

Executive Summary

Context

The direction and expectations of the *State Literacy Strategy*, which has been in operation since 1997, were detailed in *Focus on Literacy*, a position paper on the explicit and systematic teaching of literacy in NSW government schools. The literacy strategy was developed to ensure Government literacy commitments were addressed in a coordinated and comprehensive way. In 1999, to reflect government commitments, the literacy strategy was expanded to the State Literacy and Numeracy Plan.

The *State Literacy Strategy* particularly focuses on: the teaching of reading K–6; interventions where students are experiencing difficulty; careful monitoring of students' literacy needs as they move from primary to secondary schools through the Year 7 English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA); and meeting the needs of students in all secondary school classrooms.

Key elements of the strategy are:

- the teaching of literacy in an explicit and systematic way;
- continuity in the development of each student's literacy skills through a planned, whole-school approach;
- coordinated and targeted school programs in response to the identification of literacy needs and at critical transition stages in each student's literacy development;
- early identification of students who are experiencing difficulties with literacy and provision of appropriate support;
- intensive local training and development for teachers in recognising and addressing the literacy needs of students;
- development of effective learning partnerships with parents and caregivers;
- monitoring of students' literacy achievement; and
- the establishment of literacy support teams in schools and districts.

The *State Literacy Strategy* was supported by extensive documentation (refer to Appendix 2). It was a coordinated strategy across departmental directorates so that a literacy focus drove all support services and programs, such as the *Country Areas Program* (CAP) and *Priority Schools Funding Program* (PSFP). Throughout all of these initiatives, literacy was presented as a common goal. Focused support included increased *Reading Recovery* consultancy, *Linkages Program* consultants and *Early Literacy Initiative* (ELI) consultants across the state. There were also specifically focused programs including *Log on to Literacy*, an online literacy program for isolated schools with limited access to consultancy support.

The Literacy Strategy with a K–10 focus has seen an increased concentration of resources including personnel and support materials, comprehensive testing of student literacy skills and training and development programs for teachers. The strategy has adopted a coordinated and targeted approach to the use of these resources and programs to support schools as they work to improve the literacy achievements of all students.

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Since 1997, the *State Literacy Strategy* has maintained its focus on:

- improving the teaching of literacy in both primary and secondary schools;
- providing additional support to students with special literacy needs;
- providing intensive local training and development for teachers in literacy;
- developing learning partnerships with parents and caregivers;
- establishing school literacy teams to coordinate a whole-school approach to the teaching of literacy; and
- monitoring the effectiveness of the strategy at school, district and state office level.

Evaluation Purpose

The purpose of the 2003 *State Literacy Strategy* Evaluation has been to provide advice about the effectiveness of the *State Literacy Strategy* and recommendations for new directions from 2004. The rationale for a program evaluation resides within the *School Development Policy (1999)*, NSW Department of Education and Training.

The background statement to this policy makes the following points.

- A goal of public education is to provide a system of effective schools for all students.
- An effective school will be one that is constantly striving to enhance its educational provision through a process of self-evaluation, reporting and development within the resources available to it.
- School development is inextricably linked to professional development and, ultimately, positive student outcomes.
- The system has the responsibility to support such development and ensure a quality provision of education for all students.
- These shared responsibilities between the school and the system are outlined in the school accountability and development model of NSW government schools. There are four elements to this model:
 - i. annual school self evaluation;
 - ii. annual school reporting;
 - iii. school reviews; and
 - iv. systematic monitoring and reporting.

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for the evaluation were devised in consultation with the *State Literacy Strategy* Evaluation Reference Group to investigate and evaluate the *State Literacy Strategy (1997–2003)*, to report on how and to what extent:

- student literacy achievements have improved;

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- teacher knowledge and skills to explicitly teach literacy have been enhanced;
- schools have adopted a whole-school approach to planning for literacy improvement;
- links between primary and secondary schools have been improved;
- students' literacy levels have been accurately assessed;
- students with literacy problems have been better supported;
- partnerships between teachers and parents to ensure literacy development have become more effective; and
- state office has provided coordinated support, including policies, programs and consultants, to assist teachers and schools.

Finally, the evaluation was expected to make recommendations about future policy, program and support directions in literacy.

Summary of Findings

The evaluation of the *State Literacy Strategy* reveals that the strategy has been highly successful. There is evidence in hard data, observations and anecdotal responses that the *State Literacy Strategy* has changed teaching practice and focused resources to markedly improve student learning outcomes. All standardised test data indicate either improvement or stable trends. Of particular note is the improvement of students in the lower bands of the Year 3 Basic Skills Test results. There has been a drop of more than 28% in the number of students in the lowest band, Band 1. Many students interviewed were able to articulate how they learn, reflecting the explicit nature of the language about literacy they have shared with their teachers.

Teachers are better equipped to identify student areas of need and more able to target particular groups of students requiring support. They provide more explicit teaching tasks, assessment tasks and support frameworks to facilitate better outcomes for students. The quality of assessment tasks has improved as has the quality of teacher feedback. There are increased levels of sophistication in student work samples indicating greater confidence in all areas of literacy. The *State Literacy Strategy* has been a catalyst for change and has enabled teachers individually and collectively to enhance their skills in teaching literacy. Literacy support teams have played key roles in driving the thrust in literacy across key learning areas (KLAs) and stages. Importantly, many literacy support teams have been integrated with other committees and teams.

The links between high schools and primary schools have improved in many cases because of the *Linkages* focus. Where good communication occurred between key personnel across stages, teachers were able to identify support strategies for students with special needs during critical periods of transition.

There has been a major shift in the professional manner in which data is used by teachers in schools. Teachers and principals have developed sophisticated skills in the use of data analysis to successfully target individual student needs, whole-school literacy strengths, and areas for development. Teachers are much more knowledgeable about literacy learning and student progress.

Their skills in supporting students who have literacy needs have improved markedly over the period of the *State Literacy Strategy*. The success of programs provided to enhance skills of lower primary students, particularly increased *Reading Recovery* support and the *Early Literacy Initiative* (ELI), was widely recognised.

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Good communication, including face-to-face sessions, newsletters and access to some excellent websites, continues to be valued by parents. There were indications of strong parent participation in many schools, especially in those where parents were encouraged to feel comfortable as part of the school culture.

The *State Literacy Strategy* documents were found to be extremely valuable for professional development and as reference points for planning and implementing teaching activities. The coordinated nature of training and development was one of the strengths of the *State Literacy Strategy*. Teachers were generous in their praise of the range of courses that had been provided. There was much data to indicate that quality courses delivered by both state and district consultants had been instrumental in driving teacher change and improving student outcomes as a result.

The evaluation gathered the following information in relation to the terms of reference.

Student literacy achievements have improved

There have been marked improvements in student literacy achievements revealed by observations, anecdotal evidence and through hard data examined in this evaluation. Since the *Basic Skills Test* (BST) began in 1989, there has been an expansion of statewide testing. The *English Language and Literacy Assessment* (ELLA) test was introduced as part of the *State Literacy Strategy*. There is a developing culture of evidence-based decision-making reflected in teaching practices and professional development mirrored in the responses of teachers and school leaders. The *State Literacy Strategy* evaluation case studies produced many responses from teachers about the effective use of data from the BST, ELLA and *Primary Writing Assessment* (PWA) changing teaching practices to improve student literacy achievements.

Analyses of BST trend data indicate that the impact of the State Literacy Strategy has been most noticeable in student literacy achievements in the early years of schooling. There has been a trend over the last seven years which indicates that the number of students in the lowest bands has declined steadily. The data indicates there are now 28% fewer students in Band I, the lowest band, than seven years ago. There has been a significant gain in the performance of boys in that time to narrow the gap between boys' and girls' achievement and a significant improvement in non-English speaking background (NESB) student performance. Further work on assessment and the tracking of students through schools and across schools will assist teachers to more readily respond to student needs and to target them explicitly and systematically.

Teachers are better equipped to identify student areas of need and more able to target particular groups of students requiring support. The quality of assessment tasks has improved as has the quality of teacher feedback. There are increased levels of sophistication in student work samples indicating greater confidence in all areas of literacy.

Many schools provided evidence of improved student outcomes from a range of sources including statewide testing, student portfolios, work samples, standardised and diagnostic testing, parent feedback, student reflection and peer evaluations.

Students had strong understandings of what literacy is and many students in case study schools could articulate with confidence what they had learnt and how literacy applied across the curriculum. Teachers were conscious of the need for students to be engaged in and able to enjoy their learning through literacy. Students indicated that they understood how they had grown in literacy development and how the complexities changed as they moved through the stages. Students also understood and were able to articulate the purposes of literacy across the KLAs.

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Although there were improvements in the performance of many sub-groups of students there was evidence that equitable outcomes are not being achieved for some groups. Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (A&TSI) students have improved but not at a comparable rate or to the level achieved by other sub-groups as reflected in statewide averages.

There were many indications that NESB students were achieving improved outcomes. In some instances teacher expectations of NESB students were not as high as they should be and consequently student expectations of themselves were low. In some circumstances it was evident that teachers could better utilise NESB student learning in their first language to improve literacy outcomes.

Concerns were expressed about the engagement of some boys and there were indications that this problem is common in the middle years. Teachers indicated that literacy learning is hindered when students have limited background experiences, have behaviour difficulties or have high mobility or poor attendance patterns. Literacy should continue to be made a focus of teaching and learning in relation to students who have behaviour, attendance or mobility issues and for boys' education.

Teacher knowledge and skills to explicitly teach literacy have been enhanced

Teachers have developed an awareness of the value to be gained from explicit teaching strategies. Respondents indicated that teacher involvement in marking statewide tests including the Primary Writing Assessment (PWA) and English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA), had made a significant impact on teacher understandings. Teachers have benefited from their involvement in these programs and training in the *Follow-up to BST*. Data from statewide testing (especially BST, PWA and ELLA) has enabled schools and teachers to access robust information about overall student progress, sub-groups of students and about individual student achievement against syllabus outcomes. A number of teachers commented that there should continue to be support for school-based marking of PWA, ELLA and the *Follow-up to BST*. They have also learnt much from the *Consistent Teacher Judgement (CTJ)* courses. Information from these courses has, in many cases, been the catalyst which has generated teacher knowledge and enhanced skills to teach literacy explicitly and systematically. The links of test items to syllabus outcomes has also assisted in this process.

The involvement of teachers in PWA and ELLA marking was seen as providing significant professional development. Teachers indicated that this training helped them link student needs with syllabus outcomes. There is a need to revisit, update and reinforce aspects of the strategy and to support it with appropriate training and development. There were many suggestions about the directions professional development might take, including visual literacy courses and more training in the skills involved in talking and listening. Teachers also indicated that they would like more information about the literacy needs of students in Stages 5 and 6.

Literacy support teams have played a key part in driving the thrust in teacher development in literacy across KLAs and stages. Importantly, literacy support teams have joined with other committees and teams to develop a whole-school focus on literacy. Literacy support teams are most effective when they are driven by key personnel who are responsible for ensuring that strong communication is a priority. These teams play a vital role in determining school literacy priorities and training and development needs.

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In many schools, literacy support teams have been very effective in providing the momentum for teacher learning in schools, particularly in secondary schools where they provide a platform for literacy learning across the KLAs. They have been a key factor in coordinating teacher skills to support students requiring additional assistance, with some outstanding examples of success.

The *State Literacy Strategy* has been a catalyst for change, enabling teachers individually and collectively to enhance their skills in teaching literacy. ‘Teaching programs were explicitly structured detailing literacy demands, syllabus outcomes, resources, teaching/learning experiences and assessment requirements’ – such observations were indicative of the focus teachers have on explicit teaching. Students who were interviewed identified the strategies their teachers used, reflected on their own learning, and were also able to articulate how they learned.

A major strength of the *State Literacy Strategy* has been the coordinated literacy thrust of programs statewide. This included the *Country Area Program* (CAP) and the *Priority Schools Funding Program* (PSFP). Teachers spoke of the importance of PSFP and CAP funding support in that, where students are disadvantaged or isolated, it is critical that literacy is a focus of these programs. Primary teacher responses indicated appreciation of the benefits derived from the *Early Literacy Initiative*, *Reading Recovery* and *Starting with Assessment* programs.

Collaboration across stages and KLAs and teamwork were highlighted as essential ingredients where the strategy has been most effective. The *State Literacy Strategy* has been a catalyst for cooperative consultation across programs and across KLAs. Teachers have been encouraged and assisted to teach in a systematic and explicit way using the outcomes from the syllabus assessment data and strategies suggested by the support documents through a range of programs.

Teachers particularly commented on the value of modelled, guided and independent strategies such as scaffolding for student learning. These strategies have been instrumental in enabling many teachers to move from whole-class instruction, to lessons comprising guided literacy groups, individualised programs and modelled and shared literacy experiences.

There were several areas where respondents specifically indicated that the coordinated focus of the *State Literacy Strategy* should continue. These included more concentration on the systematic teaching of critical and visual literacy, the systematic teaching of talking, listening and writing and the need for teachers to explicitly teach grammar. Some teachers who were not taught grammar explicitly at school have found teaching grammar difficult.

The importance of providing support in the teaching of literacy skills for beginning teachers and for casual teachers who play an important role in many schools, especially in isolated and rural schools, was emphasised. Teachers stressed the value of in-school courses provided by state and district offices, especially those related to the follow-up of statewide testing. Training and development driven by cooperative and collegial strategic planning in schools is an important aspect of school-based training and development.

Beginning teachers expressed concerns about the varying standards and course content of teacher preparation programs at universities. Information from varied sources indicated that opportunities for student teachers to become familiar with *State Literacy Strategy* documentation have varied widely.

The *Early Literacy Initiative* program, which supported teachers through in-school training, focused on Kindergarten to Year 2. Programs designed for teachers should continue to focus on the development of literacy, particularly in the early years, and be structured so that they are conducted with an in-school team training focus. Training and support through *Reading Recovery* have been

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of great significance in building teacher knowledge and skills, as has been the provision of programs such as *Log on to Literacy* and *Outback Reading* to support isolated schools.

There should be a continuing focus on data gathering and common understandings developed to ensure the accuracy of the sharing of information. Teachers stated that the focus on the use of data should be accompanied by a greater emphasis on the tracking of students. Other responses indicated the need for teachers to be continuously trained in data analysis and in the application of the outcomes for effective teaching and learning programs. Teachers also indicated that the strategy should continue its successful focus on the integration and embedding of literacy across all the KLAs.

It is important that the *State Literacy Strategy* documentation be revisited, revised and reinforced, that a systematic and planned approach be adopted to cater for new teachers, and that sufficient time is allowed for reflection on practice. Original and revised documents should be reissued to teachers on CD-ROM and made available on the Intranet. Regional literacy officers should work with teachers to revisit and reinforce the *State Literacy Strategy*.

Clear directions should be developed to allow reflection, consolidation and continuity of the *State Literacy Strategy*. Directions indicated include teacher training and development in visual literacy, talking and listening, critical reading skills, a balance between reading, writing, talking and listening and a greater focus on literacy in Stages 5 and 6.

Schools have adopted a whole-school approach to planning for literacy improvement

Teachers indicated many strategies which schools used to foster a whole-school approach to literacy. These included planning, collaborative decision-making, cooperative program development and the strategic use of personnel. Whole-school approaches were clearly evident in both primary and secondary school case studies. Teachers indicated an emphasis on literacy, and the teaching and learning cycle, had assisted them to identify areas of need and had provided direction for planning. Literacy support teams have provided a common focus. They have encouraged the development of team cultures among literacy support staff. Strategies such as those used by English as a second language (ESL) and support teacher learning difficulties (STLD) staff are shared and teachers across KLAs recognise that they are all teachers of literacy.

In some schools, training in the establishment and role of professional teams made a significant contribution. Whole-school approaches have been most effective when guided by well coordinated literacy support teams.

Effective literacy support teams were representative across school staff, encompassing all stages, KLAs and support personnel. They not only coordinated teacher training and development but also early diagnosis, intervention, monitoring and tracking of students with literacy learning difficulties. They have given teachers confidence in knowing how to secure support and design responsive programs.

Whole-school training and development has been the key enabling many literacy support teams to establish learning communities in their schools. Coordination across programs has meant that schools and teachers, when assessing, planning, programming, teaching or dealing with special needs, were confident in addressing the literacy needs of students. Senior school executive support for literacy teams has been critical to their success, not only symbolically reinforcing the importance

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of literacy in the school but also in a practical sense. Teachers were aware of the importance of planning both at school and system level. Literacy criteria formed the basis of the planning of equity programs. The literacy strategy was enhanced by a coordinated approach between programs such as CAP and PSFP using the *State Literacy Strategy* criteria.

Literacy support teams have made literacy strategies an important aspect of the school management plan. Planning for literacy has been included in many school self-evaluation processes and in the setting of annual targets. Respondents mentioned plans that were detailed, reviewed regularly, and collaboratively developed by teachers and parents. Teachers spoke of major school initiatives in text types, guided reading, targeting and resource allocation. They talked of home reading programs, the use of school contracts, writing journals, individual student assessment profiles and the revision of KLA programs to ensure they have a literacy component.

Some high school teachers indicated that literacy support teams had well-documented literacy plans, shared programming and assessment strategies and coordinated monitoring processes to support teachers across KLAs. It was reported that many student behaviour problems emanate from their poor literacy skills. Teachers appreciated school support in recognising the coping skills that many of these students adopt.

Some schools indicated that they would benefit from interaction with other schools who have successfully used a whole-school approach. These included small schools wanting to work with other successful schools of a similar size, and primary schools where there were stage meetings but little interaction across the stages. Secondary teachers suggested they would like more practical advice and support for whole-school literacy programs. They would like to be better able to map student literacy skills across years and across faculties.

The *State Literacy Strategy* has provided the framework for the coordination of programs across the Department of Education and Training to ensure unity of purpose about literacy. This provided a common focus in curriculum, equity and support programs. Training and development should target whole-school development to ensure that literacy development in schools is sustained and continually revitalised.

Teachers preferred in-school training and wanted a focus on strategies that work. There were indications of some dissatisfaction with 'train the trainer' models. Strategies for whole-school training should accompany professional development in literacy. Training should nurture high expectations of student achievement by teachers and the consistent and demonstrated belief that all students can achieve.

Links between primary and secondary schools have improved

There were many outstanding examples of collaboration between high schools and primary schools. There were many successful *Linkages* programs. Communication between key personnel has assisted teachers to identify support strategies for students with needs at critical stages of transition. Secondary school teachers have worked with primary teachers on the development of a standard framework, 'buddy' connections have been made between high school students and students of their former primary schools and high school teachers have visited Kindergarten to Year 6 classes to observe how those teachers teach literacy.

Significant avenues for teachers' professional development across stages have been participation in marking the writing tasks for ELLA and PWA and the provision of support documents that provide analysis of the statewide tests. These documents link test items and tasks to syllabuses and provide a resource of appropriate teaching strategies. There has been an increase in the sharing of

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information between primary and secondary schools related to statewide test results. Some secondary schools and their feeder primary schools have established systems by which they share BST and ELLA results very effectively. There were many responses which indicated that the sharing of statewide test results, particularly BST and ELLA, was of great value. A particular strength has been the follow-up to ELLA in that it has supported a focus on specific and explicit learning in literacy in secondary schools. Some primary teachers have been involved in ELLA marking and some secondary teachers in PWA marking which has increased their understandings of broad curriculum outcome expectations.

Action-research programs, many with a literacy focus, promoted better links between teachers at critical stages of student development. Programs such as the *Literacy Action Research Kit* (LARK) enabled teams of high school teachers to work with their feeder primary schools on teaching and learning programs. There were a number of instances of locally developed programs for talented students. Other quality teaching programs addressed the development of writing skills by using information gained from analysing ELLA results to target particular areas of need. In other instances, primary and secondary teachers worked collaboratively to develop units or work across Years 6 and 7.

In some districts there were systems in place to track students with specific literacy needs from Year 6 to Year 7. Suggestions from both high school and primary school teachers indicated a need to establish strategies and improve protocols to better share statewide testing results, particularly ELLA results, between high schools and their feeder schools. Teachers indicated that in many cases data is not shared and not fully understood. Revised protocols and improved electronic data distribution of results would assist teachers.

Schools will benefit from access to various strategies and programs which promote understanding and common knowledge as well as fostering more effective links at critical stages of student development. High school teachers commented that they would benefit from the acquisition of primary school pedagogy. Many would like to know more about programs such as *Reading Recovery* and to talk to primary teachers about addressing literacy needs. Organisational and cultural differences between primary schools and high schools present barriers which many schools have difficulty surmounting.

There is a need to continue with a focus on critical stages of transition in each student's literacy development. Teachers made suggestions about ways in which the links between high schools and primary schools could be improved. They indicated that further linkages should be a system priority. Programs which begin with assessment and focus on an effective teaching and learning cycle should be further developed.

Student literacy levels have been accurately assessed

Teachers indicated that the promotion of the teaching and learning cycle as a planning and teaching framework has meant that more teachers are using assessment as the starting point for teaching and learning. They are more aware of student literacy levels and of where they need support. They spoke of a range of strategies including benchmarking, outcomes-based assessment, annotated samples of work with attached checklists of stage-appropriate outcomes and indicators providing explicit criteria for consistency of teaching responses. They also identified a range of standardised tests used to supplement curriculum-based testing and statewide testing.

Teachers indicated that their pedagogy had become more focused. The explicit nature of teaching tasks, assessment tasks and support frameworks to facilitate better outcomes for students were seen

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as strengths of the literacy strategy. Teachers believed that the strategy should continue its focus on the teaching and learning cycle to position assessment as a significant part of the planning process. There was extensive positive feedback on the use of assessment as the starting point in the teaching and learning cycle. Schools indicated that they use a range of internal assessment tools as well as making good use of statewide testing.

There has been a major shift in the professional manner in which data is used by teachers in schools. Teachers and principals have developed high order skills in the use of data analysis to successfully target individual student needs, to identify whole-school literacy strengths, and to target areas for development. A number of professional development programs including *Consistent Teacher Judgement* (CTJ), ELLA and PWA marking promoted teacher expertise in determining student literacy levels. Teachers indicated that participation in ELLA and PWA marking had helped them to give students better knowledge of what was required and to better inform students how they were progressing in all KLAs. The *Starting with Assessment Kit* has been implemented in Early Stage 1 and Stage 1 to provide detailed knowledge of student abilities and to foster explicit and systematic teaching programs.

Primary school teachers indicated that many schools carry out comprehensive pre- and post-assessment activities to inform their teaching and monitor the learning of literacy. Primary teachers indicated that PWA marking and programs including *Early Literacy Initiative* (ELI) and *Reading Recovery* had supported the systematic analysis of student needs. Teachers valued the information provided by *Data on Disk* for the analysis of BST results and syllabus item analysis. Teachers indicated that the analysis of BST data had ensured areas for improvement had been addressed, resulting in significant improvement in literacy achievements – and improved BST results over time. There were some concerns that more could be done to identify and support more able students.

High school teachers spoke about the thorough analysis of ELLA results and expressed appreciation for the value of the feedback at both teacher and school level. They found the analysis particularly useful in catering for students at risk.

There were a number of responses about reporting to parents which indicated that schools were attempting to provide parents with relevant information based on outcomes. Many parents indicated that, by using portfolios, schools were committed to reporting student outcomes accurately to parents. Many teachers provided an accurate picture of student progress. Some parents did not understand outcomes-based reporting and some teachers resented the amount of time taken by aspects of reporting.

The ELI program supported teachers in monitoring student progress in the early years. Teachers in isolated schools valued *Reading Recovery* based programs such as *Outback Reading* and *Log on to Literacy* because these programs allowed them access to professional development which helped them to accurately determine student literacy levels. Teachers indicated that the CTJ course improved teacher confidence about the accurate assessment of student achievement at each stage.

Teachers indicated that time pressures, lack of consistency and a need to further develop skills limited effective assessment practices. They felt that future directions should include more training on outcomes-based assessment. They also believed that there is a need to develop a tracking system for student growth in KLAs, stages and outcomes and especially from Stage 3 to Stage 4. Many schools found it difficult to develop suitable systems for tracking student achievement against syllabus outcomes.

There is more work to be done to develop understanding among teachers of outcomes-based learning and to clarify student progress and expectations for parents.

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Students with literacy problems have been better supported

Teachers indicated that they use a number of different strategies to ensure that individual student needs are supported. These include developing specific policies for students with literacy problems, individual learning programs and team teaching with support staff. Teachers indicated that literacy support teams play a very important role in ensuring that students with learning difficulties are identified and that teachers are assisted in a coordinated way to cater for them. Teachers strongly endorsed the retention and expansion of some programs, particularly *Reading Recovery*, because of the outstanding success rates recorded for students experiencing difficulties. *Reading Recovery* has improved reading skills by targeting students in need of support at a critical stage of literacy development. The program has benefited students in many schools where teachers trained in *Reading Recovery* not only support individual students, but also change their teaching practice to target the explicit needs of others in the class. In addition, they influence the teaching practice of other teachers.

Teachers acknowledged the important role played by the support teacher learning difficulties (STLD) in assisting both students and teachers. The role appears to be most effective when support occurs in class. Team teaching (with teachers aides, ESL and STLD teachers) has provided immediate support for students and indirectly assisted the literacy improvement of other students because of the effective strategies utilised and propagated by the STLD. Teachers indicated that supporting students with high needs as early as possible in their development should continue as a high priority.

A range of assessment strategies identify students with special learning needs at each stage of their development. Teachers are more aware of the students who have literacy problems, what those problems are and the kind of support they require. Early identification of problem areas has enabled teacher and STLD support to be targeted incisively. There were indications that identification was happening as early as pre-school and that *Early Bird* and *Ground Running* programs were identifying students in Kindergarten in Terms 2 and 3.

Data from running records, standardised testing, teacher observation and evaluation, as well as the use of statewide testing including BST and ELLA, is used to target areas of need at critical stages of transition for students. Teachers indicated that they group students to provide support for those with literacy problems. Peer support is a strategy which many teachers have found to be successful.

Literacy support teams assisted teachers by providing strategies to cater for a range of student needs and linked students to in-school and external support. Examples included accessing departmental resources, funding and programs and focusing on Year 7 students, boys at risk and those with behaviour problems. Teachers indicated the importance of support during transition periods for students and indicated that senior students also need literacy support.

The self-esteem of many students with literacy learning difficulties had improved as a result of their specific learning and the support they had received from other students. Boys were often seen to be negative about receiving literacy support. Teachers suggested there is a need to research and address the link between behaviour and literacy achievement.

There were indications that less experienced teachers found the diversity of student literacy needs in their classes a challenge. Teachers suggested that continuing the development of strategies to cater for students in multi-ability classes should be a priority. Some teachers in high schools have difficulty recognising specific literacy problems and others are unaware of how to support students with special needs in the KLAs.

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A number of schools have developed programs to train parents in their support roles as tutors at school. Parents have also been trained to support their children at home. Where tuition has not been provided, some parents have requested assistance with training for parent tutor programs.

There were comments which indicated the value of documents such as *Follow-up to ELLA* and the *Teaching Literacy in ...* series in supporting teachers' responses to students with literacy needs. Teachers are much more knowledgeable about literacy learning and identifying student progress than they were at the beginning of the *State Literacy Strategy*. Their skills in supporting students who have literacy problems have improved markedly. Programs should continue to be implemented or expanded to ensure that students with learning problems are given support as early as possible in their learning.

A professional development focus should be expanded to support teachers in managing the wide range of student needs they cater for in classrooms, as they strive to improve student learning outcomes for individual students. Strategies in professional development should be expanded to include training to address problems associated with literacy learning and other issues including self-esteem and behaviour.

Teachers indicated that the method of allocation of STLDs should be refined and that the allocation should be over a longer period to ensure that continuity is maintained. A consultancy role was suggested for the STLD to teach teachers how to more effectively support those with learning needs in class.

Partnerships between teachers and parents to ensure literacy development have become more effective

The important role of parents as models at home and as support at school was highlighted by teacher responses. Some schools have initiated programs to train parents in aspects of literacy. Parents indicated that programs such as *Partners in Print* and *Talk to a Literacy Learner* have been very effective and that some schools have cultures which are very supportive of their involvement. Aboriginal support programs such as *Koori Kindy* and the Aboriginal tutor program have been effective. Aboriginal literacy and numeracy funding has been used successfully to support Aboriginal students and particularly to promote the engagement of boys in literacy. Parents appreciated the support that was given to students who had literacy learning needs. They were grateful for the ways in which they were kept informed about the progress of their children.

Good communication continues to be valued by parents. A number of avenues of communication including face-to-face sessions, newsletters and access to excellent websites drew positive comments from respondents. There were indications of strong parent participation in many schools and support for strategies which have encouraged parents to feel comfortable with the culture and ethos of the school.

A number of schools identified difficulties in establishing effective communications with parents. Some of the reasons cited were:

- communities with many languages where expertise in a number of languages is required;
- lack of confidence of some NESB parents to approach their schools; and
- parent reluctance to be as involved in high school as they may have been in primary school.

Sometimes the contribution that parents can make is not recognised and parents can sometimes fail to understand both the importance of their contribution and the possibilities available to them. Parents commented that they would like more assistance in their role as classroom helpers. Some teachers talked about problems created by inconsistency of attendance when parents volunteered as tutors.

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There were many responses from both teachers and parents which indicated that schools value parent involvement and strive to better involve and inform parents. Parents indicated that more could be done to inform them by keeping them in touch with the language of literacy. A number of responses indicated that parents would like more information and knowledge about helping their children with literacy. Some parents would like to know more about the syllabuses, particularly English K–6, and about outcomes and expectations.

Teachers believed that schools need to look for innovative solutions to improve partnerships with parents and that lack of involvement should not be viewed as a lack of support. They believed that it was important for parents to receive information about assisting their children with literacy development at home. Some parents felt that teachers should approach them personally or by letter if they needed parent helpers and that training should be provided for volunteers. Involvement of parents decreases as students move from early to later stages.

Information should continue to be provided for parents about the important role they play in literacy development both at home and at school. Parents also need to be supported to more fully understand how their children are progressing and how they can assist the literacy development of their children.

State and district offices have provided coordinated support, including policies, programs and consultants, to assist teachers and schools

Many successful professional development strategies and activities have assisted schools to implement the *State Literacy Strategy*. Whole-school approaches were seen as most successful. Responses from teachers indicated that schools benefited from and appreciated the roles played by district consultancy. Schools nominated a number of programs as particularly influential for teacher development and student literacy learning such as the *Early Learning Initiative* and *Reading Recovery*.

Teachers were very positive in their comments about the documentation which was a key element of the *State Literacy Strategy*. They mentioned documents including the series *Teaching Literacy in ...*, *Starting with Assessment*, *Strategies for Teaching Reading*, *the Literacy Planning Matrix*, *Principles of Assessing and Reporting*, *Teaching Reading: a K-6 Framework* and their support documents. These documents provided a wide range of information including theory, practical support and valuable resource material. Responses from teachers indicated that the documentation was seen as a key aspect of the strategy. The *State Literacy Strategy* documents were found to be extremely useful as cornerstones for professional development and reference points for planning and implementing teaching activities across the whole school.

There were many indications of the support these schools and teachers received from consultants involved in state and district programs. They reported that district consultants assisted with ELLA analysis in cross-faculty teams and that literacy and *Linkages* program consultants drove the literacy agenda. Schools mentioned support in areas of text type, vocabulary, spelling strategies and guided reading. The ELI facilitator role was seen as important in providing programs and assessment strategies. The *ESL/Linkages* project provided an understanding of ESL scales and student strengths and needs. Analysis of BST and ELLA data by district office personnel, including the CEO School Improvement, was valued.

Training in *Reading Recovery* had helped teachers develop a more systematic and explicit approach to the teaching of literacy. Consultancy support for ELI was well received and had a major impact on schools.

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Some schools felt that consultancy support was difficult to access particularly in secondary schools beyond Year 8. Respondents indicated that there should be a more flexible consultancy model and that all consultants should have expertise in literacy support. Some schools indicated that distance limited their access to district office activities and contact by consultants. Programs designed to cater for isolated schools such as *Log on to Literacy* and *Outback Reading* were valued as accessible professional development for isolated schools.

Suggestions for future directions included access to technology related training and alternative models to 'train the trainer'. Electronic presentations could be provided so that schools can organise their own training and development with new documentation. There should be broad school-based trialling of materials before release including more criterion-based marking such as ELLA and PWA training.

Teachers indicated that there was not enough support to accompany the initial release of *State Literacy Strategy* documents and that too many documents had arrived too soon. The next phase of the *State Literacy Strategy* should focus on reflection, refinement and strategically timed support and program implementation. Some teachers felt that their schools had dealt with the documents in an ad hoc way. Many teachers indicated that some documents were no longer available. They indicated that new teachers and casual teachers had not been trained in relation to the literacy strategy.

More time is needed to ensure that the *State Literacy Strategy* directs teacher practice. While some schools believe that each school should receive updated hard copy materials, others suggested that electronic delivery, such as CD and web-based resources, should be considered.

A coordinated strategy should be developed to reissue the documentation related to the *State Literacy Strategy* in such a way that the momentum of the strategy is maintained and schools have time to reflect, revisit and refine their practices and programs.

Technology should be used to cater for those schools disadvantaged by isolation. It is important that electronic material be supported by interpersonal contact from regional officers. The professional development needs of casual teachers should be included in efforts to ensure that teachers are kept current with literacy pedagogy.

There should be more effective coordination and communication with tertiary institutions about literacy learning. This would ensure that teachers being trained are in touch with current research and curriculum development and familiar with strategies developed by the NSW Department of Education and Training in relation to the teaching and learning of literacy. This area needs to be monitored on a regular basis.

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Recommendations

- 1 That clear directions are established to allow consolidation and continuity of the *State Literacy Strategy* to ensure that currency in teachers' understanding and instructional capacity is maintained.
- 2 That a coordinated strategy be developed to revisit, revise and reissue the *State Literacy Strategy* documentation. A systematic planned approach should cater for the range of teacher needs and allow time for reflection. Strategies should include documentation being delivered through online access, an updated CD-ROM, and the use of technology supported by personal contact to cater for isolated schools.
- 3 That improving literacy outcomes for *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander* (A&TSI) students becomes a major system priority and that unity of purpose in relation to this goal is established with other government and non-government agencies.
- 4 That protocols and procedures be reviewed, clarified and better communicated to exploit the potential of productive sharing within the department of systemic testing data with an emphasis on diagnostic analysis and student development.
- 5 That tracking students within and across schools be refined to ensure there is consistency in data gathering and common understandings and expectations about information shared. Strategies should include the development of electronic pro-forma documents to enable ease of administration, and teacher training opportunities which emphasise the importance of consistency in the assessment and tracking of students.
- 6 That schools develop strategies and have access to programs which foster more effective links between teachers to promote understanding and knowledge across stages at critical transition points for students, especially from Stage 3 to Stage 4.
- 7 That literacy programs continue to be implemented or expanded to ensure that students at greatest risk are given support as early as possible in their learning. This includes students with behaviour, mobility or attendance issues and boys.
- 8 That the focus be maintained on pedagogy development across the K–12 continuum. These professional development opportunities should also be available to beginning and casual teachers to ensure that teacher knowledge and skills are kept current. Strategies should focus on:
 - the teaching and learning cycle;
 - modelled, guided and independent teaching and learning strategies;
 - assessment strategies and the effective use of data; and
 - classroom management while catering for a range of abilities.
- 9 That in the early years of schooling, literacy teaching and learning continue to be supported with quality programs. Strategies should include: continued training of teachers in literacy programs which support students at risk in Early Stage 1 and Stage 1; maintaining and developing programs which ensure that teachers in isolated schools receive explicit and systematic support in literacy teaching, particularly to assist students in the early stages; and the continued development of whole-school teacher training programs.

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- 10 That training and development target whole-school development particularly in relation to ensuring that literacy learning is sustained and revitalised at appropriate stages. Key elements to support effective whole-school literacy development should include collaborative educational leadership and support for effective literacy/learning support teams.
- 11 That schools be better supported to reinforce the important role that parents play in literacy development both at home and at school and that parents be better supported to fully understand reporting about student outcomes and student progress.
- 12 That more effective coordination and communication about literacy learning occur between the department and teacher training institutions to ensure that content and pedagogy taught in tertiary institutions are more closely aligned to the *State Literacy Strategy*.