

THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PATHWAY: AWFUL TO ADEQUATE

Schools that are moving from 'awful to adequate' lack the internal capacity to improve. To get the basics in place, and to establish the pre-conditions for success, they need a high level of external support and direction.

Improvement Dimension	Key Issues	Diagnostic Questions	
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Usually there is no comprehensive view of the curriculum that is progressive, individualised, or inquiry oriented. – Commonly, the curriculum is an amalgam of the 'favourite things' of individual teachers, or materials they have used for some time and with which they are comfortable. – The curriculum lacks coherence and encourages little engagement from students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Has a curriculum audit determined how well the curriculum meets mandated requirements? – Is introduction of such materials preceded by professional conversations about curriculum that establish the rationale for change and how the change links to the school's emerging narrative? (Establishing clear curricular guidelines and scaffolding is of urgent importance. This cannot be a matter for debate.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is there a clear process for importing structured and proven curriculum materials where they are lacking? – Is the importance of literacy and numeracy in every classroom emphasised? – Are planning cycles implemented (like the cycle on page 8)? – Have students' views been shared with teachers as additional motivation for change?
Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Teaching is often highly individualised, inconsistent, lacking in pace and informed by the teacher's own prior experience. – Debate about teaching is not a common professional practice in the school, and teachers are allowed or encouraged to 'do their own thing'. – There is a great variation in teaching practice and consequently student progress and performance is highly variable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Has an audit of teaching practice been conducted and presented (without attribution to individual teachers) as a picture of the school's common professional practice? – Has the audit resulted in development of a 'good lesson' template that is the initial basis of common teaching practice? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Does the 'good lesson' reflect what research about good practice, such as the Theories of Action for Teachers? – Are there clear descriptions of what performance looks like at Commencing, Intermediate, Accomplished, and Expert levels? – Are these descriptions used as a key reference for conducting classroom observations and discussing observation data?
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Usually there is not a clear idea of what effective learning looks like. – Learning is sporadic and makes little connection to the aptitudes, experiences or ambitions of the individual learner. – As a consequence both attendance and behaviour are at low levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is a narrative being developed about the fundamental belief that all students can learn and succeed? – Is there a 'student charter' that specifies basic expectations and entitlements? – Are simple strategies in place for valuing student voice? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is there a common behaviour protocol for managing learning behaviour (as distinct from a protocol for behaviour management)? – Have all stops been pulled out to increase student attendance?
Assessment/ Data and Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The school sees itself as a victim of overly rigorous external accountability. – This defensive attitude persists even though the accountability framework has often exposed the school's weaknesses. – Inability to use feedback as part of a strategic approach to school improvement. – The school is static and there is a feeling of 'being caught in the headlights' or headlines. – Professional observation of classroom practice is seen as judgmental and punitive, and not as the key strategy for collective professional development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is there a clear diagnosis of the school's current performance, based on the best available evidence? – Is the diagnosis linked to the school's emerging narrative for improvement and moral purpose, inspired by a view that 'our students deserve better than this'? – Does diagnostic data inform the school's improvement plan? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are improvement cycles in place (like the cycle proposed on page 8)? – Has the idea been seeded for implementing peer observation against clear specifications of practice? – Is there a School Improvement Team?
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Often senior leaders are 'part of the problem' and need to move on. They may have experienced success in the past, but are unable to meet the contemporary challenges of school leadership. – In most cases the external support they have received has not been specific, or strategic, or sustained enough, to enable real improvement. – The school is in a cycle of decline or complacency – teaching is individualised, the curriculum fragmented, and student achievement lags expectations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – As a matter of urgency, has a leadership audit been conducted? – Have the audit outcomes been discussed with the existing leadership? – Where a transition to new leadership is necessary, are reasons for a change expressed in terms of moral purpose for the students? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is there a process in train to source temporary leadership capacity from experienced leaders who can establish the pre-conditions for improvement? – Is there a process in train to ensure that high quality leaders will be appointed to provide sustained leadership for the school improvement journey?

THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PATHWAY: ADEQUATE TO GOOD

Schools that are moving from 'adequate to good' are refining their developmental priorities and focusing on specific teaching and learning issues. They are building capacity within the school to support this work.

Improvement Dimension	Key Issues	Diagnostic Questions	
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Schools may struggle to get to 'good' if they have a one size fits all approach to curriculum planning and delivery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – target the middle, offer little challenge to the top, and offer little access to the bottom. – The top 20 per cent of the students is often switched off and coasting. The bottom 20 per cent is often subject to curriculum experiences that have little rigour and offer little aspiration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is there an unrelenting focus on literacy and numeracy across every subject of the curriculum? – Is lesson planning sufficiently consistent so that students get a good experience, regardless of teacher or subject? – Do students know how their learning fits together and what mastery looks like? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is learning sequenced from year to year so that it is coherent and learners can 'orientate' themselves within their learning? – Are curriculum units moderated and standardised so that comparisons between students, cohorts and teachers are reliable and useful?
Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Often teachers do more work in classrooms than the students. – Often there is too much whole-class teaching. This limits learning to the pace of the slowest in the group, and stops or impedes those who can make faster progress. – Some school leaders do not appear to have an effective strategy for disseminating new policies and best practice. This means that work to improve teaching leads to incremental change rather than swift change. – Teaching improvement is often held back by weaknesses in assessment and planning. This can mean that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students are insufficiently challenged • teaching lacks pace because expectations are not set high enough, students are sufficiently engaged, and negative behaviour is common. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is the school focussing on an intensive initial drive to reskill staff in a specific repertoire of teaching and learning approaches? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is the school's focus on every teacher applying, in every lesson, effective teacher protocols that are firmly based in evidence, such as the Teacher Theories of Action – for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harnessing clear learning intentions and a narrative for the lesson that all students understand • Setting challenging learning tasks and planning ways for all students to achieve them • Framing higher order questions • Connecting feedback and data • Committing to assessment for learning • Implementing co-operative group structures?
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Schools often lack central systems and processes that enable students to develop themselves as learners. – Marking and feedback are often directed at a personal level and have little task relevance. – Teachers infrequently use specific strategies to drive learning. Strategies are often used in an ad hoc manner. They are not understood as a means for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing learner autonomy • eliciting clear evidence of student thinking which influences planning and delivery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do all teachers adopt a range of strategies that enable them to elicit evidence of student thinking? – Is the evidence used as a planning aid? – Is there a climate in every classroom around the belief that all students can achieve? – Is there a strong belief system amongst teachers which holds that underperformance is never the result of student aptitude or attitude? 	
Assessment/ Data and Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Data is often seen as a blunt performance management tool rather than as a mechanism for ensuring an ongoing dialogue about teaching and learning. – Line management systems often lack sufficient clarity to ensure that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • data is interrogated at planned intervals throughout the academic year • there is a clear accountability for this data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are systems in place for reliably tracking student progress and setting targets based on the data? – Are teachers enabled to use assessment information effectively to plan challenging lessons that take account of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prior attainment • the learning needs of individuals and groups? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is tracking data used to inform lesson planning and accelerate student progress? – Is feedback about, and marking of, students' work used to help them understand what they need to do next to improve? – Is time built into lessons to allow students to act on teacher feedback?
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Senior leaders are often still establishing themselves as an effective leadership team. – There are pockets of good leadership practice within the school – however, senior leaders are yet to ensuring consistent practice among middle leaders – Often it is difficult to establish consistent approaches to teaching and assessment. – Often behaviour, and other issues that influence learning, are left to individual teachers and departments to manage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are high expectations, high achievement for all, and high levels of accountability, communicated as part of a clear vision for the school and its students? – Does the senior leadership team work as an effective team with clear roles and lines of accountability? – Is there a systematic approach to monitoring and evaluating improvement strategies? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are systems and protocols for monitoring pupil progress and intervention being developed? – Are there effective performance management systems for all staff, and are they linked to the school's development plan? – Is there a sustained focus on improving the quality of teaching at all levels throughout the school?

THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PATHWAY: GOOD TO GREAT

'Good to Great' schools are working with specific strategies to ensure that the school remains a 'moving' school – a school that is continuing to enhance student performance and networks with other schools. There is a determined focus on sustainability and succession planning. There is a move to system teaching and system leadership that develops staff at all levels.

Improvement Dimension	Key Issues	Diagnostic Questions	
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Achievement has lifted in core subjects through intensive drilling and micro-management of the testing/examination system. – Specifically designed structures are in place to ensure English and mathematics interventions are targeted to the right students at the right time. – Often there is uncertainty about how to move to a structure that enables all students to achieve highly in all subjects. – Often there is uncertainty about how to incorporate literacy and numeracy across the curriculum, so that every teacher is a teacher of language and a teacher of numeracy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is there a rigorous, research based approach to developing literacy and numeracy? – To orientate students within the curriculum, do curriculum models take students from the early years through to secondary years? – Does the curriculum enable students to get to grips with the fundamental structure of each subject discipline? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are the core concepts in each subject discipline clearly mapped out? – Are the outcomes of assessments constantly analysed (every student every half term) to inform: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • student progress • design of short term (six-week) interventions • long term reviews of the curriculum map?
Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Good schools usually have structures that ensure most teaching is consistently good and that there are no pockets of inadequate practice. – Often not enough teachers – at all levels – know what outstanding teaching looks like and how to improve their teaching with exemplary practice in mind. – Many good schools have managed to shift the focus in the classroom from teacher to student. However, students often still see the teacher as the 'font of all knowledge' and that their role as students is to 'remember' what their teachers say. – Students often have fixed views of themselves as a learner and the school does little to challenge this, accepting that a percentage of students simply cannot improve. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are all students treated as individuals? – Is the classroom atmosphere one of constant collaboration and support? – In the classroom and during independent study, do learners regularly work in small groups, thinking and analysing with pertinent support from the teacher? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are all staff engaged with a number of high-leverage development activities such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • microteaching • observation of classroom methods • video/audio review/feedback • observing the practice of others • being observed?
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A key difference between a 'good' school and a 'great' one is the extent to which students self-regulate their own approaches to learning. – Often senior leaders have established a clear and simple model that enables all teachers to provide developmental feedback, and gives students opportunities to interact with this process. Mostly this is a teacher led and teacher initiated activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is there an explicit, consistently executed plan accepted by all staff that enables the shift from teacher to student led autonomy? – Are students actively engaged in learning behaviour that demonstrates they have high levels of self-efficacy and are willing to take risks and make mistakes? – Is the feedback students receive constantly task referenced and never refers to personal attributes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do students embrace challenges, relish difficult tasks, and know how to find support? – Do students always use the language of growth and development when talking about their learning?
Assessment/ Data and Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Good schools tend to have strong systems for identifying student underperformance and intervening to ensure that students meet the expected standard. – Data is usually robust in core subjects but there is some variance in 'other' subjects. – Most teachers use performance data to plan lessons and review their impact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do teachers know the target for every individual student and their progress towards it? – Do teachers ensure that each learner receives targeted support to maintain exceptional progress? – Does every student receive precise feedback about what they need to do next so that they hit their target? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Does assessment provide a robust and valid picture of student thinking? – Do students take ownership of their learning? – Do students set precise steps for themselves to reach mastery, monitoring themselves and regulating their thinking during every lesson? – Does the tracking of students ensure the right students are targeted at the right time?
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Good schools often fall into two categories; those that are good but are coasting, and those that are on a longer improvement journey. – Regardless of their differences, both types of school require the same leadership actions if they are to make the shift to excellence. An unrelenting focus on the quality of teaching and learning, and a no excuses culture, are central to this shift. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is there a new narrative that spells out the 'cultural shift' required for achieving excellence, accompanied by a clear set of values? – Does the new narrative focus on the shift from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitoring to development • getting the basics in place to developing expertise? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are the next generation of teachers and school leaders being developed and are they modelling the lifelong approach to learning that you want your students to embody? – Are members of the school's governing body being similarly developed?

THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PATHWAY: GREAT TO EXCELLENT

The signal characteristic of 'great' schools and schools that sustain excellence is the way in which they search for excellence internally, and offer support to other schools undertaking an improvement journey.

Improvement Dimension	Key Issues	Diagnostic Questions	
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – All schools, including excellent schools, can tend to towards didacticism (the impulse to teach something) rather than inquiry (a preference for finding things out). – The key challenge is to build into the curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • problem solving • the application of knowledge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is an inquiry focus present across the curriculum? – Does the curriculum entitlement for all students include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leadership opportunities • adventurous activities • cultural activities? – Do teachers have time and resources to reconstruct their curriculum and schemes of work using inquiry and fertile questions as the dominant curriculum forms? (For more on fertile questions, see pages 12-13 of <i>Curiosity and Powerful Learning</i>, one of the manuals in this series.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are research 'lesson study' and peer observation the main mode of professional development and learning? – Does the design of curricular tasks for students incorporate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • problem-solving • inquiry • sustained collaboration • appropriate scaffolding • worthwhile and intrinsically motivating products?
Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The challenges for teaching are the same as those noted below for learning. – The journey to excellence necessarily involves teachers becoming increasingly autonomous in professional judgement within an educational system dominated by external criteria and accountability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are their shared understandings across the school about learning and achievement? – Do teachers have a shared language for learning and achievement through applying Theories of Action? – Is experimentation and risk taking encouraged in the knowledge that real learning lies in understanding the failures rather than the successes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is joy taken in every demonstration of success? – Is optimism and celebration of achievement apparent across the whole school?
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The substantial challenge is to deepen learning in personalised and intellectually challenging ways, and at the same time respect the expectations of a mandated curriculum and external examinations. – A related challenge is how to help learners become more independent and self-directed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is individual potential developed by providing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outstanding teaching • rich opportunities for learning • encouragement and support for each student? – Are students directly contributing to the improvement process? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are students involved and empowered in the learning process by providing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • powerful, self-generated constructive feedback • peer assessment • induction into higher order thinking skills • autonomous forms of group and self-directed learning structures and protocols?
Assessment/ Data and Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The key issue is balancing the demands of external accountability with a work culture that prizes internal assessment and peer accountability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Does the school respect the external accountability framework? – Does the school ensure that it surpasses all the usual expectations and demands? – Is the school explicit, eloquent, and prolific in defining achievement with a view to igniting teacher enthusiasm, generating student motivation, and raising expectations? – Is there a similar focus for students on self-directed learning and peer assessment? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is the capacity for internal accountability nurtured and deepened by developing teachers' skills in a range of internal accountability strategies and practices such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • action research • self-evaluation • triads and non-judgemental peer observation • student tracking systems?
Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The key internal challenge for leadership is to maintain vision, motivation and innovation in a school that is already outstanding. – The key external challenge is how to support other schools while maintaining the school's own performance and resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 'In effective schools, school leaders disseminate eloquence' (Weick, 1985) – do leaders in your school do this? – Is an explicit part of the school leader's role to articulate the school's values, and to reinforce them at every opportunity? – Are these values embedded and shared by all school staff, students, and parents/carers? – Is the school embracing the challenge of continually raising the bar for what is possible? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is the school maintaining and developing outstanding leadership through distributed leadership, including student leadership? – Is the development of system leadership offering alternative curricular practices and new ways of teaching and learning? – Are teachers becoming skilled in these new processes through working alongside others in and beyond the school?