Evaluation of the take-up and sustainability of new literacy and numeracy practices in NSW schools

Progress Report 1

Project Brief DETSSNP1027

August, 2011
Evaluation of the Take-up and Sustainability of New Literacy and Numeracy Practices in New South Wales Schools

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1. Introduction

The Smarter Schools National Partnership Agreements on Literacy and Numeracy, Low Socio-economic Status School Communities (Low SES) and Improving Teacher Quality were agreed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) on 28 November 2008.

The three Partnerships align with the COAG National Education Agreement, where States and Territories agreed that 'all Australian school students need to acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society and employment in a globalised economy.'

The National Partnership Agreement on Literacy and Numeracy between the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments is designed to deliver sustained improvements in literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students, especially those who are falling behind.

The priority areas for reform in the Literacy and Numeracy Partnership (referred to as The National Partnership or NPLN hereafter), are:

- effective and evidenced-based teaching of literacy and numeracy
- strong school leadership and whole school engagement with literacy and numeracy
- monitoring student and school literacy and numeracy performance to identify where support is needed (COAG 2008).

From a national perspective, the intention has been to ensure a strong focus on high quality literacy and numeracy teaching, combined with strong school leadership and whole school approaches, which together are needed to support students to develop effective, strong literacy and numeracy skills.

Since the launch of the Smarter Schools National Partnership in 2008, state and territory jurisdictions have been working generally in a cross-sectoral and collaborative manner to develop strategies to plan and implement the three National Partnership priority areas for reform in schools.

In NSW, cross-sectoral planning meetings occurred, schools were advised of their participation and these schools commenced planning and implementation in various aspects of each of the relevant National Partnership priority areas for reform. While the majority of schools involved in NSW are from the Government sector, both the Catholic and independent sectors have also systematically commenced initiatives to address each reform area.

At the time of writing this report, 147 schools across NSW had begun implementation of Literacy/Numeracy two year initiatives, including 114 government schools, 26 Catholic schools and 7 independent schools. Funding for the Literacy/Numeracy initiatives has been committed for a four year period, delivered to schools over two financial years (2009/2010 and 2010/2011).
In New South Wales the students participating in the National Partnership currently represent:

- 16 per cent of Aboriginal primary students in New South Wales
- 7 per cent of first phase ESL primary students in New South Wales government schools
- 12 per cent of refugee primary students in New South Wales government schools
- 11 per cent of students in remote New South Wales schools. (Source: 2011 NSW Implementation Plan)

Within this state, evaluation of Smarter Schools National Partnerships implementation and initiatives is guided by a committee that has been appointed by the Minister for Education and Communities. The National Partnerships Evaluation Committee (NPEC) has a major responsibility for overseeing the design and implementation of major strategic evaluations of the Smarter Schools National Partnership reforms, including the evaluation of the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership, referred to in this report. A key deliverable for the evaluation is this first Progress Report.

This first Progress Report of the Evaluation of the National Partnership in Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN) is organized under the following headings:

- Progress against projected timeline
- Issues encountered in data gathering
- Preliminary findings, including the background and context of the NPLN, as identified in relevant documents describing the NPLN, and trends and issues identified from interviews with stakeholders and school personnel
- Next steps to be taken in the evaluation.

2. Progress against project timeline

Table 1 below highlights a summary of key evaluation activities undertaken since the commencement of the evaluation in early 2011.

Detailed below the Table is an explanation of the major steps undertaken in the first data gathering event in schools and with key stakeholders in March/April 2011.

Table 1: Progress against proposed Evaluation Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Activity</th>
<th>Activity Completion Date</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finalisation of contract and signing of contract</td>
<td>Jan 2011</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial meeting with members of cross sectoral committee to clarify expectations, project refinement and timelines to ensure project achieves its desired outcomes. During this meeting the evaluation team will seek to identify key contacts within each sector to obtain any</td>
<td>Mid February 2011</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Project Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Activity</th>
<th>Activity Completion Date</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information gathered to date in regard to the planning stage of the initiatives.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of schools to participate in interviews with school leaders and teachers</td>
<td>March 2011</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undertake document analysis. Coordinate and conduct key sector representative interviews and interviews with school leaders and teachers</td>
<td>March 2011</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Gathering of data re initial impact of the National Partnership from school representatives attending Smarter Schools Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership Celebrating Success, Embedding Change Conference, held in Sydney on 19 and 20 May 2011</em></td>
<td>May 2011</td>
<td>Results to be presented in second Progress Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finalise evaluation design, Evaluation Plan and develop instruments. Submit to NPEC for feedback/approval. Trigger for first progress payment.</td>
<td>June 2011</td>
<td>Completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First progress report. Trigger for third progress payment</td>
<td>August 2011</td>
<td>Under consideration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3. Initial Data Gathering

As noted above, a key step in the early stages of the evaluation process was to identify the current situation in relation to the planning and implementation of the NPLN. For this purpose, data was collected from three main sources: a review of available documentation relating to the NPLN; a series of interviews/focus groups with school leaders in 12 school sites, and interviews with key stakeholders from NSW school systems/sectors.

Table 2 provides a summary of interviews and focus groups conducted to date.

**Table 2: Summary of focus groups and interviews, April 2011**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus groups and interviews with school leaders and teachers in 12 schools</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Independent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All planned focus groups with selected schools were completed by June 2011</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 completed</td>
<td>3 completed</td>
<td>1 completed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy—6 schools</td>
<td>Literacy—2 schools</td>
<td>Literacy—1 school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole school</td>
<td>Whole school</td>
<td>Whole School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Schools participating in the initial round of interviews/focus groups were identified by the relevant system/sector coordinators as being representative of schools participating in the partnership, including a selection of those in metropolitan, regional and rural locations, proportionate to the number of schools in each sector. Schools were selected to be representative of the range of practices and outcomes achieved by those participating in the National Partnership: they were not selected to represent best practice. Interviews took place over a four week period in March-April 2011.

Depending on the particular circumstances of each school, interviews were conducted either individually with the principal or other school leaders, or more frequently, together with other school leaders. In some schools, small groups of classroom teachers also participated in interviews. These arrangements were made to suit the school timetable, other priorities and commitments of school staff, and the time they could make available to the evaluators. In all cases, the arrangements agreed were designed to minimize disruption and inconvenience to the school. Questions used as discussion starters during these interviews are shown in the interview schedule attached as Appendix 2.

A content analysis of the responses to the interview questions was conducted to identify common trends and issues occurring in the sample of schools. The preliminary observations from this content analysis are summarized in a later section of this report.

An additional data collection opportunity became available at the Smarter Schools Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership Celebrating Success, Embedding Change Conference, held in Sydney on 19 and 20 May 2011, which was attended by over 200 school representatives and other stakeholders. The evaluation team was asked to participate in this conference. In one session, there was a short opportunity for the evaluation team to pose three questions to the plenary group that was then asked to discuss and record its responses.
The participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

- “As a consequence of the Literacy & Numeracy SSNP what has been the most significant change for your school (or schools that you work with)?
- Why has it been significant?
- What have been the consequences of this change?”

4. Document Analysis

From the extensive literature surrounding the NPLN, it emerges that strategies employed under the NPLN (e.g. the NSW Implementation Plan) are in alignment with, and supportive of, system-wide and cross-sectoral intentions to improve and sustain literacy and numeracy gains for NSW students. The logic which links the goals and activities in the NPLN across a national, state, school system/region, and individual school levels, is guided by the consistently held position that literacy and numeracy are essential foundation skills that allow young people to achieve at school, to go onto further learning, and to participate fully in society and work. The consistency of this message is demonstrated by the priorities set out the in COAG NPLN Agreement being reiterated in the NPLN reform areas, and the tailoring of the COAG NPLN performance indicators (see Table 3 below) to the NSW performance measures. The NPLN forms a cohesive platform with the other two National Partnerships, founded on the shared emphasis on building the capacity of the school leadership to implement well researched and evidence-based strategies/programs, and to be accountable for this through the effective measurement of identified outcomes.

The analysis of documentation surrounding the take-up and sustainability of new literacy and numeracy practices in 147 NSW schools provides context for investigating whether strategies employed under the National Partnerships on Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN) match system-wide and cross-sectoral intentions. The literature review included program requirements identified at the national level, state level, the school system/sector level, and the school level, and a review of previous NPLN evaluations, progress reports and annual reports.

The MCEETYA Four-Year Plan 2009-2012 (companion document to the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians 2008) outlines the key strategies and initiatives that Australian governments will undertake to support the achievement of the educational goals for young Australians. These strategies and initiatives include the:

- National Education Agreement,
- Schools Assistance Act 2008, which confirms the Australian Government’s financial support for the non-government school sector,
- Smarter Schools National Partnerships Agreements on Literacy and Numeracy, on Low Socio-Economic Status Communities, and on Improving Teacher Quality.

The MCEETYA Four-Year Plan 2009-2012 provides a framework for the planning of collaborative federalist activities in education and the overarching objective of the COAG reform agenda to improve the wellbeing of Australians now and into the future.

The Smarter Schools National Partnerships, endorsed by COAG on 29 November 2008, contribute to
the strategic aims of the National Education Agreement, including the objective agreed by all state and territory governments that, ‘all Australian school students need to acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society and employment in a globalised economy.’ While each of the three National Partnerships has its own rewards and reforms, they operate together to form a cohesive platform with the aim of achieving higher standards in all schools.

Specifically, the National Partnerships Agreement on Literacy and Numeracy (COAG NPLN Agreement) outlines that the Australian Government is providing $540 million over four financial years to facilitate and reward the implementation of evidence-based strategies that improve student literacy and numeracy skills, and so recognises that literacy and numeracy are essential foundation skills that allow young people to achieve at school, to go onto further learning, and to participate fully in society and work. The COAG NPLN Agreement cites the analysis of national and international research together with stakeholder feedback on the influences on students’ literacy and numeracy learning outcomes, as providing the evidence base for the identification of three priority areas of reform. These are:

1. effective and evidence-based teaching of literacy and numeracy,
2. strong school leadership and whole-school engagement with literacy and numeracy,
3. monitoring student and school literacy and numeracy performance to identify where support is needed.

The roles and responsibilities of the NSW Government are outlined in the COAG NPLN agreement. A key aspect of this was the development of implementation plans to form the basis of bilateral agreements to be negotiated between the Commonwealth and the NSW Government. Hence, the National Partnership Agreement for Literacy and Numeracy: Bilateral Agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia and the New South Wales (2009) (the ‘Bilateral NPLN Agreement’), outlines the ongoing participation, reporting, monitoring and auditing responsibilities of reforms and rewards between DEEWR and the NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC), the Catholic Education Commission NSW (CEC) and the Association of Independent Schools NSW (AISNSW) consortium.

The NSW Implementation Plans for Smarter Schools National Partnerships 2009 (‘NSW Implementation Plans’) contain three implementation plans, one for each National Partnership. Among other things, the NSW Implementation Plans mandate “Reform Areas” which align with the three aforementioned priority areas detailed in the COAG NPLN Agreement, and thus are in accord with consistent evidence that teacher quality is the single greatest in-school influence on student engagement and outcomes, that literacy and numeracy is a cornerstone of schooling, and that socio-economic status remains a significant determinant of educational outcomes (NSW Implementation Plans 2009:4).

An important aspect of the National Partnerships approach is setting specific outcome targets for each state/territory, with significant financial incentives attached to the achievement of these mandated targets. The four mandated measures are:

- Students at or above the national minimum standard (All students) (Reading/Numeracy)
• Students above the national minimum standard (All students) (Reading/Numeracy)
• Mean scale score (All students) (Reading/Numeracy)
• Students at or above the national minimum standard (Indigenous students) (Reading/Numeracy).

The NSW Implementation Plan (Literacy and Numeracy) identifies that $41 million was allocated to NSW as facilitation payments in the first two years (2009/2010) of the NPLN and $47.6 million per annum as reward payments in the final two years (2010/2011), triggered by the achievement of the four mandated National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) measures. To maximise the direct impact on student learning outcomes, it is stated that at least 80 per cent of the funding available will be used to support participating schools to provide direct interventions in the classroom. In particular, the performance measures for NSW require that:

1. The percentage of students above the minimum standard in the ‘focus domain’ of either literacy or numeracy will increase from 68.9% to 70.5% in 2010
2. The average of the mean scores in the focus domain will increase from 414.8 in 2008 to 424.8 in 2010
3. The percentage of Indigenous students at or above minimum standard in the focus domain will increase from 74.9% in 2008 to 76.2% in 2010
4. The percentage of students at or above the minimum standard in the focus domain will increase from 88.5% in 2008 to 89.1% in 2010

Optional local measures were also identified to provide additional indicators of the effectiveness of interventions within a jurisdiction, reflective of the different groups of schools and contexts. NSW elected to use three local measures:

1. Implementing the series of National Partnership Literacy Numeracy assessments developed by the DEC Educational Measurement and School Accountability Directorate (EMSAD).
2. Completing the Data Analysis Skills Assessment (DASA).
3. Conducting school self-assessment using The NSW DET Analytical framework for effective leadership and school improvement in literacy and numeracy.

The COAG NPLN measures are indicated in Table 3:

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1 Data Analysis Skills Assessment is designed for teachers to develop skills in the analysis of NAPLAN data.
The existing strategies in NSW have given the state a sound base from which to undertake reforms embedded in the National Partnerships, as detailed in the NSW Implementation Plan (Literacy and Numeracy). Literacy and numeracy have been priorities in NSW government and non-government schools. In government schools, the implementation of programs (e.g. Best Start and Reading Recovery) is guided by policy, the Office of Schools Plan 2009-2011 and the NSW DET Literacy K-12 Policy, and full cohort testing in basic skills that has been in place for two decades. In the Catholic sector and in independent schools, literacy and numeracy have been priorities in accordance with the relevant policies or frameworks (e.g. REACH Parramatta Catholic Education Framework or independent school policies) and the educational accountability and assessment requirements of the Schools Assistance Act 2008 (e.g. targeted funding for the Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs Program).

Reflective of these reforms is the comparative strength of the performance of NSW students in the 2008 NAPLAN results (NSW Implementation Plans 2009:6). The NAPLAN results have also identified a need for further improvement in Stages 2 and 3 in NSW schools, as well as the particular need to focus on developing gains for indigenous students and students from socio-economically disadvantaged communities. The NSW schools participating in the NPLN understand the importance of building on student achievement in reading and numeracy in the middle and upper primary years. The NSW Implementation Plan sets out participation for continued National Partnerships funding. These include:

- capacity building in leadership,
- school self-evaluation,
- focus on the achievements of Aboriginal students enrolled in participating schools.

Participation in the two year NPLN (2009/2010 and 2010/2011) is designed to give schools opportunities to embed practices that will deliver sustained improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes for their students. It is intended that effective teaching and leadership practices are disseminated to support system-wide improvements.

Participation of eligible schools is managed by each school sector. Schools targeted by the NPLN were identified as eligible using a range of criteria including:

- 2008 NAPLAN data: schools in which the percentage of all students at or below minimum standard is above the state percentage (using Reading and Numeracy at Years 3 and 5)
- Assessment of schools’ suitability and readiness to participate in the National Partnership,
as determined by the relevant DEC regional and Catholic Education Commission diocesan offices or the AISNSW

- Regional/diocesan capacity to support school leaders and teachers as they participate in bold and innovative lasting school change
- Schools’ characteristics including enrolment size, student language background, student demographic data (e.g. proportion of refugee students and/or Aboriginal students), and the degree of disadvantage of the schools

As a result of identifying schools by these criteria, students participating in the NPLN include: 15 per cent of Aboriginal primary students in NSW; 8 per cent of first phase ESL primary students in NSW government schools; and 12 per cent of refugee primary students in NSW government schools. The full list of government and non-government schools included in the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership can be found at:


To support targeted NSW schools in the implementation of the reforms, including the selection of specific literacy or numeracy programs, an Information Package for Schools was provided to government and non-government schools in 2009. The information package details NSW performance measures, the roles and responsibilities of schools, regions/dioceses, the literacy and numeracy state coordination team, the school/classroom program facilitators, the learning and teaching classroom leaders, guidelines on using funding, the use of Individual Learning Plans and the Aboriginal Education local cultural immersion program.

The Information Package for Schools also presents a detailed overview of literacy and numeracy initiatives to be selected by schools, following their self-evaluation, for Stages 2 and 3. These options include selecting either a literary or a numeracy focus for the school, and then choosing one individual intervention strategy for students experiencing difficulties and one whole school/class program. The development of an Individual Student Learning Plan was required for students at or below minimum standard, and may also be considered for students experiencing difficulties in reading or numeracy development as a result of a language background other than English, a learning difficulty, limited opportunities to schooling, and students with a disability. The participation of teachers and leaders in the capacity building component of the NPLN is also required.

As noted in the Smarter Schools National Partnerships NSW Annual Report 2010 (SSNP NSW Annual Report 2010), 102 schools in NSW are undertaking literacy programs and 45 are undertaking numeracy programs. A summary of these options in government and non-government schools is provided below in Table 4 from information extracted from the Information Package to government and Catholic Schools, the NSW Implementation Plan, and the SSNP NSW Annual Report 2009 and 2010. Where schools could demonstrate effectiveness of existing intervention approaches in regards to raising student literacy or numeracy achievement, they could nominate to continue that program.
Table 4: Summary of NPLN program options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whole School/Class Programs</th>
<th>NUMERACY</th>
<th>LITERACY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Developed/provided by</td>
<td>Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking off with Numeracy (TOWN)</td>
<td>NSW DEC</td>
<td>Focus on Reading 3-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning in Early Numeracy (K–4) Learning in Numeracy (5–8)</td>
<td>AIS NSW</td>
<td>Reading to Learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy Matters</td>
<td>CEO, Sydney</td>
<td>Accelerated Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindful Learning: Mindful Teaching</td>
<td>CEO Parramatta with USYD Faculty of Education and Social Work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Steps Literacy 2nd Edition - Reading</td>
<td>CEO Canberra and Goulburn, Wilcannia-Forbes and Wagga Wagga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Approaches</th>
<th>NUMERACY</th>
<th>LITERACY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Developed/provided by</td>
<td>Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking off with Numeracy (TOWN)</td>
<td>NSW DEC</td>
<td>MULTILIT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUICKSMART Numeracy Program</td>
<td>SiMERR National Centre, University of New England</td>
<td>Supporting Individual Readers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy Matters</td>
<td>CEO Sydney</td>
<td>Using Individual Education Plans (IEPs) with LEXIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Learning Plans</td>
<td></td>
<td>Targeted Reading Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Successful Language Learners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the system/sector level, the NSW Department of Education and Training, Catholic Education Commission of NSW and Association of Independent Schools of NSW work together as managers of the reforms to achieve the intended outcomes of the three Partnership Agreements, and to share best practice.

In managing NPLN school participation, each sector has varied the provision of documentation, resources, consultancy and mentoring support, and professional learning. The Wollongong Catholic Education Office provides a Learning and Teaching Framework that contains guidelines for implementing literacy/numeracy initiatives in their schools. Government schools developed their initiatives from the NSW DET’s Office of Schools Plan 2009 – 2011. AISNSW provides facilitators and mentors to support independent schools in the delivery of required NPLN outcomes.

At the school level, a range of literature and other resources have been developed and/or purchased by individual schools, or within a cluster of schools, to assist their staff to implement the NPLN, to monitor students’ progress, and to put in place strategies for the sustainability of the programs. Schools from all three sectors are given the opportunity to participate in the relevant learning Community of Schools, grouped around a common focus on literacy or numeracy. The SSNP NSW
Annual Report 2009 notes that several communities of schools have been formed, such as government sector regions of Sydney (literacy), Western New South Wales (literacy), North Coast regions (literacy) and the Catholic Diocese of Parramatta (literacy). These arrangements have continued in 2010-11.

Reporting on milestones and outcomes, for accountability purposes is managed at the school level by the relevant school sector e.g. the DEC School Education Director or the Diocesan Catholic Education Office. The reporting and accountability of independent schools is managed by the AIS NSW. Schools in NSW targeted for the NPLN are requested to report to the relevant organization annually on the following:

- Development and online publication of a school plan which encompass the reforms to be undertaken as part of their participation in the NPLN.
- Development or amendment of a School Improvement Plan aimed at achieving improvements in the focus area, either reading or numeracy.
- Completion of the Data Analysis Skills Survey (DASA) baseline data collection and teachers having ongoing access to e-learning modules SMART Data Analysis.
- All students in Years 3, 4 and 5 in participating schools complete the NPLN assessment.

A suite of resources developed by the NSW Department of Education and Communities was made available to all NSW schools in 2009 and 2010 to enable them to undertake the school self-evaluation and to monitor their progress. The NSW Implementation Plan (Literacy and Numeracy) details schools’ participation in a supported self-evaluation review process. For example, this includes participation in regional self-evaluation workshops, undertaking a situational analysis in literacy and/or numeracy and using the School Measurement, Assessment and Reporting Toolkit (SMART and SMART 2 online e-learning modules) in their analysis, and the Data Analysis Skills Assessment designed for teachers to develop skills in the analysis of NAPLAN data.

*The NSW DET Analytical framework for effective leadership and school improvement in literacy and numeracy* is a critical resource that supported participating NSW schools to conduct a self-evaluation. Following the evaluation each school was provided with a school profile and a set of practical strategies to support school improvement in literacy and numeracy. This self-evaluation was complementary to the professional learning in the *Team Leadership for School Improvement* program. The AISNSW conducted a leadership Program for independent schools is that employed the tools, resources, guides and templates produced by the NSW DEC.

*The NSW DET Analytical framework for effective leadership and school improvement in literacy and numeracy* consists of 25 statements, each with descriptors, strategies, questions and resources, which form the basis of a school evaluation into their capacity to develop a culture of high performance in literacy and numeracy across the whole school. To enhance teachers’ understanding of what actions can be taken when planning for improved student outcomes, the framework covers the five leadership dimensions identified by Viviane Robinson (2005) as being the most critical in terms of improving leadership practice and impacting on student performance. These dimensions are: strategic resourcing, establishing goals and expectations, ensuring an orderly and supportive environment, planning and coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum, promoting and
participating in teacher learning and development. In addition to the dimensions identified by Robinson an additional dimension was included in the analytical framework to meet the requirements of the National Partnership. This dimension provided strategies and resources to support effective partnerships with parents, carers and school community.

The professional learning component, the *Team Leadership for School Improvement* program, is scaffolded by seven key concepts, including teacher quality, teachers as leaders, beliefs and values about teaching and learning, results-focused teamwork, data-focused school improvement, strategic professional learning, and sustainability.

A comprehensive website (www.det.nsw.edu.au/proflearn/areas/sld/programs/tlsip/index.html) provides a range of resources and support materials to assist schools in using *The NSW DET Analytical framework for effective leadership and school improvement in literacy and numeracy* and NSW DET policies such as Leading and Managing the School.

The monitoring and reporting arrangements of the NPLN are reflective of the requirements in Schedule C of the *Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations*. The SSNP NSW Annual Reports 2009/10 highlight that each school had undertaken a self-evaluation to determine whether their focus should be on literacy and numeracy. Of the 147 schools participating in this National Partnership, 102 schools had committed to implementing literacy programs and 45 schools committed to implementing numeracy programs. The SSNP NSW Annual Report 2009 also noted that during the year each of the 147 schools had formed a school leadership improvement team that completed facilitation training. This self-evaluation has enabled the school leadership improvement team to work with the support of the program facilitators during 2010 and 2011 to enhance their in-school capacity to improve student achievement. It is further acknowledged that such enhancements are reported by participants to have also been strongly influenced by the range of tailored professional learning experiences that have been experienced by both teachers in classrooms as well as school leadership teams. These experiences, made possible through the NPLN initiative, appear to have enhanced teachers’ and leaders’ confidence and capability in more systematically addressing student learning needs and driving cultural change. These issues are explored further in the preliminary observations from the evaluation field data gathering below.

The 2010 SSNP NSW Annual Report for the Minister provides details of achievements against targets and milestones. In summary, there are four targets for National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy schools related to NAPLAN results. Three of the four targets were exceeded:

- the percentage of all students below the national minimum standard decreased from 11.5% to 9.5%, exceeding the target by 1.4 percentage points
- the percentage of all students at or below the national minimum standard was decreased from 31.1% to 28.3%, exceeding the target by 1.2 percentage points
- the percentage of Aboriginal students below the national minimum standard decreased from 25.1% to 20.3%, exceeding the target by 3.5 percentage points.

The mean score for all students increased from 414.8 to 423.7, just 1.1 scale score short of the target (424.8).

The following extract from the 2010 Annual Report also highlights achievements against the three local measures, as follows.
Local Measure 1: National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy Assessment

All 147 schools implemented the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy assessment for students in Years 3, 4 and 5 in 2010. Targets were based on 18 months’ progress on this measure and followed students who were originally tested for baseline data in Years 2, 3 and 4. All targets for improvement were exceeded. The reading target for Year 3 was exceeded by 0.7 scale score points for year 4 by 0.4 and for Year 5 by 0.2 scale score points. For numeracy, the Year 3 target was exceeded by 2.3, the Year 4 target by 3.1 and the Year 5 target by 1.0 scale score points.

Local Measure 2: Data Analysis Skill Assessment

In 2010, the second Data Analysis Skills Assessment (DASA) was completed by schools participating in the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy, following the baseline data assessment completed in 2009. The National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy target was to reduce the average percentage of teachers in phase 1 (the lowest phase) across the 7 domains of DASA from 65.5% in 2009 to 60% in 2010. The 2010 DASA assessment revealed that the target had been significantly exceeded, showing that the average percentage of teachers in phase 1 has now been reduced to only 30%.

Local Measure 3: Literacy and numeracy leadership programs

The 2010 target for Local Measure 3 was achieved in 97 of the 125 schools2 (77%). These schools achieved a growth of one (or more) band levels in half of the 25 framework statements in the NSW DET Analytical Framework for Effective Leadership and School Improvement in Literacy and Numeracy.

There were two significant subsets of the 77% of schools who achieved the Local Measure 3 target:

- 31% of schools achieved growth in 80% of the statements
- 13% of schools achieved growth in 100% of the statements.

In March 2010 the Smarter Schools National Partnerships in NSW: Evaluation of Initial Implementation (Initial Implementation Evaluation Report) report published by ARTD Consultants presented findings into the effectiveness of the implementation across all three National Partnership components.

The Initial Implementation Evaluation Report found that, by early 2010, schools’ capacity to monitor student performance was increased and new literacy and numeracy programs were introduced as planned. Challenges to implementing reforms included the need to take into account how different sectors and systems operate, and teachers learning how to use student data routinely. Overall, the Initial Implementation Evaluation Report presents an encouraging picture, especially given the relatively short timeframe since initial implementation began. The report notes, for example, that schools had increased their expectations for improvements in their students’ NAPLAN results and that teachers’ understanding of pedagogical issues for whole-school literacy and numeracy

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2 Data for Local Measure 3 is collected from the 125 schools participating in the Team Leadership for School Improvement Program and using the NSW DET Analytical Framework for Effective Leadership and School Improvement in Literacy and Numeracy to benchmark their progress.
improved. Further, the report observes that schools were beginning to see the benefit, especially in terms of sustainability, of the NPLN approach which involves whole school/class, individual, as well as capacity building programs.

As detailed in the *Smarter Schools National Partnerships NSW Progress Report 2010* (SSNP NSW Progress Report), NSW has responded to the National Partnerships by undertaking ‘ambitious and significant reform’ (2010:1). The changes that have been pursued have been systemic, not simply isolated or short-term programs, leading to early signs of cultural change in schools. As of mid-2010, all current NPLN schools were implementing reform. Some significant achievements within the NPLN in 2010 have included:

- Teachers in NPLN accessing training in student data analysis and assessment, e.g. completing the Data Analysis Skills Assessment (DASA) and School Measurement, Assessment and Reporting Toolkit (SMART).
- Whole school or whole class reading programs were implemented by 1,434 teachers in NPLN schools in 2010.
- Whole school or whole class numeracy programs were implemented by 539 teachers in NPLN schools in 2010.
- 1,356 teachers participated in quality professional learning in the area of reading designed to improve the quality of teaching in these areas and in turn the reading performance of students.
- 496 teachers delivering whole school/class numeracy programs.
- 4,948 students had Individual learning plans in reading or numeracy in 2010 (2,288 in reading interventions across 90 schools and 1,511 in numeracy interventions across 45 schools), including 1,568 Aboriginal students.
- Individual reading programs in 102 NSW NPLN schools in 2010, targeting 3,206 primary students.
- Individual numeracy programs in 45 NSW NPLN schools in 2010, targeting 3,206 primary students.
- During 2010, 310 students achieved the exit numeracy goals for the individual student intervention programs in numeracy.
- During 2010, 892 students achieved the exit reading goals for the individual student intervention programs in numeracy.
- 244 teachers and executives participated in local Aboriginal cultural immersion programs in 2010.

These achievements identified in the NSW Annual Reports suggest that progress is being made towards the three priority areas of reform: effective and evidence-based teaching of literacy and numeracy; strong school leadership and whole-school engagement with literacy and numeracy; and
monitoring student and school literacy and numeracy performance to identify where support is needed.

5. Observations from the data gathering conducted to date

Whilst data gathering for the evaluation is still at an early stage, it is nonetheless possible to discern some clear trends and issues in relation to the implementation of the National Partnership for Literacy and Numeracy. Caution does need to be taken in extrapolating from these early observations, as the sample of stakeholders and schools from which data was obtained at the time of writing this progress report was small.

As noted above, schools selected for participation in the NPLN were not representative of all schools in NSW, but reflected those in which student literacy and numeracy outcomes were generally below average. The observations below in no way are meant to reflect the circumstances of schools across NSW; indeed, until quantitative data scheduled for collection later in the evaluation has been considered, may not even be representative of the 147 NPLN schools. The preliminary observations summarised below should not be taken to imply that the changes or enhancements noted have been achieved in all NPLN schools, nor that the issues addressed during the NPLN were present in all schools or schools generally across NSW. It is also important to note that the NPLN has not been implemented in a vacuum; indeed in many instances they are an extension of previous initiatives. Despite this caveat, it should be noted that there is a high degree of congruence between the issues identified in this early round of interviews and those reported in the evaluation of the initial implementation phase of the National Partnerships strategy (ARTD Consultants, 2010).

A key part of the NPLN strategy has been concerned with building the capacity of schools and individuals to deliver more effective literacy and numeracy programs. Interviews with stakeholders and a sample of school leaders show that considerable effort has been expended in providing professional learning opportunities, which in addition to enhancing understanding of pedagogy, have had additional benefits in terms of increased motivation and enthusiasm of leaders, teachers and students. In particular, school leaders reported that they have appreciated being brought together (within sectors) to train, share ideas and engage in the planning process. The opportunity that these occasions provide for participating schools to exchange ideas and share solutions to anticipated problems has been a feature of the sector based professional learning workshops. In addition, school leaders interviewed for the present evaluation have identified some key factors they believe have contributed to the success of the initiative. These factors, which will be explored further in this evaluation, include:

- involving program facilitators/support staff in planning and implementation
- providing the SMART package and NAPLAN data to assist school planning, to identify where improvement is needed and where it can be achieved
- providing training in using student data and completing needs-based systematic school self-evaluations and support for completing this task
• providing leadership training reinforcing the importance of effective instructional leadership and enhanced student outcomes in Literacy and Numeracy

These factors are similar to the success factors identified in the ARTD evaluation of the Pilot Phase of the initiative. The information considered in the document analysis (including the NSW Progress reports to DEEWR in 2010 and 2011,) demonstrate that the National Partnership initiative is meeting its planned targets. Further, the initiative has been well planned, systematically involving the cooperation of all education sectors in New South Wales. The resources developed to support the initiative, including the tools to assist schools undertake their self-evaluations (such as the NSW DET Analytical framework for effective leadership and school improvement in literacy and numeracy, DASA, and SMART data analysis professional learning) are of high quality and have been well received by participating schools.

As discussed below, there is evidence from the initial interviews that the National Partnership reform initiative has already made a contribution in terms of changed practices within schools, enhanced teacher knowledge and skill in relation to use of student outcomes data in lesson planning and delivery, changed teacher attitudes and expectations, enhanced leadership capacity, and improved pedagogy in the schools involved.

As indicated in the initial project brief and further elaborated in the Evaluation Plan (Erebus International, 2011), the purpose of the initial data gathering stage was to identify general themes relating to the planning and initial implementation of the Partnership as well as an exploration of those issues requiring further investigation. The observations detailed below were therefore based essentially on a small sample of schools and a relatively limited sample of key stakeholders.

Some reference is also made below to the anecdotal comments by school representatives attending the Smarter Schools Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership Celebrating Success, Embedding Change Conference, held in Sydney on 19 and 20 May 2011. However this latter information will be addressed more fully in the Second Progress Report. Caution should therefore be exercised in the extent to which these observations can be interpreted as preliminary findings. To generalize from these findings would be unwise.

Outlined below are the initial observations from the data gathering process, presented in terms of the six key Focus Areas from the Evaluation Plan and the relevant evaluation questions contributing to each of those Focus Areas in this relatively early stage of implementation. It should be noted that where a small number of evaluation questions have not been specifically addressed below, the data at this stage does not enable informed comment.

Table 5 details where the information sources that have been analyzed in the making of the following observations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: Summary of focus groups and interviews, April 2011</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>12 focus groups with school leaders and teachers</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• All 12 planned focus groups with selected schools were completed by June 2011</td>
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<td><strong>Government</strong></td>
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<td>8 completed</td>
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The following sections summarise the initial observations of the evaluation from the above data sources in regard to the key focus areas set out in the evaluation Terms of Reference.

**Focus Area 1. What change has been attempted?**

1.1 What was the rationale for the reform initiatives? How do these relate to the strategies outlined in the implementation plan?

In alignment with the objectives of the COAG NPLN Agreement (see document analysis), the strategies outlined in the NSW Implementation Plans focus on three priority areas of reform:

- Teaching and Learning,
- School Leadership and Whole School Engagement, and
- Monitoring Student and School Performance.

The implementation of these reform areas is designed to demonstrate the mutual interest and shared responsibilities held by the Commonwealth and states/territories, and the high value of collaboration with non-government schools in achieving outcomes.

The performance benchmarks, indicators, reform targets and strategies for NSW (negotiated in the development of the NSW Implementation Plans) were informed by the state’s cohort of students, schools and school communities, and the availability and suitability of data to measure improvement. The NSW approach to the reform areas has involved ‘focusing particularly, but not only on, our need to build on student achievement in reading and numeracy in the middle and upper primary years’ (NSW Implementation Plan: 51).
The three dimensions of the NPLN interventions—whole-school/class, individual student, and capacity building—operate cohesively to address the three priority areas of reform whilst building the sustainability of the programs themselves. Central to the reform direction in NSW has been the cross-sectoral approach and the cooperation between the NSW DEC, the CEC and AISNSW in the development of implementation and evaluation strategies. Accordingly, actions to achieve the reform priorities are clearly articulated in the strategies of the NSW Implementation Plans:

**Reform priority 1 — Effective, evidence-based teaching:** Increased teacher capacity to deliver high quality literacy and/or numeracy programs has been supported through professional learning and resourcing that accompanies the particular literacy/numeracy interventions selected at each school. Reinforcing this reform priority is the strong evidence base that accompanies the range of whole-school/class and individual literacy and numeracy programs available, some of which were developed cross-sectorally (e.g. for Years 3-6 and TOWN), and that are selected by schools’ basis of evidence from each school’s self-evaluation. Enhanced teacher capacity to use NAPLAN data, demonstrated by the completion of the Data Analysis Skills Assessment (DASA), has been also been supported through professional learning and training, such as the SMART e-learning modules.

**Reform Priority 2 — Strong leadership and whole-school engagement in literacy and numeracy:** NSW has addressed the need to build a culture of continuous improvement in literacy or numeracy through strategies which increase leadership capacity. This cultural change has been developed through the work of sectoral and/or cross-sectoral Communities of Schools; of the Learning/Teaching Classroom Leaders, supported by school leaders, at class and whole-school levels; of program facilitators within regions, dioceses or groups of independent schools; and of relevant DEC school leaders and teachers participating in cultural immersion programs for school working with Aboriginal communities.

The effective implementation of whole-school strategies has been enabled by leadership (principal and school executive) involvement in professional learning, across the three school sectors. These leadership programs have consistently focused on supporting schools to implement the strategies of the NPLN effectively and sustainably.

**Reform Priority 3 — Monitoring school and student performance to identify when support is needed:** Schools in NSW have been supported in their monitoring of student performance through the analysis of NAPLAN data and through locally developed assessment schedules and tools, such as participation in the series of National Partnerships Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN) assessments. The commitment to monitoring school and student performance is demonstrated by NSW government and non-government school sectors selecting to implement this local measure (agreed in the NPLN Bilateral Agreement).

The self-evaluation review process using *The NSW DEC Analytical framework for effective leadership and school improvement in literacy and numeracy* and other tools/training developed by non-government schools has been crucial in ensuring strategic action is taken in the identification, implementation and monitoring of appropriate literacy/numeracy programs. The findings of schools’ data analysis identifying areas for literacy/numeracy improvement are reflected in school plans, as required, ensuring transparency and ongoing accountability.
1.2 To what extent has the SSNP literacy and numeracy implementation plan in NSW schools resulted in the adoption of literacy and numeracy programs, teaching practices or school strategies or that are new or substantial reworkings of existing approaches and programs in the schools?

The small amount of data gathered at this stage of the evaluation provides some indication of the kinds of changes that have occurred as a consequence of the NPLN, but further data gathering will be required to establish the extent to which these changes have taken place, and the particular circumstances that have led to these changes.

From the interviews conducted to date, and presentations and reports from all schools participating in the initiative at sharing conferences, it is clear that there has been evidence of implementation of activities and programs aimed at whole school pedagogical change.

Teaching practices that were substantially new to the schools participating in the NPLN included:

- Programs that involve greater in-class participation of students, dialogue and cooperative learning.
- Use of higher quality teaching resources, including a focus on understanding electronic texts and visual literacy. There is now more use of interactive whiteboards, especially in AL lessons. The NPLN funding has also been used in some schools to buy an extensive range of classroom sets of novels, and picture books, which are used in integration with whiteboard resources.
- Structural changes to the school day, including use of extended blocks of time for literacy and numeracy
- Greater use of teaching techniques that encourage student-centred learning, more group work, and recognition of individual student needs
- More structured, scaffolded and explicit teaching, language and writing skills, e.g. through promoting understanding of concepts such as the author's intent and language features
- Greater use of paraprofessionals within classrooms, instead of, or in addition to, withdrawal of students from the classroom.

The above list of changed practices is not exhaustive, but indicates the kinds of changes that have occurred. Further examples of changed practice will be identified and described in the school case studies to be conducted later in the evaluation.

1.3 What were the rationales and strategies for program selection? What research or evidence base was used to guide the design of the initiative?

Guided by the importance of monitoring school and student performance (Reform Area 3) the selection of literacy or numeracy programs within schools was strategic and aligned with the rationale of the NPLN to achieve sustained improvements in student outcomes, especially for those falling behind.
Participation in self-evaluation workshops provided by DEC regions, dioceses or AISNSW, along with executive team leadership improvement programs, was designed to assist schools to select a literacy or numeracy focus for students in Stages 2 and 3. Professional learning also involved a focus on building capacity amongst staff in data analysis (such as through the SMART e-learning modules), and school-based assessment data. Within each sector, leadership teams from each of the 147 participating schools in NPLN were engaged in self-evaluation workshops, including the provision of tools to enable them to identify whether they should focus on literacy or numeracy for students in stages 2 and 3.

Once a literacy or numeracy focus was selected, schools chose particular whole-school/class programs as well as individual intervention strategies. Schools were provided with materials in the Information Packs which detailed the evidence base for the program options, and were encouraged to consider their schools’ particular context and strengths, areas most in need of student outcomes improvement, and student demographic data (such as indigenous student or ESL communities). The requirements of individual students were also considered when selecting individual interventions or when developing Individual Learning Plans.

Where schools could demonstrate an existing intervention in literacy or numeracy was effective, they could nominate to continue this intervention and build on its strengths. Another factor in decision making evidenced in some cases where schools felt there was special potential or expertise with a group of nearby schools, the DEC region, or the dioceses, to support/facilitate the implementation of a particular program.

1.4 How have systems/sectors supported the change initiative in schools?

The Literacy and Numeracy State coordination team has liaised with NSW government, independent and Catholic schools to coordinate the implementation of the NPLN, to develop some literacy and numeracy programs, and to facilitate collaboration between the three sectors. Within each sector, the provision of documentation, resources, consultancy and mentoring support, and professional learning to manage NPLN school participation has varied.

Broadly speaking, the key strategies undertaken by DEC regions, AISNSW and Dioceses to support their respective schools have been to facilitate professional learning and workshops for school self-evaluation, to assist schools to develop their school plan and set literacy or numeracy targets, to recruiting school/classroom program facilitators and teaching and learning classroom leaders, and to help coordinate schools in the reporting of milestones and targets. More particularly, however, different regions and dioceses have adopted particular strategies and programs for their schools. For example, DEC provided intensive professional learning to 429 teachers in 37 schools in the Focus on Reading 3-6 program for 2010 (NPLN NSW Annual Report 2010), and the Catholic Education Office Parramatta collaborated with the University of Sydney Faculty of Education and Social Work to present a symposium to 200 school leaders and teachers on ‘Mindful Learning: Mindful teaching.’

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3 Smarter Schools National Partnerships Symposium, St Oliver’s Primary, 19 February 2010
AISNSW provided facilitators and mentors to support independent schools in the delivery of required NP outcomes, which included professional learning in the Learning in Early Numeracy (K–4) Learning in Numeracy (5–8) as well as courses through their centres of excellence, such as the Leadership for Enhancing Data Driven Reading and Numeracy Improvement.

Another dimension of sectoral support for schools has been to encourage the establishment of Communities of Schools, and this has not only provided more efficient use of resources but also provided professional support and collegiality amongst teachers and school leaders. Communities of Schools are a form of self-directed learning community, which provide informal means for exchange of ideas and experiences. Typically, these groups are comprised of teachers or executives from a number of schools in a particular geographic area (although they can sometimes be on-line "virtual" communities), that meet on a regular basis to discuss issues of mutual concern. In relation to the NPLN, stakeholders noted instances where groups of principals met regularly to discuss not only the progress of their reform activities but to inform their own professional learning in relation to their leadership role. While these "learning communities" were typically established by the system/sector facilitators, some have continued in 2010/2011 under their own initiative.

Focus Area 2. What effects and synergies can be discerned?

2.1 To what extent, in what ways, and in which circumstances has the adoption of new SSNP approaches and programs produced improved teaching and learning environments?

While there is emerging evidence of changed classroom pedagogy, of equal importance has been the change in overall approach to teaching identified by stakeholders. It has been noted that the NPLN has provided schools with a stronger sense of purpose for literacy, and has made it more possible for them to adopt a team focus with common goals, rather than teachers working as individuals. The interviews conducted with principals and other leaders of NPLN schools to date suggests that teachers in these schools are now more likely to meet on a weekly/fortnightly basis as a team to plan and review progress. Descriptions of current practice and case studies presented by NPLN schools at the 2011 Sydney Celebrating Success, Sharing Change conference also reinforce the more frequent prevalence of such practices. Teacher and student enthusiasm has been reported to be much greater as a consequence and the quality of learning has noticeably improved.

Teachers are now more able to support each other – even new teachers have benefited through exposure to the same professional learning as other staff members. This has been further encouraged by the NPLN helping Principals to give a focus to staff professional development and provided a focus for communicating to the community and to set goals and celebrate success. It has also provided a framework to talk to staff about pedagogy. Staff meetings have changed, for example, from discussion on administrative matters to a focus on professional learning centred on improving teaching practice.

In the schools visited thus far, it has been noted by school leaders and teachers interviewed that teachers in these schools are now much more confident in their use of the new pedagogy. This has come about as a result of the professional learning undertaken. (It was noted that the professional development provided by facilitators was of a very high quality). There is also now more professional
conversation and sharing of ideas among teachers. In general, the specific programs and activities have been new to teachers, and have required extensive professional learning to be undertaken. This has been found to be a useful way of achieving consistency in pedagogy across the school.

Not only has the NPLN assisted to increase dialogue between teachers, it has also increased dialogue between schools. A common strategy adopted by schools was to form clusters that enabled pooling of funds, for example to allow employment of teacher leaders for professional development, which may have been beyond the resources of any one school. In addition, there has been some interest from non-NPLN schools in learning from the experiences of those that have adopted new practices and programs as part of their participation in the NPLN. It is also noteworthy that several schools are now citing the introduction of a common language being employed by both teachers and students. Not only does this facilitate communication but also assists the learning of key concepts in both Literacy and Numeracy.

From the teachers' perspective, an advantage of the initiative is that they now have a common understanding of the teaching of literacy (thanks also to the use of evidence based research findings in the professional development) – they believe in what they are doing and are seeing success at student level. Teachers are talking about learning and student achievement in a positive way.

The teacher focus groups conducted thus far suggest that, for some teachers in NPLN schools, there has also been a significant change in the way that they view students in the classroom. For example, there is now greater understanding of techniques for responding to individual differences in students' learning styles and stage of development. Teachers interviewed said that individual pathways are now used more frequently in follow up to whole class instruction and support staff were used in the classroom to enhance this trend. The increased monitoring and assessment of student progress and the use of individualised learning plans has allowed teachers to more effectively tailor their approaches to the needs of individual students.

While such practices may have been common in many schools and classrooms, including NPLN schools for many years, stakeholders expressed the view that the basis for such practice was implicitly understood by teachers, rather than the consequence of an explicit, planned and coordinated approach. The major difference from past practice in many NPLN schools noted by stakeholders, is the strategic and holistic nature of the approaches now being adopted, drawing together elements of good practice. While the use of specific programs remains an important component of practice, use of such programs was reported to now be made on a more considered basis, and be part of a suite of responses rather than the sole or main response to student under-performance.

Systems and sectors have made a consistent effort during the NPLN to ensure that all schools understood the fact that the three priority areas for action must work together, rather than as discrete areas of activity. All communication with schools has stressed this focus. Systems and sectors have also worked with facilitators to reinforce this message, e.g. through conferences and also built it into the professional development courses.

An important aspect of the NPLN has been the emphasis placed on engagement of the whole school community in the development process, rather than focusing on building the capacity of individuals. Stakeholders working directly with groups of NPLN schools report that they have observed that the
implementation of the NPLN has also been achieved on a whole school basis, and involved school executive teams and teaching staff, and in some instances casual, temporary and support staff, enabling cultural change to be instituted. This was also evident in the case studies and reports presented at the 2011 SSLNNP Sharing Success, Embedding Change conference. In these presentations, as well as the school visits conducted thus far, it was frequently noted that previous attempts to improve literacy and numeracy, new programs were often adopted by one or a few teachers, and while supported by other members of the school community, did not require a commitment to holistic change. It was commonly reported in the NPLN schools visited, for example, that all teachers were now using a common approach, using the same pedagogical model as part of their whole-school plan for literacy or numeracy.

Previous programs were said by the teachers from NPLN schools interviewed to have operated more as "add-ons" in their classrooms to existing modes of teaching literacy or numeracy. The capacity to train all staff in the use of a particular program, such as Accelerated Literacy, has been one of the factors that has facilitated change in core literacy practice as a consequence of NPLN funding.

Drawing from all of the data available thus far, it is possible to identify several factors which appear to have made an important contribution to the successful uptake of new teaching practices. Firstly, teachers have readily embraced the philosophy of NPLN because of their attitude and desire to help their students. It has been readily observed in the participating schools that the majority of staff have commenced the learning journey and are already well ahead of where they were in 2010. The match between systemic and sector policies and directions was also said to have been important in providing philosophical or theoretical alignment with the NPLN objectives. Similarly important has been the emphasis given to making explicit the research base upon which the strategies have been based. It was noted that when staff understand the rationale behind changes to teaching practices, and are provided with a research base that supports this as best practice, they are generally willing to attempt change. In the schools visited thus far, school leaders frequently expressed the view that most of their teachers have welcomed the initiative and have been further encouraged by their observation of early signs of improvement in student learning and behaviour.

Secondly, the high levels of support provided through NPLN funding has also been critical in facilitating pedagogical change. The appointment of classroom leaders – skilled teachers who have received additional training in literacy or numeracy pedagogy and tasked with coordinating and facilitating the implementation of new literacy or numeracy approaches in their school or cluster of schools – was also very important. Most of the schools in NPLN did not have someone in this role previously. This strategy required a high level of investment in the initial stages, for example in identifying what these leaders were expected to do, training them so they had the skills necessary for coaching and mentoring, understanding best practice etc. These leaders will also have a strong role in sustainability. These classroom leaders are a strong resource developed from the initiative, and while they were always a part of the intended implementation model, their impact has been stronger than expected, according to stakeholders.

Thirdly, the strong level of accountability built into the initiative, through establishment of firm targets and tied incentive payments at a state level, have provided an imperative for action, which has elevated the priority of the reforms and requiring staff at both school and systemic levels to take
direct action. Regional and sector facilitators have played a strong role in fostering this sense of accountability, ensuring continuous attention was given to all required aspects of implementation. Strong accountability at school level has also been facilitated by provision of tools and knowledge to assist schools to conduct more effective self-evaluations, allowing them to better monitor the effectiveness of their implementation efforts.

While the experience of the vast majority of schools participating in the NPLN has been positive, mention was made of some perceived limitations. One area that has not developed as strongly as desired during the NPLN in the schools visited thus far has been increased engagement of parents/wider school community in supporting student learning. Schools have typically promoted their NPLN activities to parents in newsletters, P&C meetings and so on. Some have conducted information sessions for parents in relation to how parents can support their children’s literacy and numeracy learning, and the particular application of the programs adopted under the NPLN. Some schools have also said that they have trained some parents as volunteer tutors, for example, to assist them to implement Multilit. These activities are not typically different from the ways that schools have attempted to engage parents in the past, and (at least in the schools visited thus far), not considered to have been more effective than previous efforts. However, all of the schools visited acknowledged that this was an area in which further work was needed.

All schools visited have identified the substantial investment of teacher time that the initiative has required. The additional funding from the NPLN has made purchase of release time possible, but some schools find it more difficult than others to employ casual relief staff, and some indicated that it will be challenging for them to maintain the present level of commitment from within their own resources. However, while demands and expectations have been high, it has also been a common perception that the investment has been worthwhile given the results achieved.

In addition, there are also concerns that the more intense focus of the new approaches sometimes meant that it was more difficult to cover all of the syllabus requirements. This was offset by the belief that as student outcomes improve, the pace of curriculum coverage could increase. However, there was also a view expressed that the initiative has not worked as well for students with high level special learning needs (SLN), but was more effective for students who were simply “behind” in their learning. It was argued that a different approach is needed for SLN students and the NPLN programs should not be a substitute for these.

The extent to which these factors were common experience in NPLN schools, and any further examples of changed practice will be further examined in later stages of the evaluation in the survey of schools and case studies.

2.2 To what extent has the NPLN produced a rethinking of teachers’ beliefs about best practice?

The data gathering conducted to date does not allow this question to be answered at this stage in any real depth. However, Principals interviewed commented that teacher beliefs about how children learn had been challenged, and they had gained additional strategies providing effective means of addressing these learning needs.
Regional facilitators have observed that teachers are becoming more reflective towards their teaching practices, towards their roles and responsibilities as teachers, and about what constitutes ‘best practice’.

Teachers expressed that they increasingly saw the advantages in taking a whole school approach to the teaching of both Literacy and Numeracy. These changed perceptions were built on two important understandings. The first related to the ease with which students will be able to move from year to year and stage to stage without the need for further testing to determine achievement. The second related to the teachers’ increasing ability to engage in meaningful dialogue with each other based on a whole school understanding of the Key Learning Area under consideration.

At another level, teachers in the evaluation interviews articulated that best practice teaching involves a deeper consideration of student learning outcomes in planning for teaching and learning processes. This situation had arisen because of the professional learning in which they had recently participated. This experience provided new and more meaningful opportunities for teachers to interpret students’ results in a way that had direct meaning for planning and teaching.

The evidence of such rethinking by both teachers and Principals highlights the significant value that systems and sectors can provide in the forms of direct support already provided through both professional development and physical tools and resources.

### 2.3 Have low impact strategies been replaced by high impact strategies?

The evidence gathered to date does not allow comparison of the relative success of previous strategies for literacy and numeracy improvement to be made at this time. However, what is evident is that the NPLN has helped to change the way that decisions are made about planning for and delivery of literacy and numeracy in the NPLN schools. According to the stakeholders interviewed and schools visited, decisions about which strategies, programs, activities and resources are selected are now more likely to be made systematically, collectively, and on a more informed basis. In addition to the reduction in ad hoc and individualized decision making that was said to have been common practice previously, the structures and processes that have been established within schools also allow more planned and transparent self-evaluation and monitoring of the effectiveness of the strategies and programs they adopt.

These changes have come about as a direct result of the various planned state-level initiatives that have formed part of the overall NSW NPLN strategy, particularly through the professional learning and capacity building elements. The changes also reflect the effective promotion of the evidence-based approaches and philosophies that have underpinned the implementation of the NPLN in NSW (for example, Hattie, 2003; Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, [eds] 2000). These foundations provide the potential at school level for more frequent replacement of low-impact strategies with higher impact strategies.

From the perspective of systemic policy, the evaluation data raises several issues that require further exploration. The first of these concerns the relative merits of approaches and programs that focus on (and provide funding for) individual students, as opposed to block funding at whole school level. There are numerous examples of the former approach (such as the Commonwealth Tutorial Voucher
Initiative and later Reading Vouchers program and Even Start National Tuition Program) and at a state level, programs such as Reading Recovery.

The NPLN targets funding at the school level, but it does not preclude schools from adopting programs or activities that assist individual students as well as strategies designed to influence whole-class instruction. There is no suggestion that the programs targeting individual students were ineffective or indeed, "low impact", in terms of meeting their immediate objectives at a particular point in time. However, when the issue of sustainability of outcomes is considered, it may be that strategies focusing on capacity building offer more promise. Further evidence in relation to this issue will be gathered later in the evaluation.

The second issue requiring further reflection is related to the above, and concerns the relative priority given to strategies that are reactive to low academic outcomes, as opposed to strategies that are proactive in implementing structures and processes that research suggests will lessen the likelihood of poor outcomes being achieved. From the comments from stakeholders and schools visited thus far, it would appear that the NPLN allows an appropriate balance of proactive and reactive elements, within a holistic and integrated framework.

2.4 To what extent have universities and other partners been engaged in developing or delivering new approaches programs? How effective have these partnerships been?

At this stage of the evaluation, there has been little mention of engagement of universities or other partners in relation to development or delivery of the NPLN. While it is clear that the NPLN draws heavily on an identified research base, this is distinct from specifically commissioned assistance or support. (This is not to say that such support has not been sought, simply it has not been highlighted in the interviews conducted to date). The exceptions concern particular academics who have been employed as critical friends, evaluators or providers of professional learning in particular jurisdictions. In addition, professional learning in relation to specific programs funded under the NPLN has been delivered in some instances by contracted providers. In all of the instances cited, the relationship between university and other partners has been viewed positively by the relevant jurisdiction or school concerned, and considered to have contributed to the success of the initiative.

2.5 What impact have the National Partnerships arrangements had on the relationships between schools and their relevant system/sectors, including at regional/diocesan level? What lessons can be drawn for future support arrangements and policy initiatives for literacy and numeracy in schools?

The NPLN has been credited by systemic stakeholders interviewed with enhancing the relationship between the participating schools and their relevant system and sector in several ways. It has provided a vehicle through which systems and sectors have been able to support and reinforce initiatives that have been seen to be desirable and may have already been the subject of programs or strategies, sometimes over a considerable period of time. More effective use of student outcomes data, for example, has been seen as a systemic priority for a long time.
The NPLN has provided an imperative for schools to engage with the tools and resources available to them (as well as the newly developed tools). While these tools have been in existence for some time, and used as a matter of routine by many schools, school leaders interviewed for the evaluation said that the direct support given by the system/sector facilitators and NPLN-funded professional development had allowed them to use these tools more effectively, and to give greater prominence to outcomes analysis in their planning processes. Similarly, systemic stakeholders interviewed believed that the professional learning provided through the NPLN has enabled school staff and policy makers to develop shared understanding and common language around the conceptual underpinnings of the reforms. This has been aided by the development and dissemination of a sound research base that has lent credibility to the initiatives proposed. School staff interviewed frequently cited research findings they had been exposed to through NPLN professional development as having inspired or motivated changed practices in their schools.

At the school level, the emphasis on capacity building for leadership teams has been perceived by stakeholders interviewed to have empowered Principals to hold teachers more accountable for their work and for changing their practices. School leaders said they believed the initiative had given them a feeling of much greater legitimacy and credibility to initiate conversations about specific pedagogical practices and undertake classroom observations. Staff meetings also were reported in the schools visited to now give greater priority to pedagogical rather than administrative issues. The enhanced transparency and accountability has increased openness and dialogue among teachers. This philosophy is reflected in the "Team Leadership for School Improvement" program. Both of these aspects reflect what some call greater "corporate ownership of student outcomes", while in another sector it is referred to as "deprivatising" classrooms.

The same has been said to apply at system/sector level, allowing regional/diocesan personnel to conduct more informed dialogue with their schools. The greater transparency observed within schools appears to have been extended to conversations beyond the school boundaries. The improved outcomes observed and greater sense of empowerment to address lower than desired performance provided by the new strategies, programs and approaches adopted has been said by those interviewed for this evaluation to have given schools confidence to discuss their situation with greater openness.

It should be noted here that the relationship between the schools and their system/sector has been strongly influenced by the close and effective relationships built by the program facilitators at region/diocesan and sector levels. This relationship has been characterized as trusting and supportive, enhanced by the fact that the facilitators, while demanding of rigorous implementation, were not in a line management relationship with the schools they supported. These relationships were not the result of happenstance, but the result of careful selection of the relevant personnel, appropriate training, and support from their own systemic/management structures. The lines of communication established between participants from across the three sectors at all levels (including the cross-sectoral working party) were said to have been productive and conducive to sharing of ideas and approaches, setting a tone for the conduct of the National Partnership that has contributed to its early success in NSW.
The lessons from this experience for future support arrangements and policy initiatives for literacy and numeracy in schools are complex, and may be different in the various systemic/sectoral contexts. While further data is required before definitive conclusions can be drawn, the critical success factors appear to derive from the totality of effort involved in the implementation of the National Partnership, as much as any particular element. However, it would appear necessary that:

- Close and focused support of the kind provided by the program facilitators would be a necessary component of any similar effort.

- The number of schools that each facilitator supports be of about the same size as that involved in the NPLN, so their efforts are not spread too thinly.

- The role of the facilitator needs to be focused largely on supporting the specific initiative – their time allotted for the role should not be deflected into other tasks.

- The expertise of the facilitator needs to be focused on pedagogy as much as curriculum content; they must have a strong appreciation of their role as a change agent and the change process that is the subject of the initiative; and an appreciation of the bigger picture of the reform agenda (and receive their own professional development and support to enable continuous development of this expertise).

- The facilitators need to have sufficient seniority and personal qualities to work effectively with school executives as well as classroom teachers; they must be able to model effective practices for colleagues as well as be persuasive in conveying both the necessity for, and possibility of radical changes in school direction and practices where needed.

Further preliminary observations about factors contributing to the success of the NPLN suggested that may have relevance to future initiatives, are discussed in later sections of this progress report, and will be further investigated in later stages of the evaluation.

**Focus Area 3. How effective has implementation been?**

**3.1 To what extent have strategies and programs been implemented as intended and what effects has this had on outcomes and sustainability?**

The consensus of system/sector stakeholder views has been that the NSW Implementation Plan has proceeded as planned. No schools have dropped out during the implementation period. All of the key strategic elements are being implemented, with very little adaptation occurring. Strong guidelines were established at the outset to ensure that expectations were understood by all stakeholders. While some initial difficulties may have been experienced in some settings, these have been relatively minor and overcome by the open communication established by the system and sector management teams. These early implementation issues were discussed in the ARTD report on the evaluation of the Pilot phase of the initiative.

The technically complex processes involved to satisfy the NPLN requirement to integrate the three reform priorities into a coherent whole school-based implementation approach need an investment of time to ensure there is school-wide commitment to and understanding of the reforms. The
implementation model was not designed as a quick fix intervention program delivered in isolation from the cultural change required for whole school improvement.

Initial data gathering reported in the NSW Annual Reports (2009/10) to DEEWR also suggests that the NPLN initiative has been implemented as intended in the significant majority of schools, and as a result, its operation has been effectively targeted at improving literacy and numeracy for students and building capacity amongst staff and the school leadership. Further, as noted in interviews conducted with systemic/sector representatives for this evaluation, the consistency of execution owes much to the work of the regional/diocesan/sector facilitators and their commitment to maintaining the integrity of the Implementation Plan, and in turn, the professional learning designed for them, as well as the relationships established between facilitators and management staff.

3.2 How, where and why have new operational arrangements, programs and teaching practices been effective in producing improved learning opportunities and student outcomes?

Analysis of the impact of the initiative on student learning outcomes will be undertaken in later phases of this evaluation. However, data from 2010 in the DEC progress reports to DEEWR shows that NSW exceeded the targets for 2011 reward payments. As noted earlier in this report:

- the percentage of all students below the national minimum standard decreased from 11.5% to 9.5%, exceeding the target by 1.4 percentage points
- the percentage of all students at or below the national minimum standard was decreased from 31.1% to 28.3%, exceeding the target by 1.2 percentage points
- the percentage of Aboriginal students below the national minimum standard decreased from 25.1% to 20.3%, exceeding the target by 3.5 percentage points.

It should be noted that isolating specific effects from particular interventions and for particular circumstances may not be possible, given the interactions between various structural elements and programs that have occurred. Students may have participated in an individual program, such as Multilit, but also participated in whole class programs such as Accelerated Literacy. They may also have benefited from changes to whole class pedagogy such as scaffolded learning. Student outcome scores as measured by the NAPLAN tests also reflect the prior learning that has occurred in previous years and from the learning experienced in KLAs other than literacy or numeracy.

In addition, Principals and teacher leaders have observed that changes in teaching strategies as a result of the new pedagogy (e.g. ‘think, pair, share’, ‘thinking/talking partners’) have increasingly been transferred across to the teaching of all KLAs (in Years3-6). Indeed some Principals have expressed their surprise that this had occurred so quickly.

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4 The think, pair, share strategy is a cooperative learning technique that encourages individual participation and is applicable across all grade levels and class sizes. The think, pair, share strategy increases the kinds of personal communications that are necessary for students to internally process, organize, and retain ideas. Students think through questions using three distinct steps: (1) Students think independently about the question that has been posed, forming ideas of their own; (2) Students are grouped in pairs to discuss their thoughts. This step allows students to articulate their ideas and to consider those of others; (3) Student pairs share their ideas with a larger group, such as the whole class. Often, students are more comfortable presenting ideas to a group with the support of a partner. In addition, students' ideas have become more refined through this three-step process.
There have been other qualitative comments about outcomes for students observed by teachers interviewed to have been a consequence of the NPLN. As the pedagogical approaches in the NPLN programs encourage students to take responsibility for their learning and to actively participate in class, learning environments have become more engaging and conducive to good behaviour. Schools have reported improvements in student behaviour with anecdotal evidence of students being more engaged and motivated in the classroom, and with greater attendance rates these anecdotal observations about increased attendance could perhaps be verified through system-collected data). Schools using the Accelerated Literacy program report it appears to be especially effective at including and encouraging students with behavioural and learning difficulties by creating a supportive environment. The Focus on Reading program, for example, ensures that students cannot ‘tune out’ as they need to be prepared to ask questions and give answers.

At another level, schools have been already equipped through professional learning and appropriate resources, to more meaningfully engage parents in their children’s learning. In the sample of schools visited thus far, some principals identified “partnerships” established with parents as an outcome of efforts initiated as part of their NPLN strategy. These partnerships were a consequence of the greater understanding that parents now have of teacher intentions and actions with their children.

3.3 How have schools identified success and kept themselves apprised of successful implementation and outcomes?

In line with one of the priority reform areas, schools involved in the NPLN have increased their capacity to collect and analyse data, particularly in relation to student learning outcomes. In addition to the NAPLAN results, schools are using a variety of standardized tests and school developed assessments to better understand student learning. They are more likely, for example, to make use of pre- and post-testing to identify learning gains and areas they may need to be re-visited for individual students and whole classes. While the use of such assessments is not necessarily new, even in the NPLN schools, what is new is the way the data is used on a more transparent, reflective and holistic basis. The professional development provided around analysis of NAPLAN, and the processes involved in conducting school self-evaluations have been cited as providing important models and tools that have encouraged the adoption of these new approaches.

It is evident that many schools have been encouraged to document their “journey” undertaken (as evidenced by the displays at the May sharing conference). Regional facilitators have encouraged this as a form of “action research”, using standardized reporting formats. Much of the schools’ observations of success have been anecdotal. In the interviews with school leaders conducted thus far, participants identified enhanced student and teacher engagement with learning, better student behaviour, more sophisticated conversations about learning, and increased enjoyment of learning as typical outcomes of their NPLN work.

Likewise, schools report increased teacher morale, enjoyment of teaching and greater collegiality as typical outcomes. None of these factors has been formally measured in any of the schools visited thus far, but were commonly noted as benefits of their NPLN participation.
Teacher expectations of student learning are said by stakeholders interviewed to have changed significantly, for example, teachers are more likely to accept the view that all students can learn. Data about what students know and can do (at whatever level) is more frequently used as the starting point for devising strategies for progressing forward. The extent to which adoption of this “strengths based” approach to teaching and learning, noted as one of the benefits accruing from NPLN participation, will be tested further in later stages of this evaluation.

3.4 What operational arrangements and organizational and system policies have supported and/or hindered the implementation of new strategies and programs?

The support provided by all systems and sectors in NSW for the NPLN has been extensive. As discussed in the document analysis above, these operational arrangements include professional learning programs, accountability responsibilities at both system/sector and school levels, school plans, resource development, dedicated support and coordination personnel, communication systems, among other things. Importantly, the focus has been on both school leadership teams, at the whole school level and classroom teachers. This dual thrust is already creating synergies in school that are enhancing the role of school leadership and deepened the impact of teaching in classrooms.

All schools visited thus far have made extensive use of these support mechanisms. Most have made use of the DASA tool and SMART2 professional learning packages to enhance their integrated use of data. While the level of confidence in the use of such data may vary between schools and within a school’s staff, teachers are reporting that they are now engaging in a level of dialogue that is new yet meaningful for them.

The significant majority of schools felt that all the resources they needed for NPLN implementation were readily available, were of high quality with a sound research base. In addition schools have valued the opportunity to engage in a process of self-evaluation, resulting in the development of a tailored school plan and appropriate whole school/class programs to address the reform areas. Many schools have cited a dual advantage in this process. Not only has it provided a clear direction, set of strategies and accountabilities for action. In addition teachers have valued the opportunity it has provided in enhancing their skills in evaluation and planning, which are directly transferable to other areas of responsibility.

As indicated throughout this report, anecdotal evidence from schools also highlights the value of the regional/sector/diocesan Facilitators as a critical friend in the planning and implementation process. In some cases this has been achieved through the establishment of school communities where good practice is shared. In other situations, Facilitators have been directly involved with schools in helping to achieve milestones and targets relating to the NPLN program.

The factors that have been reported to have hindered the implementation of the NPLN appear to be more reflective of the kinds of factors that limit the introduction of any new program or approach in schools, rather than the result of any structural or systematic shortcoming in the design of the NSW NPLN implementation. Further evidence of the extent to which these inhibiting factors have been significant or have inhibited achievement of program outcomes will be gathered later in this
evaluation in the planned survey of schools and school case studies. Schools have also received assistance from system and sector professional learning in leading and managing the change process. In this way, they are well positioned to identify and address any forms of resistance should they arise. Comments from both Principals and teachers however indicate that such instances are rare.

From the observation of the experience of schools gained thus far, the majority of problems encountered have been overcome with sensitivity, clear communication, and persistence.

Examples of issues cited include:

- Staff turnover, and in particular, loss of key personnel such as the in-school leader. As noted elsewhere, the impact of this factor has been addressed by adopting team-based approaches and whole-school professional development to ensure widespread understanding and ownership of the programs, approaches, strategies and activities adopted.

- Time pressures and competing priorities. It must be expected that an initiative of the scale, scope and complexity as the NPLN will take time for all the processes to be completed and for benefits to become obvious. NPLN funding has made purchase of release time possible. At the same time, communication from system/sector level coordinators and facilitators has helped schools better understand the importance of prioritizing literacy and numeracy learning as the foundation for successful learning in other areas.

- Variability in the initial skill and confidence level of key school staff, which has been addressed through structured professional learning, modeling by facilitators, availability of resources and tools and so on.

- Initial teething problems such as unfamiliarity with processes for managing grant funds. The close contact between the schools and their regional/diocesan/sector facilitators allowed timely information on how to manage these issues to be transmitted. Formal and informal professional development was cited by interview participants as a significant factor in helping teachers and school leaders learn new skills, for example in conducting the situational analysis that informed their literacy or numeracy plan.

Focus Area 4. How have schools approached issues of sustainability, resilience and transferability?

4.1 What plans for sustainability of outcomes and practices were undertaken during the implementation phase? How successful were these? What level of support did systems/sectors provide?

The preliminary data gathered thus far suggests that the issue of the sustainability of results has been a feature of planning for the National Partnership from the inception, and a central feature of the design of the NSW implementation strategy. Sustainability may not have been uppermost in the minds of school personnel in the early stages of implementation, but has been a topic of discussion
throughout late 2010 and 2011 between program facilitators and school staff. In discussing progress and proposals for responding to identified needs, program facilitators have as a matter of routine (as part of the overall state implementation strategy) posed the question to school leadership teams "how can this (action) be sustained after funding ceases, for example, how they will induct new teachers into the processes that are now in place."

According to stakeholders interviewed, sustainability is embedded in the fundamental model of school functioning that is implicit in the National Partnership approach adopted in NSW. "Sustainability comes most from developing teachers understanding about how students learn, having a common approach that is evidence based, changing the way that data is being used, not just as a "score" but as a window into children's thinking; changing teachers' understanding about what teaching is. Understanding syllabus content is not enough if this can't be translated into practice".

An advantage perceived of the NPLN by stakeholders was that it did not require adoption of any particular program but builds on approaches such as that involved in the "Inquiry Cycle" (Timperley, 2009) based on enquiring into the needs of students and the consequent professional learning needs of teachers. The processes underpinning these approaches allow meaningful integration of (evidence based) strategies such as reciprocal teaching and guided reading that teachers can use to build students' understanding, but which in and of themselves are not sufficient to constitute the pedagogical shift envisaged by the NPLN reform priorities. Such approaches require a different way of thinking about the nature of teaching and learning in some instances – but also provide an opportunity for thoughtful decision making about what will be of most benefit for each learner. Stakeholders say they have readily supported the reform priorities because the inherent approaches align comfortably with policy directions already adopted or advocated by the various education systems/sectors in NSW. Despite this, the early opportunities provided to teachers through professional learning, affords them enhanced skills that they will continue to use after the funding has ceased.

Stakeholders also noted that sustainability has been assisted by the fact that the processes employed in the NP have become embedded into regional/diocesan/school practices. However, they also recognised that sustainability will depend on the extent to which momentum is maintained by individual school leaders and the extent to which a whole school perspective and decision making is retained. The notion of clear accountabilities to be achieved will also focus thinking on longer term sustainability issues.

While capacity building at the school level has also been cited as one of the keys to sustainability of National Partnership reform outcomes, it was also noted that some of the activities implemented by schools have only been possible with the assistance of National Partnership funding, and may require recurrent expenditure to maintain. Examples of such activities include the employment of paraprofessionals to work with teachers in classrooms or to support individual students. The extent to which schools are able and willing to fund these activities from other sources will be central to the continuation of such activities. Similarly, schools will need to identify resources to make time available for professional learning and meeting/planning time – both activities cited as key
determinants of the cultural changes that have occurred during the early stages of the National Partnership.

In addition to the work undertaken within the 147 schools involved, the NP strategy in NSW has produced some significant tools and resources that will continue to have currency well after the funding period has ceased. They will also be available to schools beyond those participating in the National Partnership. The resources include the specific teaching and learning programs developed in literacy and numeracy, tools to assist informed analysis of student outcomes data, and a range of professional learning modules, among others. There is some evidence from observations made by regional facilitators that the use of these tools and approaches has already been encouraged outside the National Partnership schools by regional/diocesan officers. For example, some School Education Directors have encouraged non-NPLN schools to utilise NPLN tools and resources to facilitate their ongoing self-evaluation processes used in NPLN schools to develop whole school plans. Later data gathering planned for this evaluation will provide further evidence in relation to the extent to which various elements of the NP strategy are sustained.

4.2 What resource allocations, organisational arrangements, and other strategies have schools and systems implemented to sustain new programs and practices

Several potential challenges to sustainability have been identified by stakeholders interviewed thus far in the evaluation. The extent to which these challenges prove to be significant inhibitors of continuous improvement, and the approaches adopted to overcome these challenges will be documented later in the evaluation. Examples of such emerging challenges and the solutions noted to date are summarised below.

- **The need for executive leadership.**

  Strong support and leadership of the initiative from the school executive appears to be critical to ensuring continuing engagement of teachers – particularly in the face of other competing priorities. While leadership development has been a key part of the professional learning experiences provided by the NPLN strategy, continuing leadership support has been established in some areas through establishment of professional learning groups or clusters of principals who meet regularly to discuss issues arising from the implementation of the NPLN. These self-forming groups are said to have allowed principals and school leadership teams to develop greater ownership of the way they have implemented the NPLN rather than seeing it as something imposed upon them. The opportunity to exchange ideas with neighbouring schools is already seen as a valuable exercise.

- **Continuing in-school coordination.**

  Continuing leadership of the initiative is not only a function of the work of Principals or other school executives. As described by stakeholders and schools visited, a key element of the success observed thus far has been provided by the enhanced coordination of literacy and numeracy learning by designated in-school facilitators (classroom leaders). Schools visited viewed the role played by these classroom leaders as vital for ensuring
sustainability of NPLN programs, e.g. through creating professional dialogue, enhancing collaborative planning, modeling effective practices and driving change through leadership to ensure a whole school coordinated approach. There are a number of schools in both NPLN partnership and Low Socio-Economic Status (LSES) partnership that are planning to, or are already utilising monies from the National Partnership to fund the continuation of reforms and positions (e.g. schools collectively pooling their LSES money to fund a facilitator position for them to share in the future).

- Planning for teacher and executive turnover.

Teacher turn-over (as well as the high levels of temporary casual teachers in some schools/stages) was identified by all stakeholders as a potential threat to sustainability of the new practices and approaches developed through the NPLN. Schools have approached this differently, some being more proactive than others. Some schools visited have identified the need to develop structured induction and specific professional development for transferring and beginning teachers in relation to both the overall school approach to literacy and numeracy and specific programs such as TOWN. They recognize that they will need to commit their own resources to this professional development to maintain the reforms achieved over time. In a similar fashion, schools visited thus far have chosen to implement the NPLN initiatives across K-2 (in some cases K-12), including this broader range of staff in whole school staff and stage meetings, in school professional learning sessions, professional dialogue and collegial support. The potential for loss of key staff leading to erosion of the progress made has been ameliorated in some instances by embedding commitment to the NPLN-inspired processes in school policy documents, strategic plans, and supporting documentation.

Schools visited have also developed a range of documentation, such as checklists and pro-formas for staff, banks of lesson plans and scope and sequence charts to support them in implementing new literacy or numeracy approaches, but which also provide an ongoing resource for themselves and others beyond the NPLN funding period. Embedding the NPLN processes into the school plan, and associated identification of professional learning and resource support has been fund to be effective in ensuring that the initiative is not dependent the expertise of any particular individual.

- Competing priorities.

The NPLN has helped increase the focus on learning, particularly in relation to Literacy and Numeracy as the central focus of school and purpose of schooling. However it was also observed that there are many other pressures on the time of school staff, all of which are considered important. Early indications from schools visited suggest that resource intensive activities, such as developing and monitoring Individual Learning Plans, may require reassessment in future in relation to the perceived benefits they produce. This is entirely consistent with the intention of the NPLN reform priorities for schools to use data to inform their decision-making. In the particular example of IEP's, some schools have addressed the issue of resource intensity by developing group plans as a way of facilitating this planning process, based on the literacy and numeracy...
continuum. Learning to manage data effectively has been a challenge all schools have needed to address in this initiative.

It should be noted that each of these potential challenges remains the responsibility of particular schools and are not the result of any actions at the system/sector or diocesan level. Indeed, depending on their contextual characteristics, schools may decide to address these issues in distinctively different ways. As these potential challenges emerge, Facilitators may be well placed to share examples of good practice to address such issues. Data gathering at later stages will focus on these matters.

4.3 How cost effective have the SSNP strategies and programs been in gaining the desired outcomes?

Specific quantitative data in relation to cost-effectiveness has not been considered at this stage of the evaluation, and will be the subject of separate analysis in Phase 2 (2011). Comments from those interviewed suggest that, in their view, the National Partnership has been effective (in the non-cost sense of the term), in that it appears to have largely begun to meet its overarching objectives and there has been demonstrable achievement in each of the three priority reform areas. However, they also correctly identified the challenges in quantifying these benefits in dollar terms (particularly as there may be downstream benefits in later years), and the difficulty of establishing alternative cost benefit comparisons against which the NPLN can be benchmarked.

Various issues in relation to the funding model relevant to the issue of cost-effectiveness did receive comment and are worthy of further consideration. These issues include

- the match of funds to school needs;
- the appropriateness of selection of target schools, and
- the quantum of funds allocated to each school.

In relation to the matching of funds to school needs, the consensus of opinions expressed by stakeholders suggests that for the majority of schools selected for inclusion in the National Partnership, the selection criteria (see p.9 for details) were appropriate, however for a very small number of schools with rapidly expanding enrolments, initial funding was not adequate. These are relatively isolated examples, which can be dealt with effectively by sufficiently flexible funding guidelines. A small number of concerns were expressed likewise about the accuracy of identification of schools for inclusion in the Partnership. Again, identification was appropriate for the vast majority of schools included, but there were examples cited of apparent anomalies in the schools selected. It was argued that the method of determining initial eligibility based on a single year’s data was not the most accurate way of gauging which schools could most benefit from additional support and resources, although the necessity for a simple, agreed starting point was clearly acknowledged.

The comments from those interviewed thus far suggest that the overall quantum of funds made available to each school was "about right". It was noted that significant amounts of funds are needed to support the range of activities and programs undertaken within each school's literacy or numeracy strategy, and it was preferable in their experience to have one relatively large pool of
funds that could be applied flexibly as needed, rather than a succession of small or piecemeal funds tied to particular activities. It was further noted that the scale of change attempted was not likely to have been achieved without the scope within the school budgets to engage fully with the range of options provided within each of the Partnership’s strategic elements.

The capacity for all teachers within a particular school to receive professional development in relation to a selected literacy or numeracy program, which was instrumental in allowing for consistency of understanding and approach, was said to have been beyond the scope of many schools without the assistance provided by National Partnership funds. Likewise, it was also noted that purchase of resources such as whole class sets of reading materials would have been beyond the capacity of some schools without National Partnership funding support.

Systems and sectors are always faced with the difficult policy decision of how best to distribute scarce funds; whether to attempt to reach as many schools and students as possible but in doing so, spreading funds thinly, or to concentrate funding in a smaller number of apparently most needy schools. As the evaluation progresses, further evidence may emerge from analysis of cost data planned for Phase 2 of the evaluation later in 2011 which may help to identify whether the National Partnership funding quantum and approach has achieved an appropriate balance of depth and breadth of reach.

A further issue, worthy of exploration, concerns the length of the National Partnership funding period. While the funding parameters were clear from the start (as described in various documents including the Bilateral Agreements), a frequently expressed view was that even better results might have been achieved if the initiative had provided schools with 3 year funding rather than 2 years.

However, it was also noted that the short time frame (and incentive payment provisions) provided strong pressure for achievement of quick results, which has required a high degree of effort on the part of everyone involved. It was reported that the targets have placed a high degree of focussed effort on schools, but have had the positive result of giving a greater sense of urgency to schools about lifting their outcomes. Later investigation of the sustainability of change from the National Partnership may provide some insight into whether the length of the initiative was sufficient to embed cultural changes in school practice and classroom pedagogy to sustain enhanced student learning outcomes.

Focus Area 5: What are the implications for systems?

It would be premature to draw conclusions about systemic implications of the NPLN experience at this stage of the evaluation, but it is appropriate to note the perceptions of stakeholders in relation to the factors that have contributed to the success of the National Partnership. These observations may have relevance for future initiatives of this kind.

First, the importance of the support of the systems and sectors themselves at the highest level should not be under-estimated. This high level support gave credibility, legitimacy and priority to the NSW implementation in all sectors, enabling it to be seen as relevant to the local context, rather than a standardised program imposed from outside. The fact that the initiative was conceived as,
and adopted as a genuine partnership at a systemic level was important in ensuring that implementation proceeded in a manner that respected both the letter and spirit of the Bilateral Agreement. This spirit of partnership, being evident in state-level processes and communication, was carried through in this same spirit to school level, ensuring that implementation was not an exercise in compliance with external requirements, but seized at all levels as a genuine opportunity to achieve common objectives. Indeed, the alignment between the COAG reform priorities and current NSW system/sector policies was a further determinant of the success of the partnership referred to above.

Second, the high level of cross-sectoral cooperation was similarly important in ensuring that students at risk of low literacy and/or numeracy outcomes in all schools were able to be addressed. The spirit of cooperation was evident in all phases of implementation, from planning to evaluation. The success of the cross-sectoral cooperation appears to owe much to the personal contributions of the individuals involved, but was also empowered by the commitment at a system/sector level noted above.

Third, the scope and scale of the NPLN and amount of funds available in NSW may have had a significant bearing on the extent of change possible, and in turn, impact on student learning outcomes. The intensity of effort seen in NSW may not have been possible in smaller states and territories (with a concomitant impact on the achievement of desired outcomes). The national evaluation of the Smarter Schools National Partnership may shed some further light on this issue. However, preliminary interviews with NSW systemic stakeholders suggest that the scale of the NSW initiative provided for the development of a significant infrastructure to support implementation. The extent to which this may have contributed to the success of the reform strategy will be further investigated in later stages of the evaluation.

From initial observations, it would appear that this infrastructural support was critical to the success of the initiative. Stakeholders have commented that it has not been one element, but the totality of the overall strategy that has underpinned success. At the same time, achieving integration across the various elements has not been a matter of chance. The scope of funds in NSW allowed for employment of sufficient people, and at a sufficiently senior level to allow for high quality planning, coordination, liaison with the Commonwealth government, extensive and accurate reporting of progress, among other things. It has been a dedicated effort, not an add-on to other responsibilities.

The size of the project has also been important in providing scope for the development of new resources (such as TOWN), which may not have otherwise happened. (This issue is discussed further below). Likewise, the amount of funds available at school level has been important in allowing access to professional learning on a scale that is uncommon; for the purchase of release time to allow for planning and reflection, and for purchase of resources that may not have been contemplated previously.

Fourth, there was a high degree of fidelity between the conceptualisation of the initiative, as expressed in the NSW Implementation Plan, and the reality of implementation. While the strong accountability built into the initiative through target setting and incentive payments was viewed as a positive feature, in situations such as this there is always the possibility that the incentives will have perverse effects. For example, schools might be encouraged to attempt to raise NAPLAN scores by
“teaching to the test” rather than genuinely attempting pedagogical change. That this did not happen in NSW is testimony to the support and direction of systems/sectors and leadership of the initiative by the individuals concerned, including the work of the regional/diocesan/sector Facilitators in ensuring the processes (e.g. in conducting the school self-evaluations) were conducted as intended.

Fifth, the fidelity noted above was only possible through thorough advance planning. The investment in time and effort for this upfront planning is great, and impacts on the timeliness of start-up, but ultimately pays dividends. The lessons for systems and sectors from this experience is that it is far better to have a well thought out and coherent project plan than to accept easy options.

Last, again as a consequence of the thoroughness of planning, it would appear that the NSW implementation has benefited from a great deal of in-kind support from all systems and sectors, as well as the resources developed made directly possible through NPLN funds. Examples of this in-kind support noted here include the contribution of EMSAD in the development of the NPLN Assessment Bank of student outcomes test items. Other examples can be cited from the other sectors. The implication from this experience is that initiatives such as NPLN have to be accepted as having system-wide importance, not an activity on the periphery that is “owned” by a particular group of individuals. Initiatives of this scale have implications for a wide variety of stakeholders in different locations, which should be explicit rather than reliant on good will.

As the evaluation proceeds, the observations above can be validated against a broader range of evidence. In addition, the implications for systems/sectors in relation to teacher professional development and pre-service education, for example can be drawn out

Focus Area 6. To what extent has the reform change agenda been sustained post-funding?

(Note: Data in relation to long term sustainability of the reform initiative will not be collected until 2012-13)

6. Next Steps in the evaluation

The next steps in the evaluation are as projected in the Evaluation Plan, are described below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finalisation of schools to participate in case study visits.</th>
<th>August 2011</th>
<th>Criteria for selection schools has been discussed with the NPLN team</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online survey commenced</td>
<td>August 2011</td>
<td>Survey drafted, to be completed following feedback</td>
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</table>
Further details of the proposed methodology for Phase 2 of the evaluation (to take place during August-December 2011), is described below, and further articulated in the Evaluation Plan.

**School Survey**

This evaluation will provide an opportunity for all schools participating in the implementation of National Partnership activity (147 Literacy and Numeracy schools) to comment from their own perspective about their experience of the National Partnership, and the outcomes achieved from this involvement. An on-line survey will be developed for this purpose. This methodology is proposed as an accurate and efficient analysis of results within a short timeframe, that provides quantification of the impact of the partnership against desired outcomes, and also qualitative data that can help to explain trends observed. Because the number of schools participating in this National Partnership is relatively small, the full population of schools will be invited to participate rather than a smaller sample, to ensure the broadest coverage of schools in the various contexts across the state.

The survey will be administered in Term 3 2011, to allow maximum time for the partnership to impact on schools, yet also interfere as little as possible with other school priorities that typically occur in Term 4.

The survey will be initially targeted to the school principal, but the introductory letter will advise that they may delegate the survey to the most informed member of staff, or consult with other staff in the preparation of the school response. The survey does not seek to gather the personal experiences of the principal, but rather the experience of the school as a whole.

It is anticipated that this on-line survey will have a two week turn-around time so follow-up of individual schools will be an important aspect of this data gathering approach. To ensure maximum participation in the survey, follow-up will be undertaken by the evaluation team where this is appropriate.

To minimise time requirements on school representatives, wherever possible, the survey will include a mix of qualitative questions that provide rich data and closed questions that when aggregated will provide quantitative analysis of the extent to which changes have occurred in various factors across NSW. Assistance to use technology to complete the survey will be available at all times via an Erebus
administrator contact number included in the initial communication from sectors and identifiable in the on-line survey.

Initial analysis of the survey data will be provided in the second progress report, and further elaborated in the Final Report. Analysis of the quantitative data will be largely at the descriptive level, e.g. number/percentage of respondents giving a certain response (disaggregated as appropriate). We will use SPSS software to facilitate the analysis. Content analysis will be used to identify trends and themes in the qualitative sections of the survey.

The survey data will be used to assist identification of the relative effectiveness of the various strategies, initiatives etc, on the various intended outcomes of the partnership. It will be able to provide data on the extent of impact, and the extent to which cultural change has occurred in schools, as well as the factors that have facilitated or hindered such change. Together with data from other sources, the survey will allow inferences to be drawn about the effectiveness and appropriateness of the National Partnership at a strategic policy level.

The survey has the limitation that as it involves self-reporting, it is not possible to verify independently the ratings given by respondents. As this is not a high stakes survey, and may be completed anonymously, there is less pressure on respondents to give inaccurate answers. There are practical limitations as to the number of questions that can be asked, but the complexity of the national partnership arrangements means there are a large number of areas that are of interest to the evaluation. There is a compromise to be reached between depth of questioning and breadth of coverage. The trade-off is addressed to some extent by the inclusion of the case studies as a means of gaining greater insights into the quantitative responses. This survey, as with all surveys, requires careful construction to ensure that questions are unambiguous, easy to follow, yet inclusive.

Case studies with a sample of participating schools

As indicated earlier, the major purpose of the case study component of data gathering will be to identify and illustrate “on the ground” practices that are occurring in schools as a result of the partnership. These findings are not intended to be reported on a school by school basis, but rather synthesised to provide an overall perspective of implementation in schools as the preliminary step for drawing conclusions of a strategic nature that may inform future policy, funding or related strategic imperatives. In addition the findings from the case study will also shed light on and amplify the information from other data gathering methodologies, particularly the on line survey. In this way the case studies will be employed to contribute towards an explanation of the statements made by respondents in the online survey.

Therefore, in order to provide an illustration of the changes that have occurred in schools as a consequence of the partnership and to gain a deeper understanding of the change processes, we propose to undertake a series of 20 case studies in selected participating schools.

It is anticipated that in each school we would conduct a series of interviews with school leaders and teachers, based around the key evaluation questions highlighted in the Evaluation Plan. In addition, each school will be requested to table for discussion any documentation relevant to their participation in the partnership. This may include their most recent situational analysis, whole school plan of action and related priorities based on the Situational Analysis, as well as teaching programs,
lesson plans, samples of student work and so on, as appropriate, to illustrate the statements made by teachers. Schools will also be invited to table any documentation related to student outcomes data and other relevant school based initiatives undertaken.

It is envisaged that each visit is likely to require approximately 2 to 3 hours of school time. Identification of the school sites to participate in this phase of the data gathering will be coordinated in collaboration with the NPEC and a representative from each education sector. This process will ensure that minimum disruption to schools is achieved and the most appropriate schools are engaged. A semi-structured interview schedule will be used to guide these interviews and will be provided to the school site prior to participation in the discussion.

It should be noted that what we have described as “case studies” are not true case studies as that term is used in the ethnographic research literature, and will not be presented as a report on each location. They are in fact a series of in-school interviews and observations centred on a particular school site and involving multiple perspectives about common issues. The case study interviews have the inherent limitation that respondents may seek to answer in a way that promotes a particular view (e.g. making their own contribution appear as favorable as possible). As with other forms of qualitative enquiry, overcoming this limitation derives primarily from the skill of the interviewer in drawing out information in a non-threatening manner, and triangulation of any particular piece of evidence from the interviewee with other sources, e.g. observations or examination of school documents and artifacts. It is acknowledged that only a small number of schools will be involved in this aspect of data gathering, hence the capacity to generalize from the data collected will be limited and inferences drawn must be treated with caution.

**Student Outcomes data analysis**

The ultimate measure of the effectiveness of the professional learning provided through the National Partnerships is whether changed teaching practice and school approaches impacts on student learning. Therefore, a brief analysis of student learning outcomes will be required to further explore the top-level data presented in the NSW Annual Reports to DEEWR in relation to performance against targets.

While outcomes data is important in understanding the overall impact of policy decisions and the strategy adopted to implement this policy, it must be remembered that measured student outcomes are just part of the consideration of impact. Given the timeframe available for the evaluation, we will restrict our analysis to use of already gathered outcomes data (NAPLAN literacy and numeracy available from ACARA) to illustrate trends pre and post implementation. This data will be indicative and not able to prove causality, but will be useful in demonstrating any readily observed trends. Data should be available for the 2 years prior to implementation and two years post implementation.

To supplement the NAPLAN data, teachers will be asked in the school survey described above to note any perceived changes in student outcomes, and the evidence they have to support these perceptions (such as results on class tests, external academic competition results like the UNSW mathematics competition). In addition, teachers will be asked to rate any perceived changes in student engagement in literacy and numeracy, and their evidence), such as more frequent
completion of homework, attention in class, borrowing of library books and so on. These perceptions will also be further examined as part of the case studies described above.

NAPLAN analysis will cover the period from 2008-2013, including scale score analysis, value-added measures, disaggregated by gender, socio-economic status, location and Aboriginality. Comparison against the targets for reward payments from the Commonwealth will also form part of this analysis.

**NPLN assessment Bank data**

A second key source of student outcomes data will be derived from the NPLN Assessment Bank tests. These Assessment Bank tests contain items similar to those used in NAPLAN. The advantage of using this data is that it provides further evidence of change in performance over time. Data from these tests, for students in years 3-6, will be included for each year of the evaluation up to 2013. Data up to 2011 will come from school administered tests conducted as part of the NPLN, while the data from 2012-2013 will be extracted from school online use of a facility being developed by the DEC. Note that successive cohorts in 2012 and 2013 who will have left primary school by then will need to use the age-appropriate versions of the tests. Similar procedures will be employed for the analysis and reporting of this data as used for NAPLAN data.

Post 2011, school participation in the NPLNA will be voluntary. However, feedback about schools’ use of the NPLNA to date suggests that there is a strong willingness by schools to continue to use the bank of assessment questions for their own purposes. When the Assessment Bank goes on line later in 2011, it is expected that the DEC will publicise use of the assessment facility provided. In addition, it is expected that schools’ use of this facility will reflect the extent to which the key reform priority of greater school use of student outcomes data for planning is being sustained. It would be expected that the DEC itself will continue to emphasise this message through its mainstream policy and accountability structures. However, the evaluation team will also send an email to all NPLN schools at the appropriate point in the evaluation alerting them to the facility, to encourage maximum participation at the point of analysis and highlighting the advantages to schools of the use of the DEC tool. Previous discussions with DEC staff suggest that providing schools with incentives to use the Assessment Bank would be counter-productive, negating the intentions of the reform agenda as a whole.
Bibliography


Timperley, Helen 2009 Using assessment data for improving teacher practice, ACER Conference August 2009
### Appendix 1: Milestones for NSW NPLN Implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Due date</th>
<th>Milestone</th>
<th>Facilitation Payment</th>
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<tr>
<td>May 2009</td>
<td>Signing of bilateral agreement and State Implementation Plans</td>
<td>$19.04m (100% payment for 2009)</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 2009</td>
<td>Acceptance of NSW Final Implementation Plans</td>
<td>$5.44m (25% payment for 2010)</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 2010</td>
<td>State annual report on progress</td>
<td>$16.32m (75% payment for 2010)</td>
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<td>o Data Analysis Skills Survey (DASA) baseline data collection completed</td>
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<td>by all schools</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o Publication of school plans on school websites</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o Teachers in participating schools have ongoing access to e-learning</td>
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<td>modules SMART Data Analysis (By December 2009, SMART e-learning will</td>
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<td>be fully functional)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>o All students in Years 3, 4 and 5 in participating schools complete</td>
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<td>the National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy March 2010 assessment</td>
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Appendix 2: Interview Schedule: School leader/teacher

Focus Area 1: What change has been attempted?

1. To what extent has the SSNP literacy and numeracy implementation plan resulted in:
   a. the adoption of literacy and numeracy programs,
   b. teaching practices or school strategies that are new or substantial re-workings of existing approaches and programs in the schools?

2. How has your school instituted the initiative?

3. What were the rationales and strategies for program selection?
   Prompt: Why have schools not implemented numeracy programs as extensively as literacy programs?

Focus Area 2: What effects and synergies can be discerned?

2. To what extent has the adoption of new SSNP approaches and programs produced:
   a. improved teaching and learning environments?
   b. a rethinking of teachers’ beliefs about best practice?
   Prompt: In what ways, and in which circumstances, has this occurred?

3. How effective are the new approaches/environments compared to previous strategies?

4. What level of short, medium and longer term improvements have been achieved?

5. To what extent have universities and other partners been engaged in developing or delivering new approaches programs? How effective have these partnerships been?

Focus Area 3: How effective has implementation been?

6. To what extent have strategies and programs been implemented as intended?

7. What effects has implementation had on outcomes and sustainability?

8. What operational arrangements and organizational or system policies have:
   a. supported the implementation of new strategies and programs?
   b. hindered the implementation of new strategies and programs?

9. What resources have been required for implementation, and were they available?

10. How have new operational arrangements, programs and teaching practices been effective in producing improved learning opportunities and student outcomes?
Prompt: Please give examples of where and why this has occurred.

11. How has your school identified success and been apprised of successful implementation and outcomes?

Focus Area 4: How have schools approached issues of sustainability, resilience and transferability

12. Which programs and strategies have proved to be most sustainable and resilient? How has this been achieved?

13. What impediments to the sustainability of the initiatives’ goals can be identified?
   a. How have impediments changed over the life of and beyond the Smarter Schools National Partnership? How have they been addressed?

14. What resource allocations, organisational arrangements, and other strategies has your school implemented to sustain new programs and practices in the context of:
   a. teacher mobility, when staff join or leave existing programs?
   b. changed levels of resourcing beyond the SSNP initiative?
   c. competing priorities and demands or changed teaching environments?

Prompt: for example, the introduction of the National Curriculum, including strategies developed to support a shared understanding of and improved teacher capacity in literacy and numeracy pedagogy.

15. To what extent, how and under what conditions can successful strategies be scaled up to be replicated in other contexts?

16. How cost effective have the SSNP strategies and programs been in gaining the desired outcomes?

Prompt: Has there been a shift in approach to teaching literacy and numeracy resulting in improved literacy and numeracy teaching capability that is sustainable and transferable?

Have there been substantial improvements in student outcomes in literacy and numeracy for low achieving students?

Focus Area 5: What are the implications for systems?

17. What implications are these for the future delivery:
   a. professional development for existing teachers?
   b. teacher training for teaching students?

Focus Area 6: To what extent has the reform change agenda been sustained post-funding?

18. How sustainable has the impact of the national partnerships strategy been?
19. What has helped or hindered sustainability (including any systemic support?)
20. What lessons can be learned for future implementation of literacy and numeracy initiatives?
21. Which programs and strategies have proved to be most sustainable and resilient and how has this been achieved?
22. What impediments to sustainability of initiative goals can be identified? How have they changed over the life of and beyond the Smarter Schools National Partnership? How have they been addressed?
23. To what extent, how and under what conditions can successful strategies be scaled up to be replicated in other contexts?