

VICTORIA

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Victorian  
Auditor-General

Audit summary  
of  
Managing Teacher  
Performance in  
Government Schools

Tabled in Parliament  
26 May 2010

# Audit summary

Research shows that teaching quality is the largest in-school factor affecting student learning at about 30 per cent. Managing teachers' performance and their development is critical both for helping teachers to improve their skills and for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) to achieve its goal to improve the quality of teaching in government schools.

Victoria's 1 555 schools operate in a highly devolved environment in which principals are primarily responsible for day-to-day operations. This includes administering DEECD's teacher performance assessment and development arrangements which comprise:

- the performance and development culture (the culture), which sets out how schools can support teachers to teach to their potential
- an annual performance and development cycle (the cycle), which assesses teachers against DEECD's professional standards, summarised in Appendix A.

The audit sought to determine whether the quality of teaching in government schools has improved as a consequence of the culture and the cycle. We examined the design of the culture and the cycle and how DEECD's central and regional offices implemented and managed them. For schools we surveyed a representative sample of teachers, their performance assessors and principals for their views on the culture and cycle's impact on teaching practice and how schools manage the cycle.

## Overall conclusion

DEECD continues to address limitations with its current performance cycle principally through its school improvement program. This includes trialling new ways to describe and measure teacher capabilities, and piloting performance pay. These are all positive measures.

However, unless further action is taken it will still not be possible to assess and reliably demonstrate whether the quality of teaching has improved. Currently there is insufficient evidence to reliably demonstrate this.

There are encouraging indications from both DEECD's, and our own survey of principals and teachers, which show that the majority believe the quality of teaching is improving. However, this is not sufficient and cannot be solely relied upon. Survey responses are perceptions which are not substantiated by verifiable data. DEECD also needs to compile better data that shows how well teachers are performing against the skills and knowledge expectations DEECD sets for teachers and how performance has changed over time.

For the school improvement initiatives to be demonstrably effective they will need to be integrated into the cycle of performance feedback to teachers. Definitive milestones and timelines for implementation of these further initiatives also need to be set.

## Findings

### Integration of continuous improvement efforts

Since 2003 DEECD has undertaken an ambitious school improvement program to improve the teaching and learning environment in schools and address identified weakness in teacher performance management. Its strategy has been to give school leaders the skills to create an environment for teachers to teach as well as they can, and for students to improve their learning outcomes. DEECD has introduced this environment into schools through its Performance and Development Culture Accreditation Scheme. DEECD accredited 98 per cent schools between 2005 and 2009.

More recently, DEECD has introduced or is trialling new ways to describe and measure teacher capabilities. It introduced the *e<sup>5</sup> instructional model* (*e<sup>5</sup> model*) in 2009 to describe the capabilities that teachers need to be effective in the classroom. DEECD expects teachers and school leaders to use these capabilities as the basis for helping teachers improve their classroom practice. Its current *Disciplined Approach to Whole School Planning* trial (Disciplined Approach trial) involves teachers self-assessing improvements in their classroom practice as a result of targeted professional development.

DEECD is also running a performance pay trial in 2010 and 2011, which strengthens the governance around performance assessments and gives all teachers at a school the opportunity to receive a salary bonus.

DEECD's new teacher performance initiatives are positive developments which should help to better measure teacher skills and knowledge. However, it is too early to tell what effect the *e<sup>5</sup>* model will have on schools, and it is unclear if or when DEECD will roll-out its current trials across the school system.

Although these initiatives have the intention of improving teacher performance, they are not well integrated with one another, or with the performance and development cycle where teachers are assessed.

DEECD's *e<sup>5</sup>* model and Disciplined Approach trial are part of an encouraging effort to describe teacher skills in terms of their classroom practice and to measure whether teachers improve following targeted professional development. However, they differ in their descriptions of teacher skills, knowledge and the professional standards under the cycle. Further, neither is integrated into the requirement under the cycle for teachers to identify professional learning activities based on their previous performance assessment.

The culture and cycle share similarities such as the need for teachers to have a performance and development plan, and for teachers to receive feedback on their performance. However, DEECD does not require schools to link what schools must do under the culture to what they must do under the cycle. For example, under the culture, teachers must receive multiple sources of feedback on their performance, but there is no actual requirement for this feedback to form the basis of their performance assessment. Schools may do this, but it is their choice rather than mandated practice.

## Performance assessments

Currently, principals assess teachers against the professional standards in the cycle, only in terms of whether they have met or not met the standards, not how well they have been met using an assessment scale. DEECD suggests indicators against each standard to help principals do this, but their use is not mandatory.

A core set of mandatory indicators would give DEECD a base to more reliably measure teacher skills and knowledge, both as part of the cycle and also any future trials relating to teacher performance. The indicators should be used as part of a teacher's annual assessment and in conjunction with an assessment scale to rate how well teachers meet these indicators. Collecting such data would strengthen and more reliably demonstrate how teachers are performing in classrooms.

## Operation of the performance culture and cycle

DEECD's arrangements for managing teacher performance compare well against the 12 elements we identified as best practice. DEECD fully met eight elements and partially met three. These elements covered preparing for teacher improvement, professional development, review and feedback and assessor training. The only best practice element not met is that DEECD and its regional offices do not routinely assess how well schools evaluate teachers under the cycle.

In these circumstances DEECD's central office cannot be assured that:

- schools are conducting the steps in the cycle in line with requirements
- it can identify any significant inconsistencies in how schools assess teachers.

DEECD central office also does not routinely evaluate the impact of the culture or cycle on teachers. As a result, it cannot be certain they are achieving their aims. DEECD central office reviewed the culture in 2009, the first review of the impact of its approach to teacher performance management since 2003.

The lack of monitoring and evaluation has likely contributed to DEECD not identifying three aspects of the culture and cycle that are not operating as intended. While most principals, assessors and teachers were satisfied with the operation of the cycle and culture, our survey results indicate that:

- around 25 per cent of teachers (about 9 300 teachers) are not identifying professional development activities, which is a requirement under the culture and cycle

- around 25 per cent of principals and assessors (about 400 principals) feel either unprepared or, very unprepared, to address underperformance constructively. This is concerning given the critical responsibility principals have in managing the cycle and in identifying teachers' professional development needs
- around 5 per cent of teachers (about 2 000) did not participate in a performance assessment because their cycle was concluded without them or their school does not use the cycle at all.

Further, in relation to teachers' knowledge of the cycle, one in three did not know how underperformance is assessed or how to use the results of their performance assessment to inform development of their next performance plan. This suggests that these teachers do not necessarily see their assessment as being relevant to improving their teaching performance from one year to the next, and that the value they get from the cycle is questionable.

More generally, teachers reported lower levels of knowledge than assessors about how they are assessed against the professional standards, and their responsibility and those of their assessor in preparing for their performance assessment.

However, our survey results also indicate that the majority of teachers, assessors and principals believe the culture and cycle have improved teacher knowledge and skills. The main areas of perceived improvement were in teaching strategies, teacher confidence and participation in professional development activities. In relation to the latter, 79 per cent of teachers (about 29 500) were satisfied with the opportunities from their school to meet their professional learning and development needs, and 74 per cent of teachers (about 27 600) were satisfied with the support from their school to meet these needs.

## Recommendations

Number	Recommendation	Page
	The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development should:	
1.	Mandate a set of core performance indicators and an assessment scale against which schools can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assess and grade teacher classroom skills and knowledge against expected requirements</li> <li>• monitor change over time in teacher performance.</li> </ul>	16
2.	Review how it can effectively integrate all its performance management and development tools and processes to optimise its evaluation and management of teacher performance.	16
3.	Obtain regular and reliable assurance that schools are managing the performance and development cycle in line with its requirements particularly for teacher underperformance.	16
4.	Identify and address why some teachers know little or nothing about how they are assessed, and how to use the cycle to improve their teaching from one year to the next.	27
5.	Define underperformance so that schools share an understanding of what it is.	27
6.	Identify what principals and assessors need to address teacher underperformance constructively, provide that support and assess its effectiveness.	27
7.	Remind schools of its requirements for teacher performance assessments and participation in professional development activities.	27