

## **NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES TO SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This document provides an Executive Summary of the findings of the research undertaken in respect of component 2 of the School Accountability Framework Review – National and International Perspectives and Approaches to School Accountability.

This component of the Review required the investigation and review of current international literature, the documentation of input from senior Department of Education and Training officers who had been involved with school accountability related study tours and the updating of the Summary of Approaches document originally prepared for the 2005 Australasian Accountability Network Meeting.

Elaborations related to this Executive Summary can be located in a range of summary and detailed papers that provide a rich source of information from a wide range of both Australian and international approaches. These papers are available from the SAF Review area of <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/accountability/>.

In addition to these papers, information on the approaches undertaken in other countries and the perspectives of key authors arising from the literature review are included in this Executive Summary.

The literature review is primarily focused on accountability in the government or public sector within Australia and internationally. The extent to which sectors exist and are differentiated varies throughout the world. Similar accountability processes are evident in some countries, particularly where the government provides the major funding source and where external inspectorates are in place. Within Australia private school accountability is linked to registration renewal. The processes are generally of an operational compliance nature. In addition there are a variety of processes involving School Boards and system level administrative bodies.

In preparing this paper it has been assumed that, for the Western Australian context, school accountability relates to providing system and public assurance and the ongoing pursuit of quality improvement. De Grauwe and Naidoo (2004:39) conclude that ‘the challenge is not to choose between accountability and quality improvement, but to find the right balance between these aims, between internal and external evaluation, between the criteria set by central authorities and those set by the school staff itself, between the demands of the ‘public’ and the needs of the professional community.’

Earl & LeMahieu (cited in Earl, 2005:7) contend that ‘*Accounting* is gathering, organising and reporting information that describes performance, *Accountability* is the conversation about what the information means and how it fits with everything else that we know, and about how to use it to make positive changes.’

### **COMMON ELEMENTS, DIFFERENCES AND TRENDS**

Our review of the literature highlighted the following common elements, differences and trends.

Gurr (2006:2) notes that, 'in recent times there has been intense interest in most parts of the world to create systems for monitoring school performance'. De Grauwe and Naidoo (2004:20) refer to 'the worldwide trend towards school evaluation'. Cuttance's (Radii, 2005:4-6) national and international review of school accountability approaches reports trends towards the incorporation of school self-evaluation, greater access to school performance information and a significant element of external independent assessment and reporting.

Approaches to school accountability are often national or at least strongly influenced by agendas at the national level and many are heavily reliant on the conduct and reporting of standardised tests in specific curriculum areas undertaken by students at selected points of schooling.

Several systems throughout the world have long established **external inspection models** (including England, Scotland and Ireland). Others have more recently introduced such models or are considering them including New Zealand, Netherlands and some Australian states. In many cases the external inspection is valued by stakeholders, particularly the media and parents. However, inspection models are generally considered to be expensive. Where these models have recently been reviewed (including England, New Zealand, Scotland and Victoria) there has been movement to streamline processes such as differential approaches and a lighter touch for the schools considered as highly effective. MacBeath (2006:16) concludes that 'the logic of proportionality is clearly accepted as something for the future'.

Opinion is divided on the impact of school evaluation and accountability processes on the performance of schools. Many authors question the inherent value of the components of some systems. Elmore (cited in Gurr, 2006:3) 'disputes the long-term worth of external accountability environments and suggests that for real and sustained school improvement, teachers and principals need to take more responsibility for the outcomes they influence.'

Hattie (2005:12-13) argues that 'we must develop an accountability system that is located from the student level upwards, directly involving and influencing the teacher and principal level, as such a system is more likely to have major effects on the quality of teaching and learning.'

In cautioning the evaluation of school effectiveness on the basis of narrow, even inappropriate, performance indicators, Ainscow (2005:10) challenges us to 'measure what we value, rather than is often the case, valuing what we can measure'. In considering the United States context Jones (2004:1) calls for 'a new model of accountability – one that is balanced and comprehensive, one that involves much more than test scores.'

In contrast with general trends De Grauwe (2004:78) notes that in Finland, a country that consistently performs at the highest level in international tests, 'the national inspection system was discontinued in 1991. Decision-makers felt that the benefits from external inspection and advice services were minimal and that, in view of the high level of training and professionalism of teachers and the strong parental interest in the schooling of their children, quality control could be entirely trusted to them.'

Many systems have developed **accountability frameworks** which feature the components of school planning, school self-assessment, school reporting and school review (internal or external). Self-assessment and reporting are usually annually based, planning is often both longer term (3-4 years, strategic) and annual (operational) with review cycles varying from 3-6 years. Western Australia's public school system's current two-yearly review cycle, based on a series of interactions between district directors and schools, rather than a one-off event, appears to be unique.

There is an increasing **emphasis on school self-assessment**. Various terms such as school self-evaluation, self-review or self-assessment, this is a prominent feature in the processes of all Australian public school systems and countries including New Zealand,

England, Scotland, Ireland, Canada, Hong Kong, Singapore, Finland and the Netherlands. Even where independent inspection systems are established the potential value of school self-evaluation is increasingly being acknowledged.

Riley and MacBeath (2000:1) note that 'The self-evaluating and self-improving school is the school that has the in-built resilience to meet change, as well as the internal capacity and know-how to assess its strengths and weaknesses, and build its development planning on that solid foundation.'

In summarising the 2002 international seminar 'School Evaluation for Quality Improvement' De Grauwe and Naidoo's report, (2004:13-14) 'paints the contours of a school evaluation system, focused on improvement, empowerment and accountability rather than the latter alone. While acknowledging the role of standardised testing and external validation they note that 'School self-evaluation stands at the heart of such a system.'

**Broader frameworks for inspection/review**, including those in New Zealand, England, Scotland, Ireland, Singapore, Hong Kong and Australia have been developed in contrast to USA's almost exclusive reliance on 'high stakes' testing, sometimes referred to as 'results based accountability' (Anderson, 2005). The broader frameworks reflect the findings from the significant body of school effectiveness research (see for example Scheerens, 2000 and Cresswell, 2004).

Despite these broader frameworks and **public reporting** related to them, it is often the various analyses of test results, including the publication of achievement tables, rankings and league tables that are used in an attempt to assure public confidence. Countries have taken differing positions on whether inspection/review reports should be made public. New Zealand, England and Scotland all require and provide public reporting of the reports. In contrast, reports are not made publicly available in Singapore and Ireland. MacBeath (2006:13) notes that the agreement by Hong Kong's Education and Manpower Bureau 'not to publicise school reports is already easing anxiety'.

In many of the countries reviewed, information for the public, and in particular to the local school community, is also provided through **annual school reports**. These reports and other access to individual school performance information are increasingly being made available through school and system web sites. Guidelines, and in some cases prescription, provide the basis for the content and format of these reports.

The use of **growth models**, sometimes labelled value-added analysis, is evident in England, Hong Kong, Singapore, some Australian states and some states in the USA. Growth models are being considered for the processes that support the No Child Left Behind legislation in the USA.

Attention is also turning to **support processes**. De Grauwe and Naidoo (2004:12) note that 'schools simply need more than information on their performance; they also need guidance on how to improve and support while attempting such improvement. When evaluation is simply limited to information, it will be of little help. When it consists mainly of informing the public of school results it could actually be harmful...'

Revised processes in England include the introduction of School Improvement Partners. In Scotland a system of proportional response has been established linked to the findings of school inspections. In some USA and Australian states various regional and district based services are called upon to support schools in response to reviews and the analysis of test results.

Finland, South Korea and Singapore have a strong focus on teacher training and continued professional development for serving teachers and principals. In Finland the initial selection process for students applying for the teacher education program is very rigorous. All teachers graduate with a Masters degree (5 years).

South Korea has recently introduced an **evaluation system for teachers and principals**, while in Singapore teachers and principals are appraised using the Enhanced Performance Management System. Every school is to have a School Staff Developer to ensure that training and professional development programs encompass teacher needs while maintaining a focus on school goals.

Experienced teachers in Ontario, Canada are formally evaluated every three years. Inexperienced teachers are mentored, closely monitored and evaluated. An unsatisfactory rating for any teacher can result in a recommendation for termination.

In providing a framework for examining directions for educational accountabilities for K-12 education in Saskatchewan, Canada, Leithwood (2005) proposes the adoption of a reciprocal, professional approach. In addition to the assessment of student progress and stakeholder opinions, the importance of developing and appraising teacher and administrator performance against professional standards is emphasised.

The National College of School Leadership in England provides continuous learning requirements for Head teachers. From April 2004 it has been mandatory for all Head teachers in government schools to hold or be in the process of securing the National Professional Qualification for Headship.

**Sanctions and rewards** are elements of the accountability processes in some of the countries reviewed including USA, England and Scotland. Current state law in California provides award programs, both monetary and non monetary for schools that meet the Academic Performance Index which is the cornerstone of California's Public Schools Accountability Act 1999.

Singapore appears to have the most formal reward and recognition system in place through its Masterplan of Awards (MoA) which recognises school success in the delivery of holistic education. The awards have three levels and are linked to Singapore's School Excellence Model. Schools are also rewarded by being classified as autonomous.

## **AUSTRALIA**

All government schools in Australian states and territories have processes to ensure school accountability and the underlying principles are very similar. There is flexibility within each state and territory approach to accommodate a range of schools and school populations.

While terminology may differ, the common elements established in all Australian government school accountability processes include – a school accountability framework, school plan, school self-assessment, annual school report and school review.

Cuttance (2005:5) concludes that 'most systems allow schools flexibility in how they present school plans – a guided approach rather than prescription is the norm.' Schools in South Australia (SA) use a template format for their site plan. Tasmanian schools use a template to produce their Partnership Agreement however their School Improvement Plan (SIP) is school determined. Non-mandated templates for the School Plan are available in SA and Victoria. Differences are evident in the extent to which parents and the community are involved in school planning.

School self-assessment is a highly valued element of school accountability throughout Australia. Different school self-assessment tools and rating scales are used to measure a school's performance. All states would be using their population based testing programs for the purpose of assisting school self-evaluation. In some states, such as Victoria, parent and teacher surveys are mandated as part of the self-evaluation process. Victoria has also recently introduced a mandated template for school self-evaluation and SA is piloting a self-review template in 2007.

Only schools in Western Australia (WA) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), after undertaking a school self-assessment, determine a judgement about their performance, ACT – five point scale (Aspiring, Developing, Functioning, Achieving and Excelling), WA – (Effective/ in need of intervention and support).

Schools in Tasmania, ACT and the Northern Territory (NT) conform to a mandated template for their annual report. A report template is available in Victoria but is not mandated for schools to use. New South Wales (NSW) had a highly controlled and mandated template approach but have recently moved to allow schools much greater flexibility. Currently, WA, SA and Queensland do not provide templates, however, as is the case in the other states, the reports reflect the mandated and guideline requirements outlined in their respective accountability frameworks and related policies.

The most diverse element of the school accountability processes within Australia is that of school reviews which are either conducted internally or externally.

The ACT, SA and NT have been considering introducing external review models. The ACT has established a contracted, external, independent coordinator role, though reviews have been undertaken by internal teams. SA now appears to be settling on reviews undertaken by district directors. Internal reviews are conducted by district directors in WA, school development officers in NSW and executive directors of schools in Queensland.

Victoria has a differential review model based on the performance and circumstances of schools. Reviews may be negotiated, continuous or diagnostic. The continuous and diagnostic reviews involve accredited external school reviewers. Negotiated reviews involve a 'critical friend'.

In NSW and Tasmania the internal reviews are linked to evidence which suggests attention may be required. Within Queensland a review by exception is also a part of the internal process.

School review cycles vary. They are two yearly in WA, three yearly in the ACT, NT, Queensland and SA and four yearly in Victoria. School reviews are not part of a mandatory cycle in NSW and Tasmania. WA is the only state to base its review on cumulative visits from the district directors.

A number of states now allow external accreditations to be undertaken by organisations such as the Council of Internationally Accredited Schools (CIAS).

At this point in time WA, SA, NT and Tasmania are reviewing their school accountability processes.

In his review of school accountability in Australia Gurr (2006:1) comments that, 'school education in Australia is a complex interplay between federal and state governments, and between government and non-government schools.' The Australian Government is increasing its involvement in areas that have traditionally been the jurisdiction of state and territory governments and their respective education systems. This includes legislative requirements associated with the reporting of individual student performance, annual school performance reporting and national testing to be introduced in 2008. The provision of significant Commonwealth funding is linked to jurisdiction compliance with these requirements.

## **INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL STUDY TOURS**

In the second half of 2004 and early 2005, senior officers from the Department of Education and Training had an opportunity to participate in international educational study tours. One executive director and seven district directors were selected to be interviewed in May, September and October 2006 because of the accountability focus of their particular study tour.

The range of school accountability processes encountered by the senior departmental officers varied enormously from Croatia, a country seeking advice on establishing a self-management quality assurance model, through to Scotland, the USA, England, and Ireland, all countries with established accountability systems in place. With the exception of Ireland these countries also imposed sanctions for schools determined to be performing poorly.

In contrast, Finland was found to have no apparent school accountability system, however, a very strong focus on teacher recruitment, training and development is operating within a culture where education is highly valued. Parents and community confidence in their local school was seen to be strong in Finland, Scotland and Ireland.

Feedback from the participants suggested that aspects of potential interest for the WA context included: the use of quite detailed frameworks to assist school self-evaluation and review (Scotland – How Good is Our School, Ireland – Looking at Our School, England – the Self- Evaluation Form); the importance now being placed on school self-evaluation; the external inspection processes being used with public and private schools often being reviewed using the same accountability model; the differing roles undertaken by layers of government or authorities and the review of these; the use (and over-use) of standardised test results; moves for lighter touch in reviews and associated proportional response; the significant costs associated with external inspectorates; and the use of sanctions and rewards.

An emphasis on ongoing professional development and support for developing the capacity of school leaders and teachers was particularly evident in Finland, England and Ireland.

It was also evident that, as is the case in Australia, processes were often being refined and reviewed.

## **SELECTED COUNTRY OVERVIEWS**

This paper makes reference to a wide range of school accountability processes from countries throughout the world. This section highlights key aspects of the approaches taken in a selection of the countries - USA, England, South Korea, Singapore and New Zealand.

### **USA**

The 'No Child Left Behind' (NCLB) law (2002) mandates that USA states adopt comprehensive accountability systems for identifying and improving underperforming schools. The major focus of NCLB is to provide all children with a fair, equal and significant opportunity to obtain high quality education. The law aims to have all students performing at proficient levels on state academic assessments in mathematics, reading (grades 3 – 8) and science (elementary and grades 10 – 12) by 2014. NCLB specifically prohibits any national testing or federally controlled curriculum. The law covers all public schools in all states of the USA and some private schools.

Title 1 schools, defined by student enrolment, census, poverty and other data, receive federal funding. Title 1 schools who fail to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on the cross cohort comparisons of the percent of students meeting the proficiency standards in one year compared to the previous year's percent proficient, face sanctions. Non Title 1 schools that do not make AYP do not face sanctions, however these schools must amend their school accountability plans to indicate how they will improve. States must provide parents and the public with annual report cards on school district performance.

Information on student achievement is disaggregated by sub groups. NCLB is highly expensive and up for renewal in 2007.

Within the demanding framework established by NCLB, states in the USA have determined their own testing regimes, methods for monitoring performance and supervisory, evaluative and support processes. States have also developed their own responses for both high and low performing schools.

## **ENGLAND**

The moves towards a more balanced and sustainable approach to school accountability processes in England followed the release of the Government's Green Paper in 2003 called *Every Child Matters*. Under the accountability and integration proposal outlined in this paper, the creation of an inspection framework for children's services was to be actioned with the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) taking the lead in bringing together joint inspection teams.

Following a long history of an inspectorial model for school accountability dating back to 1839, Ofsted was established in 1993 as a non ministerial department to inspect educational facilities throughout England.

In 2004 *A New Relationship with Schools* (NRwS) document and subsequent NRwS publications, developed jointly between Ofsted and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) were released. The NRwS document acknowledged that times had changed and schools were more likely to have established systems in place for self-evaluation, development planning and performance management. The NRwS documents describe the importance of, and new requirements relating to, school self-assessment, improvement planning, and the introduction of nationally accredited School Improvement Partners.

The vision for the educational service was subsequently outlined in the *Ofsted Strategic Plan 2005 – 2008* and the Government's October 2005 White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All*.

The new school accountability arrangements commenced implementation in September 2005. Schools are now inspected every three years, with inspection reports made available to parents and published on the Ofsted website.

A school usually receives two to five working days notice of the inspection and inspections are proportional to need. Schools are required to inform parents of the inspection. The size of the inspection team is dependent upon the size of the school and ranges from one to five inspectors. The inspection team spends no longer than two days in the school. Lighter touch inspections of one day involving one inspector occur for high performing schools.

A feature of the new arrangement is the focus on school self-evaluation and the completion of the Self-Evaluation Form (SEF). Inspectors study the school's SEF, the School's Performance and Assessment (PANDA) report and the report from the previous inspection to prepare a pre-inspection briefing about the school.

When schools are inspected they are judged on a four point rating scale. If a school's overall effectiveness is judged as causing concern, the school can be placed on special measures or issued with a notice to improve. The progress of these schools is monitored by HM Inspectors and they receive their first visit four to six months after designation. If there is no improvement, a school causing concern can, subject to a formal warning, be closed and replaced by a Fresh Start school.

Under the national curriculum, students undertake four sets of national tests corresponding to attainment targets under four key stages – ages 7, 11, 14 and 16. These

tests are in mathematics and English in all key stages and in science in key stages 2, 3 and 4. School results are published each year in the form of league tables.

RAISEonline (Reporting and Analysis for Improvement through School self- Evaluation) is a single source of school data and analysis developed by Ofsted using the results of the national testing program. It is due for release in the autumn term 2006 and replaces the PANDA report and the Pupil Achievement Tracker system.

To ensure that direct support is provided to schools the School Improvement Partner (SIP) initiative is being implemented. By the end of 2007 all schools will have a nationally accredited SIP.

School Improvement Partnership Boards have been established in some local education authorities to oversee school improvement in one or more schools. In some cases a failing school may be replaced by an academy. An academy is a new type of secondary school usually established in a disadvantaged area by sponsors, working in partnership with government and local education partners.

School profiles have replaced school annual reports. The school profile provides information on an annual basis to parents and the wider community about school progress that includes priorities, programs and data from a variety of sources.

## **SOUTH KOREA**

Culturally there is a strong focus on valuing education and teachers in South Korea. The Korean proverb, 'One should not step even on the shadow of one's teacher' highlights the degree of respect traditionally given to teachers.

Educational changes and developments such as the introduction of the national curriculum are linked to political events. 'To ensure accountability, the evaluation policy of schools has been carried out throughout the country since 1997. However, the results of this policy are obscure and controvertible' (Jin, 2001). The National Assessment of Educational Achievement was established in 1998 and in 2004 random sample testing was conducted in grades 6, 9 and 10 in a range of learning areas. A new approach for the evaluation of teachers and principals based on professional standards has recently been introduced.

An external evaluation committee system has been established with provincial and metropolitan offices of education administering school evaluations, usually on an annual basis. 'Each office is responsible for the preparation of evaluation areas, criteria and methods, and establishing an evaluation committee. The educational administrators, school principals and vice-principals, school teachers, university professors, researchers and parental representatives who are appointed to evaluation committees receive no special training.' The school evaluation 'is focused on learning and teaching, curriculum, student needs and community consciousness', however, the evaluations 'do not deal with all aspects of the school nor is there uniformity in the criteria used or the schedule...The results of school evaluations are used for supervision consultations and as a basis for providing financial rewards to well-performing schools.' (De Grauwe and Naidoo, 2004:26)

Despite its success in achieving high test scores the highly competitive nature of the system and in particular the emphasis placed on the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT), which determines entry to one of three main universities, draws extensive criticism. Parents allocate significant funding and students devote extensive time to out of school tutoring in preparation for the examinations.

## **SINGAPORE**

The School Excellence Model (SEM), adapted from a business model, was introduced to Singaporean schools in 2000 to guide schools in their capacity for reflection, self-assessment and to prepare the school for change.

SEM has provided schools with a more systemic framework and holistic approach to self-assessment by measuring both outcomes and processes and requiring schools to examine their practices not independently but as parts contributing to a whole (Hean, 2002:2,3). Cluster superintendents facilitate the school improvement process.

Consultancy on school self-assessment and external validation of schools is provided by the School Appraisal Branch. School validation is five-yearly with the external evaluation teams drawn from a range of backgrounds. (Ministry of Education, 2006:1)

The Branch is responsible for the implementation of the Masterplan of Awards (MoA). These were introduced in 1998 to recognise school success and sustained achievement in both educational process and educational outcomes (based on examinations). The objectives of the award plan include:

- used as a school accountability tool for MOE to identify good practices that can be used to improve the education system.
- used as a benchmarking tool for schools to measure their performance against that of other schools as part of continual improvement.
- used as a source of information to allow parents and students to make informed choices when selecting schools. (Ministry of Education, 2006:2)

The Branch also validates applicants for Autonomous Status and assists schools with their application for the Singapore Quality Class Award. Autonomous schools were introduced in 1994 to reward quality education provision with increased school funding and flexibility.

In 2004 School Achievement Tables replaced the previously available ranking lists. The School Achievement Tables are intended to provide a broader view of the performance of schools with the focus on both academic and non academic subjects.

The Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) undertaken at the end of Primary 6 appears to have particular importance in the system as it is used to determine student placement to a variety of secondary school tracks or streams which generally lead to differing outcomes.

## **NEW ZEALAND**

The school accountability framework in New Zealand is based on the English and Scottish models, however, there are elements included in the framework that are very similar to Australia including strategic planning/ annual plan, self-review, annual reporting and school review. A feature is the integrated approach to external review and self-review.

School planning requirements are legislated with the requirement for the production of a School Charter which includes both a strategic, longer term perspective and an annually updated plan (priorities, targets, strategies, resourcing etc). School reporting is also a legislative requirement and includes an assessment of progress against planned outcomes.

The Education Review Office (ERO) is responsible for reviews of all schools – public and private. Review reports go to the school boards of trustees and the government, and are made public on the ERO website. The review cycle is every 3-4 years.

A significantly revised review process was introduced in 2002 which included greater emphasis on school self-review, and student engagement and achievement. The review process is supported through key documentation including the *Framework for Reviews in Schools*, *Evaluation Indicators for Education Reviews in Schools* and the *Board Assurance Statement and Self-Audit Checklists*. The Framework was updated in 2006.

ERO also undertakes Supplementary Reviews (where the performance of a school causes concern) and Special reviews (investigations in response to specific issues). In 2000, ERO introduced post-review assistance to help boards of trustees develop plans of action to address issues identified in their school review report.

While ERO is separate from the Ministry of Education they both work to support improvement in schools.

## **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

Around the world, school accountability systems vary due to the community values and the political and cultural influences within particular countries. There is evidence to suggest that in recent years there has been a convergence of approaches as jurisdictions learn from each other and continue to seek more effective and efficient processes.

This Executive Summary has highlighted the main features and trends relating to school accountability in systems across Australia and internationally. A number of supporting papers are available which provide further detail for many of the approaches and perspectives noted here.

In considering the approaches and key elements referred to in this paper it is essential that Western Australia's unique context is acknowledged in the determination of an appropriate framework that will best meet the agreed purpose and intended outcomes for school accountability.

*School Accountability Framework Review*  
*National and International Perspectives and Approaches*  
**Selected References**

The following references have been selected from the wide range of papers, articles, books and websites which were used in the development of a range of summary and detailed research papers and culminated in the writing of the Executive Summary. These papers with full reference lists are available from the SAF Review area at <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/accountability/>.

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