The Impact Study on the Effectiveness of External School Review in Enhancing School Improvement through School Self-evaluation in Hong Kong (The Impact Study on the Effectiveness of External School Review) Phase II Report – Executive Summary

Quality Assurance Division

Education and Manpower Bureau

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THE IMPACT STUDY ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF
EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW IN ENHANCING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
THROUGH SCHOOL SELF-EVALVATION IN HONG KONG

(THE IMPACT STUDY ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF
EXTERNAL SCHOOL REVIEW)

PHASE II REPORT – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

1.1 The Impact Study on the Effectiveness of External School Review in Enhancing School Improvement in Hong Kong (The Impact Study on the Effectiveness of External School Review), an independent study conducted by Professor John MacBeath of the University of Cambridge and Bill Clark of Cambridge Education from 2004, was to evaluate the implementation of the School Development and Accountability (SDA) Framework with its two key components of school self-evaluation (SSE) and external school review (ESR). The Phase II Impact Study is based on data collected from ESR conducted in 2003/04 (99 schools) and 2004/05 (139 schools). By the time of this report, a third cohort of schools in 2005/06 was already providing some data but these have not been systematically included in this report as the data set was still incomplete. Reference is made to these schools where data are seen as potentially significant.

1.2 The first report of the Impact Study, published in early 2005, described the largely positive experiences of the first 99 schools to be involved. While commenting on the many teething problems, characteristic of any system-wide innovation, it concluded that the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) had essentially got it right by laying a foundation to build on, with leading-edge schools in a position to exert a major influence on developments in the future. It has put self-evaluation centre stage and lent a sense of urgency to improvement and accountability. The challenge outlined then was to provide support for schools to embed self-evaluation as an integral aspect of school and classroom life, infusing the thinking and practice of teachers and school leaders. This implied ongoing professional development, keeping the structure and nature of ESR under constant review and continually refining and enhancing the relationship between internal SSE and external school review.

Development from Phase I Impact Study

1.3 Prior to 2003, the Quality Assurance (QA) Framework had been in place for six years but, in the light of emerging knowledge in Hong Kong and other parts of the world, the time was seen as right to introduce a programme which would be congruent with the devolution of decision-making through school-based management. The twin aims of school development and accountability would, it was planned, be realised through the SDA Framework based on systematic and

rigorous internal SSE, complemented by ESR. Documentation to support the new approach was developed and a training programme for Quality Assurance Division (QAD) inspectors was conducted in September 2003, followed by a further training programme for front line external school reviewers in December 2003.

1.4 In the following two and a half years up to the publication of this report a continuing series of professional development events was put in place for front line teachers and principals, external school reviewers as well as ESR team leaders and members. This was complemented by updated information on SDA, web-based SSE tools and revisions to the structures of ESR and protocols in response to feedback from schools and findings from the Phase I Impact Study. A wide range of international experts contributed to these ongoing workshops, seminars and public lectures. In November 2005, the SDA Framework was further streamlined with the development of an e-platform (ESDA) to help schools in systematic data management and an online data collection tool for stakeholder survey and school-based questionnaires. Schools were again reminded to avoid undue workload through over-documentation and over-preparation for ESR.

1.5 Following the 2005 publication of the Phase I Impact study, QAD responded to the findings, putting in place new guidelines for schools. This was a clear signal to the schools that EMB did listen to the views of the profession and was itself able to learn and improve. With this new dispensation, schools were freed from some of the pressures of documentation and workload, with a loosening of structures to enable schools to speak more proactively for themselves. The key recommendations were:

- No requirement for schools or ESR teams to provide ratings on the 14-Performance Indicator (PI) areas.

- Latitude for schools to use other qualitative and quantitative descriptors relevant to their developmental stage.

- Slimming down of the School Self Assessment (SSA) report to 20 pages, focusing on key issues and improvement measures over the past three years.

- ESR to focus on three key documents, i.e. the SSA report, Key Performance Measures and the stakeholder survey data analysis.

- School Management Committees to continue to receive copies of the report but not to upload the ESR reports to the EMB website for the 1st cycle of implementation of the SDA Framework.

- More concrete feedback by EMB on school performance and, in particular, more specific advice on learning and teaching strategies.

- A consolidated inspection report on the key observations from ESR and other types of inspection to be published every year with areas for improvement and examples of good practice.

Phase II Impact Study

1.6   The Phase II Impact Study followed from the evaluation of Phase I, employing similar strategies to document the authentic voices of the profession through questionnaire surveys, case studies and cross-school focus group interviews. In both phases, two sets of confidential questionnaires were sent to the teaching staff of all ESR schools. Questionnaires on ESR were issued immediately following ESR together with the ESR Draft Report and post-ESR questionnaires were issued at a later date around November in the following school year after the preparation of the Annual School Plan. Over 15,000 questionnaires were collected from teachers and principals from the ESR schools, with a response rate of around 70%.

1.7   In 2005/06, 8 case studies in primary, secondary and special schools were conducted by Professor John MacBeath and Bill Clark (the Cambridge Research team) to complement the 8 case studies reported on in Phase I. 10 field observations of the ESR process in schools were added to the 10 conducted in 2003/04, all with follow-up questionnaires for principals, ESR team leaders, ESR team members and the external school reviewers. In addition, 7 cross-school focus group interviews were conducted with front line teachers, principals, School Improvement Team (SIT) members and School Sponsoring Bodies of the 2003/04 ESR schools by Professor John MacBeath in February 2006 to complement those 22 cross-school focus group interviews for the 2003/04 and 2004/05 ESR schools already conducted by EMB itself in December 2004 and 2005 respectively. To trace the impact of ESR and the embedding of SSE for school development, questionnaires were issued to the SIT of the 2003/04 ESR schools in early 2006, and completed by 701 SIT members in 89 ESR schools with a response rate of 90%. The SIT members were asked to engage in joint evaluation as a team, discussing their own individual viewpoints on the impact of ESR on school planning and development.

2.   **MAIN FINDINGS**

2.1   The Cambridge research team was to evaluate the impact of the implementation of the SDA Framework with the complementary processes of SSE and ESR on schools and to make recommendations as to necessary further improvement. These are the headline findings.

The importance of leadership

2.2   Effective and visionary leadership holds the key, not only to self-evaluation, but to how ESR is prepared for, accommodated, and used to the benefit of the school. It was in preparation for ESR that the quality of leadership was most often affirmed or exposed. Where there was strong and self-confident leadership, the process was managed with minimum disruption and minimal anxiety. Where leadership was weak, anxiety and disruption to routine could run through the school, with a principal's own anxiety and lack of confidence infecting staff and inducing over-preparation.

2.3   Leadership may be portrayed on a spectrum running from those who saw ESR as a threat and those who welcomed it as an opportunity, those who worked hard to hide and cover the cracks as against those who opened up their schools to constructive scrutiny. There were some principals who welcomed ESR for a more strategic reason – as a lever to push reform faster with a stamp of external authority. Both questionnaire and interview data show that a significant majority of senior leaders found ESR helpful and constructive even when there were initial reservations or scepticism.

2.4   Above all, leadership manifested itself in response to change. What demarcated the strongest from the weakest principals was their proactive attitude to new ideas and new ways of doing things. They had a clear sense of ownership of their school's priorities and future direction and, because there was a resilience and set of values shared within the school, were not easily blown off course. Leadership was then located not simply at the apex of the school hierarchy but exercised at various levels within the school, growing dispersed authority rather than holding it to oneself.

Maintaining and embedding self-evaluation

2.5   Leadership holds the key to the vitality and sustainability of school self-evaluation. The quality and effectiveness of schools is determined by the extent to which confidence and expertise in self-evaluation permeates the culture of the school. The evidence revealed a continuing lack of confidence among front line teachers in the use of SSE tools in their day-to-day work. While School Self Assessment (SSA) brought a new sense of urgency to the development of self-evaluation, it tended not to be seen as an extension or refinement of what had gone before but rather as another new initiative. At this stage of development, there are still many teachers who see the primary audience for SSE as the review team rather than the school itself. This is a perception likely to prevail as long as self-evaluation is viewed as an event rather than a process integral to ongoing professional practice.

2.6   Nonetheless, there are leading-edge exemplars to draw on from schools that have made SSE their own, have built the bridge from their ongoing work on self-evaluation so as to embed it in their daily round of activities. There are many examples of individual teachers who are comfortable with critical reflection on their practice through peer lesson observation or student feedback on classroom learning and teaching.

2.7   While there is some way still to go in embedding self-evaluation in the ongoing flow of classroom activity, one of the signal benefits of SSA has been in bringing teachers together beyond the classroom to share in a whole school dialogue. For many this was the first time they had been encouraged to think more holistically and systematically about their school as an organisation, or as a community of learners. SSA worked well in general and proved to be of particular benefit to schools with no previous experience of self-evaluation.   For them a structure and a starting point proved both important and welcome.

2.8   The press for evidence has helped schools move from intuitive and impressionistic evaluation of quality and performance to a more systematic and rigorous approach

to assessing practice. It has challenged complacency, insulation and self-satisfaction where that existed.

The key role of the School Improvement Team (SIT)

2.9   We have described leadership as being the key to effective SSE/ESR but this may be as much the leadership of the SIT as of the principal. In response to the questionnaire item '*Who has the greatest influence on the development of SSE in the school?*', most principals cited themselves. A few, however, put themselves in second place behind the School Improvement Team. This is not an either/or question but one of powerful synergy when leadership is distributed and SITs are given opportunities to take a lead. The efficacy and credibility of the SIT as an advisory and decision-making body, rather than a bolt-on addition, relies on a number of critical factors:

- Membership which includes a cross-section of staff with high credibility among their colleagues;

- Vision as to what self-evaluation can achieve and feed into school improvement;

- Scope to exercise initiative and creativity;

- Teamwork which exceeds and synergises the capacities of all its members; and

- Initiative and ownership which create confidence and shared leadership throughout the team.

2.10   A vital SIT is one committed to the team's work, keen to learn more about self-evaluation, happy to support their peers in school-wide improvement. This has implications for principals and senior managers as it would be difficult for School Improvement Teams to fulfil their function without strong and ongoing support and guidance.

The impact on learning and teaching

2.11   The essential value of SSE/ESR is measured by how it impacts on learning and teaching. Since the inception of the SDA Framework, there is clear evidence from focus group interviews, teaching staff, SITs, school leaders and, perhaps most tellingly, students, that classroom teaching is now more engaging, student-centred and open to critical appraisal by other staff, senior management and students. While all of these gains cannot be attributed solely to SSE/ESR, self-evaluation has played a part in helping teachers to be more open with their colleagues, to be more skilled in offering feedback as well as being more receptive to student voice. Peer observation and collaborative lesson planning have clearly been given impetus by SSE/ESR. ESR recommendations have helped school leaders to put in place the structural supports which facilitate peer collaboration, such as timetabling and human resource manpower planning. The evidence suggests that, as curricula develop and new approaches to teaching and learning emerge, teachers

who are familiar with the tools and strategies of self-evaluation will be more receptive to change and more able to adopt new ways of doing things.

Clarifying and communicating the purpose of ESR

2.12   The evidence continues to show, in the latest survey and focus group data, that there exists continuing anxiety and tension around ESR. This rests, to some extent at least, on misunderstanding, miscommunication and disinformation about what ESR is for and how it relates to SSE. There have been calls for a suspension of ESR or a longer time span between ESR visits to schools. Despite clear guidelines from EMB, some schools, which have not undergone ESR, attend too much to rumours and persist in over-investment in preparation for ESR.

2.13   As the data make clear, the central problem lies in the anxiety generated from the anticipation of forthcoming review rather than in the ESR process or aftermath. The messages from all the schools from which the questionnaire data collected between 2003 and 2006 show a consistent pattern of response. Three out of four staff members agreed ('strongly agree' and 'agree') that ESR had helped their school devise future goals and development plans, while there is a fairly consistent agreement, around 65%, that ESR had given an informed judgement on the effectiveness of the school's own self-evaluation process. As well as positive affirmation these data also show that there is still room for improvement.

2.14   SSE and ESR have together achieved a greater sense of transparency within school and in relation to the parent body. There is less of a hiding place for poor practice while good practice has, to a large extent, been uncovered and celebrated. Nonetheless, the purposes of review will continue to need clarification, elaboration and exemplification.

Enhancing the procedures of ESR

2.15   Review currently takes the form of a pre-briefing followed by four days in schools, the bulk of the time spent in examining documentation, interviewing staff, students and parents, shadowing students and observing in classrooms. This formula appears to work well and the majority of questionnaire responses were positive as to the range of activities involved. The major obstacle has been the paper chase in the months leading up to review, often involving redundant collection and even creation of paperwork to satisfy the external eye. This is, in part, attributable to the pre-briefing coming too close to the four-day visit, and the ESR team not having an earlier opportunity to explain to the whole teaching staff the requirements so as to pre-empt the frenetic activity of over-preparation and the mounting anxiety that accompanies it.

2.16   In both phases of the study, the concerns consistently raised by teachers were in relation to classroom observation. Their views had much less to do with the fact of observation itself than with the nature of the process and the lack of feedback. Given that the main purpose of lesson observation is to validate the school's own judgement on learning and teaching across the school, rather than focusing on individual teaching performance, external review procedures have not included feedback to individual teachers after lesson observation.   In the absence of any

comment by the reviewer, some teachers feel unsure as to what conclusions are being reached, how it will be reported and what may happen as a consequence. The present tight schedule of ESR allows little space for providing substantive professional feedback to individual teachers. During the course of the review, this has been the subject of much discussion within EMB and the depth of feeling among teachers has been understood and acknowledged.

Delivery in oral and written reporting

2.17 Questionnaire data in both 2003/04 and 2004/05 show a positive response to the external team's oral and written reporting. 70% of staff agreed that the ESR team had identified their schools' strengths, and there was much praise for the sensitive way in which it had been handled by the team. The oral feedback session was generally described as 'excellent', 'fair', 'balanced' and 'encouraging', with 'supportive appreciation' and clear in its summation of the issues. Some principals were, however, critical of the review teams' underestimating a school's quality and, in other cases, of 'overpraising' with feedback being too bland or too uncritical. When teachers made this comment, it may have been because they had hoped for some perceived bad practices in their schools to be picked up, such as the ineffectiveness of leadership. The most common criticism, however, was that the ESR team had failed to understand the context of the school or its unique qualities.

2.18 Reporting back to the school staff has been shown to be a delicate issue requiring expert balance, not only of the issues to be given but in its delivery. This applies to both written and oral feedback with a particular premium on face-to-face delivery.

Getting to grips with attainment, achievement and added value

2.19 Within the context of a generally positive welcome for review, judgements about a school's achievement and value-added performance in public examinations have been a subject of much discussion with diverse perceptions. One of the purposes of using the measurement of 'value-added' is for comparison of students' academic performance with schools of similar student intake. It is a move that has been broadly welcomed as an advance on the reporting of 'raw' attainment scores, creating a more even playing field for inter-school comparison and reflecting schools' efforts in helping students to progress over time.

2.20 However, a few schools observed or interviewed have displayed dissatisfaction with the way value-added performance is presented in the ESR report as a one-off judgment of the students' achievement, especially in very challenging circumstances with either low or high banding secondary one intake. Some teachers feel that they have been working to their capacity and for children's all-round development, and that the term 'value-added' should encompass developing students' character and social and moral values. Although, in some cases, this reflected low expectations of students on the part of some teaching staff, the issue of how to present value-added performance in both oral feedback and report writing is sensitive and warrants more attention.

Developing the role and expertise of review teams

2.21 Observations of the ESR process by the research team in 2004/05 and again in 2005/06 affirm the general findings from questionnaires that ESR teams are highly professional in their approach. It is also clearly evident that they have improved and learned from earlier feedback and evaluation. It takes some time to adapt to the new mode of review as the system migrates from QAI to ESR. One area in which there was marked improvement between 2004 and 2005 was in the quality of questioning and interviewing, particularly in probing for evidence. Most team members have come to grips with ESR as validating schools' own self-evaluation and they are now more comfortable with the process. Inevitably, there was some variation in quality within and between teams.

2.22 While all teams observed ESR guidelines, highly effective teams were distinguished by their flexibility in applying the guidelines. Less effective teams tended to focus too closely on detail in summing up and in oral feedback sessions dominated by detailed monologues and reading from notes. The most effective teams were flexible in their application of guidelines, adept at 'reading' the culture of the school and adapting their approach with both pragmatism and integrity to their remit. Their oral feedback had more the tone of conversation than instruction. This is testimony to the way in which EMB had responded to Phase I recommendations on providing training, enhanced professional development opportunities and focus on building capacity within ESR teams.

Disparities in expertise, experience and attitudes in schools

2.23 What the data show clearly in both phases of the study is the wide spectrum of schools in terms of their embrace of self-evaluation and readiness for ESR. At the 'best practice' end of that spectrum, there are schools highly enthusiastic about SSE and ESR and the benefits they have brought to their schools. At the other end are schools still struggling to come to terms with what is required. The evidence suggests that, by the next round of ESR, there will be a larger number of schools which have made significant progress in embedding self-evaluation and it is unlikely that they will need the same ESR formula as the first time round. There will be schools that have made moderate progress but still with some areas of weakness. There will also be schools that may have made little progress, perhaps even regressed.

Responding to the continuing issue of workload

2.24 In all of the data, teachers' workload has remained a continuing theme. SSE and ESR have added further to workload in a climate where there has already been an intensification of teaching. In the face of low attainment and increasing problems experienced by young people, teachers have redoubled their efforts to support and counsel their students, working longer hours and giving more of their personal time, at the expense of their domestic life. EMB has responded to this with new measures to supplement the teaching force. The role of leadership has proven to be vital, and will continue to be so to ensure that new sources of funding and support are deployed to best effect to create a climate friendly to self-evaluation and innovation.

A worldwide movement

2.25   Around the world, governments are moving away from 'top down' inspection or quality assurance systems to give more responsibility to schools for their own self-evaluation. This is part of the trend towards local management of schools, which has been very widely welcomed by teachers and school leaders, because it represents a shift in power and puts the levers of change in the hands of those in the best position to know where change is most needed. It is usually allied to a system of external support and challenge.

2.26   Hong Kong, being at the forefront of that global movement, is learning from what is happening in other parts of the world as well as offering a model from which other countries can learn. The 'sequential' model of SSE/ESR adopted by EMB is now widely seen as the most appropriate form of school development and accountability. It is a form that has been adopted in Asia Pacific countries such as Japan and Singapore, in Australia and New Zealand and in many European countries. In all of these countries schools are increasingly expected to be self managing and self improving, with self-evaluation playing a key role in school improvement. Hand in hand with this, inspection and quality assurance systems take as their focus a school's own effectiveness in evaluating itself and telling its story to a wider audience. In practice there are tensions between the improvement agenda and demands for external accountability and no country can claim to have got the balance right. The 'anxiety syndrome' leading up to inspection/review is not unique to Hong Kong but something common to all systems. Not all systems, however, are as successful as Hong Kong in diminishing the apprehension and establishing a more collegial relationship.

Self-evaluation integral to new initiatives

2.27   For many teachers, self-evaluation is still seen as another initiative along with curricular change, new pedagogies and new directions in assessment.   From a policy point of view the message of successful self-evaluation has to be that SSE is not another initiative alongside these but that it underpins and connects everything that a school undertakes.   When SSE is embedded, teachers routinely and rigorously evaluate learning, teaching and classroom management and have an evidence base with which to evaluate any innovation. Senior leaders, knowledgeable about and committed to self-evaluation know how to guide the embedding of change within a self-evaluation and improvement framework. It is clear that there remains a lot to be done for teachers and senior leaders whose understanding of the role of SSE in holistic change is less advanced and who adopt a mechanistic approach to implementing new initiatives.

The battle for hearts and minds

2.28   It is a paradox that, in spite of its general success, SSE/ESR sometimes receives a bad 'press'.   The evidence from this study does not substantiate a negative view. It is inevitable that, in any innovation, mistakes will be made and refinement will be needed as practice moves forward and obstacles are encountered. Like any innovation, it is a learning process.   While, by and large, in schools already

reviewed, the battle for hearts and minds has been largely won, it is elsewhere that myth and rumour distort the perceptions and expectations of those still to experience it.

Implementing School Development and Accountability

2.29 In summary, the achievements in the implementation of the School Development and Accountability Framework are substantial and impressive. These have been accomplished within a brief time frame, requiring a shift in mindset and in practice. While substantive, system-wide change takes time and embedding is a slow process of winning hearts and minds, there is evidence of:

- a deepening understanding and heightened confidence of school staff in relation to ESR and SSE;
- a growing concern for, and willingness to engage with, evidence to move from impressionistic evaluation of quality and performance to a more systematic, rigorous and informed approach to assessing practice;
- sharing of thinking and practice by teachers beyond the classroom in a whole school dialogue;
- pedagogy becoming more engaging, more student-centred, more open and receptive to student voice;
- a higher priority among schools accorded to the embedding of self-evaluation;
- a welcome for the insights of ESR teams and setting of clear agendas for improvement in follow-up to review;
- SSE and ESR together achieving a greater sense of transparency within school and in relation to the parent body;
- the enhanced skills of ESR teams in conducting review; and
- responsiveness of EMB to schools' concerns, and initiatives taken to address these issues.

2.30 The implementation of SSE and ESR as complementary processes, has served as a significant catalyst to change and school improvement. Schools are at different points in terms of confidence with self-evaluation and their trajectories of improvement. Some acknowledge that there is still a distance to travel. Evidence from all of the data sources as to success in sustaining and enhancing improvement are summarised under three main headings:

(1) School level priorities, management and administration

- Greater focus on major concerns
- Embedding of SSE as routine
- Reviewing and streamlining of administration structures
- Improving the process of school planning so as to be more reflective
- Heightening the involvement of front line teachers
- More systematic approach to collecting and analysing data
- Greater clarity of success criteria

(2)   Attitudes, ownership and motivation of staff

- Better team spirit in the school
- More dialogue among teachers across the school
- A greater sense of ownership and involvement in school priorities
- More willingness to provide challenge and constructive criticism

(3)   Impact on teaching and learning

- Clearer aims and objectives in teaching and learning
- Teachers becoming more proactive in innovation and sharing practice
- Consolidating and affirming good practice
- Widening the repertoire and use of SSE tools
- Teachers more self reflective in their approach to teaching and learning
- Shift in emphasis from teacher-centred to student-centred learning
- More group discussion and peer interaction in classrooms: in the past, students were too passive
- Improving questioning techniques with more open-ended questioning in classes
- Collaborative lesson planning more focused than previously: more professional sharing of ideas
- Greater use of internal assessment data to inform teaching and learning
- More cross reviews of teachers' work in Key Learning Areas
- More recognition of learner diversity: looking at the needs of individual students

2.31   What remains to be done is for schools to apply the lessons of systemic change for school improvement from leading-edge exemplars. That is, teachers learn from teachers and school leaders from their peers. As anxiety and resistance to ESR has been fed laterally and collegially by peer-to-peer networks, those same networks have already been used to promulgate good practice and positive experiences. The evidence is clear that there is a fertile soil in which to grow further.

3.   RECOMMENDATIONS

Sustaining development

3.1   Sustainable school development and intelligent accountability will require a capacity building approach in which self-evaluation is progressively embedded at classroom level and permeates all initiatives, so that SSE is not seen as an extra but is built into every aspect of practice. In most cases this will not happen without support and challenge at various levels of the system, which is clearly aligned in purpose and values – EMB, School Sponsoring Bodies, School Management Committees, school leadership and School Improvement Teams.

3.2   As the system develops, it will be important that schools' own prior experiences with self-evaluation are affirmed and 'home grown' approaches are helped to grow further and in the right direction. Rigid or uniform templates can stifle initiative and ownership. The provision of web-based support and training will prove vital

in helping schools to assume ownership and become more confident and creative in their own approaches – as long as these forms of support avoid the pitfalls of off-the-shelf solutions.

3.3   The greater the sense of teacher ownership of SSE, the less contention there will be over review and fewer the headaches for policy makers. For EMB, looking to the future, this means exercising care so as not to reinforce a mechanistic top down approach to self-evaluation but to build from within, from leading-edge practice in schools and from outstanding practice elsewhere, encouraging experimentation with new and creative ways of telling the school's story.

Integrating of self-evaluation

3.4   In all new initiatives and associated training, self-evaluation should play an integral part. Whether assessment for learning, curriculum planning, teaching strategies, data management or data literacy development, tools and strategies for self-evaluation should always feature. It is only through this process that SSE will come to be understood not as another initiative but as a way of thinking and behaving.

The role of school improvement teams

3.5   As a significant lever for change at school level, it will be critical for the composition, function and scope of SIT's work to be widely understood and provision made for them to be proactive in developing and sustaining SSE.

3.6   Senior leadership in schools will need guidance in how to deploy the SIT most productively, helping them to gain a sense of shared ownership in that vital aspect of a school's work. Further professional development for SITs should be targeted on those schools where such support is most needed.   More training for SITs on the interpretation and use of a wide source of data (such as value-added performance, Territory-wide System Assessment, Stakeholders Survey, etc.) would help sharpen their data analysis skills to enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching.

ESR reporting to schools

3.7   The nature of the oral feedback needs to be continually revisited to ensure it is less of a delivered verdict and more of an occasion for dialogue, with the highlighting of key points. This could be promoted with a physical arrangement of furniture that encourages a more open and collegial exchange. Consideration also needs to be given as to whether and how more teachers might be included.

3.8   EMB has taken steps in including the 'moving average' of value-added performance in assessing students' academic performance. This may help to avoid some of the pitfalls of the one-off judgement, as the moving average looks at trends over three years.

External networking and support

3.9 Regional Education Offices (REO) were, on occasion, commented on with appreciation, although they did not figure large in case study interviews. While acknowledging the limitations of capacity and time for REO, their support and guidance for SSE/ESR is a high level priority. They can make a valued contribution if they are present at, and perhaps contribute to, the pre-briefing for ESR (which would be arranged before the summer vacation), and are able to follow through with schools in helping to advise and contain the documentation process. Following ESR, REO could make a valuable contribution by working with a SIT to examine plans for taking forward recommendations stemming from review. In the longer term, REO should follow up and advise on the embedding of self-evaluation and/or liaise with other agencies who may be providing support for school staff.

3.10 In addition to materials and web-based support already made available by QAD, it will be vital to fully exploit practitioners' knowledge and expertise in SSE through accessible web-based and DVD resources. Imaginative use of these media can capture practical strategies and good ideas and be used for interactive workshops and school-based professional development.

3.11 Systemic change will be enhanced through collegial networking, providing structures and opportunities for school leaders to learn from and with their peers. These do rely on incentives, scaffolding and external support to make them viable. These same principles apply to SITs and teachers.

Accountability and reporting

3.12 As accountability remains a key aspect of SSE/ESR, schools will need to consider how they report to their parents and other stakeholders on their own SSE/ESR findings, whilst following the protocols stipulated by EMB.

3.13 There is also a need for further consideration as to whether to upload ESR reports on to EMB website after the first cycle of ESR. Striking a balance between enhancing accountability and transparency and avoiding undesirable effects (such as the schools being stigmatised by inappropriate quotations from ESR reports) should be an issue for EMB and the broader education sector to consider.

Enhancing ESR procedures and protocols

3.14 EMB's prompt response to advancing the onsite pre-ESR briefing to the whole teaching staff before summer vacation for schools undergoing ESR in 2006/07 is a positive move. In so doing, the ESR team leader could clarify the requirements so as to avoid over-documentation and undue preparation as schools are likely to start documentation at year-end review and formulate the Annual School Plan for the coming year during the summer.

3.15 As well as providing earlier briefing and ongoing guidance to pre-empt over preparation, the nature of documentation requested may still need to be further reviewed so as to focus on what really matters (such as the analysis of the

students' work and performance, how teachers feed back on teaching and learning and how evaluation findings are addressed in subsequent planning, etc.). There needs to be a critical appraisal of what documentation can either reveal or conceal.

3.16 While the prime objectives of lesson observation to validate the school's own judgment on learning and teaching should be clearly conveyed to teachers at the pre-briefing, EMB should consider giving brief oral feedback to individual teachers after lesson observation to address their concerns.

3.17 As SSE/ESR develops, EMB has been keeping protocols under review and updating them. This applies to the Stakeholders Survey, Key Performance Measures and Performance Indicators (PIs). Ongoing revision of the PIs will further strengthen the inter-relationship and synergy of SSE and ESR.

Moving towards proportional review

3.18 The data base on school performance developed from the current four-year cycle of ESR should be mined to help put in place a system of proportional review. The school performance data provide the basis for the extension of the time scale for the next round of review. EMB could consider moving to a six-year review cycle in line with the 6 years of primary and 6 years of secondary school with the senior secondary curriculum in place so that ESR will take place at least once during a student's passage through primary and secondary education.

3.19 Using manpower effectively and discriminatingly will mean employing differing approaches to schools with diverse levels of performance and at different stages of development and, more and less intensive, with more variation in challenge and support. We may envisage schools with strong, confident self-evaluation requiring less external verification, a shorter length of visit and greater reliance on the school itself to play a proactive role in the review. Other schools may require something similar to current review procedures while some may require a longer, more in-depth exploration of areas of weakness with an enhanced role for REO and other external agencies. Proportional review is not the immediate priority but preparing for such a system will become increasingly important over the next few years before the next cycle of ESR.

Continuing professional development

3.20 Developing the role and expertise of ESR teams and external school reviewers, through ongoing professional development, will continue to be a priority as new members are brought on board, the system develops and changes to SSE/ESR are put in place.

3.21 Future training might be best directed towards more advanced issues such as style, sensitivity, time management, interpersonal relationships and the communication skills of being an ESR team member.

3.22 School leadership is ultimately the single most important ingredient in making SSE work. Workload issues, over-preparation and infectious anxiety will continue to be a problem unless senior leaders give a strong steer to teachers and model

their priorities accordingly. Effective enhancement of the quality of school leadership will rely on EMB's ability to use pioneering leaders (and not only principals), supporting their colleagues in other schools through collegial networking and leading professional development. In this respect web resources and REO guidance will play their part in strengthening collegial networking.

Winning the battle for hearts and minds

3.23 Large scale reform will require a multi-pronged strategy, most likely to be achieved by:

- exposing teachers to leading-edge exemplars from schools that have made SSE their own;

- providing compelling evidence that self-evaluation has direct and tangible impact for teachers and students;

- accessibility of tools of self-evaluation that are user-friendly and powerful; and

- experience of success in using tools of self-evaluation with a demonstration of their impact in improving learning and teaching, enhancing professionalism and improving schools.

3.24 Schools with robust, embedded self-evaluation represent the future growth points in the system and it is critical for system-wide development that their classroom teachers, panel heads and principals be enlisted as valuable ambassadors for self-improvement.