

Schools Renewal: A Strategy to Revise Schools within the New South Wales State Education System

New South Wales. Management Review, NSW Education, 1989 (Director: Brian Scott)

Overview of the document

40 page advanced briefing of the Management Review of the NSW education system. The Review was commissioned by the Minister in April 1988. The Director of the Review was Dr Brian Scott, “a leading businessman and consultant who has been previously involved in a number of reviews relating to public education in Australia” (p. ii). The review proposes major changes in the NSW State School System and sets out a Schools Renewal Strategy which involves the devolution of greater control to schools.

Keywords

Management review of NSW education system; devolution of greater control to schools; budgets; staffing; flexibility; management; encouraging greater community involvement; disabled students; ancillary student support; curriculum development.

Terms of Reference

1. Review operational structures within the Department of Education and TAFE and the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs in terms of their efficiency and effectiveness in achieving their purposes and government goals.
2. Review administrative arrangements including relationships at regional level in the Department of Education and TAFE.
3. Review relationships at the central level between the Department of Education, Department of TAFE and Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs.
4. Identify desirable relationships between the Education portfolio and the employment and training functions in the Department of Industrial Relations and Employment.

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FOREWORD

- Written by the Review Director, Dr Brian W. Scott.
- Begins by noting that “This briefing describes proposals for major change in the NSW State school system. It sets forward a Schools Renewal Strategy to create a progressive new era for all students in State schools.” (p. 1)
- Provides a very brief overview of the changing context of education and notes that the prime aim of the Review is to make schools “educationally effective and efficient organisations”. (p. 1)
- Notes that the Review found a clear need for dramatic change in educational administration in NSW, and that the “traditional centralised system is no longer appropriate for today’s schooling needs”. (p. 1)
- Argues that “very significant devolution is called for”. (p. 1)
- Notes the current period of economic insecurity and the need for financial restraint.
- Notes that the Review’s strategy presents three challenges:
 - “The Government is being asked to commit to basic reform; and to guarantee funding continuity for the reform package;
 - The Department is being asked to adopt a new decentralised, school-centred approach to educational administration, which is both responsive and accountable at all levels; and
 - Parents and local school communities are being asked to provide more active and constructive support for their children, in schools right across the state.” (p. 2)

THE AIMS OF SCHOOL RENEWAL

- Notes that the renewal aims to:
 - “Provide high quality education to students in New South Wales by revitalising the administration and operation of government schooling.” (p. 3)
 - “Promote more active involvement by the community, parents and industry in the delivery of education.” (p. 3)
 - “Provide the opportunity to build teacher esteem through greater responsibility, better career opportunities, and upgrading of professional and administrative skills.” (p. 3)
 - “Obtain the best value from expenditure on education by placing management emphasis on performance and outcomes.” (p. 3)
 - “Carry through a commitment to the most effective systems and technologies in education and administration.” (p. 3)

- “Foster a dynamic environment in which educational change can continue to take place.” (p. 3)

I. DIRECTIONS FOR CHANGE

Background

- Notes that this document is an advanced briefing to the full report of the Management Review which is due to be presented to Government later that year.
- Notes that the ministerial portfolio of education and youth affairs “today covers an exceedingly wide span of educational activities, reflecting great changes since the early years of the century, when educational was largely synonymous with school education.
- Makes the following recommendation:
 - “The Department responsible for delivering school-level education should be re-named the Department of School Education (DSE)”. (p. 3)
- Notes that the review of the Department of Technical and Further Education is to be presented at a later stage but that the conclusion of the Review is that: “The Department of School Education and the Department of Technical and Further Education should remain as separate organisations, both reporting to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs.” (p. 4)
- Notes that the purpose of this advance briefing is three-fold:
 - “To inform the people of New South Wales, particularly those with a stake in the education system, of the nature and direction of proposed reform;
 - To explain to those within the system the dimensions of recommended changes; and
 - To outline an action program needed to implement change at an ambitious yet realistic pace.” (p. 4)

The State Education System Today

- Notes that the NSW school system one of the largest centralised systems in the world.
- States that in recent years “students, teachers and parents have become increasingly dissatisfied with the way education is delivered and with its outcomes”. (p. 4)
- Notes that there is a general perception that standards of public education are declining.
- States that “Structural and functional strains have been aggravated by a strong and growing emphasis on bureaucratic requirements. Thus a major finding of the Management Review is that:
 - The efficiency and effectiveness of public education is today seriously undermined by existing structures, and burdensome operational and administrative procedures.” (p. 5)

II. THE STRATEGY FOR CHANGE AND RENEWAL

What the Review Found

- States that “Education has been provided in New South Wales over the last 100 years and more on the basis of a fundamental guiding assumption: namely, that control over the quality of education is best achieved through a centralised system of providing schools, employing staff, setting curriculum and evaluating outcomes.” (p. 5)
- Notes that this assumption is no longer valid.

- Concludes that the principle of applying uniform State-wide practices for equity does not work as:
 - “It causes much of the decision-making to be embedded at the centre, away from the point of teaching and learning;
 - It allocates resources in accordance with rigid formulae rather than on the basis of need; and
 - It seriously impairs each school’s ability to respond to the requirements of its students.” (p. 5)
- Notes that the Review has devised an alternate set of premises.

Key Premises

- Notes that the Management Review’s strategy for change and renewal derives from five fundamental premises:
 - “The school, not the system, is the key organisational element providing teaching and learning.” (p. 5)
 - “Every school is different and therefore has different needs.” (p. 5)
 - “The best judge of those needs will usually be the individual school’s teachers and the community.” (p. 6)
 - “Schools will best meet their needs if they are enabled to manage themselves in line with general guidelines.” (p. 6)
 - “The role of the system, if it is to be effective, must focus on providing support to schools and their leaders.” (p. 6)
- Notes that based on these premises, the Review has concluded overall that “The most effective management approach to revitalising education in New South Wales is to make all schools well-managed, self-determining, self-renewing centres of educational quality.” (p. 6)

Schools Renewal: The Concept

- Argues that the present centralised system inhibits schools in their task and notes that the Review has found that “A basic change is needed so that the system is totally committed to supporting the school, rather than the school being in support of the system.” (p. 6)

Empowering Schools for Renewal

- Notes the “long-standing and deeply-held belief among administrators of the State education system that it provides for all students on an equitable basis.” (p. 6)
- States that “On the evidence, the Review has concluded that it is simply not true that students all over the State have access to the same education: the quality of education provision varies greatly from region to region, district to district, and school to school.” (p. 6)
- Makes the following recommendation:
 - “The State system should not only recognise that variations between schools exist; it should encourage and expect schools to be different, at the same time fostering excellence and ensuring that deficiencies in quality are corrected.” (p. 7)
- Notes that the Renewal Strategy “gives schools power to bring about dynamic grassroots change” by giving schools “greater control over their own resources” and “providing system support for school-based development.” (p. 7)

Turning the Organisation Downside Up

- Notes that this essentially entails a reversal from the ‘top down’ model of authority to one in which the school is “at the centre of a decentralised support structure” (p. 7).
- Makes the following recommendation:
 - “A decentralised basis of organisation structure needs to be adopted, whereby decisions and actions take place as near to the school as possible, consistent with sound principles of educational administration.” (p. 7)
- Discusses the consequences of this recommendation in relation to Head Office staff, Central Executive Accommodation, Regional Resources and Education Resource Centres and provides pictorial charts of the proposed new structure.

III. CHANGES AT SCHOOL LEVEL

The School Renewal Plan

- Notes that “Under the School Renewal Strategy, schools would assume, over a three year period, greatly increased discretion over two essential resources – people and money. As a consequence, principals and their executive staff would be able to guide the future of their schools much more directly and progressively.” (p. 10)
- The Review recommends that “within the framework of overall departmental goals”:
 - “Each school should develop its own Renewal Plan as the basis for its on-going program of school improvement and professional development.” (p. 10)
- Notes that these Renewal Plans “would be a simple document outlining a program of action for achieving the school’s agreed educational goals and priorities over five years.” (p. 10)

School Budgets

- Notes that principals currently have little financial authority or flexibility and financial decisions have largely been controlled by Head Office and that this has meant little training has taken place at a school level in basic financial management.
- States “The Management Review believes this must change. It recommends that”:
 - “School budgets should be introduced on a progressive basis for all schools in the State over a three-year period. Appropriate school staff, including the principal, must receive the necessary prior training in financial management and budgeting techniques.” (p. 10)
- Outlines the features the budget will need to have.

School Staffing

- Notes that traditionally schools have been staffed centrally from a State-wide pool of teachers and public servants.
- States that “The Management Review conducted detailed research at school level, and reached the clear conclusion that:
 - “The most efficient way of building excellent schools is to ensure that each has a principal appropriate to the school’s needs, a stable and cohesive executive team, and a willingness by senior staff to assist and encourage other teachers at school.” (p. 12)
- Recommends a number of changes to school staffing arrangements on a ‘phase in’ basis over five years.

IV. SCHOOL-LEVEL SUPPORT

- Notes that this and the following three section of the Review outline support for schools. This section details:
 - Professional support for teachers, including professional development;
 - Administrative support, including the implementation of computerised administration, and cluster support; and
 - Cluster support, based on a new kind of schools management unit based on a 'Cluster' of schools which should replace the current District Inspectorate function.

V. EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTRE SUPPORT

- States that "The Education Resource Centres (typically taking up an area of about 250 square metres) are planned to become the hub of localised professional and curriculum support for the 50 to 60 schools within the four clusters. They will also be an educational "shopfront", keeping teachers abreast of available resources, materials and services, and providing meeting facilities for teachers and school communities." (p. 16)

VI. REGIONAL SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

- Notes that the Department's 10 regional administrations have in recent years taken a more active role in the management of schools. The Management Review found that generally these regional structures are working well and have the capacity to take on greater responsibility.
- State that "The Review believes that within the overall framework of support for schools, a Region is best able to provide the necessary general planning, professional support and administrative functions to provide the necessary general planning, professional support and administrative functions to allow schools to operate most efficiently and effectively. It therefore recommends that:
 - "Major devolvement of operational responsibility to Regions and, where appropriate, to schools be carried out over the next three years." (p. 16)
- Discusses Regional Management and Regional Structure and Staffing.

VII. CENTRAL EXECUTIVE SUPPORT

- States that "The present Head Office of the Department is large, comprising over 2,000 people in 13 directorates and three other units, and is charged with an exceedingly wide range of administrative, educational and operational tasks." (p. 19)
- Notes that "The Management Review found conclusively that the heavy centralisation of operational management in Head Office does not assist effective school development. Complex and often overlapping structures, as well as long, typically tortuous process lines have increasingly alienated school communities, and classroom teachers in particular, from 'the system'." (p. 19)
- Notes that fundamental changes are needed and outlines proposals to: devolve most operational management to regions and to schools, simplify structures, reduce resources at the centre and redistribute them to regions and schools, loosen centrally decided formula relating to staffing, budgets and other resources, and the linking of financial and budgetary processes to educational outcomes and performances.
- Discusses the future role and structure of 'Central Executive', which would be largely confined to policy development and coordination, department-wide general management oversight and corporate planning and coordination.

- Notes that “the Department of Education appears to have excessive influence on the Board of Secondary Education’s activities”. (p. 21)
- Outlines a proposal for how the influence can be lessened.

VIII. SPECIALIST SUPPORT

- Notes that “The Department currently provides specialist support for schools in a number of areas, including: curriculum; education resources and services; special education for disabled students; guidance and counselling services; and other student welfare and support programs.” (p. 22)
- Notes that the Review found that most support services are under-utilised, sometimes difficult to access and often uncoordinated.
- Makes the following recommendation:
 - “Each school should be able to purchase or contract within clearly defined guidelines specialist services which best fit local needs.” (p. 22)

Curriculum

- States the following in relation to the curriculum:
 - “The process of curriculum document design should be streamlined, and accelerated, and also be better balanced and coordinated with implementation and evaluation activities.” (p. 23)
 - “Consultancy services and educational resources should be provided concurrently with the release of curriculum documents, and where possible, supported in schools by consultants who have been involved in curriculum trialling.” (p. 23)
 - “Exchanging or co-developing curriculum materials with other schools, Regions, States or other providers (including non-government schools) should be actively encouraged.” (p. 23)
 - “Entrepreneurship by school and regional personnel in selling locally-developed curriculum services should also be actively encouraged.” (p. 23)
 - “Much greater use should be made of contracted externally-supplied curriculum support materials and services.” (p. 23)
 - “Curriculum documents and other educational resources prepared for correspondence students should logically be integrated with the general curriculum.” (p. 23)
 - “Greater encouragement should be given to and use made of the work of professional associations in curriculum support.” (p. 23)

Education Resources

- States the following in relation to the curriculum:
 - “Education Resource Centres should be shop-fronts for the sale and contracting of educational resources.” (p. 23)
 - “Schools should be able to purchase those resources which best support their curriculum.” (p. 23)
 - “When curriculum-related equipment is needed, Regions should be able to ‘bulk-by’ on behalf of schools; while schools should be free to make their own preferred purchases.” (p. 23)
 - “Library services should be rationalised and consideration given to housing a limited collection in each Region.” (p. 23)

- “Resource production in Central Executive should focus on those areas where support is more effectively harnessed for State-wide provision. For example:
 - Radio, television, satellite, etc.
 - Initial curriculum support
 - Promotional material.” (p. 23)

Disabled Students

- Makes six points including that: special schools should have the same flexibility in budgeting and staffing as other schools; and that “cluster-based curriculum and professional support for special class teachers should be given encouragement, wherever appropriate, at cluster and regional level”. (pp. 23-24)

Guidance, Counselling and student welfare support

- Makes four points including that principals identify the type of support that best suits needs of school, and that regions should allocate funding.

IX. CAREER SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS, PRINCIPALS AND ADMINISTRATORS

- Overviews the current system of employment within Education Department and notes that there are three different authorities: the teaching service, the public service, and the ancillary staff. Makes an argument about the need for major policy change and details proposals for promotion, recruitment and selection, career paths, transfers, and rewards and incentives.

X. PARENT AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- Begins by noting that parental and community support for schools varies widely (and notes socio-economic and English language fluency as two factors which influence level of involvement).
- Outlines the benefits to schools where community involvement is high and makes recommendations for encouraging greater community involvement.

XI. PERFORMANCE BUDGETING SUPPORT

- Notes that “the education budget is currently framed and administered in ways which inhibit effective financial and operational management by Head Office, Regions and schools”. (p. 30)
- Recommends that:
 - “Education budgets should be framed so that resources are allocated in line with planned educational outcomes.” (p. 30)
- Details the “performance budgeting approach”. (p. 30)

XII. EFFICIENT ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

- Provides an overview of the importance of efficient administrative support as an adjunct to “educational effectiveness”. (p. 31)
- Recommends an upgrade of administrative systems, specifically so that they can include data on outcomes and details proposals for changes to property management.

XIII. AN ECONOMIC EQUATION FOR SCHOOL EDUCATION

- States that “The School Renewal Strategy provides a blueprint for fundamental restructuring of State school education. It is designed to build an administrative infrastructure which will support the effective operation of schools into the next

century. This will require a substantial investment in people and other educational resources.” (p. 33)

- Details the budgetary implications including a one-off allocation of \$50 million and maintaining expenditure on school education in real terms over the next five years.

XIV. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RENEWAL PROGRAM

- Details proposals for the implementation of the Renewal Program, noting that it will require, “strong direction”, “financial commitment”, “major professional development and training initiatives”, and “information and consultation”. (pp. 35-39)

EPILOGUE – WHAT THE CHANGES WILL MEAN

- Notes that “The Schools Renewal Strategy aims to bring substantial benefits to all involved in, or associated with, State school education in New South Wales.” (p. 40)
 - “For students it will mean better teaching and learning through more effective and efficient use of educational resources.” (p. 40)
 - “For teachers it will mean stronger career prospects through a fairer promotional system, more relevant professional development, and more flexible career paths.” (p. 40)
 - “For principals it will mean greatly enhanced ability to shape their schools’ future and the quality of teaching and learning through more direct control over vital resources.” (p. 40)
 - “For administrators it will mean having effective operational control in their management role through greater individual autonomy in decision-making.” (p. 40)
 - “For parents it will mean greater confidence in their school’s ability to meet their children’s educational needs through more responsive management approaches.” (p. 40)
 - “For the community it will mean a clearer appreciation of the State school system’s performance capabilities through much greater emphasis on student outcomes.” (p. 40)
 - “For industry it will mean that better educated students will be more able to respond to the vocational opportunities of the workplace.” (p. 40)
 - “For private providers of education resources and services it will mean greatly expanded opportunities to service public education through opening up the market.” (p. 40)
 - “For the government of the day it will mean greater confidence that the best value is being achieved from the education dollar through revitalised schools, more effective administration and greater accountability.” (p. 40)