

Evaluation of the take-up and sustainability of new literacy and numeracy practices in NSW schools

Phase 3 – Sustainability

Draft Final Report

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Evaluation of the Take-up and Sustainability of New Literacy and Numeracy Practices in New South Wales Schools

Phase 3 – Sustainability

Executive Summary

This Report examines the sustainability of the impact of the National Partnership for Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN) in NSW, two years after the cessation of funding for the initiative.

The NPLN took place in NSW schools between 2009 and 2011 as one of a suite of initiatives that formed the Smart Schools National Partnerships. The Bilateral Agreement between the Australian Government and NSW government allocated \$81.6 million for 2008/9 AND 2009/10 in co-contributions for facilitation of the initiative, with a further \$95.2 million allocated by the Australian Government as potential reward funding. In NSW, the NPLN in NSW engaged some 147 schools (114 government schools, 26 Catholic schools and 7 independent schools). At the conclusion of the funding period, 102 schools over NSW were implementing literacy programs funded by the NPLN and 45 were implementing numeracy programs.

The initiative identified three priority areas for reform:

- Effective and evidence based teaching of literacy and numeracy
- Strong school leadership and whole-school engagement with literacy and numeracy
- Monitoring student and school literacy and numeracy performance to identify where support is needed

The NPLN initiative was evaluated in 2012 by Erebus International. The evaluation found that the allocated funding met its objectives by facilitating and rewarding the deployment of evidence-based strategies to improve student literacy and numeracy skills in NSW. The NPLN in NSW has been well-managed as a cross-sectoral initiative, and its implementation was well supported by strong central co-ordination and a regional infrastructure of highly skilled and extensively trained project facilitators. The initiative benefited from a strong accountability framework and processes, as well as a core emphasis on developing teacher and executive competence and confidence through extensive professional learning.

The evaluation of the implementation phase found that at the conclusion of funding for the NPLN, there was no significant change in student outcomes as measured by average NAPLAN reading and numeracy scores. This is not to say that the initiative was unsuccessful in achieving at least some of its intended outcomes. Most importantly, the evaluation of the implementation of the NPLN showed significant changes in the way the target schools

approached the teaching of literacy and numeracy. In particular, there had been significant changes in:

- The level of professional dialogue between teachers about students and learning
- More collegial planning and programming practices
- Use of student outcomes data (including school based diagnostic assessments and standardised test data) for setting whole school, grade/stage and individual class programs
- Increased teacher capacity to use assessment data
- A refocusing and re-energising of schools on academic learning
- Classroom practices to emphasise the importance of explicit instruction, scaffolding learning, and differential learning
- More inclusive whole-school evolution and planning practices
- More hands-on instructional leadership roles played by principals

Perhaps more importantly, principals and teachers reported that students showed more positive attitudes towards reading and numeracy as a result of stronger engagement with learning.

A key factor in the achievement of these reforms was the appointment of in-school coordinators (Classroom Leaders) to both work with individual teachers and act as a conduit for co-ordinating professional learning. The present evaluation examined the extent to which these impacts have been sustained in the target schools, two years after cessation of NPLN funding. In doing so, the evaluation was cognisant that interpretation of change (or not) in the schools is not straightforward, as all of the schools have been involved in one way or another, in a range of other national, systemic and local programs and initiatives that have provided varying levels of funding and resources to achieve goals not dissimilar to those of NPLN. These initiatives include the Low Socio-Economic Status (SES) School Communities National Partnership, the NSW Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan, and Great Teaching Inspired Learning. .

Initiatives like the NPLN thus operate in a complex environment. There are many factors that have influenced what has happened in the NPLN schools both during implementation and since funding ceased. A limitation—not a deficiency—suffered by most large scale educational evaluation is that it is difficult to attribute change to any one influence in particular. No single source of data in itself will be adequate for demonstrating conclusively that the initiative was successful or not. This evaluation has therefore used multiple sources of data that collectively can be used to reflect on the sustained effects of the initiative. In doing so, the evaluation remains cognisant of the fact that the implementation period was itself relatively short.

The data gathered in relation to student outcomes since the funding period ceased provides little evidence of any significant change that can be attributed to the impact of the NPLN. Trends in NAPLAN scores in targeted schools have tended to be similar to those recorded for NSW as a whole. Although there are a number of schools which have sustained improvement in student outcomes, these have been in the minority. These results demonstrate the entrenched nature of the gap in academic performance in target schools and those elsewhere in NSW, and the level of challenge faced by such schools. The data also amplifies the observations made in the 2012 evaluation report of the importance of intervention in the early years of schooling and the necessity for more current initiatives including Best Start and the NSW Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan

Further data to inform the current evaluation of sustainability was gathered from a survey of principals from all 147 participating schools, and case studies on 20 schools that had been involved in the original evaluation. These data showed that the extent of any impact on school or teacher practices varied considerably. Some caution is needed in interpreting the survey data, as the response rate was lower than may be desired. The totality of the evidence gathered suggests that in about one quarter of the schools involved, the positive changes initiated during the NPLN were still evident, indeed had become firmly embedded in the school's culture. These schools had established specific practices to ensure that, for example, quality teaching practices continued to be used consistently by all staff, including new appointments. These schools typically used their own funding, or funding from other programs, to continue some form of co-ordination of whole school and individual professional learning.

In a further 50 per cent of schools, the positive changes initiated by the NPLN were still evident, but in a reduced form. In these schools, there had typically been a reduction in the amount of time devoted to collaborative planning and programming, while still recognising the importance of doing so. These schools typically no longer had funds to continue to employ a specific coordinator for literacy/numeracy.

In the remaining 25 per cent of schools, it was often difficult to identify any lasting impact of the NPLN, or indeed, any teacher who had significant involvement in the initiative. In these schools, it was more likely to observe a return to individualistic rather than collaborative decision making, less collaborative practice, and reduced commitment to or knowledge of the NPLN reform principles and research base.

The evaluation found that sustained positive impact was most often associated with the following:

- Continuity of executive staffing. It is instructive that in the schools with the least sustainable impact, there had usually been a turnover of principal and other executive staff, as well as key teaching staff. Sustainability was enhanced when the school retained the literacy/numeracy co-ordination function ensuring that corporate knowledge of the reform initiative was retained.
- Strong initial understanding by the school (particularly its leadership) that the purpose of the NPLN was primarily about school improvement, not simply about the

use of particular literacy or numeracy intervention programs funded by the initiative. In these schools, the NPLN was seen as means to achieve wider systemic reform, not an end in itself

- Use of alternative funding sources to continue the improvement journey. Principals who recognised the importance of the NPLN as a vehicle for whole school change were more likely to use either their own funds or alternative program funds to continue the initial NPLN focus on building teacher capacity, formalising quality teaching practices, strengthening accountability, and embedding assessment and evaluation practices as a normal part of school routines.
- Development of leadership density across the school. Sustainability was considerably enhanced in schools where all or the majority of staff developed a sense of ownership of the NPLN reform agenda, saw themselves as active participants in change (not people who had things done to them), and accepted that continuation of current practices would not achieve the desired change in student outcomes. In these schools, the quality teaching practices became “the way we do things around here”. These schools had also developed strong induction processes to ensure new staff conformed to these norms.
- A strong commitment by all school staff to improve student outcomes. Sustainability was greatest in schools where staff adopted a “no excuses” approach to student academic performance. In these schools, teachers were not content to “blame” poor results on students’ home backgrounds but saw it as their responsibility to respond to those circumstances as best they could. Teachers in those schools had a strong sense of professional accountability towards each other and for the school as a whole. There was a much more strongly expressed sense of collective responsibility for student performance than in schools with less sustained impact.

These findings, along with reflection on the implementation of the NPLN as a whole, suggest some important lessons for systems and sectors that have applicability to future reform initiatives. These lessons include the following:

- To achieve lasting and widespread impact on student learning outcomes in highly disadvantaged schools, the reform initiatives (and associated funding) must be continuous over a considerable length of time. Many principals considered the two year period of the NPLN to be too short to achieve the impact expected.
- Serious reform initiatives require a high level of continued systemic oversight and direction. This provides both legitimacy and priority for the reform, ensures a continuing focus on accountability, signals that change is both necessary and expected, and sustained impact is considered important by the system/sector. The central co-ordination function has a key role in promoting communication of expectations, good practices and feedback about results achieved to participating schools.

- Systems and sectors have a key role in ensuring continuity of commitment to the reform agenda when there is turnover of key staff including principals. There will always be turnover of staff in schools for a variety of reasons. However, given the level of investment involved in initiatives like the NPLN, it would seem reasonable that when new appointments are made, the individuals involved should have some level of awareness of and commitment to the change journey already underway, and not arbitrarily change this direction.
- The emphasis on school improvement initiatives needs to enhance teacher and leadership competence and confidence. It is not primarily about implementing particular programs or purchasing resources (although there is a place for investment in both of these). The central concern within the reform agenda should be on enhancing teaching and leadership skills and identifying what resources are needed to support the learning of individual students.

In summary, it is possible to conclude that the NPLN has contributed to a sustained change in the culture of many, but not all, of the schools involved. It has raised expectations for learning, and provided many teachers and principals with tools, skills, and most importantly, the motivation for improving quality practices. These positive changes in pedagogy and school management had not, however, translated into a significant increase in student learning outcomes in the targeted schools as a whole. The evaluation has clearly identified factors that support and inhibit the continuity of impact of the reforms and reaffirmed the principles of good practice in the design of reforms with aims similar to the NPLN. The evaluation continues to highlight the seriousness of effort required if lasting change is to be achieved in reducing the discrepancies in student outcomes across NSW.

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Evaluation of the Take-up and Sustainability of New Literacy and Numeracy Practices in New South Wales Schools

Phase 3 – Sustainability

Chapter 1: Introduction

On 28 November 2008 the Smarter Schools National Partnerships (SSNP) were agreed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). Three components of the SSNP were established:

- **National Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN)**
\$540 million over four years between 2008-09 and 2011-12 to facilitate and reward evidence based strategies that improve student literacy and numeracy. For implementation in NSW, the Commonwealth invested \$40.8 million, with matching funds to be provided by the NSW government. An additional \$58.9 was allocated for meeting the reward targets of this Partnership.
- **National Partnership on Improving Teacher Quality (NPITQ)**
\$550 million over five years between 2008-09 and 2012-13 to improve the quality of the Australian teaching workforce. For implementation in NSW, \$30.1 million was invested, with an additional \$112 million received for meeting reward milestones.
- **National Partnership on Low Socio-economic Status School Communities (NP Low SES)**
\$1.5 billion between 2008 and 2013 to support education reform activities in low socio-economic status schools. For implementation in NSW, \$593.3 million was allocated by the Commonwealth. NSW invested \$237 million, which allowed 140 additional schools to participate in the four year Partnership and 100 schools to participate in a two year program

In addition to the above, an extension of the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership Principal Professional Development (PPD) was implemented over the period 2012-2013. NSW was able to access a maximum of \$11,898,742 in Commonwealth funding to develop and implement transformative professional learning for principals and aspiring leaders. The projects include leading improvement, innovation and change; the development of Principal Action Learning Communities and Learning Alliances and building instructional leadership capacity.

A stand-alone literacy and numeracy National Partnership was implemented beginning in the 2013 school year. The Improving Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership (ILNNP) was a cross sectoral National Partnership involving 600 schools in New South Wales with \$74.95 million in funding available, of which \$5 million is tied to demonstrated improvement in local performance measures. The ILNNP provided support for students who have fallen behind their peers in literacy or numeracy, or are at risk of doing so. The ILNNP also provided

professional learning opportunities to build the capacity of teachers in literacy and numeracy instruction and the provision of personalised and differentiated support.

The three SSNPs align with the 2009 National Education Agreement in which States and Territories agreed that, 'all Australian school students need to acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society and employment in a globalised economy'. As a strategically significant suite of education reforms, numerous evaluations have been commissioned to investigate various aspects of SSNP implementation, impact and sustainability at both a State/Territory and Australian Government level.

In 2011, Erebus International (Erebus) was contracted by the National Partnerships Evaluation Committee to undertake an evaluation of the NPLN in NSW, titled *Evaluation of the take-up and sustainability of new literacy and numeracy practices in New South Wales schools*. The NPLN, designed to deliver sustained improvements in literacy and numeracy outcomes for all NSW students and especially those falling behind, identifies the following priority areas for reform:

- effective and evidenced-based teaching of literacy and numeracy
- strong school leadership and whole school engagement with literacy and numeracy
- monitoring student and school literacy and numeracy performance to identify where support is needed.

In view of these reform areas, the implementation of the NPLN has constituted an ambitious and innovative undertaking in NSW, unusual in its scope and scale. The initiative was delivered to identified schools across two financial years, 2009/2010 and 2010/2011. In late 2009, 147 schools across NSW had begun implementation of literacy or numeracy initiatives, including 114 government schools, 26 Catholic schools and 7 independent schools. By 2012, 102 schools across NSW were undertaking literacy programs and 45 undertaking numeracy programs under the NPLN.

As observed in the *Final Report for Phase 1* of this evaluation (Erebus 2012), the implementation of the NPLN in NSW differed from many reform efforts of the past by targeting multiple aspects of the educational enterprise deliberately and comprehensively, namely:

- leadership and school management;
- planning, pedagogy, programs and resources;
- student engagement, and school-community relationships.

On the whole, allocated funding met its objectives by facilitating and rewarding the deployment of evidence-based strategies to improve student literacy and numeracy skills in NSW.

1.1 Overview of evaluation reporting for Phase 3

This Final Report sets out preliminary findings for Phase 3 Sustainability of the *Evaluation of the take-up and sustainability of new literacy and numeracy practices in New South Wales schools*. Phase 3 is concerned with evaluating the medium-term sustainability of NPLN i.e. what gains in literacy and numeracy outcomes, and what pedagogical and leadership practices, have been sustained in schools in the two year period following the cessation of NPLN funding in June 2011.

The evaluation process commenced in 2011 when Erebus was contracted on behalf of the NSW Minister for Education to undertake the evaluation of Phase 1 Implementation. Erebus delivered findings in the aforementioned *Final Report for Phase 1* (Erebus 2012) in September 2012.

Since this time, work has been carried out towards the completion of Phase 2. This has included finalising a strategic review of the outcomes of literacy and numeracy program evaluations in NSW (Phase 2a) and developing a dissemination strategy and an online resource to share literacy and numeracy best practice (Phase 2b). See section 2.2 of this Progress Report for more detail.

As the last phase of this evaluation, project planning for Phase 3 Sustainability commenced in December 2012. In the first quarter of 2013, data analysis to inform the preliminary findings contained herein was undertaken. This evaluation concludes with the delivery of this Final Report for Phase 3. A timeline of key reporting deliverables from 2011 to the present is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Progress against key timeline and deliverables, Phase 1 - Phase 3

Project Activity	Activity Completed by
Finalisation of contract and signing of contract	January 2011
Phase 1 – Implementation	
Finalise evaluation design and Research Plan.	June 2011
<i>Progress Report 1</i>	April 2011
<i>Progress Report 2</i>	December 2011
Submission and approval of <i>Final Report for Phase 1</i>	September 2012
Phase 2a – Strategic Review of NPLN Program Evaluations	
Project commences	March 2012
Submission and endorsement of draft findings	July – August 2012
Delivery of <i>Phase 2a Final Report</i> (variation 2)	March 2013
Phase 2b – Development of Interactive Resource	
Project commences following endorsement of draft findings of Phase 2a	August 2012
Submission and approval of Project Plan	January 2013
Development of final draft of resource	April 2013

Project Activity	Activity Completed by
Phase 3 - Sustainability	
Project planning commences	December 2012
Revised timeline for Phase 3 approved	February 2013
Data analysis for progress report	February – March 2013
Delivery of <i>Progress Report 1</i>	March 2013
<i>Draft Final Report</i>	January 2014

1.2 Methodology for Phase 3

The methodology and reporting requirements for Phase 3 (Sustainability) are specified in the Evaluation Plan submitted by Erebus to the Secretariat to the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) Advisory Council and approved in June 2011.

1.2.1 Data gathering for Final Report Phase 3

The following data gathering was conducted in 2013 to inform this Final Report for Phase 3:

- a. *School case study visits.* Each of the 20 original case study schools was visited to observe how the implementation of the NPLN has transitioned into sustainable practices and outcomes since the time of the initial case study visits. In addition, the case studies investigated the success of plans for sustainability, why they have been successful and in which contexts. School leaders, classroom teachers and NPLN coordinators (or equivalent) were interviewed in each school, where appropriate.
- b. *Key stakeholder interviews.* Face-to-face or telephone interviews were held with appropriate stakeholders from each system/sector to document any changes in the overall policy and organisational context for the initiative. Stakeholders interviewed included program managers for the SSNP in each system/sector and the DEC coordinating team, plus a sample of regional Literacy/Numeracy consultants and School Education Directors. Stakeholders were asked about their perceptions of the sustainability of NPLN practices in view of the wider education reform environment, and to reflect on factors at a systemic/sectoral level that facilitated or inhibited the resilience of NPLN activities after the cessation of the partnership.
- c. *Analysis of student outcomes data.* The continuation of NAPLAN time series data to include 2013 results was analysed to identify whether the changes between 2011 and the cessation of funding indicate trends in student outcomes. This report adopts the convention used by ACARA that a statistical difference between groups is indicated by a difference of six or more scale points. In the discussion of results, the “NPLN Target schools” refers only to the NAPLAN results for schools that selected Literacy programs as the focus of their efforts. Likewise “Numeracy results for NPLN schools” refers to those schools that selected Numeracy as the basis of their interventions. Data in relation to changes in growth between Year 3 and Year 5 includes only results for students matched at both time points within the same school.

- d. *Online survey.* All schools that received NPLN funding since 2009 and participated in the Phase 1 online survey were asked to participate in the second survey administration in 2013. A modified version of the original survey was used to identify what has changed and what has been maintained since the end of 2011, and what gains have been transferable with regards to whole-school leadership, teacher capacity building and classroom practices.

Because the number of schools participating in this National Partnership was relatively small, the full population of schools (other than those involved in case studies or piloting the instruments) were invited to participate to ensure the broadest coverage of schools in the various contexts across the state. To minimise time requirements on school representatives, the survey included a mix of qualitative questions to provide rich data and closed questions that when aggregated provided quantitative analysis of the extent to which changes have occurred in various factors across NSW.

The survey was administered in early Term 4 2013, to allow maximum time for the partnership to impact on schools, yet also interfere as little as possible with other school priorities that typically occur in Term 4. The survey was sent out at the same time as the Cross Sectoral Impact Survey, which may have impacted on schools' willingness to complete both surveys.

The Sustainability survey was initially targeted to the school principal, but the introductory letter advised that they could delegate the survey to the most informed member of staff, or consult with other staff in the preparation of the school response. The survey did seek to gather the personal experiences of the principal, but rather the experience of the school as a whole. The online survey had a two week turn-around time, with a further extension of 10 days to ensure maximum participation in the survey.

Analysis of the quantitative data is largely at the descriptive level, e.g. number/percentage of respondents giving a certain response (disaggregated as appropriate). Content analysis was used to identify trends and themes in the qualitative sections of the survey.

The survey had the limitation inherent in all surveys, that as it involves self-reporting, it is not possible to verify independently the ratings given by respondents, although the survey results have been triangulated against observations made during school visits and interviews with principals and teachers. As this was not a high stakes survey, and was completed anonymously, there was less pressure on respondents to give inaccurate answers. There were practical limitations as to the number of questions that could be asked, but the complexity of the NPLN arrangements meant there were a large number of areas that were of interest to the evaluation. A compromise was needed between depth of questioning and breadth of coverage possible. The trade-off was addressed to some extent by the inclusion of

the case studies as a means of gaining greater insights into the quantitative responses.

Survey response rate

A total of 56 responses were received from the 114 schools invited to participate in the online survey, giving a response rate of 49 per cent (compared to 69% in 2011). The 20 schools that participated in case studies for this evaluation were not asked to also complete the survey, to help reduce the data burden on them.

The characteristics of those schools that did respond to the survey are shown below. Note that not all respondents answered all questions, percentage responses shown in the Tables represent the proportion of valid responses received for the relevant question.

In general the response characteristics of the 2013 sample were in line with that obtained in 2011. It is therefore likely that the results of the 2013 sample are representative of the schools that responded in 2011. The respondents to both the 2011 and 2013 were broadly representative of all NPLN schools in terms of sectoral distribution and focus of intervention.

Table 2: Number of Respondent schools by sector

		2011		2013	
	Total no. of schools in the initiative	Percent of total responses	No. of responses	Percent of total responses	No. of responses
Government	114	78.9%	60	80.0%	40
Catholic	26	14.5%	11	10.9%	6
Independent	7	6.6%	5	9.1%	5

Table 3: Number of Respondent schools by Location

	2011		2013	
	Percent of total responses	No. of responses	Percent of total responses	No. of responses
Metropolitan	35.1%	27	38.2%	21
Regional city	33.8%	26	34.5%	19
Rural	29.9%	23	20.0%	11
Remote	1.3%	1	7.3%	4

Table 4: Enrolments of responding schools

	2011		2013	
	Percent of total responses	No. of responses	Percent of total responses	No. of responses
25 or less	0.0%	0	0.0%	0
26 to 159	18.2%	14	16.4%	9
160 to 300	29.9%	23	36.4%	20
301 to 450	22.1%	17	30.9%	17
451 to 700	28.6%	22	16.4%	9
701 or more	1.3%	1	0.0%	0

Table 5: Number of Enrolments of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent in Respondent Schools

	2011		2013	
	Percent of total responses	No. of responses	Percent of total responses	No. of responses
None	7.9%	6	3.6%	2
1-2%	15.8%	12	23.6%	13
3-5%	19.7%	15	14.5%	8
6-10%	30.3%	23	21.8%	12
11-15%	7.9%	6	21.8%	12
16 -20%	10.5%	8	5.5%	3
21% or more	7.9%	6	9.1%	5

Table 6: Component of the National Partnership for Literacy and Numeracy (NPLN) Implemented by Respondent Schools

		2011		2013	
	All NPLN schools	Percent of total responses	No. of responses	Percent of total responses	No. of responses
Literacy	102 (69%)	74.0%	57	73.6%	39
Numeracy	45 (31%)	26.0%	20	26.4%	14

Note these figures are broadly similar to the breakdown of the full cohort of NPLN schools in 2009-2011, in which 69 per cent chose a Literacy focus and 31 per cent a Numeracy focus.

Table 7 below shows that the majority of responses were provided by principals, but had been delegated to other staff members in around one third of schools.

Table 7: Who completed the 2013 survey?

	2013	
	Percent of total responses	No. of responses
School Principal	64%	36
Assistant or Deputy Principal	14%	8
In-school NPLN facilitator or leader	5%	3
Classroom teacher	18%	10
Other*	4%	2
Total	100%	56

* Other respondents included 1 ESL teacher and 1 “Leader of Pedagogy”

1.3 Structure of the Final Report for Phase 3

This Final Report for Phase 3 of the evaluation of the NPLN is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 focuses on how the Sustainability phase of the evaluation sits in relation to findings of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the evaluation, and highlights the strategic objectives of Phase 3 in view of wider education reforms.
- Chapter 3 examines key findings that relate to planning for sustainability which are contained in the *Final Report for Phase 1* (Erebus International 2012) and the report on the *Cross Sectoral Impact Survey* (ARTD 2012). Summarising these findings enriches the interpretation of Phase 3 data analysis, and informs the research questions for the final round of data gathering in the second half of 2013.
- Chapter 4 reports on the sustainability of the impact of the NPLN in three key areas: impact on student learning outcomes; impact on teacher confidence and competence, and impact on school organisation and operations.
- Chapter 5 looks at the factors that have facilitated and hindered the sustainability of impact.
- Chapter 6 provides a discussion of the data in Chapter 4 and conclusions in relation to the lessons that can be learned from the NPLN experience and implications for school systems for future reform efforts.

Chapter 2: Objectives of Phase 3 in context

2.1 Objectives of Phase 3

Phase 3 investigated what schools, systems and sectors have done to sustain initiatives made by the NPLN initiative. Phase 3 will clarify trends in student literacy and numeracy performance, and the cultural changes in pedagogical and leadership practice, observed in 2012-2013 following the cessation of NPLN funding.

In alignment with Focus Area 6 of the Evaluation Plan: To what extent has the reform change agenda been sustained post funding (June 2011), Phase 3 not only considers *what* activities by school teachers, leaders and systems/sector have helped or hindered sustainability but also informs an appreciation of *why* sustainability has, or has not, occurred. In doing so, Phase 3 will enrich an evidence-base to support future iterations of literacy and/or numeracy programs in NSW schools.

As a strategically-important evaluation in the context of a suite of education reforms, Phase 3 will also be critical in providing its primary audience—the Australian Government and NSW Governments and education sector representatives—with evidence of what changes have been sustained in the two years beyond the NPLN. By informing the development of effective and sustainable policy-making and funding decisions for education reform at the state, systems/sector and individual school level, Phase 3 is a crucial component of the overall evaluation of literacy and numeracy practices in NSW schools.

Evaluating the objective of Phase 3 given ongoing activities in schools and systems/sectors between 2012-2013

Two priority areas for schools and systems/sectors to focus on following the cessation of NPLN funding were identified and enumerated in the Evaluation Plan (Erebus International 2011):

1. Sustained implementation of literacy and numeracy programs, supported by capacity building in schools through continued engagement in whole-school teacher professional development, and executive engagement in leadership programs.
2. Growth in teacher capacity to assess student performance through the School Measurement, Assessment and Reporting Toolkit (SMART 2) by providing ongoing access to e-learning modules in SMART Data Analysis.

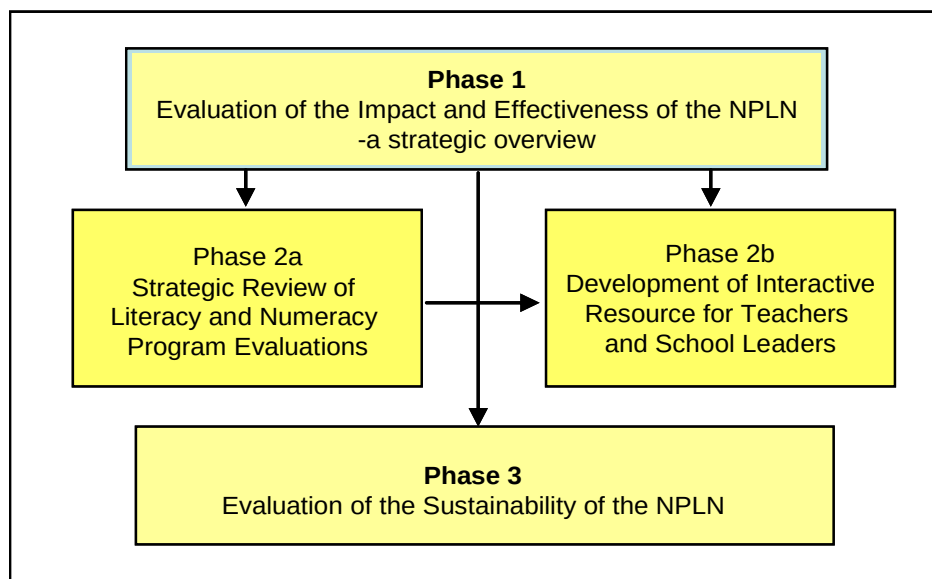
These priority areas also respond to the cumulative evaluation findings that the ongoing delivery of literacy and numeracy programs—when supported by growing teacher capacity in the context of strong leadership—may embed the cultural change required for a successful transition from implementation to sustainability.

2.2 Phase 3 in context

When considering Phase 3 in context of the wider NPLN evaluation in NSW, it is important to appreciate that the findings draw on a combination of unique data gathering events in 2013 *and* the accumulated body of evidence documented throughout Phase 1 and Phase 2.

Phase 3 reflects the iterative process that Erebus has engaged throughout this evaluation and is responsive to emerging findings, trends and challenges. The relationship between these three phases is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Relationship between Phases of the NPLN evaluation



Phase 1 Evaluation of the Impact and Effectiveness of the NPLN

The purpose of Phase 1 of this evaluation was to give a strategic overview of the implementation of the NPLN in NSW, examining its impact and effectiveness. From January 2011 to May 2012, the Phase 1 evaluation employed a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data gathering from six sources: document analysis; interviews with key sector representatives and regional DEC staff; interviews with schools leaders and teachers in 12 schools; case studies with a sample of 20 schools; online survey of schools, and student outcomes data, including NAPLAN.

Guided by the Evaluation Plan, Phase 1 examined five Focus Areas:

- Focus Area 1: What change has been attempted?
- Focus Area 2: What effects and synergies can be discerned?
- Focus Area 3: How effective has implementation been, including cost-effectiveness?
- Focus Area 4: How have schools approached issues of sustainability, resilience and transferability?

- Focus Area 5: What are the implications for systems/sectors from the evidence gathered?

Two progress reports were delivered by Erebus International in April 2011 and December 2011. The reports focused on the planning and rollout of the NPLN at a strategic/sectoral level and within schools.

The *Final Report of Phase 1* (delivered by Erebus in September 2012) contained findings from the implementations stage of the evaluation, reported against the five Focus Areas. Focus Area 4 and Focus Area 5 contained findings about planning for sustainability, which are now relevant for Phase 3.

The report found that progress towards enhancing teacher and leadership capacity, and adopting an evidence-based approach to pedagogy and planning was demonstrable. The final stage of Phase 1 was informed also by the analysis of student outcomes data from NAPLAN results in Year 3 and 5 over the period from 2008 to 2011. At that point in time, the qualitative evidence of positive impacts on student learning had not yet been translated into improved NAPLAN scores.

The implementation of the NPLN was found to be well planned, managed and resourced, supported by cross-sectoral cooperation, underpinned by a sound body of evidence about student learning, effective pedagogy and instructional leadership. Observations were made regarding the complex interplay between the local school context, the systemic education environment, and other state-wide and national initiatives—all of which affect the outcomes of any particular program.

Phase 2a Strategic Review of NPLN Evaluations & Phase 2b Development of Interactive Resource

Phase 2 of the NPLN evaluation comprised two parts. In March 2013, Erebus International submitted the *Report for Phase 2a* (final draft). This phase involved a strategic meta-analysis of findings of program level evaluations of the eight literacy/numeracy programs implemented in NSW schools during the NPLN. (Note these evaluations were undertaken only within the government and Catholic sectors).

Four of these evaluations were conducted by Urbis Pty Ltd: Taking Off With Numeracy, Multilit, Mindful Learning, Mindful Teaching and Focus on Reading 3-6. The other four evaluations: Accelerated Literacy, Individualised Learning Plans, QuickSmart and Reading to Learn were conducted by the Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau (SEPEB) within the Department of Education and Communities.

The analysis of these program-level evaluations provided a comparative overview of the findings to inform decisions about literacy and/or numeracy programs and practices at a local school and system/sector level. The findings identified the local school and system/sector contexts in which each program works best for enhancing student outcomes and the cost effectiveness of each program.

The methodology for the Phase 2a evaluation involved three components: document analysis of the eight program evaluations; interviews with key sector representatives in government and non-government school sectors, and school case studies.

The findings highlighted nine elements of the implementation of literacy or numeracy programs that have a positive association with student learning outcomes over time:

1. Purposeful student engagement
2. Differentiated teaching and learning
3. Evidence based decision making
4. Effective instructional leadership
5. Responsive teaching approaches
6. Agreed whole school reform agenda
7. Collaborative whole school culture
8. Targeted professional support
9. Tailored resource utilization

A key learning was that it is the combination of reform elements and not one aspect of a particular program that creates sustainable change in student outcomes and teacher/leadership capacity.

Planning for Phase 2b commenced following the NSW Minister for Education's endorsement of draft findings of Phase 2a in August 2012. Phase 2b involved developing an online resource targeted at school leaders and teachers to share and promote the effective practices identified in Phase 2a, including authentic examples of the implementation of NPLN programs NSW schools and classrooms.

The approach to Phase 2b was iterative, involving extensive consultation, testing and refinement of concepts and ideas developed in early stages of the project. The following steps were identified in the Phase 2b Project Plan:

1. Test and validate the effective practices framework through relevant consultations.
2. Gather examples of practice from a sample of schools that participated in the NPLN.
3. Design a brief that will allow a website developer to assemble the collected material.
4. Implement the design brief to develop a draft prototype website.
5. Test the website with contributing schools to develop a final product.
6. Provide the DEC with a final copy of the online resource for wider dissemination across all sectors.

Phase 2b was successfully completed with the production of the Effective Practices in Literacy and Numeracy website (see <http://www.cese.nsw.gov.au/EffectivePractices/>), launched by the Minister for Education, Mr Adrian Piccoli at Rosemeadow Public School on 31st July, 2013.

Phase 3 Evaluation of the Sustainability of the NPLN

The Phase 3 evaluation looks to the medium term sustainability of NPLN outcomes in student performance and at a pedagogical, whole-school leadership and sectoral/systemic level. “Medium term” sustainability refers to those changes that can be observed in 2012 and 2013, the two years following the cessation of NPLN funding.

The key question to be addressed by Phase 3 of the evaluation is *to what extent has the reform change agenda been sustained post-funding?*

- How sustainable has the impact of the National Partnerships strategy been?
- What has helped or hindered sustainability (including any systemic support)?
- What lessons can be learned for future implementation of literacy and numeracy initiatives?
- Which programs and strategies have proved to be most sustainable and resilient and how has this been achieved?
- What impediments to sustainability of initiative goals can be identified? How have they changed over the life of and beyond the SSNP? How have they been addressed?
- To what extent, how and under what conditions can successful strategies be scaled up to be replicated in other contexts?

Responding to this key question also involves consideration of findings from earlier phases of the evaluation as to how schools prepared for sustainability, as well as the changing education landscape within NSW that will impact on how schools think about teaching and learning and implementation of literacy and numeracy programs into the near future. These issues are taken up in the discussion in Chapter 3 below.

Chapter 3: Implications of key findings from Phase 1 – planning for sustainability

This Final Report builds on a rich body of evidence from previous NPLN evaluation reports and the *Analysis of the NSW Smarter Schools National Partnerships Cross-sectoral Impact Survey: Phase 1* (ARTD 2012) which is presented below.

At the most general level, the *Final Report for Phase 1* (Erebus International, 2012) noted that sustainable implementation of the NPLN priorities would depend on schools' ability to continue to access flexible funding to support activities commenced with NPLN funding; ongoing commitment by instructional leaders; and the extent to which the NPLN priorities had been embedded into school planning practices.

At the end of 2011, planning for sustainability was still in an early stage of development in the majority of participating schools. However, some schools had progressed further than others. In those schools which had made most progress, it was possible to identify specific activities and strategies which had been implemented with the specific intention of facilitating sustainability. These activities and strategies were:

- Planning for literacy and numeracy programs to ensure the initiative remains a priority.
- Ongoing capacity building of staff with a whole school approach to professional learning.
- Implementing longer-term structures, irrespective of staff turnover, to support cultural change.

While adopting these approaches up to and including 2011, more than half of the principals who were interviewed in the case studies were confident that, given adequate in-school levels of support, the impact of the NPLN initiative could be sustained into 2012 and 2013. The quantitative data from online school surveys reinforced these findings and clarified the two levels at which staff believed change must occur to impact positively on sustainability:

1. At a leadership/whole school level:

- The adoption of a whole school approach to literacy or numeracy planning, and
- The provision of identified leadership positions for literacy or numeracy coordination.

2. At the classroom teacher level:

- The constant focus of teachers on evidence-informed planning via NAPLAN and other measures, and
- The enhanced teaching practices for literacy and numeracy learning.

Qualitative case study discussions supported findings pointing to the important relationship between building teacher capacity and effective instructional leadership and also drew attention to its significance with regards to processes of cultural change. One key aspect of cultural change observed in discussions with teachers was the enthusiasm felt when building pedagogical skills and when adopting new routines that become “business as usual”.

The integration of a whole-school commitment into system/sector wide imperatives is an important for ensuring the sustainability of reform initiatives. Over 70 per cent of survey respondents felt that a changeover of staff or school leader would inhibit sustainability to a “moderate” or “great” extent.

A final element of wider cultural change discussed in case studies concerned the role of parents/carers. The engagement of parents/carers was found to be the most challenging of all strategies for sustainability.

The *Final Report for Phase 1* (Erebus 2012) also highlighted how the sustainability of the NPLN was supported at a systemic level:

- The *high-level of active leadership, guidance and strategic support* of NPLN lent credibility, legitimacy and priority to the NSW implementation across all sectors.
- The *strong degree of cross-sectoral cooperation* ensured that the needs of students with low literacy and/or numeracy outcomes in all school sectors could be addressed.
- The *scope and scale of funding/resourcing* for the NPLN in NSW had a significant bearing on the extent of change possible, and in turn, on the emerging impact on student learning outcomes.
- The *high degree of fidelity* between NPLN conceptualisation, as expressed in the NSW Implementation Plan, and the reality of its implementation in schools and classrooms.
- The *investment of time and effort in advanced planning*, with an early focus on the need for sustainability, paid dividends in terms of a well thought out and structured approach.
- The *commitment to in-kind support* by securing buy-in from all systems, facilitated by thorough planning for the NPLN as an explicitly cross-sectoral initiative.

The lessons that may be drawn from attempts to transition from NPLN implementation to sustainability can be identified under the five headings, below.

Table 8: Strategic lessons from observed interactions between schools and sectors

Observed interactions between schools and systems/sectors	Strategic lessons
1. Financial management	
The level of financial accountability and the large amount of funds made available through the SSNPs presented administrative challenges for some schools.	Supporting schools to ensure good financial management is a crucial component to sustaining the viability and credibility of literacy and numeracy reforms.
2. Role of Principal/NPLN coordinator	
The explicit acknowledgment of school leaders was at the heart of successful cultural change, and the role of an NPLN coordinator as an internal “champion” of this change, was crucial.	Engaging with current research about good leadership practice, especially instructional leadership, is an essential feature of sustainability.
3. School planning	
Enhanced school-level planning was a key element of implementation that, given an adequate investment of time and resources, embedded evidence-based decision making.	Directing time and resources towards planning for sustainability from the outset can support practices that are resistant to changes in funding, staffing and other resources.
4. Teaching and Learning	
Improved quality of teaching and learning was at the heart of the conceptualisation of the NPLN initiative, and focused schools on their central mission. This focus was reflected in teacher enthusiasm towards improved classroom practices that enhanced student engagement.	The fidelity of education reforms to quality teaching and learning fosters meaningful student/teacher interactions. In the longer term, these qualitative attitudinal shifts may underpin measurable and sustainable gains in student outcomes.
5. Professional development of existing teachers	
Well-resourced and highly tailored professional learning for teachers and school leaders was vital for NPLN implementation; however less resource intensive approaches (e.g. peer observation) were slower to embed.	Attending to pedagogical training while recognising the resource cost requires an approach that retains, in the most efficient way possible, those professional learning programs that are shown to be most effective.

The Analysis of the NSW Smarter Schools National Partnerships Cross-sectoral Impact Survey: Phase 1 (hereafter CSIS Report 2012) was prepared by ARTD Consultants for the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation. This report provides a snapshot of the extent of change in education practices achieved by all three SSNPs by September 2011. It is based on responses from 662 of 936 NSW schools participating in the SSNPs.

It is encouraging to observe that findings in the CSIS Report largely align with those contained in the *Final Report of Phase 1* however, as the findings in the CSIS Report are generally *not* disaggregated between the different National Partnerships, it is difficult to discern which observations relate specifically to the NPLN. .

General findings from the CSIS report that are relevant to the issue of sustainability in Phase 3 include:

- Investing in education reform can bring about improvements in schools. Such investment can reasonably be expected to result in improved academic performance and engagement.
- Principals are actively leading reforms. Investment in building Principals' instructional leadership is associated with school improvement and teacher capacity.
- Investing in teacher learning and professional development is directly associated with increased teacher capacity. Mentoring and in-class support are particularly effective, and require fewer resources.
- Future reform initiatives should recognise the time needed to achieve momentum and diffuse new practices through all levels of staff in a school.
- Providing schools with funding and flexibility in staff arrangements can enable them to focus on professional development where it is needed most.
- At the system level, more work and/or evidence may be needed to encourage schools to increase engagement with local communities.
- At the system level, more may be need to be done to encourage and support collaborating with experts and professional staff outside school. (ARTD 2012:xxii-xxiii)

The strategic conclusions in the CSIS Report identified the following as 'areas for further exploration' (ARTD 2012: xxiii):

1. What are the mechanisms for driving differential improvements and take up of practices between teachers, Principals and executives?
2. What is the true extent of increases in teacher capacity given that teachers, executives and Principals report different magnitudes of improvement?
3. What is the relative impact of different SSNPs on key outcomes measures and the lessons for education reform?
4. What are the reasons behind the small perceived impact on schools engagement in local communities, parents and external partners?
5. What are the different perspectives of Principals and teachers about the magnitude of changes, especially in regards to increases in teacher skill and capacity?
6. For what reasons do contextual factors impact on outcomes for teacher capacity?

While it is beyond the scope of the current evaluation to answer these questions explicitly, the issues opened fruitful lines of inquiry that were important for understanding the drivers of sustainability. Question 1, for example, directs thinking towards the different roles that teachers, Principals and executives hold as change-makers and sustainers. Questions 2, 3 and 5 draw attention to the import of clarifying the degrees of reported change in the

context of a multi-faceted education environment. Question 4 highlights the challenge of engaging parents and, like Question 6, asks *why* certain contextual factors have differential impacts on program elements.

By keeping these issues front of mind during Phase 3, this evaluation takes an integrated and iterative approach to evidence and perspectives already at play in recent evaluations of literacy and numeracy reforms in NSW.

Chapter 4: Ongoing Impact of the NPLN

This section of the report considers evidence in relation to the impact of the NPLN on three key areas: (1) impact on student learning outcomes, (2) impact on teacher capacity and impact on instructional leadership, and (3) overall school culture, operation and organisation.

4.1 Ongoing impact on school organisation and operation

The starting point for this evaluation is to consider the extent to which literacy or numeracy was a continued focus for effort in those schools targeted for participation in the NPLN. As noted in the Phase 1 report, schools were supposed to identify either Literacy or Numeracy as the focus for their efforts, based on an analysis of school needs. This did not happen in every case, as some dioceses and DEC regions mandated participation in a particular program (largely because of their capacity to support only one intervention program within the resources available), regardless of identified school needs.

Table 9 below shows the results for schools responding to the 2013 survey of school leaders regarding the ongoing focus of their efforts.

Table 9: Focus on Literacy or Numeracy since end of NPLN funding in 2011

	Percent of Total
Continuing to focus on literacy	45
Continuing to focus on numeracy	4
Expanded focus to both literacy and numeracy	37
Shifted focus to literacy from numeracy	6
Shifted focus to numeracy from literacy	8
No longer focusing on either literacy or numeracy	0
N=	52

Table 9 above shows that the majority of schools responding to the survey had chosen to continue a focus on literacy, or had expanded their focus to both literacy and numeracy. This is not surprising given the finding in 2011 that 74 per cent of the schools in 2011 had a literacy focus to their NPLN engagement. However, in 2013 only 45 per cent of schools continued to have an exclusive focus on literacy. This reflects the dual focus expected in Action Plan schools. Very few schools focused exclusively on numeracy. None of the responding school focused neither on literacy or numeracy.

Table 10 below provides a key insight into why sustained focus and impact has not been maintained in a significant number of schools. The findings from the Phase 1 evaluation identified the fact that the Literacy or Numeracy Facilitators (called Classroom Leaders in the government sector) played a pivotal role in the implementation of the NPLN in schools. In 2011, 79 per cent of surveyed school leaders said that the facilitator had enhanced literacy or numeracy teaching to a great extent in their school. Table 10 shows that in 2013, less than one-quarter of these facilitators were still in the same school and performing a similar role

to that which they performed during the NPLN. A further 31 per cent of the former facilitators were still employed at the same school but not acting as a facilitator. While these teachers may be applying enhanced skills in and practices in their own classrooms, it is likely they are having less impact on other teachers, as the time release previously provided through the NPLN may no longer be available. It should not be assumed that the work of the former facilitator is devalued or ignored; indeed the case study observations showed that many were being used as valuable resource for building on the work commenced during the NPLN. However, the Table also shows that in 28 per cent of responding schools, the facilitator had left the school and had not been replaced by another staff member performing a similar role.

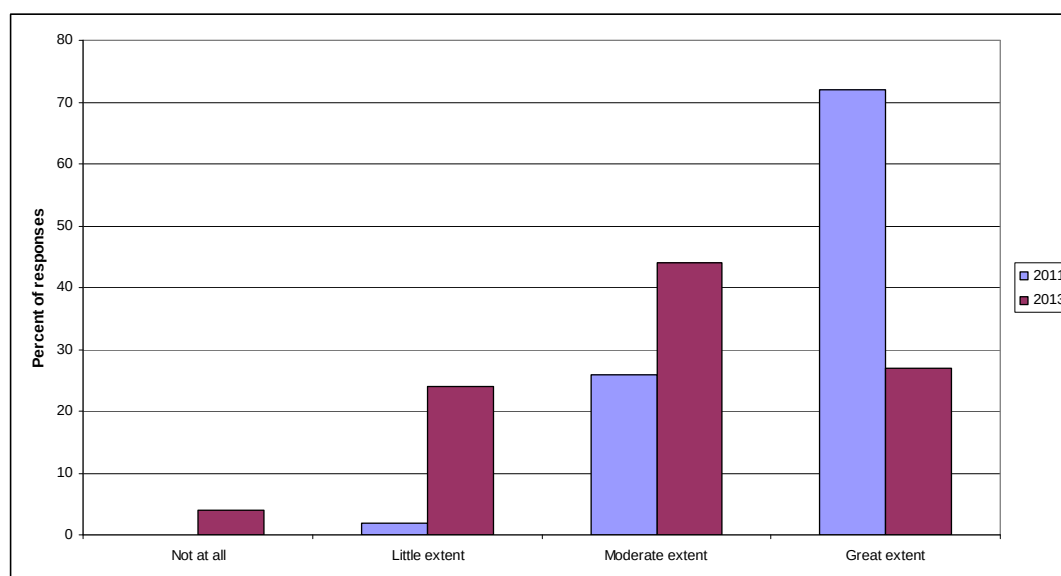
Table 10: Role of the Literacy or Numeracy Facilitator since end of NPLN funding in 2011

	Response Percent
Engaged at the school and continuing in a role equivalent to a NPLN facilitator	24
Engaged at the school but no longer in a role equivalent to a NPLN facilitator	31
Not engaged at the school but a different staff member is in a role equivalent to a NPLN facilitator	18
Not engaged at the school and there is no staff member in a role equivalent to the NPLN facilitator	28

Figure 2 below compares school leaders' ratings of the success of the initiative in 2001 and 2013. In 2011, more than 70 per cent of school leaders surveyed believed the NPLN change journey had been successful to a great extent. By 2013, only 28 per cent of principals believed the change journey had been sustained to the same extent. While the 2013 results are still positive in the majority of schools, they also suggest that nearly 30 per cent of school leaders believed that cultural change had either not been sustained or sustained only to a limited degree.

The survey results above are consistent with the evaluation team's observations of the extent to which sustainability had occurred in the case study schools visited, with little sustainability evident in about one-quarter of schools visited, strong sustainability and significantly changed practices occurring in a further one-quarter of the case studies, with the remaining 50 per cent showing a reduced level of impact over time, but still retaining some beneficial aspects from the experience.

Figure 2: School leaders' ratings of the extent to which the NPLN change journey had been sustained in their school



*NB In 2011 the question asked how successful the change journey had been thus far

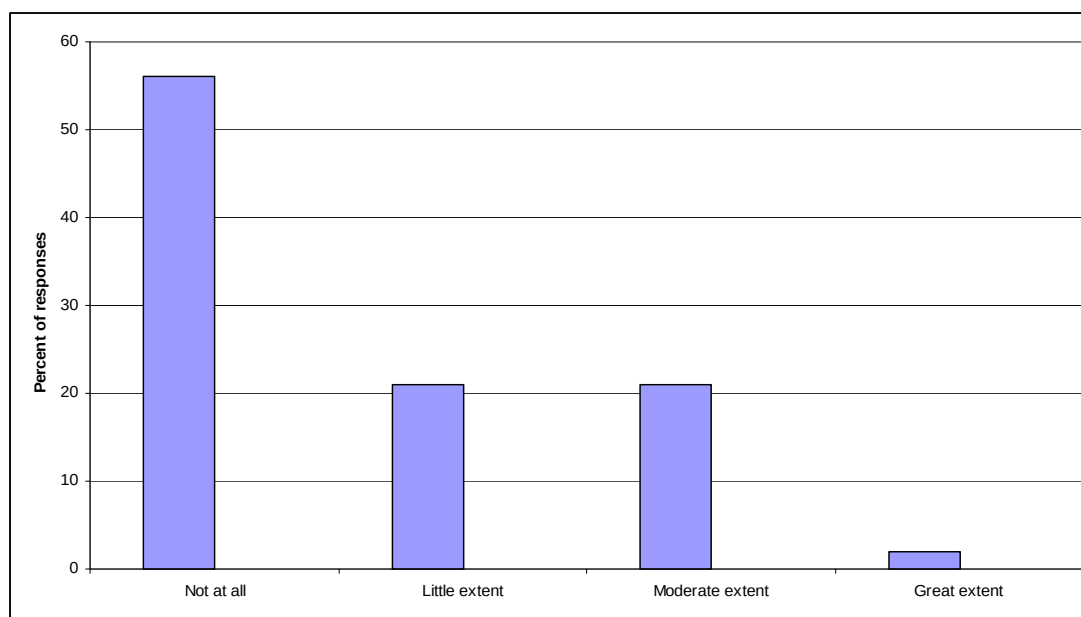
Partnerships with universities

In the implementation phase of the NPLN, the first phase evaluation found that there was little evidence of widespread engagement of universities or other partners in relation to development or delivery of the NPLN. It was noted that while the NPLN draws heavily on an identified research base, this is distinct from specifically commissioned assistance or support. The exceptions concern particular academics who have been employed as critical friends, evaluators or providers of professional learning in particular jurisdictions. In addition, professional learning in relation to specific programs funded under the NPLN was delivered in some instances by contracted providers. In all of the instances cited, the relationship between university and other partners was viewed positively by the relevant jurisdiction or school concerned, and considered to have contributed to the success of the initiative. However, the majority of schools in 2011 (more than 70 per cent) had little or no effective engagement with university or other partners.

Figure 3 below shows that in 2013 the great majority of schools responding to the survey had little or no ongoing relationship with university partners. Of the small number that indicated there was an ongoing relationship, the most frequent form of partnership concerned provision of professional learning in specific areas.

In 2011, about two-thirds of the schools responding to the survey had established partnerships with universities or other partners during the NPLN. Figure 3 shows that in 2013, of those schools that did have such partnerships in 2009-2011, these had not been maintained in 56 per cent of cases, with a further 21 per cent using these partnerships only to a little extent. Less than 5 per cent of the responding schools were still engaged in these partnerships to a great extent.

Figure 3: School leaders' perceptions of extent to which partnerships with universities and other partners had been sustained



4.2 Sustainability of Impact on Teaching and Learning

A major priority of the NPLN was to change teachers' pedagogical practices, on both an individual and whole school (or at least Years 3-6) basis. In consequence, a significant proportion of the initiative's funding was devoted to teacher professional learning to provide explicit instruction in the use of the selected literacy or numeracy programs (and the pedagogical practices associated with these programs), as well as more general professional learning in relation to student learning outcomes data analysis, and current research on school improvement and school effectiveness. Similarly, significant resources were invested in enhancing the level of in-school support for teachers to enhance their teaching practice, through increased peer observation and critiquing of lessons, more systematic and more frequent assessment of learning, and greater emphasis on student mastery of intended outcomes as the basis for progression, among other things.

The evaluation of the implementation phase showed that there had indeed been an observed change in teacher behaviour as a result of this investment, including changes in the level of teacher professional dialogue, collaboration, and sense of accountability to their peers. Likewise, there were significant changes in the ways that teachers used data for programming and planning, how lessons were structured and delivered, and in the overall level of staff morale.

4.2.1 Impact on Teacher behaviour

The current phase of the evaluation has sought to establish the extent to which these positive outcomes have been sustained.

As seen in Table 11 below the great majority of 2013 survey respondents believed the NPLN had ongoing impact on teachers' willingness to engage in professional learning, and to exchange ideas about professional practice. It is instructive that principals' believed that the NPLN had little or no sustained impact on only a small number of teachers, an observation that was also echoed in the case studies conducted in 2013, where in most of the larger schools visited, principals expressed the view that there remained a small number of teachers who had firmly entrenched views and were highly resistant to change. This greater willingness to engage in professional learning by the majority of teachers in NPLN schools had not translated into Intention to seek higher levels of NSWIT accreditation.

Table 11: School leaders' perceptions of the extent to which the NPLN had sustainable impact on teacher behaviour, 2013

	Not at all (%)	Little extent (%)	Moderate extent (%)	Great extent (%)
Willingness to engage in professional learning	2	11	36	51
Willingness to exchange ideas about professional practice	2	15	26	57
Intention to seek higher levels of NSWIT accreditation	9	45	28	18

4.2.2 Impact on teachers' content knowledge of literacy and numeracy

A major focus of the NPLN was the provision of extensive, and often whole school teacher professional learning about effective pedagogy in literacy and numeracy learning, particularly through training in the use of the selected intervention program (such as Focus on Reading). As noted in the Phase 1 evaluation report, the underlying principles of all of the intervention programs were similar in stressing the importance of practices such as hands-on learning, explicit teacher directions, scaffolded learning and providing informed feedback to students. The "new" pedagogy also stresses the importance of changing the way that teachers work so that programming and planning was based on better understanding of students' real, rather than assumed, needs and achievement levels.

The evaluation of the first phase of NPLN showed that this professional learning, coupled with a renewed sense of instructional leadership within the participating schools had led to significant increases in teachers' content knowledge of literacy and numeracy, as well as improved pedagogy at individual teacher, and stage-wide and sometimes school wide levels.

Figure 4 below compares principals' perceptions of the impact of the NPLN on teachers' content knowledge of literacy and numeracy. It can be seen that in 2011 nearly 70 per cent of principals believed that the NPLN had been very effective in building teachers' content knowledge, but in 2013 this had reduced to just over 50 per cent. While the impact of the intensive teacher professional learning in 2011 was evident in the very small percentage (2%) of cases in which the NPLN had little or no impact on teacher's content knowledge, by

2013 this had grown to 20 per cent. This may be a result of teacher turnover in the NPLN schools (ie teachers new to the schools had not been trained in the pedagogical practices and programs introduced during the NPLN), or an honest reflection on the fact that the professional learning provided during the NPLN had no lasting impact on some teachers' content knowledge.

Figure 4: School leaders' perceptions of impact of the NPLN on teachers' content knowledge of literacy and numeracy, 2011-2013

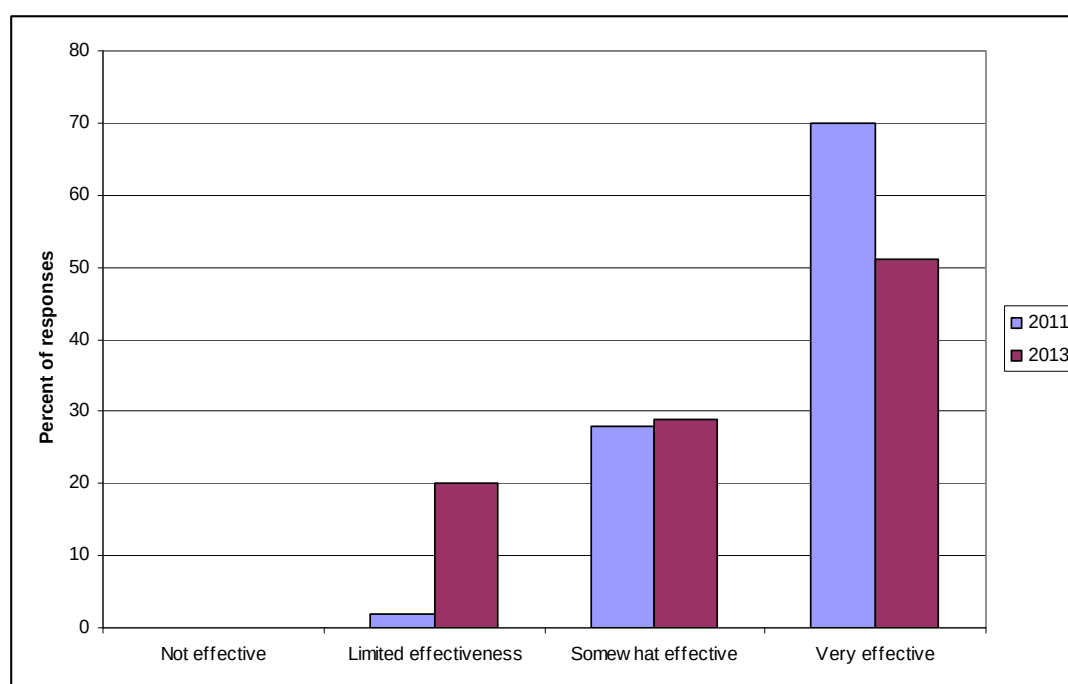


Table 12 below shows that school leaders' believed that many of the school approaches to teaching and learning had been sustained in 2013. This suggests that the NPLN was largely successful in the majority of participating schools in embedding a whole school approach to literacy and numeracy planning and teacher professional learning; enhancing instructional leadership and data driven planning. This was also observed to be the case in around three-quarters of the case study schools visited. In these schools, principals and teachers said they had now adopted more inclusive programming and whole school planning practices, had abandoned previous individualistic and idiosyncratic approaches to accessing professional learning programs, and furthermore felt it unlikely that this would change in the near future. While the great majority of schools responding to the survey had been able to sustain identified literacy and numeracy leadership positions and specific programs introduced during the NPLN, a significant number of schools participating in the NPLN had not been able to do so. Some 22 per cent of schools had not sustained leadership positions and 18 per cent had abandoned specific programs.

These findings suggest that the capacity of schools to retain programs will depend on each of the threats to sustainability including turnover of staff, other priorities for time and funding, the perceived level of success coming from investment in these areas, and the development of alternative improvement strategies.

Table 12: Extent to which School leaders believed that changed practices had been sustained

	Very sustainable (%)	Moderately sustainable (%)	Not very sustainable (%)	Not sustainable (%)
A whole-school approach to literacy or numeracy planning	49	47	2	2
Identified leadership positions to coordinate literacy or numeracy	41	35	22	2
Specific programs introduced with NPLN funding, e.g. TOWN or Focus on Reading	33	41	18	8
Data driven planning for literacy or numeracy	44	52	2	2
Enhanced teaching practices for literacy or numeracy learning	52	40	8	0
Enhanced instructional leadership	43	43	12	2
A whole-school approach to teacher professional learning	52	34	12	2

Similar sustained improvements in teaching and learning practices can be seen in the majority of schools in Table 13 below. Increased collaboration between teachers, adoption of more explicit approaches to teaching, increased scaffolded learning, and more explicit articulation of expectations are all positive strategies that were emphasised throughout the NPLN and appear to have been taken up and sustained in the majority of schools.

The Table also indicates two areas where change has not become embedded to the same extent in all schools, namely more effective use of support staff in classrooms and adoption of tailored approaches to classroom groupings. This is consistent with observations in the case studies, where schools that had not also been part of the other initiatives such as the Low SES National Partnership or the NSW Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan (where both these areas have been priorities) had not made as much progress as those who had this additional support. Principals in these schools had used the additional funds from these other initiatives to continue to provide time for teacher release, for example, to maintain the collaborative planning practices begun during the NPLN. In addition, the Action Plan has continued to focus on evidence based decision making (among other things), building on the work done during the NPLN on enhancing teachers' skills in data analysis.

Table 13: Extent to which School leaders believed participation in the NPLN up until the end of 2011 led to sustained improvements in their school's teaching and learning environment

	Not at all (%)	Little extent (%)	Moderate extent (%)	Great extent (%)
Adoption of a more explicit approach to teaching	4	9	31	56
More direct links between student outcomes and teaching/learning experiences	2	7	41	50
More consistent use of terminology in relation to literacy or numeracy by teachers and students	2	11	42	44
Increased use of scaffolded learning	2	7	39	52
More effective use of learning support staff in the classroom	4	27	38	31
Increased collaboration when planning literacy or numeracy teaching/learning strategies at stage level	2	7	28	63
More explicit articulation of expectations for student learning for teaching staff	2	9	41	48
More explicit communication of expectations for learning to students	5	14	30	52
Tailored approaches to classroom groupings	2	21	47	30

4.2.3 Use of data to inform practice

Increasing the use of student assessment data to inform planning at whole school and classroom levels was a key objective of the NPLN. Considerable professional learning support was provided to schools by the systems/sectors to make better use of NAPLAN data and to more effectively plan self-evaluations. Various tools, including the Data Analysis Self Assessment (DASA) were developed to further assist schools understand where practice in relation to student data analysis could be improved. In addition, each of the intervention programs reinforced the need for pre and post testing of students to determine the effectiveness of teaching and to identify areas that would need to be revisited.

Table 14: School leaders' perceptions of the extent to which training in the use of student outcomes data during the NPLN has enhanced practice

	Not at all (%)	Little extent (%)	Moderate extent (%)	Great extent (%)
Whole school planning in literacy/numeracy	2	9	48	41
Stage-wide planning in literacy/numeracy	5	7	43	45
Classroom program development	2	13	56	29
Effective classroom teaching of literacy/numeracy	2	7	57	34
Use of individualised learning plans	2	21	47	30
Dialogue between teachers about effective pedagogy	2	16	47	36

Table 14 above shows that the NPLN has significantly increased the use of data to inform teachers' practice, and that the impact of this training has been sustained through 2013 (supported in many instances by continuing emphasis from initiatives with similar goals, such as Best Start and the NSW Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan). The impact in NPLN schools was particularly evident in relation to whole school and stage based planning. As reflected in Table 8 above, while the impact was still positive overall, impact on development of individual learning plans occurred to a lesser extent.

4.3 Impact on student learning outcomes

The ongoing impact of the NPLN has been identified using two principal sources of data: analysis of NAPLAN results and teacher judgments of student performance in class-based assessments and other behavioural observations. Each of these sources of evidence is considered in turn below.

4.3.1 Trends in NAPLAN Scores – NPLN Schools vs Rest of NSW

The following Tables and Figures track changes in average NAPLAN scores in NPLN schools and schools in the rest of NSW over 2008 to 2013, extending the time series beyond the immediate funding period of the NPLN initiative. In interpreting this data, it must be remembered that the NPLN was essentially implemented over a 15 month period in schools. As discussed in the Phase 1 and Phase 2 reports, embedding changes of the magnitude sought by the NPLN takes time, and may not be immediately evident in student outcomes scores.

NAPLAN data for 2008 was used when selecting schools eligible for the NPLN and is included here for comparative purposes, representing the situation "before" the implementation of NPLN. The data from 2008 illustrates the size of the difference in average outcomes for students in NPLN schools in NSW compared to other schools across the state. There is some debate about extent to which the 2008 scores are a valid baseline against which to measure

any impact of initiatives over time, as the 2009 and beyond data may reflect changes in the way that results were scaled in the process of calibrating NSW results to a national NAPLAN scale. For this reason, 2009 data may be more appropriately considered as the baseline for analysing change over time within cohorts. It is also acknowledged that since the first full year of implementation was not until 2010, the Year 3 NAPLAN results will largely reflect influences from their K-2 learning before the NPLN commenced. While the NPLN was officially targeted at Years 3-6, it is known from interviews with schools and regional facilitators that the great majority in fact included all teachers K-6 in professional learning and other aspects of the initiative. It is therefore valid to consider post-2011 Year 3 NAPLAN scores as one indicator of the impact of the initiative.

As funding for NPLN initiatives concluded in 2011, the NAPLAN scores for 2012 can be seen as indicators of literacy and numeracy improvements sustained beyond the immediate life of the initiative. However, caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions regarding long-term future trends on the basis of the inclusion of 2012 NAPLAN data alone. Not all year-to-year changes reflect changes in cohort performance or in program effects.

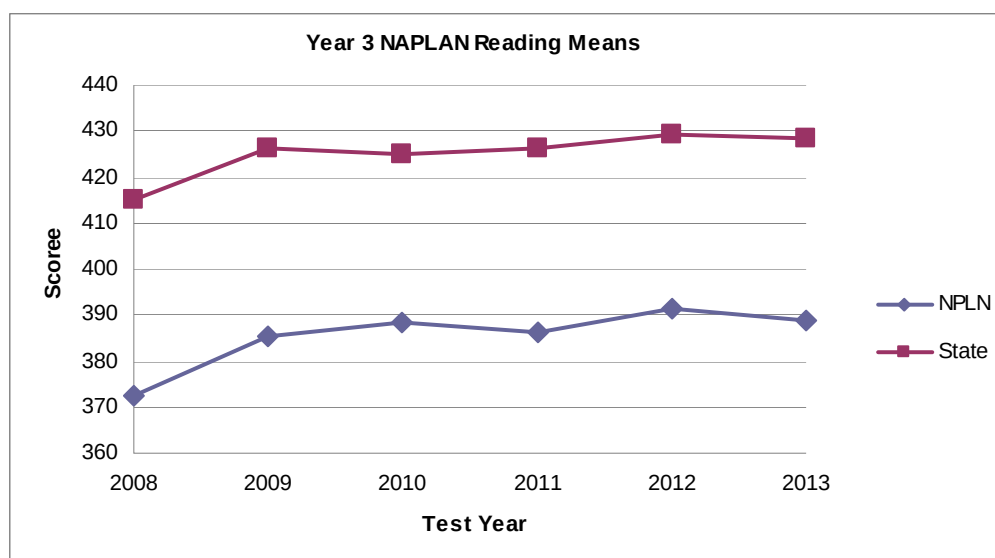
To strengthen the evidence base, a number of different measures of literacy and numeracy performance in Year 3 and Year 5 are considered in the analysis below. These measures include:

- mean NAPLAN scores;
- the percentage of the students *below* minimum standards, and *at or below* minimum standards; and
- mean growth of reading and numeracy scores for students over time.

Reading scores: Year 3 and Year 5 from 2008 - 2013

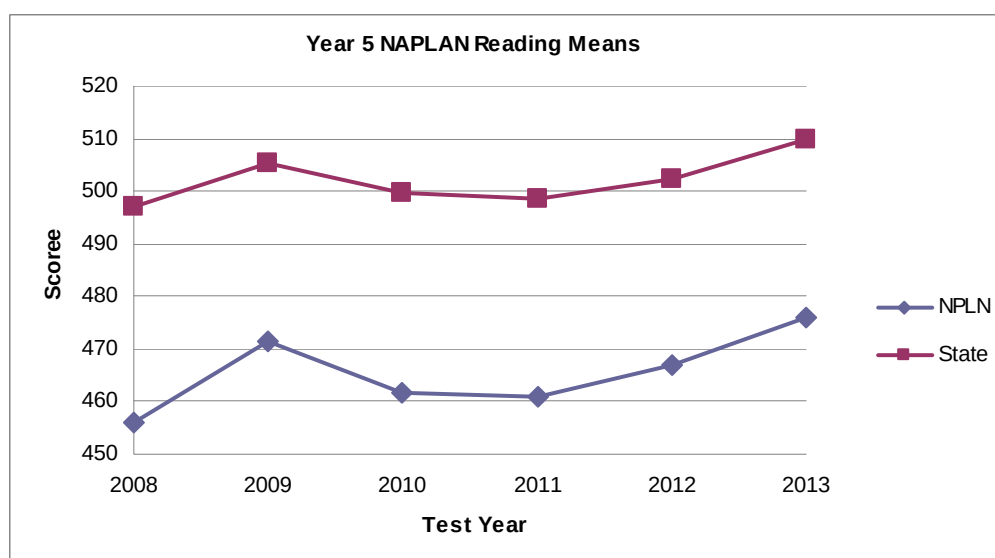
Figure 5 (below) shows that average Reading scores for Year 3 NPLN schools have not changed significantly since 2009. As noted above, there are some limitations to extent that Year 3 data in the early years of the initiative reflect the impact of the NPLN. The increase between 2008 and 2009 is thought to largely be attributed to changes in the way the NAPLAN scores were scaled rather than any increase in Reading performance. Year to year variations since 2009 have generally not been statistically significant. The gap in average Reading scores between NPLN schools and the rest of NSW is as large as it was before the NPLN commenced. The gap in performance for Year 3 students in Reading is both statistically and educationally significant. During the period of the NPLN, scores for this group were generally on an upward trend (as they were for students elsewhere in NSW). However, in 2013, Year 3 Reading scores were lower than in 2012 for both for NPLN schools and all other schools across the state. The decline is not statistically significant, and may not be representative of an emerging trend.

Figure 5: Year 3 NAPLAN Reading, NPLN schools vs Rest of NSW, 2008-2013



Year 5 NAPLAN Reading scores (Figure 6, below) demonstrate similar trends in that the average Year 5 Reading score has increased since 2008 in NPLN schools *and* in other schools in NSW (after an unexpected decline in 2010 and 2011).

Figure 6: Year 5 NAPLAN Reading, NPLN schools vs Rest of NSW, 2008-2013



The rate of improvement since 2010 appears somewhat greater in NPLN schools than those elsewhere across NSW although not to a statistically significant extent on a year by year basis. It would be difficult to conclude from this data that the NPLN had any impact on the average results for the Year 5 cohort in Reading. The gap between students in NPLN schools and other schools in NSW remains significant. Given that the emphasis of the NPLN was supposed to be on Years 3-6, it might be expected that it would (if successful) have a greater impact on Year 5 results than Year 3 results. This appears to be the case, and a continuation of current trends would be a very positive outcome, even though the improvement may not be a direct result of the NPLN. Nonetheless, the size of the gap suggests that further work

remains to be done to address the differential in performance between NPLN and other schools in Reading.

An alternative way of looking at the relative NAPLAN performance of students in NPLN schools and the rest of the state is to examine the percentage of students in each of these groups who do not meet the national minimum standard in Reading. This analysis reflects on how the NPLN may have impacted on students who score at the lower end of the NAPLAN assessments, rather than the average discussed in the figures above.

Figures 7 and 8 show that, in general, the percentage of students in NPLN schools who are below the NAPLAN minimum benchmark score for Reading has decreased over time since 2008. The results for 2009-2012 indicate stronger NAPLAN performance in the NPLN schools than for the 2008 baseline year, and since 2011 the percentage of students below the national minimum standard has continued to fall. In 2013, the percentage of students below minimum standard in all schools, including NPLN schools is the lowest it has ever been in the time period considered. It is likely that this result is more a reflection of other more recent initiatives than it does the NPLN. While the gap in performance between NPLN schools and non-NPLN schools has clearly closed since 2008 at Year 3 level, the percentage of students below the National Minimum Standard (NMS) at NPLN schools remains nearly double that of students in other schools across NSW.

Figure 7: Year 3 NAPLAN Reading - Percent of students below National Minimum Standards, 2008-2013

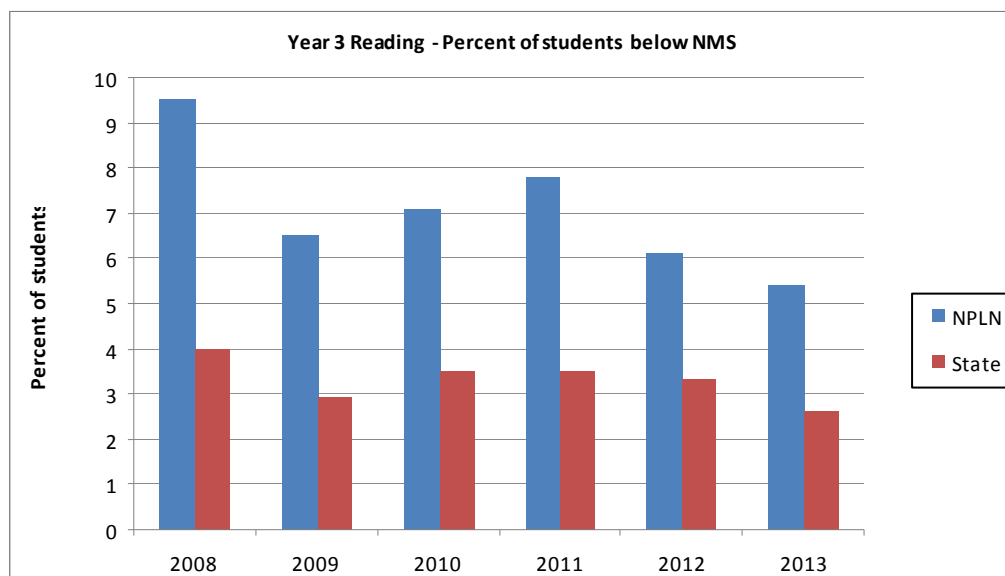


Figure 8 (below) indicates that there has been an overall decrease in the percentage of Year 5 students below the national minimum standard in NPLN schools since 2008. The results for 2013 for students in all schools, including NPLN are markedly different than in previous years, with a significant reduction in the percentage of students below the National Minimum Standard.

Figure 8: Year 5 NAPLAN Reading - Percent of students below National Minimum Standards, 2008-2013

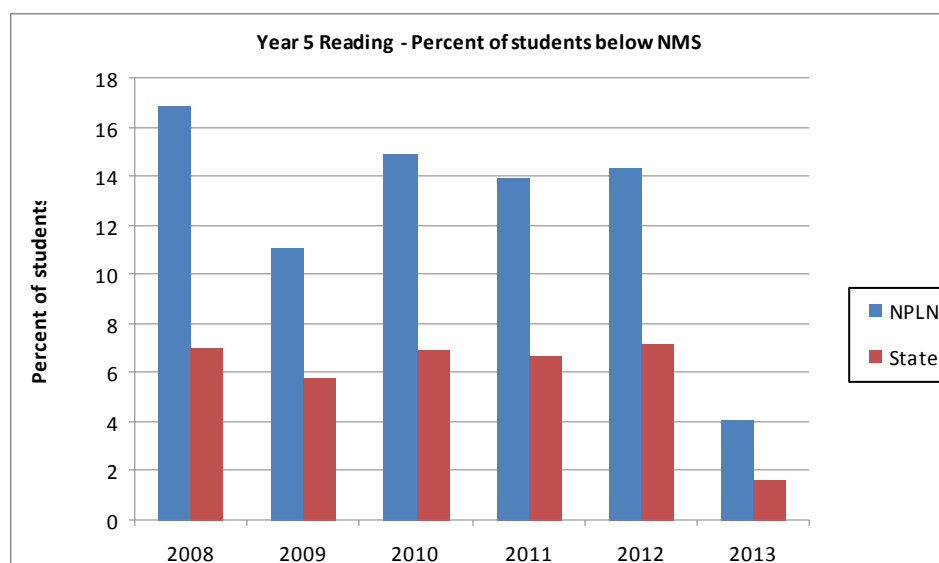


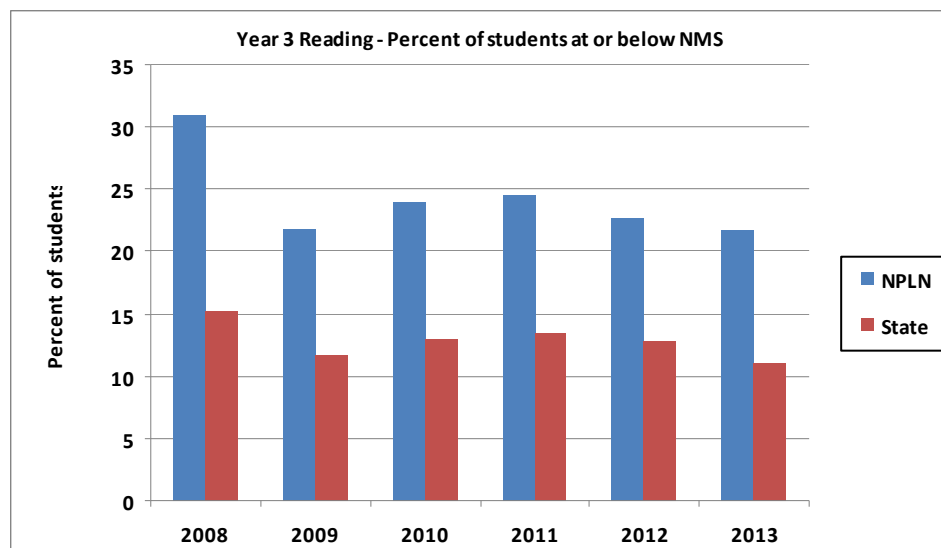
Figure 8 demonstrates that the percentage of Year 5 students in NPLN schools who are below the national minimum standard in Reading remains significantly greater than for the rest of NSW in 2013. The percentage of students below the benchmark has decreased significantly in NPLN schools in 2013, however, the percentage of students in other schools below the benchmark also fell significantly. Less than 2 per cent of students in Year 5 in the rest of NSW are now achieving NAPLAN Reading scores below the benchmark, compared to 4 per cent of students in NPLN schools. Given the equivalent figure in 2008 was more than 17 per cent, this represents a significant achievement, particularly if the trend is continued in future years. Whether the 2013 results reflect the impact of the NPLN is however, open to question, since the state wide trends follow a similar pattern.

As might be expected when examining results of students who are *at or below* the national minimum standard for Reading (rather than just students *below* the benchmark in Figures 7 and 8), the year-on-year variability is moderated by the greater proportion of students who are performing at the national minimum standard for Reading. This is evident in Figure 9 (below) by a more stable trend towards improvement in Year 3 Reading scores across 2008 to 2013. Nonetheless, as observed in other NAPLAN results for Year 3, the trend in 2013 is positive but similarly illustrates the extent of the challenge for the future. It may be unrealistic to expect that an initiative that ran in schools essentially for an 18 month period would be able to raise student learning outcomes in historically low performing schools to the same level as schools across the state. This data makes clear that if achieving equity of outcomes is the goal, further work remains to be done.

Figure 9 displays the ongoing performance gap between Year 3 students in NPLN schools and the rest of the state. However the gap in performance, and the relative distribution of performance (i.e., the ratio between scores in NPLN and Rest of State) that has reduced slowly, yet consistently, over the period since the NPLN commenced. This trend has continued following the cessation of funding, and in 2013, the gap reduced to its smallest

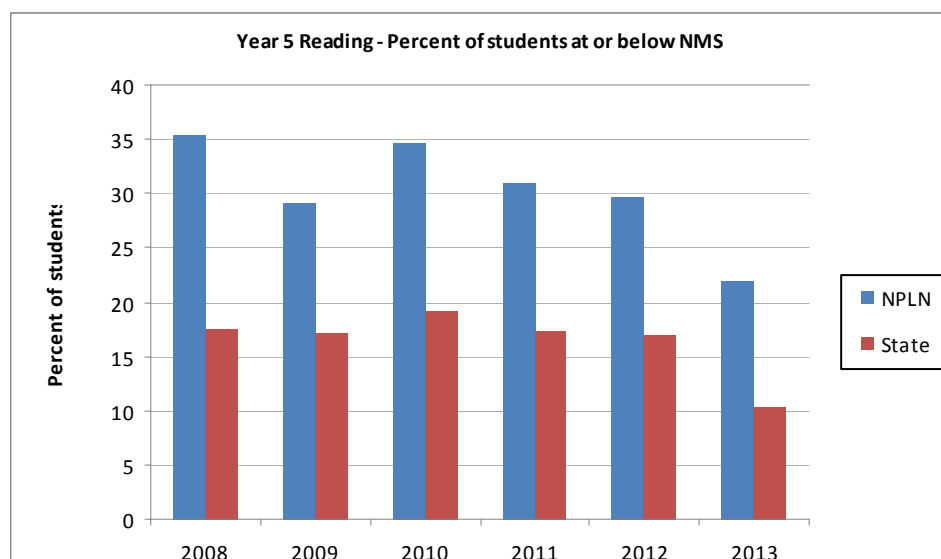
size since the commencement of the NPLN. The overall percentage of students below the minimum standard, in both NPLN schools and in NSW generally has reduced to 2009 levels. Close to 20 per cent of students in NPLN schools are reading at the minimum standard. The data in Figures 9 and 10 provide little evidence to suggest that the NPLN had any sustained impact on NAPLAN scores in Reading.

Figure 9: Year 3 NAPLAN Reading - Percent of students at or below National Minimum Standards, 2008-2013



Reading scores at or below national minimum standards for Year 5 students shows a similar trend to the Year 3 scores, evident in Figure 10 (below). The percentage of Year 5 students at or below the NMS fell by around 8 percentage points across NSW in 2013 to the lowest level in the time period measured, and also by a similar amount in NPLN schools. While the fall in the percentage of students below the NMS is welcome, it would be difficult to attribute this outcome to the impact of the NPLN alone, given the trends observed across NSW.

Figure 10: Year 5 NAPLAN Reading - Percent of students at or below National Minimum Standards, 2008-2013



Another valuable measure of performance over time is the average growth in students' scores between Year 3 and Year 5 as illustrated in Table 15 below. Table 15 indicates that reading growth scores for students in NPLN schools have been consistently greater than those in schools in the rest of NSW (and in 2013 the difference is statistically significant). Reflecting the continued improvement of Year 5 Reading scores, these results are the strongest evidence that the NPLN initiative has helped to improve Reading outcomes for students in the targeted schools. As noted above, a caveat on interpretation of the positive result in 2013 must be applied. While a positive finding, the improvement observed cannot be attributed to the NPLN alone; indeed, it may reflect cohort effects, or may reflect the ongoing contribution of funding from other sources to continue the strengthening of instructional leadership and teacher competence and confidence commenced during the NPLN.

Table 15: Mean Growth between Year 3 and Year 5, NPLN Schools vs Rest of State

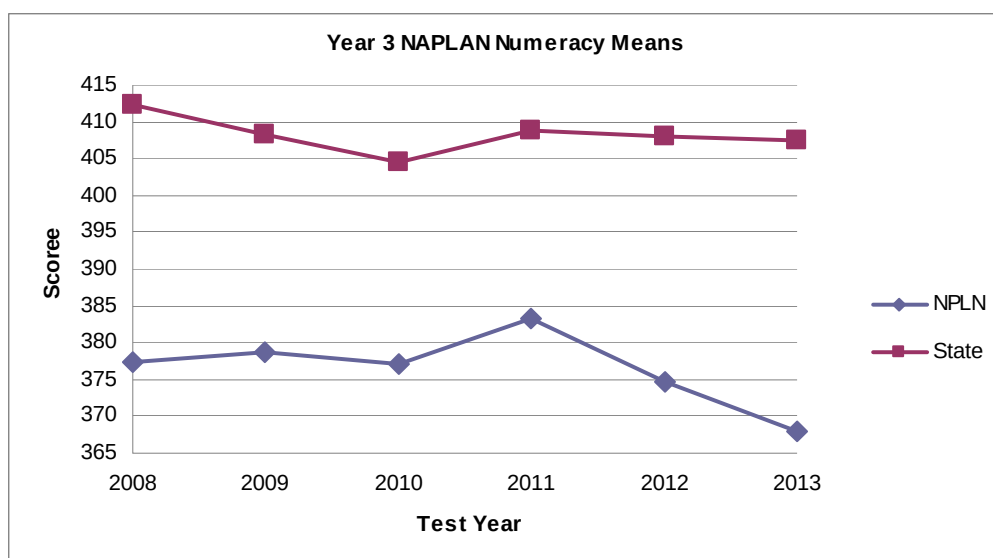
Matched students at same school	Mean Reading Growth	
	NPLN Schools	Rest of State
Year 3 Cohort 2008 / Year 5 2010	85.8	83.6
Year 3 Cohort 2009 / Year 5 2011	75.6	72.1
Year 3 Cohort 2010 / Year 5 2012	79.3	77.8
Year 3 Cohort 2011 /Year 5 2013	92.0	82.6

Numeracy scores: Year 3 and Year 5 from 2008 - 2013

The data shown in this section reflects the Numeracy outcomes for those schools that selected Numeracy as their focus during the NPLN. The Figures in this section below highlight how performance in Numeracy reflects different and often more complex trends than Reading. Figure 11 (below) shows that between 2008 and 2011, average Year 3 NAPLAN Numeracy scores were relatively stable in NPLN schools while average scores declined in other schools in NSW. However, this peak in performance in 2011 was not sustained into 2012 when Numeracy scores declined and this decline was sharper in NPLN schools than across the rest of NSW.

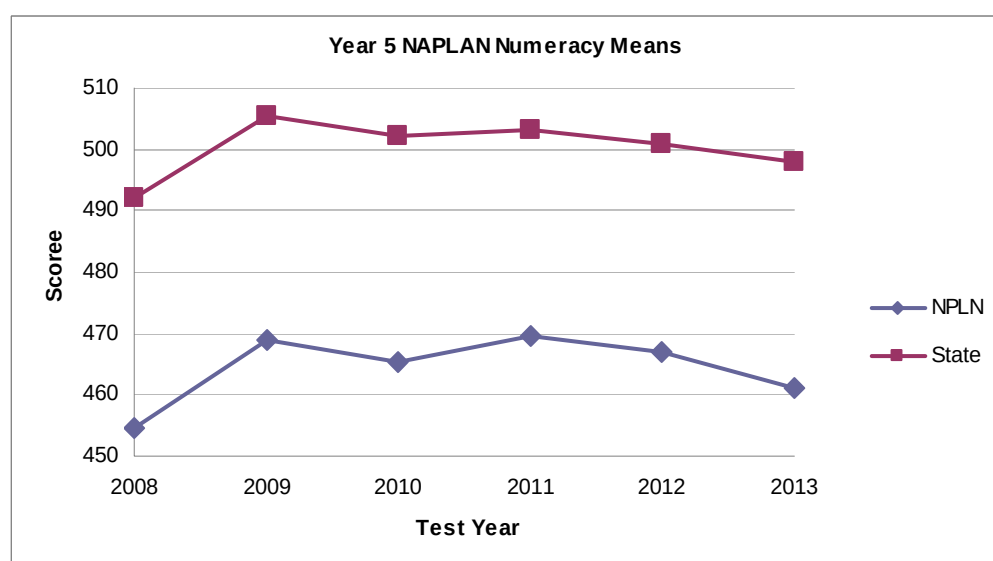
In 2013, this trend has continued, with further deteriorating performance in those NPLN schools that focussed on Numeracy in 2009-11. In interpreting this data, it must be remembered that only a relatively small number of schools (45 in total) were involved in Numeracy programs compared to Literacy programs. This caveat is a consequence of the tendency for particularly strong or weak performance in a small number of schools to have a greater apparent impact on the mean scores for that sample, than would be the case when a larger number of schools are considered, such as in the Rest of NSW sample. Despite this caveat, the trends in NPLN schools since 2011 present a cause for concern that required further investigation.

Figure 11: Year 3 NAPLAN Numeracy, NPLN schools vs Rest of NSW, 2008-2013



The results in Figure 11 indicate a general decline in the Year 3 Numeracy mean scale scores in both NPLN schools and the rest of NSW over the period 2008-2013 (especially since 2011). The year on year decline in NPLN schools since 2011 is significant, but has been stable in the rest of NSW (where year to year variations have not been statistically significant). Figure 11 highlights that the gap between NPLN Year 3 Numeracy scores and the rest of the state in 2013 remains large, and is in fact increasing (the gap has increased by more than 15 points since 2011). Why this has been so is not immediately apparent, although it might be noted that of all the programs funded by the NPLN, TOWN (the major Numeracy whole school program) was the least well regarded by Principals and rated as the least effective. However, since the NPLN has ceased, alternative programs for Year 3 students in NPLN schools do not appear to have been more successful, and perhaps even less so than TOWN.

Figure 12: Year 5 NAPLAN Numeracy, NPLN schools vs Rest of NSW, 2008-2013



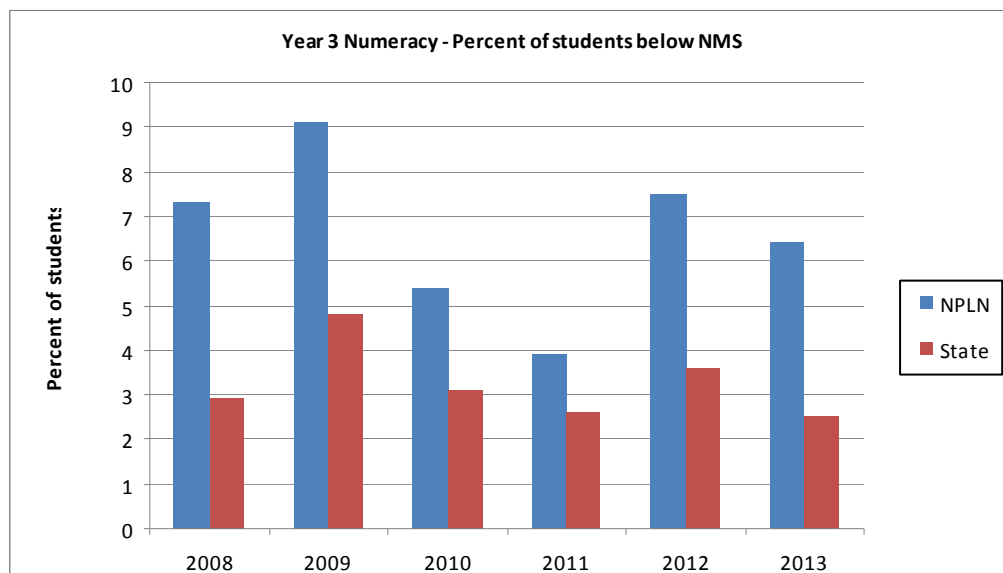
Trends for Year 5 Numeracy as shown in Figure 12 demonstrate that trends in average scores have tracked at roughly similar rates for students in NPLN schools and those across NSW. However, average Numeracy scores for Year 5 students have continued to decline in all schools since 2011, with the decline since 2012 greater in NPLN schools. The rate of decline for Year 5 students is not as great as for Year 3 students but is indicative of the need for further intervention and focus on numeracy in all NSW schools generally.

An alternative way of looking at the relative Numeracy NAPLAN performance of students in NPLN schools and elsewhere in NSW is to examine the percentage of students in each category who do not meet the national minimum standard in each learning area.

As with Reading scores, the Numeracy scores (Figures 13 and 14 below) indicate that, at all Year levels, the percentage of students below the national minimum standard remains considerably higher in NPLN schools than in the rest of NSW.

At Year 3 level (Figure 13), there has not been a consistent trend in the percentage of students who did not meet the minimum Numeracy benchmark between 2008 and 2013. Over this period, the trend for Year 3 Numeracy towards improving performance against the benchmark in NPLN schools has mirrored that for NSW as a whole. While there was a slight improvement in both NPLN schools and NSW as a whole in 2013 over the 2012 results, overall they have not returned to the same levels seen in 2010 and 2011.

Figure 13: Year 3 NAPLAN Numeracy - Percent of students below National Minimum Standards, 2008-2013



The increase in the percentage of Year 3 students below the Numeracy benchmark from 2011 to 2012 was evident in all schools across NSW, yet the rate of this increase was greater in NPLN schools. During the period when the NPLN was implemented (2010/11), the data in Figure 13 suggests that the percentage of students below the NMS fell to their lowest level, but increased when the initiative ceased (2012/13). This trend cannot be attributed to the NPLN alone, as a similar pattern of results was observed state wide. However, the rate of increase in the percentage of students below the numeracy benchmark in NPLN schools

after 2012 has been greater than in other schools. Why this may have occurred is open to speculation, but it should be noted that fewer schools continued with TOWN (the main Numeracy teaching program used in NPLN schools), perhaps resulting in a lesser emphasis on numeracy development in 20102/13.

It should be noted that as of 2013, a considerable performance gap between NPLN and schools across NSW in Year 3 Numeracy remains, and is as large as it was prior to the NPLN. While this one year decline in performance shown in 2012 and 2013 in Figure 9 may not be indicative of a negative trend, they do match the decline seen in the Numeracy mean scale scores discussed earlier (although the caveats about interpretation of effects in small sample sizes noted above also applies here). As such, it would be difficult to attribute any long term positive impact on NAPLAN Numeracy scores to the NPLN initiative. These results suggest that Numeracy remains an area that requires ongoing systemic intervention in future. This conclusion is further suggested in Figure 14 below. While the percentage of Year 5 students below the national minimum standard for Numeracy fell between 2008 and 2011, they have continued to increase in 2012 and 2013. The percentage of Year 5 students not achieving at the National Minimum Standard is greater in NPLN schools than it was in 2008, before the initiative commenced. While the percentage of students in non-NPLN schools also increased in 2012 and 2013, the rate of increase has not been as great as in NPLN schools.

As noted in regards to Figure 13 the continued decline in performance shown in Figure 14 may point to the challenge of stabilising performance and embedding sustainable improvements over time. It would appear from Figure 14 that when the NPLN ceased, the proportion of Year 5 students below the National Minimum standard began to increase. This suggests that not only was any positive impact of the NPLN not sustained, but also that the way that Numeracy is being taught in the schools choosing Numeracy as a focus during the NPLN has not been more effective. Care needs to be taken in interpreting this data as only a relatively small number of students are involved, so year to year variations may not reflect the impact of systematic factors.

Figure 14: Year 5 NAPLAN Numeracy - Percent of students below National Minimum standards, 2008-2013

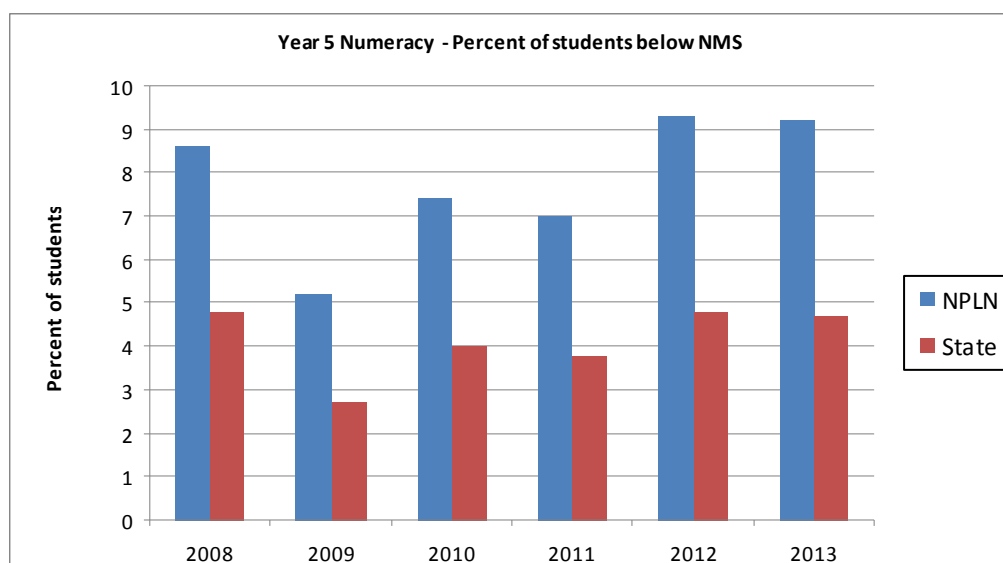


Figure 15 shows a similar trend to that observed above. The percentage of students at or below the benchmark has tended to decrease in Year 3 Numeracy in schools across NSW since 2009—a welcome result. However, this trend was not sustained in NPLN schools in 2013. The percentage of students at or below the NMS in NPLN schools has remained fairly static in NPLN schools since 2009. These results provide further evidence that the NPLN Numeracy interventions have not had a sustained positive impact.

Figure 15: Year 3 NAPLAN Numeracy - Percent of students at or below National Minimum Standards, 2008-2013

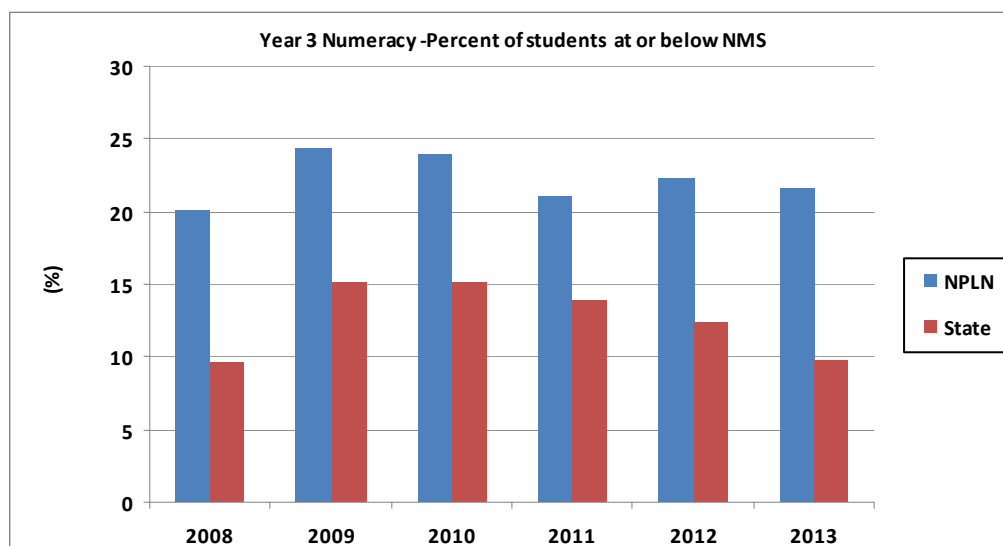
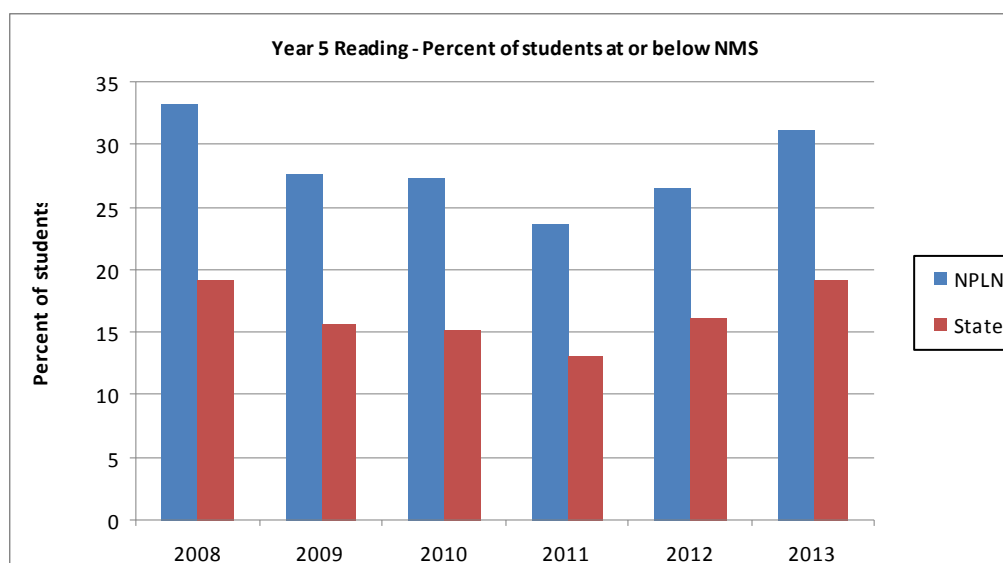


Figure 16 shows that trends in relation to the percentage of students at or below the Year 5 Numeracy National Minimum Standard are similar in NPLN and non NPLN schools. After an early improvement, in 2012 and 2013 the percentage of students at and below the standard has increased. The gap between target and non-target schools is large and has been maintained.

Figure 16: Year 5 NAPLAN Numeracy - Percent of students at or below National Minimum Standards, 2008-2013



Given the trends in NPLN are the same as those observed in non-NPLN schools, it is difficult from this data to ascribe any changes in year to year results to any particular intervention that formed part of the NPLN. It is more likely that the results reflect factors that are common across all schools. However, the 2013 data, which shows an increasing percentage of students at or below the NMS, suggests that a renewed focus on Numeracy state-wide may be warranted.

To shed more light on these trends, observing the average growth for students as they progress from Year 3 to Year 5 is another valuable measure of performance. Table 16 (below) shows the growth rates of students over two points in time (when in Year 3 and again in Year 5), and compares the growth within NPLN cohort to the rest of the state.

Table 16: Mean Numeracy Growth between Year 3 and Year 5, NPLN Schools vs Rest of State

Matched students at same school	Mean Numeracy Growth	
	NPLN Schools	Rest of State
Year 3 Cohort 2008 / Year 5 2010	84.2	89.1
Year 3 Cohort 2009 / Year 5 2011	91.0	93.8
Year 3 Cohort 2010 / Year 5 2012	92.7	96.7
Year 3 Cohort 2011 / Year 5 2013	77.4	88.2

These results indicate that growth scores for Numeracy tended on average to be lower in NPLN schools than other schools over the time period considered. The gap in average growth scores tended to be narrower for the 2009 and 2010 cohorts. However, growth scores have significantly declined in all schools for the 2011-13 cohort, but are significantly worse in NPLN schools. These figures would be expected from the significant decline in the 2013 mean scale score results.

On the whole, and as with Reading scores, the NPLN initiative has not significantly closed the gap in Numeracy between students who were in the lowest performing schools in 2008 and their peers in the rest of NSW.

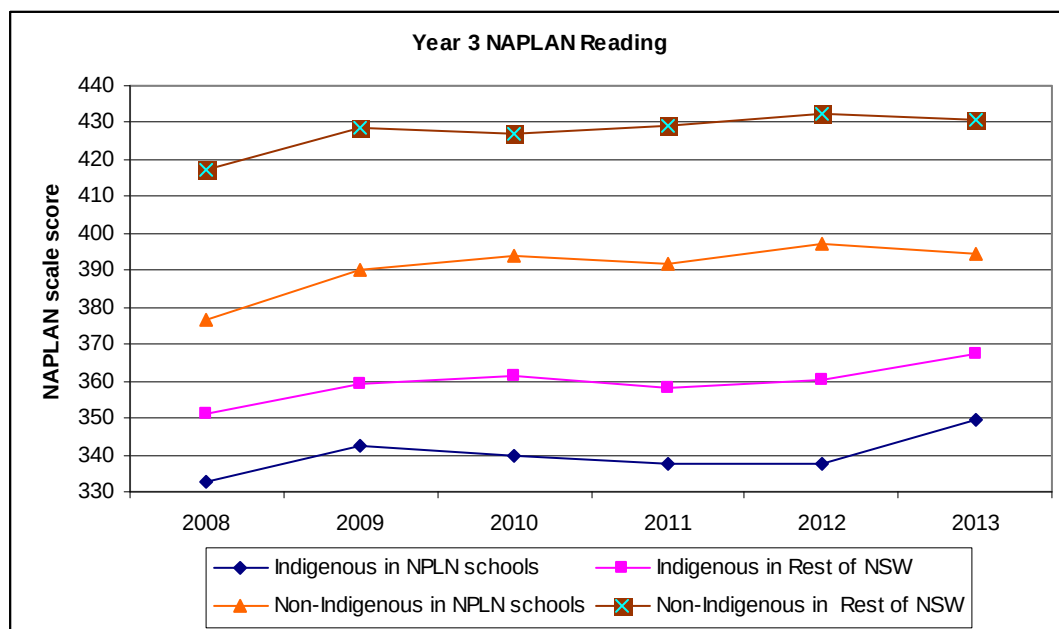
Trends in NAPLAN scores – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students

The following analysis presents trends in NAPLAN scores for ATSI and non-ATSI students, in NPLN schools and in schools in the rest of NSW. To supplement the observations made here, the Final Report for Phase 3 will extend this time series to include 2013 NAPLAN results.

ATSI Reading scores: Year 3 and Year 5 from 2008 – 2013

Figure 17 (below) highlights the significantly lower starting point for performance in Reading among Year 3 ATSI students, whether in NPLN schools or otherwise. Following a peak in average scores across the board in 2009, the performance of ATSI students across the rest of NSW has been relatively stable until 2013, when there was a significant improvement. This improvement occurred for ATSI students in both target and non-target schools, but has been greater in NPLN schools. The gap between ATSI and non-ATSI students has been reduced, but still remains significant. These are positive results, but given the state-wide trends, this improvement cannot be attributed to the NPLN, and may indeed not be sustained in 2014. As the number of ATSI students in NPLN schools is relatively small, interpretation of this data must be made with caution.

Figure 17: Year 3 NAPLAN Reading for ATSI and Non-ATSI students, 2008-2013

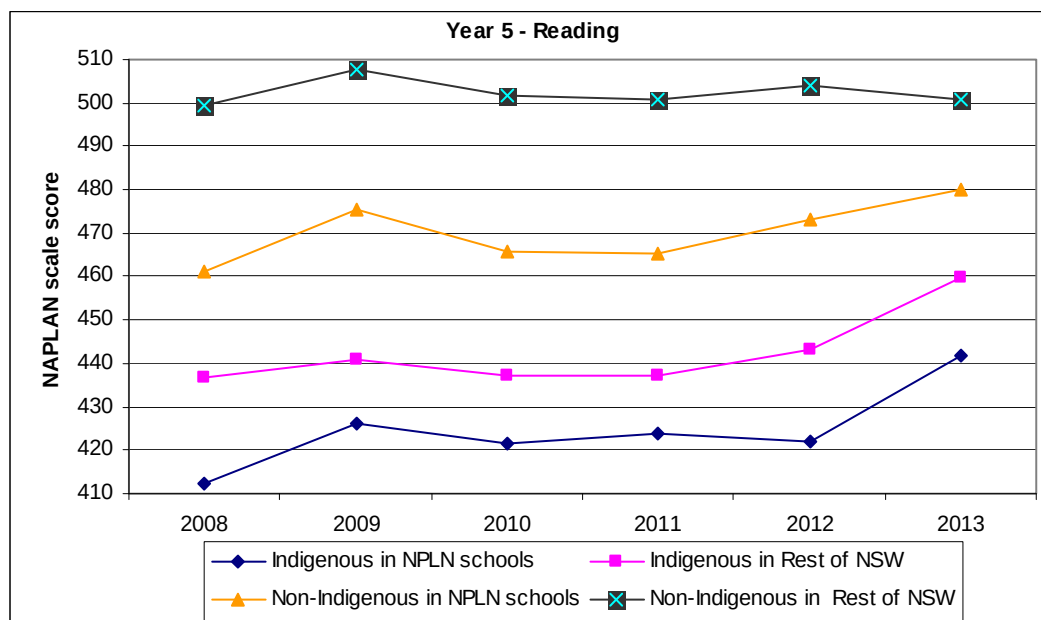


At the Year 5 level, NAPLAN Reading scores in Figure 18 (below) show a trend towards consistent improvement in Reading, for ATSI and non-ATSI students in both target and non-target schools.

Average Reading scores for non-ATSI students in Year 5, whether in NPLN schools or not, continue to be higher than for ATSI students. Scores for students in NPLN schools are, on average, lower for both ATSI and non-ATSI students relative to those scores for the students at schools in the rest of NSW. As with Year 3 Reading scores, Figure 18 indicates an increase in Year 5 average Reading scores in 2009 and the significant upturn in results for ATSI students in NPLN schools.

While the gap in performance between ATSI and non-ATSI students remains large, this gap was narrower for Year 5 Numeracy in 2013 than in previous years. It is not possible at this point to say whether this is part of a trend or a one-off result due to chance or some other factor. However, as for the Year 3 results, it would be unwise to attribute the changes in 2013 to the NPLN, although it may have made some contribution along with other initiatives. It is also inappropriate to place too much emphasis on one year's results, however the result is worthy of further investigation.

Figure 18: Year 5 NAPLAN Reading for ATSI and Non-ATSI students, 2008-2013



ATSI Numeracy scores: Year 3 and Year 5 from 2008 - 2013

Over the period of 2008 to 2013, the trends in Year 3 NAPLAN Numeracy results for ATSI students. As the total number of students in NPLN Numeracy schools was relatively small compared to those engaged in Reading the results need to be viewed with caution. Despite these caveats, Figure 19 (below) indicates that the average Numeracy scores for ATSI students in NPLN schools rose significantly between 2008 and 2011. Indeed, 2011 marks a peak in performance across the board. However, while in 2013 Numeracy average scores for Year 3 students in NPLN schools declined significantly, results for ATSI students actually improved, reversing the significant fall that occurred in 2012. Again, some caution needs to be placed on the interpretation of this data, as the number of ATSI students involved in the NPLN is small. Variation from year-to-year may be the result of chance rather than a reflection of the systematic impact of any particular intervention.

The improvement of ATSI student Reading and Numeracy both in NPLN and non-NPLN schools suggests that some factors outside the NPLN initiative itself may have contributed to these results. Again, the recent improvements should not overshadow the reality that Year 3 ATSI Numeracy scores are worse than they were in 2008, particularly in NPLN schools. There has certainly not been a continuous improvement since the commencement of the NPLN. Despite the claimed achievements of the intervention programs used for Numeracy at program level, these improved outcomes would not appear to have contributed to improved NAPLAN results.

Figure 19: Year 3 NAPLAN Numeracy for ATSI and Non-ATSI students, 2008-2013

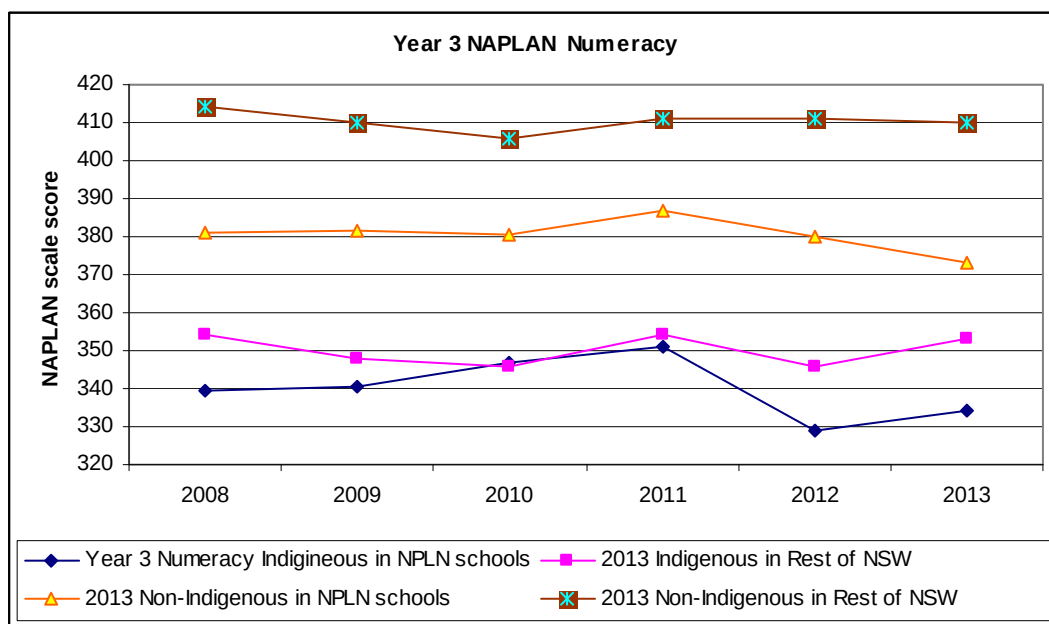
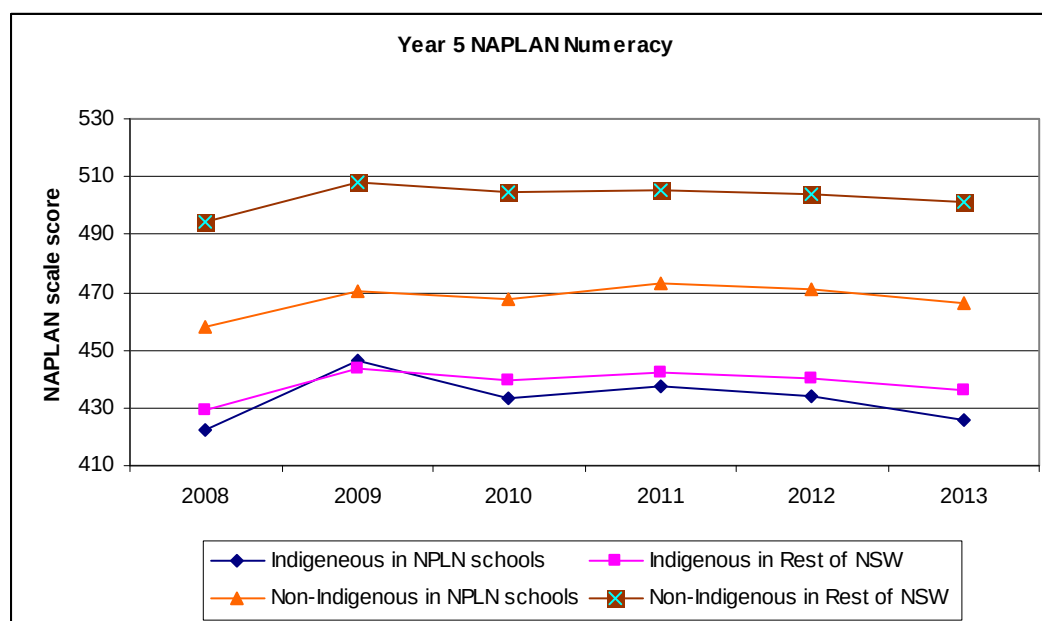


Figure 20 (below) shows trends in relation to NAPLAN Numeracy scores for Year 5 students, similar to those in Year 3, the key difference being the smaller one-year variation between 2011 and 2013. In addition, the gains seen at Year 3 level for ATSI students have not been observed for Year 5 students.

Over the period from 2008, the gap in Year 5 average numeracy performance between students, whether ATSI or non-ATSI, in NPLN schools and those elsewhere is largely unchanged. The year to year variations since 2010 in ATSI performance are generally not statistically different. The overall picture for Numeracy for all students in NPLN schools is not overwhelmingly positive, and it would be difficult to conclude that ATSI students exposed to a numeracy intervention during the NPLN received any benefit from this exposure in terms of how it has impacted on their NAPLAN performance. This is not to say that there may not been other beneficial impacts for these students that are not measured by NAPLAN.

Figure 20: Year 5 NAPLAN Numeracy for ATSI and Non-ATSI students, 2008-2013



When comparing the Reading and Numeracy results for ATSI students, it is clear that while different numbers of students are involved in the targeted schools for each subject area, it is also likely that the results do reflect differential program effects. While the NPLN may have led to general improvements in school culture and pedagogy in schools choosing to focus on Numeracy, these may not have been sufficient in and of themselves to impact on student learning outcomes.

4.3.2 Teacher Observations on student learning

Despite the modest gains in NAPLAN scores reported above, principals' surveyed believed that the NPLN had contributed to measured increases in literacy overall. The data in Table 15 below reflects the observations made in the case studies that there was considerable variability between NPLN schools: some had sustained significant gains, some had little or no sustained improvement, and in a small number of schools performance had declined. In the majority of schools, the most frequent comment from principals was that they had managed to reduce the number of students performing at the lowest levels.

What is perhaps more important is that principals and teachers were able to discuss data about student learning in their school with some confidence—a situation they unanimously agreed would not have been possible before the NPLN. A variety of assessment regimes were used (in addition to NAPLAN), including a range of standardised tests such as the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) tests, Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (NARA), but also the Schedule for Early Numeracy Assessment (SENA) testing for Numeracy, and other forms of diagnostic interviews. In government schools in particular, the use of the Literacy and Numeracy Continua had achieved considerable impact in providing a framework for systematic and regular judgment of student progress against defined standards.

In Table 17 below, school based assessments reflect findings from the NAPLAN analysis and from the 2011 evaluation results: that sustainable outcomes for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) students, Aboriginal students, students with learning difficulties and behavioural problems made less progress than students overall.

Table 17: Extent to which measured outcomes in Literacy have been sustained

	Not at all (%)	Little extent (%)	Moderate extent (%)	Great extent (%)
Student outcomes, overall	3	21	62	14
Culturally and linguistically diverse students	3	47	44	6
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students	3	31	53	13
Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	3	30	57	10
Students with behavioural issues	3	37	54	5
Boys	3	19	73	5
Girls	3	22	68	8

Table 18 below suggests similar findings for numeracy: that school based assessments of student outcomes show moderate gains in the majority of schools. However, the disparities between population groups do not appear to be as great for numeracy as for literacy (a result not substantiated by the NAPLAN data). However, in interpreting the survey data in Table 18, it must be remembered that only a relatively small number of schools participating in the NPLN focussed on Numeracy.

Table 18: Extent to which measured outcomes in Numeracy have been sustained

	Not at all (%)	Little extent (%)	Moderate extent (%)	Great extent (%)
Student outcomes, overall	7	10	67	17
Culturally and linguistically diverse students	9	17	70	4
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students	4	11	71	14
Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities	7	14	69	10
Students with behavioural issues	7	11	75	7
Boys	7	4	79	10
Girls	7	4	79	10

Table 19 below shows a similar pattern to results obtained in 2011. In the majority of schools responding to the survey and visited for the case studies, principals and teachers believed the new approaches to teaching and learning instituted during the NPLN had led to

sustained changes in student behaviour. As seen in Table 19 below, these changes occurred to a great extent in about one-quarter of schools, and to a moderate extent in around half of the schools. This increase in behaviour was manifested through greater engagement in class, resulting in fewer disruptions to lessons, which in turn increased student enthusiasm for schooling and most strikingly, students' confidence in their own ability. Table 19 shows that student confidence increased to a moderate or great extent in 87 per cent of schools.

Table 19: Extent to which NPLN has impacted on students' behaviour

	Not at all (%)	Little extent (%)	Moderate extent (%)	Great extent (%)
Student attendance at school	7	32	37	24
Student behaviour	10	17	50	23
Cooperation among students in class	7	16	58	19
Student motivation and engagement	4	11	58	27
Student confidence in their learning abilities	4	9	71	16

Part of the explanation for this increased confidence may come from the more explicit teaching strategies so that learning intentions are now clear for students. The development of shared language for between students and teachers may also help students to be able to express learning needs more appropriately. Likewise, the emphasis on students taking greater responsibility for their own learning in the NPLN may also be having an effect.

An illustration of this comes from the practice observed in many schools in the case studies. One teacher described it this way:

"We begin every lesson with a discussion of the learning intentions. Students now understand what this term means. I write the learning intention on the blackboard so that students can refer back to this while they work. I end each lesson with a recap to prompt students to think about whether the learning intentions have been achieved. This way, everyone knows what they are supposed to be achieving as the outcome of the lesson, rather than simply being busy. Because we have a shared language about learning now, students feel much more comfortable about asking questions if they don't understand something".

Impact on Other Key Learning Areas

Both at the time of the NPLN and in 2013 there is some evidence from case study schools of the use of the same pedagogical principles used in literacy and numeracy in other Key Learning Areas (KLAs). This finding is important, because it reflects the broader cultural change sought from the initiative over and above the use of specific intervention programs. Approaches to programming and planning based on evidence are an example of approaches

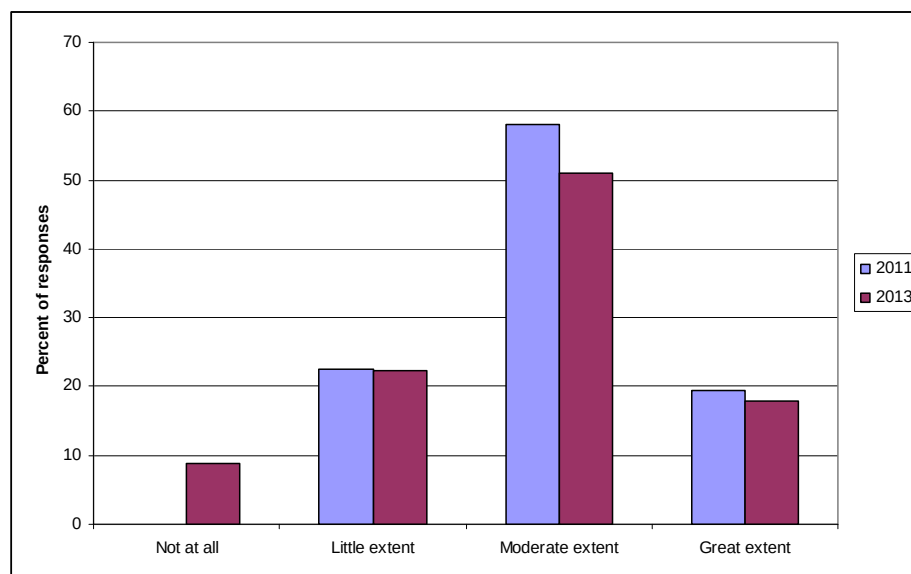
that have cross-curricular relevance. The increase in collaborative stage-based planning also provides an opportunity for reinforcement of scaffolded learning.

While the major focus has been on direct development of literacy and numeracy skills, in many schools the use of integrated units of work in which literacy and numeracy are reinforced through content drawn across the curriculum. In terms of generalising learnings from the current project, teachers consistently enjoy the opportunity to collaboratively plan not just literacy and/or numeracy but are now actively engaged in developing cross curriculum themes and units across a wide range of key learning areas.

Classroom teachers also report that, where relevant, they more consistently engage in what they describe as an “explicit teaching” approach to their pedagogy. Participation in the initiative has ensured that they understand the importance of identifying at the outset key learning outcomes for students, based on ongoing data and specific student results. Moreover they have adopted an approach to pedagogy that directly targets key learning points, with appropriate resources to ensure that learning is focused to maximise the opportunity for students.

Figure 21 below shows that there has been about a 10 per cent decrease in the percentage of school leaders who perceived the NPLN had impacted on other KLAS between 2011 and 2013. This result in 2013 is consistent with the general dissipation of impact of the NPLN. It is positive, however, that the majority of schools still observe moderate or greater impact of the NPLN across KLAS.

Figure 21: Extent to which school leaders believed the NPLN has had sustained impact on KLAS other than Literacy and Numeracy



Chapter 5: Factors influencing sustainability of NPLN Impact

This section of the report considers factors which have influenced the sustainability of the impact of the NPLN. It is important to note that the context in which the NPLN was delivered, and that which has developed since the cessation of the NPLN funding period. Across all systems and sectors, several other initiatives have commenced which aim to enhance teacher pedagogy, instructional leadership and evidence based practice (among other things). Some of these initiatives have included significant additional funding which have allowed release of teachers for professional learning, employment of specialist support staff, time release for planning and reflection, and for release of executive staff. This is particularly important in smaller schools where the principal may also have a classroom teaching role.

To provide a flavour for the kinds of impacts sustained in participating schools, four vignettes are provided below. The vignettes were chosen by the evaluators from among the case study schools visited as illustrative examples of the of the schools showing greater or lesser degrees of sustainability. The examples chosen are also illustrative of the dynamic nature of schools chosen for participation in the NPLN, and the range of factors that have impacted on the sustainability of the impacts sought by the initiative. The first vignette illustrates an unsuccessful experience, in which little trace of the NPLN initiative can now be identified. The case studies that follow represent more successful experiences. These latter case studies highlight the importance of the initiative being contextualised by schools as part of a broader school improvement process, which is focussed on cultural change from the outset. These case studies also illustrate the importance of staff empowerment and continuity of leadership orientation (if not identical personnel) in maintaining the momentum established during the initiative's funding period.

Case study 1.

This school had an acting principal in 2011 who was subsequently confirmed in the position, following the resignation of the former Principal in 2010 after a long period of absence. There is now only one other teacher who was in the school at the time of the NPLN. Only two of the present staff are permanent, and three others are casuals. Both former Assistant principal positions have been abolished. Enrolment in this school has significantly declined over time. The school population is also highly transient, and over 55 per cent of students are Aboriginal.

The school receives additional funding for the Aboriginal students and will receive more in future. The school also received funding from the Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership for two years for the appointment of a Highly Accomplished Teacher (HAT) during the same time period as the NPLN, but who has since left the school. The current principal believes this resource had insignificant long term benefit, largely because of the person involved. The school had employed a large number of support teachers using National Partnership funds, but these have all been discontinued.

None of the current staff are still using Accelerated Literacy, which was the main program used

during the NPLN. Only one of the current teachers was trained in this methodology. While some positive results were attributed to the program, they were not at the level they needed to be and not thought to be likely to improve in future. In retrospect, the choice of Accelerated Literacy was seen to be a poor one as it did not provide a good fit with students' real needs. Multilit (which was the intervention program used during the NPLN) has also been totally abandoned this year, as the results were not being achieved for the investment made in it. The funds formerly allocated to these interventions are now being used to employ a Support Teacher Learning Assistance (STLA). For the past two years the school has not been using individual student withdrawal interventions but used small group in-class support with the STLA (a trained teacher) rather than untrained assistants. This has led to vastly improved results.

It was believed that the NPLN had done very little to change the culture of teaching in this school in itself – Accelerated Literacy was seen as an add-on rather than a replacement of previous practices. The changes that have come in recent years were not a direct result of the National Partnership. For example, in 2013, the staff have a greater level of input to school decision making, largely as a consequence of the management style of the current Principal, who did have experience in the implementation of the NPLN but in another capacity.

The school has now adopted Focus on Reading, which provides a framework for going forward and has provided good professional learning for all current staff (using the professional learning model of the NPLN but not funds from that source). This has provided a consistent focus rather than one-off professional development for individuals.

It has been evident to the current principal that the only way that enhanced results and changed culture would be achieved in this school was if the principal seized the initiative from the outset and used the resources to achieve strategic outcomes. When the Principal and executive did not embrace and lead change in the past, the reforms attempted were not successful. For this reason, it was decided that close systemic monitoring and support was required which is consistent across the school s from the outset. This external focus is necessary to ensure there is accountability for decision making.

The greatest weakness of the NPLN in this school, according to the Principal, was that only superficial changes happened at the classroom and whole school level. Teachers participated only in the minimum amount of required professional learning. He believed that the culture in the school that had developed as a result of their experience with a host of previous short-term programs led teachers to see the NPLN as simply “the latest bucket of funding to support the latest fad”. It was not used as a tool for wider change. This resulted from some poor decision making relating to the use of funds, the people employed, and a failure to embrace the theoretical frameworks underpinning the school improvement model inherent in the NPLN. Most of this, in turn, can be attributed to the absence of sustained leadership in the school at the time the NPLN was operating. There remains very little of lasting benefit in this school from the investment provided by the NPLN or the programs adopted at that time. Going forward will require ongoing, stable leadership in the school and considerable systemic support. While progress has been made, the school remains little advanced on the situation before the NPLN commenced in 2008.

Case study 2

This school appointed a new principal in 2013—the second since the school was visited in 2011. It also has a new Deputy Principal (appointed from within the school). The former Literacy/Numeracy coordinator and a significant number of the teachers who took part in the NPLN training have also left the school. 20 per cent of teachers were on maternity leave, replaced by casual teachers.

The school took part in the NPLN Focus on Reading program. It also received funding from the low SES National Partnership after the NPLN ceased.

One executive teacher and a classroom teacher who had been in the school during the implementation of the NPLN took part in the interview.

The school used Low SES funding to maintain the Literacy Coordinator position for a short while after the NPLN ceased, but this has now been discontinued. However, Focus on Reading has been continued, and the teachers interviewed believed that the essence of that program remains, in that the use of common language about teaching and learning, use of the Literacy Continuum, programming in short cycles, use of data and collaborative working continue to be common practice in the school. (It was stated that none of these practices were the norm before the NPLN).

The teachers interviewed believed that some broader benefits from the NPLN were also identifiable. For example, it was believed that all teachers still feel more accountable to each other and base their programs on data from the Literacy and Numeracy Continua. The quality of activities and resources inspired by the NPLN has also continued. Focus on Reading changed the way that teachers think about teaching; the nature of collaboration and the high degree of consistency of approach across classes have also continued. The Assistant Principals have congruent expectations about teaching and learning in Years 3-6, which have helped to maintain these changes.

A significant factor contributing to the retention of these changes was thought to have derived from the credibility of the Focus on Reading program, which also helped bring credibility to the stress on changing pedagogical practices. The emphasis on all teachers participating in the initiative was also seen as contributing to the changes becoming embedded practice. No-one was exempt from participation. This was evident in the assistance given to the cultural change process by having all staff look intensively at the data on performance—previously this was an executive-only activity. By doing so, it became obvious to all that the school was underperforming and that what they were doing at the time was not working. In the past, it was believed that many of the staff had a sense of denial about NAPLAN results, or else “blamed” the students’ socio-economic circumstances as the cause of their poor results.

The situational analysis undertaken at the outset using the Analytic Framework has thus been continued, but not as frequently as during the NPLN. However, all staff (rather than just executive) are now required to participate in some aspect of whole school planning. Each staff member is part of a team responsible for one priority area. This sense of inclusion (commenced during the NPLN) has helped staff feel part of the decision making process. The teaching staff now has a much greater sense of ownership of whole school operation. Having a shared language, shared understanding and shared responsibilities has been important in contributing to this.

The emphasis on a theoretical framework was also thought to have been important in giving coherence to teaching, so teachers did not feel as though they were implementing a series of isolated activities. This involved teachers giving up some long established but ultimately unsuccessful practices. However, the NPLN experience had shown them the importance of considering the outcomes of what they were doing (using student data) and thus had a better understanding of why certain decisions were being made.

Programming now happens on a 10 lesson cycle—teachers have shared goals and outcomes as a stage. A much higher quality range of learning activities, such as use of hands-on materials for problem solving challenges, is now used (linked to the Continuum), rather than simply a succession of photocopied worksheets. There has been a big shift from superficial learning to deep learning—also a lot more differentiated teaching (catering to different students' needs within the classroom). The executives interviewed believed that now teachers know what they are teaching, why they are teaching (a particular concept), what they want students to achieve, and what will happen next, both for individual students and the whole class. There is still an emphasis on explicit teaching, telling students more explicitly what they are doing and what they will get out of it, and why they are doing it. Teachers are sharing ideas for activities more openly. (It should be noted that all of these things formed part of the philosophy of Focus on Reading commenced during the NPLN, but have continued to be supported by other initiatives of the DEC, such as Best Start, L3 and support for the Literacy and Numeracy Continua, which have helped to maintain sustainability).

Peer observations (begun during the NPLN) have been continued using Low SES funds. It is now a much more structured process in which Assistant Principals work with teachers 2 days per week – either observing lessons, team teaching, or demonstrating lessons. This is linked to teachers' annual professional learning plan, and contributes to ongoing analysis of stage strengths and weaknesses—using joint planning and discussion with structured follow up to address identified issues. The process is documented in the sense that teachers are asked to identify good ideas and practices, not just passively observe modelled lessons. There is a strong expectation that all teachers will participate in this process, no matter how many years they have been teaching.

The staff interviewed believed that none of the above would have changed without the extra funds from both the NPLN and low SES NP, to buy teacher release time and to access external profession learning. They believed that now the National Partnerships have ended, they will have to considerably scale back the intensity of collaborative practices, but will use school funds to continue some mentoring processes as they see the benefits that this has produced.

Their overall conclusion was that the NPLN gave the school a good start for their cultural change journey, but without the additional funds from other sources would not have had the same impact. Continuity of the Assistant Principal team and their enthusiasm for Focus on Reading has helped the new Principal to maintain the momentum. However, managing staff changes has been a major challenge. The willingness of the new principal to listen to staff and to recognise past efforts, not impose a new regime was also credited with sustaining the changes commenced during the NPLN.

Case Study 3

This school has the same executive team they had for the final year of the NPLN in 2011. There have been no significant changes to the teaching staff but a few beginning teachers have been appointed in 2013. Enrolment is steady (whereas other local schools have declining enrolments). The school received some additional funding after cessation of the NPLN through the ILNNP extension program. The school has subsequently implemented the Language, Literacy and Learning (L3) program.

This school used TOWN during the NPLN. This has now been discontinued but they have kept the principles underpinning the program. For example, they have continued the emphasis on scaffolded learning and use of hands on materials. This has now become “part of what we do”. Regular classroom visits, collaborative teaching, staff meetings and discussions have also continued and reinforce good practice. According to the principal, these things would not have happened five years ago, as staff were very assertive in their belief that “professionalism” meant they could make individual, unsupervised decisions about their practice. The money from the NPLN was considered to have been essential in buying time for team building. Since then, the principal has continued the processes commenced during the NPLN using school funds, but on a reduced scale.

Use of data has improved and continues, reinforced by the Literacy and Numeracy Continua. Two staff meetings per term lead a discussion of data relating to student progress against the continua. Data for every student is recorded electronically 8 times per year. Staff meetings discuss how the staff intend to respond to this data. Close monitoring of every student now takes place.

Teachers have a much greater sense of collective responsibility than they did before the NPLN as a consequence of these shared discussions about student performance. Every teacher is expected to contribute ideas as to how identified weaknesses in teaching practice can be overcome, thus feel greater ownership of results both positive and negative. This process has become intrinsic to how the school operates, which is evidenced by the dialogue heard in the staffroom. They describe it as “everyone wants to know what other teachers are doing. It’s like building bricks, everyone contributes”.

The continued employment of the same principal and Numeracy Coordinator has helped to provide momentum and coherence to the vision for how the school would develop. The Principal has explicitly kept a strong focus on the change journey, which was understood as the main goal of the NPLN, and believes that teachers would not now go back to their old practices. The original NPLN reform elements continue to have relevance in the school because they are seen to have worked in producing better quality teaching, better staff and student welfare, and (to a lesser degree) improved student results.

Planning and programming is now based on student needs (based on the Continua), making learning much more purposeful. The Principal is confident that the use of particular teaching strategies by individual teachers is now done for a reason, not just to keep children busy and quiet. In the past, lessons most often consisted of children competing worksheets, and the workbook was the de facto curriculum. Now, when worksheets are used it is for a particular purpose aligned to identified student needs. The staffroom discussions are now about what is good for students, not what makes teaching easier.

All teachers now want to know the NAPLAN results for the school, not just the Year 3 and 5 teachers. This is a distinct change from the past when there was active opposition to NAPLAN testing. All teachers in the school work as a team to set targets for achievement in the management plan based on student data. Prior to the NPLN, most of the teachers would not have known what was in the plan, and planning was done in isolation from consideration of student outcomes data. This has contributed to a greater sense of ownership. There is a strong sense, according to the Principal, that they are no longer “just going through the motions” in maintaining the status quo, reflecting a view that “teachers are there to make a difference”.

The Principal and Coordinator believed the research literature, in which the NPLN was based, was very important in providing the impetus and credibility to reinforce the leadership vision. They understood that it takes a team effort to bring about continued cultural change. The NPLN was empowering because it helped good teachers to have the confidence to do things differently from how it was done in the past. They knew that the negative pressure from other staff not to “rock the boat” was not right and that practices had to change. Gaining the support of these teachers at the outset helped to provide the momentum for change for the overall change effort.

An unexpected but important outcome from the changed pedagogy and emphasis on individual achievement has come about because of the improved relationships between children and teachers, rather than the adversarial relationships that existed in the past (a legacy of intergenerational culture in the school community). The focus on individual learning showed that teachers cared about individual students. They now explain what the purpose of each lesson is and why they are doing things—students are now more open about asking questions when they don’t understand something. The use of ongoing data collection has allowed identification of students who were struggling and who should have been high performing.

Overall, the executive interviewed believed that the change process would have occurred in the school anyway, but would have been much slower without the funding provided through the NPLN. The money allowed the Principal to reward teachers for their effort (through release time) to develop trust among the staff. The Principal has a strong role to play in providing instructional leadership, through visiting classrooms, attending professional development, supporting the facilitator, and questioning staff, but not in a top down way. The emphasis has always been on doing things together.

Support from parents for the changes has also been a facilitating factor. They can see that things are changing for the better. This has been shown through surveys of parents and student carried out by the school.. For all aspects of school management, evidence is now the basis for decision making.

The change process has been sustained also as a consequence of planning for this from the start. The executive have seen this as a five-year process (even though the NPLN was only funded for the first 2 years). They understood that the funding needed to be spent strategically to institutionalise changed work practices and understanding of the teachers’ roles in the school as a whole, not simply purchase resources or a new teaching program. The Principal believes that they have been largely successful in achieving this vision thus far.

Case Study 4

This Catholic School has had a declining enrolment over recent years, and is now catering for 170 students K-6, due both to declining numbers of school age children in the area and competition from other local schools. It has been implementing Flexible Learning Spaces and Focus 160 (a structured Literacy and Numeracy program) as diocesan initiatives in 2013. The Principal is leaving the school at the end of 2013. The school has received funding for an additional literacy teacher for 2 terms and \$24,000 for resources (the funding has been used to release the principal from her current classroom teaching load).

The school has had four Teacher Educators since the implementation of the NPLN in 2010 – three of whom were not considered by staff interviewed to have been very effective or appropriate appointments. Only 5 of the original staff from the time of the National Partnership are still in the school. According to the Principal, this has had both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, the increased teacher skill-base developed during the NPLN has been reduced, but on the other hand, it has presented the opportunity to employ some motivated and talented new staff.

Teacher capacity building is still happening in this school, although it is now through the Focus 160 program. The school had built up an extensive process of peer observation and collaborative planning during the NPLN. This is also continuing but to a lesser degree, and focussed now on numeracy rather than literacy. The change is due to a better understanding of school needs, as numeracy has emerged as a higher priority than at the time of the NPLN.

The greatest legacy of the NPLN is that teachers now have a greater depth of understanding of their students' capabilities and needs, which was not the case in the past. The use of data wall, visually displaying student progress against identified literacy and numeracy milestones, has been an important tool in this journey. This has made true levels of performance transparent and visible for all staff. The principal expressed the view that in a small school it is essential that all teachers take responsibility for all students. It is not possible for teachers to take refuge in their own classroom to the exclusion of what is happening in other year levels. The discourse of data analysis to drive planning and programming has changed significantly as a result of the NPLN process (but also Focus 160).

According to the Principal, teacher capacity building feels more authentic now, although it has taken four years for this to occur. This has resulted from a change in the way that support was provided – which previously was mostly on a withdrawal model – but is now mostly in classrooms. Open discussions about learning intentions and success criteria are now a part of normal practice. Teachers are engaged in a lot more reflective practice than previously. All teachers now collaboratively engage in the enquiry cycle, using common language, greater consistency between classes. Learning is now more open, student driven, and teachers are less concerned about people observing them. Teachers are more willing to share and seek help. What was informal in the past is now formal. Teachers on the same stage are now offered release from classroom teaching at the same time to enable collaborative planning. The beneficial changes observed in 2013 were not seen to be a direct result of the National Partnership as most of the current staff had not been part of it, but the NPLN has formed part of a continuous process of change including many diocesan activities. The Principal commented that the NPLN was a

springboard for change in that it helped teachers to confront the reality of the low level of student performance in the school, which subsequently gave the principal authority to drive change.

According to those interviewed, there are always challenges in small schools with limited personnel and funding. There is a need to use all the funding available from all sources holistically to achieve objectives rather than tightly earmarked for specific purposes.

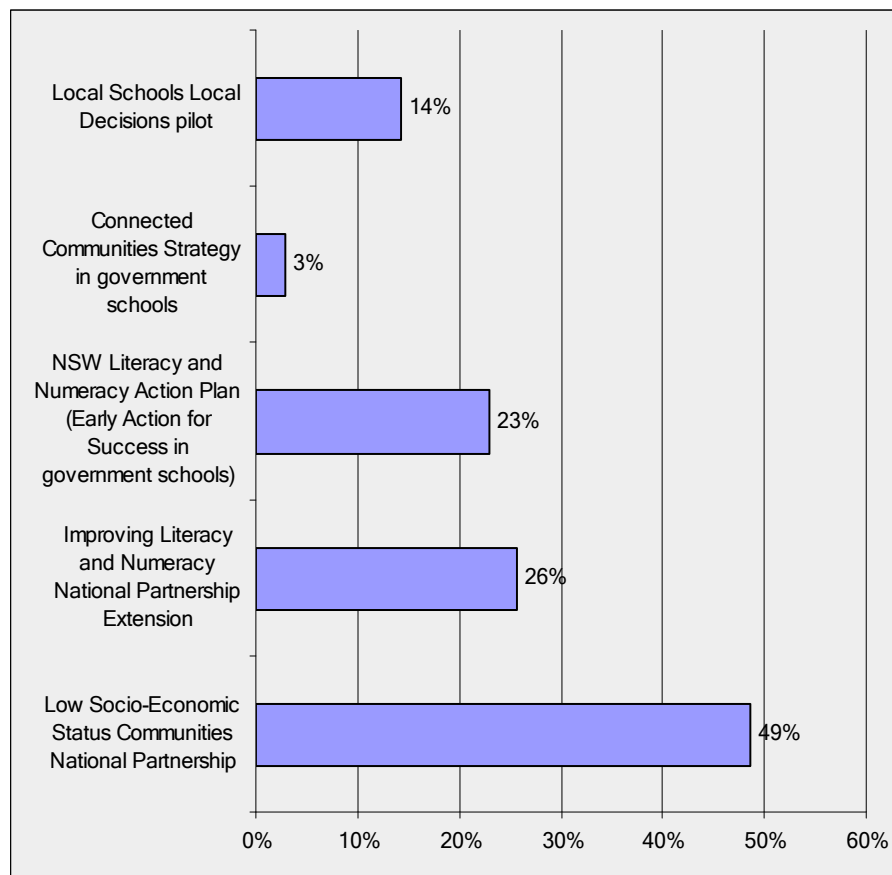
Several initiatives begun during the NPLN have been abandoned on the basis of experience. The school was working with one person from Sydney University on Readers Theatre, which they believed was ineffective for the school's needs. The "cluster of schools" notion developed during the NPLN, which was intended to provide a forum for sharing ideas and providing mutual support for school leaders, has also been abandoned as there was no natural synergy between those involved in this instance. Mindful Learning, Mindful Teaching was also not continued as the diocesan "program", but was replaced by Focus 160 (a Diocesan initiative).

Overall, the consensus of those interviewed was that the school has retained all of the "must haves" from the NPLN (although not all current staff may recognise the origins of "normal" practice in the school). However, staff commented that for the collaborative culture to survive it would require the new leadership team being committed to the same processes

Factors facilitating sustainability of impact of NPLN

Figure 22 below shows that nearly half of the schools responding to the survey also received funds from the Low SES National Partnership. As observed in the case studies and in the comments from Principals, these funds were frequently applied to continuance of strategies commenced during the NPLN. One-quarter of the NPLN schools responding to the survey also received additional funds from the Intensive Literacy and Numeracy Program (ILNP), which was an extension of the NPLN. In addition 23 per cent of responding schools were also participating in the NSW Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan, which notionally targets K-2 but in effect, continues the whole school focus on literacy and numeracy improvement begun during the NPLN.

Figure 22 Responding schools' participation in other initiatives since 2011



Impact of this additional funding

The following comments from Principals illustrate the contribution of additional funding to the sustainability of the NPLN reforms.

“Additional funding from external sources has enabled the school to continue these broad-based programs that focused on building teacher capacity and improving student outcomes. As this process has become embedded in school culture less financial resources have been needed.”

“The NPLN funding allowed all staff to be trained together producing a high level of professional dialogue that produced quality teaching and sustainable changes K-6, observed in class programs and the way teachers plan for differentiation catering to the students needs.”

“Teacher professional learning on new programs and Quality Teaching Framework will allow the programs to be sustained. Executive being used in a Leadership/Mentor role has provided staff with valuable TPL and classroom practices that, now developed, can be sustained. Purchasing of valuable literacy resources and kits will promote sustainability and further development of rich literacy sessions and student achievement.”

“The NPLN funding allowed for staff 3-6 to undergo 'best practice' training to support students with comprehension of text read, viewed, listened to across all KLA's. Our school would have been able to undergo such rigorous training if funding was not supplied.”

“The additional funding from ILNNP has provided the school with an opportunity to focus only on the aspects of Reading texts and comprehension. This minimized focus allows for explicit professional learning which should produce sustained results. The initial round of National Partnerships funding provided a constrained model, whereby schools needed to take on a pedagogy or pre-packaged program to improve results K-6. The new ILLNP has not put these constraints on the school, allowing the freedom to make the professional learning, target development and successive actions to be a more differentiated approach, mirroring the needs of the school. Schools are able to apply the funding in a way that meets their needs, rather than prescribing to a 'program' to improve teaching and learning and student achievement of outcomes.”

Figure 23 shows that, in the schools responding to the survey, the turnover of executive and teaching staff has been a significant issue. There had been a turnover of principal in 54 per cent of responding schools, with a similar percentage of schools reporting turnover of a significant number of teachers. It is also significant that 65 per cent of other executive staff have left the school. Similarly, 41 per cent of schools reported a significant increase in part-time or temporary appointments. The loss or changed role of the former literacy or numeracy coordinator (classroom leader) has been noted elsewhere. This high level of turnover represents a significant challenge to sustainability. Not only is there a loss of knowledge about the particular teaching methodologies and intervention programs used, but also potentially a change in the educational philosophies underpinning the improvement journey initiated by the NPLN.

Figure 23: Staff changes in responding NPLN schools since 2011

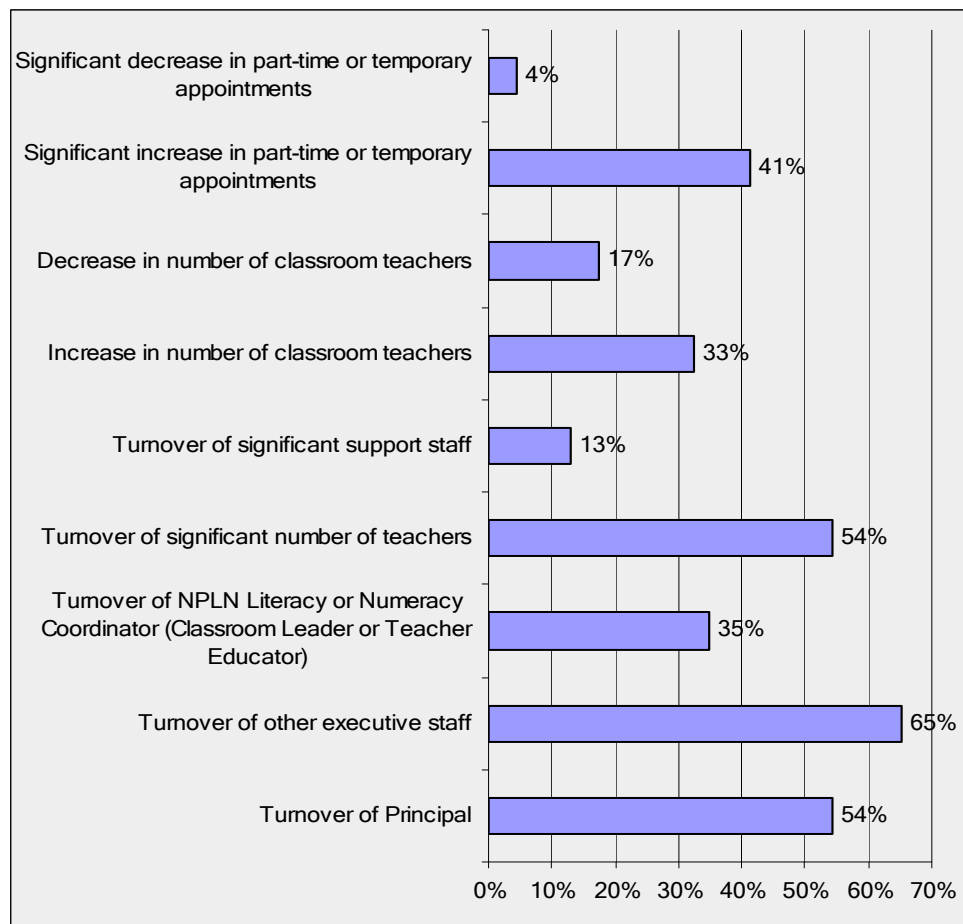


Table 20 shows that principals believed that the most effective strategies for sustaining the NPLN approaches had come from the professional development of staff, building a culture that uses student outcomes data as a key aspect of school planning, and training an in-school facilitator or coordinator for literacy and numeracy. Purchasing teaching and learning resources and developing a whole school improvement team were also considered to be effective strategies.

Engaging volunteers and community support, and engaging with parents/carers were considered to be the least effective strategies for sustainability. Only slightly more than half of the schools responding to the survey had found identifying alternative sources of funds to have been effective. It is somewhat surprising, given the high rates of mobility in these schools reported elsewhere, that planning for mobility had not been a successful strategy in the majority of schools.

Table 20: School leaders' perceptions of effectiveness of strategies for sustaining NPLN approaches and outcomes in their school

	Very effective (%)	Moderately effective (%)	Little effect (%)	Not effective (%)
Purchasing of teaching and learning resources	41	49	5	5
Training an in-school facilitator/coordinator for literacy or numeracy	46	34	15	5
Training a whole school improvement team	37	37	19	7
Professional learning for teaching staff	54	35	9	2
Professional learning for non-teaching staff	25	35	20	20
Development of in-school resources and documentation	32	41	22	5
Explicit identification of NPLN approaches as a whole-school priority in policy documents	33	43	11	13
Building a culture that uses student outcomes data as a key aspect of school planning	49	30	12	9
Engaging volunteers or community support	12	26	21	41
Engaging with parents/carers	14	33	24	29
Planning for teacher mobility	12	27	36	25
Identifying alternative sources of funding for activities made possible by NPLN funding	23	28	34	15

School leaders' comments on facilitating factors

The following comments from school leaders illustrate the range of factors that have contributed to sustainability of the NPLN.

*"Willingness of staff to engage in training that would help them professionally
Being able to train all staff in-school time and being led by a staff member they knew and respected. Being able to share and have time to discuss together outcomes of teaching practices and review data."*

"Collaborative planning sessions for teachers to work together sharing expertise, experience and curriculum knowledge."

"Increased employment of School Learning Support Officers (SLSOs) Purchasing of valuable Literacy resources and programs Staff TPL raining of all staff in QTF Executive off class to lead the whole-school change process."

"We saw NPLN as the springboard to make significant cultural change and knew planning after NPLN was essential to ensure sustainability."

"Professional dialogue and exchange of ideas."

"More hands-on tasks rather than children consistently being spoken to."

"Whole school planning through each stage - some stages do it well under an efficient AP that shows student learning and progression."

"Raising the priority of improved student learning outcomes. Showing the most effective and research based strategies training and professional development in many of the teaching strategies seen to improve student learning Training in the importance and use of data in driving school improvement, teaching and learning activities and as a facilitator of staff pedagogical discussion."

"The fact that all teachers and staff are working towards the same outcomes. A greater focus on Literacy and Numeracy with explicit teaching strategies being implemented."

"Team building, collegiality, team teaching and mentoring, collaboration."

Factors hindering sustainability of NPLN impact

Almost all of the factors identified by participants in the NPLN that had hindered the sustainability of impact related to staffing issues. As might be expected turnover of staff and replacement by people not trained in the methodologies involved or sympathetic to the reform priorities had the greatest negative impact. A significant minority of respondents identified the consequences of the cessation of funds, including reduced professional learning and time for collaborative planning as hindering factors. Competing demands for teacher and executive time arising from the new National Curriculum, isolation and a shift in focus were also mentioned as hindering factors. The following comments from principals illustrate the range of issues raised:

"Change in ALL executive roles. Staff with a negative attitude to change. Persistent negative behaviour from a small group of children. Staff misusing the executive as leaders/mentors for behaviour management in the classroom and constantly calling upon executive instead of using their own behavioural management strategies."

"Inconsistency in staff attitudes towards programs implemented."

"Changes in staff composition; traditional teachers who are firmly entrenched in old pedagogy."

“Lack of communication and one staff member being in control who has since moved on.”

“I think that if the Principal had been trained in the NPLN focus then it may have been sustainable. The Principal was happy for the team to push the focus, yet it did not stem from him, appearing to staff that his perception of the program was limited. I believe that if he had supported the team vocally and had been proactive on reflecting on programs and visiting classrooms, the focus may have had a chance of being sustainable. The principal was happy for the team to be the voice.”

“Loss of vital support staff / lack of collaboration and discussion when purchasing much needed resources and change of principals / not having a principal to guide us for a term or two / lack of cooperation between AP's in the school while lacking a principal / changes in staff. Not using Support staff appropriately.”

“Lack of funding for teacher release for professional learning, mentoring, coaching and observing colleagues.”

“Changing over of some staff, necessitating training (starting over again) Involvement in numerous projects due to staff dedication and energy and proactivity, sometimes spreading ourselves too thin. Lack of extra funds to support staff with extra duties as in school coordinators, particularly executive staff.”

Table 21 below suggests that the great majority of principals saw that competing demands and priorities was likely to inhibit sustainability of the NPLN. Significant numbers of principals also saw changed levels of resources, that is, a loss of funds as an important inhibitor of sustainability of impact. Turnover of school leadership, and to a lesser extent teacher turnover were also thought to be key factors affecting sustainability.

Table 21: School Leaders' perceptions of factors likely to inhibit future sustainability of NPLN outcomes

	Not at all (%)	Little extent (%)	Moderate extent (%)	Great extent (%)	N/A (%)
School leadership turnover	10	15	34	37	4
Teaching staff turnover	10	10	52	28	0
Changed levels of resources beyond the National Partnership funding period	0	15	36	49	0
Competing demands and priorities	5	5	32	58	0
Student mobility	10	35	35	18	2
Changed demographics of the school community	15	42	24	17	2

Lessons for the future

Given the factors identified above in Tables 20 and 21, it is not surprising therefore that Principals considered the key elements that should be included in any future literacy or numeracy initiatives are support for accessing additional teaching staff and teacher release time, and co-ordination of in-school professional learning. This is consistent also with the earlier finding of the importance of the literacy or numeracy facilitator in leading the improvement effort. Likewise, working with school principals and executive leadership teams to facilitate capacity building and team leadership and support for school self-evaluation processes, priority and target setting. Fewer school leaders considered that working to improve engagement of the school community was an essential feature of improvement initiatives (and it is acknowledged that this was not a major focus of the NPLN). The implication from this Table is that sustained change is unlikely to occur without additional funding and leadership, both within the school and at system/sector level.

From the Phase 1 evaluation, it would appear that the majority of Principals considered the quantum of funds they received per annum during the NPLN was “about right”. The availability of a small amount of flexible funds for purchase of resources such as class sets of reading materials, and technology (including multiple iPads and Smartboards) is necessary to implement quality literacy and numeracy programs, but in itself is not sufficient to bring about sustained change. The major costs relate to teacher salaries, including release time and employment of a person to lead and provide professional learning for staff.

It is interesting to note that these elements have been incorporated into the NSW Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan, the centrepiece of which is the employment of Instructional Leaders (or their equivalent). The success of this strategy is already evident from early evaluation results (Erebus International, 2013).

Table 22: School leaders’ perceptions of elements that should be included in any future literacy/numeracy improvement initiatives

Element	Percent of responses (N=42)
Support for school self-evaluation processes, priority and target setting	64%
Working with school principals and executive leadership teams to facilitate capacity building and team leadership	67%
Support to access or purchase additional resources, not including teaching staff	62%
Support to access additional teaching staff or teacher relief	81%
Facilitation of partnerships with the community	38%
Coordination of in-school professional learning for literacy or numeracy intervention programs	76%
Facilitation of sharing of good practice through conferences etc.	57%

System/sector support for the initiative

Table 23 shows that the majority of survey respondents found that each of the forms of support offered by systems and sectors was found to be helpful or very helpful, with the exception of facilitating partnerships with the community. This is consistent with responses cited above which suggest that involvement of parents and community did not figure highly in the implementation of the NPLN or subsequent activity. Schools most highly valued support which contributed to capacity building, especially through in-school professional development in relation to the intervention programs. A significant number of principals responding to the survey (28%) felt that supporting school self-evaluation processes was not at all helpful or of little help. A similar percentage of respondents (31%) had reservations about the benefits of conferences for sharing good practice. Most find such conferences to be helpful, but a significant minority found them of little or no benefit. The response may depend on the type of experience that schools had during the NPLN. The case study interviews suggest that those that attended local events, including local cluster and network events found them useful, but those that attended the national events found them to be less relevant and providing little they could translate into their own circumstances. It is instructive to note that many of the schools involved in the case studies were not aware of the *Effective Practices* website developed as part of the phase 2 evaluation of the NPLN, but were very interested in exploring the site in more depth when shown it.

Table 23: School leaders' perceptions of the helpfulness of the following forms of system/sector support for the sustainability of NPLN activities/priorities in their school?

	Not at all helpful (%)	Little help (%)	Helpful (%)	Very helpful (%)
Support for school self-evaluation processes, priority and target setting	2	26	44	28
Working with school principals and executive teams to facilitate capacity building and team leadership	5	21	43	31
Facilitating partnerships with the community	9	47	26	14
Coordinating in-school professional learning for literacy/numeracy intervention programs	2	12	41	45
Facilitating sharing of good practice through conferences etc.	7	26	37	30

School leaders' comments on lessons for systems and sectors

The most frequent comment made by school leaders about lessons for future literacy and numeracy initiatives for systems and sectors concerned the need for the initiative to be funded for longer periods, and for schools to have flexibility in use of that funding. The schools that were successful in the NPLN recognized that the essence of changing student outcomes was in enhancing quality teaching, which comes largely from professional learning

and increased accountability. The following are a sample of the comments made by school leaders:

"When provided, a large input of professional training in house and with a larger group of the staff the benefit is worth far more than only 1-2 staff being trained in a technique and the other staff not 'on board' with the idea. Having a large group discussing and leading the change was very beneficial in my school, changing attitudes towards their own professional development and their need to keep abreast of educational developments."

"Additional funding is needed in schools for best practice to be sustainable."

"Schools must look more in depth at what they are doing and align their direction with research based evidence. Level of funding for all schools should be increased so all may meet the ever increasing needs of all students in a professional and supportive environment. Funding should be provided to allow for focus on teaching and learning. Without this funding schools will be forced to choose between teaching and learning priorities and ongoing maintenance issues."

"Sustainability of any quality, inspiring program will only occur if adequate funding and resources are committed. If a program is achieving results ie: increasing the quality of pedagogy and student outcomes, do not stop part way through."

"More freedom on how to allocate funds would make for equitable distribution of learning and resources to students in need."

"This [the NPLN] is a powerful model but needs to be supported over a longer timeframe."

"Give clear parameters and direction and funding. Accountability of principal and executive. NPLN should have been a Community of Schools (CoS) based initiative. Person at local level to facilitate and to ensure schools are continually monitoring their progress."

"Facilitators are necessary to continue support for schools at all stages of ongoing development - not much point spending money if you don't have the staff to guide the schools into best practice e.g. cutting personal at District levels Money is needed for schools to carry out their own professional development."

"Time frame is important, as is allowing sufficient time to have changes imbedded in culture. Long term projects are ideal."

"Schools require injections of funds to support initiatives to improve outcomes for students including teacher relief time to collaboratively plan, implement and evaluate programs. Whole school professional learning is vital. Leadership capacity is vital."

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions

This report has examined the sustainability of outcomes achieved from the National Partnership for Literacy and Numeracy, implemented from 2009 to 2011.

In drawing conclusions about the sustainability of outcomes from the initiative, it is important to acknowledge the context within which the initiative took place and has operated in schools since the initiative funding ceased. As noted in the Phase 1 evaluation report, the NPLN achieved acceptance at both system/sector and school level because it aligned theoretically and practically with work already commenced to increase school effectiveness in NSW schools. In the period after the cessation of funding, the NSW DEC has been in a period of significant structural change beginning in 2013, which has impacted on the nature of support available. A number of cross-sectoral initiatives have also impacted on school improvement imperatives.

The context also includes a range of national, state and local reform initiatives and funding programs that have allowed many NPLN schools to continue to implement the reforms commenced during the NPLN. These programs include the *Low SES National Partnership*, which delivered considerable funds to participating schools, and the more recent *NSW Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan*. Many of these initiatives have aims similar to the Action Plan, and seek improvement through similar capacity building processes. Many of these reform initiatives draw on the same research literature as that underpinning the Action Plan, and seek similar changes in classroom pedagogical practices, leadership behaviour, and school organisational practices.

In relation to the implementation of this project in NSW government schools, it should be acknowledged that schools consider that such NSW government priorities as Great Teaching Inspired Learning, Every Student Every School and Local Schools Local Decisions provide both an essential ethos and conceptual underpinning for the work they are doing in relation to the Action Plan. In fact some Principals indicated that these priority documents provide a framework within which these schools continue on their change journeys.

Each of the sources of data used in this evaluation have some limitations, and on their own, cannot be used to provide a precise or definitive measure of the impact of the NPLN on either teaching and learning practices or student outcomes. These limitations are acknowledged in the body of this report. However, the totality of the evidence all point to similar conclusions.

Synthesis of the gathered from the various sources used to inform this evaluation suggests that in about one quarter of the schools involved, the positive changes initiated during the NPLN were still evident; indeed had become firmly embedded in the school's culture. These schools had established specific practices to ensure that, for example, quality teaching practices continued to be used consistently by all staff, including new appointments. These schools typically used their own funding, or funding from other programs, to continue some form of co-ordination of whole school and individual professional learning.

In around half of NPLN schools, some positive changes initiated by the NPLN were still evident, but in a reduced form. In these schools, there had typically been a reduction on the amount of time devoted to collaborative planning and programming, while still recognising the importance of doing so. These schools typically no longer had funds to continue to employ a specific coordinator for literacy/numeracy.

In the remaining 25 per cent of schools, it was often difficult to identify any lasting impact of the NPLN, or indeed, any teacher who had participated in the initiative. In these schools, it was more likely to observe a return to individualistic rather than collaborative decision making, less collaborative practice, and reduced commitment to or knowledge of the NPLN reform principles and research base.

In summary, the evaluation found that sustained positive impact was most often associated with the following:

- Continuity of executive staffing. It is instructive that in the schools with least sustainable impact, there had usually been a turnover of principal and other executive staff, as well as key teaching staff. Sustainability was enhanced when the school retained the literacy/numeracy co-ordination function ensuring that corporate knowledge of the reform initiative was retained.
- Strong initial understanding by the school (particularly its leadership) that the purpose of the NPLN was primarily about school improvement, not simply about the use of particular literacy or numeracy intervention programs funded by the initiative. In these schools, the NPLN was seen as means to achieve wider systemic reform, not an end in itself.
- Use of alternative funding sources to continue the improvement journey. Principals who recognised the importance of the NPLN as a vehicle for whole school change were more likely to use either their own funds or alternative program funds to continue the initial NPLN focus on building teacher capacity, formalising quality teaching practices, strengthening accountability, and embed assessment and evaluation practices as a normal part of school routines.
- Development of leadership density across the school. Sustainability was considerably enhanced in schools where all or the majority of staff developed a sense of ownership of the NPLN reform agenda, saw themselves as active participants in change (not people who had things done to them), and accepted that continuation of current practices would not achieve the desired change in student outcomes. In these schools, the quality teaching practices became “the way we do things around here”, and had developed strong induction processes to ensure new staff conformed to these norms.
- A strong commitment by all school staff to improve student outcomes. Sustainability was greatest in schools where staff adopted a “no excuses” approach to student academic performance. In these schools, teachers were not content to “blame” poor results on student’s home backgrounds but saw it as their

responsibility to respond to those circumstances as best they could. Teachers in those schools had a strong sense of professional accountability towards each other and for the school as a whole. There was a much more strongly expressed sense of collective responsibility for student performance than in schools with less sustained impact.

These findings, along with reflection on the implementation of the NPLN as a whole, suggest some important lessons for systems and sectors that have applicability to future reform initiatives. These lessons include the following:

- To achieve lasting and widespread impact on student learning outcomes in highly disadvantaged schools, the reform initiatives (and associated funding) must be continuous over a considerable length of time. Many consider the two year implementation period of the NPLN to be too short to achieve the impact expected.
- Serious reform initiatives require a high level of continued systemic oversight and direction. This provides both legitimacy and priority for the reform, ensures a continuing focus on accountability, signals that change is both necessary and expected, and sustained impact is considered important by the system/sector. The central co-ordination function has a key role in promoting communication of expectations, good practices and feedback about results achieved to participating schools.
- Systems and sectors have a key role in ensuring that continuity of commitment to the reform agenda when there is turnover of key staff including principals. There will always be turnover of staff in schools for a variety of reasons. However, given the level of investment involved in initiatives like the NPLN, it would seem reasonable that when new appointments are made, the individuals involved should have some level of awareness of and commitment to the change journey already underway, and not arbitrarily change this direction (while accepting a need to constant refinement of practices).
- The emphasis on school improvement initiatives needs to enhance teacher and leadership competence and confidence. It is not primarily about implementing particular programs of purchasing resources (although there is a place for investment in both of these). The central concern within the reform agenda should be on enhancing teacher and leadership skills for identifying what resources are needed to support the learning of individual students.

It is possible to conclude that the NPLN has contributed to a sustained change in the culture of many of the schools involved. It has raised expectations for learning, and provided many teachers and principals with tools, skills, and most importantly, the motivation for improving quality practices. The evaluation has clearly identified factors that support and inhibit the continuity of impact of the reforms and reaffirm the principles of good practice in the design of reforms with aims similar to the NPLN. The evaluation continues to highlight the seriousness of effort required if

lasting change is to be achieved in reducing the discrepancies in outcomes for students across NSW.

Lessons for systems/sectors

There are several lessons for systems/sectors from this evaluation, both in terms of understanding what contributes to sustainability of results, and in relation to the management and planning of large scale reform projects.

Scope and scale of reform initiatives

The first and most important of these lessons is that change initiatives of the scope and scale of the NPLN require considerable time for those changes to become embedded. The NPLN provided a significant catalyst for change, but not all schools were capable of leveraging from this strategic opportunity to fundamentally change teachers' attitudes and pedagogy, or to change deeply entrenched cultures of disengagement and isolation.

In these situations, in what was effectively an 18 month implementation window, the NPLN was simply too short to achieve lasting change. It would appear imperative that future initiatives be planned with a much longer funding period from the outset. This is consistent with the research literature on the timescale required for achieving change discussed in the Phase 1 report. This is also consistent with the observation that greater sustainability was achieved in NPLN schools which were able to continue the new ways of working introduced in the initial period using funds from other sources (e.g. the low SES National Partnership and *Early Action for Success*).

The need for accountability

This is not to say that the funding period should be unconditional—indeed a strong lesson from this evaluation concerns the need for rigorous accountability for the achievement of defined outcomes and targets, regular reporting against those targets, and close external scrutiny of schools' progress against intended outcomes.

It is imperative that this funding to support school improvement not be seen by schools as an “entitlement” (because of the characteristics of their population) built into their annual budget as de facto recurrent funds. This evaluation has shown that more successful schools viewed the totality of the funds available to them as a holistic resource to achieve their strategic intentions. It is also necessary that the project funds are applied directly for the purpose of supporting change.

The implication from this is that there is a key role to be played by system/sector line management structures in the Government and Catholic school sectors, and by central project staff in the Independent sector. As noted in the Phase 1 evaluation report, the regional facilitators in the Government sector (and similar roles in other sectors) played a major role in ensuring the fidelity of the NPLN implementation and without the high level of central coordination and communication provided through this project infrastructure, the success of the initiative would have been more limited than was observed. It would thus appear to be critical that future projects similarly establish strong project management systems and processes, which are staffed appropriately for the duration of the initiative. This

central project team needs to work hand-in-hand with the schools' local management structures. While there has been significant restructuring in the DEC of school support mechanisms over the past 2 years and these have not been finalised, it is fair to conclude that not all schools have received the same level of involvement of the then School Education Directors as others, which impacted negatively on both the schools' commitment to a change process and sustained improvement in outcomes.

An orientation towards reform

As observed earlier schools which saw the NPLN as an opportunity to achieve fundamental change in pedagogy and practice from the outset made greater gains than those who saw it simply as a funding source to implement a particular literacy/numeracy program or to top-up school funds. Similarly, schools which saw the NPLN as an add-on to current practice rather than an opportunity to do things differently achieved less sustained improvement. In future initiatives seeking systemic change, it would appear necessary for system/sector line management functions to play a leading role in ensuring that schools develop these "mindsets" that underpin the long term success of stimulus funding are firmly established. This in turn depends on the systemic authorities viewing the initiative in the same light, and not an external imposition by another jurisdiction.

Continuity of staffing

The observation that the most significant inhibitor of sustainability of the NPLN comes from the high level of turnover of executive and teaching staff in target schools also has implications for systems/sectors. It would appear imperative that, at a minimum, when there is a change of principal, for example, that the new appointments have an educational philosophy that is congruent with that underpinning the change initiative. In addition, (especially given the emphasis in the NPLN on enhancing educational leadership), it would appear necessary that new appointments have the high level understanding and technical skills required to support the change objectives (for example in analysis and evaluation to drive evidence based decision making). It was not always apparent in case study schools that a commitment to maintaining the NPLN change journey played a significant role in staffing decisions.

There are clear implications for this for system/sector recruitment and appointment processes, as well as for the ongoing support and professional learning of principals (and other key executive).

Provision of tools and resources

Likewise, it would appear to be important that systems and sectors maintain the availability of the tools and resources developed during the NPLN, such as the Team Leadership for School Improvement program and the Analytic Framework. These tools were noted as important in helping schools to focus on big picture strategic change, and in codifying good practice.

The value of longer funding period to allow for professional learning for teachers new to the school (beginning teachers as well as transferring experienced staff) has also been amply

demonstrated. The research shows conclusively that the best form of professional learning for teachers is delivered in-school in a targeted way to meet identified teacher needs in relation to the achievement of school goals. The additional funding is necessary to provide the release for more senior staff to lead in-class mentoring and modelling, time for joint stage-based planning and for data analysis and reflection.

It is also important to consider the implications of the success of the NPLN model itself for how systems/sectors might deploy resources to enhance students' literacy and numeracy outcomes. The NSW NPLN model required schools to select one of a small number of whole class literacy or numeracy programs, and a targeted intervention program.

Intervention programs

The intervention programs used during the NPLN were important in giving focus and substance to the pedagogical change process. While there were distinct differences between the methodologies involved in each program, all emphasised explicit instruction, scaffolded learning, hands-on activities and continuous assessment. The evaluation findings suggest that in the main, the NPLN achieved significant success in changing the nature of activity in the classroom from one based on busy work to one that fosters purposeful learning and deeper understanding. Despite this, the separate program-level evaluations of the intervention programs conducted by Urbis and the DEC were equivocal about the impact the programs had on student learning and were not able to identify any of the programs as distinctly superior to others (a finding replicated in a later literature review of the effectiveness of literacy and numeracy programs by ACER).

The current evaluation's findings suggest that schools have in many cases discontinued the programs selected as part of the NPLN implementation (particularly TOWN) or significantly modified how they are used.

Regardless of the merits or otherwise of the particular programs implemented during the NPLN, the clear finding is that sustainability of the reform objectives in the longer term depends on the capacity of the schools to abstract the pedagogical and school management principles from the programs and apply them to mainstream curriculum implementation. As noted in the Phase 1 evaluation report, the likelihood of this happening depended on the principal's understanding that the selected programs were a means to an end rather than the primary focus of the initiative. Not all school principals appeared to have taken this view or understood the strategic purpose of the initiative.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that school improvement initiatives based on structured capacity building are preferable to approaches that simply provide grants to schools to use as they see fit, or that mandate the use of a particular program. The latter appear to make, at best, short term contributions to specific students, which are neither sustainable nor address the reasons why learning failed to occur in the first place.

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