What Works Best reflection guide

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

Introduction
Putting Evidence into Practice

What is the purpose of this publication?

The *What Works Best Reflection Guide* is a practical resource for teachers and school executive staff. It gives schools explicit examples of what can be done to improve student engagement and achievement. Teachers can use this guide to reflect on their individual teaching strategies and to evaluate their own practice. The themes discussed can also be implemented through a whole-school approach.

Drawing on the evidence presented in CESE's publications *What works best: Evidence-based practices to help improve NSW student performance*, *Six Effective Practices in High Growth Schools*, *Student Wellbeing* and *Tell Them From Me* case studies this guide assists school staff to reflect on what's working in their schools and what can be improved.

What is included?

The *What Works Best Reflection Guide* puts forward seven key themes:

1. High expectations
2. Explicit teaching
3. Effective feedback
4. Use of data to inform practice
5. Classroom management
6. Wellbeing
7. Collaboration

Each theme in this guide includes the evidence about why it is important and a section on what it looks like in practice. These themes align with the six effective practices of high growth schools, which we identified as part of our High Value Add evaluation.

With this information in mind, staff are invited to reflect on what they do well, what they could do better and what they might do differently over the next year.

More information

To read the publications referenced in this Reflection Guide, visit CESE's website: **www.cese.nsw.gov.au/publications**
To get in touch with us, email **info@cese.nsw.gov.au**.

1. High Expectations

What does the evidence say?

- High expectations are linked with higher performance for all students.

- The reverse can also be true. Some students from disadvantaged backgrounds may be achieving less than their full potential due to lower expectations of their ability.

- All students need to be appropriately challenged in order to learn – but many NSW students say they aren't being challenged enough.

- A culture of high expectations needs to be supported by effective mechanisms and strategies that support every student's learning needs. Curriculum differentiation is an effective means by which this can occur in every classroom.

What does this look like in practice?

- Share work samples among teachers to ensure that assessment expectations are consistent and that a culture of high expectations is promoted across a school.

- Display explicit learning guides (e.g. Literacy and Numeracy Continua) in classrooms to show students what performance benchmarks are and to encourage them to pursue higher levels of achievement.

- Have a common set of guidelines across a school that rewards positive behaviour and have a transparent set of procedures for responding to negative behaviours.

- Organise trips to a local university for students and parents to help raise their expectations about future academic study.

What do we do well?

What could we do better?

What could we do differently this year?

2. Explicit Teaching

What does the evidence say?

- Explicit teaching practices involve teachers clearly showing students what to do and how to do it, rather than having students discover or construct information for themselves.

- Explicit teaching recognises that learning is a cumulative and systematic process, starting with building strong foundations in core skills in literacy and numeracy.

- Effective teacher practices ensure that students have clear instruction on what is expected of them, and what they need to learn from tasks. It ensures that students are given time to engage with the learning process, ask questions and get clear feedback.

- Students who experience explicit teaching practices make greater learning gains than students who do not experience these practices.

What does this look like in practice?

- Show students exemplars of success (e.g. sharing work samples that meet achievement benchmarks).
- Develop accessible teaching resources that include templates for how to differentiate lessons and assessments.
- Display explicit learning progressions (e.g. Literacy and Numeracy Continua) in classrooms to show students what performance benchmarks are and to encourage them to pursue higher levels of achievement.
- Systematically deliver basic skills, and teach skills in the right sequence so that students master the building blocks of skills like literacy and numeracy.
- Ask students challenging questions, such as 'why, why-not, how, what-if, how does X compare to Y, and what is the evidence for X?'
- Review learning and explain how it contributes to related, and more complex skills.

What do we do well?

What could we do better?

What could we do differently this year?

3. Effective feedback

What does the evidence say?

- Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on student achievement.

- Feedback that focuses on improving tasks, processes and student self-regulation usually has a positive effect.

- Rewards, as well as some kinds of praise, tend to be ineffective or at times have a negative effect.

What does this look like in practice?

Emphasise feedback that:

- Is about a student's process or effort. For example, 'You must have tried hard'.

- Encourages students' self-regulation. For example, 'You already know the key features of the opening of an argument. Check to see whether you have incorporated them in your first paragraph'.

Avoid feedback that:

- Praises a student's innate intelligence or talents. For example, 'You are a great student'.

- Is in the form of extrinsic rewards for work, such as stickers.

What do we do well?

What could we do better?

What could we do differently this year?

4. Use of data to inform practice

What does the evidence say?

- Effective analysis of student data helps teachers identify areas in which students' learning needs may require additional attention and development.

- Data can also help teachers see which students may be struggling to engage with particular learning areas, and understand which students respond better to different teaching approaches in their classroom.

- High-quality assessment practice is crucial for effective data analysis of student outcomes and wellbeing.

- Teachers need access to tools, skills and training to help them interpret and use this data effectively.

What does this look like in practice?

- Prioritise professional learning in effective use of data, and encourage evidence-based teaching practices across the school.
- Use student data (e.g. NAPLAN, Literacy and Numeracy Continua) to identify students' learning needs, develop learning targets and monitor progress.
- Design and implement good formative assessment in order to obtain useful data which can be used to adapt and inform teaching practice.
- Use data as the basis for professional discussions, including how assessment data helps identify and address students' needs.
- Promote data based collaboration within and across schools.

What do we do well?

What could we do better?

What could we do differently this year?

5. Classroom management

What does the evidence say?

- Effective classroom management is important for creating the conditions for learning.

- Data confirms a link between effective classroom management and student performance.

- Early career teachers are likely to benefit from explicit support in developing effective classroom management strategies.

- Classroom management strategies will be more effective if they are consistent with a school-wide strategy to manage student behaviour.

What does this look like in practice?

- Establish and teach school and classroom rules to communicate expectations for behaviour.
- Build structure and establish routines to help guide students in a wide variety of situations.
- Foster and maintain student engagement by including opportunities for active student participation in lessons.
- Reinforce positive behaviour.
- Consistently impose consequences for misbehaviour.
- Provide particular support in classroom organisation and management to new and trainee teachers.

What do we do well?

What could we do better?

What could we do differently this year?

6. Wellbeing

What does the evidence say?

- There is an increasing focus on student wellbeing in education, in recognition that schooling can contribute to the development of the whole child, which in turn can drive academic outcomes.

- Higher levels of wellbeing are linked to higher academic achievement, Year 12 completion, better mental health and a more pro-social and responsible lifestyle.

- Survey data from NSW reveals that students' social and emotional engagement is at its lowest in the middle years of high school.

What does this look like in practice?

- Increase sense of belonging through initiatives such as house systems, peer support groups and extra-curricular activities.

- Enhance connection through consultation and communication with the broader school community (including students, teachers and parents).

- Create a safe school that encompasses both physical safety (i.e. free from risk, harm or injury to students), and emotional safety (i.e. free from negative behaviours such as bullying).

- Introduce targeted social and emotional learning programs.

- Seek to objectively understand patterns in student wellbeing. This can be done through CESE's *Tell Them From Me Survey* (see *http://surveys.cese.nsw.gov.au* for more information).

What do we do well?

What could we do better?

What could we do differently this year?

7. Collaboration

What does the evidence say?

- Great teachers don't just 'happen'; they are developed and keep on developing throughout their professional life.

- Effective collaboration is key to sharing successful and innovative teaching practices across the teaching profession.

- Not all collaboration is effective. Teachers need to engage in professionalised collaboration that explicitly aims to improve teacher practices and student outcomes.

- A whole-of-school focus is needed to develop a culture of excellence. School leaders need to support teachers' professional learning, take a central role in collaborative networks and work to identify the strengths and weaknesses of teaching at their school.

What does this look like in practice?

- Focus professional learning and development needs on student needs and improving learning outcomes.

- Open classrooms to one another and be prepared to discuss the effectiveness of different strategies, and support the broad aim of working together to improve the quality of teaching across the whole profession.

- Use external expertise to ensure that best practice models are identified through a process of critical validation and have a whole-school focus.

- Develop easily accessible platforms to share teaching resources (e.g. shared drives).

What do we do well?

What could we do better?

What could we do differently this year?