider	Audience*	5=< pieces of codable information?
<b>Aspirant Middle Leader Certificate</b>	United States	-	The Educational Collaborative for International Schools (ECIS)	New	Y
<b>Aspiring Leaders Development Program</b>	Australia	ACT	ACT Education Directorate	Current	N
<b>Catholic Middle Leadership Programme</b>	United Kingdom	-	NorthWest Catholic Dioceses Training	All	Y
<b>Catholic Schools Middle Leadership Program</b>	Australia	All	National Excellence in School Leadership Institute (NESLI)	All	Y
<b>COBIS Programme for Middle Leaders</b>	United Kingdom	-	Council of British International Schools	All	Y
<b>COMHAR Middle Leadership Program</b>	United Kingdom (Ireland)	-	Professional Development Service for Teachers	All	N
<b>Country Dioceses Leadership Program (CDLP)</b>	Australia	VIC	Diocese of Ballarat Education limited	New & current	N

Program name	Country of origin	Australian state (where state-specific)	Provider	Audience*	5=< pieces of codable information?
<b>Create: Middle Leaders</b>	Australia	VIC	Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership	Aspiring (teacher leaders) & new	Y
<b>Developing Middle Leadership Programme</b>	United Kingdom	-	Inspiring Futures Professional Development	Aspiring & new (primary-school specific)	N
<b>ESP Middle Leader Development Programme</b>	United Kingdom	-	Educational Success Partners (ESP) Ltd	Not specified	N
<b>Leadership for Middle Leaders Program</b>	Australia	All	The Australian Counsel for Educational Leaders (ACEL)	New & established	Y
<b>Leading for the Future: Middle Leader Development Programmes</b>	United Kingdom	-	Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) Professional Development	All	Y
<b>Leading from the Centre</b>	Australia	VIC	Independent Schools Victoria	Middle & senior leaders	Y
<b>Management and Leadership in Schools Programme</b>	Singapore	All	National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University (NIE NTU)	Middle managers	N
<b>Middle Leader Certificate Courses</b>	United States	-	The Educational Collaborative for International Schools (ECIS)	New & current	Y

Program name	Country of origin	Australian state (where state-specific)	Provider	Audience*	5=< pieces of codable information?
<b>Middle Leader Development Forum</b>	United Kingdom	-	Dragonfly	All	N
<b>Middle Leader Induction</b>	Australia	NSW	School Leadership Institute (NSW Department of Education)	New	Y
<b>Middle Leaders</b>	Australia	NSW	Association of Independent Schools of NSW	Current	N
<b>Middle Leaders in Schools</b>	Australia	TAS	Professional Learning Institute	New & experienced	Y
<b>Middle Leaders Professional Learning Opportunity: Teacher Leadership Program</b>	Australia	-	Catholic Education South Australia	Aspiring & new	N
<b>Middle Leadership Development</b>	Australia	QLD	Queensland Association of State School Principals (QASSP)	All	Y
<b>Middle Leadership Development Program</b>	Australia	NSW	School Leadership Institute (NSW Department of Education)	Established & advanced	N
<b>Middle Leadership Development Programme</b>	United Kingdom	-	Leadership Search Consultancy (LSC) Education	New & current	Y
<b>Middle Leadership Excellence in Practice</b>	United Kingdom	-	Learners First Schools Partnership	All	Y




Program name	Country of origin	Australian state (where state-specific)	Provider	Audience*	5=< pieces of codable information?
<b>Middle Leadership Matters Program</b>	Australia	All	Australian Council for Educational Leaders (ACEL)	All	N
<b>National Middle Leadership Development Programme</b>	United Kingdom (Wales)	-	GwE	All	Y
<b>ProfDip Middle Leadership</b>	United Kingdom (Ireland)	-	University College Dublin	Not specified	N
<b>School Leadership and Management Prerequisites</b>	Australia	TAS	Department for Education, Children and Young People (Tasmanian Government)	Experienced & advanced	Y
<b>SSAT Middle Leadership Programme</b>	United Kingdom	-	The Schools, Students and Teachers Network	All	Y
<b>Stronger Smarter Leadership Program</b>	Australia	All	Stronger Smarter Institute	All	Y
<b>Women's Middle Leadership Program</b>	Australia	All	National Excellence in School Leadership Institute (NESLI)	All	Y

\* Coded using aspiring, new, experienced and advanced where relevant, for consistency

The logo for the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) features the lowercase letters 'aitsl' in a sans-serif font. The letters are filled with a vertical gradient that transitions from a light yellow-green at the top to a darker teal at the bottom.

Australian Institute  
for Teaching and  
School Leadership  
Limited

The bottom of the page is decorated with two overlapping triangular shapes. A teal triangle points upwards from the bottom left corner, and a yellow-green triangle points downwards from the top right corner. They meet at a point in the lower right quadrant of the page.

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