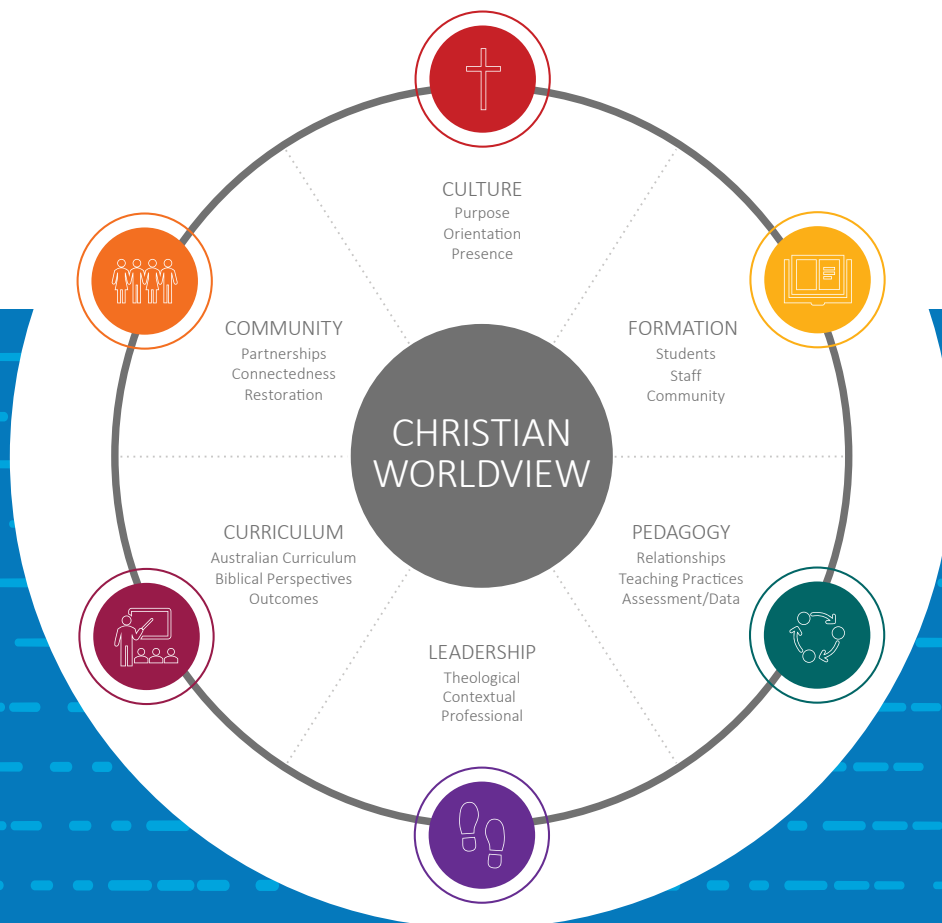


Architecture School Improvement Tool

Overview & Rationale



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Rationale

Every student is made in the image of God. Therefore, the unique needs of every child are the primary concern of a Christian school. The Mparntwe (Alice Springs) Education Declaration (2019) emphasises that education plays a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians¹. A Christian School education is well placed to meet these important objectives.

“The mission of a Christian school is the spiritual, educational, emotional, social and physical development of every child in a holistic way”

We are called to live as the people of God. The Christian life is a life lived in communion with God and others. The development of students in a Christian school takes place in community. They are places of belonging, built on shared values and beliefs, and committed to mutual care and respect. They are communities in which Biblical faith, values and beliefs are formative for the school community and integrated into curriculum, practice and culture.

“Christian schools are communities of grace, belief and practice”

As a direct response to Jesus’ example of servant leadership, Christian schools have a strong culture of mission and service both at home and overseas. They educate students to be locally and globally active citizens, concerned about the welfare of others and about using their gifts to serve.

“Christian school students learn to find their purpose in following Jesus’ example, using their gifts to serve others”

Many CSA members were commenced by and remain affiliated with a local church and draw their enrolments from church families. Others are associated with and supported by members from a number of churches in their local area. In addition, most CSA schools also attract significant enrolments from families who, while not currently attending a Christian church, nonetheless deliberately choose the school because they desire for their children an education that is based upon Christian beliefs and values.

“CSA member schools are closely aligned with parents and churches in their communities. They are one of the expressions of the body of Christ, serving parents by partnering with them in the education of the children”

In the first pages of the CSA text “Locating Learners in God’s Big Story 2.0”, teachers are asked, “What does it mean to educate in a distinctively Christian way?” The framework that follows to respond to this question through the lens of school improvement.

¹ Educationcouncil.edu.au. 2020. Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration. [online] Available at: <<http://www.education-council.edu.au/Alice-Springs--Mparntwe--Education-Declaration.aspx>>.

School Improvement Framework

“I know all the things you do. I have seen your love, your faith, your service, and your patient endurance. And I can see your constant improvement in all these things.” Revelation 2:19 (NLT)

The vision of Christian Schools Australia is clear:

“Schools are nurturing communities, and are excellent, radical, transforming, Christ-centred, service-focussed and a Christian community.

In his letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul states “Give your complete attention to these matters. Throw yourself into your tasks so that everyone will see your progress.”² Paul is encouraging Timothy, and by extension all Christ followers, to improve his skills and abilities leading the Church, encouraging the believers, and teaching. In the education context the paradigm of school or educational continuous improvement is a relatively new one and is even more so in the Christian schooling context.

With Timothy as a role model, Christian schools, leaders and teachers must seek to put in place a process for continuous reflection, review and improvement that leads to progress towards the relevant school vision.

The Australian Council of Educational Research states that “The ultimate goal of any school improvement process is to enhance and facilitate better learning for students, including levels of achievement and wellbeing.”³ A rigorous school improvement process includes the following elements:

- A **school improvement framework** that identifies key elements that ultimately influence student learning outcomes.
- A **‘current reality’ review process**, gathering data and evidence of where the school is currently in relation to the school improvement framework. A range of data tools can be utilised in the process.
- A **school improvement plan**; a road map that systematically sets out the changes a school needs to make to improve student learning and outcomes.
- Collection and analysis of relevant **school data** and **evidence** sets.
- A **checking and review process** to monitor progress and make recommendations for modifications or refinement as required.

Additionally, the challenge is often sustaining change once it has been enacted. Sustaining change means building capacity within schools, ensuring that teachers and schools leaders are able to adapt and modify, committed to continuous learning, and can lead to change, particularly when roadblocks are encountered.⁴

² 1 Timothy 4:15

³ <https://www.acer.org/au/school-improvement>

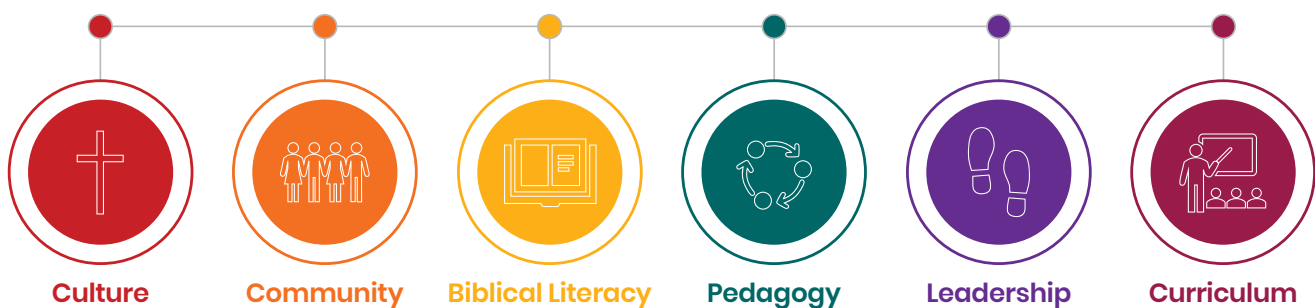
⁴ L Stoll 2009, ‘Capacity building for school improvement or creating capacity for learning? A changing landscape’, Journal of Educational Change, vol.10, p.117.

School Improvement Framework (cont...)

The school improvement framework that follows has been developed to enable Christian schools to answer three key questions:



It is informed by the CSA Architecture, with a particular emphasis on the architecture “Levers”:



The framework is designed to provide informed and evidence-based direction for schools on their continuous improvement journey. The framework has been designed as a cyclic process:

- an External Review facilitated by an external team, including a Principal colleague from another Christian school,
- development and implementation of an action plan based on the recommendations of the review team, and supported by an external critical friend, and
- an end of cycle external review in the third year to reflect, celebrate, and initiate a new improvement cycle.

Framework Examples

In Australia, all state and territory education systems have developed and/or implemented school improvement processes, including school improvement frameworks. Additionally, the Australian Council of Educational Research have developed the National School Improvement Tool, which provides a rigorous school improvement process for school systems and individual schools. In the independent school sector, representative bodies, for example Independent Schools Queensland, have developed school improvement frameworks and processes to serve the needs of their constituents, many of whom are 'stand-alone' schools, and not part of a schooling system.

Jurisdiction	Process	Link
Western Australia Department of Education	School Improvement and Accountability Framework	https://det.wa.edu.au/accountability/detcms/education/evaluation-and-accountability/binary-files/school-improvement-and-accountability-framework.en?cat-id=13027342
South Australia Department of Education	School and preschool improvement – building the momentum	https://www.education.sa.gov.au/teaching/school-improvement
Victorian Department of Education	Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO)	https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/management/improvement/Pages/FISO.aspx
NSW Department of Education	School Excellence Framework	https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/school-excellence-and-accountability
Education Queensland	School Reviews	https://schoolreviews.eq.edu.au
Education Tasmania	Uses a process based on a modified NSIT	
Australian Council of Educational Research	National School Improvement Tool	https://www.acer.org/au/school-improvement
Independent Schools Queensland	Supporting School Improvement School Reviews	https://www.isq.qld.edu.au/schools/principals-school-leaders/school-improvement/
Association of Independent Schools NSW	School Improvement	https://www.aisnsw.edu.au/schoolimprovement
Lutheran Education Australia	Quality Schools	https://www.lutheran.edu.au/school-professionals-2/leadership/quality-schools/
Adventist Education Australia	Quality Adventist Schools Improvement Framework	https://www.adventist.edu.au/Professional-learning/QAS-Project
Brisbane Catholic Education	The School Improvement Framework	https://www.bne.catholic.edu.au/schools-curriculum/Pages/School-Improvement.aspx

Literature Review Synthesis

While there is significant and abundant research in relation to school improvement, there are some common findings that can be utilised to frame any school improvement agenda. These include (in no particular order):

The fundamental importance of school leadership, and the centrality of the Principal. While the trend has been in education to move towards a more distributive leadership model, there is still a strong correlation between effective school operation and improvement and high capacity school leadership⁵.

The fundamental importance of trust – trust between and among all school stakeholders. In their book ‘Trust in Schools’ Bryk and Schneider present that those schools with a high level of relational trust are far more likely to initiate and sustain the types of changes that will improve student learning and outcomes⁶.

An uncompromising focus on improvement in instructional practice. The quality of teaching is critical to successful student outcomes, and that the most significant way to improve student learning outcomes is to improve the quality of instruction⁷.

A strategic improvement cycle is developed and implemented that is oriented towards research validated, evidence-based, sustainable and professional learning, informed by student learning and feedback⁸.

High levels of parent and community engagement with the school. There is strong empirical evidence about enhanced outcomes for young people when the school, parents & carers, and the community work collaboratively⁹.

The school improvement essentials described in school improvement research, and outlined above, are applicable to any school, whether state government, Catholic or Christian. However, there is less research available that considers if there are distinctives for a Christian school within a school improvement paradigm. In her 2011 Isaac Armitage lecture Dr Briony Scott identifies data sets that she collects at her K-12 independent school. She then goes on to make the following statement, “we can measure all those things and still not measure the success or failure of a school. And in particular, I can capture all of this information and be none the wiser about the Christian nature of the school in practice.”¹⁰ It has been difficult to identify recent specific research in relation to school improvement processes that also capture the distinctive of a Christian school.

Internationally, the Association of Christian Schools International have developed the resource ‘Flourishing Schools: Research on Christian School Culture and Community’. (See link on next page)

⁵ Leithwood, K., & Mascal, B. (2008) Collective Leadership Effects on Student Achievement. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(4), pp. 529-561

⁶ Bryk, A.S & Schneider, B (2002), *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement*, New York, NY: Russel Sage Foundation

⁷ https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Industries/Social%20Sector/Our%20Insights/How%20the%20worlds%20most%20improved%20school%20systems%20keep%20getting%20better/How_the_worlds_most_improved_school_systems_keep_getting_better.ashx

⁸ Jensen, B., Sonnemann, J., Roberts-Hull, K., Hunter, A. (2016) *Beyond PD: Teacher Professional Learning in High-Performing Systems Australian Edition*, Washington DC: National Center on Education and the Economy

⁹ Epstein, J. (1995), *School/family/Community Partnerships*, Phi Delta Kappan

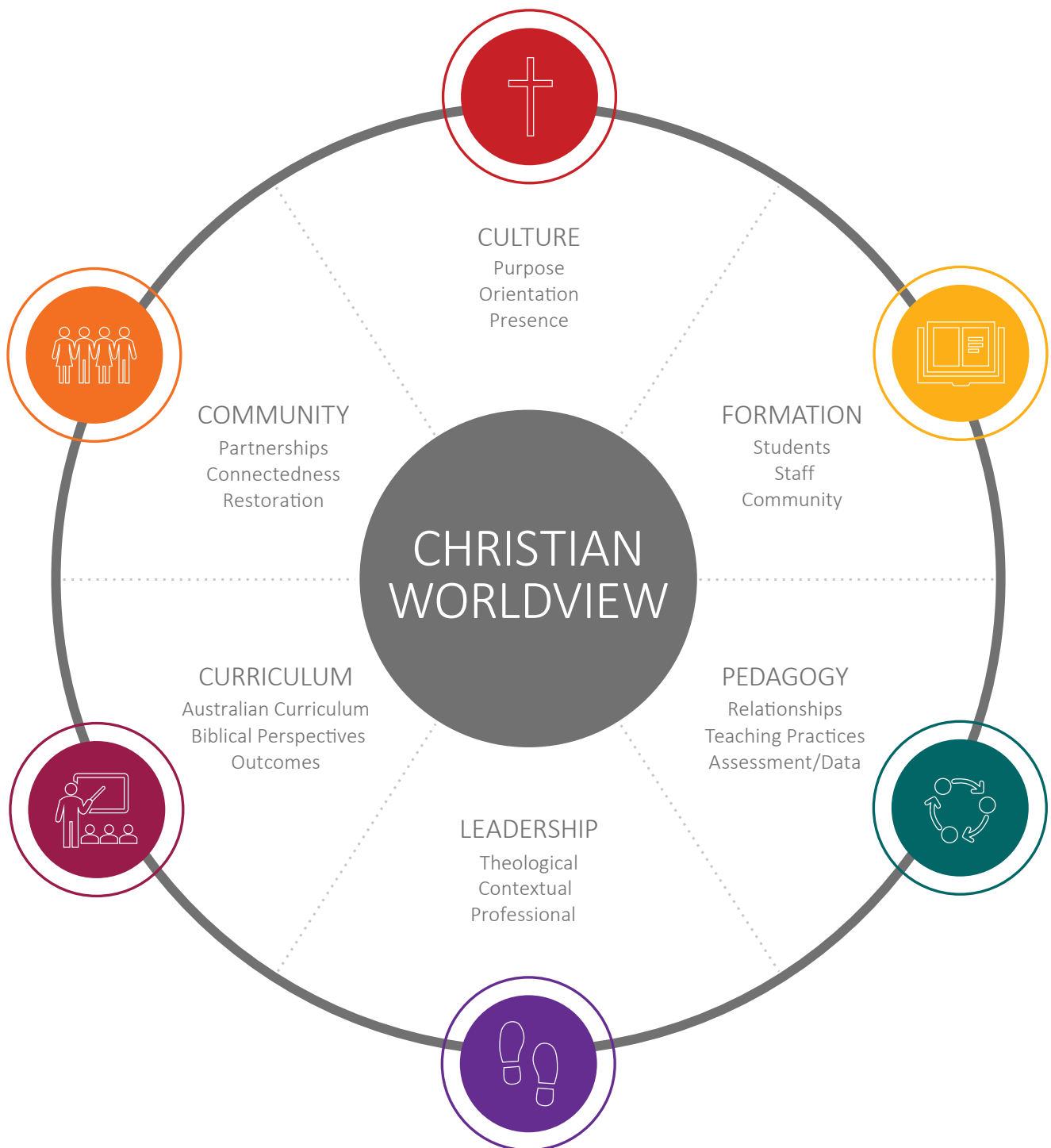
¹⁰ Scott, B., (2012) What is the measure of a Christian school? *Journal of Christian Education*, 55(1), pp. 37-50

Example School Improvement Literature Review Documents

Research	Provider	Link
School improvement frameworks: The evidence base	NSW Office of Education	https://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/images/stories/PDF/School_improvement_frameworks-The_evidence_base.pdf
School Performance Improvement Frameworks (SPIF) Project: Federal Department of Education	Smarter Schools National Partnerships	https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/school_performance_improvement_frameworks_report.pdf
Continuous School Improvement – What Matters Most	Anne McIntyre: The Vincent Fairfax Ethics in Leadership Foundation Churchill Fellowship	https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/media/fellows/2010_McIntyre_Ann_1.pdf
Self-Improving Schools Background paper	Independent Schools Queensland	Only available to ISQ school members
Leading School Improvement: What Research Says	The Wallace Foundation	https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Leading-School-Improvement-What-Research-Says.pdf
Flourishing Schools: Research on Christian School Culture and Community	Association of Christian Schools International	https://community.acsi.org/flourishingschools/home?token=C18DDB1F-4964-4BD7-AC3A-04EF86355385

School Improvement Framework | Visualisation

The visualisation, below, seeks to capture the essence of the framework in that all parts are reliant on each other. There is no element more important than the other and each relies on each other to enable a Christian school to be as effective as possible (1 Corinthians 12). That being said, a Christian Worldview is the underpinning lens of a Christian school. Additionally, the 5 levers (Pedagogy, Community, Formation, Curriculum and Leadership) are all directly influenced by, and influence, the **culture** of the school (the 6th lever).



School Improvement Framework | Review Process

As identified previously, all state education jurisdictions, and education organisations that support schools in the independent and Catholic education sectors have school improvement processes. Central to these processes is a form of review which seeks to provide data and evidence in relation to the following questions:

- What are we currently doing?
- How are we going?
- How do we know?

While the methodology of the review can vary between jurisdictions (and even schools), there are some common elements to all. These include:

- **A review team** that leads and facilitates the school improvement process.
- **A reference framework**, identifying and describing key influences on school effectiveness.
- **A process for data/evidence gathering**, to measure activity against the reference framework.
- **A strategic planning process** to identify, develop, implement and monitor key strategies to address foci identified for improvement in the review process.

With many Christian schools being 'stand-alone' schools, and therefore do not have 'systemic' processes to support and guide continuous school improvement, the following process is recommended to facilitate rigorous school improvement. The school improvement tool has been designed as a cyclic process, constructed as a staged implementation, facilitating continuous improvement underpinned by a rigorous and research-based methodology. This methodology requires the following commitment elements:

1. **Acknowledgement** of need for, and impact of, a methodical school improvement process. There must be an acknowledgement of, and commitment to, the need for continuous school improvement from the school board and senior leadership, including the Principal, for a school improvement process to be successful and sustainable.
2. **Formation** of a 'school improvement team' with representation from a cross section of the school community. It is recommended that, at the minimum, the composition of the school improvement team includes:
 - a. the school Principal,
 - b. key school leaders
 - c. at least one classroom teacher,
 - d. a non-teaching staff member.

The question of student representation is one that can only be addressed at the individual school level but is encouraged.

3. **Commitment** to the cyclic nature of the process, including:
 - a. Completion of previsit survey by school staff with leadership responsibilities.
 - b. 2-day external review facilitated by an External Review team
 - c. Development and implementation of a staged action plan
 - d. End of cycle external review in the third year to reflect and celebrate; and initiate a new improvement cycle.

School Improvement Framework | Review Process (cont...)

1.

STAGE 1

School Improvement Review facilitated by External Review Team

The School Improvement Review facilitated by External Review Team stage is designed launch a rigorous school improvement review with an impartial and experienced team of school improvement professionals who facilitate a rigorous and objective review. The External Review Team will usually consist of 3-4 members and will consist of a Lead Reviewer, the relevant CSA Executive Officer, and a CSA Principal. The 'Lead Reviewer' will have extensive experience in school reviews and data gathering. One member of the External review team will always be a Principal colleague from a CSA school.

The External Review Team undertakes the following actions:

1. Collects relevant data and evidence of current reality framed by the elements of the framework. The External Review Team will collect this evidence via a range of means including interviews and focus groups.
2. Present an overview and analysis of this data to the School Improvement Team, including affirmations/commendations, and recommendations, and facilitate a discussion with the School Improvement Team as what this means to the school.

The State Executive Officer provides ongoing support for the School Improvement Team through the following actions:

1. Support the School Improvement Team in the decision as to the possible school improvement foci.
2. Support the School Improvement Team in the development of an action plan using the Action Research Cycle improvement methodology to identify, implement, monitor and modify improvement strategies that have high impact on student learning and outcomes.

2.

STAGE 2

Development and Implementation of an Action Plan, supported by an External Critical Friend

The Action Plan is designed as an annual check on progress and impact in the school improvement journey. The school improvement action plan is important because it provides a structured approach for setting goals associated with the review recommendations, and tracking progress towards achieving those goals. It helps the school improvement team to focus their resources, increase accountability, promote data-driven decision-making, and encourage collaboration among stakeholders. The external 'critical friend' is an essential element of the review process as the critical friend provides an objective lens to the process, as well as providing a level of collegiate accountability. It is strongly encouraged that the school will engage with a critical friend with extensive school improvement experience who can support, guide, challenge and facilitate the school improvement journey. The critical friend could be a CSA Executive Officer or a local Principal or other school leader.

School Improvement Framework | Review Process (cont...)

Over the term of the school improvement action planning process, the School Improvement Team undertakes the following actions:

1. Development of an action plan informed by the review recommendations (an action plan template is provided on page 40).
2. The school improvement team collects data/evidence during implementation of the action plan.
3. Other relevant data (quantitative and/or qualitative) is collected.
4. The data is analysed and discussed by the School Improvement Team, supported by the External Critical Friend.
5. The School Improvement Team celebrates any 'wins', no matter how small, and identifies areas of concern.
6. School Improvement Team agree to any modifications/adjustments to action plan as indicated by data
7. Action plan adjusted and implementation continues.

RECOMMENDED: STAGE 3

3.

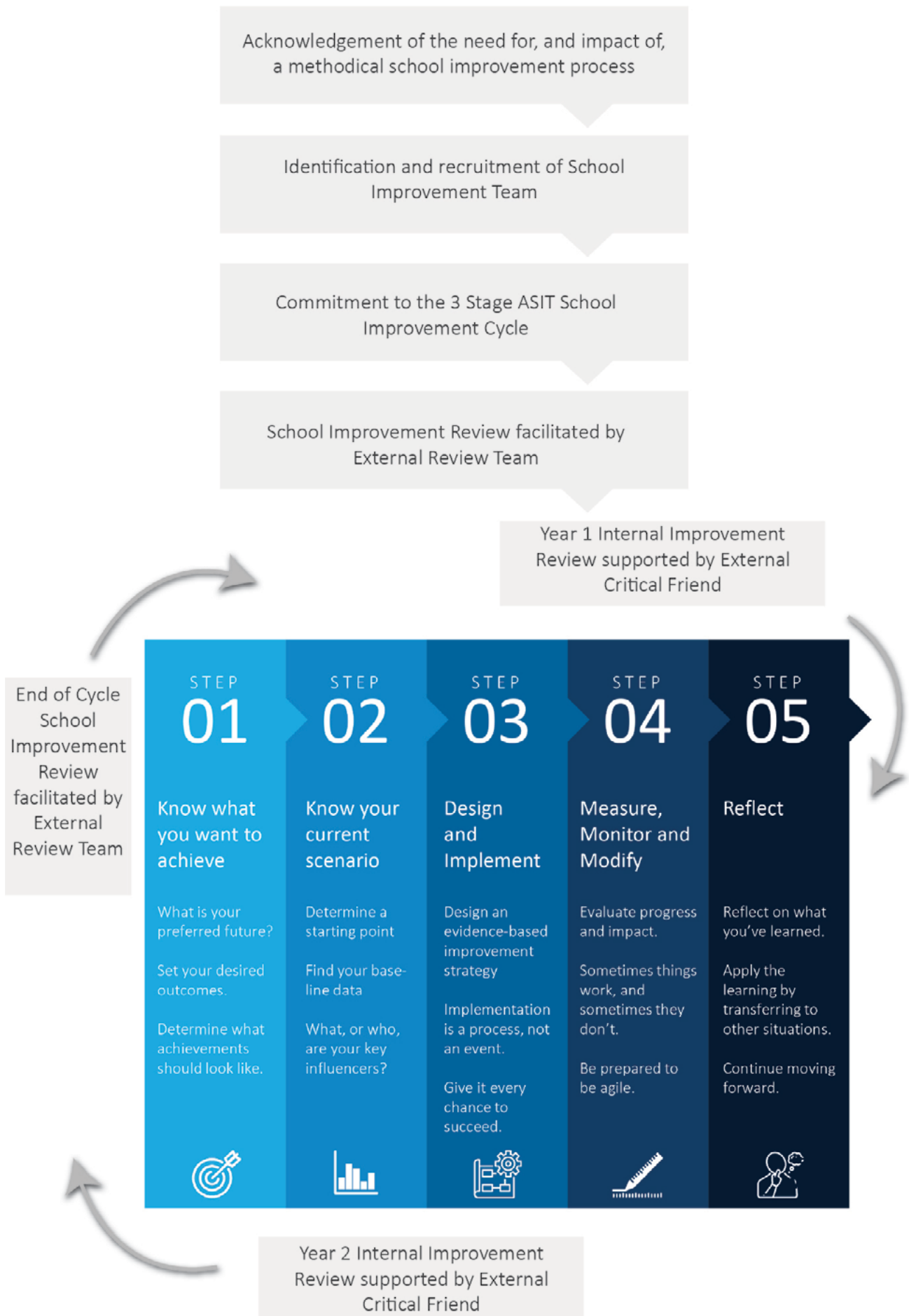
End of Cycle School Improvement Review facilitated by External Review Team

At the end of the third year of the school improvement cycle an end of cycle external school improvement review may be undertaken. It would be recommended, but not essential, if the members of the original external review team returned to conduct this end of cycle review. The purpose of this review process is two-fold:

1. to reflect and celebrate, supporting the School Improvement Team in particular, and the broader school community in general, in recognising and celebrating progress on their school improvement journey, and
2. to initiate a new improvement cycle to support continuous school improvement.

The External School Improvement Review Team will follow the same process as the original external review, with a particular emphasis on identifying evidence of school improvement in the identified foci, and, if indicated, make recommendations as to a subsequent school improvement foci.

School Improvement Framework | Review Process (cont...)



Key Roles in School Improvement Process

While the numerical composition of a school improvement team will be somewhat governed by the size of the school, the following is a recommendation of the personnel composition of the school improvement team.

School/College Principal

With significant research indicating the fundamental importance of the Principal in school improvement initiatives, it is an imperative that School/College Principal is a member of the school improvement team, and it is strongly recommended that s/he chair the team. While a Principal may want to distribute leadership and thus nominate another team member to chair the team, it is the authors experience that this provides opportunity for 'other things' to divert the attention (and often attendance) of the Principal, whereas if this key school leader is chairing the team, then there should be a resultant stronger commitment to leading the process.

Classroom Teachers

To ensure that the review and school improvement process is not seen as simply a top down driven initiative, it is highly recommended that there is at least one classroom teacher representative on the team. For a P-12 school, it would be prudent to have a representative from each of the sub-schools, whether junior, middle and/or senior.

Non-teaching Staff

One of the authors learnings from a number of years facilitating and guiding school reviews and school improvement processes is in the importance of including a non-teaching staff member on the team. These key support people are often overlooked when schools initiate these types of processes. However, they often bring a different 'lens' to the discussion, which has proven to be insightful and valuable on many occasions.

OPTIONAL

School Board Member

With the focus of the proposed review/school improvement process ranging from whole-school to individual classroom, the support of the school board is seen as vital. Actual participation of a board member in the process would be considered optional and a local school decision

Parents

While it is considered optional that a parent representative be included in the process, the selection of the right person is a major consideration. It is recommended that the parent representative is not also a staff member of the school. The selected parent must be willing to have their own outlook, but not one with 'an axe to grind'.

Students

The question of student representation is one that can only be addressed at the individual school level. The inclusion of student representation should not be seen as 'tokenism', and the careful selection of student representation can add value to the process.

External Independent Critical Friend

One of the key influences on the ongoing success and positive impact of this process is in the inclusion of an independent external consultant who supports, guides and challenges the school as they journey through their review and school improvement journey. It is strongly recommended that any school engaging in the ASIT process engage with a critical friend who will provide honest perspective, targeted questions, accountability and encouragement throughout the school improvement journey.



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