



THE SCHOOL
ACCOUNTABILITY
FRAMEWORK

D E P A R T M E N T O F E D U C A T I O N

TITLE: The School Accountability Framework

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INTRODUCTION

Government schools occupy a special place in the Western Australian community because they educate 70 per cent of the State's young people, are distributed throughout an enormous land mass, and the costs of their operations account for a quarter of the State government's budget.

It is essential that in return for the confidence placed in our schools and the resources utilized, we demonstrate the quality of education we provide.

That is why accountability measures must be in place at all levels of the government schools system.

Both government and the broader community must be assured that the system as a whole is achieving high standards of educational outcomes that prepare children well for success in the future.

Local communities must be confident that their schools are providing a quality education that meets the needs of their children.

Individual parents must be given credible information about their children's performance and know that their school is using that information to help students to achieve their potential.

The School Accountability Framework is built on five fundamental commitments:

1. **We are committed to high standards.** We strive to ensure that every student who attends a government school achieves the highest standard of learning of which he or she is capable. In today's world with the demand for a highly educated workforce, high standards are needed for everyone.
2. **We are committed to every government school being effective.** Every school is required to set high standards for student performance, to assess the educational progress of all its students and to establish targets for improvement. The extent to which these objectives are achieved is a measure of the school's effectiveness. And, through its planning and accountability processes, every school must continually seek to improve its effectiveness.
3. **We are committed to quality teaching.** All students are entitled to be taught by a qualified, competent and caring teacher. Every teacher is expected to monitor students' progress, to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and to provide an educational program that is appropriate to their needs.

4. **We are committed to parents receiving quality information about the standards being achieved by their schools.** Not only must our schools be excellent but the community must have confidence that they are. The quality of what schools do must be apparent to those who have a stake in them, in particular the parents. They must have confidence that appropriate standards are being achieved by their children and that schools are working to maintain those standards.
5. **We are committed to the wider community being better informed about the standards being achieved across the government schools system.** Education is an essential community service and we must be open with the community about the outcomes being achieved by our students. This is crucial to building community support for and confidence in public schools.

As well as ensuring that every school's performance is open to scrutiny, accountability mechanisms should help the school to improve its performance. This occurs as schools engage in a thorough self examination identifying their strengths and weaknesses as a basis for their improvement planning.

Collective reflection, analysis and commitment to improvement will ensure that the effort schools put into demonstrating accountability will add real value to their educational work.

THE SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

This Framework sets out the requirements for all schools in relation to accountability and review.

It replaces existing policies related to school development planning and school accountability.

The Framework is to be interpreted in association with *Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting: Policy and Guidelines* and *Policy Framework for Performance Management*.

It is a crucial part of the Department's overall quality assurance framework, which includes system-level mechanisms such as Monitoring Standards in Education (MSE) and internal audit, and which is articulated in the Department's Annual Report to the Minister and Parliament.

The Framework integrates existing accountability measures into a coherent and easily-understood accountability regime for schools.

It provides the government, the community and the Department with the information they require to be confident about the high quality of government schooling in Western Australia and it does this in a way that is manageable for schools.

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POLICY

1. All schools are required to produce, in partnership with their school community, a school plan setting out their objectives, priorities, major initiatives and evaluation measures.
2. All schools are required to assess their performance in terms of standards of student achievement and the effectiveness of the school.
3. All schools are required to make available to the public and to the District Director a School Report that describes the school's performance.
4. School staff are accountable to the principal and school principals are accountable to the District Director for the performance of the school.

KEY CONCEPTS

School accountability policy is based on five key concepts.

1. Accountability involves responding to information about performance.

Central to the notion of accountability - at the level of the individual teacher, the school or the system as a whole - is an acceptance of responsibility for the achievement of outcomes and the taking of appropriate action to improve performance.

Demonstrating accountability includes describing the outcomes sought, collecting information about the extent to which they have been achieved and taking action to improve them.

Stated in their simplest form, the key accountability questions are:

- What are we trying to achieve?
- How well are we achieving it?
- How can we improve?

Staff in schools are very familiar with these questions, because for some time they have been addressing them through their school development planning processes.

When fully implemented, the *Outcomes and Standards Framework* will be central to the way in which the questions are answered.

It will provide the vehicle for teachers to monitor the achievement of their students and to demonstrate their accountability, through their School Report and school planning processes.

Accountability involves more than reporting. Collecting and reporting information about performance is only part of demonstrating accountability. The other part is determining what the information means and what action should be taken in response to it.

2. Accountability is linked to outcomes.

The core purpose of schools is to enable the success of each and every student.

Schools therefore, must be able to demonstrate to themselves and to the communities they serve that what they do makes a difference to student learning.

While information about the achievement levels of the students provides an important basis for determining how well a school is performing, it cannot on its own indicate whether a school has done its job well.

As well as the school demonstrating the levels of achievement of its students, judgements about the effectiveness of the school must also involve how well the school takes action to raise those achievement levels.

A proper picture of a school's effectiveness must therefore embody both the outcomes being achieved by the students and the school's response to the information about student achievement.

This position is based on the important principle that teachers and principals can only be held accountable for factors over which they have control.

Since they do not have control over all the variables that impact upon student achievement, they cannot be held accountable for it in an absolute sense. However, because the school can make a difference to the level of achievement of the students, schools are accountable for maximising the difference they make in terms of student outcomes.

3. Demonstrating accountability is a professional responsibility of school staff.

The school development planning policy introduced in 1990 signalled a shift away from an inspectorial approach to accountability toward one of schools taking responsibility for demonstrating their effectiveness to others.

This position locates accountability within the professional responsibility of the school staff, by creating an expectation that staff demonstrate the quality of their work as part of the expression of their professionalism.

The line manager acts both to ensure that this responsibility is accepted and to support staff in doing so.

Reporting information for accountability purposes should be a by-product of collecting information that the school needs to have for its own purposes. Having good information about the school's performance is an important part of the ongoing improvement planning by school staff.

4. Rigorous self-assessment is at the heart of effective accountability.

Rigorous self-assessment requires a willingness and confidence to interrogate one's own performance information.

While schools and systems vary in the approach they take to school accountability, the success of any approach ultimately depends on how well the school reviews its own performance.

Effective internal review involves the school gathering information about the levels of student achievement, analysing and judging the adequacy of those levels, identifying strengths and weaknesses in its overall performance, and assessing which aspects of the school's operation should be changed to generate improved performance.

5. Schools are accountable to their communities and to the Director-General.

The *School Accountability Framework* acknowledges the two-way accountability of schools. Schools listen and respond to their local community's needs and provide information about the school's performance. They also respond to systemic priorities and requirements and provide an assurance that every government school is meeting accountability requirements.

COMPONENTS OF THE SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

This section explains each of the four components of the School Accountability Framework.

- 1. Schools plan
- 2. Schools self-assess
- 3. Schools produce a School Report
- 4. District Directors review schools

1. SCHOOLS PLAN

Schools adopt a planning framework that enables them to both meet the requirements for annual reporting and provide a useful framework for improvement.

However, it is no longer necessary for school plans to be constructed according to the School Development Planning framework.

This is a recognition that the planning model used by a school should reflect the needs of the school. That is, so long as the plan enables the school to respond to the community's needs, accommodate Departmental initiatives, and demonstrate its accountability, schools have flexibility in terms of the planning model they adopt.

The *School Education Act 1999* encourages the participation and involvement of parents and local community members in planning for the school's future. This should be undertaken by working with the School Council.

The primary function of the School Council is to take part in establishing and reviewing the school's objectives, priorities and general policy directions and the financial arrangements required to fund them. Principals will need to work with their School Council to ensure that Council members are informed and sufficiently skilled to take an active and meaningful role in this process.

Whilst a School Council has no role in the day to day management of the school, it is the forum for the school community to have input into the direction of the school. A successful school plan will have the support of the School Council and be the end result of a process of consultation and discussion with the school community.

Appropriate School Council involvement in school planning requires that a clear differentiation be made between high-level direction setting planning (which involves the School Council and finds expression in the school plan) and operational planning (which is the responsibility of the principal and staff of the school).

A failure to acknowledge the different levels of school planning could both confuse the involvement of the School Council and also result in an unwieldy school plan.

For school accountability purposes, the school plan must contain the school's objectives, priorities and major initiatives, and the measures to be used to evaluate progress.

Evaluation measures must be able to provide members of the school community with relevant and meaningful information and enable the School Council to regularly review the progress towards achievement of the school's objectives.

The information gathered using the measures is reported in the School Report.

Other internal operational planning is documented according to the school's own requirements.

While central office will require principals to demonstrate that central initiatives have been responded to appropriately, the school plan is not necessarily the vehicle for such demonstration. It is through the line management relationship between the principal and the District Director where such compliance monitoring and reporting occurs.

There are also many ways that line management accountability can be effected that do not involve documentation in plans or formal agreements. A conversation between a principal and a District Director may be sufficient in many cases.

As a result of their experience with school development planning, many schools have moved away from using a single year time frame for their school plans.

Some have found it important to set some long-term directions to provide a context for their annual plans. These schools might have a five-year planning horizon, with a particular set of initiatives planned for the first year. The five-year plan is then reviewed and updated annually in consultation with the School Council.

While planning timeframes may differ, reporting is required annually. Other schools have continued with annual plans, but with different planning horizons for different priorities. Some priorities may need to be addressed over a three-year time scale, while others may require only one year to implement.

2. SCHOOLS SELF-ASSESS

Student achievement

Principals and teachers need to assess the levels of achievement of all students.

Teachers have always made judgements about what students know and can do as demonstrated in their everyday learning in the classroom. On the basis of these judgements, they have designed appropriate learning programs and reported to parents.

However, they have not used a common set of outcomes on which to base their judgements.

When the *Outcomes and Standards Framework* is fully implemented, parents can have confidence that the judgements made by one teacher about the child's levels of achievement are comparable to the judgements of another teacher at that school, or to the judgements of teachers at any other government school.

Establishing the comparability of teachers' judgements against the *Outcomes and Standards Framework* will require a great deal of moderation activity within and across schools.

Teachers will need to have opportunities to discuss and share examples of what constitutes a particular level of achievement by a student.

Many schools already use Monitoring Standards in Education (MSE) test materials as part of a process of moderating teachers' judgements about levels of student achievement.

The process of fine-tuning teachers' judgements will also be assisted by annual literacy and numeracy benchmark testing for year 3, year 5 and year 7 students.

In time teachers will use the *Outcomes and Standards Framework* to form a judgement about the level of, say, a year 3 student's achievement in reading, and will then consider the student's result on the benchmark test to inform their judgement.

In order to provide a complete picture of the school's performance in terms of student achievement, it is important to include the social and personal outcomes desired as well as academic outcomes. These are represented in the Overarching Learning Outcomes of the *Curriculum Framework* as well as the Learning Area Outcomes.

Skills such as critical thinking and problem solving are also important outcomes for students' future success, but are often not monitored and reported because of the difficulty of doing so in a reliable and valid way. This requirement presents a particular challenge for schools, and assistance will be provided by the Department.

As well as monitoring the performance of students across the school and at particular year levels, school staff also need to know about the performance of particular groups of students: perhaps the girls are doing better than the boys or the performance of the Aboriginal students is different from that of the other students. This is important information for school staff to have to inform their improvement planning, rather than public reporting.

Analysing the school's performance to answer questions like this assists the school to target its improvement efforts at the points where it is most needed. This is fundamental to the Students at Educational Risk initiative.

Having gathered some information about student achievement levels, a key question in any self-assessment is whether that level of performance is up to expectations. How does one know whether the standards being achieved in the school are acceptable or not?

Reaching an answer involves comparing the school's performance with a standard of some kind.

The standard might be a State average; it might be based on other schools with similar student populations: it might be a national benchmark; or it might be the school's own performance in previous years.

Schools will be assisted in this process as the standards component of the *Outcomes and Standards Framework* is developed.

They will also be provided with information about the performance of "like" schools on national literacy and numeracy benchmark testing.

Effectiveness of the school

Having reviewed their performance in terms of student achievement, school staff also need to assess whether the school is operating as effectively as it could so that the maximum value is added to the students' learning.

This involves reviewing such aspects as the learning environment, relationships with the community and the management of staff.

School Performance: A Framework for Improving and Reporting has been used by many schools as a framework for reflecting on how the various aspects of the school are functioning.

While the use of *School Performance* is not an essential part of the school accountability process, it is anticipated that many schools will continue to use it as a support document to structure their internal review processes.

3. SCHOOLS PUBLISH SCHOOL REPORTS

The School Report is the key vehicle for providing the community with information about a school's performance.

While there is a long tradition of schools reporting to parents on the performance of individual children, reporting to parents and the local community on the performance of the school is relatively new.

In recent years, this has occurred through reporting to the School Decision-Making Group on progress with the school development plan.

Many schools have already instituted some form of annual reporting to their community on their progress. Others report their performance progressively throughout the year via newsletters and meetings.

This needs to continue and become more rigorous.

All schools will produce a School Report that gives parents and members of local communities a clear sense of the standards being achieved and the schools' effectiveness in reaching the objectives set out in their school plans. Parents need to have information reported to them that shows the progress being made in the agreed priority areas of the school plan.

Any information that could identify individual students must not be published in School Reports. In general, information about school performance should be communicated in such a way as to ensure that the maximum amount of information is placed in the public domain while avoiding simplistic league tables based on narrow measures of school performance.

Three kinds of information are to be included in the School Report.

1. Information about the school and its context

- Ethos of the school - a statement of the values and guiding principles that underpin the school's operation.
- Outcomes sought for students - the Outcomes in the Curriculum Framework and other outcomes identified by the school.
- Nature of the community the school serves - the characteristics of the school's local environment.
- Programs offered - including any specialist programs.

2. Information about student outcomes

- Eventually, this will be reported in terms of the Outcomes and Standards Framework. All schools will include appropriate measures of student success. In primary schools this will include the results of literacy and numeracy benchmark testing.
- Destination of students.

3. Information about school management

- Progress report on priorities
- School budget
- Student participation data
- Enrolment trends
- Retention rates

In addition to reporting this mandated information, schools may also wish to include a range of other information, such as measures of the school environment that would strengthen the confidence of parents in the school their children attend.

Some schools will use the School Report to celebrate the achievements and highlights of the school year.

While the School Report will be tabled and discussed with the School Council to assist it to play its review role, it will also be a public document available to any interested members of the community.

4. DISTRICT DIRECTORS REVIEW SCHOOLS

Reviews of schools by District Directors provide assurance to all stakeholders that schools have conducted rigorous and comprehensive self-assessments, reported the required outcomes in their School Reports and responded with appropriate improvement plans.

This validation enables those with an interest in a school to have confidence in the quality of the school's review and reporting processes. It also provides schools with valuable feedback about their performance and directions for improvement.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION/AUTHORITY

School Education Act 1999

Sections 63 (1) (e), 128 (a), 232 and 233.

