



NSWSPC Position Paper

Ratified at State Assembly 26 November 2009

The Role, Authority, Leadership and Accountability of the Principal

1. Background

In August 2004, the NSW Secondary Principals' Council (NSWSPC) endorsed the original version of "*The Leadership of Secondary Education in NSW Public Schools*"¹. This was an interim position paper setting out a range of principles, commitments and recommendations in relation to the role of principals and other school leaders in NSW public secondary schools. In the intervening years, the context and politics of public education and of its leadership at a state, national and international level have shifted in significant ways and it is timely to review, re-affirm where appropriate and re-state the NSWSPC position. **(Recommendation 1)**

It is significant to acknowledge that since the publication of the original document, some seminal national (e.g. Mulford²) and international research (eg Robinson³) has been published and presented to principals, governments and principal professional associations. This research is strongly focused on identifying school leadership that will improve learning outcomes for students. The fact that the dimensions identified in the research align closely with the roles identified by the Council's original paper is a testament to the depth of understanding of the role held by principals and the wide consultation undertaken in its preparation.

Many frameworks

One of the major challenges facing principals in defining and articulating their role, leadership, authority and associated accountabilities is the interest by governments, bureaucracies, systems and professional associations in doing the same. In addition to the work in this area being done by employers, a number of professional associations, universities and private enterprises have their own leadership frameworks, often tied closely to professional and commercial learning tools and

¹ This document is available on the NSWSPC Members' website members.nswspc.org.au

² Mulford, B., & Edmunds, B. (2009). *Successful school principalship in Tasmania*. Launceston, Tasmania: Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania.

B. Mulford. (2008). The leadership challenge: Improving learning in schools. Camberwell, Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research Australian Education Review #53. (Can be downloaded for free at: <http://research.acer.edu.au/aer/2/>)

³ There are many references including Robinson, V (2007) *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why* ACEL: ACEL Monograph Series Number 41

activities. In the research conducted by ACER to inform the work on principal standards⁴, there were already 44 principal and leadership platforms published in Australia by different organisations.

National Standards

Over recent years, federal governments have shown considerable interest in the development of national standards for teachers and principals. The most recent developments have been centred on the three categories of capabilities identified by Teaching Australia for both teachers and principals. Each category is now supported by details of the capability and descriptors of the accomplished demonstration of these capabilities. The NSWSPC contributed extensively to the consultation process in relation to the structure of the model. More recently the NSWSPC, through its affiliation with ASPA, has had representation on the working party developing the detail of the standards and descriptors. In doing this the Council has expressed its concern that the original three dimensions overlap and that the attempt to isolate “professional knowledge” from the other areas of leadership causes unnecessary duplication. The resulting lack of clarity in the language of the descriptors results in poor alignment between the actual work of accomplished principals and the proposed standards.

There is a need to ensure that the national standards engender confidence in their purpose and application. In order to do that, they need to capture the spirit and values of school leadership for the future in their representation of the accomplished principal.

Having made that position clear, the NSWSPC strongly supports the development of one national set of principal leadership standards and supports a national standards-based framework for professional accreditation and recognition of principals. **(Recommendation 2)**

The NSWSPC also notes, that in all national initiatives and partnerships for schools, increased levels of principal “autonomy” underpin requirements and benchmarks for funding.

The NSW Context

In many other states and jurisdictions, the role, authority, leadership and associated accountabilities are published as part of the employment of principals. In NSW DET, there is no one overarching document (or even location) that:

1. defines the role of the principal;
2. clearly articulates the authority and associated accountabilities of public school principals;
3. describes and explains changes made in the conditions of employment of principals over time, including PARs and principal improvement programs;

⁴ Elizabeth Kleinhenz, Lawrence Ingvarson, and Stephen Dinham. "Evaluation and Revision of the CECV Leadership Standards Framework" 2009

Available at: http://works.bepress.com/stephen_dinham/86

4. informs the NSW position on principal standards and defines their relationship to employment conditions. **(Recommendation 3)**

In preparing this paper, the NSWSPC has searched for legislation, regulation, policy and procedure that relates to the principal and found a myriad of places where policy development since 2004 has impacted on the role and workload of the principal, sometimes with disregard for existing policies and procedures. Particular issues have been raised in relation to the failure of the union and the employer to consider how changes to legislation (often from outside the education portfolio), case law, regulation and policy in a range of areas within and beyond the Office of Schools require the principal to accept the delegation of accountability, without consideration of the complexity of the work of principals. Appendix A is a table prepared for this work and published in October 2007 that shows a summary of the key areas of accountability. At the time the table was developed there were 80 discrete areas of principal accountability within various policy and portfolio statements and since that time others have been added as a result of further changes in legislation, government and employer expectations. .

In surveys undertaken by the NSWSPC and NSWPPA, principals consistently report

1. an increase in accountability for a range of “management” tasks without the commensurate authority and
2. a failure to quarantine significant time for principals to undertake those roles which will directly influence quality teaching and improved student learning outcomes.
(Recommendation 4)

The recent “Principal Autonomy Research Project” report released by the Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard in October 2009 supported this view when it stated (P 65);

It was acknowledged at the system level that NSW is perceived as one of the most centralised systems in Australia. The Department officers understood that research did not show a relationship between autonomy and learning outcomes.... Reference was made to the higher levels of autonomy that were introduced in the late 1980s but there was a retreat to a more centralised approach from the early 1990s.... The recent reorganisation of the system reduced the number of people available to support schools and increased the number of authorities between the school and the Department. These changes were seen by principals to be a constraint on autonomy.

Principal Classification

During the last two years a variety of models of principal classification based on staff numbers have been discussed in NSW DET as part of salary and award negotiations. It is the position of the NSWSPC that secondary, central schools and some schools for specific purpose (SSPs) catering for secondary aged students are inherently complex organisations compared to other schools and organisations of a similar size and that this is only partially recognised in the models proposed to date. It is the position of the NSWSPC that secondary and central schools as well as some schools for specific purpose (SSPs) catering for secondary aged students should have an identified minimum number of levels of classification to recognise their complexity. For the purposes of this

paper, the NSWSPC would expect that, at different salary (classification) levels there would be different levels of authority and delegation that recognise the size and complexity of the school.

A Changing Culture of Work Practice

Further, there has been a change in culture in NSW DET from a “delayed” organisation that viewed students, parents and schools as internal customers and clients to a more multi level organisation (as a result of the commitment to tri level reform). Schools now have much more complex systems of communication within DET directorates and regions. This complexity has had its greatest impact on the principal, a person expected to understand, implement and be accountable for all policies and requirements in the school.

Accompanying these changes has been a “strengthening and enhancement”⁵ of systems of line management within the Office of Schools through the Regional Director and School Education Director. There has also been a return to centralised procurement, contracts and payments in a number of areas that, in preliminary analysis conducted by principal associations, has increased the workload in school administration for principals and their teams, while removing local authority and initiative. It is possible these practices may improve the financial efficiency of NSW DET over time, despite the fact that a number of the new initiatives and projects take little or no account of the “un-costed” impact on the school and the principal. At present, the changes being made have not been researched, nor have they been aligned to longer term government purposes for public schools and schooling in NSW.

That said, the breadth and depth of dialogue between the senior levels of the DET and its principal associations has never been greater, with principals contributing very significantly to policy development at both state and national level. The NSWSPC values its relationship with the NSWPPA and the NSWDET as outlined in the proposed Alliance of Leaders Charter. The NSWSPC believes that the goals of this Charter will be realized more fully when a genuinely consultative, open and transparent relationship between the stakeholders is embedded in the culture of each organisation.

Leading & Managing the School (L&M) and PARS

Leading & Managing the School, published in 2000, is the key policy document underpinning PARS (principal assessment and review schedule). It is a document that needs to be revised and updated to better define the authority of principals⁶ in relation to the core areas involved in leading for learning. Only then, should the related accountabilities be identified. In recent years, additional accountabilities have been added to PARS through changes to regulation and policy. Some of these changes were not clearly negotiated, resulting in a perceived shift in principal workload and accountability (without the authority to command the resources that might be required by the changes). In any revision, the NSWSPC would expect the concerns listed in Points 1 – 4 (pages 2 – 3) above to be addressed.

⁵ These terms have been used in the most recent staffing agreement and in asset management documents.

⁶ The only reference to principal authority in the current document is in the appendix, written in 1992.

School Leadership Capability Framework

Within the DET principals and school leaders have access to capability statements defined by the Professional Learning and Leadership Development Directorate (PLLDD) *School Leadership Capability Framework* (SLCF)⁷. The SLCF is not universally used and access to the evaluative tools is limited to principals participating in some specific PLLDD run programs. The Council recognises that these capability statements were agreed only for use as a developmental framework. Further, the NSWSPC would not wish the SLCF framework used as part of any accreditation process without revision and reference to more current international and national research. Whilst the NSWSPC is highly supportive of the SLCF as a developmental tool, it acknowledges that it has not been developed into a Standards Framework and has limited descriptors in relation to evidence of the capabilities identified.

New General Selection Criteria for Principals

More recently another reference point, the 2009 *general selection criteria for principals*⁸ (which describe the skill set by which applicants for principal positions are assessed, interviewed and ranked for promotion) was introduced. These criteria drew heavily on consultation about the work of the NSWSPC and NSWPPA in leadership, were aligned to all other frameworks and were grounded in research into the characteristics of effective principals. With the accompanying support document these criteria provide a strong guide to the role and skills of the principal at entry level and beyond. The NSWSPC supports the use of the 2009 general selection criteria as a basis from which to develop a set of descriptors for the work of accomplished principals in NSW.

The NSW Institute of Teachers

One significant change in context since 2004 has been the establishment of the Institute of Teachers (IOT)⁹ in NSW. The IOT has established and implemented a cross-sectoral framework of professional standards for the accreditation of teachers which provides, among other things, a formal, agreed statement of the elements and standards required of teachers from those in their formative years to those demonstrating qualities of professional leaders. While the standards shape an implicit reference point in relation to teachers at a range of levels of expertise they do not describe the standards of principals or other school leaders in any formal leadership position. Further, the structures established for accreditation, maintenance of accreditation, registering of courses and achieving higher levels of competence have been developed by DET and IOT in ways that place decision making authority beyond the school and the profession, while leaving most of the clerical and procedural work in the hands of the principal. **(Recommendation 5)**

⁷ [https://portalsrvs.det.nsw.edu.au/f5-w-68747470733a2f2f7777772e6465742e6e73772e6564752e6175\\$\\$/profilearn/areas/sld/frameworks/slcf.htm](https://portalsrvs.det.nsw.edu.au/f5-w-68747470733a2f2f7777772e6465742e6e73772e6564752e6175$$/profilearn/areas/sld/frameworks/slcf.htm)

⁸ [https://portalsrvs.det.nsw.edu.au/f5-w-68747470733a2f2f7777772e6465742e6e73772e6564752e6175\\$\\$/media/downloads/employment/promotion/codegenselecrit.pdf](https://portalsrvs.det.nsw.edu.au/f5-w-68747470733a2f2f7777772e6465742e6e73772e6564752e6175$$/media/downloads/employment/promotion/codegenselecrit.pdf)

⁹ <http://www.nswteachers.nsw.edu.au/home.aspx>

The School Principal in a state school

As a public institution, public schools exist within an interdependent framework involving each other, their local community, the professional community of educators, the education department and the government of the day. While the public education system provides enormous opportunities and benefits, this framework inevitably gives rise to a dynamic set of tensions which must be continually acknowledged and resolved if the system is to provide the best possible service to the community.

In our democracy, the government frames policy through a process of dialogue with the community at large and it is ultimately accountable for the expenditure of public money and thereby, for the efficient and orderly operation of its institutions, including the public education system.

Delegation

Under legislation, public employees are limited in their actions and initiatives by their particular delegation of authority. They are responsible for implementing the policy of the government of the day and may not comment publicly from their position on the efficacy or otherwise of that policy. They work within a line management system and may be engaged by a contract with particular performance criteria related to their role. The initiation and origination of policy tends to be limited to the more senior levels and will, of political and practical necessity, tend to relate to and align with the priorities, concerns and imperatives of government.

Line management and accountability

Generally speaking, the line manager in the public service has the authority to direct the mode of operation of their subordinates and is responsible for supervising their work. Thus, as a public employee, the principal is placed in a subordinate role to their line manager (ie SED) and may be presumed to be accountable via that manager for all aspects of their role. Where the line manager has relevant experience or is in close touch with the nature of the work of their subordinates, tensions and difficulties can be minimised fairly easily. Where the experience of the manager does not relate closely or currently to the work of the subordinate,¹⁰ the supervision and accountability processes become more problematic, usually involving devices such as “key performance indicators” or various kinds of “outcomes measures” as proxies for complex and actual work of the subordinate.

The limits of authority and terms of accountability must be negotiated on an ongoing basis as circumstances evolve. The principal and teachers in public schools are learned professionals engaged on the basis of their sharing a body of expert professional knowledge and accredited skills. They have the responsibility to frame policies and implement practices for their schools in accord with the best current understanding of curriculum and of teaching/learning practices, as well as the needs

Devolution

¹⁰ For example, where specialised external consultants or skilled professionals are involved

Various inquiries into the operation of public education have underlined the central importance of the school and the role of the department as a mechanism for supporting the schools. In places other than NSW, this idea has taken the form of almost total devolution of authority (and funding) to the school and the effective minimisation (or even elimination) of any departmental bureaucracy. NSW never moved that far and has, with the re-establishment of the regions and the centralisation of resource management, already retreated along the relatively short distance it travelled down the devolution path.

The NSWSPC supports genuine strategies to devolve decision making, resources and authority back to schools and principals (as was done in the early 1990s) on the basis that it increases the flexibility of the principal to cater for the diversity of individual school contexts. The NSWSPC also accepts that there will be different accountabilities in a devolved leadership and management model, one that will increasingly require moving resources from centralised and regional functions into schools. The NSWSPC will not support any model of devolution that devolves only management roles, nor will it support any model where accountability and workload are devolved without the commensurate authority and school funding to flexibly set goals, design curriculum delivery in ways that suit the school, allocate resources, engage in innovative professional learning and use a broad range of measures of achievement. (Recommendation 6)

The role of the School Education Director

The role of the School Education Director (SED), particularly as it relates to the role and authority of principals within their jurisdiction, has been difficult to define in recent years. Positive survey results from the annual principal survey conducted by the Office of Schools are influenced by the way the survey was originally designed, an issue raised by the NSWSPC each year. The survey has limited capacity to allow principals to comment on the effectiveness of SEDs in specific aspects of their roles as they impact on the authority of the principal. The clearest picture that appears to principals is one of a “supervisor” or “superior”, consistent with the line management model described earlier and even that model is implemented variably within and between regions. (Recommendation 7)

Managerialism

While it is fair to say that negotiations at the macro policy level are, in many areas, proceeding satisfactorily, many principals are concerned at the ways in which their ability to determine the path of their own school have been circumscribed in ways that seem to them simply, in the worst sense of the word, “bureaucratic”. In feedback principals have highlighted their concerns that the educational framework of schools and the principal’s work is being reframed by managerial language and practice. The lack of trust implicit in removing the delegation to principals is both frustrating and, given the high level of reporting and auditing, a quite unnecessary relic of twentieth century public service culture. This is especially so when principals of secondary, central schools and SSPs are then held accountable for the work of much larger numbers of employees and a more complex organisation than many of their nominal supervisors.

It is time that these practices and requirements were brought into the open and subjected to a principled assessment in a way that acknowledges both the professionalism of principals and the proper needs of public accountability.¹¹

The Principal as a Professional Leader

Traditionally, the professional authority and accountability of principals has had little in common with the accountability mechanisms found in other, similar professions. There has been no statutory or other board of learned education professionals to which matters of professional practice, accreditation and accountability could be referred. That situation may be about to change, following the establishment of the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and the preparation of national standards for teachers and principals. It did not change with the introduction of the Institute of Teachers for reasons already discussed above.

In NSW, the Institute of School Inspectors used to perform some of these functions, to the extent that they were a “gatekeeper” to the profession and a (more or less) learned institution in their own right; leading, endorsing and proscribing various educational practices. Over recent decades since the demise of the inspectorate there has been no effective profession-based mechanism for the accountability of principals, nor of those in a line management relationship with principals. Principals have been accredited by virtue of their appointment by panels with limited expert knowledge and even less rigorous evidentiary analysis. Following their appointment, an individual principal’s professional accountability has been continually entangled with his/her managerial accountabilities and the particular issues of the day, often a result of new political imperatives.

On the one hand, the principal is styled as the “educational leader” of the school in terms which imply responsibility for the whole gamut between educational visionary and business manager. On the other hand, the principal is the last link in a chain of hierarchy closely concerned with and coupled to the policy program of the government of the day and the demands – legitimate or otherwise – of its bureaucracy.

In the best practice research (Robinson: 2007¹²) used in the original *Authority and Accountability Project* undertaken by the NSWSPC and NSWPPA, the professional roles of school leaders which were identified as making the most significant difference to improved student outcomes were:

1. Leaders plan, co-ordinate and evaluate teaching, learning and the curriculum (0.42 effect size)
2. Leaders establish goals and set expectations (0.35 effect size)
3. Leaders ensure orderly and supportive learning environments (0.27 effect size)
4. Leaders are seen to be strategic in resourcing teaching & learning (0.34 effect size)

¹¹ Please refer to the NSWSPC Position Paper: School Accountability, Development and Reporting which is available on the website at nswspc.org.au

¹² See Footnote 3

5. Leaders participate in and promote teacher learning & development (0.84 effect size)

Where the government or system takes control and authority in relation to these matters which are, more properly, the professional roles of principals, it is unlikely there will be sustained improvement in student learning.

In recent years, the NSWSPC has recognised its increasing role in succession planning, principal preparation and the provision of high quality professional learning for principals and other school leaders. The NSWSPC has been strongly committed to the Leadership Alliance and has, through a number of reference groups, and especially the Leadership Reference Group, been involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of professional learning and the accreditation of teachers.

As part of its commitment to the development of the profession of principals, our representatives and individual members have formed strong relationships within and between the major professional associations in Australia. The NSWSPC will continue to seek partnerships with a range of associations and will also seek to be a registered, independent and significant provider of professional learning for principals and aspiring leaders in relation to the new national standards. The NSWSPC will also seek to establish high quality learning and research partnerships with universities to advance this work¹³. **(Recommendation 8)**

The Principal as a Community Leader

Feedback from principals at all stages of developing this paper drew attention to the importance of strong ethical leadership, emotional intelligence and the expression of a powerful moral purpose for the leadership of public schools and their communities. As educational leaders, principals engage with deep philosophical questions about the kind of society and future their schools are creating for their students. Principals recognise the importance of the school as a builder of social capital in the local and wider community. In many pieces of research and analysis undertaken by NSWSPC since the Futures Project,¹⁴ the importance of the principal as a community leader has been a feature, especially in rural and regional communities. The principal is appointed by a panel representing the interests of the school and its community and, in the majority of these panels, the community representatives are expecting the principal to build networks and capacity in that community. There is no other position in the school that mandates the authority, responsibility and accountability to engage the community and, in many cases advocate and represent it in partnership with other community leaders.

The school community expects the principal to lead and, in most situations, gives the principal moral authority to do so. The community of the school also holds the principal accountable through annual school reports and other much more intangible measures of the principal's commitment to that school and its community. It is critical that DET procedures (and their

¹³ The NSWSPC would like to establish learning and research partnerships with universities and professional associations to undertake high quality research into leadership, student learning and teacher learning.

¹⁴ This paper is available on the NSWSPC website: www.nswspc.org.au

implementation by SEDs and other regional personnel) recognise the authority of principals in their school community and ensure that they provide support to the principal as a community leader. **(Recommendation 9)**

2. The NSWSPC position on the role, authority, leadership and accountability of the Principal¹⁵

The Role of the Principal

The NSW Secondary Principals' Council re-affirms the statement of beliefs and values set out in *"The Leadership of Secondary Education in NSW Public Schools"*, and re-commits to the view of the principal's role expressed in that document¹⁶; specifically that the principal as school leader will:

1. Lead and be responsible for maximising the educational achievements of all students to create and sustain cultures of success, learning and achievement underpinned by consistent pedagogical platforms, the development of the whole child and a positive values framework.
2. Lead and be responsible for the design and implementation of the school's curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning programs within agreed curriculum frameworks to address the needs of particular student, staff and community contexts.
3. Sustain strong educational leadership and effective professional learning and development to strengthen and support the profession within and beyond the school.
4. Lead and be responsible for recognising and building student and school capacity to develop strong community relationships and work with colleagues to position public secondary and central schools as the preferred choice for the twenty-first century.
5. Lead and be responsible for the planning, organisation, management, administration, evaluation and accountability of the school to accommodate diverse school-community contexts.

The Authority of the Principal

It is the position of the NSW Secondary Principals Council that in order to exercise their proper role, principals require a sufficient level of authority to lead the school, in the framework of a public education system and in the context of the school and its community. It is also the position of the NSWSPC that principals need to be authorised to delegate that authority within the school in ways that reflect the growing complexity of secondary and central schools.

The authority which principals are able to exercise in leading and managing their schools is delegated to them a complex set of legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks. These frameworks – and the accountability mechanisms which flow from them – have evolved over many years and are subject to continued incremental change.

One element of the preparation of this position paper has been the enormous task of bringing together those frameworks and mechanisms into one place and the result is a formidable collection. Another element has been a deep and extensive consultation with principals around NSW in relation to their perceptions of the adequacy of their authority in various domains and

¹⁵ Please note that the NSWSPC believes this statement should also be extended to describe the role of the deputy principal with a far greater recognition of the role of the senior executive in schools needing to be a feature of future planning.

¹⁶ See Recommendation 1

their perceptions of the accountability mechanisms which they must address. It is the position of the NSWSPC that a risk management and compliance culture has resulted in detailed lists of accountabilities being developed at the expense of careful consideration of the authority that principals should hold in leading their schools. Further, principals have reported in surveys and consultation that they think their authority for key areas of school leadership and management has declined since 2004.

It is the position of the NSWSPC that the authority of principals derives from three major areas that are shown in the diagram below. Like other professionals employed in public institutions, such as doctors, principals have a professional authority that derives from their expertise as a teacher and school leader. Principals have an in depth understanding of the processes of teaching and learning and a repertoire of experiences, professional learning and academic studies that underpin their ability to select (and reject) strategies for teacher and student learning in schools. As a result it is most likely that principals will have greater expertise and currency in this area than most bureaucrats. It is also the position of the NSWSPC that NSW DET will need to make a much greater commitment to linking research in effective professional leadership (in universities) and practice (in schools) than it has done in the past. **(Recommendation10)**

The second source of authority for principals is the systemic authority which derives from the appointment and selection of the person who will lead the school. As each panel is led by a SED and each decision to appoint a principal is approved by the Regional Director, the authority of the principal to lead and manage the school as outlined in key policy documents, including *Leading & Managing the School* (2000) is established at appointment. It is the position of NSWSPC that the appointment and continued satisfactory performance of the principal through PARs gives the principal the authority to lead and manage the school flexibly within the constraints imposed by legislation and resource restrictions. It is further the position of NSWSPC that principals should have their delegation and authority more clearly defined, published in one location and recognised by the regional and state bureaucracy. **(Recommendation 11)**

The third source of authority for principals derives from their role in the school and wider community. While this authority is true of all principals, it is most often articulated for principals working in rural and regional communities. It recognises that the contexts in which principals work vary considerably and those contexts imply equity considerations that must inform both the authority and accountability of the principal. Principals need to exercise their authority to engage diverse communities and build the capacity of the community to support the school and its students. This is an authority given by the members of the community (including students, teachers and parents) to the school's principal and cannot be mandated by governments, employers. The NSWSPC supports the position that principals must have the authority to act for their students and the community to create change and improvement. It also supports the position that SEDs and regional directors need to understand the contexts of different schools and support the authority of the principal in acting for students and the community¹⁷.

¹⁷ See Recommendation 9



Figure 1 The sources of principal authority

The Leadership of the Principal

In the international research (analysed by Robinson et al, 2007) and in statements made by governments, educational policy makers and professional associations, the concept of the principal leading for learning has gained much greater prominence than was allowed earlier in this decade¹⁸. Where principals are given the authority, resources and time to lead for learning there is evidence of significant improvement in student learning.

Further, what was seen as a dichotomy in the previous century between management and leadership is now seen to be a much more integrated relationship with management as the base of the leadership pyramid. The effective, accomplished principal will be able to lead the school morally and strategically while at the same time managing and delegating the operational tasks involved in managing change with people.

It is important for DET policy makers, government and external agencies to understand that almost all schools have only one principal and that many secondary, central schools and some schools for specific purpose (SSPs) catering for secondary aged students are large and complex. In

¹⁸ See Recommendation 8

these schools, it is simply not possible for one person to undertake every aspect of management or make every decision or sign every piece of paper and, as a result, it is the position of the NSWSPC that other professional leaders in the school should lead teams and projects as negotiated within the school and delegated by the principal. The NSWSPC supports a distributed leadership model that recognises the different types and levels of professional expertise that exist within the school's staff (and its community) to ensure effective succession planning and the sustainability of programs within the school. **(Recommendation 12)**

While recognising the differences created by school classification, context and community, the NSWSPC acknowledges that the work of principals, especially in leading for learning has common elements that have been identified in a range of research, frameworks and platforms. The NSWSPC supports a standards-based approach to the definition and accreditation of principals' work at entry and accomplished principal levels¹⁹. The NSWSPC is committed to providing expert representation and advice to the process of developing national standards, while at the same time expressing concerns about the current and proposed framework.

Once the standards are agreed, the NSWSPC will seek a prominent role in providing high quality professional learning, both in its own right and in partnership with other professional associations, universities, the national institute and DET. **(Recommendation 13)**

The Accountability of the Principal

In recent years, the accountability of the principal has become a major interest of employers, governments and unions. It is in this aspect of the principal's work, more than any other, that principals have reported (in surveys and focus discussions) their experience of a culture of distrust, risk management, risk aversion and compliance. Many policy makers have a good understanding of the need for policy to be flexible enough for different contexts; far fewer have any understanding of the need for policy to address a range of experiences and expertise among principals and staff. There is a perception among principals that, since 2004, the place of audit, compliance and paper records has assumed far too great an importance in principal accountability. Rather than asking principals to be accountable for the achievement of professional standards and school improvement on a range of measures, there is an increasing emphasis on desk audits of policies and narrow measures of student performance.²⁰ **(Recommendation 14)**

During the same period, academic research and professional associations have demonstrated that a focus on narrow performance measures, disconnected from curriculum is detrimental to school improvement.

Section 9 of the *Teaching Service Act Regulation 2007* defines the management of schools. It states: The member of staff who is in charge of a school must manage the school concerned in a proper, efficient, economic and equitable manner.

¹⁹ See Recommendation 2

²⁰ Please see the NSWSPC *School accountability, development and reporting position paper* (September 2009).

The obligations imposed by sub clause (1) include the following:

- a. having well-stated policies and plans of action, clearly defined goals, a balanced, sequential and appropriate curriculum and suitable mechanisms for supervision, evaluation and documentation that ensure co-ordination of all school activities, continuity of policy and good communication,
- b. encouraging and assisting the professional development of members of staff without discrimination, as required by the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977*,
- c. making effective and economic use of resources,
- d. ensuring staff and student discipline,
- e. encouraging members of staff to submit suggestions for increasing the efficiency of staff,
- f. training members of staff and providing opportunities and facilities for them to improve themselves in matters connected with their official duties:
 - I. by attendance at courses organised by or for the school, and
 - II. at tertiary institutions,
- g. compliance with obligations under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000*.

The emphasis and limitations of this regulation are well understood by principals as are the increasing number of other pieces of legislation, regulation and policy that are being used to direct the accountability of principals. For this position paper, the NSWSPC has taken the position that principal accountability should derive from the role, authority and leadership of the principal, rather than drive it. Put in educational language, the assessment should assess the purpose and planned outcomes of the work of principals, rather than defining the work of principals based on a checklist of up to 80 areas of accountability. The lack of an aligned and coherent framework in NSW DET that links the role of the principal, principal authority and leadership with the associated accountabilities will see more “accountabilities” added to an already complex list. It also leaves NSW DET well behind the other states in leading change at a national level. **(Recommendation 15)**

As a result, the NSWSPC recommends the following categories (based on the October 2007 table)²¹ could provide an aligned framework for principal accountability that derives from the role of public school principals in NSW and is linked to key legislation, regulation and policy.

Role of the principal (2004)	Authority & accountability for
Lead and be responsible for maximising the educational achievements of all students to create and sustain cultures of success, learning and achievement underpinned by consistent pedagogical platforms, the development of the whole child	Creating a Culture of Achievement (was “Teaching and learning”)

²¹ As part of the work on the *Authority and Accountability Project*, undertaken by SPC and PPA a table summarising the accountabilities of principals in DET schools was developed by Brian Ralph in 2007. The accountabilities are no longer current with the addition of new child safety regulations, changes to attendance legislation and the requirements of National Partnerships.

and a positive values framework.	
Lead and be responsible for the design and implementation of the school's curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning programs within agreed curriculum frameworks to address the needs of particular student, staff and community contexts.	Ensuring a Targeted Curriculum (was "Curriculum") and Creating a Student Culture of Engagement, Relationships and Wellbeing (was "Students")
Sustain strong educational leadership and effective professional learning and development to strengthen and support the profession within and beyond the school.	Building Professional Leadership, Development and Practice (was "Staff")
Lead and be responsible for recognising and building student and school capacity to develop strong community relationships and work with colleagues to position public secondary and central schools as the preferred choice for the twenty-first century.	Building Social Capital and Capacity (was "Community")
Lead and be responsible for the planning, organisation, management, administration, evaluation and accountability of the school to accommodate diverse school-community contexts.	Strategically Planning and allocating resources (was "School organisation" and "resources")

It is the position of the NSW Secondary Principals Council that the principal should be accountable for the leadership & management of the school in all areas:

- (i) in which they have the authority to determine their school's practices and
- (ii) for which they have appropriate resources and expertise available and within their control.

Three general directions of accountability are recognised:

- (i) accountability to the school community;
- (ii) accountability to the government of NSW, through the DET; and
- (iii) accountability to the profession through national standards.

It is the position of the NSW Secondary Principals' Council that the forms of accountability used with principals should have carefully articulated protocols that ensure consistency and fairness in their application without the "one size fits all" problems of the current PARs implementation. Further, it is the position of the NSWSPC that principal accountability should not be solely linked to school accountability but should instead recognise the principal as an individual leading a complex organisation.

Any principal (as opposed to school) accountability framework and implementation used in PARs should be required to consider:

- the role of the principal
- the authority of the principal
- the context of the school
- the relative leadership expertise of the principal and
- the personal professional goals of the principal related to national standards.

Professional accountability should be developmental and futures focused, rather than punitive. It should include opportunities for high quality feedback based on best practice feedback models used in educational settings and should help the principal identify both strategic professional

achievements and future directions. It should be conducted by skilled supervisors with accredited professional learning in coaching and feedback. **(Recommendation 17)**

3. Recommendations

That the NSWSPC will:

1. Re-affirm, re-commit and continue to use the five dimensions from the 2004 Leadership of Secondary Education in NSW Public Schools to define the role of the principal in secondary and central schools.
2. Actively support the development of national principal standards and their use in NSW rather than the development of separate state standards. This will include the use of national standards for professional accreditation and recognition of the work of accomplished principals.
3. Lobby and work with the NSW DET and the NSW TF to consolidate documents related to the employment, role, authority, leadership and accountability of the principal into one key document (or website).
4. Support the development of frameworks and policies that define the role, authority, leadership and accountability of the principal in terms of leading for learning and will:
 - a. reject processes that re- focus principal work on managerialism.
 - b. continue requests for a school business manager as requested in the 2004 paper.
 - c. monitor the development of all documents used in NSW DET in relation to the role, authority, leadership and accountability of the principal to ensure their focus and processes are based in the best practice research on leading for learning.
 - d. Identify those areas of the school's operation for which the principal does not have authority and/or accountability.
5. Reject being given accountability for DET, BOS, IOT and other agency processes without the commensurate authority to command resources and delegate to other leaders within the school.
6. Strongly support models of genuine devolution that locate authority, decision making, finances and resources in the school and school-community.
7. Seek consultation with NSW DET to clarify the role of the SED, including the details of areas of SED accountability, and the role of the principal in ways that better delineate the authorities of each role in relation to leading schools and leading for learning in particular schools.
8. Continue to seek high quality learning partnerships with a range of professional associations, universities and accredited leadership consultants to ensure that secondary and central school principals in NSW have high quality professional learning in relation to national principal standards.

9. Support the position that principals must have the authority and support of the SED and regional director to act for their students within the context of their particular school community in order to optimise learning, change and improvement.
10. Seek ongoing recognition by government, the bureaucracy and the community of the professional authority of principals in leading schools.
11. Expect to have the delegation (authority) of principals more clearly defined, and recognised by regional and state bureaucrats, especially those whose delegation is lower than the principal.
12. Support models of distributed professional leadership in secondary and central schools that recognises the professional expertise of other staff in the school.
13. Seek to be a registered, independent and significant provider of professional learning for principals and aspiring leaders in relation to the new national principal standards.
14. Support the development of high quality professional learning and PARs processes that recognise the different levels of principal experience and address the learning and developmental needs of beginning and accomplished principals.
15. Support new accountability processes that ensure that accountability is derived from the role, authority and leadership of the principal rather than the development of policy without consideration for the context of the work of secondary and central school principals.
16. Require any professional principal (as opposed to school) accountability framework and implementation used in PARs to consider:
 - a. the role of the principal
 - b. the authority of the principal
 - c. the context of the school
 - d. the relative leadership expertise of the principal and
 - e. the personal professional goals of the principal in relation to national standards and national accreditation authorities.
17. Work with the NSWPPA and the NSW DET in the *Alliance of Leaders* to develop protocols for the implementation of professional accountability through PARs within NSW DET that will include consideration of national standards, the model used for professional feedback and the requirement that all supervisors have formal professional learning in coaching and feedback.