Executive summary

School review is designed to provide an expert, independent analysis of current school performance and practice, and to advise on appropriate goals, targets and improvement strategies that will help shape the school’s new strategic plan.

School review examines the school’s performance on the key student outcomes: student learning, engagement and wellbeing, and pathways and transitions. School review complements and follows directly from the school self-evaluation. Independent reviewers and critical friends are selected based on their educational expertise and trained to ensure that they are familiar with the Department’s current policies, frameworks and priorities. They use this knowledge base to provide an informed perspective about the evidence presented and the improvement strategies recommended. When combined, the school self-evaluation and school review provide a strong evidence base from which schools can confidently develop their strategic direction for the next four years.

School review aims to be a challenging yet positive experience, focused on improving student outcomes and engaging the broader school community. Importantly, school review is not an inspection process nor is it focused on compliance with legislation or regulation. There is an expectation that the Effective Schools Model will be used as one of the frameworks to analyse the school’s performance.

The differential model of school review recognises that schools are at different stages in their development and the review process needs to align with the school’s particular context, stage of growth, and need. There are four categories of review: negotiated, continuous improvement, diagnostic and extended diagnostic review.

- The negotiated review is a flexible and focused review whereby the school uses a critical friend to examine a specific area for improvement identified from the school self-evaluation. This type of review is to be undertaken by schools with student outcomes and other key indicators above expected levels, although the school’s capacity to manage such a review is also considered.

- The continuous improvement review involves a pre-visit from the reviewer, a one-day review panel meeting with the principal, school council president and key staff, plus a report to staff and the school council. The review can also incorporate a focus group with students. This type of review is to be undertaken by schools with satisfactory student outcomes and other key indicators, but with scope for improvement.

- The diagnostic review follows a similar structure to the continuous improvement review but provides two field work days that can be used for focus groups, interviews, etc. This type of review is to be undertaken by schools with some student outcomes and other key indicators below expected levels, or where the circumstances of the school are complex, such as a multi-campus school, a P–12 school, a school with a large number of students with disabilities, or a recently merged or de-merged school.

- Extended diagnostic reviews are to be undertaken by schools that would benefit from more intensive analysis of their data and circumstances and can occur at any time of year and outside the school’s usual four year cycle. Extended diagnostic reviews require a detailed and rigorous methodology. The review approach is specified in the individual school’s terms of reference document. The terms of reference are the responsibility of the Regional Network Leader who will develop these in conjunction with the school and reviewer. It is expected the range of data analysed and information sources used will be extensive. The extended diagnostic review includes four field work days.

Continuous improvement, diagnostic and extended diagnostic reviews are coordinated centrally and are undertaken by accredited school reviewers with expertise in education and school improvement. Negotiated reviews are managed by the school and region.

Regions are responsible for allocating the type of review that a school will undertake. Reasons for the allocation of review type are dependent on a range of conditions such as the complexity of the school’s circumstances, the school’s performance in relation to student outcomes; enrolment changes; and the school’s capacity to manage the review. The above criteria ensure that the available resources are provided to those schools in greatest need.

Regional offices are expected to ensure that schools are appropriately briefed on the rationale for the review allocation. This will be further evident through the terms of reference document for extended diagnostic review, diagnostic review and negotiated review.
1. Introduction

The School Accountability and Improvement Framework is constructed around four main elements:

- evaluation of progress via an internal school self-evaluation and an external school review
- planning for improvement via a school strategic plan and annual implementation plans
- reporting on progress via an annual report to the school community
- managing risk and compliance with legislation, regulation and policy via the school compliance checklist.

These elements are not discrete and independent tasks but rather, in keeping with the intent and principles of good governance, are part of a coherent planning and reporting process for organising school improvement efforts.

These guidelines outline the process for school review, including detailed information on each of the four types of review, ensuring there is a shared understanding of how a review can add value to the work of the school community in achieving improved outcomes for students.

Figure 1 outlines the year of self-evaluation, review and planning.
Figure 2: Schematic representation of school review

Allocation of review type by region

Briefing school community

School self-evaluation

Review Preparation

Extended diagnostic review
Preparation and submission of the terms of reference

Diagnostic review
Preparation and submission of the terms of reference

Continuous improvement review
Nature and purpose of the review discussed with the reviewer

Negotiated review
Preparation and submission of the terms of reference followed by selection of the critical friend

Reviewer/critical friend preparation

Review activities

Reports prepared and presented

Response to the review report (optional)

Feedback on the school review process

School strategic plan
2. What are the principles underpinning school review?

School reviews are premised on the same principles that apply to the School Accountability and Improvement Framework as a whole. Of particular relevance to school review are the principles of strengthened collaboration and shared responsibility, as well as the recognition of differential performance between schools.

School review involves a strategic partnership between the principal, the school community, Regional Network Leader, the school reviewer (or critical friend) and the School Improvement Division. Each level of the system shares responsibility for ensuring that the review generates a constructive outcome for the school and its community and enables effective planning for improvement.

Accountability must be a reciprocal process. For every increment of performance I demand of you, I have an equal responsibility to provide you with the capacity to meet that expectation.

Elmore, 2000

The distribution of schools across the four-year accountability and improvement cycle provides an opportunity for network schools to work more collaboratively during their year of self-evaluation, review and planning. The Regional Network Leader, in consultation with network principals, may determine the benefit of a number of reviews being undertaken by the same reviewer, or reviewers from the same company, to ensure that common issues are identified and addressed in a consistent manner. However, each school will continue to receive its own review report.

School review recognises that each school operates in a particular context. While reviews are conducted within a common overall framework, there is flexibility to ensure that each review can be tailored to meet the individual needs of the school, whether it is a primary, secondary, small, special, residential, language or community school.

Communication facilitates collaboration, and school review is premised on openness and transparency regarding process and emergent issues.

3. What areas are addressed in a school review?

The School Accountability and Improvement Framework addresses three student outcomes:

- student learning
- student engagement and wellbeing
- student pathways and transitions.

In a school review the school’s performance in each of these outcomes is examined through the following questions, which reflect those used in the school self-evaluation.

Question 1. What student outcomes was the school trying to achieve?

During the school self-evaluation, schools reflect on their goals or priorities developed at the start of the planning period in relation to the student outcomes areas – student learning, student engagement and wellbeing, and student pathways and transitions. The reviewer needs to understand these goals to provide a context for the subsequent analysis. The school review report will briefly acknowledge the desired outcomes outlined in the school self-evaluation.

Question 2. What student outcomes did the school achieve?

In addressing this question, reviewers will consider the school’s self-evaluation as well as performance data and other relevant information in developing their advice on the school’s performance in each of the student outcome areas. The focus is on developing conclusions about overall performance and noting key findings such as:

- trends in outcomes that have emerged over time
- particular cohorts of students who have achieved significantly above or below average outcomes
- improvement in the performance of particular student cohorts as they move through the school
- differences in outcomes between different skill areas within the English and Mathematics disciplines
- comparisons with the state mean and SFO band.

In undertaking their analysis, reviewers:

- understand the context/environment in which the school operates
- examine all relevant data to ensure their analysis and recommendations are well-informed
- make judgements about the quality of the available data
• where possible, base conclusions upon information drawn from a variety of sources rather than from any one particular set of data
• deal impartially with both positive and negative data
• indicate where their conclusions may vary from those reached by the school in the school self-evaluation
• understand issues associated with small sample sizes in small schools, both in interpreting data and in respecting the confidentiality of individual student information.

Question 3. Why did the school achieve/not achieve improved student outcomes?
The reviewer reflects upon the operations and practice of the school that may have contributed to performance in the particular student outcome area - that is Why did the school achieve/not achieve improved student outcomes? In considering this question, reviewers can choose from several approaches.

Reviewers can identify and examine key factors known to influence student outcomes such as pedagogy; assessment and reporting; curriculum; transition and pathways processes and practice; student attendance; teacher performance and development; links to business/industry/TAFE; and programs or strategies designed to actively engage and support students, particularly those with additional needs or regarded as vulnerable.

The Effective Schools Model (Figure 3) adapted from the work of Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore (1995) provides an evidence base for examining current practice and selecting key improvement strategies. The model has been demonstrated to correlate with improved student outcomes and therefore can be used to inform discussions in the school.

The model assists reviewers to probe questions such as What is the school doing well? and Did the school choose the most effective strategy to achieve its targets?

Reviewers will also draw upon the school’s context in examining the question Why did the school achieve/not achieve the desired outcomes? It may be that the context of the school has changed since the outcomes were developed, and this should be acknowledged by the reviewer.

When analysing why a school achieved/did not achieve the desired outcomes, it may be necessary for the reviewer to comment upon the nature of the desired outcomes themselves. For example, a desired outcome may be regarded as very ambitious or, alternatively, insufficiently challenging. The reviewer can address these issues when discussing the school’s achievements in this area.

Figure 3: Effective Schools Model

Some aspects of a school’s operations can be assessed using quantifiable data such as the number of students with an individual learning plan. Where there is no available quantifiable measure it is often useful to ask the opinion of those affected.

Reviewers may discuss relevant subscales from the staff, parent and student opinion surveys here. For example, connectedness to teachers may impact upon engagement outcomes.

Question 4. How effectively did the school manage its resources to support the achievement of improved student outcomes?
In assessing student outcomes, reviewers reflect upon the question How effectively did the school manage its resources to support the achievement of its desired outcomes? The resources component describes how the school allocated budget, infrastructure and materials, staffing and time, and used ICT to improve student outcomes. This question calls for reviewers to critically examine how effectively they believe the school managed and aligned its resources to support improved student outcomes.

Question 5. What can the school do in the future to continue to improve?
It is in response to the question What can the school do in the future to continue to improve? that reviewers add particular value. The reviewer considers the school’s own recommendations in the
school self-evaluation and, drawing on their expertise and the evidence base around school improvement, recommends they be pursued or perhaps modified. In providing their recommendations, reviewers will indicate what they believe the school needs to focus on most to improve student outcomes.

Reviewers may make recommendations about targets for each student outcome area for the next school strategic plan. Targets will be further developed or finalised by the school in consultation with the Regional Network Leader as part of the school strategic planning process. Actions for the annual implementation plans may also be discussed here.

Information on goals, targets, key improvement strategies and actions for annual implementation plans are detailed in the School Strategic Planning Guidelines.

While continuous improvement, diagnostic and extended diagnostic reviews focus on all student outcomes and key questions, negotiated reviews address selected student outcome focus areas.

A more detailed description of the process for each of the review types follows.

4. Negotiated review

Negotiated review focuses on one or more areas where the school requires an independent perspective about how to move to the next level of improvement.

The parameters for this review ensure that the process:

- results in a review process and report that has the potential to make a meaningful contribution to the preparation of the school strategic plan
- engages the whole school community including staff, students, council, parents and where appropriate, early childhood professionals
- involves a critical friend who must be external to the school
- is investigative in nature and focuses on the challenges identified in the school self-evaluation
- is flexible but rigorous in terms of methodology.

The process for the negotiated review is discussed below and a link to a detailed flow chart is provided in the ‘Further support and information’ section at the end of the guidelines.

Briefing for staff and school council on upcoming review

Principals must ensure school staff and school council are briefed on the upcoming review, its nature and purpose, and their potential involvement as soon as practicable after being allocated a negotiated review.

Completion of the school self-evaluation

The school undertakes a self-evaluation which then forms the basis for identifying an area of specific focus for the negotiated review. It is expected that the school will undertake a rigorous analysis of its data over the review period to inform the school self-evaluation and assist in identifying an area for specific improvement focus. Schools complete the school self-evaluation report in Term 1 or early in Term 2 before the development of the review terms of reference. The school self-evaluation report must be submitted to the School Improvement Division on completion.

Development of the methodology

A methodology for the review will need to be considered as part of the development of the terms of reference. Given the flexibility of negotiated reviews, there is no standard approach that must be adopted for the review process.

The following approaches, while not exhaustive, could be taken:

- researching the available literature on good practice in the focus area, relating findings to the school’s context and making recommendations about what strategies the school could adopt
- conducting a survey/interviews/focus groups with parents/students/other schools/other education, training or employment providers/local business and industry to inform the school’s work in the focus area of interest
- conducting a panel meeting at the school to discuss the focus area(s) in detail
- integrating the review with relevant research or enquiry-based activities from other initiatives that are being undertaken; for example, self-assessment against the Effective Schools Model, the eInstruction Model and Principles of Learning and Teaching, the Developmental Learning Framework for School Leaders and the Performance and Development Culture Revised Self-assessment Framework
- undertaking action research through the implementation of a research/review cycle on an area of focus identified by the school.
Preparation of the terms of reference
The terms of reference will be developed following the completion of the school self-evaluation. The document outlines the:

• aim or purpose of the investigation
• brief methodology/approach, including:
  – engagement of the school community including staff, students, council and parents
  – resources to be used
  – author(s) of the review report
• name, role and anticipated time commitment of critical friend(s)
• completion date of review report (note: the completion date for the review should be set so as to ensure that the subsequent strategic planning process can be completed in time for the commencement of the next four-year cycle).

At this stage, it is desirable to identify the way the final report will be prepared and the strategies for communication of the review outcomes to the school community. The Regional Network Leader will ensure that personnel from the regional office are available to participate as appropriate in the review process.

The final agreed terms of reference must be signed by the principal, school council president and Regional Network Leader. The terms of reference are to be finalised by the 5th week of Term 2. Schools must provide an electronic version of their final terms of reference, including the scanned signed endorsement page, to the Regional Network Leader who will ensure it is saved to Edutrack following the advice provided by the Schools Improvement Division.

The template for the terms of reference document is available at the school review homepage. The link is provided in the ‘Further support and information’ section at the end of the document.

Recruitment and briefing of the critical friend
The appointment of the critical friend is finalised only after the Regional Network Leader has approved the terms of reference.

The role of the critical friend is outlined in the terms of reference. Consideration should be given to the time that the critical friend has available to contribute to the review. The critical friend could potentially undertake one or more of the following:

• examine an area of the school’s operations and practice and provide feedback
• analyse the school self-evaluation and provide feedback to the school
• facilitate workshops
• facilitate focus groups/interviews (schools will determine whether parental notification and/or consent is required for any planned focus groups with students)
• conduct a literature review
• write the review report.

Critical friends should be credible, external to the school, and be able to assist the school in the chosen area for investigation. To do this, they may need content expertise (for example, knowledge of approaches and strategies in early years literacy or numeracy) and may also require certain process expertise (for example, report writing, facilitating focus groups, conducting literature reviews).

While not exhaustive, the people who could act as critical friends include:

• another principal or senior educator from Victoria, interstate or overseas
• a consultant from education, organisational health, leadership, financial management, etc
• academics and/or researchers
• staff members from relevant areas of the Department or its statutory authorities.

With the introduction of the differential review model, the Department’s resources in the school review program are necessarily directed to the schools in greatest need, in particular to those undergoing diagnostic and extended diagnostic reviews, which are resource intensive. As a result, at this time the Department is unable to fund schools directly for any expenses associated with the negotiated review. If a school chooses to select a critical friend who requests payment, funding will need to be provided by the school.

Preparation of the review report
The report from a negotiated review will be concise and developed in a way that is readily accessible to the school community. A typical negotiated review report will be 3 to 4 pages and needs to include:

• Aim/Purpose
• Method
• Discussion
• Conclusions and recommendations for action.

The review report is expected to include recommended strategies for inclusion in the school strategic plan. As the negotiated review is limited to only one or two focus areas, the review report will
not contain recommendations for all three student outcomes that are addressed in the school strategic plan. The school self-evaluation document will inform the development of the school strategic plan in these remaining areas. The review report can offer direction in terms of targets but actual targets need not be specified. These will be included in the school strategic plan.

The author(s) of the review report should be decided prior to the review and outlined in the terms of reference document. In some instances the critical friend may write the report, whereas in other instances the principal or nominated staff member may write the report, or it may be a co-authored report.

Presentation to staff and school council
As with all types of review, a presentation is made to staff and school council. This would usually be undertaken by the author of the review report.

Providing a final copy
A final copy will be provided to the Regional Network Leader. The Regional Network Leader will ensure the final version is saved to Edutrack following the advice provided by the School Improvement Division.

Development of the school strategic plan
Having submitted a copy of the final review report to the Regional Network Leader and the School Improvement Division, the school can now use this information to inform the strategic planning process.

5. Continuous improvement review

Continuous improvement reviews will usually be completed within a four-week period from the pre-visit by the reviewer to finalisation of the review report. It will involve a number of visits to the school by the reviewer. These must include the school pre-visit, the review panel meeting and the presentation of the school report to the staff and school community.

It is expected that there will be a break of several days between the review panel meeting and the presentation of the final report. Exemptions may be made in the case of small and remote rural schools and the procedure for this is discussed in greater detail below.

The Regional Network Leader will ensure that personnel from the regional office are available to participate as appropriate in the review process including the review panel meeting.

The continuous improvement review will be conducted in Term 2 or Term 3 after the completion of the school self-evaluation.

Reviewer briefing
The school reviewer will receive an initial briefing on the upcoming review by the Regional Network Leader.

Briefing on upcoming review
Principals ensure school staff and school council are briefed on the upcoming review, the nature and purpose of the review, and their potential involvement, as soon as possible after the review type is known.

Gathering information on the school
The reviewer develops an appreciation of the school’s context by meeting with the principal and potentially the school council president or representative and the school leadership team to discuss the nature and purpose of the review. At this time, the logistical arrangements for the review will be established and data such as the school self-evaluation and performance data identified by the school will be provided to the reviewer. A checklist outlining the materials that the school can provide to assist the reviewer is located at Appendix 1.

Analysing the information
The reviewer analyses all information and identifies questions to be addressed at the school review panel meeting.

Undertaking the review panel meeting
The review panel has a critical role in the review process and provides a formal opportunity for the school community to meet with the school reviewer and provide input into the review process. To indicate school community members’ possible role in the review panel, a handout has been developed and a web link is provided in the ‘Further support and information’ section.

The school reviewer attends a meeting at the school with the principal, school council president (or representative), members of the school leadership team and other staff. Held over a full school day, the review panel meeting allows discussion of key issues and potential recommendations arising from the reviewer’s analysis of the school self-evaluation and performance data. It is expected that the Regional Network Leader or a member of the regional office will also attend the review.

Preparing the review report
The reviewer prepares a draft report, and seeks feedback from the school and the Regional Network
Leader or regional representative prior to finalising and submitting the document. A typical continuous improvement review report will be in the order of 20–30 pages.

Presenting to staff and school council
As with all types of review, a presentation is made to staff and school council. The school supports the reviewer by coordinating these presentations. Presentations are usually held at least several days from the review panel meeting to allow the school time for reflection and consideration of the draft review report.

In the case of small and remote rural schools, the review process may be condensed with the panel meeting and presentation to school council occurring on the same day. However, reviewers must seek permission for this arrangement from the school and Regional Network Leader.

Providing a final copy
The review company will provide an electronic copy of the final review report to the Regional Network Leader and the School Improvement Division.

6. Diagnostic review
Diagnostic reviews are undertaken by school reviewers approved by the Department to undertake this type of review. The review may also involve highly-skilled specialist consultants who support the reviewer on specific issues (for example, a literacy audit) as determined by the terms of reference.

Because of the intensity of the review process, and likely complexity of the issues involved, it would be expected that the review would be undertaken over a six to eight week period from the establishment of the terms of reference to preparation of the final report.

The key activities in diagnostic reviews are outlined below. It should be noted that some activities may occur in parallel as the sequence is tailored to meet the specific situation of a school.

Reviewer briefing
The school reviewer will receive an initial briefing on the upcoming review by the Regional Network Leader.

Establishing the review process
A meeting is held between the principal, Regional Network Leader and the reviewer to establish a working relationship that will facilitate the progress and completion of the review.

The Regional Network Leader ensures that appropriate personnel from the regional office are available to participate as required in the review process. This may involve attending meetings with the principal and/or the school reviewer, helping to facilitate logistical arrangements if necessary, attending presentations of the review findings and recommendations to staff and school council.

Briefing on upcoming review
Principals ensure school staff and school council are briefed on the upcoming diagnostic review, the nature and purpose of the review, and their potential involvement in the review. Regional office staff are available to assist with such briefings if required.

Developing terms of reference
The Regional Network Leader is responsible for the management and preparation of the terms of reference for each diagnostic review. The terms of reference outline the scope of the review as well as the methodology, including the anticipated duration. The dates for undertaking the review work will be established in consultation with the school and the Regional Network Leader to enable them to participate as appropriate in the review. Reviewers will identify the content of the field work days.

It is important that schools and reviewers are involved in the development of the terms of reference to ensure a shared understanding of the scope and nature of the review. It is expected that the Regional Network Leader will take the lead role in the development of the terms of reference with the school reviewer providing expert advice where appropriate, e.g. the proposed methodology for the review.

Terms of reference are finalised subsequent to the development of the school self-evaluation and must be approved by the Regional Network Leader, the principal and the school council president. It is the Regional Network Leader’s responsibility to ensure the completion and submission of the terms of reference at least two weeks prior to the commencement of the review. The Regional Network Leader will also ensure the final version, including the scanned signed endorsement page, is saved to Edutrack following the advice provided by the School Improvement Division.

The template for the terms of reference document is available at the school review homepage. The link is provided in the ‘Further support and information’ section at the end of the document.
Reviewer’s pre-visit to the school
The reviewer develops an appreciation of the school’s context and attends a meeting with the principal, school council president (or representative) and the school leadership team to discuss the nature and purpose of the review, as well as logistical arrangements.

The reviewer is provided with the school self-evaluation, performance data and other relevant information by the school as preparation for the meeting. A checklist outlining the materials that the school can provide to assist the reviewer is located at Appendix 1.

The Regional Network Leader may also provide network-level data, e.g. the network report and other regionally held information, to the reviewer to supplement his/her analysis and understanding of the school’s context.

Analysing the information
The reviewer analyses all information and identifies questions to be addressed during the subsequent fieldwork at the school.

Undertaking the diagnostic review activities
The terms of reference outline the methodology to be used in the review. The review will include two fieldwork days and a review panel meeting. The two fieldwork days may include meetings / interviews / focus groups with the school leadership team, school council, school staff, students, parents, or principals or staff from other schools in the area, etc. Some reviews may also allocate fieldwork time to allow individual staff members who wish to have a one-on-one confidential meeting with the school reviewer. This will have been specified in the terms of reference. In general, the school reviewer will undertake approximately 14 hours fieldwork in the school. Fieldwork includes interviews / focus groups / surveys with staff / students / parents / principals of other schools. Fieldwork activities may be spread over several days, depending on the activities arranged.

During the review activities, reviewers may use school data sets as a prompt for discussion or to address particular issues. In all such activities, the school reviewer is obliged to outline to participants the purpose of the activity, confidentiality arrangements, and the way in which information will be used. Importantly, the scheduling of all review activities should take into consideration the workload of participants.

Protocols on specific types of activities are as follows:

- Classroom observation may occur, but only with the consent of the teacher.
- Schools will determine whether parental notification and/or consent is required for any planned focus groups with students.
- If a review is to include the views of principals of neighbouring schools, the principal in the school undergoing the diagnostic review contacts the principal of the neighbouring school to request their cooperation with the review process.

The school reviewer ensures that the principal is briefed about the progress of review activities. Such briefings should not breach the confidentiality arrangements that school reviewers establish with those who are participating in focus group discussions or meetings.

In exceptional circumstances, additional fieldwork hours may be requested. In such instances, the Regional Network Leader must complete an Application to Extend Fieldwork Hours form for approval once the need for additional hours is identified. This form, available from the School Improvement Division, outlines the proposed methodology that requires the additional hours. If approved, this confirmation will be communicated to the Regional Network Leader, assistant regional director – school improvement and the lead contractor of the review company.

In undertaking the review, the school reviewer manages the review activities that occur in the school, and the principal ensures that the reviewer receives support for coordination where required, including the scheduling of presentations to staff and school council.

Undertaking the review panel meeting
The review panel has a critical role in the review process and provides a formal opportunity for the school community to meet with the school reviewer and provide input into the review process. To indicate school community members’ possible role in the review panel, a handout has been developed and a web link is provided in the ‘Further support and information’ section.

Maintaining ongoing communication
The school reviewer communicates regularly with the principal and Regional Network Leader as necessary during the review process.

Preparing the diagnostic review report
A typical diagnostic review report will be in the order of 20–30 pages. The review report is similar to a continuous improvement review report in that it addresses all three of the student outcome areas
from the School Accountability and Improvement Framework. The report will present a set of recommendations for action by the school and, where appropriate, actions that may need to be taken by DEECD regional and/or central office.

Importantly, any specific issues or actions relating to principal performance and development within the school would be addressed as part of the principal class performance and development process, not the diagnostic review process. Before the draft report is provided to the school a copy must be provided to the School Improvement Division for quality assurance.

**Providing a supplementary report**

In exceptional cases, the school reviewer may provide a supplementary report directly to the Regional Network Leader and School Improvement Division when it is considered that the nature of the material requires strict confidentiality. However, the development of the supplementary report must first be discussed with the School Improvement Division.

Where a supplementary report is prepared, the Regional Network Leader would advise principals that an additional report had been provided and where possible would discuss the findings and recommendations. Supplementary reports must be submitted to both the Regional Network Leader and School Improvement Division.

**Presenting to staff and school council**

As with all types of review, a presentation is made to staff and school council. The school supports the reviewer by coordinating these presentations. Presentations are usually held at least several days from the review panel meeting to allow the school time for reflection and consideration of the draft review report.

**Providing a final copy**

The review company will provide an electronic copy of the final review report to the Regional Network Leader and the School Improvement Division.

7. **Extended diagnostic review**

Extended diagnostic reviews are to be undertaken by schools that would benefit from more intensive analysis of their data and circumstances and can occur at any time of year and outside the school’s usual four year cycle. Extended diagnostic reviews are more intensive reviews based on a detailed and rigorous methodology including 28 hours of fieldwork. Because of the intensity of the review process, and likely complexity of the issues involved, it would be expected that the review would be undertaken over an eight to ten week period from the establishment of the terms of reference to preparation of the final report.

**Reviewer briefing**

The school reviewer will receive an initial briefing on the upcoming review by the Regional Network Leader.

**Establishing the review process**

A meeting is held between the principal, Regional Network Leader and the reviewer to establish a working relationship that will facilitate the progress and completion of the review.

The Regional Network Leader ensures that appropriate personnel from the regional office are available to participate as required in the review process. This may involve attending meetings with the principal and/or the school reviewer, helping to facilitate logistical arrangements if necessary, attending presentations of the review findings and recommendations to staff and school council.

**Briefing on upcoming review**

Principals ensure school staff and school council are briefed on the upcoming extended diagnostic review, the nature and purpose of the review, and their potential involvement in the review. Regional office staff are available to assist with such briefings if required.

Schools are expected to have completed a school self-evaluation before the review process begins. If the school has undertaken a review in the year prior to the extended diagnostic review, then the school self-evaluation prepared for that process can be modified and used.

**Developing terms of reference**

The Regional Network Leader is responsible for the management and preparation of the terms of reference document for each extended diagnostic review. It is important that schools and reviewers are involved in the development of the terms of reference to ensure a shared understanding of the scope and nature of the review. It is expected that the Regional Network Leader will take the lead role in the development of the terms of reference with the school reviewer providing expert advice where appropriate e.g. the proposed methodology for the review.

The terms of reference outline the scope of the review as well as the methodology, including the...
anticipated duration. The dates for undertaking the review work will be established in consultation with the school and the Regional Network Leader to enable them to participate as appropriate in the review. Reviewers will identify the content of the fieldwork days.

Terms of reference are finalised subsequent to the development of the school self-evaluation and must be approved by the Regional Network Leader, the principal and the school council president. It is the Regional Network Leader’s responsibility to ensure the completion and submission of the terms of reference at least two weeks prior to the commencement of the review. An electronic version of the final document must be provided to the region and the School Improvement Division prior to the commencement of the review.

The template for the terms of reference document is available at the school review homepage. The link is provided in the ‘Further support and information’ section at the end of the document.

**Reviewer’s pre-visit to the school**

The reviewer develops an appreciation of the school’s context and attends a meeting with the principal, school council president (or representative) and the school leadership team to discuss the nature and purpose of the review, as well as logistical arrangements.

At this time, the reviewer is provided with the most recent school self-evaluation, performance data and other relevant information. A checklist outlining the materials that the school can provide to assist the reviewer is located at Appendix 1.

The Regional Network Leader may also provide network-level data and other regionally held information to the reviewer to supplement their analysis and understanding of the school’s context.

**Analysing the information**

The reviewer analyses all information and identifies questions to be addressed during the subsequent fieldwork at the school.

**Undertaking the extended diagnostic review activities**

A range of activities will be undertaken to provide the school reviewer with the required depth of information to clearly identify and explain any issues associated with the school’s performance. The Regional Network Leader and school reviewer will need to ensure that the most appropriate methodology is used given the school’s context and internal environment. This will be clearly outlined in the terms of reference.

The time period for the review allows for extended engagement with the school community and the use of more time intensive and innovative means to collect data. Activities may include surveys, focus groups, individual interviews, a review panel meeting involving key stakeholders, and other processes that ensure all members of the school community are included. To support the review process, Regional Network Leaders will ensure that appropriate regional personnel are available as required.

The extended diagnostic review will include four fieldwork days and a review panel meeting. The fieldwork days will involve meetings/interviews/focus groups with the school leadership team, school council, school staff, students, parents, or principals or staff from other schools in the area, etc. Some reviews may also allocate fieldwork time to allow individual staff members to have a one-on-one confidential meeting with the school reviewer. All activities will have been specified in the terms of reference.

During the review activities, reviewers may use school data sets as a prompt for discussion or to address particular issues. In all such activities, the school reviewer is obliged to outline to participants the purpose of the activity, confidentiality arrangements, and the way in which information will be used. Importantly, all review activities are scheduled taking into consideration the workload of participants.

Protocols on specific types of activities are as follows:

- Classroom observation may occur, but only with the consent of the teacher
- Schools will determine whether parental notification and/or consent is required for any planned focus groups with students
- If a review is to include the views of principals of neighbouring schools, the principal in the school undergoing the extended diagnostic review contacts the principal of the neighbouring school to request their cooperation with the review process.

The school reviewer ensures that the principal is briefed about the progress of review activities. Such briefings should not breach the confidentiality arrangements that school reviewers establish with those who are participating in focus group discussions or meetings.
Undertaking the review panel meeting
The review panel has a critical role in the review process and provides a formal opportunity for the school community to meet with the school reviewer and provide input into the review process. To indicate school community members’ possible role in the review panel, a handout has been developed and a web link is provided in the ‘Further support and information’ section.

Maintaining ongoing communication
The school reviewer communicates regularly with the principal and Regional Network Leader as necessary during the review process.

Preparing the extended diagnostic review report
If the four field work days are conducted over two or more school terms an interim progress report will be provided by the reviewer to the School Improvement Division. After the fieldwork has been completed a draft report will be prepared. It is expected that a typical extended diagnostic review report will be in the order of 25–35 pages. The draft report will be reviewed by the School Improvement Division prior to being provided to the school.

Importantly, any specific issues or actions relating to principal performance and development within the school would be addressed as part of the principal class performance and development process, not the extended diagnostic review process.

Providing a supplementary report
In exceptional cases, the school reviewer may provide a supplementary report directly to the Regional Network Leader and School Improvement Division when it is considered that the nature of the material requires strict confidentiality. However, the development of the supplementary report must first be discussed with the School Improvement Division.

Where a supplementary report is prepared, the Regional Network Leader would advise principals that an additional report had been provided and where possible would discuss the findings and recommendations with the principal. Supplementary reports must be submitted to both the Regional Network Leader and School Improvement Division.

Presenting to staff and school council
As with all types of review, a presentation is made to staff and school council. The school supports the reviewer by coordinating these presentations. Presentations are usually held at a time following the review panel meeting to allow the school time for reflection and consideration of the draft review report.

Providing a final copy
The review company will provide an electronic copy of the final review report to the Regional Network Leader and the School Improvement Division.

8. What happens after the review?

Communication and distribution of the review report
Reviewers, or report authors in the case of negotiated reviews, provide a presentation to meetings of the staff and school council, thereby assisting them in their work to develop the school strategic plan. The principal ensures that the outcomes of the review report are shared with other members of the school community, including students and parents. Reviewers, or report authors, provide electronic copies of the final review report to the principal, school council president and Regional Network Leader.

Response to review report
Schools have the option to prepare a brief response report (1–2 pages), which is to be signed off by the principal and school council president. This is not part of the review report, but is submitted to the Regional Network Leader and the School Improvement Division and will be read with the review report.

Feedback on the review process
The members of the school review panel and the Regional Network Leader are invited to complete feedback surveys on the quality of the school review. The surveys are periodically sent by the central office to the principals involved in the reviews, as well as regional staff. School reviewers are also asked to provide feedback on each review undertaken. These online surveys are an important part of the Department’s quality assurance process to ensure continuous improvement of the school review program.

Development of the school strategic plan
Review reports assist in the development of school strategic plans and therefore in framing actions to improve school performance. Guidelines for the School Strategic Plan can be found on the School Accountability and Improvement website. The web link is included in the ‘Further support and information’ section at the end of the document.

In negotiated review, the review report addresses only one or two student outcome focus area(s), selected as being of particular importance over the next four-year period. The negotiated review is
therefore likely to inform a part of the school strategic plan, with the school self-evaluation document informing the remainder of the plan.

9. Quality assurance

What are the qualifications of school reviewers, and how are they chosen?
The Department contracts a number of organisations to provide school review services. School reviewers have the following skills and experience:

- Expertise in school improvement and organisational effectiveness within the educational sector
- Thorough knowledge of the Victorian education system and the policies and frameworks used to support school improvement
- Ability to establish effective professional relationships, with high level interpersonal skills including negotiation and diplomacy
- Excellent communication skills, with an ability to convey complex information in a concise, professional and effective manner appropriate to the audience, both via written and oral means
- Expertise in data analysis and interpretation
- High ethical standards.

Reviewers undergo an initial accreditation program delivered by the Department, and are also required to attend a yearly briefing. Contractors are required to ensure reviewers engage in other professional development activities to ensure they maintain their expertise.

Only those reviewers with an appropriate level of experience and expertise are approved to undertake diagnostic and extended diagnostic reviews. Reviewers engaged in these reviews are required to undertake additional training. In addition, those reviewers approved to conduct reviews in special schools are required to have a strong understanding of the unique context of those schools. All reviewers have to operate within the Reviewer Code of Practice (see Appendix 2).

In diagnostic and extended diagnostic reviews, the reviewer may be assisted by additional specialist personnel with expertise in areas such as organisational change, business planning, evaluation, leadership development, curriculum and pedagogy. These additional specialist personnel work under the leadership of the school reviewer(s) in a support role on specific issues.

How are reviewers ‘matched’ to school reviews?
Meetings are conducted with personnel from the School Improvement Division, the region and the lead contractors of the review companies to ensure the matching of school reviewers to schools is appropriate.

How does the Department ensure the quality of the school review process?
In addition to the rigorous selection and accreditation process, and the requirements for ongoing training, the Department uses a range of mechanisms to ensure the quality of school reviews. These include:

- Representatives from the Department will from time to time attend school review panel meetings
- All draft diagnostic and extended diagnostic review reports are reviewed by the School Improvement Division before the report is provided to the school
- All new reviewers are observed conducting a review in their first year and provided with extensive feedback. The draft report from this review is quality assured by the School Improvement Division before is it finalised
- A sample of continuous review reports from all reviewers is assessed by the School Improvement Division
- Appraisal meetings are held with the lead contractors twice a year to provide feedback on their reviewers and company’s performance based on survey results and other communications
- Members of school review panels complete feedback surveys on each review
- Regional Network Leaders or regional staff involved in the review process provide feedback on reviewers and review reports.
- Reviewers complete feedback surveys on each review.

What if there are concerns with the way the review is progressing?
If the principal or school council president has any concerns about the way in which a continuous improvement, diagnostic or extended diagnostic review is progressing, such concerns should be discussed with the school reviewer in the first instance. If the concerns cannot be resolved, this should be discussed with the Regional Network Leader.
10. Frequently asked questions

Who is the audience for the school review report?
The primary audience for the report is the school and school council. This is consistent with the principles embedded in the School Accountability and Improvement Framework that continuous school improvement depends upon strengthening the internal accountability and responsibility of a school rather than having a sole focus on external accountability.

How does the school review report add value to the school’s work?
The school reviewer does more than simply verify the conclusions in the school self-evaluation. The reviewer’s expertise in data analysis, their extensive knowledge of the education sector and their understanding of the factors that impact on a school’s capacity to improve, means that they can provide a sophisticated analysis of the school’s data, its internal capacity and the strategies that will assist the school to make progress.

Should the review report present data?
The focus for review reports is analysis and key recommendations. Where appropriate, reviewers will refer to specific findings to support their conclusions, but the re-presentation of significant amounts of raw data is not required, as the school review report is designed to be read in conjunction with the available performance data. For example, within the school review report, it is not necessary to present lengthy descriptions of particular data outcomes for different year levels or subject strands but rather identify high level trends.

Does the school review report focus on strengths as well as weaknesses, and does it reflect the context of the school?
While the school review provides an objective and critical assessment of the school it also recognises the school’s achievements. The review will reflect the context within which the school operates and the value-add for students.

How does organisational health fit into the school review report?
Organisational health or school climate is an important factor in creating the conditions for achieving improved student outcomes. The health and wellbeing of staff impact on absentee rates, retention of staff, engagement with and enjoyment of work and, ultimately, the educational experience of students.

The staff opinion survey can provide a perspective on school climate. Examining the four elements of empathy, clarity, engagement and learning provides a picture of how well the staff are working together to build a positive culture of learning that supports improved student outcomes.

To help schools better understand and analyse school climate data, the Department has developed a resource package that offers practical advice on how school leadership teams and staff can help to improve their school climate. A link to the resource *Healthy Schools are Effective Schools - An Introduction to School Climate* is available at the ‘Further support and information’ section.

Data from the staff opinion survey and other school climate data can be referred to when addressing key questions 3 and 4, *Why did the school achieve/not achieve improved student outcomes?* and *How effectively did the school manage its resources to support the achievement of improved student outcomes?*

How does the quality of the environment/facilities relate to the school review report?
The focus of school review is on the achievement of student outcomes. If, in the opinion of the reviewer, the quality of the facilities or environment is influencing the achievement of student outcomes, then the reviewer will identify this under the question ‘Why did the school achieve/not achieve improved student outcomes?’

In regard to considerations about facilities, the School Accountability and Improvement Framework has synergies with Building Futures. Under the Victorian Schools Plan, the Building Futures policy guides investment in Victorian school infrastructure and facilities to ensure that school design supports improvement in student outcomes to:

- promote individualised learning
- create settings for innovative teaching
- incorporate new technology
- be environmentally sustainable, and
- support community involvement.

How does school review relate to issues of education provision?
The review process focuses on improving the performance of the school being reviewed, and it is not intended to be, nor is it sufficient as, a de facto review of education provision.
In considering the school’s performance in the three student outcomes areas, a reviewer could potentially identify that low or decreasing enrolments in a school may be affecting the provision of a broad curriculum or pathways which are relevant to the school’s community. The outcomes of the review will be viewed in the context of the network’s provision planning process. In such instances reviewers would not recommend a particular course of action, other than:

a) that the school works with network schools or agencies to adopt a more collaborative approach to curriculum provision; or
b) that the school community works with the support of the network and regional office to identify the best way forward on these issues; or
c) that the school works with the Regional Network Leader and other network schools to inform the development of the network provision plan.

What is the status of recommendations made by the reviewer?
The Department engages school reviewers to provide expert independent advice on school performance and improvement. Therefore, the school review report is similar to any independent expert advice sought by the Department. It is not ‘binding’ but it is authoritative information which the school, Regional Network Leader and regional office use for planning the future directions of the school through the development of the school strategic plan.

Is the school review report a consensus document?
The review report is not a consensus document - it is independent advice to the school and the Department. However, to ensure there are no factual errors and to gain feedback on the proposed recommendations, the draft report is provided to the principal and the Regional Network Leader prior to the report being finalised.

11. Summary of roles in school review
How is the school reviewer involved in school review?
School reviewers are engaged by the Department to provide independent advice on school performance and a sophisticated analysis of the factors that are impacting on the performance of schools. Reviewers work within the guidelines, frameworks and code of practice set down by the School Improvement Division.

Reviewers are responsible for:
- undertaking a pre-visit to the school
- contacting the Regional Network Leader regarding the school review
- analysing the school self-evaluation and other data
- collecting additional information through focus groups, etc (diagnostic and extended diagnostic reviews)
- briefing the principal, school council president and regional office personnel on the progress of the review (as required)
- attending the review meeting at the school
- preparing and submitting the school review report
- presenting the review findings to meetings of staff and school council.

How is the school principal involved in school review?
The principal plays a central role in review, both in their role as principal as well as their role as executive officer of school council. The principal is responsible for:
- managing the development of the school self-evaluation, which informs the school review
- briefing the school community, including staff, students, council and parents, regarding the imminent review
- actively participating with the Regional Network Leader in development of the terms of reference for the review in negotiated, diagnostic and extended diagnostic reviews
- briefing the school reviewer, and ensuring they are provided with the school self-evaluation, performance data and other relevant documentation as identified by the school
- ensuring the review panel and any other review activities are coordinated within the school, including the presentations to staff and school council
- keeping staff and school council informed of the progress of the review
- providing feedback on the draft school review report
- overseeing the preparation of the response to the school review report if required
- providing feedback to the School Improvement Division on the quality of the review process.
How is the school council involved in school review?
The school council is an integral part of the governance structure of the school. Its role includes:

- participating in the development of, and endorsing the school self-evaluation, which informs the school review
- participating in the development of the terms of reference for diagnostic, extended diagnostic and negotiated reviews
- participating in the review meeting
- participating in focus groups or interviews
- discussing the school review report at school council
- contributing to, and endorsing the school’s response to the school review report if required
- providing feedback to the School Improvement Division on the quality of the review process.

In keeping with the principles of good governance, the school council president (or representative) would brief school council on review-related activities in which they had been involved as the representative of the school council.

How are school staff involved in school review?
School staff contribute to the school review process through direct engagement in their roles as staff members as well as through their representation on the school council. They are engaged in the review process through:

- participating in the staff opinion survey and considered in the school self-evaluation and school review
- participating in the preparation of the school self-evaluation, which informs the school review
- participating in the review meeting, as required
- participating in focus groups as required for diagnostic and extended diagnostic reviews and possibly negotiated reviews
- attending the presentation of the school review report by the school reviewer/author of the negotiated review report
- providing input to the response to the school review report, as required
- providing feedback to the School Improvement Division on the quality of the review process.

How are parents and students involved in school review?
Parents and students may be engaged in the development of the school self-evaluation, which informs each of the school reviews. In negotiated, diagnostic and extended diagnostic review, parents and students may also be involved directly in the review, either through focus groups, forums or surveys.

Parents on the school council will be involved in the review through this body. They may also have the opportunity to present to, and obtain feedback from, their Parents’ and Friends’ Association or equivalent support group.

Students and parents may also contribute to the review through responses to the attitudes to school survey and the parent opinion survey, as well as through the school self-evaluation.

What is the role of regional network leaders and the regional office?
The regional offices and Regional Network Leaders have accountability for the performance of schools within their region and network and oversee a range of support services to assist schools.

Regional Network Leaders are responsible for:

- allocating schools to the most appropriate form of review, based on a best match with the needs of the school
- developing the rationale for the allocation of review type and ensuring schools are appropriately briefed in this regard
- developing the terms of reference for negotiated, diagnostic and extended diagnostic review and submitting these to the School Improvement Division
- if required, applying for additional fieldwork hours for a diagnostic review by completing the appropriate documentation and submitting to the School Improvement Division
- briefing the school reviewer prior to each review
- providing support as appropriate in continuous improvement, diagnostic, extended diagnostic and negotiated reviews
- attending the school review panel meeting and presentations
- developing local protocols for school review within the Department’s policy framework
monitoring school performance within the network and providing support where appropriate

ensuring all relevant review documentation is completed, and the final version is saved to Edutrack following the advice of the School Improvement Division.

Regions are responsible for:

- providing training to schools in the school review process
- assisting in the allocation of reviewers for continuous improvement, diagnostic and extended diagnostic reviews
- approving amendments to the scheduling of school reviews between semesters or across years.

What is the role of central office?

The School Improvement Division is responsible for:

- developing the Department’s policy framework for school review, including guidelines and templates and the provision of resources and better practice examples
- managing the contracts for school review services, including reviewer accreditation, training and quality assurance
- managing, in cooperation with regional office personnel and lead contractors, the allocation of reviewers based on a best match with the needs of the school
- approving any requests from the Regional Network Leader for additional fieldwork hours in the case of a diagnostic review
- monitoring and evaluating the school review process to support continuous improvement.

12. Further support and information

Readers may find the following web-links and documents useful:

Effective Schools Model

Negotiated Review flow chart

School Accountability and Improvement Framework

School Self-evaluation Guidelines

School Strategic Plan Guidelines

Healthy Schools are Effective Schools: An Introduction to School Climate

Regional contacts

Regional Network Leaders and regional accountability and improvement personnel can provide further assistance to schools. A list of regional accountability and improvement personnel is located at

To contact the School Improvement Division regarding the School Accountability and Improvement Framework, please email: schoolaccountability@edumail.vic.gov.au

References


Appendices

Appendix 1: Pre-review checklist

Principal undertakes the following tasks prior to the review:

- Briefs school community on the upcoming review, including role of panel members on review day.
- Ensures that the school council president and Regional Network Leader are consulted in setting the review day to enable attendance.
- Provides materials to the school reviewer (see table below).

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<tr>
<th>Documents and resources that may assist the reviewer</th>
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<tr>
<td>Previous school strategic plan</td>
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<td>School self-evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student attitudes to school survey report</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent opinion survey report (including open-ended responses)</td>
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<td>Staff opinion survey report</td>
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<td>School level report</td>
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<td>NAPLAN data</td>
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<td>VCE/VCAL/VET data</td>
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<td>Teacher judgements</td>
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<td>On track data</td>
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<td>Additional relevant student learning outcomes data</td>
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<tr>
<td>Locally held data on attendance, suspension, behaviour incidents, staff teaching allotments, timetable, staffing profile, professional learning activities, newsletters, meeting schedules, curriculum planning documents</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Student Mapping Tool</td>
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Appendix 2: Code of Practice for School Reviewers

School Reviewers should:

- perform their role in accordance with guidelines and processes that are established by the Department
- at all times act honestly and with integrity, and treat all those involved in a review with courtesy and respect
- carry out all review work in an impartial and objective manner. Reviewers should avoid any conflict of interest and, in particular, they should not have had a previous connection or involvement with the school that gives rise to a perceived or actual conflict of interest
- make independent judgements based upon fair and responsible interpretation of the available information and evidence, and present findings in their review report accordingly
- ensure the school Principal is aware of all intended meetings or discussions that the reviewer is planning to undertake during the course of a school review
- not initiate any contact with students without the prior agreement of the school Principal unless they are in the presence of the Principal or a staff member delegated by the Principal
- maintain the confidentiality of all information obtained as part of a school review
- not promote to the school recommendations for the uptake of products or services with which the reviewer is associated, unless such products or services are presented within the context of a range of options available to the school
- prepare review reports that are direct, logical and based on the facts obtained during the course of the review.

Reviewers may lose their accreditation to act as a reviewer if they breach the code of conduct or otherwise do not perform their role according to the expected standards.