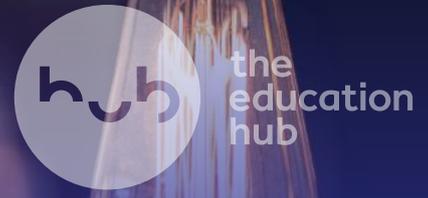


Leading strategically in educational settings



School resources

This paper outlines the process of leading strategically in simple terms, whilst acknowledging that educational leadership is a complicated team game, not a solo pursuit, and leading people is never simple.

What is strategic leadership?

When we hear the words strategic leadership, two things come to mind:

1. the need to lead with a clear vision about the type of organisation we want our workplace to develop into; and
2. the need to do this work in a strategic or smart way. Given the typical overload of educational leaders who are often distracted from strategic intent by day-to-day crisis management and the burden of many administrative and relational tasks, this means working cleverly with and through the skill of others.

The challenges of putting strategic intentions into practice vary workplace to workplace because 'culture eats strategy for breakfast', and ultimately it is a leader's ability to simultaneously seek progress towards their vision while building trust with a myriad of people in their context that makes them a leader and builds organisational culture. Thus, the simplest definition of leadership - and a difficult thing to achieve - is the ability to pursue valued goals with, and through, others.

Regardless of whether an organisation needs 'turning around' or is functioning quite well, the core work of the strategic leader is to:

- Work with stakeholders to build an overarching vision of what kind of organisation is sought
- Articulate broad strategic goals
- Convert them to measurable annual goals (targets) and strategies to reach them
- Monitor and manage the progress towards them

Setting strategic direction

Vision and strategic goals are created with broader stakeholders - the parents, governors, community members, students and staff. Creating this vision requires a broad investigation of the environment: finding out what, in the eyes of the various stakeholders, is successful that can be built off, what new directions need considering, and what is not working and should be dropped. Because of the breadth of this work and the time it takes to organise, implement, analyse and convert data to a coherent overarching vision and some strategic goals, it is typically only carried out in depth about once every three to five years and is often aligned with the election of new governors.

Firstly, historical data on achievement need to be considered for their patterns of strengths and weaknesses. It is useful to have high level historical data clearly set out so that any obvious patterns can be discussed (see Table 1 for a fictional example). Presenting quantitative data in a clear tabular fashion is the start of this exercise. A scan of the high-level data, such as that in Table 1, may lead to

a conclusion that written language is relatively weak and, while there is room for improvement in all the basic subjects, mathematics has been improving steadily over time and reading is just holding at a pretty steady level. It might be concluded that current work done in mathematics is gaining returns and should continue but literacy needs a stronger focus over the next three to five years, particularly written language.

TABLE 1: Historical overview of key results

At or above expected level	2017	2018	2019	2020
Maths	69%	73%	76%	82%
Reading	79%	73%	80%	81%
Written Language	72%	71%	75%	73%

If so, the strategic leader would then want to look at disaggregated data to see how the males versus females are performing, and how different ethnic groups or special interest groups such as learners with English as a second language or new immigrants are performing.

But this stage requires a broader scan of the environment than just the academic results. Building an overarching strategic vision often requires a lot of qualitative data gathering. This can still be kept simple and easy to manage. For example, asking stakeholders two simple questions such as the following can provide a lot of useful trend data from different groups of stakeholders:

- What is working well here?
- What would you change if you were in charge?

Stakeholders tend to discuss the 'known' and are deeply influenced by their own educational experiences. Some of the 'unknown' is useful to throw into the mix to develop a clear vision². Any national or regional goals should also inform the vision.

While an organisation does need to consider such matters as its finances, its personnel practices, its health and safety practices and so on, most of these aspects of running an organisation are 'business-as-usual'. They have to be done well but they are not a driving source for the vision. Effective educational leaders put their focus on the educational outcomes that are sought, have a clear vision for what needs to be improved, work with others on how to get those improvements and, most importantly but most rarely done, they develop short-term indicators of progress towards those goals.

Thus, a strategic overview can be articulated in one or two pages: vision, core values that underpin how the work is carried out, a few overarching goals for the education of students and a summary of some possible core strategies (developed from feedback gathered) that are likely to contribute to greater success in the future. There should not be a lot of goals, nor is a blow-by-blow description of how the goals will be reached year-by-year required. These goals are narrowed further, along with more detail on strategy, in the annual plan. The strategic plan should be a roadmap for the next three to five years in very broad terms. The following example from Mangere College in Auckland demonstrates how simple this can be:

			Vision Excellence in education Values Respect and responsibility
Strategic Goals			
Academic Achievement		School Culture	
Pathways			
Excellent outcomes for all students	Safe and inclusive culture	A clear pathway for all students	
Strategic programmes			
Data for improvement	MC Way	Enhancing teaching and learning skills	
Annual target			
14+ credits for every student in every course			
Our Principles			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We value language, culture and identity • We make decisions that are right for the students • We are open in our communication, systems, shared vision and feedback • We build capacity in people - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are caring and challenging • We have high expectations • We are positive • We believe in people and their capacity to succeed • We Always Do Better • We have fun together and celebrate success 			
How we measure our success			
Academic achievement	Student Wellbeing survey results	Destination data	

Developing the annual plan

While the strategic plan is the governors' responsibility, the annual plan that converts that vision and direction into an annual workplan is the task of the principal in a school or headteacher in an early childhood setting. A good annual plan is short, easy to read and succinctly contains the key learner-

centred goals along with the immediate actions to be taken to achieve them. Additionally, each goal can be set out on one or two pages for clarity. It is the thinking and energy that has gone into the goals and strategies that motivates effective action, not the amount of words.

Setting annual goals

Leadership is the pursuit of valued goals with and through others. Thus, setting goals is all about motivating a team to put extra effort into a few agreed priorities. For goals to work, the people that are expected to implement the goals must agree that the goals are worth pursuing or they are not likely to put in the effort. This is most effectively done by sharing the data that show past patterns, and genuinely checking in to see if the interpretation of data and the formulation of the goals are right in the eyes of most staff. To achieve improvement, the 'buy-in' of others is required, and this is usually best gained by working on the data, goals and strategies together. The strategic leader's role is to guide the team through this process.

Key questions to ask when prioritising annual goals are:

- What groups of learners are not progressing as they should?
- What is it that is limiting these learners from making progress?
- Where do we need to put our efforts first?

To find the answer to those questions, it pays to set out historical data clearly in a disaggregated form and to examine the patterns as a group (see Table 2 for a fictional example that builds off the decision to pursue written language in Table 1). Different people with their different lenses pick up different patterns of interest. In Table 2, Māori achievement and achievement of girls could be picked up as patterns to investigate further and as groups to target for acceleration.

% Written Language At or above expected level	2017	2018	2019	2020
All	72	71	75	73
Māori	53	63	69	66
Boys	74	73	80	85
Girls	65	73	73	79

Using both numbers and percentages in tables of data is recommended when student numbers are small because fluctuations in percentages may look dramatic, but may not really be because the sample is so small (for example, a 10% shift in a sample of 20 students). Similarly, don't read too much into small variations in percentage results for hundreds of students. Moving one or two percentage points with large numbers is unlikely to represent a real shift in performance.

The key to looking at quantitative data is to try to ascertain any patterns of interest. An effective annual plan is built off the variation of past results. People's theories about what has worked in the past ('why did those results go up that year?'), or why variation is evident where it wouldn't be expected ('how did that department get such good results?') are the potential source of the strategies³.

Getting everyone's input and theories as to why certain patterns exist at this stage is not preparation for the improvement work but the start of the collective work of gaining improvement. When people develop and test theories, they get excited, and excitement about the direction is what a strategic leader is seeking to develop. Using the fictional data of Table 1 and Table 2, an organisation could decide to focus on improving written language because the data is relatively poor and has not improved over time, because success in written language underpins success in many other subjects, and because there are discernible groups not doing as well as others. So, at this stage, our fictional organisation's priority goal is clear: improve written language, particularly that of girls and Māori. Whatever goals are decided on, the following criteria for effective goal setting are recognised as key to success⁴.

Goals should be few and clear

Because goals are all about motivating a team to act in a united way, there should be very few goals. A team cannot be motivated by a shopping list of goals. If you want to motivate people, most of the team must agree on the priorities and be able to easily hold them in their heads. Goals work in people's minds, not on paper. There is no definitive science on how many goals are optimal, but in practice, one or two learner-centred goals are often enough.

Sometimes, organisations that have many needs decide they must have many goals and pursue them all because they cannot afford to wait. While this sounds reasonable, the science does not agree⁵. Improvement is made by accomplishing small measurable gains in a key problem area. What is learnt in achieving one small goal is often able to be transferred to solving other problems as time goes on. Goal accomplishment is incremental and achieved by doing a few things well and being able to assess the success, then moving on to the next small goal. Success breeds success.

Educational goals should be learner-centred

Goals should be clearly focused on the learners' needs. They should not be about the adults. An organisation may well want to use technology more in classes and improve teachers' use of learning intentions. If the focus is the learner's needs, however, these initiatives may be framed as some of the strategies to help reach the goal. A simple rule of thumb is:

- Educational goals are about the learners
- Strategies for improvement are mostly about what the adults have to do to reach the goal

In this way, a leader can minimise the goals, keep the focus simple and memorable, and lead decisively.

Staff must have the capacity and commitment to put in extra effort to reach goals

Goals are not reached by writing them down, though that is an important first step. People must focus and put in extra effort to realise a goal. The strategic leader's role is to take other distractions off the table so staff have the space to concentrate on the goal. That is the whole point of having goals. It is not that you stop doing other things but that you prioritise your available energy and concentrate on one or two areas of improvement with a passion. This is helped by narrowing the goal to a clearly defined and measurable subset of the goal (in other words, a target or SMART goal) in order to make progress towards the goal visible.

Setting targets or SMARTER goals

An annual goal may be 'to improve written language' (the direction is clearly set), but to motivate a team you need to see measurable improvements. To make this possible, narrower targets or SMARTER goals need to be set. SMARTER stands for:

- **Specific** While the annual target may be to improve written language results, a shorter-term target is probably required - one that can be easily monitored in the short term.
- **Measurable** This along with 'time-bound' tends to be the most powerful condition, but only if measurement of progress occurs regularly⁶.
- **Achievable, but challenging** By and large, the higher the goal, the higher the achievement, so long as it is not ridiculously out of reach (which can be demotivating). By having a high goal that you are committed to, you put in more effort, whereas if the goal is around the level you are already achieving, people tend to think that what they have done in the past is enough, and put in no extra effort.
- **Relevant** It should be focused on what your community of learners need to focus on as a priority rather than, for example, aligning with nationally set targets. For instance, a school with very low NCEA 1 results would be better to focus on Level 1 achievement before tackling the nationally set target of 85% achievement at NCEA 2, because, until they are getting good results at Level 1, Level 2 results are largely irrelevant.
- **Time-bound** That is, that the target is measured in relatively short time-frames. This is one of the most powerful factors, as it is this 'checking in' and getting feedback on how you are progressing against the target that makes targets motivating.
- **Ethical and equitable** A negative example of this can again be related to New Zealand's recent example of a national target of 85% of students gaining NCEA 2. Most schools met this target, but it is variously reported that, in some cases, the students most in need of high expectations were guided into courses that helped them attain NCEA 2 but limited their ability to succeed at higher levels because they were 'easier standards' or courses that would not allow them to progress further⁷. This would not be considered ethical in that it is not promoting equitable outcomes.
- **Responsive** Following on from the point above, a responsive target would be to focus on all students getting NCEA 2 without jeopardising their longer-term options.

Four methods for setting a target

There are many ways to set a target but one element is always required and that is 'baseline' data, or the historical pattern of results or starting point for the target. Targets do not have meaning without reference to a baseline because, without it, the level of challenge of the target cannot be assessed.

'Finger in the air'

In practice, most organisations use this approach to set targets. In other words, it is a completely arbitrary process, such as 'let's go for a 20% improvement'. However, being unscientific does not mean that it is ineffective. The fact that the target is clear, ambitious and easily remembered is all that is required so long as people are committed to it and prepared to work hard at it, because goals and targets are all about motivation. In the end, it does not matter if you do not reach a target. What matters is how much closer you came to it than you would otherwise have, because of the focused effort you put in.

Extrapolation

This is a method frequently used by government departments. It is when a target some years out is set, and then a line is drawn from there to the current state of achievement and annual targets are set on the basis of that line. On the face of it, it looks scientific, but in practice it may not motivate effort (particularly if people don't believe it is achievable), and can result in unmemorable and unhelpful targets such as '54.76% of students need to meet x standard'.

Benchmark

This method uses a target created nationally such as the 85% target for NCEA Level 2 used in New Zealand at one stage, or uses the performance of similar schools to set a standard to be reached. These are often successful because they are easy to remember (provided they are not clouded by other targets).

Real faces and names

This method involves investigating which learners are not meeting a given benchmark or are at risk of not achieving it, and then converting the names to numbers and percentages based on what is possible but challenging.

TABLE 3: Two examples of targets set with two years' baseline data informing them

	2017	2018	TARGET 2019
Primary example (using real faces and names to create target)	80/300 students below expected level	60/300 students below expected level	42 students who are below the year level expectation will have made accelerated progress and be at the year level expectation.
Secondary example (using 'finger in the air' method to set high and challenging target)	74% attain NCEA 1	76% attain NCEA 1	90% attain NCEA 1

Whichever method is used, the strategic leader's role is to use the data and the consensus about what is important to set a target that is a stretch but which the team wants to achieve, and then problem-solve with the team about the best way to achieve it.

Taking action: Causal analysis and strategy decisions

Developing a culture of high expectations and total focus on one or two goals at a time must be driven from the top, as must the process of gaining agreement on key strategies to reach the goal. These decisions start with an analysis of the causes of 'the problem'. One effective method of getting some structured brainstorming about causes of the improvement problem (for instance, lack of progress in improving the quality of the written language across the school) is to use a fishbone diagram and follow that process through using up to 5 'whys'⁸.

Once the three or four best hypotheses as to contributors to the current problem are on the table, a way of testing those theories can be decided upon. For example, in a hypothetical example of wanting to improve written language, the analysis from the fishbone exercise could be reduced to the three most powerful causes that were within the team's realm of influence to address. These might be:

- Not enough time spent on writing - students cannot do anything meaningful in the set time and way teaching is carried out
- Teacher knowledge of the standards the school is seeking is not clear
- Teachers are not confident at writing themselves

Those causes, once verified by checking, help to narrow down the best responses (strategies) to address each cause. So, in the example scenario, changes to timetabling may be an important part of the response, as well as changes to the focus and nature of the professional learning programme. Table 4 sets out these likely causes along with possible ways of checking these theories and possible strategic responses to address the problem.

TABLE 4: Example of possible causes of problems, way of checking these theories and possible strategic responses

Three most likely causes with high leverage if addressed	Way to check validity of cause	Possible strategic response
Not enough time spent on writing.	Student voice: Interview three students per class of varying ability and check their view about what happens when they write. Do they get enough time?	Lengthening period of time for writing.
Teacher knowledge of the school's key benchmarks is not clear.	Teacher voice: Rate on 1 to 10 scale your knowledge of key benchmarks in teaching written language for your class.	Providing sessions focused on the staff developing their understanding of key benchmarks. Agreeing on key benchmarks sought.
Teachers are not confident at writing themselves.	Teacher voice: Rate confidence in teaching written language skills on a 1 to 10 scale.	Setting up professional learning groups with one self-assessed 'expert writer' per group. Using teacher written language tasks as a pedagogical strategy in the professional learning sessions.

It can be useful to think of strategies in two categories:

1. Tightening up on 'business-as-usual' or structures (for example, how meetings are used, or changing the roles of leaders to better align to the goal)
2. Introducing the new and strategic (for example, type of teacher learning programme)

Examples of 'business-as-usual' or structural changes often include:

- Provision of adequate and appropriate resources (time to do the work, right people for right tasks, finances backing the goal)
- Tight monitoring of short-term results every term

- Putting a person or team in charge of the goal and the data collection for it
- Changing the focus of meetings from information provision to places to look at data and monitor and respond to results (in other words, they become professional learning groups)
- Changing role expectations (for example, changing expectations of leaders so they all have an explicit role in supporting the goal pursuit)

Examples of the new and strategic might be:

- All teachers implementing one agreed approach to paragraph writing
- Middle leaders having professional development to support their skills in leading meetings
- Building professional capability of all teachers with a range of formal and informal supports including individual level support, broader intellectual stimulation, role modelling and school-wide investigation into the effectiveness of practices through data monitoring, ultimately resulting in the building of a core set of agreed effective practices

Not all strategies are planned up front and then implemented. At times, effective practices simply emerge out of someone's actions and are found to be effective and adopted⁹. The key is to not have a whole lot of other things going on as well as the annual goal focus. Everyone can remember and get excited by focusing on one goal and learn from one or two things they are trying to do to impact it. If there are a lot of things going on, no one knows what action is impacting what outcome. 'Know thy impact' is key to the science of improvement.¹⁰

Monitoring progress during the year

Gaining substantial improvement requires concerted and coherent action¹¹. Success depends on many people agreeing to carry out certain acts in a consistent way. The most critical of these is the regular monitoring of progress with practical measures, and then responding to that data.

Interim measures/practical measures/quick wins/small wins/intermediate outcomes/just-in-time data

All of these terms refer to the same thing. They represent the ability to convert targets into smaller, more readily visible and attainable small measures of progress. For example, 'Improving written language' is a broad goal. While it can be converted into a target based on annual data, in practice leaders need to refine the target further by focusing on key aspects of written language that are of immediate concern. Only then will they see progress in the short-term and be sure that they are heading in the right direction with the strategies they have theorised as being effective. It may be that common problems impeding progress are a lack of quantity of writing, a lack of author's voice and an inability to write confidently in sentences and paragraphs. In that case, more refined baseline data can be collected on these problems. Then the improvement strategies can focus on those explicit sub-sets of the broader problem of improving written language quality. These more refined data can be collected in many different ways.

The advantage of measuring small wins is that they allow close monitoring of improvement on a small part of the problem and thus, progress is easier to see and more easily achieved. People are motivated when they see progress and willing to put more effort into something that clearly works. Small wins must be focused on the learner outcomes, but may also be focused on what teachers agree to do or leaders need to do. It is useful, for example, to measure teacher confidence in using a strategy at the same time as learners' success in displaying a skill that was taught with the strategy. This helps the learning organisation to be confident that its professional development is actually impacting learners as well as enhancing teacher confidence.

Ways of measuring small wins

Rubrics are one common way of establishing short-term measures. Continuing with the written language example, samples of student work could be classified into four categories (focused on their ability to write a sentence: see Table 5). Key to this process is only having one idea in a given rubric. For example, you would not have 'sometimes uses full stops and capitals and is starting to show author's voice' because a learner may meet one criterion but not the other: the author voice ideas would need to be assessed separately.

TABLE 5: Example of how a rubric is built

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Rarely uses ... full stops and capitals	Sometimes uses ... full stops and capitals	Usually uses ... full stops and capitals	Almost always uses ... full stops and capitals

Teams of teachers would have to agree what 'rarely', 'sometimes' and so on look like (for instance, 3 or 4 times per 100 words). Then samples of student work can be categorised. If 70% of students are working at levels 1 and 2 and 20% at Level 3 and 10% at Level 4, the logical target might be to aim to move most students to at least Level 3.

Student voice is another way of establishing progress in the short-term. This does not have to involve using a survey. Surveys are often long and complicated, and take too much time to administer and analyse. Small wins should be data that are easy to gather and yet a good indicator of progress towards the bigger goal you are trying to achieve. If the problem was seen as lack of appropriate teacher feedback and feedforward, a few students from each class could be asked to provide an example of the type of feedback they received on their work this week. The patterns in those data could then be re-checked one term later after a few teaching strategies have been consistently implemented.

Self-assessment is another easy-to-utilise tool. For example, 'Rate your confidence on a scale of 1 to 10'. Doctors do this all the time when they ask patients to rate their level of pain. The point is to gain some quick measurable indicators that teachers or students are making progress on a narrowly defined part of the problem that is theorised as preventing student progress. Key to this process is asking what data will provide the confidence that our strategies are working without involving a lot of extra work to gather.

When everyone focuses on teaching and reinforcing the expectations across the school, and concentrates on one or two small wins at a time, improvement is likely to occur quickly. When carried out in this way, improvement can be addictive, because it is easy to see the progress that occurs and then move on to the next small win. But the success of the strategy depends on someone analysing, collecting and sharing the data with the whole staff regularly, at least once per term, in the form of a table or graph. The key is to clearly show how much improvement has been gained, and to analyse who still has to make the progress and how to support them to make the learning gain. This is how goals motivate team effort. It is wise to have one person or a small team in charge of this data collection task.

Becoming a learning organisation

By working on one small part of the perceived problem and making progress, leaders and teachers learn about what works. This learning can then be applied to other areas of need. For example, when this process is applied well, people usually end up with more efficient use of meeting times to focus on the learning priority. They learn to be more effective with their approach to professional development. Theoretically, professional development should be the key to improvement, but unless it is tied to small

wins that check its efficacy by shifts in student, teacher and leadership behaviour, it is unlikely to make an impact. Much professional development is wasted as people seek a 'general inoculation' rather than problem-specific learning. In our theoretical written language case, an inoculation approach would be to bring in a provider and let them run a course on written language. This bypasses the analysis that is carried out in an effective school at the causal analysis stage. In our example, the causes of the problem were organisational (not enough time) which needed leaders and teachers to address it, not professional learning. There was also lack of teacher knowledge about school benchmarks which required the staff to work together to decide on expectations. Input from an external expert would be useful at this stage, as would their input into precise problems that the professional learning groups identify, but a general inoculation is unlikely to be useful. The beauty of this process is that it can be applied repeatedly and becomes the way continual improvement is sustained through day-to-day actions (such as your regular meetings times), not through major interventions.

Putting the thinking into an annual plan

The annual plan captures the theory for improvement. It is sometimes wise to map out only the first steps in detail, perhaps for one term, as an analysis of small wins after one term will drive next steps. An annual plan can be captured on a page or two. This is well illustrated in an example from Bucklands Beach Primary School in Auckland. Note how the small wins are explicit in the plan.

IMPROVEMENT PLAN - DOMAIN: Learning	
Strategic Goal: Improve outcomes for all students, particularly Māori, Pasifika, ELL and specific needs.	
Annual Goal Accelerate the progress of students achieving below or well below the national standard in writing	Annual Target By the end of 2017, the 34 students who are below the national standard in writing will have made accelerated progress and be at or above standard. By the end of 2017, the 32 students who are well below the national standard in writing will have made accelerated progress and be below or at.
Baseline data	
2016	Writing
Below	34 (7.9%)
Well Below	32 (7.5%)
Key Improvement Strategies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate as a staff for consistency • Share best practice through staff and team meetings • Video and reflect on own practice against good practice criteria • Train TAs to be ELA, and work with teacher's plans to feed in vocabulary for writing 	

When	What (examples)	Who	Indicators of Progress
Termly	Use e-asTTle to identify individual and specific writing needs and then ensure teacher PLD aligns with the writing needs so that teachers deliberately teach to student needs with clear, specific interventions - evidenced in planning as well as delivery	Principal & writing team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and teaching reflects students' needs • Writing improves in the areas targeted
Term 1 – student speak Ongoing	Make learning totally visible to students i.e. getting the progressions in student speak, all students able to articulate what they are learning and why, what good looks like (using rubrics, exemplars), their next steps and how to get there	Whole staff • literacy team to pull them together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students know their next steps and can talk about their learning • The use of exemplars and rubrics are obvious in students books, the classroom etc
Terms 1, 2, & 3	Teachers to video their writing teaching and reflect with their practice with their coach	Whole staff, coaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent good practice is being achieved across the school
Term 1	Provide ELA training for Learning Assistants and ongoing support for each of them from the ELL teacher	TAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased vocabulary scores in e-asTTle rubric • ELAs can confidently work with ELL students
Term 2	Engage in whole school e-asTTle and OTJ moderation	Whole staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More consistent moderation across cohorts
End of term 1, then ongoing	Plan an extra three-way meeting at the end of term one with the parents of the 59 students, share targets, resources and how whānau can support learning through targeted actions	Whole staff, parents, SENCO to monitor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SMART targets met through support at home
Ongoing	Introduction of the Spiral of Inquiry and working through the process with staff with a focus on developing a hunch, learning and taking action; sharing what has worked, asking the question what have we learned, and taking next steps and making it a habit. Embed in appraisal	Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student results increase in writing • Student voice reflects higher level of engagement in writing

Monitoring

Measure three aspects of writing at the beginning and end of each term, starting at term 2.

SMART targets set for home are met.

Increased stage in language for ELL students in August. Compare beginning and end data with last year's data.

Resourcing

Staff meetings, progressions in kids speak visible around the school.

Conclusion

We do need to plan – ‘to fail to plan is to plan to fail’¹² - but not a lot of detail is needed. Rather, it is this process of continual improvement that needs to be understood and implemented, and it is the strategic leader's job to drive that. Much of what is required may well be termed ‘management’- it is a process that needs hands-on management. But at the heart of it, what is required is

- clarity on what core problem you are trying to solve and therefore what goal is being pursued;
- clarity on the causes of the problem and therefore what core strategies could be theorised as being required to address them; and
- clarity about what small wins will provide confidence that progress is being made during the year.

The best of plans can get it wrong, but we learn by doing and the beauty of small wins is that, if something is not working, it is obvious in the short-term. A change in direction may be needed if the causal analysis was incorrect, or, if the reason for failure is that not everyone is applying the agreed strategies, a ‘call to action’ is required. Clarity, coherence and commitment are the keys to success¹³.

Recommended Reading

Amabile, T.M., & Kramer, S.J. (2011). The power of small wins. Harvard Business Review, May 2011.

Bryk, A.S. (2010). Organizing schools for improvement. Phi Delta Kappan, 91(7), 23-30.

Endnotes

1 Attributed to twentieth-century management guru, Drucker.

2 For example, investigating research on effective learning environments (e.g., the OECD's learning principles, <http://www.oecd.org/education/cei/50300814.pdf>) can help to broaden the mind as to what is possible and what should be envisaged in a successful learning environment.

3 Bryk, A.S., Gomez, L.M., & Grunow, A. (2011). Getting ideas into action: Building Networked Improvement Communities in Education. In: Hallinan M. (Ed.), *Frontiers in Sociology of Education*. Frontiers in Sociology and Social Research, vol 1. Dordrecht: Springer.

4 Locke, E.A., & Latham, G.P. (1990). A theory of goal setting and task performance. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

5 Latham, G.P., & Locke, E.A. (2006). Enhancing the benefits and overcoming the pitfalls of goal setting. *Organizational Dynamics*, 35(4), 332 - 340.

6 Fernandez, K.E. (2011). Evaluating school improvement plans and their affect on academic performance. *Educational Policy*, 25(2), 338-367.

7 Wilson, A., Madjar, I., & McNaughton, S. (2016). Opportunity to learn about disciplinary literacy in senior secondary English classrooms in New Zealand. *The Curriculum Journal*, 27(2), 204-228.

8 See <https://www.educational-business-articles.com/fishbone-diagram/> for instructions on this process.

9 Mintzberg, H. (1989). *Mintzberg on Management*. New York: The Free Press.

10 See John Hattie <https://vimeo.com/88176199>

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