MINISTRY OF EDUCATION NEW ZEALAND

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga Aotearoa

Provision of School Support Services — an evaluation

Report to the Ministry of Education

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MartinJenkins

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Provision of School Support Services – an evaluation

Final Report

MARTIN JENKINS

Preface

This report has been prepared for the Ministry of Education by Meenakshi Sankar and Fleur Chauvel from MartinJenkins (Martin, Jenkins & Associates Limited) and peer reviewed by Nick Davis, Director MartinJenkins and Anna Kelly and Ed Strafford from the Ministry of Education.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

MartinJenkins was contracted in 2006 by the Ministry of Education to undertake the evaluation of the provision of School Support Services (SSS). The SSS contracts are the Ministry's largest investment in centrally-funded professional development. In addition to the SSS agreements, there are a number of other national professional learning and development (PLD) initiatives (a result of Government policy) that are also funded by government. The focus and priorities of the SSS contracts are revised or reshaped annually in response to Government policy and emerging issues and challenges facing the schooling sector.

Research evidence shows that what school leaders and teachers know and do is one of the most important influences on what students learn. In this context, professional learning and development is critical as it enables the Ministry to strengthen the understanding and skills of school leaders and teachers so that they can best meet the learning needs of all students. A multi-year evaluation of the provision of SSS was initiated to better understand aspects of the current system that work or do not work with a view to informing Ministry decisions and considerations about future professional development provision.

Evaluation approach

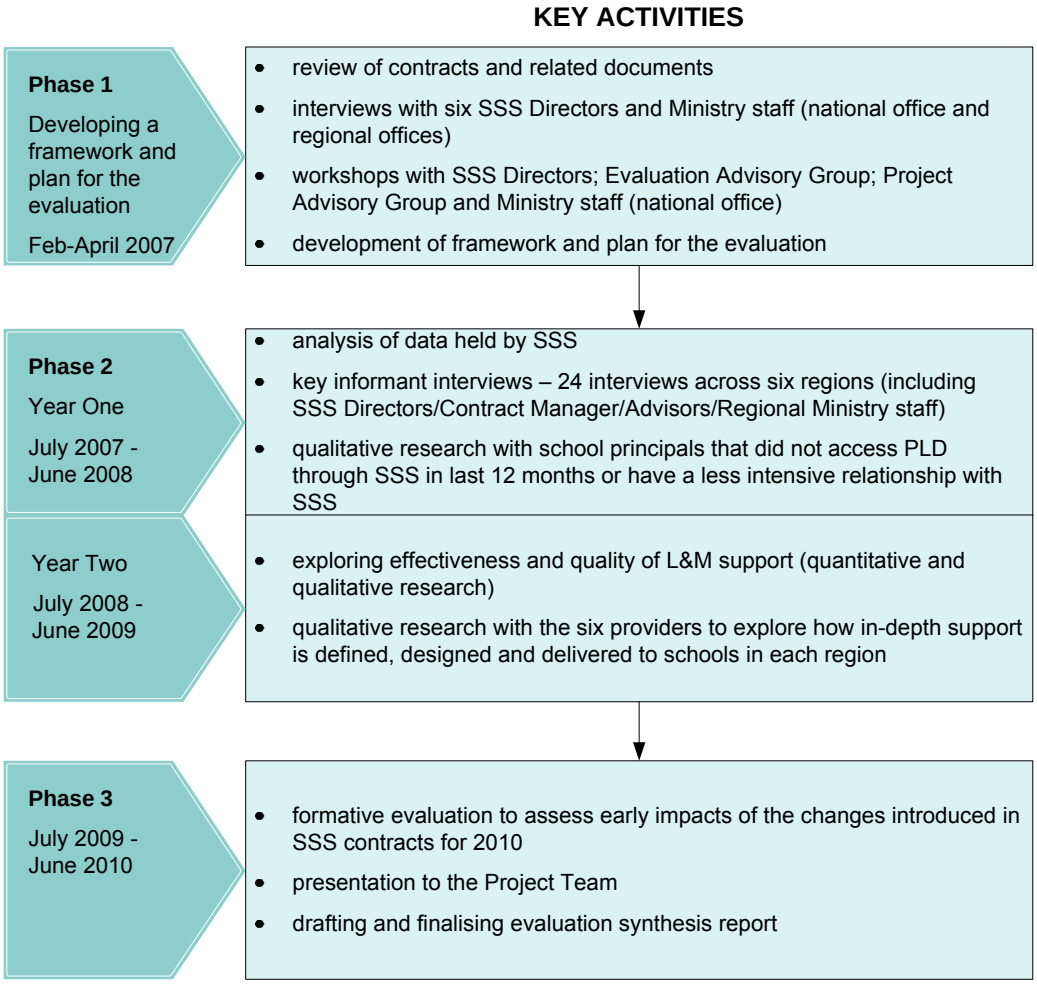
Discussions with internal and external stakeholders in early 2007 established that the evaluation of the provision of SSS was expected to serve an improvement and learning purpose in keeping with the long-term, established and non-contestable nature of the school support service agreements. Consequently, the evaluation was designed to provide ongoing feedback to the Ministry so as to strengthen the contracting environment and enable providers to deliver more effectively. An improvement focus would also yield rich insights about the way in which providers and the Ministry operated which in turn would contribute to lifting the outcomes of in-service professional learning and development.

To respond to these requirements and needs from the evaluation, evaluators began by developing a conceptual framework to anchor and guide the data-collection activities over the three-year period. The framework and the rationale underpinning the framework is outlined in detail in Chapter 3.

The following diagram illustrates our approach to the evaluation. On completion of each evaluation activity within each phase, an analytical workshop was held with SSS Directors (to test and validate findings from each activity to ensure robustness of the analysis and interpretation) and with a Ministry Reference Group to test and disseminate findings for wider use within the Ministry. A final internal workshop was also held to explore broad conclusions and to confirm the direction of this final report.

There were three broad phases and key activities in each phase were as outlined below.

Figure 1: Description of the phased approach to the evaluation



Main findings

The Ministry is charged with meeting Government's goals and aspirations for education. Achieving these goals requires the Ministry to equip schools and teachers with what they need to support all students to learn. The Ministry invests in a range of professional learning and development initiatives to support teachers in New Zealand and the SSS represent a significant proportion of this investment. Key messages that emerged from this evaluation can be summarised as follows:

- Data on access, to determine which schools were accessing or not accessing professional development services offered by SSS, was patchy and inadequate to provide an accurate and nationwide picture of schools that participate in professional development. As a result, it was not possible to undertake any trends analysis or identify patterns in the profile and mix of schools accessing professional development from SSS. The evaluation highlighted the importance of this data to build a comprehensive picture of the *use* of professional development services offered by SSS. In response to this, the Ministry revised the data-collection templates from 2008 onwards, requiring providers to provide more detailed information about delivery of PLD to schools in their region. This allowed the Ministry to build a nationwide picture of access more easily.
- There was variability in the processes and criteria used by providers with respect to school selection. The evaluation found, for instance, there was no systematic or explicit approach to school selection, and schools felt processes around selection lacked transparency. The selection of school tended to be demand-driven (schools that asked for PD received it) and/or network-driven (schools that had a prior relationship with advisors tended to have easier access to the service) and/or through referrals (where schools were referred to the service by the regional Ministry office). More importantly, the findings indicated that there were no explicit criteria for school selection, creating a perception among some school leaders that the resources were not being used efficiently and effectively.
- The delivery of PLD is strongly driven by expectations and aspirations set out in the SSS contracts. The school support services are a collection of professional development services that the Ministry purchases for schools that allows the Ministry to meet government's commitment to education. The services purchased are varied annually to respond to government priorities. Consequently, the contracts offer the Ministry a tremendous opportunity and leverage to shape and influence PLD delivery by ensuring that the contracts are well written and provide a clear direction about Ministry expectations for a given year. Changes introduced to the 09/10 contracts requiring providers to focus on a smaller number of high-priority areas and prioritising support for schools and students that need it most sent a clear signal about current government's focus on lifting student achievement.
- There are a number of Ministry–funded professional development providers and there were significant differences in how these PD contracts were designed, managed and implemented by the Ministry. This created confusion as schools received support from more than one Ministry-funded professional development provider at any given point in time. These variations meant that schools experienced these contracts differently even though they were run by the Ministry, and led to mismatch in expectations as the resources across these contracts were not spread evenly.
- There was an expectation from the National office (responsible for overseeing the contract) that SSS providers would consult with regional Ministry office to identify regional needs and priorities. The evaluation found that these links and relationships were not being exploited sufficiently and regional Ministry office felt excluded from these contracts, resulting in missed opportunities for using regional intelligence when prioritising or selecting schools. These issues were addressed in the 09/10 contracts and there is a now a clear expectation that regional Ministry office would have an active role in the prioritisation and planning processes. The formative evaluation to examine how these plans are playing out revealed that there are significant issues that could impact on the success of this approach/model. These relate to perceived capacity and capability constraints within the regional Ministry

offices; lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities; and lack of involvement in the setting of the SSS contract outputs and focus areas.

- The provision of leadership and management support through SSS was part of a wider Leadership Strategy aimed at providing professional learning and development support to principals. In addition to the SSS contracts (focused on first-time principals, aspiring principals, principals in at-risk schools and middle leaders) there were other initiatives such as the Principals Development Planning Centre, focused on providing professional development to experienced principals. The evaluation found that provision of services with respect to leadership and management across the four priority groups identified in the SSS contracts was uneven. The commonly-held view was that first-time principals and principals in schools at-risk absorbed the bulk of the resources. This limited access to the service by school leaders in general.
- The way in which in-depth PD work was delivered to schools was viewed positively by participating schools. As noted earlier, the selection of schools tended to be demand-driven rather than driven by need, which meant that schools that were most in need did not always receive or have access to the support. The evaluation also showed that monitoring success or impact of the in-depth PD tended to be limited to content and pedagogical shifts while other areas of school development, critical to sustainability, were often ignored. Maximising value of the in-depth PD offered to schools requires consideration of impact at all levels: at an individual teacher level; at a department or syndicate level; across all teachers in the school; and at a school/institutional level. The evaluation findings highlight an opportunity for the Ministry to redirect providers' focus and efforts to ensure the support provided is cognizant of the wider system in which the teacher operates. That is, as well as effecting change at an individual teacher and/or syndicate and/or department level, support provided through SSS also responds to issues or constraints in the wider school environment. This can be achieved through specific support provided to a range of groups including school leaders, middle leaders, teachers, provisionally-registered teachers and their mentors, and overseas-trained teachers. Regardless of the group being worked with, advisors can and must be encouraged to work towards leading change within the school.
- Notions of sustainability are central to SSS and the Ministry had an expectation that sustainability goals and principles were built into the design and delivery of professional learning and development support. The evaluation highlighted a high level of variability across providers in this regard and, while in some instances there was intentionality around sustainability, there were other instances when sustainability conversations occurred when the PLD came to an end. This left schools with an acute sense of loss and a feeling of being 'left in the lurch'. To ensure goals of sustainability are achieved, there is a need for a deliberate and planned approach to sustainability.
- Monitor progress in ways similar to how effectiveness of PLD is tracked. This needs to begin with a shared definition of what exit means and a common understanding across providers as to why exit matters.

Lessons learnt

The evaluation findings emphasised the continued importance of PLD because of the role it plays in strengthening/enhancing the understanding and skills of school leaders and teachers to best meet the learning needs of all students. The Ministry facilitated access to quality PLD by investing in a range of professional development in the school sector, including SSS. Historically the design and implementation of the SSS contracts were underpinned by principles of equity (ensuring access to quality PLD for all teachers), a focus on strengthening teaching practice and promoting synergy between pre-service and in-service to ensure consistency in curriculum implementation. More recently there has been a shift in policy direction towards a more targeted approach to delivery (focusing on schools with need) and a focus on school development (due to the growing notion of the need to contribute to continuous improvement of schools). In light of these changes, it may be necessary to reflect on the extent to which current design of the SSS meets

emerging needs and shifts in policy and how the Ministry can support and contract PLD services from the sector in general.

The findings from the evaluation show that there is value in maintaining a centrally-funded PLD infrastructure as it ensures that the design and delivery of all support are underpinned by cultural responsiveness, teaching as inquiry and pedagogical content knowledge. The challenge the Ministry faces is to better understand which type of PLD investment is most appropriate given current government's priorities, how best to deploy it and the conditions that achieve success. Further the current government has fewer, clearer priorities for education and it may be appropriate to reflect on whether the current approach to PD provision and PD contracts is still relevant.

A way forward

The evaluation activities undertaken have collectively identified the growing importance of good planning, targeting, effective service delivery and ongoing monitoring and evaluations to inform future decisions. Applying these findings suggests the need to structure the design of any future PLD infrastructure around effective processes for policy development, beginning with an understanding of the opportunities including clarifying the policy intent; developing and designing the response; implementing the response and reflecting on and learning from the intervention (monitoring and evaluation). In light of this, it is useful to reflect on the evaluation findings presented in this report with a view to raising questions for consideration by policymakers in the future. These relate to four broad areas:

- ***Understanding the opportunity***

  Underpinning the Ministry's strategies and interventions in PLD, there needs to be a clear understanding of the opportunity and how this can be leveraged by the Ministry to better achieve government's goals and aspirations for education. This requires the Ministry to describe a relationship between the theory and the evidence to support effective interventions as this will enable resources to be used more effectively and establish stronger alignment between the different initiatives that have similar objectives. There is also need for promoting consistent messages about expectations, and desired behaviours so as to build a shared understanding of the problem across the different stakeholders.

- ***Developing a strategic response***

  Central to any strategy or response is having a clear sense and articulation of the goal or outcome that the organisation and/or the contracts for services are working towards. In the context of SSS contracts, the evaluation indicates that providers have focused on outputs (namely, outputs/schedules in the contract e.g. numeracy, literacy etc) and plan their resourcing and delivery of PLD around these outputs resulting in a siloed and fragmented approach. Developing a strategic response requires a shift towards an outcomes focus as it will enable providers to take all aspects of the wider system into consideration, in order to support cultural change at the school. Adopting this approach requires the Ministry to *manage for outcomes* and promote a stronger connection between outputs and outcomes across all PLD providers. This shift will need to be supported by a clearer mandate and accountabilities.

- ***Implementing the response***

  Historically, the SSS agreements were negotiated and funded centrally by the Ministry of Education and delivered regionally by six universities located across New Zealand. The Ministry managed and structured the contract and how providers delivered PLD, with the expectation that schools received PLD in a flexible, coordinated way. It was important to allow regions to innovate and not try to force them into centrally-determined frameworks and processes. The trade-off for giving more degrees of freedom to providers is the need to strengthen governance and management arrangements at the centre to ensure that effective accountability is maintained, particularly relating

to identifying priority groups; establishing clear criteria and focus for the PLD and providing training, guidelines and templates, and other forms of administrative support to ensure consistency in delivery.

- ***Monitoring and evaluation***

  Tracking progress towards outcomes is essential to inform the ongoing development, refinement and improvement of any intervention. Given the complex nature of the PLD and school environment, the ability to respond to issues and opportunities as they arose was essential to ensure that risks were minimised and opportunities leveraged. Given the complex nature of PLD and the myriad of factors that contribute to achieving desired change, it is by implication often difficult to 'unpack' the impact of particular PLD strategies and interventions. However, evaluation of a small number of initiatives and ongoing monitoring can contribute to the growing knowledge base about what works to improve quality of teaching; the process also lifts student engagement and achievement.

Abbreviations

Advisors	The staff employed by SSS providers to deliver services to schools
AToL	Assess to Learn PD
BES	Best Evidence Synthesis
ERO	Education Review Office
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
HOD	Head of Department
INSTEP	Inservice Teacher Education Practice project
L&M	Leadership and Management output area funded under the SSS contracts
LDO	Literacy Development Officer
LPDP	Literacy Professional Development Programme
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MoE	Ministry of Education
NZC	New Zealand Curriculum
PLD	Professional learning and development
PRT	Provisionally-registered Teacher
SSS	School Support Services
SSS Providers	The six universities that are contracted by the Ministry to provide professional development and support to schools

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the report by setting out the purpose and scope of the evaluation, summarising the evaluation approach and outlining the structure and content of this report.

Purpose and scope

The Ministry of Education's Statement of Intent identifies a Ministry priority for 2010-2015 as 'lifting achievement for every learner across the education sector.' As the government's lead advisor on education, the Ministry strives to ensure that the education system equips all young people with the skills and knowledge they need to be engaged and informed citizens and part of a productive workforce. While the system works well for most students, evidence shows that it does not adequately meet the needs of some groups. Māori, Pasifika learners from low socio-economic areas and learners with special education needs, on average, continue to achieve at lower levels than their peers.[1]

The quality of teaching is widely acknowledged as a key influence that impacts on the achievement of learners. Research shows that what school leaders and teachers know and do are the most important influences on what students learn. In this context, professional development is critical as it enables the Ministry to strengthen the understanding and skills of school leaders and teachers so that they can best meet the learning needs of all students. This has led to investment in a range of professional development in the school sector, including school support services.[2] The SSS contracts are the Ministry's largest investment in centrally-funded professional development. In addition to the SSS agreements there are a number of national initiatives (a result of Government policy) that are also funded by government. The focus and priorities of the SSS contracts are revised or reshaped year-to-year in response to emerging issues and challenges facing the schooling sector.

A multi-year evaluation of the provision of SSS was commissioned in 2006 to examine the effectiveness of the professional development and support offered by SSS providers to schools in their region. Initially the scope of the evaluation included both a process and an outcomes focus and evaluators were asked to shed some light on the professional development and support offered under the leadership and management output and the in-depth area (as a number of the PLD initiatives were already being evaluated independently). However, there were significant changes introduced to the SSS contracts which meant that an outcomes evaluation was no longer appropriate. The evaluation approach and methodology were revised to have stronger formative and process focus than originally anticipated.

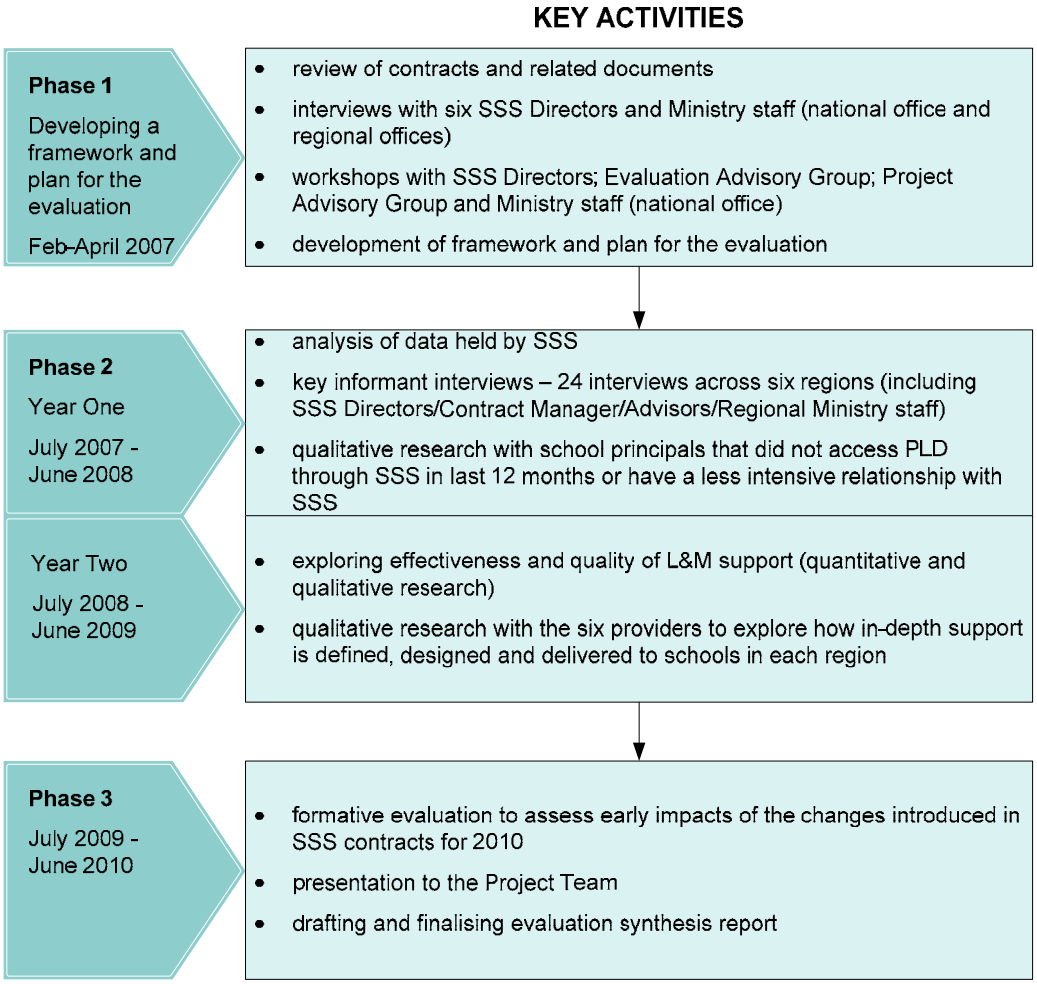
1 The Ministry of Education's Statement of Intent 2010-2015, page 7.

2 These non-contestable agreements with six universities were established in 1989 when the advisory service was transferred from the Department of Education to the six colleges of education. Over time these colleges merged with universities.

The evaluation approach

The following diagram illustrates our approach to the evaluation. There were three broad phases and key activities in each phase were as outlined below.

Figure 2: Description of the phased approach to the evaluation



On completion of each evaluation activity within Phase 2, an analytical workshop was held with SSS Directors (to test and validate findings from each activity to ensure robustness of the analysis and interpretation) and with a MoE Reference Group to test and disseminate findings for wider use within the Ministry. A final internal workshop was also held to explore broad conclusions and to confirm the direction of this final report.

Structure and content of this report

The remainder of this report is set out as follows:

- Chapter 2 sets the context for professional development support in New Zealand and includes a brief description of the SSS contracts and of their evolution; summarises the changes implemented during the evaluation period.
- Chapter 3 outlines the evaluation methodology and the framework that underpinned the evaluation. It also presents the high-level description of the evaluation activities undertaken in each of the three phases. A more detailed description on the methodology can be found in Appendix 1.
- Chapter 4 discusses the key enablers and influences on providers' ability to deliver effectively under the SSS contracts.
- Chapter 5 discusses the main findings of the evaluation including key achievements and challenges faced in ensuring effective delivery of SSS by providers as well as the Ministry.
- Chapter 6 identifies emerging issues from the changes introduced in the SSS contracting environment and its potential impacts on the provision of professional development support to schools.
- Chapter 7 draws lessons for the Ministry from the evaluation about the effectiveness and efficiency of SSS provision and identifies pathways for improvement of the system for the provision of PLD support to schools. By drawing on the collective insights gained from the multi-year evaluation, this chapter raises issues for consideration by the Ministry for the future.

Chapter 2: Setting the scene

This chapter tells the story of the evolution of the SSS contracts, the Ministry's expectations from these contracts and how these have changed over the years and the implications for the evaluation.

Evolution of School Support Services

The school support services (SSS) contracts are non-contestable agreements that the Ministry has with six universities for the ongoing provision of professional development and support. The universities are: University of Auckland, University of Waikato, Massey University, Victoria Link (a subsidiary of Victoria University of Wellington), Canterbury University and University of Otago. The SSS contracts represent the Ministry's largest investment in centrally-funded professional learning and development. The SSS expenditure comes from the $22.5 million school advisory services or 'baseline' appropriation. Other appropriations are added to the SSS contracts to purchase additional services. The contracts are reviewed annually to ensure the services purchased reflect government priorities, the growing evidence of what makes for effective professional learning and development, and PD needs in the school sector.

Early notions of SSS can be traced back to the Review of Advisory Services in 1990 ('Shallcrass Report', 1990) which recommended that the Colleges of Education should become responsible for providing school development services[3] and that there be a shift in emphasis away from giving advice and support to teachers to encouraging development and growth of schools. This early model of school development services has undergone significant changes over time, leading to the development of the current SSS model. Despite the many forms that SSS has taken over the years, providers of professional development services and Ministry staff believe that some of the core ideological principles underpinning the delivery of SSS have remained largely unchanged through the years. These relate to government's desire to ensure the following:

- equity in access to services (particularly for schools in remote/rural areas)
- synergy between pre-service and in-service training and consistency in implementation of the national curriculum
- school development focus rather than the provision of individual in-service experiences to teachers
- a future focus to assist schools to look beyond the immediate issues and to proactively shape the direction and vision
- teaching practice is informed by research evidence, thus forging a closer relationship in which the knowledge base of both researchers and practitioners is valued and shared.

These core principles were woven into the SSS contracts as they evolved and changed over the years. All professional learning and development support provided by SSS to schools since 2004 was required (under Schedule One of the SSS contracts which overarches the entire Agreement) to have an explicit focus on:

- supporting teachers' professional decision-making through helping them to gather, analyse and use data, including student achievement data, as the basis for professional decision-making;

[3] School development included curriculum, teacher, school and school community development.

- challenging teachers' existing beliefs, expectations and professional practices and supporting teachers to make changes in their practices that will more effectively help all students to become successful learners, particularly those who are, or are at risk of, underachieving;
- raising teachers' level of pedagogical content knowledge (including subject knowledge)
- establishing inclusive school cultures and effective learning communities within and between schools.

It is important to take note of the priorities noted in the SSS contracts during the Phase 2 evaluation period (2007-2009) as these issues influenced the nature of the questions and the focus of the evaluative inquiry. During the evaluation period, the contracts maintained a strong focus on implementing the New Zealand Curriculum; raising Māori student achievement; strong professional leadership and raising achievement of Pasifika students. For instance, 2007 Schedule One described the priority areas in very broad terms noting that the 'provision of targeted professional development for school leaders and teachers will facilitate the achievement of the Ministry's priorities to ensure all students experience effective teaching; children's learning is nurtured by families and whānau; and evidence-based practices are used by all involve in schooling.

The Ministry varied the contracts annually to allow for changes in government policy and the sector's professional development needs to be taken into consideration. Consequently, during 2008 and 2009 the emphasis in Schedule One of the contracts was on implementation of the New Zealand Curriculum and SSS providers were tasked (in addition to other priority areas, such as raising Māori student achievement, and strong professional leadership) with ensuring schools were supported to base all curriculum planning and review on the NZC from 1 February 2010. Similarly, advisors were expected to work with *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*, which provided direction and guidance for Māori medium teaching and learning, which was expected to be regulated in 2011. Consequently, Schedule One of the SSS contracts in this period gave significant thrust to these areas. For 2009, findings from the evaluation and changes to government priorities led the Ministry to tighten Schedule One and introduce greater specificity about its expectations.

Historically, the SSS contracts were not the main lever for shifting underachievement in schools. Over time, this has changed and changes introduced to the services purchased under the SSS contracts in 2010 aptly illustrate these shifts. The Schedule One of the 2010 contracts asks providers 'to focus on a smaller number of high-priority areas than in previous years and clearly prioritise support for schools and students that need it most.' Providers were also expected to strategically use a mix of face-to-face and online activities to provide a range of PLD services encompassing information provision through workshops and seminars, working with school clusters, and engaging in providing in-depth professional learning and development with prioritised schools.

The Schedule also specified a stronger role for the regional Ministry office and the expectation that providers will work with the regional office to develop and implement a process to prioritise and select schools that will receive support. There is also an expectation that when supporting a school, advisors take note of the range of support the school is receiving to ensure services are linked and schools experience a cohesive service. These changes, amongst others to the contracts, have been in response to a combination of factors including feedback from the evaluation and related research, increased alignment with government priorities and feedback received by the Ministry from the providers during contract negotiation meetings.

The implications of these changes were that the evaluation design needed to be adapted and adjusted to the changing priorities of the SSS contracts. More detail on the evaluation methodology is discussed in the following chapter as well as in the Appendix.

Chapter 3: Evaluation methodology

This chapter outlines the overarching framework and plan for the evaluation, including the evaluation purpose, the theory of change that identified the key evaluation focus areas, and the high-level questions addressed in the evaluation.

Evaluation purpose

Discussions with internal and external stakeholders in early 2007 established that the evaluation of the provision of SSS was expected to serve an improvement/learning purpose in keeping with the long-term, established and non-contestable nature of the SSS contracts. Consequently, the evaluation was designed to provide ongoing feedback to the Ministry so as to strengthen the contracting environment and enable providers to deliver more effectively. An improvement focus would also yield rich insights about the way in which providers and the Ministry operated, which in turn would contribute to lifting the outcomes of in-service professional learning and development.

To respond to these requirements and needs from the evaluation, evaluators began by developing a conceptual framework to anchor and guide the data-collection activities over the three-year period. The framework and the rationale underpinning the framework are outlined in the following section.

Developing a theory of change

The primary aim of the evaluation, as stated in the Request for Proposals document, was to explore "how **effective** is the professional development provided by SSS at improving the quality of teaching for students in New Zealand". The issue of effectiveness of professional development delivered through the SSS contracts is highly complex and multi-faceted and a number of aspects are difficult to measure (such as lack of data and/or lack of robust measurement tools); there is a delayed effect of teacher professional development on students learning outcomes; there are other external factors that impact on teachers' ability to implement or use the learning (such as the prevailing school culture, wider community environment, maturity of the school leadership, and so on).

It is also likely that the same teacher or school receives PD support through other channels – for example, new teachers are likely to be doing on-the-job learning, which is a confounding factor in assessing effectiveness. There are a number of other Ministry-funded PD contracts that schools have access to such as the ICT PD, the Literacy Professional Development Project, and the AToL Project, which make it difficult to disentangle the effects of PD delivered by SSS from other forms of support.

Evaluators considered these challenges and designed an approach using principles underpinning the Theory of Change.[4] This approach was perceived to be appropriate in the context of the SSS evaluation as it allowed the evaluation to examine how the SSS system works to achieve the intended outcomes. It highlighted the need to capture not only the process elements but also the need to collect information on the hypothesized linkages. The 'theory' in this instance was developed in conversations with key stakeholders to explore their conceptualisations about how PD offered by SSS could be expected to bring about the desired changes. The conversations pointed to the need for the evaluation to take

[4] Weiss, C. 'Theory-Based Evaluation: Past, Present and Future.' In Rog, D and Founier, D (eds*), Progress and Future Directions in Evaluation: Perspectives on Theory, Practice and Methods*.. New Directions for Program Evaluation, no 76. San Francisco: Jossey:Bass, 1997.

into account the context and the need to understand the enablers and barriers that impact on providers' ability to be effective.

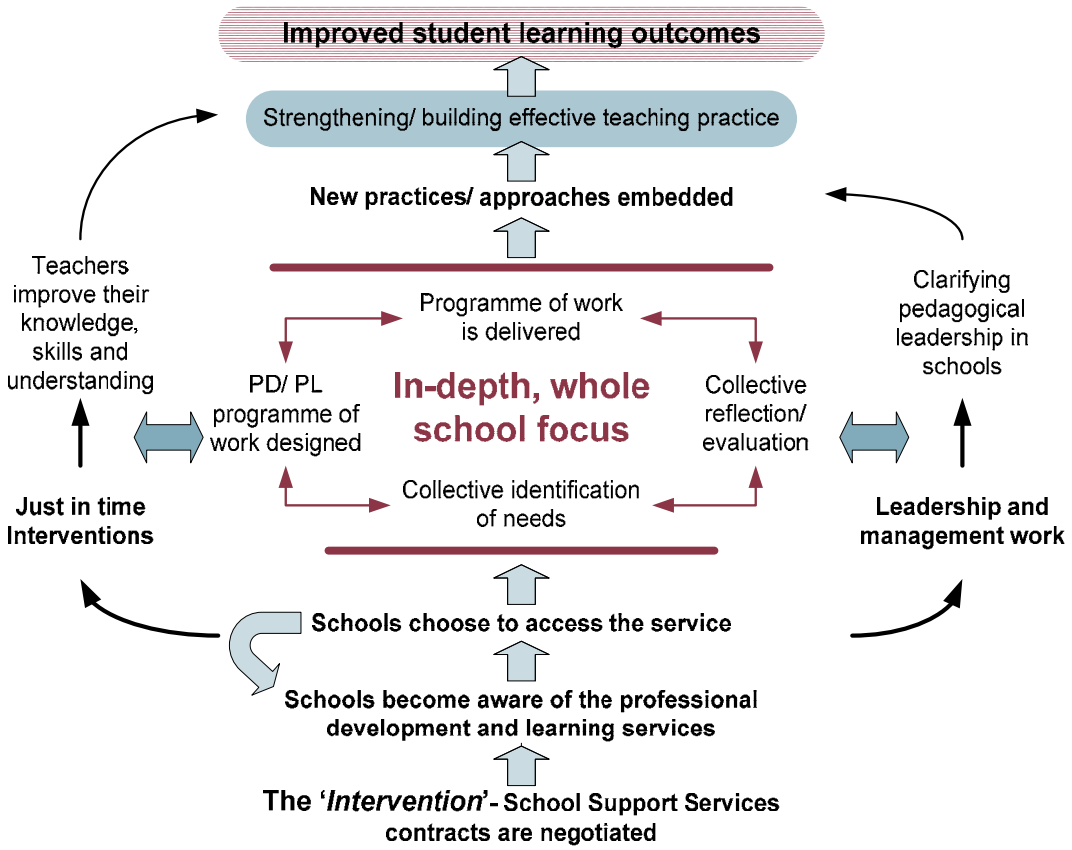
The *theory of change* that underpinned the SSS contracts and formed the cornerstone of the evaluation approach was particularly relevant for a systematic review of an intervention where cause and effect can be both directly and indirectly related and can be attributed to a number of contextual factors beyond the scope of the SSS contracts. Any examination of effectiveness of the professional development provided by SSS therefore needed to show not only whether, but also how, the professional development provided by SSS led to changes or shifts in awareness, level of participation by schools, and knowledge and skills of teachers and school leaders in order to achieve improved outcomes for students.

The following diagram depicts a plausible *theory of change/action* developed in 2007 and articulates *how* the SSS contracts were expected to work in the real world to deliver the desired outcomes. A key assumption that underpinned the SSS contracts (the theory of change) was that in-depth, whole-of-school, focused professional development, when facilitated in a collaborative, co-constructed way across all levels in the school by qualified and capable change agents (advisors), can bring about changes in teaching practice which in turn will lead to improved student outcomes.

Applying principles of the *theory of change,* evaluators viewed the SSS contracts as the *intervention* or *the mechanism* for change. For SSS contracts to be effective, providers need to undertake a number of activities, including promoting awareness of their services, negotiating access with schools in their regions and working collaboratively and closely with schools to integrate professional development within the broader context of the school. It was expected that this iterative, ongoing, inquiry-driven way of working would embed new mental models, systems and practices in the school and promote a culture of ongoing learning. In this manner effective teaching practice was facilitated, which in turn led to improved student outcomes, the ultimate outcome of the *intervention.*

Schools can also **choose** to access SSS in other ways, such as through *just in time* interventions or support for school leaders (such as support for first-time principals, aspiring and potential school leaders, *at-risk* school leaders). The way in which these 'interventions' contribute to the overarching outcome is depicted in Figure 3. Regardless of the nature of the school's participation in a PLD intervention, there was an expectation that the intervention by provider would bring about changes in the desired direction. These changes can be noted in any or all of the following areas – the wider school system; its culture; the teaching practices and the knowledge, skills and attributes of participants.

Figure 3: Working towards achieving desired outcomes



At the same time, evaluators needed to be cognizant of the fact that the provision of PLD to teachers and school leaders is only one of the many interventions in this space designed to bring out changes in the ultimate outcome. In addition, there are a number of private providers of professional development that schools may choose to access. There are a number of other influences in the wider context that impact on the implementation of this plausible theory of action, and these are discussed below. To that extent, it may be useful to think of the *contribution* of PD through SSS in facilitating or strengthening effective teaching practice rather than looking at the issue purely in terms of *attribution*.

Main evaluation questions

The overarching focus for the evaluation was on understanding aspects of the professional development provision by SSS that work or do not work. The conceptual framework outlined in Figure 3 guided the data-collection phase of the evaluation and identified the different lines of inquiry needed to provide the Ministry and SSS providers with rich insights about how services are currently provided. At the time of developing the evaluation framework and plan the questions were broadly clustered into two groups:

(i) understanding the role and influence of the contextual factors in helping and/or hindering effective provision by SSS providers

(ii) describing the short, medium and longer-term outcomes achieved by School Support Service providers for teachers, schools and students in New Zealand.

However, the context for SSS provision went through significant changes during the evaluation period. As a result, the evaluation plan was adapted to reflect a stronger formative focus.

Key evaluation activities

The main evaluation activities undertaken during the evaluation period are outlined below. Specific details with regard to the methodology and methods used in each phase and in each activity can be found in Appendix 1.

Table 1: Evaluation phases

Phase	Focus	Evaluation activities
Phase 1 (April 2007)	Developing the evaluation framework and plan	• Document review • Interviews with the six SSS Directors and contract managers • Interview and workshops with internal Ministry staff to further develop and test the evaluation framework
Phase 2		
Year one (July 2007-June 2008)	Understanding the contextual influences that help and/or hinder SSS providers' ability to be effective as well as examine progress towards short-term outcomes	• Analysis of data held by SSS regarding access • Key informant interviews including all SSS Directors and contract managers; two advisors; Regional Ministry of Education Managers; regional stakeholders • Qualitative Research with schools that (a) have a less intensive relationship with SSS, or (b) access PD from non-SSS providers
Year two July 2008 - June 2009	Examine how and in what ways is the professional development and support facilitated by SSS providers working for teachers, for school leaders and students with respect to the Leadership and Management output and in-depth PD	• L&M – interviews with 28 school principals, identified as having received leadership and management support – two focus-group discussions with leadership and management coordinators from the SSS regions – an online survey of all school principals in New Zealand • In-depth PD – Case study research
Phase 3 July 2009- June 2010	Understanding impact of the changes to the SSS environment with a view to developing an evaluation synthesis report including lessons learnt	• Interviews with all six SSS providers including managers, advisors and team leaders • Interviews with Regional Ministry Office • Interviews with Regional Stakeholders

Analysis and reporting

During the course of the evaluation, seven different evaluation activities were completed, each offering a unique perspective on the SSS system and its effectiveness. The evaluation methods used were ideally suited to making assessments about different aspects of effectiveness and showing how each method had its own limitations and biases. At the conclusion of each activity a report was drafted capturing key themes and insights; and the findings were then tested with the Ministry project team to ensure analysis and interpretation were meaningful and robust. This evaluation synthesis report draws on the findings from all the different evaluation reports to make informed judgements about the performance and delivery of current SSS.

Chapter 4: Enablers and key influences

This chapter synthesises findings from the different work strands undertaken as part of the evaluation and provides an overview of the key achievements and challenges faced in ensuring effective delivery of professional learning and development by both providers and the Ministry.

The Ministry of Education is charged with meeting Government's goals for education and achieving these goals requires the Ministry to equip schools and teachers with what they need to support every student to learn. In this context, professional development is critical as it enables teachers and school leaders to acquire the understandings and knowledge needed to best meet the learning needs of all students. The Ministry invests in a range of professional development in the school sector and the SSS contracts represent a significant proportion of that investment - the SSS contracts are the Ministry's largest investment in centrally-funded professional development. Through the evaluation, the Ministry hoped to better understand how these contracts were working to achieve the outcomes; it documents its key achievements and challenges for the future. Drawing on the findings from the different evaluation activities, this chapter provides rich insights into how these contracts are interpreted, managed and delivered at a systemic level to support school leaders and teachers to achieve best possible outcomes for students in their schools.

Understanding 'access'

In the evaluation literature, it is recommended that evaluation of any programme-delivery initiative begins with a preliminary analysis of *access* to shed light on the extent of participation by the target group. This is consistent with the theory of change developed for the evaluation (refer Figure 2) which clearly establishes the relevance and importance of understanding access in order to understand effectiveness of SSS provision. Therefore the first step in the evaluation journey involved building a picture of who was, and who was not, accessing professional learning and development services offered by providers under the SSS contracts. Evaluators asked all six providers to provide data for the 2006 school year using a standardised template (see Appendix 1) to enable comparisons across the regions. For the purposes of the analysis, *access* was defined as hours accounted for by providers under the SSS contract.

The analysis was undertaken to identify trends and patterns in the profile and mix of schools accessing professional development from SSS. Evaluators wished to determine, for instance, whether SSS was being accessed more by larger, urban schools than smaller, rural schools; whether there was a higher proportion of high-decile schools accessing professional development from SSS; whether the same schools were accessing professional development across the three-year period; whether schools with high Māori/Pasifika rolls were accessing professional development from SSS, and so on. Understanding these patterns was seen as important and critical to building a picture of the *use* of professional development services offered by SSS.

It was difficult for providers to supply the required information as their information management systems were not designed with this purpose in mind. This meant that there were significant inconsistencies in the data as some providers were not able to provide the requested breakdown of information. In addition, there were different interpretations of what constitutes professional development hours – while some providers counted in-school professional development hours, others included time spent in planning the PD in these calculations. Given these limitations, the findings about access must be seen as indicative only and as providing insights about general trends and patterns. Probably the most important insight from undertaking the data analysis on access was that providers themselves did not appear to use this information on access to help plan their delivery of PD.

The data supplied by the SSS providers showed that there was no obvious or discernible pattern with regard to access – most schools appeared to be accessing some form of professional development from SSS. By and large, there was an even spread across the schools with some minor exceptions – for example, in one region, there were a higher number of large, urban, high-decile schools accessing professional development support than smaller, rural and lower-decile schools. In another region, the highest number of hours delivered were in medium, urban, low-decile schools. In yet another region, large, urban schools received the highest number of PD hours in the 2006 year. However, generally speaking there appeared to be no significant trends in relation to coverage.

The lack of any strong pattern was interpreted by providers and Ministry staff in a number of ways:

- It was felt to reflect the principles of equity on which the school support service contracts were based. Interviews with school leaders revealed that all schools that requested professional development received some sort of advice and assistance from the providers either in the form of a phone call or an email which were counted under the broad umbrella of 'professional development hours'. It also highlighted that providers' database did not distinguish between the different *types* of professional development they offered; therefore the total PD hours reported was often clouded by a number of smaller contact hours, delivered over a longer timeframe.
- It suggested that SSS providers were not targeting delivery of professional development to schools in their region. Given that the national contracts identify certain groups as being priority groups, it was reasonable to expect some differences in the number of hours accessed by schools. However, this was not the case, suggesting that providers were taking a more ad hoc approach and working with schools that requested professional development support regardless of their need.
- Interestingly, the Regional Ministry staff were surprised when told that the data showed a rather even spread. In their view and experience, SSS providers did not differentiate sufficiently on the basis of 'need' except in exceptional circumstances (such as at-risk schools) and tended to work with schools that self-select or are easier to get to. However, this perception was not supported by the data provided by the SSS provider working in that region. Consequently, we need to tread with caution in our interpretation of this reflection.
- Some of the larger providers did undertake significant work with low-decile schools, but their data on professional development provision did not reflect this work. This could be due to the fact that a significant proportion of their work with low-decile schools is outputted through other MOE contracts (such as Schooling Improvement contracts). These interrelationships between SSS contracts and other Ministry-funded PD contracts need to be factored into the mix when analysing data patterns.

Key message: Data on access and participation was too patchy and inadequate to provide an accurate picture of schools that access or did not access PLD from SSS.

Impact of the structure and management of the contract

School support services represent a collection of professional development services that the Ministry purchases for schools. Therefore understanding provider perceptions of the structure and management of these contracts was critical to understanding effectiveness. The SSS contracts were seen by providers as an accountability document and they invested significant effort and time in ensuring that hours were delivered as per the agreement, as indicated in the following quotations:

> We work to outputs, we work to hours. (SSS Management)

> The milestone reports are meant precisely for that. First of all, the Ministry wants to be confident that the contracts are being discharged as part of their accountability process. Then they want to know are we achieving desired outcomes? But again they only want to know this in the particular output area, not across the whole school. There is some change in direction to more in-depth work but then that means that we will work only with 80 schools, not 180! (SSS Management)

The SSS contract is a national-level three-year rolling contract negotiated nationally and reviewed annually in a series of discussions between the SSS Management and National team. The Regional Ministry staff had a minimal role to play in these discussions and negotiations, and this was a source of some frustration for the Regional Office. The Regional Ministry staff viewed the contract as an important lever for bringing about desired shifts in teaching practices in schools in the region and felt that they could work more actively with the local SSS provider towards this objective. In their view, such collaborative effort would ensure that the PD programme meets the needs of schools identified at a regional level. The observation by a regional Ministry staff member that "we (Ministry staff including regional staff and SSS providers) may be doing the right things by the contract but are we doing the right things?" is indicative of the current state of mind about the contracts amongst some managers.

> Our role as regional office is twofold – feed back regional intelligence into policy development process and secondly to provide some clarity to the regions as to what the Ministry is trying to achieve. Despite this, we have little control over important contracts negotiated at a national level and if we want it to go in a certain direction or have a particular sense of priority in the region, we do not have that flexibility. (Regional Ministry Manager)

> I don't think there is as yet a sense of working together on a regional strategic plan. There does need to be more intentional working together actually because we both have responsibilities within the region. (Regional Ministry Manager)

The SSS providers noted that the structure of the contract and the relationship-based nature of the contracting process had changed considerably over the years, contributing to greater focus and clarity for delivery of professional development services to schools. The annual negotiation meetings were seen as incredibly helpful and presented providers with an important opportunity to discuss and debate emerging issues. However, providers also highlighted particular issues of the contract structure that they believed posed some challenges and these are discussed below:

- The contracts were constructed on a population-based funding model which tended to disadvantage some regions, particularly in the South Island. There were limited economies of scale, which in turn impacted on the provider's ability to recruit and retain skilled and experienced staff. Limited resources meant that the management had to create roles that grouped together different types of PLD work; consequently providers struggled to find the right people to fill the roles and this in turn affected their credibility and reputation. Providers' believed these issues also compromised their ability to deliver an effective service (resources were spread too thinly across all the output areas, limiting their ability to be effective). A possible way around this (as was suggested by the Ministry at the time) was for providers' to use a more targeted approach, where they focused on a few critical PLD areas in a given year, or utilised other innovative approaches to service delivery.

- Providers' believed the structure of the contract seemed to be out of sync with the changing face of professional development. For instance, the contract is structured around output areas, whereas the Best Evidence Synthesis on Professional Development and Learning showed that professional development was effective when there was a systems focus, and whole-school approach which cut across curricular areas and management structures in the school. Consequently, there was a growing sense amongst providers that the output-oriented nature of the contract limited, and in some instances inhibited, innovation. The following quotation expresses this well:

> Professional development is headed in a direction that is more multidisciplinary, multi-speciality approach. It is about building effective cultures within school, effective learning cultures. Well, you can't do that when you have people focused on and grouped around output areas like Leadership and Management, Literacy, Numeracy etc. We have ended up with an organisational structure that mirrors the contract and so there is some real tension between what we are expected to do as per the contract and where we really believe we should be going in terms of effective PD. (SSS Management)

> You can understand why they need to structure the contract in this way. It is for accountability but it is a big obstacle to innovation. I have talked to some outstanding people in this area who would be ideal for advisory services but they say they cannot work in an environment where one is ticking boxes and counting hours. The advisors can be far more effective and can have far greater impact if they have a bit more flexibility with the contract, worked across curricular areas. (SSS Management)

It is interesting to note that when the Ministry made changes to the contract structure to allow providers' to innovate and deliver services in a more flexible cross-curricular way, few providers made changes to their organisational structure or service provision to exploit this flexibility.

- Balancing national priorities with regional needs was an ongoing issue – Regional Ministry staff felt excluded from this nationally-driven and managed contract and felt they were unable to leverage the SSS contract to influence changes in their region.

  SSS providers also talked about the challenges of juggling national priorities with regional needs. In one region, for instance, the provider faced unique challenges in that they had a disproportionately high number of new principals and a number of these were first-time principals. If school leadership was seen as critical to achieving sustainable shifts in teaching practices, then providing these new leaders with highly intensive and high-quality support was the first step towards this goal. However, there is lack of clarity around to what extent these issues are a reflection of the limitations of the contract, or a reflection of lack of planning on the part of SSS providers, or lack of flexibility in terms of the organisational structures and systems which impacts on the provider's ability to be regionally responsive.

Key message: The delivery of PLD appeared to be strongly driven by expectations and aspirations set out in the SSS contracts. This offers a tremendous opportunity to the Ministry to shape and influence delivery by ensuring the contracts are well-written and provide clear direction about the Ministry's expectations regarding PLD priorities and focus for a given year.

School selection/prioritisation process

While Schedule One of the SSS contract outlined broad areas of focus, providers were expected to develop their own strategies and plans to ensure that Ministry priorities were met in the regions. The evaluation findings showed that practices varied across providers and there did not appear to be a consistent or coherent framework or criteria for decision-making. Consequently, selection of schools tended to be demand-driven (schools that asked for PD received it) and/or network-driven (i.e. advisors were familiar with the school or had a prior relationship with individuals in the school) and/or through referrals (namely, schools were referred to the SSS by ERO or the Regional Ministry office). This was not ideal as it meant that:

- decision-making was not systematic (that is, no needs analysis to identify schools with need)
- professional development provision catered to schools that were able to take advantage of their knowledge and networks to access the service (resulting in lack of transparency in selection).

Some providers were also requiring their advisors to lodge formal requests for support by school to the SSS management team and a decision was then made at this level. This allowed the institution to match the request against a wider set of 'criteria' such as decile level of the school, prior knowledge about the school including quality of leadership and management, its approach to PD and staff turnover. The institution then made an informed decision about school. The findings from the different evaluation activities also showed that:

- regional Ministry office staff were unclear as to the criteria used by providers
- SSS Managers were unable to provide any overarching rationale for schools they worked with and tended to rely on advisors to make the decisions
- advisors acknowledged that they frequently identified schools using their networks or prior relationships
- schools were often unaware of why they didn't get on to particular programmes.

Processes used for selecting schools for Leadership and Management support (L&M)

The SSS contract set the parameters for PD support offered by leadership and management advisors. The priorities for SSS work in this area varied from year to year to reflect current government priorities. For instance in 2008 the expectation was that particular emphasis would be given to programmes that strengthen professional leadership, including the development of pedagogical leadership for aspiring and first-time principals. It is therefore not surprising to find that L&M advisors focused their attention on first-time principals, schools at-risk, aspiring principals and middle and senior leaders who expressed a need for support towards school development and improvement. In 2009, the key areas of focus were modified in the contract with *Kiwi Leadership for Principals* as the underpinning philosophy and framework for school principalship in New Zealand. The priority groups, however, remained the same.

L&M advisors acknowledged that the first-time principals and principals working in schools at-risk absorbed the bulk of the resources available through the SSS contracts. This meant that middle and senior leaders and aspiring principals often missed out, creating a perception amongst this group that 'the service was not for us'. Balancing priorities and needs of school leaders in the region with resources allocated in the contract posed the biggest challenge for L&M advisors. For instance, school principals talked favourably about the ways in which L&M facilitators operated and described their work as supporting school leaders to develop effective educational leadership that built the right conditions necessary for successful teaching and learning in the school. However, the support was not available to all school principals and was determined by providers on the basis of need and Ministry priorities which was a source of some frustration.

Principals reported that providers sent out a survey requesting schools to identify their professional development needs for the following year. However, principals tended to focus this on the needs of teachers in their school rather than focus on the needs of leadership and management. This suggests that a survey might not be the most appropriate way of getting principals to identify L&M needs in the school.

> I did get the survey and we filled it out. As a result of that we did get significant support from SSS for our teachers. I did not mention anything about L&M as I know that it was not the right place to mention these needs. But when the L&M advisor came in and sat down with me, we talked and we came up with a number of L&M issues for the school to think about and work through. This led to the X (L&M advisor) coming to the school and working with the management team more regularly. (School Principal)

> Principals are not always able to request for support as they don't know what that support looks like. So we actually need them to come and see us and talk these things through. It is different from supporting first-time principals where you can guess what support they need – it will be to do with management and learning about the day-to-day management of the school. But for middle and senior leaders it is the discussions that yield rich information about what is needed or likely to be relevant. (School Principal)

Processes used for selecting schools for in-depth PD support

From the Ministry's point of view, the question of how schools are selected for in-depth support is important as it increases confidence and assures stakeholders that schools that need the service have access to it: targeting is central to the notion of equitable funding and ensuring that limited resources are appropriately distributed across schools in NZ.

Case study research to explore the area of in-depth professional development highlighted that the processes by which providers (institutions and advisors) made decisions about in-depth schools were variable. It seemed that providers took a multitude of factors into consideration – they gathered information from a number of sources, including the Regional Ministry office, Principals' networks, advisors' own networks and intelligence, L&M advisors and schools and matched these with SSS priorities, their staffing levels and their own intelligence about the school (for example, willingness by leadership to engage) to distil the pool of potential schools to a realistic number. Schools nominated by the Literacy Development Officer (LDO) or the Regional Ministry Office were prioritised over other schools owing to concerns about student achievement and learning. By and large, there appeared to be higher level of clarity with regard to literacy and numeracy than with other PD areas.

The following quotations illustrate the range of considerations taken by providers and advisors when making decisions about schools:

> I have worked with the junior school, so working with whole-school was a natural progression. I implemented a numeracy PD in the school a few years ago. (Advisor)

> We implemented a science PD in the school and then we were asked if we could to turn it into whole-school project as there was a new middle management team including a new principal. So we shifted the focus from science to student engagement and built on our work with the school. (Management)

> We often talk to principals as we attend the principal network meetings. For example, at the secondary principal meetings I will talk about the fact that we are doing some whole-school initiatives and so they might approach us as a result of that. (Management)

> The LDO works quite strongly with us and so does the local Ministry office. They might identify a school that they want us to support. (Management)

> I was delivering numeracy PD and then an opportunity came up. We had funding for 4-5 schools for Home-School partnership. So I asked the principal if they wanted to develop stronger relationship with parent community. (Advisor)

> More recently we have begun to use a school survey to identify their PD needs. On other occasions a letter goes out to schools inviting them to participate in a particular initiative that is promoted by the Ministry. (Advisor)

> I got into school X because we knew the principal in a former life. If we were looking at it from the outside we could see that it was a bit of luck that the principal knew me. He may have never rung X (provider). So frankly I don't think my involvement in this school was a result of any strategic decision-making process. In certain areas of support like Numeracy there is a definite process we follow but not in other areas. (Advisor)

Other avenues by which schools ended up as an in-depth school appear to be:

- a school's request for short- term support which over time turned into in-depth work (even though the approach may be for something totally different)
- strong relationship with school leaders– providers run courses for teachers/principals and this paves the way for a possible longer term relationship
- advisors' own interest in research and wanting to pursue academic research, resulting in the advisor approaching schools for participating in in-depth PD
- advisors actively recruiting schools for particular PD initiatives such as a home school partnership.

Providers acknowledged that their prioritisation and planning process needed to be tightened to ensure a more transparent and needs-based response to school selection. These required providers to develop more formal and explicit criteria for selecting schools for in-depth PD, and to communicate these more widely to promote awareness and knowledge about expectations and responsibilities from schools.

> This is timely as we have been thinking about our selection of schools. We need to find a framework that fits across the organization and ensures that there is a consistent response from our organization when a school makes an inquiry. We need to have a whole lot of information in the mix before we can decide and so we need to find that out from the school or from somewhere. (SSS Management)

It is important to note that while providers used several factors in the decision-making regarding schools, the criteria used and the relative weighting across these criteria are unclear. Central to targeting is the notion of well-defined criteria for who meets the test of 'need', as this avoids resource capture. This issue should be addressed, particularly as school leaders interviewed appeared to have no idea about how in-depth schools were selected; they commented that they often did not know why the school was not selected. This led to a lack of transparency around the selection process, which was not helpful. The above discussion suggests that effective targeting of schools requires a meaningful translation of national-level priorities to focus at a regional level. While there were regular meetings held between the Regional office and the SSS provider at the beginning of each year (to ensure that the national picture is balanced with regional priorities identified by the local office and to discuss how they may respond to these) timing of these meetings posed problems as these discussions needed to occur at the end of the year to ensure decision-making was more targeted. Involving the regional office in certain aspects of the dialogue around setting priorities, developing a regionally-tailored targeting strategy, and the like, could go a long way in ensuring that there is a more cohesive approach between the national office, regional office and the provider. Fostering such collaboration will enhance the SSS provider's ability to be more effective. We also believe that the revised data templates will offer an opportunity for SSS providers to be more evidence-based in their selection process.

Key message: There was no strategic approach to school selection and the processes around selection were perceived to lack transparency. The mechanisms through which regional intelligence could be brought to bear to any great extent on the decision-making processes were also limited.

Role of the Ministry

Perceived disconnect between national office and regional office – impact on effectiveness of the 'system'

The SSS agreements were negotiated and funded centrally by the Ministry of Education and delivered regionally by six universities located across New Zealand. While the contracts provided the overarching focus for professional development and learning, the universities were expected to consult with relevant stakeholders and the Regional Ministry office to identify regional needs and priorities and to develop longer-term regional strategies that responded to these needs. In response, in some regions SSS providers had established forums for engaging with Regional Ministry office to discuss and agree on priorities within the parameters set by the contract. However, both parties believed that these links and relationships were not exploited sufficiently and that there was scope for increased discussion and dialogue around sharing regional intelligence.

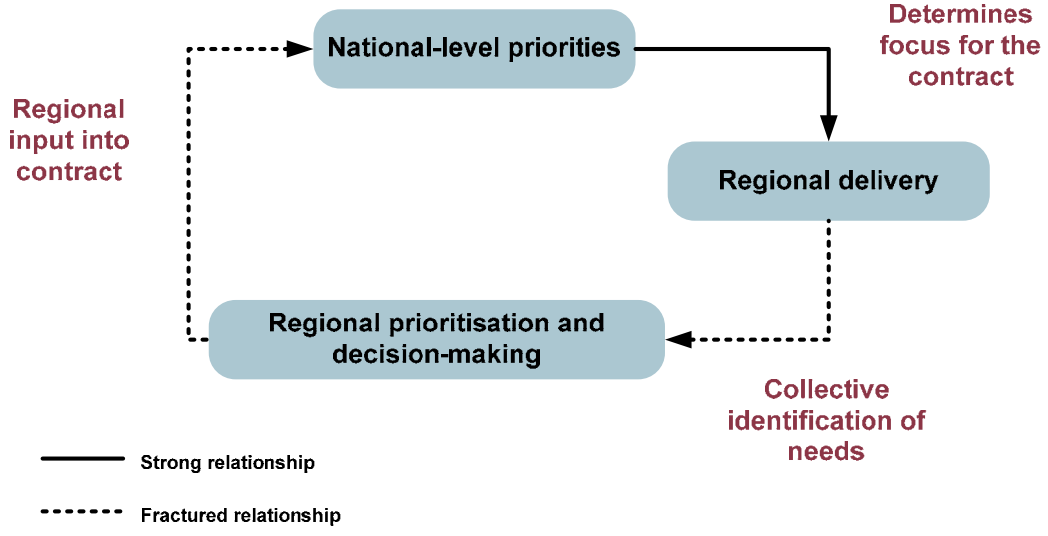
There were pockets of good practice that demonstrated the value of strengthening these links. In one region, the Literacy Development Officers located within the Regional Ministry office acted as brokers and worked actively with Lead Coordinators of Literacy within SSS to undertake strategic selection of schools and discuss where SSS should target their resources in the region. This enabled SSS to be more proactive in their approach to delivery.

Another critical issue in this regard related to the absence of a feedback loop between the national and regional levels. While the focus for the contracts was determined nationally, it was not seen to be responsive to regional issues. Regional Ministry office and SSS providers were frustrated that the contracts were not responsive to the needs of their particular region. This resulted in:

- missed opportunities for using regional intelligence in prioritisation
- missed opportunities for leveraging off each other to support schools.

Figure 4 illustrates the current situation.

Figure 4: Connection between National and Regional Ministry offices



The interviews with Regional Ministry staff also revealed that there is a lack of shared understanding about the role and purpose of the SSS contracts. While the Regional Office viewed the contracts as a lever for effecting change in schools, particularly schools at-risk, the National office viewed the SSS contracts as a centrally-funded professional learning and development infrastructure aimed at facilitating access to information and resources to all schools in New Zealand

focusing on priority areas. These differences in understandings need to be addressed if the contracts are intended to help the Ministry to equip schools and teachers with the support they need to maximise student learning outcomes.

Key message: The disconnect between the national and regional Ministry offices results in missed opportunities for using regional intelligence in prioritisation, as well as missed opportunities for leveraging off each other to support schools.

Chapter 5: Service provision

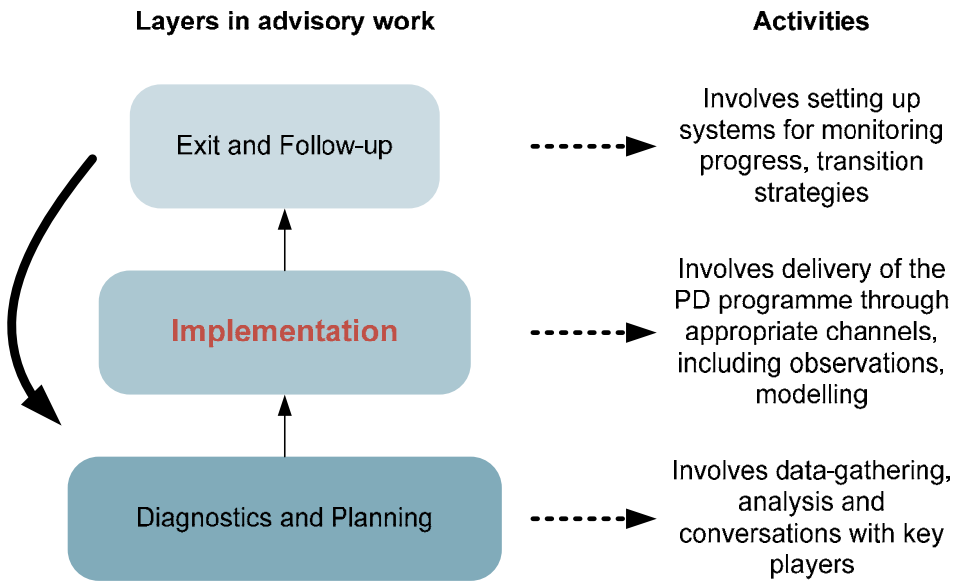
The SSS contracts provide the Ministry with avenues for providing professional learning and development focused on Ministry priorities for school leaders and teachers. The support provided is based on a body of knowledge and research of effective practice related to professional learning opportunities and their impact on teaching practice. Therefore, developing and strengthening teacher capability in gathering and interpreting evidence has always been an important element of these contracts.

SSS providers interviewed in the course of this evaluation noted that the context for professional learning and development had changed dramatically over the years. In their view, since 2007 there has been an explicit focus on student achievement and the drive to design PLD support using student learning outcomes as its anchor. This has led to significant changes to the way in which advisors supported teachers and schools, and how PD was designed and implemented in schools. School leaders, teachers, SSS management and advisors emphasized that there was:

- increased emphasis on pedagogy
- increased emphasis on facilitation and inquiry-driven approaches
- a shift to view the role of in-service teacher educator as that of a facilitator – not a mere deliverer of a suite of interventions
- increased emphasis on role-modeling in classrooms.

Broadly speaking, the way in which PLD is provided to teachers can be described as a three-layered model where the first layer represents the diagnostics and planning phase, the second layer represents the implementation and delivery phase, and the third layer represents the exit and follow-up phase. Diagrammatically, this model can be illustrated as follows:

Figure 5: General description of advisory work



Advisors reported that the second layer ie. implementation layer received the bulk of their attention. The reasons for this could be historical as, in the past, advisor practice was focused on delivering information rather than planning and diagnosis. In the current-day scenario, however, there is an expectation that a more holistic, interconnected approach to professional development is taken, particularly given the shift to in-depth work. Regardless of the type of professional development intervention, it is critical that all layers are given due attention for reasons of relevance and sustainability.

The issue of exit and follow-up is also important from a sustainability perspective. Advisors need to initiate conversations around exit and to ensure that structures and systems are put in place to ensure that shifts are sustained.

A key factor in the effectiveness and sustainability of PLD was advisor capability and skill. The SSS contracts explicitly state the Ministry's expectations around this area and specify that SSS providers invest in building professional capability of their advisors and in quality management systems that assure the quality of the services provided. Interviews with SSS management revealed that in most instances providers designed their information systems, human resource processes and professional development programme to reflect expectations around the contract. During the course of the evaluation itself, there were numerous changes made to these systems to respond to emerging issues – for instance, enabling the information management systems to be viewed by all staff so as to identify the advisor(s) working in a school. This allowed providers to offer a more coordinated support and allowed advisors to talk and share their experiences in a given school, and to strategise appropriately. Another important change introduced related to the professional development and learning for advisors. The INSTEP[5] project led to the realisation that output-focused PD did not allow or encourage cross-team, cross-curricular work. As a result, providers had reconfigured their PD teams and PD pods to allow for greater exchange of experiences and knowledge across the curriculum areas.

Service provision - Leadership and Management output

The SSS contracts provide an avenue for delivering professional development focused on Ministry priorities for school leaders and teachers. The parameters and expectations for supporting school leaders are set out in L&M output of the contract. The priorities for professional development for school leaders change annually in response to the environment. During the evaluation period, priorities for 2008 were identified as:

- the New Zealand Curriculum
- raising Māori student achievement
- raising achievement of Pasifika students
- strong professional leadership with a particular focus on aspiring and first-time principals.

Of the various initiatives aimed at influencing school and principal performance, the SSS Leadership and Management output offers the Ministry leverage to support high-quality leadership in schools, and effective ways of working within schools. Sustaining student and teacher learning can occur in a supportive environment where principals know about, and have the necessary skills to lead, change management. The Ministry's development of a professional leadership strategy provides a focal point to coordinate efforts and interventions that support leadership development in New Zealand.

School leaders interviewed as part of the inquiry into the effectiveness of L&M support offered by SSS acknowledged the increasing complexity of their roles and responsibilities and noted that expectations from school leadership have changed considerably over the years. Experienced school leaders today faced issues that were significantly more

[5] Inservice Teacher Education Practice Project undertaken by the Ministry of Education between 2004-2007. The project aimed to build knowledge and understanding and contribute to lifting in-service teacher education practice in New Zealand.

challenging when compared to the past, and responding to these issues required principals to draw on a wide range of skills and experience. Further, the role of a principal was isolating and principals looked to their peers and/or professional development support personnel to help navigate the leadership space in their schools. While this signalled a high demand for support from principals, it also suggested that the type of support needed varied considerably between principals depending on their experience, the school context and their access to their own professional networks.

To better understand delivery of PLD in relation to this output, data was gathered from both L&M coordinators located within the SSS provider organisation, as well as from school principals using qualitative and quantitative methods. Details around the methodology are available in the Appendix (refer project # 5).

Awareness of professional development and support for L&M offered through SSS

Findings from the qualitative research indicated that the majority of principals were aware of SSS and aware of the leadership and management support they had received from and through SSS. The survey further validated these findings as it showed that 9 out of 10 respondents were aware of School Support Services. There were high levels of awareness across universities, across the regions, and across school characteristics such as size, decile, FTPs and at-risk schools. Rural and urban respondents had similar levels of awareness, suggesting that geographical isolation was not a significant challenge. The findings also point to the fact that providers were successfully promoting their services in the region and these strategies had contributed to building salience and visibility for the service.

In some instances, principals found it difficult to distinguish between the professional development offered by SSS from within the SSS contract vis-à-vis other services provided by the universities or other providers. Principals were sometimes unaware of all support delivered in the school, and so while the school may have *technically* received SSS support, it may not have been targeted at the principal. This explains why sometimes the principal interviewed denied that they had received support when, in fact, the *school* had been a recipient of PD support.

In other instances, principals were unaware of the nature of support offered by SSS to *school principals*. Principals saw SSS as primarily offering advice and guidance to teaching staff and helping teachers lift their practice.

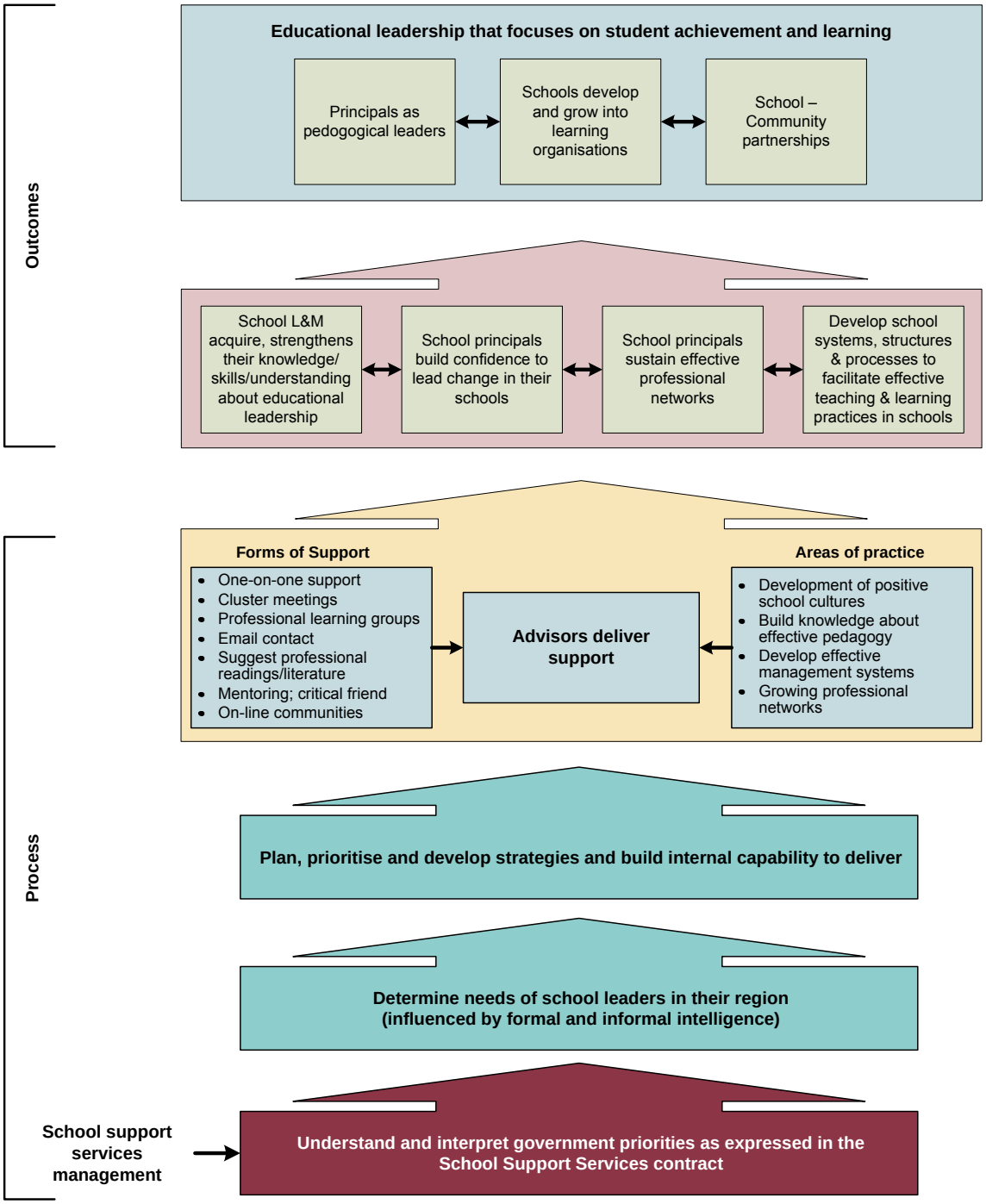
The theory of change or action that underpinned L&M delivery

In providing the services to school principals, L&M advisors took a flexible approach and gathered all relevant information that was available (such as ERO review reports; strategic plan documents; PD initiatives in place) to build a picture of where the school was at and to determine what was needed. The level of support offered was always contextualised to the needs of the school and this made it challenging for L&M advisors to articulate a theory of change to describe their work. Through the focus groups, however, evaluators made some attempts to surface the theory of change for L&M support. Figure 4 documents the ways in which L&M advisors worked.

Leadership and management support offered by SSS takes many forms and can be best described as flexible and context-specific. It targets principals, school leaders and occasionally teachers. The focus of the work can be targeted at an individual, a team (such as a senior management team or the Board of Trustees) or the whole school in the case of a whole-school intervention. It is usually delivered through face-to-face meetings, telephone calls, email discussions, facilitated sessions or tailored programmes delivered in the school.

L&M advisors saw their role as being different from the curriculum facilitators on two parameters: first, L&M advisors worked with school leaders, whereas curriculum facilitators worked with teachers (and occasionally with school leadership teams); and secondly L&M advisors rarely worked in the classroom, whereas this was a central feature of how curriculum facilitators supported teachers.

Figure 6: Plausible theory of action with respect to L&M



Providing services across each priority area

First-time principals

For the first-time principals, the L&M advisor was the first point of contact. Consequently, L&M advisors prioritised this group to ensure that they were aware of the support that was available. First-time principals were identified through a combination of formal (such as discussions with Regional Ministry Office; FTP programme; principals' association) and informal (such as local networks and intelligence) channels; and all L&M advisors said that they contacted these

principals promptly. This was supported by first-time principals interviewed in the qualitative phase. L&M advisors noted that the demand for their services exceeded their ability to provide support, leading to consideration of more efficient strategies for supporting first-time principals.

There were other types of support available for first-time principals. For example, one provider ran local meetings for first-time principals and invited new principals to their region to these meetings in order to forge local networks and relationships. In another region, the provider ran a First-Time Principals Programme to promote effective educational leadership in schools. The programme was designed to meet individual needs of first-time principals and sought to develop the professional and personal skills and capabilities of new school leaders so they could work effectively with their colleagues and communities. The programme also offered a mentoring programme which was viewed very favourably by school principals.

L&M coordinators and school principals interviewed reported that first-time principals appeared to need greater support in management aspects of their role. As a result, initial efforts were aimed at building capability to manage finance, property, the Board of Trustees, strategic planning support and human resource issues, in the first instance. As they built confidence in these areas, they looked for support in relation to implementing the NZC and growing leadership across the school. This was consistent with research published by Hodgen and Wylie, 2005, where they noted that New Zealand principals spent twice as much time on administration as their international counterparts. The multiple demands of leadership and administration were a source of tension for principals when deciding how to prioritise time and attention.

Support for schools at-risk

Support for at-risk principals was usually initiated by an ERO review and meetings were held between the Regional Ministry office, the at-risk school principal and the L&M advisor, to discuss and develop a strategy and plan for responding to issues identified in the review. The focus area for the professional development was determined by the issues identified in the review and L&M coordinators targeted their support to addressing these issues in the hope that they would not feature in any subsequent review by ERO.

Middle and senior leaders and aspiring principals

Most of the middle and senior leaders interviewed in the qualitative research reported that the quantity and level of support received were insufficient to have any enduring impact on their school. In some instances after the initial contact, the leader was provided access to a cluster, with the expectation that the cluster would in effect offer the PD support they needed.

Areas of need

The survey of school principals aimed to establish principals' level of confidence in performing various aspects of their role. On most parameters, over 90% of school principals rated their level of confidence as being 'very confident' or 'confident' with respect to their ability to:

- set strategic goals for their school that will enhance teaching and learning for all students (including Māori and Pasifika) (95%)
- respond to the professional needs of their teachers appropriately (93%)
- manage school resources (such as funding, staff, property) to achieve school goals (90%)
- effectively lead change in their school (92%)
- problem-solve most school-related issues (95%)
- build trusting and learning-focused relationships (97%)

- manage day-to-day running of the school (97%).

Respondents appeared much less confident in their ability to manage workload with only 65% rating themselves as 'confident' in this area. High-decile schools are slightly more likely to say they are 'very confident', rather than just 'confident'. There is a distinction between confidence and competence that must be considered when interpreting these results. While principals may report high levels of confidence, this may not necessarily be supported by their actual competence to perform these roles. In our view, these results therefore need to be considered in light of other data that the Ministry may have about actual competence of principals. When asked to identify areas of practice that posed most challenges or difficulties, school principals highlighted the following areas. It points to the fact that ongoing work is needed to build and strengthen the capability of school leaders in identified areas.

It was not surprising to note that both *management* and *leadership*-related aspects of the role posed challenges to the principals. We did discern a higher level of anxiety with coming to grips with management related aspects amongst first-time principals whereas experienced principals were more concerned with pedagogical leadership and how this could be implemented in their schools.

Relevance and adequacy of PD support currently available for school leaders

School leaders had a number of avenues for accessing professional development support in addition to SSS. This included the New Zealand Principals' Federation; the New Zealand School Trustees Association; other principals; Ministry of Education Initiatives; private education providers; and/or postgraduate study. The services offered encompassed conferences, courses, access to mentors, newsletters, discussion forums, professional readings, guidelines and templates. The large number of players operating in the PD landscape make it challenging to disentangle the specific role and contribution of L&M advisors.

Principals were asked for their preferred source for PD when seeking support for L&M and other learning areas. Across both, 'other principals' emerged as the preferred source, indicating the value principals place on word-of-mouth endorsement when considering PD. Accessing 'other principals' for advice occurred formally (72%) or informally (84%). School Trustees Association (36%) and support offered by the Ministry (38%) emerged as equally important source, along with SSS (33%) for PD.

With regard to support for curriculum development, SSS emerged as an important external source of support for schools (53%). Internal expertise within the school emerged as an important source for PD in the area of curriculum, with principals drawing on experience and knowledge of their own senior managers in this regard.

Challenges in accessing and attending to PD

Respondents were asked about the main challenges to getting the quality and level of support they needed to be an effective leader. This line of inquiry sought to understand the wider environmental context of the school and identify the factors that often impeded access to quality PD. The main challenges identified were:

- lack of time to do professional development (64%)
- lack of funding to purchase relevant professional development support (63%)
- difficulties in finding courses where the content was relevant (43%)
- lack of course availability at the 'right' time (40%)
- lack of quality professional development providers (27%)
- lack of an available mentor (21%).

This is important as professional development provided by SSS is intended to meet the needs of principals across the country and is funded by government so that there is no direct cost to schools. While theoretically the SSS infrastructure was a resource available to all schools, L&M coordinators acknowledged that their ability to respond to the needs of schools was limited. The pressure on resources required SSS to take a more considered and targeted approach to ensuring that government priorities and expectations were met. This has driven the focus of L&M advisory work, resulting in the needs of first-time principals and at-risk school principals prioritised higher than needs of aspiring principals and middle and senior leaders. It is a concern, therefore, that nearly two-thirds of principals believed that they lacked sufficient funds to purchase relevant professional development support for their school. This could be due to the fact that demand for PD exceeds supply and SSS resources are fully stretched. As a result of this, some schools are unable to get the PD they want when they want it.

Perceptions of effectiveness of School Support Services in relation to L&M

The qualitative research with school principals offered some insights about principals' perceptions of the quality and effectiveness of PD for school leaders provided through the SSS contracts. Areas covered in the PD provided ranged from support for setting up systems and processes to help manage the school (such as appraisal systems; budgets; reporting to Board of Trustees; data management; timetabling; planning professional development for the school); developing leadership across the school (for example by setting up senior management teams); developing understandings to lead change in the school; and general advice. Principals indicated that the NZC had set the context for the types of things they needed to get a better handle on, and most professional development in 2008 has focused on implementation of NZC.

For some principals, the main driver for using SSS was the initial contact/approach made by the SSS advisor. In other instances, access to SSS was channelled through the survey sent out by the SSS identifying professional development needs of the school. However, as noted, when filling out the survey, principals tended to focus PD needs at the school level rather than identifying their own personal professional development needs. They preferred to discuss these in person with the advisor or other principals as it helped clarify in their own minds the scope of the PD support needed.

Perceptions of effectiveness and quality of PD provision by SSS were influenced by the following factors:

- Advisors with credibility and reputation in the sector– most L&M advisors were ex-principals and there was a sense that they understood the school's context and challenges really well. Principals acknowledged that there were particular L&M advisors who had higher credibility with principals and these individuals were often sought for PD support.

- Advisors who combined theory and practice to offer pragmatic solutions. The L&M advisors were seen as very resourceful and, as individuals that had access to wide range of experiences and information to support principals in relevant and appropriate ways.

- Word-of-mouth endorsement – this appeared to be a critical factor, particularly for experienced principals. Previous work undertaken for other principals acted as an endorsement for the quality and expertise of the advisor and was often a driver for seeking out support from SSS.

- Discreet and confidential, 'can be trusted' persona that L&M advisors have acquired over the years appears to play an important role.
- Tailored service – relevant and tailored to needs of the principal and their school.
- External to the school – the fact that SSS were external to the school and seen as experts was perceived as invaluable on many fronts:

- it offered a fresh, outsider perspective into conversations around familiar issues
- there was no hidden agenda and discussions were productive and forward-looking
- it allowed the principal to step back and participate as a member of the leadership team rather than direct the discussions
- the facilitator brought a wider world view as they had worked with a range of schools.

Key message: In relation to L&M, providers focus their attention on priority groups identified in the SSS contracts. Consequently, first-time principals and principals in schools at-risk absorbed the bulk of the resources; which limits access to the service by school leaders in general. L&M advisors took a flexible approach to delivery, and principals that used the service rated it positively. A significant group of principals sought alternative sources of PLD for themselves. This could be in response to perceptions of quality or recognition that the resources were stretched and therefore not available for all.

L&M advisors also appeared to work in a delivery model and focused their attention narrowly on building the capacity of an identified group of principals. As a result, while they report on the extent to which capability was built, they do not go deeper to establish a link with Ministry outcomes in any meaningful way.

Service provision - In-depth PD

As a first step, evaluators sought to establish what constituted in-depth professional development from multiple perspectives, including SSS management, advisors and schools. The goal was to identify its defining characteristics. The responses revealed that the characteristics of in-depth work spanned a wide spectrum, ranging from time spent to quality of outcomes sought. It was differentiated from flexible, consultancy- type professional development in that in-depth PD was seen to support change at a much deeper level. Broadly, there was consensus that, *ideally*, in-depth work would encompass the following:

- The number of hours – across the six providers, 15-20 hours is a minimum figure for categorising in-depth and relates to hours allocated to a school over a school year. It appears that the 15-20 hours is an historical figure generated from the Ministry some years ago and generally still fits for in-depth classification.
- It is ongoing and occurs over a period of time, usually 2-3 years. It involves intensive, in-class, in-school support for teachers with moderate to intensive engagement with school leadership and management (though this varies across advisors).
- There is intentionality to the engagement from all parties:
  - the development and design of the PD programme is the result of a negotiated process and formalised in a Memorandum of Agreement that is signed by the school and the provider
  - the delivery of the professional development programme is systematic and each activity builds on previous work with a focus on using evidence to inform planning and delivery at each step
  - monitoring, evaluation and reflection are embedded into PD plans
  - aspirations around sustainability are explicit and understood by all parties and addressed at each stage of the PD process.
- There is significant emphasis and focus on creating pedagogical shifts in teaching and learning practices in the school.

However, in practice, these characteristics or features that formed the essence of in-depth professional development were not always evident, and emphasis on these characteristics varied significantly across institutional and advisor practice and across PD areas. There were differences in terms of level of explicitness about the sustainability goals or the balance of time allocated across key components of an in-depth PD (such as time allocated to diagnostics, delivery and evaluation and review). We noticed a higher level of consistency in planning and delivery of in-depth PD across advisors within numeracy and literacy, for example, across all six providers, literacy advisors tended to plan and deliver PD in more or less similar ways, whereas this was not true in relation to other areas, such as social sciences or physical education.

In-depth work presented itself in a variety of ways and was used to refer to in-depth work that had a learning area focus (such as numeracy; sciences; technology); department or syndicate focus linked to a learning area (such as literacy teams) or whole-school focus (with the exception of ELLP for ESOL students which is a whole-school approach but not necessarily in-depth). There is a need to distinguish between PD delivered to the whole school that relates to information provision, on the one hand, and in-depth work that is undertaken across the whole school.

The strategies used by advisors or the institutions varied depending on the particular focus of the in-depth professional development. For instance, if the in-depth PD was focused on supporting literacy in a primary school, then the range of strategies used by the advisor was related to improving teaching and learning of literacy in the school. Other aspects of the school *system* such as policies, procedures or leadership were left untouched, or dealt with at a superficial level. By contrast, if the PD was aimed at promoting school-wide changes through the implementation of NZC, then the range of strategies used by the advisor included less in-class work but focused more on whole-school facilitations and workshops. This would be supported by workshops at a departmental level but not necessarily in-class work.

The ways in which in-depth PD is delivered

Based on the interviews with providers and schools, it appears that there were many different ways of supporting a school's professional learning in an in-depth way. This section outlines the landscape of in-depth professional development and describes key characteristics of each model. Each of these approaches are valid and most providers tend to *hold* all of these models when making decisions as to the nature of in-depth support delivered to a school. What is less clear is the underpinning rationale by which providers select one model over another. It appears that decisions are more to do with provider preferences or need for achieving funding efficiencies, rather than school needs. Explicit conversations with schools about the different models and the rationale for choosing to work with the school in a particular way were rare.

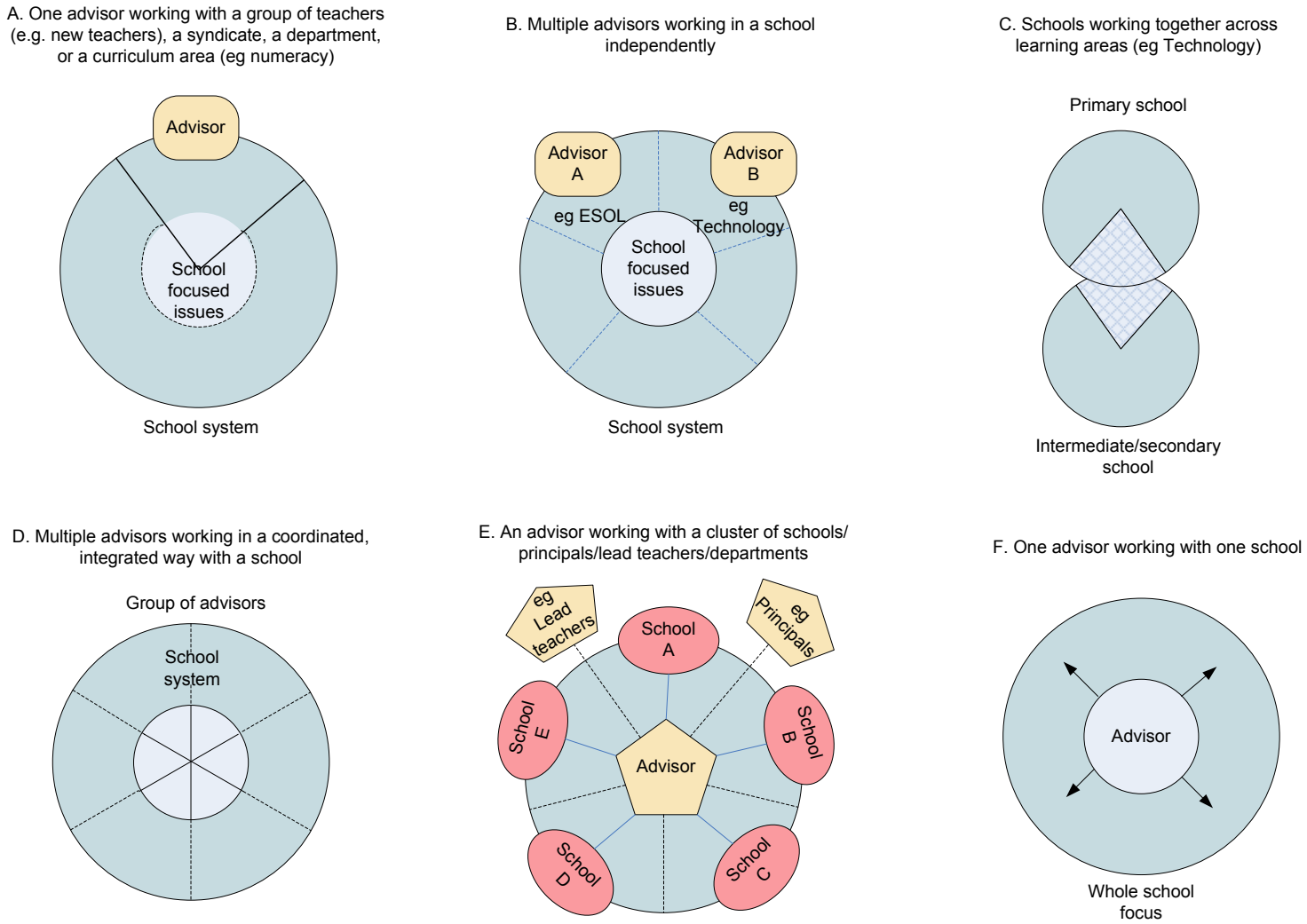
In determining the appropriate strategy or the model for in-depth PD, providers believe they needed to balance school needs to available resources; establish whether the approach is 'fit for purpose'; establish whose needs are being served; establish the value of involving multiple advisors; balance need to *demonstrate* student achievement with need to achieve systemic change.

Regardless of the approach to delivery of in-depth PD, providers were in agreement about the steps involved when working in-depth with a school. It began with:

- advisors working with schools to build a picture of the current state of play through gathering reliable data on:
  - student achievement (through analysis of achievement results)
  - teacher practice (through classroom observations)
  - student motivations and experiences (through gathering of student voice data)
  - quality of leadership and management (through leadership questionnaires)
  - school relationship with the parent community

- advisors facilitating individual and collective reflections on the data to identify focus for the PD in the school
- advisors working with school leadership and management teams to set up structures/systems and processes for implementing the professional development programme and reviewing it in an ongoing basis.

Figure 7: Models of delivery of in-depth professional development



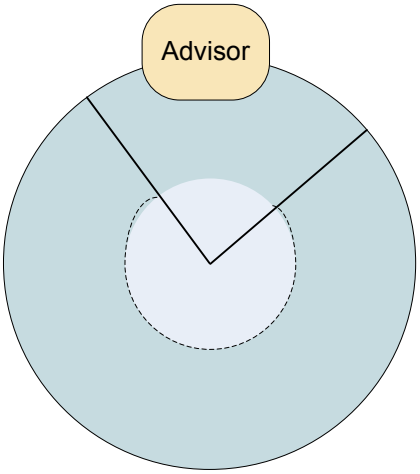
Describing each model

Model A: Advisor(s) working in a school

This appears to be the most commonly used approach to in-depth work across most providers. It involves advisor(s) working within a school with a particular group of teachers (such as PRTs or a group of overseas-trained teachers) or a syndicate on a particular learning area (such as numeracy, literacy or social sciences). In a secondary school setting, this would involve working with a department (such as science department, or technology department). This approach can be diagrammatically represented as follows:

Figure 8: One advisor working with a group in the school

A. One advisor working with a group of teachers (e.g. new teachers), a syndicate, a department, or a curriculum area (eg numeracy)



School system

The single-minded focus on learning/curriculum area in this model meant that other areas of the school were often left untouched (with some exceptions) and advisors did not necessarily regard influencing the school systems and policies, or transfer of learning to other areas of teaching, as part of their mandate. Consequently, transfer of learning and understanding to other curriculum areas occurred organically or when initiated by the school. There was a growing trend of schools nominating a PD coordinator in the school in order to create better linkages across the PD initiatives and to maximize learning for their staff.

> We have been working with schools where I know that what we have been doing with one department has impacted on the rest of the school. But this usually happens because the head of the department or people involved in the PD have made the connections. They have taken the initiative to share what they have done and learnt in their department with other HODs and that has created opportunities for transferring across to other areas in the school. (Advisor)

> My focus is literacy and I make sure that teachers use a range of evidence and strategies to inform their planning and teaching. But I don't monitor or follow up to see if they apply this to other areas of teaching. I have so many schools I work in-depth in and I see my job as sowing the seeds in literacy and leave it to the school or teachers to transfer principles of effective teaching and learning to other PD areas. (Advisor)

There were some differences in understanding between SSS management and advisors about the level of involvement with leadership and management in the school.

> In secondary school for instance, our ESOL advisors will be working in-depth with a school but they will be only talking with ESOL teachers, so other teachers in the school will not be involved. But if it is in-depth support we would expect that while all teachers may not be involved, there would be some engagement or influence in-school systems and structures. We would expect the advisor to make links to wider systemic issues in the school. However, this is a challenge for secondary schools. (SSS Management)

> I think it is better to be explicit about the focus area and go with it rather than try to extend the PD over a wide area. If I find that an advisor is focused on a learning area and is not really concerned with transfer across other areas of the school, there is no problem with that. They need to control the things they can control and not attempt to do a whole lot more than they really can. (SSS Management)

Facilitators and school leaders acknowledged that the primary focus of this approach to PD was an explicit focus on building pedagogical content knowledge and therefore highly appropriate in specialist areas in secondary schools. In primary schools, there was greater level of fluidity and teachers tended to operate in a cross-curricular way most times. Apart from numeracy, most other PD at primary schools tended to take a more holistic approach to building a culture of learning and inquiry. As indicated by an advisor, change in this model is more like 'an act of faith and we hope that by infecting one, we can influence the others'.

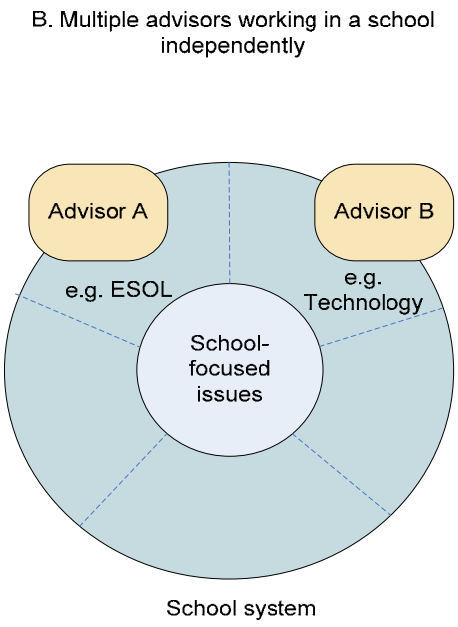
Interestingly, while this approach was seen as being relevant and appropriate in some contexts, there was a growing sense that it did not sit well with the spirit of NZC which had an explicit cross-curricular focus.

> This approach compartmentalizes learning and is totally at odds with the revised curriculum in my view. While it may be relevant for secondary schools, there is no place for it in Years 1-8. It takes a very narrow view of teaching and focuses on a few rather than the whole. Also from a sustainability point of view, there is a problem as the teachers that receive this PD will leave and the school will have got nothing from this investment. We need to ensure that there is L&M involvement in any PD as that is how we create and initiate change in schools. (Principal)

Model B: Multiple advisors working in a school

Providers felt that this approach was more appropriate and commonly used in secondary schools. In this model, multiple advisors worked in a school independently and with a distinct PD focus. This can be diagrammatically represented as follows:

Figure 9: Multiple advisors working in a school independently



For instance, there could be a science advisor, a technology advisor and/or an ESOL advisor, working in a school at the same time quite independently; and each advisor tended to focus on their own learning or PD focus area. This model appeared to be effective in schools where the school took a strong leadership role in driving its professional development and learning. Such schools felt the approach met their needs and was not seen as 'over-engineering' the process.

The lack of coordination between advisors posed some challenges to both schools and advisors. Advisors frequently talked about arriving at a school/college and seeing one of their organization's car parked in the school car park and wondering who else was working in the school. However, this curiosity did not always translate into action or efforts to create synergies across PD provision to the school. Consequently, schools experienced in-depth PD as a series of ad hoc interventions rather than a well-coordinated, cohesive and integrated package aimed at lifting the quality of the teaching and learning environment in the school. This is of concern as it meant that the real benefits of the investment in in-depth PD were not being realized for the school. Also, the strong learning area focus of the different PD initiatives meant that wider school-related issues (such as creating alignment and synergies across the school or supporting the school to develop a culture of self-review, or learning) were left untouched, as these issues fell outside the scope of the advisors engaged in the school. Advisors tended to see these issues as the domain of the leadership and management advisors and therefore did not pursue these lines of inquiry.

Providers and schools highlighted some limitations of this approach:

- Multiple advisors working independently meant that the collective value of the PD investment was not realized. Schools received a wide range of in-depth PD services and when added up it amounted to a significant amount of investment. However, the fragmented delivery model diluted the collective impact of that investment, resulting in schools receiving a series of ad hoc support. To respond to this problem and maximize impact of the PD investment, providers were considering streamlining their processes by explicitly allocating a key person in their management team the role of a liaison advisor, or the PD coordinator, for that school.

- This approach was reactive to school needs – schools made ad hoc requests to advisors and these were met by advisors in an equally ad hoc way. As a result, school requests were not reviewed within a broader framework of desired outcomes for the school and PD often ended up being a series of inputs rather than an investment to achieve improved outcomes for the school.

- Lack of consistency in approaches used by advisors meant that the school received different messages from the different advisors, creating confusion. This was illustrated in the following quotations from school principals:

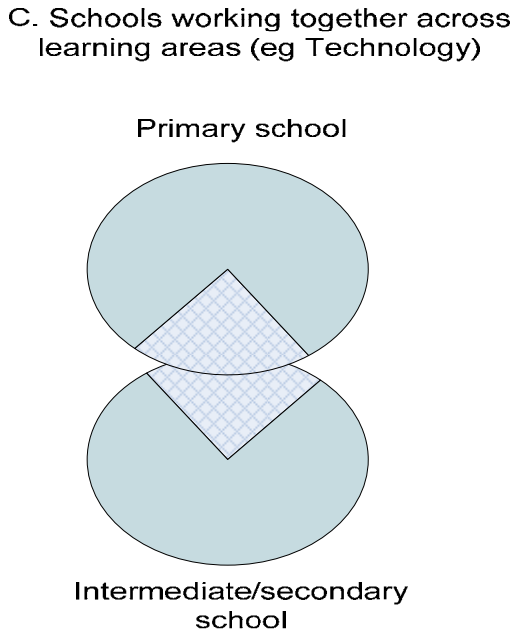
> How do you get the message across that the real value here is not the PD about numeracy or literacy or sciences, but that it is all about effective teaching and learning? I think you can miss that completely if you take this approach. But this is what our provider offers and we have to take it. We don't have a choice. (Principal)
>
> We had a number of different advisors on different PD contracts and initially that looked fine. But very quickly we figured that we were getting different messages. Each advisor has their own strength and different understandings, a different way of speaking and delivering messages, a different vocabulary. The teachers were confused as they heard quite different things. So it hasn't been a perfect relationship with the advisors across the board and so you will get quite different perspectives and experiences depending on which advisor worked with you. (Principal)

- Some schools felt that this approach to PD tended to formalize the compartmentalization of learning and did not sit well with the spirit of NZC and its focus on integrated learning.

Model C: An advisor working across schools within a PD focus area

This approach can be described as an evolution, or maturing, of Model A "Advisor(s) working in a school" focused on a learning area. As the advisor builds relationships with the teachers and a deeper understanding of the school context, he/she may look for opportunities to widen the scope and impact of their efforts. The advisor encourages participating teachers to look at the big picture and ways in which they could build communities of practice in the subject area. In some instances this had resulted in creating networks and synergies across schools. Notions of trust and sustainability are central to this model and working across schools creates opportunities for ongoing learning. Figure 10 illustrates this model:

Figure 10: Schools working together across learning areas



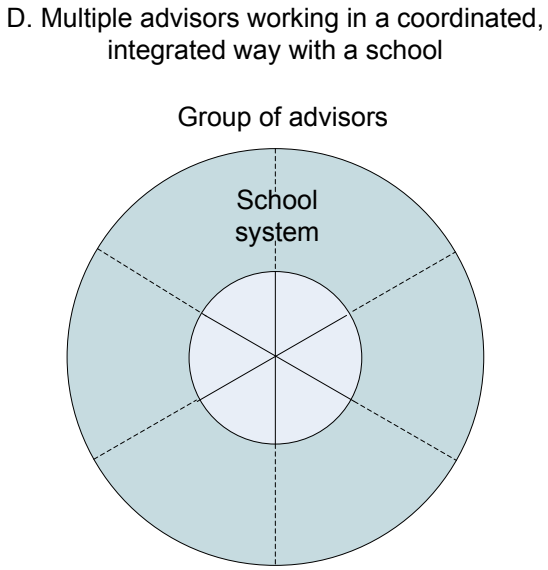
In this model, the advisor actively engages, or 'recruits', other schools in the region to develop partnership arrangements between schools. For instance, in a secondary school in the South Island, the advisor encouraged the relevant department to work with the local intermediate as a means of developing a professional cluster. Working with the teachers from the Intermediate allowed the secondary school teachers to extend their understanding of the intermediate curriculum and to gain insights into how it is taught. This provided rich contextual information about where the students were at and helped the secondary teachers to establish robust, baseline data and to tailor their teaching strategies in appropriate ways. This approach was seen as invaluable in leading the intermediate and secondary school to consider including the primary school in the cluster, thus creating a seamless conversation about the PD focus area.

In another instance, a small rural primary school in the North Island was actively encouraged and supported to develop networks with two other primary schools in the region. The goal was to create a wider platform for discussion and debate. The teachers formed a learning community and met weekly to discuss and share practice-related issues surrounding literacy. They subsequently extended the role of the learning group to observe each other's classrooms and to give feedback about teaching practices. Each teacher also set up a monitoring group of a small cohort of students to monitor the impact of their teaching strategies and tracked the students' progress over time. In this way, the teachers self-reflected and self-reviewed their own performance and effectiveness with a core group of professionals.

Model D: In-depth and whole-school focus (also referred to as 'project schools')

In this approach, PD was seen by providers and schools as a catalyst for change and an opportunity for the whole school to reflect on school purpose and direction, and to assess how well the school was doing in terms of delivering for teachers and students.

Figure 11: Multiple advisors working in a coordinated way



This model was differentiated from general, whole-school work. The latter involved running a series of workshops with all staff where participation by all staff was considered as the critical feature. By contrast, in-depth and whole- school involved a deeper level of engagement across all levels in the school and an expectation that change and transference of learning across the school will occur. In a large school, this often required a team of advisors working together and in a coordinated way to ensure school PD needs were met through a well executed planned and deliberate approach to PD delivery. In small, rural, primary schools, an in-depth and whole-school focus was *possible* to implement; however, it did depend on the skills and priorities of the advisor.

In the case study schools, we noted that the NZC offered school leaders the mandate, or the added impetus to initiate these discussions/conversations across the schools whereas, in other instances, a deliberate focus on cross-curricular learning areas such as 'effective pedagogy' or 'teaching as inquiry', had allowed a whole-school focus for the PD.

The key distinguishing feature of this approach vis-à-vis other models discussed was that an expectation of change at a systemic level (changes in school structures, processes and systems) was embedded into the approach, and advisors acknowledged that achieving school- wide shifts was a critical indicator of success. Change was seen as a social process and the focus was on developing the school as a learning community and its relationship with the wider system.

While providers and schools saw immense value in this approach at a theoretical level, not all providers and schools believed it was appropriate in ***all*** contexts. In fact, some schools were of the view that this approach presupposed that schools were unable to take ownership and responsibility for their own learning and needed to be supported every step of the way.

The following quotations highlight some of these issues and tensions in wholeheartedly supporting one model over another:

> I think it is a great approach but would really want to be sure that working together is purposeful and relevant for that context. I don't want people to work together just for the sake of it and there must be a valid rationale for taking an integrated and coordinated approach. "What is it achieving for the school?" must be the defining question. (SSS Management)

> We used to work in this way but it got out of control and we realised then that we could only ever do this for a small number of schools. Many of our schools were missing out and so we had to come with alternative ways of meeting everyone's needs. (SSS Management)

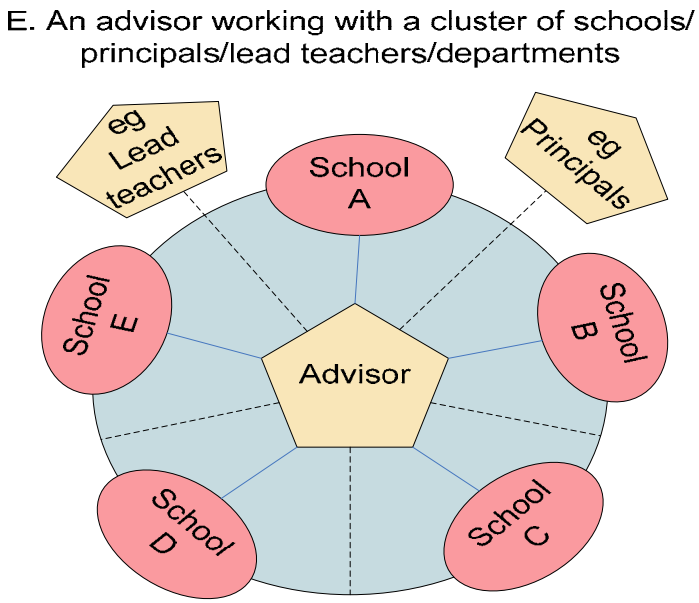
In practice, however, this approach did not always pan out as intended and the level of coordination perceived by providers did not always translate into school experiences. Also, monitoring mechanisms appeared to track progress at a student and teacher level but did not appear to be as systematic or explicit when it came to monitoring progress towards change at a systemic level.

There were some tensions around this approach as teachers found it difficult to find the time to fully engage at desired intensity to their current responsibilities. It tended to work well in schools where members of the professional learning committee had no teaching responsibilities and were able to invest time and energy in building the capability of others in the school.

Model E: Cluster approach

The cluster approach involved advisors drawing together a group of like-minded practitioners in their region (such as a cluster of lead teachers or a cluster of principals) with a view to providing a forum for sharing and learning from their individual experiences. The model can be diagrammatically expressed in the following way:

Figure 12: An advisor working with a cluster of schools



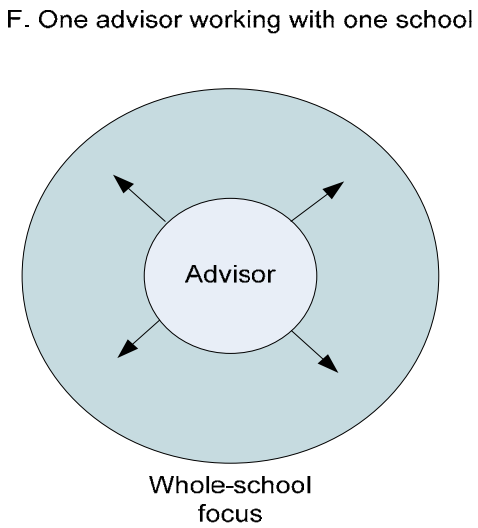
This approach was encouraged by the Ministry (in order to create opportunities for sharing knowledge and experiences across schools and practitioners) and implemented by providers owing to the need to manage resources efficiently. The focus in cluster work was on personalised learning, as individuals in the cluster learn and develop their skills and knowledge. However, these were not necessarily shared with other practitioners in the school. The value of these clusters for the individual appeared to be the opportunity to form networks across other practitioners and encouraged the growth of a number of regional-level learning communities. While this was a benefit to the individual, its value for achieving systemic-level shifts is yet to be established.

Teachers and principals interviewed believed that the rapid growth in the number of clusters had diminished its value and that over the years the quality of the facilitation, or professional conversations in the clusters, had dropped. Also, given the pressure on time, it was difficult for schools to participate in these clusters meaningfully and left it to individual teachers' discretion. The evolution of clusters into a learning community required that schools were selected carefully to ensure a 'match' as putting disparate schools into a cluster did impede learning. Schools also found themselves competing for resources and this impacted their participation in clusters. On reflection, there were opportunities for streamlining these clusters and clarifying purpose to ensure more effective coordination and learning between clusters.

Model F: Advisor working whole-school

This model was prevalent in small, rural, primary schools where, due to the size of the school, it was possible to work with all teachers in the school. Some of the schools that fitted this model in our case studies had 4-9 teachers and this made it possible to involve all teachers in the professional development programme.

Figure 13: An advisor working with one school



The two schools where this model was evident were small and all teachers were involved in the PD. The focus was on literacy in one and numeracy in the other and the advisor responded to leadership and management issues to the extent they impacted on the implementation of teaching and learning strategies addressed by the professional development initiative. However, interestingly, the teachers were unable to see application of learning or key pedagogical principles to areas beyond literacy or numeracy. Even when prompted, they were unable to see application.

Perceptions of effectiveness of school support services in relation to in-depth PD

There was widespread acknowledgement amongst school leaders that in-depth, in-school PD was an important component of effective PD. In-depth, in-school PD was tailored to school context and ensured that the PD focus was framed to respond to the school's issues and needs. Also, it provided economies of scale as professional learning opportunities were available to a wider set of teachers.

At the same time, having someone with expertise from outside the school who worked with teachers in the school in an ongoing way, was deemed as important as he/she was prepared to challenge in ways in which teachers thought about their teaching and their students. This was particularly relevant in schools where the teaching practices were variable and there had been traditionally a high level of resistance to change. In these situations, the principal looked to lift quality of teaching practices through PD as it was seen to provide a unifying focus for the school.

Schools repeatedly said that they were unclear as to the criteria that governed the selection of schools for in-depth PD. While the case study schools were clear about why they had received support (such as prior relationship with the advisor, recommended by ERO/LDO), they did say that schools in their neighborhood had been turned down with no real explanation for their non-selection.

By and large, schools that were receiving the in-depth PD were satisfied and saw immense value in the quality of the PD support offered by the SSS advisors. School leaders commented that their teachers had qualitatively 'lifted their game' and were more attuned to needs of their children than before. Teachers confirmed these findings and said that they had learnt new skills and strategies to enhance their teaching practices.

> She (the advisor) has groomed me. If you walk into my class now as opposed to two years ago you will see how I collect and record data about students and I can tell you the level each kid is reading at. I could not do that before. In the past my teaching was driven by a bit of this and that and not by where the kids were at. (Teacher)

> Prior to the PD, I would say that I didn't feel supported and didn't know how to improve myself. Since our school has been involved in in-depth PD, we have all learnt so much and now we talk about it with each other. (Teacher)

> We now have a platform on which to discuss these issues as a team. We didn't do so before. I have acquired new strategies and I can see it is making a difference. My kids' reading has improved heaps and not just their attitude to reading but the level they are reading at. I have learnt that if they don't enjoy reading, I can use different activities to keep them engaged. (Teacher)

However, schools felt that more could be done to ensure synergy between different PD focus areas to alleviate burden on teachers and to streamline the timelines.

These positive responses need to be interpreted within the context of the school's prior relationship with the provider. In many instances, the school or the principal had a history of long, established relationship with the advisor and this may have contributed to these perceptions. Also, schools that were located in geographically isolated areas were anxious that a negative evaluation could mean that the services would be tightened and that they would, consequently, no longer have access to the services. This fear may have led them to rate the service highly.

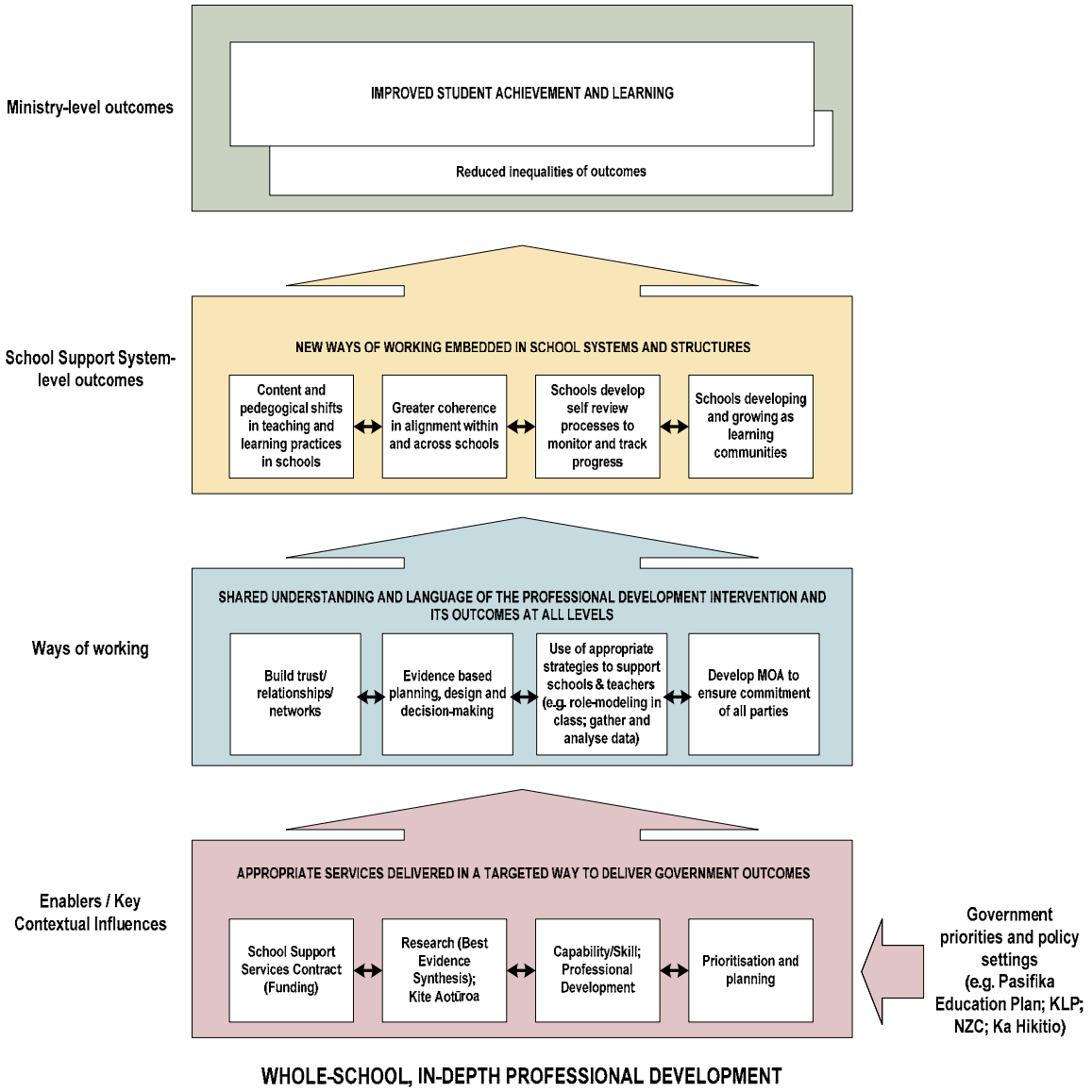
Sustaining changes was an ongoing challenge for schools

Most schools admitted that they had not thought about sustainability till the PD drew to a close and often felt that they had not made the adjustments or structural changes needed to sustain the benefits from the PD intervention. School leaders who had a big-picture view of the PD and understood the nature and type of infrastructural supports needed (such as release time, timetabling changes, learning forums, integrating professional learning goals into appraisals) to ensure that benefits were sustained, were more likely to be successful at this.

In-depth professional development – a conceptual framework

Based on our conversations with SSS management, advisors, school leaders and teachers, we developed a theory of change to articulate how in-depth professional development works to achieve intended outcomes. The picture that is presented is intended as an overview of the in-depth professional development system.

Figure 14: Understanding how in-depth professional development works to achieve intended outcomes



Enablers and key contextual influences

The quality and effectiveness of the delivery of in-depth professional development for schools are shaped by a number of critical contextual factors and these factors determine the extent to which appropriate services are delivered in a targeted way to meet government priorities. These contextual influences, or enablers, are:

- the funding setting that underpins SSS contracts
- research or the knowledge base that drive Ministry aspirations and expectations about what works in professional development

- capability and skill of the facilitators and the extent to which their own professional development and knowledge base are current and up to date, and relevant
- the prioritisation and planning processes displayed by SSS to ensure professional development is targeted to schools that need it.

These elements are the building blocks that ensure delivery of in-depth PD to schools is effective and targeted. However, as the findings of the evaluation indicated, there are some gaps in this regard which need to be addressed in order to realise the value and benefits of the PD investment. Ensuring appropriate services are delivered in a targeted way requires:

- the Ministry to articulate and identify the priority groups and focus areas for the PD more clearly. There needs to be an explicit acknowledgement that in-depth support is intended and available to schools that need it and meet the Ministry's criteria of need. Communicating information about the criteria transparently will help manage school and stakeholder expectations and demystify the selection process.
- School Support Service providers to develop robust systems and processes to implement the criteria set by the Ministry and communicate it widely within their own institutions to build greater consistency in decision-making.

We acknowledge that the Ministry is considering significant changes in this regard and is looking to trial different approaches to school selection. We believe this is a step in the right direction.

Ways of working

There appears to be a high level of consistency in how providers operate nationally towards implementing in-depth support. Advisors interviewed identified four critical steps that underpinned how in-depth work is implemented in a school setting:

- building trust and relationships with key actors in the school
- evidence-based planning, design and decision-making about PD focus and programme. The evaluation identified a variety of ways in which advisors sought to implement evidence-based planning including:
  - accessing appropriate and relevant research
  - processes for integrating student voice and experiences through student focus groups and surveys
  - classroom observations of teaching practices
  - reviewing student achievement data and facilitating collectively interpretations of the data.
- developing a Memorandum of Agreement to ensure shared commitment and responsibility to the PD
- using appropriate strategies to support schools and teachers, including role-modelling and critical feedback.

The underlying purpose and intention is to build a shared understanding and language around professional development and its outcomes across all levels in the school. However, in practice, this was not always achieved. This was partly due to the fact that the MOA serves more as an accountability document rather than a process of building consensus and support for PD at all levels in the school. Another issue/problem was related to the learning area-focused model to delivery of in-depth PD. In this case, advisors expected or anticipated achieving shared understanding of the PD only with teachers they were working with.

> I can sum up the value of in-depth PD for you in the following way. First, it's the expertise the advisors bring to the staff, their contacts, their networks and their wider knowledge. Secondly, it is the advisors who have the hard conversations with the staff, about the need to change, what the Ministry's expectations are, etc. Thirdly, the

> observations they do of classroom practice. They are seen as experts in their field and so seen by staff as having no hidden agenda except to promote effective practice. They are perceived as being objective. Fourthly, they keep coming back which is very beneficial, as it is ongoing. Fifthly, they hand the ownership back to teachers. Now this is the bit they don't do well but we can talk about it afterwards. (School Principal)

School Support Services system-level outcomes

The medium term outcomes of in-depth and whole-school professional development can be summarised as:

- content and pedagogical shifts in teaching and learning practices across the school
- greater coherence and alignment in structures and systems within and across schools
- schools developing self-review processes to monitor and track progress
- schools developing and growing as learning communities.

All these contribute to ensuring that new ways of working are embedded in school systems and structures thus achieving system-level shifts in schools.

However, our evaluation found that the relative emphasis on these outcomes varied by the type of in-depth approach or model used by advisors. For instance, advisors strongly focused on a learning area felt that they were only able to contribute to achieving content and pedagogical shifts and to a moderate extent could also contribute to developing strong professional learning environments in the school. In their view, their contribution to school-level changes as articulated in the diagram was minimal and fell outside the scope of their work.

Schools also found this quite challenging as it required them to make a parallel journey alongside the curriculum journey to ensure that the school shifted its own mental models about learning and made changes to support that learning.

> I think what this suggests is that PD in a learning area or a curriculum area is only a vehicle for bringing about wider school-wide changes. As teachers go through PD, the leadership team is going through a parallel but different journey. This assumes that the school has access to leadership and management support as well as curriculum support but this is not always possible. I am not sure that schools are ready for this as well. (SSS advisor)

Interestingly, monitoring of outcomes usually tended to be around content and pedagogical shifts but less so on the other dimensions. This needs to be reviewed as, from an ongoing learning perspective, asking providers and their advisors to track and capture more comprehensive information about change at all levels will provide a more useful picture.

Assessing effectiveness and tracking progress at an outcomes level – a possible framework

The findings from the evaluation indicate that in-depth professional development and learning provided to schools by SSS providers is invaluable and timely for the schools that receive it. It has helped raise awareness and understanding about what is effective teaching and learning practices and how best the schools can enhance educational outcomes for students. School experiences reinforced the basic principles articulated in the Best Evidence Synthesis on Teacher professional development and learning and demonstrated that when schools undertake in-school, in-depth PD they are more likely to sustain changes in teaching practices demonstrated through the PD experience. Our analysis indicates that in order to properly assess the effectiveness of in-depth PD, we need to distil impacts at a number of levels:

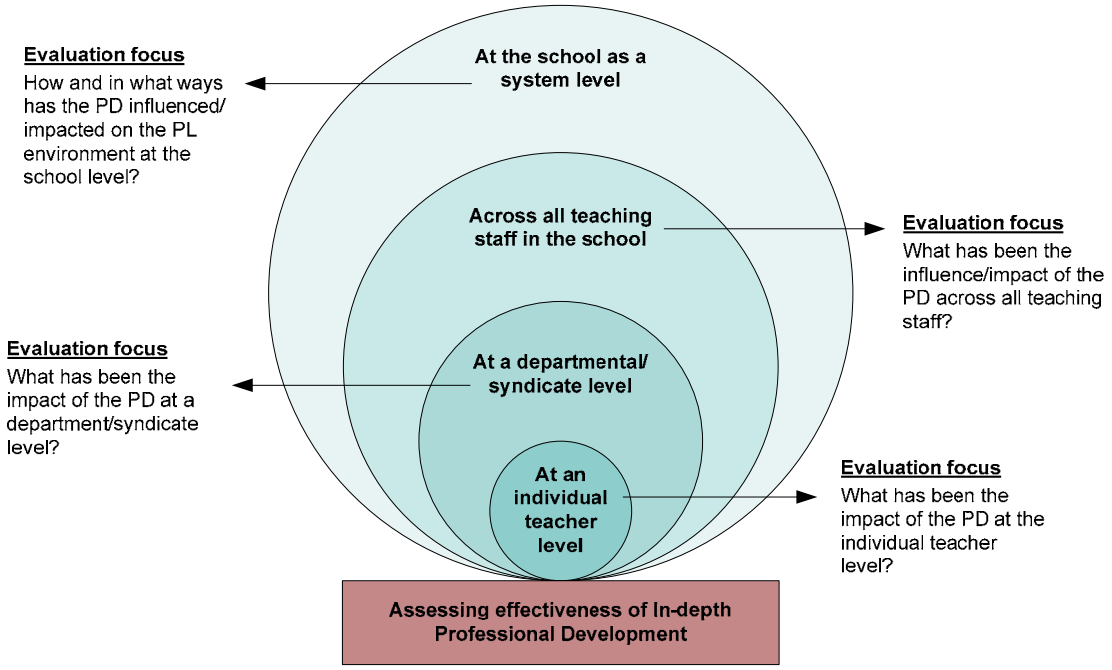
- individual teacher
- department or syndicate
- all teachers in the school

- school as a system.

We see these levels as embedded within each other, suggesting that there may be a time dimension to these impacts. For example, for changes in individual teacher level to generate impact across all teachers depends on the culture of the school, the motivation and openness to learning, support for the PD by leadership and management and, of course, time. Further, there are a number of other contextual factors that can impede these shifts from occurring easily, and this needs to be recognised.

Figure 15 illustrates the particular focus at each level:

Figure 15: Levels of impact and the focus at each level



The evaluation findings indicate that most in-depth professional development were effective at the individual teacher level and at a departmental level. However, impacts across 'all teaching staff in the school' or 'at the school system level' were more modest and difficult to ascertain. This is to be expected since the Ministry contracts focus on outputs while reporting requirements focus on demonstrating shifts in teaching practices in the classroom. Providers are not required to report changes across the whole school or to capture changes at the school at a systemic level. This is problematic from a sustainability perspective as it means that despite an in-depth professional development initiative, school cultures and systems can remain untouched. The Ministry may want to consider expanding the scope of its monitoring processes to include data or evidence on the school at a systemic level to ensure that system wide shifts are achieved.

Key messages: The way in which in-depth work was delivered to schools was viewed positively by participating schools. However, monitoring of success appears to be limited to content and pedagogical shifts while other areas of school development are ignored. Maximising value of the in-depth PLD offered to schools requires consideration of impacts at all levels: at an individual teacher level; at a departmental level; across all teachers in the school and at an institutional level. The evaluation findings highlight the need for the Ministry to ensure SSS targets the school as a system – that is, in addition to effecting change at an individual and/or syndicate/department level, support provided should also target and aim to create shifts in school cultures and systems.

Sustainability

Unlike flexible or consultancy type of support where the interaction with teachers was a brief encounter or short-term focused, notions of sustainability were central to both L&M and in-depth professional development areas. It was widely accepted that working with a group of practitioners across the school over time in a systematic, deliberate way offered greater opportunity to effect change. Teachers described a typical scenario when an intervention of some form was initiated and a range of resources were brought to bear to facilitate implementation, which then dissipated over time as the external support was withdrawn. It was precisely to counter such erosion in teaching and learning practices and to ensure gains were maintained that sustainability goals were built into the design of professional development support.

Our evaluation highlighted that there was a high level of variability across providers in this regard. We found that in some instances there was an intentionality around sustainability, whereas in other instances, sustainability conversations occurred when it was time to exit, leaving the schools with an acute sense of loss and 'being left in the lurch'. In other instances sustainability practices and issues were driven by the school leader with minimal involvement of professional development providers; this, too, is of concern. Also, the investment and effort made during the early set-up stages of the in-depth project are not reflected in conversations around exit.

> The cynic in me says is anything sustainable? I am not saying it is not important, but there is a lot of assumption that it is easy to do. We need a whole process around it if we are serious and currently we do not have the resources to operate in that way. (Advisor)

> We know numeracy is time bound and that it goes on for two years and that's it. So everyone who engages with it knows that. But in other areas it is not clear and it sort of fizzles out towards the end. (Advisor)

> In the past we didn't have a management team member involved in the PD. In the past the teacher that was leading the PD left the school and we were back to square one. We learnt from this experience and formed a curriculum committee and each HOD is represented in this committee and all PD is driven from and by this committee. The committee has a specific job description of what the intended purpose of the PD is – raise student achievement and each curriculum member presents to the Board of Trustees. That is how we create links between all the different aspects of the PD. This is entirely our own initiative as ultimately it is in our interests. The advisors only come and deliver the PD and then go away. (School Principal)

Sustainability can be seen in a variety of ways, including:

- Sustainability of participation – the extent to which participation in the professional development is sustained within the school. This is an indication of the relevance and perceived value of the professional development support.
- Sustainability of process – the extent to which structures and processes set up to manage and support professional learning are sustained. This is important to support ongoing professional learning that will lead to continuous improvement in school practices and systems. Indicators could include: establishment of systems and processes for ensuring reliable, quality data on student achievement; systems to ensure learning from professional development investment feeds into all aspects of school management, for example, induction processes, performance appraisal systems, staff meetings, structure of teacher-only days; leadership structures that have ownership of PD in place.

> As this programme has been implemented in the school, we have been able to identify staff members who can be moved into leadership roles. We are now investing in their training and building their confidence as teachers of adults. We didn't have a large pool of those and we need it if we are to run our staff meetings differently and use it to reflect or challenge current practices. (School Principal)

> We have set up a curriculum committee to oversee the PD and we now ensure that any request for PD is coordinated by the committee. The committee comprises HODs, the APs and me and it acts as a funnel for all PD in the school. It also ensures that we can drive our PD and not rely on advisors to tell us what they want to do. We

> have taken a lot of the ownership of the PD and this works for us. We have set up this system as this is the only way to ensure that we sustain the benefits and learning from the PD we do. (School Principal)

- Sustainability of outcomes in terms of teacher practices and student outcomes. Indicators of this include improvements in student achievement, sustainability of effective teaching practices, reduced staff turnover, students taking ownership of their own learning, and so on.

> We have stopped staff turnover in our school. This was important as turnover has been a big issue in this school. With the PD we are doing, teachers are motivated and valued for their skills and our kids have stability. When new teachers come on board we have experienced teachers that can work with them and mentor them and all of this enhances our ability to achieve the best for our kids. (School leader)

In order to ensure that goals of sustainability were achieved, there was a need to take a more deliberate and planned approach to sustainability and to monitor progress in ways similar to how student achievement and progress were themselves tracked. It did require consideration of focus areas beyond the immediate curricular area and allocating resources and time to undertake this properly. There was a general agreement amongst schools and providers that there was scope to improve processes around managing exit. Our conversations revealed three key insights in relation to exit:

- There was a lack of a shared understanding of the meaning and relevance of exit.
- There was little evidence of systematic and deliberate planning for exit.
- There were inadequate linkages between project outcomes, sustainability and exit.

> It is a fact that we focus a lot on the set-up phase. We don't think about it in the same way about the end part. You have now raised this as an issue and the more I think about it, I realize that we don't talk about exit strategies at all in our practice. We tell them we will leave after two years but we don't invest in planning for it and building systems that will allow us to exit in a planned and deliberate way. (SSS Management)

> I think the difference is in the levels of PD. When I say capacity building, I am focused on building the skills and knowledge of a group of teachers. When I think sustainability, I think more broadly about the systems in place to ensure that the practices continue over time. So I build the capacity of the teacher to try new strategies, it is capacity building. But if I can get the buy-in from the lead teacher and make sure that she sees it is important and supports the teachers to continue to use these strategies then that is sustainability. (Advisor)

> I personally don't think we manage exit well. We don't start those conversations till it is time to leave and by then it is too late. We cannot be sure that the changes we have been able to effect will be maintained. Thinking about exit will also make us a lot more focused on what are we there to achieve, how will we know when we have achieved it and how we can engage the school in those conversations. (SSS Management)

> There have been lots of discussions around this but our thinking is not fully developed yet. We still don't have a shared view as an organisation or amongst advisors about when to exit and how to exit. One of the things we haven't done is go back to schools we worked with say a year later and see if and how they are building on the work we have done with the school. But then our contracts do not cover this and so we have not done much about it. But I do think that it is an area we need to address as part of our own assessment of our effectiveness. There are some complex professional conversations we need to have in relation to exit. For instance, if after two years we find there is no change or that we are not getting traction, do we exit at that point or should we rethink our approach and strategy? There are no easy answers to this. (SSS Management)

Key message: in order to understand what constitutes a 'successful' exit or a 'successful exit strategy' and how introducing exit thinking might add value to the context in which in-depth PD operates, there is a need to begin with a shared definition of what exit means and a common understanding of why exit is important. Without this understanding, there is little value in taking things to the next step and talking about the development of exit and transition strategies.

Chapter 6: Responses to changes to the school support services environment

This chapter provides formative feedback on the changes introduced in 2009 and 2010 in the SSS contracting environment. The changes and developments represent important shifts in the way contracts are managed by the Ministry. Consequently, the Ministry requested early, real-time feedback to examine the nature and impact of these changes and the nature and level of support that is needed to strengthen providers to achieve desired outcomes.

Over the evaluation period, a number of changes were introduced in the SSS contracts that reflected the Ministry's changing expectations from professional development investment in general. These changes were consistent with the view that the SSS contracts were the Ministry's lever for influencing changes in teaching and learning environments in schools. There has also been a growing sense that the SSS contracts need to be considered alongside other Ministry-funding PD providers to maximise impact from the investment in PD. The changes introduced can be summarised in the following way.

- Changes in the contract structure and the PD being purchased – far fewer 'outputs' and explicit links established between different sections of the contract. The expectation is that schools receive an integrated package of support through the SSS contract, rather than separate 'siloed' interventions through separate parts of the contract.
- Some changes in how the contract is monitored (for instance, a standard approach to oral reporting was replaced by a process whereby different areas of the contract are monitored in a way that best suits the type of PD being delivered, including focus groups with principals, school visits and face-to-face conversations with SSS managers and advisors).
- Processes for prioritising and selecting schools that receive PD – shift from a demand-driven system to a needs-based approach.
- PD focus areas as determined by the MoE to reflect current government priorities and implementation of government policy (for instance, the focus on National Standards and PD support for numeracy and literacy in primary schools) means that the contract structure and the PD the Ministry is purchasing has changed.
- Purchase of SSS varied across primary (where a key focus was on National Standards) and secondary (where the parallel focus was on worthwhile qualifications).

These changes are significant as they highlight the changing context for SSS and impact on the approach to and quality of delivery. School Support Service (namely, the intervention) contracts are constantly evolving and changing and this makes it difficult to apply the principles underpinning programme theory in a consistent way. As a result, this phase of the evaluation was designed to give formative feedback to the Ministry so as to develop and refine the 'system'.

Provider response to the changes

Overall, the changes introduced in the contract priorities and expectations were regarded favourably by all parties – SSS management; SSS advisors; Regional Ministry Office; regional stakeholders; and the National office. The changes were seen as inevitable in light of the current economic and fiscal environment and changing government priorities. Providers and Ministry staff described these efforts as stemming from the need to tighten and sharpen the focus of the contract, clarify expectations and renew emphasis on the need for evidence-based practice. The expectation was that the changes introduced will result in the following:

- more open, formal, systematic approach to school selection
- increased information sharing between SSS, regional Ministry offices and other Ministry-funded providers and the integration of regional intelligence. This helped to build a robust picture of schools and PD being undertaken within a school at a regional level
- focus on the school as a *system* to facilitate more effective use of the SSS resource. Maintaining a focus on the school required advisors to take leadership and management issues into consideration when planning and implementing PD
- a joined- up approach that places schools at the centre of the PD and ensures that schools experience the PD in a coordinated and connected way.

The rest of this chapter explores early impact of these changes, including describing how providers are responding to these changes and what is working well or not working well with respect to the implementation of the changes.

Changes to prioritisation and selection processes

Prior to 2009, SSS providers were by and large expected to develop their own strategies, plans and processes to ensure that Ministry priorities were met in the regions. As a result, practices for prioritising schools to receive support varied across providers and there did not appear to be a consistent or coherent framework or criteria for decision-making by providers. Consequently, selection of schools tended to be either demand-driven (schools that asked for PD received it) and/or network-driven (advisors were familiar with the school or had a prior relationship with individuals in the school) and/or through referrals (schools were referred to the SSS by the Regional Ministry office following a visit by ERO).

To respond to these issues and to ensure better targeting of PD provision, the Ministry introduced important changes in 2009 for selection of primary schools for receiving PD. Providers were required to take a more collaborative regional approach to school selection and the expectation was that school support service contract holders would work with regional Ministry offices and other Ministry-funded providers to prioritise and select schools.

Early feedback indicates that across regions there is now a formalised and explicit approach to school identification and selection for in-depth PD. The process involves regional Ministry offices, SSS and other Ministry-funded providers who hold significant contracts with the Ministry for professional development for primary schools. The shift to a formalised and explicit approach ensures that all 'intelligence' on the school is brought to bear on decision-making and ensures a coordinated approach to PD. In the past in spite of good working relationships between providers and the Regional Ministry Office (RMO), providers tended to view SSS as a nationally-driven contract and engaged with RMO on a needs-must basis. Information-sharing was limited; there was little or no engagement in the school selection process (with the exception of schools identified as at-risk) and relationships were primarily with the LDOs. This suggested that there were opportunities to strengthen these relationships and to create scope for increased discussion and dialogue around sharing regional intelligence.

In light of the changes introduced in 2010, across all regions there is an emergence of:

- regular, formal meetings and engagement between the regional Ministry, SSS and other Ministry-funded providers on a term-by-term basis
- shared information about the work being undertaken across all schools in a region
- a coordinated approach to school identification and selection
- increased discussion and dialogue around determining schools with need and drawing on multiple sources of evidence when determining need.

Implementation of these changes

In all regions, the implementation of this change in school selection and identification processes began with a series of meetings which commenced in 2009 where all parties spent time to establish the basis for these meetings and the processes for engagement as well as the future direction of these meetings. By April 2010, three or four formalised meetings had occurred in each region with the regional Ministry, other Ministry-funded providers and SSS at a senior level. Usually the first two meetings mapped out a process and purpose of the engagement and the development of protocols to guide future ways of working. Ongoing matters explored in subsequent sessions included clarifying roles and responsibilities of parties, who 'owned' these meetings, and developing protocols on data sharing.

This shift in approach has seen SSS, the regional Ministry and other Ministry-funded providers working alongside each another to design, manage and implement professional development and take a more holistic approach to PD. The meetings led to development of spreadsheets or databases identifying schools in which SSS, the Ministry and other Ministry-funded providers have worked or are currently working and the nature of the work being undertaken, and outcomes sought. This approach has predominantly been in relation to primary schools and in-depth work. However, spreadsheets are also being developed for secondary schools in order to develop a region-wide understanding as to professional development in secondary schools.

Reflecting the specificity of the contract, providers and regional Ministry staff discussed prioritisation criteria in relation to low school achievement, as well as schools with low achievement and high numbers of Māori and Pasifika students. In cases where there was an absence of achievement data from a school, information on the nature of school's leadership, from ERO reports and a school's Charter, as well as financial management information, were considered to build a picture of the school.

There have been variable levels of progression across providers and regional offices, with relationships progressing at a different pace. Whereas some providers have progressed to the point where they have developed shared criteria for school selection and have agreed scoping processes and schools to work with and the nature of the work, others are still in the process of agreeing the way forward. Different levels of progression are shaped by a number of factors, including the nature of prior regional Ministry and SSS relationships and the number of schools in a region. The challenge of uncertainty in relation to the amount of in-depth resource available in 2010 has also impacted upon the process of school selection. Table 2 provides a high-level overview of the different levels of progression across providers and factors shaping these positions.

Table 2: Levels of progression across providers with respect to establishing revised prioritisation processes

Level of progression	Shaped by past relations	Affected by views of regionalised approach
Significant progress. Established process to identify and select schools	Strong prior relationships between SSS and regional Ministry office and history of information sharing	Very positive about regionalised approach
Still in process of evolution. Have purposefully taken a careful approach to ensuring a robust future process Confident with emerging direction	Strong prior relationships between SSS and regional Ministry office	See value in emerging approach Respect strengths and differences of one another's roles. Recognise a need to tread carefully in defining ongoing roles
Still evolving the process of working together and desired outcomes sought Continuing to define relationships and roles	Limited input from regional Ministry in the past Some tensions regarding level of input desired Some school selection occurred without input of regional Ministry	Tangible value of the process yet to be seen, and affected by historic absence of regional Ministry in decision-making process and one-sided ability of SSS to provide information and data given in-depth knowledge of schools previously worked with

Despite varying levels of progression there exists a common understanding that the focus of the contract is low achievement and schools in most need. As a result, there is a shared basis from which to identify and select schools and a consistent use of the evidence-base to plan and make decisions.

Early evidence of the impact of these changes

This formalised, regionalised and consistent approach to school identification and selection is viewed positively by all. Interviews with SSS management and Regional Ministry staff revealed that there was a mutual willingness amongst both parties to work together and to move forward. The engagement with other Ministry-funded providers was also described as positive and SSS management and Regional Ministry commented on the effective discussions that took place in the first set of meetings. While acknowledging that it is still early days, all those interviewed felt that the process has led to the following:

- development of a consistent frame to identify and select schools based on low achievement and schools in most need in relation to government priorities
- a strategic approach to determining what can be provided to a school. This is based on schools most in need as opposed to a reactive response to school requests
- an enhanced knowledge and coordination of advisors working in schools and supporting a school-wide approach in the region. In the past, advisors commented that lack of knowledge about who else was working in the school posed challenges in ensuring a coordinated delivery of the professional development support. Allowing access to this information was seen as timely as it allowed advisors to work together to ensure maximum value from the PD investment
- increased awareness of other providers operating in the region (in some instances this has been previously absent)
- a regional picture of schools and regionalised sector response. The opening up of the discussion around school selection allowed all parties to focus on regional level issues facing schools and to consider the different levers that can be brought to bear to lift outcomes for students in their region. In the past, SSS providers have tended to take a more limited and narrow view of delivery, focusing on schools that fell within the parameters of the contract with minimal input from regional players
- greater use of the evidence base for planning and decision-making
- reduced fragmentation in delivery of PD due to increased coordination
- transparent decision-making – the new process challenges the concept of ‘school readiness’ used by providers to select schools in the past. Feedback from the first year of evaluation highlighted that there were no agreed definitions or understanding of ‘readiness’ and, more worryingly, it was not clear whose responsibility it was to (a) work with schools that were not *ready* or (b) undertake the groundwork needed to make schools *ready*.

The new processes are not without their own set of challenges and this need to be worked through to strengthen the process. First, there is some sensitivity around sharing data held by SSS with RMO, given their different roles with respect to schools. This has exposed the need for more careful consideration of the parameters and circumstances within which data may be shared. There are potentially some commercial sensitivities also present when working with other Ministry-funded providers. In some regions, there is also some uncertainty about the ability to achieve collaboration with other Ministry-funded providers given past engagement which had not necessarily been viewed collaboratively. Tensions also exist around different levels of regional coverage provided by the different providers and SSS.

There is also concern about the implications of being unable to work with those schools who do not meet priority criteria for selection but whose student achievement, with professional development support, could be improved.

Other related concerns include the potential implications:

- For job satisfaction for advisors/facilitators – advisors commented that working only with schools with need can limit their experiences and inhibit their understanding of what actually works in professional learning and development.
- For existing relationships with schools if unable to respond to requests for support.
- School perceptions due to the blurring of boundaries between the Ministry and the SSS providers. The increased alignment between the two is a positive step but it also causes some confusion about the roles and responsibilities of the two groups. One team leader mentioned this consideration when recalling the 'raised eyebrows' she received after advising a school principals meeting that in-depth selection would need to go through the regionalised meeting process.
- If the process of school selection results in the identification of schools which have not self-identified as having professional development needs.

> So a lot of that primary literacy work is coming in conjunction from the Ministry and not so much from the school end. We see that often as a problem because we don't want to be a service that knocks on a school's door and says 'hello, I know you weren't expecting me to come, but the Ministry sent me because you've got a problem' but they don't think they've a problem. You know it becomes the wrong reason to be starting to work with somebody on professional development. So there's a potential for that to become an issue for us (SSS Management).

From the perspective of SSS, as well as regional Ministry offices, there is a desire for greater clarity and consistency around the specific role of regional Ministry offices in relation to professional development. Finally, future consideration potentially needs to be given to the extent to which schools are aware of the criteria for school selection. This is important as schools need to understand and accept that this is a government priority and decision for maximising impact from its investment in PD.

Evidence of joined-up and school-wide approaches to PD

In the past, the output focus of the SSS contracts led to a siloed approach to both management of professional development and professional learning contracts by the Ministry, as well as delivery of PD and PL by providers to schools. The previous chapter which paints the landscape of in-depth PD delivery models clearly illustrates how multiple advisors working in a school often worked independently with no one taking responsibility for coordinating and integrating PD across the school to maximize learning. Recent changes introduced to SSS contracts have been deliberately designed to create increased opportunities for joined-up work and early feedback on the changes suggests that these are now occurring. This has been achieved as the number of output areas in the contract reduced significantly in 2010, with the reduction in the number of national initiatives (such as Gifted and Talented) and stopping support for learning areas (science, social sciences, and so on) in primary. Other areas in the contract have been interlinked, with the contract explicitly providing for advisors from different specialist areas (such as numeracy and literacy) and advisors working in different areas of the contract (such as leadership and management) to work together.

Implementation of these changes

SSS, school principals and regional Ministry staff observed that there has been increased effort for joined-up and school-wide approach by school support service providers in the last couple of years, and advisors working in teams and *across* output areas, particularly evident in 2010. Most SSS providers highlighted the internal changes (such as staffing; creation of PL pods) that had been initiated in the last couple of years within their institutions to facilitate advisors working in teams and across national priority areas. Examples include:

- reorganisation of staff into four interlinked output-based teams with a leadership and management advisor situated in each team

- piloting of a case management approach where staff from different areas (such as numeracy, literacy and leadership and management) approach working with schools as a team
- advisors' strong preference to work together in schools as a result of an organisation's programme of internal professional development and learning developed over the last few years
- appointment of liaison officers for individual schools to ensure integrated approach to PD.

Three key factors that have influenced the shift to a joined-up work were identified as:

- First, providers' own approach to professional development has evolved in the last few years in response to evidence from projects such as INSTEP, Best Evidence Synthesis, related research, and the New Zealand Curriculum itself.
- Secondly, specific changes made to the contract in 2010, specifically: the explicitness in the contract that this is the required way of working; the interlinking of contractual outputs (such as numeracy and literacy); and the tightening or narrowing of the focus of the contract in 2010 in response to government priorities and the introduction of National Standards.
- Thirdly, the introduction of National Standards which has encouraged primary advisors and schools to work together as a team (internally and with other Ministry-funded providers) to achieve successful implementation and outcomes.

Early evidence of the impact of these changes

As a result of this shift in practice, a common language and consistent messages are emerging and being presented to schools. These transcend specific content areas.

> One of the positive outcomes of this changed way of operating from 2010 is that advisers are working together because they have to, in ways that we probably couldn't have invented ourselves without some of the work that's going on. Like the workshops that they're running for schools. There needs to be a Literacy and Numeracy, a Leadership and Management and an Assessment person there at least. So those people are all working together. It's quite amazing. The people were buzzing afterwards, because they've been pretty good, and they were all talking the language about how great it was to work with you and thought you did really well and all that stuff was going on and you could see it. (SSS Director).

All SSS providers have also undergone restructuring or reorganisation as a result of the removal of outputs from the contract in 2010. Staffing reviews have led to a number of people being made redundant or the reshaping of positions to reflect the contract. This has been timely but expensive for providers and resulted in a loss of jobs.

Looking forward, and to further encourage joined-up working and a school-centric approach, there is a belief that the Ministry could go further to model this approach by achieving stronger integration across personnel within the national Ministry office involved in SSS and across the Ministry's professional development contracts. There is also potential for the output areas in the contract to be better integrated in terms of monitoring and reporting.

Increased focus on school leadership

Focusing on school leadership in both primary and secondary is seen as key to the success of professional development efforts. It ensures that schools take a strategic approach to professional development and build communities of learning where teachers and students thrive. Engagement of school leaders in PD planning and implementation also contributes to sustainability as it positions school leaders as agents of change. The changes to SSS contracts can be seen as Ministry endeavours to integrate the L&M focus in all aspects of the contract, and encouraging providers to take a school-centred approach to PD.

There are a number of drivers to this increased focus on working with school leadership, including: the best evidence synthesis and related research; an accepted understanding of the need to work with school leadership to effect change within a school; school support services' own experiences and evidence of the necessity of this approach; and the specific emphasis of the contract in 2010 requiring advisors to engage with leaders to support them to lead change in schools.

This focus is also to some extent driven by National Standards workshops which focus on school principals and lead teachers. The contract is also explicit that in 2010 the focus for secondary education professional development support for middle leaders.

Implementation of the changes

In the Terms One and Two of 2010, providers were facilitating National Standards workshops with principals and middle leaders of primary schools where they strongly sought to convey the role of leaders leading learning in schools. There is some indication also that school leadership, both at a primary and secondary level are more open to talking about what is happening in the school and looking across the school to plan professional development work. Certainly, school principals engaged with during this phase of the evaluation spoke of a strong approach to working across a school which, in their view, was appropriate.

In turn, and in recent times, SSS are seeing a shift in the responsiveness and receptiveness of school leaders to undertaking a core role in leading schools' professional development support. Providers, however, talk about capability issues facing them as not all advisors are comfortable or have the skills to work across school leadership and management. Nonetheless they acknowledged that this was the right approach as, for PD to be effective, school leadership and management needed to own and lead the PD.

Early evidence of the impact of the changes

The explicit focus of the contract to work with school leadership is seen as positive and important, recognising that school leaders are crucial to effecting change in schools, to build leaders and to embed change systematically in schools. Moreover, working with middle leaders has not necessarily been a strong aspect of New Zealand's PLD processes.

It has been challenging for advisors not confident or familiar with working with school leadership, particularly in a climate of resistance to national standards. This has had implications in terms of time and resources for providers needing to provide sufficient upskilling, training and support. Even highly experienced facilitators have 'stressed' about their own credibility, facilitating workshops because of the newness of national standards and the expectation that they hold the expertise.

Recognising 'it's still early days yet' for the National Standards, participants raised concern at the limitations of a workshop approach emphasising the need to spend time working with leaders who need support and developing processes to support their learning and ability to cascade learning into a school.

There was also an expectation that school leaders will have the time and resources available to attend workshops and an ability, time and willingness to cascade learning within a school. Of concern was the variability of leaders to lead and cascade learning into a school; without which, attendance at workshops was not likely to have the desired effect. Related to this is the potential increased demand for more workshops and in-depth work with school leaders emerging from the workshops and concern that providers will not be able to appropriately respond to this demand with the remaining resource available in 2010, and potentially beyond. Providers will also need to determine how they work with leaders who have not attended the workshops. Finally, the challenges of showing the connection between working with school leadership and student outcomes were also discussed.

Broadening the suite of PD interventions and strategies to ensure fit for purpose

Over the years there has been a shift from flexible, just-in-time professional development support to in-depth, in-school PD. The SSS contracts reflected this and the expectations that advisors would work with teachers in the classroom through modelling was made explicit. These expectations were supported by the evidence from research such as the BES and therefore appropriate delivery model to be pursued by the Ministry. However, with the shift in government priorities and tightening of resources, the Ministry had to rethink how it delivered PD support to schools. This resulted in the Ministry considering a broader suite of interventions and strategies to meet needs for professional development. The 2010 SSS contracts reflect this change – for instance, there is an explicit expectation that PD for National Standards will be mainly delivered through regional workshops in order to meet the sector's need for information in relation to this significant policy change. As a result, there were reduced resources for undertaking in-depth work with primary schools in areas other than the national standards. This created some debate amongst SSS providers and advisors as they saw this shift as contradictory to current research evidence.

School support service providers recognised, however, that workshops offered efficiencies, as it was possible to reach schools 'en masse' to disseminate information about national standards. It also offered flow-on benefits as schools with need were easily identified through these initial workshops.

At the time of engaging with participants in March and April 2010, the workshop approach was a significant focus for providers and was seen to be a continuing approach required across Terms One and Two. As such, there was concern at the shift in the weighting of the workshop approach vis-à-vis in-depth work and the implications of this for subsequent in-depth resource that might or might not have been available to schools for the remainder of the year.

Implementation of the change

The planning and delivery of the workshops and the number of schools needing to be reached (potentially up to 500) have required significant time and resource. Most providers and Regional Ministry staff commented that the planning and facilitation of the initial workshops with other Ministry-funded providers was positive, exciting and beneficial and the shared conversations and messages between providers and with schools were valuable for developing a consistent approach. In some instances, other Ministry-funded providers appeared to arrange and facilitate workshops in isolation from SSS, and were perceived to use the workshops to promote themselves and their services, which led to some tensions.

Despite these concerns, the National Standards workshops were generally well attended and received by schools, reflecting the strength and credibility that SSS have with schools.

> Overall, it wasn't easy, as it is a very different approach and involves different ways of working. But we did try really hard and we had meetings and did all sorts of things. We did collaborate together and I just see it as a chance internally to collaborate with advisors and it worked quite well. We had a Learning Media advisor here yesterday talking to one of our advisors about the workshops and what are you running and what are we running and they're talking together and sharing ideas and it's great. (SSS Management)

Early evidence of the impact of the changes

The concerns expressed with respect to balance of resources between workshops and in-depth work suggest that there was a need for the Ministry to convey more strongly that these were not either /or options but part of a broader suite of strategies/interventions available to the Ministry for providing PD support across schools in the country. The selection of in-depth schools on the basis of need also suggests that there was an outstanding question about how the Ministry contributed to maintaining good practice in schools.

These findings suggest that there was a need to develop a more strategic approach to PD investment by government and more effective communication about how resources were allocated across the range of strategies in order to maximise impact.

Strengthened relationship with national Ministry

School Support Service Directors observed a stronger level of engagement with national office not previously had. This translated into regular contact and opportunities to discuss how the contract was operating in practice. This was attributed to the willingness of the SSS contract management team to understand the operation of the contract and to build a common vision for SSS. Meetings with managers / coordinators at national level leading up to the changes were highly valued and seen as important for discussing the direction of the contract, to clarify matters and to share practice.

Participants identified variable levels of engagement with different coordinators at the National office, which impacted on the quality and nature of information provided, including in relation to contractual requirements. This gap was somewhat mitigated by interrelationships across other SSS providers – for example, one of the SSS providers took the initiative by inviting other providers to share questions and determine potential ways forward during the initial phases of National Standards work.

Key message: The changes introduced in the SSS contracts in 2010 were seen as a step in the right direction. They have clarified the purpose and scope of the contracts and established a clear role for the Regional Ministry office, which is critical to ensuring successful delivery of PLD at a regional level. The reduced number of outputs has helped refocus efforts and to reduce clutter and time spent in administration. All of these were felt to deliver better value for the Ministry and were therefore supported by the providers. There is an expectation that these changes will be broadened to ensure greater alignment across Ministry PLD initiatives.

Chapter 7: Lessons learnt

This part of the report synthesises the evaluation findings across all the projects to identify general lessons learnt about the provision of professional development. Identifying lessons is important for identifying future opportunities for the Ministry to provide support to teachers and school leaders through centrally-funded professional learning and development. The evaluation highlights a number of ongoing issues and challenges for the Ministry in ensuring effective provision of professional development through the SSS contracts and raises critical questions for consideration for the development of future policy and delivery in this area.

Key messages that emerged from this evaluation can be summarised as follows:

- Data on access, to determine which schools were accessing or not accessing professional development services offered by SSS, was patchy and inadequate for providing an accurate and nationwide picture of schools that participate in professional development. As a result, it was not possible to undertake any trends analysis or to identify patterns in the profile and mix of schools accessing professional development from SSS. Understanding these patterns is critical to building a comprehensive picture of the *use* of professional development services offered by SSS. Consequently, it may be timely for the Ministry to introduce systems/ processes for data-collection to allow them to easily build a nationwide overview of access.
- There was variability in the processes and criteria used by providers with respect to school selection. The evaluation found, for instance, there was no systematic or explicit approach to school selection and schools felt processes around selection lacked transparency. The selection of schools tended to be either demand-driven (schools that asked for PD received it) and/or network-driven (schools that had a prior relationship with advisors tended to have easier access to the service) and/or through referrals (where schools were referred to the service by the regional Ministry office). More importantly, the findings indicated that there was no explicit criteria for school selection, creating a perception among school leaders that the resources were not being used efficiently and effectively.
- The delivery of PLD is strongly driven by expectations and aspirations set out in the SSS contracts. The school support services are a collection of professional development services that the Ministry purchases for schools that contributes to the Ministry meeting government's goals for education. The services purchased are varied annually to respond to government priorities. Consequently, the contracts offer the Ministry tremendous opportunity and leverage to shape and influence PLD delivery by ensuring that the contracts are well-written and provide a clear direction about Ministry expectations for a given year. Changes introduced to the 09/10 contracts requiring providers to focus on a smaller number of high-priority areas and prioritising support for schools and students that need it most, sent a clear signal about current government's focus on lifting student achievement.
- There are a number of Ministry–funded professional development providers and there are significant differences in how these PD contracts are designed, managed and implemented by the Ministry. This created confusion as schools received support from more than one Ministry-funded professional development provider at any given point in time. As a result, schools experienced these contracts differently even though they were run by the Ministry. This created a mismatch in expectations as the resources across these contracts were not spread evenly.
- There was an expectation from the National office (responsible for overseeing the contract) that SSS providers would consult with regional Ministry office to identify regional needs and priorities. The evaluation found that these links and relationships were not being exploited sufficiently and regional Ministry office felt excluded from these contracts, resulting in missed opportunities for using regional intelligence when prioritising or selecting schools. One of the changes introduced in the 2010 contracts is a clear expectation that regional Ministry offices

will have an active role in the prioritisation and planning processes. The formative evaluation to examine how these plans were playing out revealed that there are significant issues that could impact on the success of this approach/model. These relate to perceived capacity and capability constraints within the Regional Ministry offices; lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities; lack of involvement in the setting of the SSS contract outputs; and focus areas.

- The provision of leadership and management support through SSS was part of a wider Leadership Strategy aimed at providing professional learning and development support to principals. In addition to the SSS contracts (focused on first-time principals, aspiring principals, principals in at-risk schools and middle leaders) there are initiatives such as the Principals' Development Planning Centre focused on providing professional development to experienced principals. The evaluation found that provision of services with respect to leadership and management across the four priority groups identified in the SSS contracts was uneven. The commonly-held view was that first-time principals and principals in schools at-risk absorbed the bulk of the resources. This limited access to the service by other school leaders. L&M advisors took a flexible approach to delivery and principals that used the services rated them positively. A significant group of school leaders sought alternative sources of PLD to meet their needs in recognition of the fact that the resources were not available to all. The strong focus on building capability of an identified group of principals meant that L&M advisors operated in a delivery mode and did not work towards establishing a link between capability and Ministry outcomes in a meaningful way.
- The way in which in-depth PD was delivered to schools was viewed positively by participating schools. As noted earlier, the selection of schools tended to be demand-driven rather than driven by need, which meant that schools that were most in need did not always receive, or have access to, the support. The evaluation also showed that monitoring success or impact of the in-depth PD tended to be limited to content and pedagogical shifts while other areas of school development, critical to sustainability, were often unaddressed. Maximising value of the in-depth PD offered to schools requires consideration of impact at all levels: at an individual teacher level; at a department or syndicate level; across all teachers in the school; and at a school/institutional level. The evaluation findings highlight an opportunity for the Ministry to redirect providers' focus and efforts to ensure the support provided is cognizant of the wider system in which the teacher operates. That is, as well as effecting change at an individual teacher and/or syndicate and/or department, support provided through agreements should also respond to issues or constraints in the wider school environment. This can be achieved through specific support provided to a range of groups, including school leaders, middle leaders, teachers, provisionally-registered teachers and their mentors, and overseas-trained teachers. Regardless of the group being worked with, advisors can and must be encouraged to work towards leading change within the school.
- Notions of sustainability are central to SSS and the Ministry had an expectation that sustainability goals and principles were built into the design and delivery of professional learning and development support. The evaluation highlighted a high level of variability across providers in this regard and, while in some instances there was intentionality around sustainability, there were other instances when sustainability conversations occurred when the PLD came to an end. This left schools with an acute sense of loss and a feeling of being 'left in the lurch'. To ensure goals of sustainability are achieved, there is a need for a deliberate and planned approach to sustainability. Progress towards achieving sustainability should be monitored in ways similar to how effectiveness of PLD is tracked. This needs to begin with a shared definition of what exit means and a common understanding across providers as to why exit matters.
- The changes introduced in 2009 (including changes to the way in which the Ministry has traditionally managed and shaped the provision of PD through SSS) give providers greater clarity about the intended purpose and focus of the contracts. Providers, Regional Ministry staff and national Ministry staff interviewed felt that these changes had sharpened focus for the SSS contract. Providers initiated a number of new initiatives in their organisation to respond to the demands of the revised SSS contracts.

Implications for the Ministry

The evaluation findings highlight the continued importance of PLD because of the role it plays strengthening/enhancing the understanding and skills of school leaders and teachers so that they can best meet the learning needs of all students. The Ministry facilitates access to quality PLD by investing in a range of professional development in the school sector, including SSS. Historically the design and implementation of the SSS contracts have been underpinned by principles of equity (ensuring access to quality PLD for all teachers), focus on strengthening teaching practice, and promoting synergy between pre-service and in-service to ensure consistency in implementation.

Services purchased through the SSS agreements were designed to enhance quality teaching and learning, and support curriculum implementation across the schooling sector. Historically, the SSS contracts were not the Ministry's response to addressing identified achievement issues in schools. This was typically the remit of the Schooling Improvement project. There was an expectation that SSS providers would not work with schools that were participating in a Schooling Improvement project.

Over recent years there have been several changes in the education environment that have brought about a shift in policy direction for the SSS contracts. There has been a move away from equitable teaching and learning support for the schooling sector towards more targeting (e.g. schools with need) and a focus on school development (due to the growing notion of the need to contribute to continuous improvement of schools). This shift has been influenced by the urgency to respond to lifting education achievement for under-served groups, the growing evidence that supports PLD's direct impact on student learning outcomes, the imperative to use increasingly scarce government funds for the greatest impact, and most recently, government's clear mandate for education.

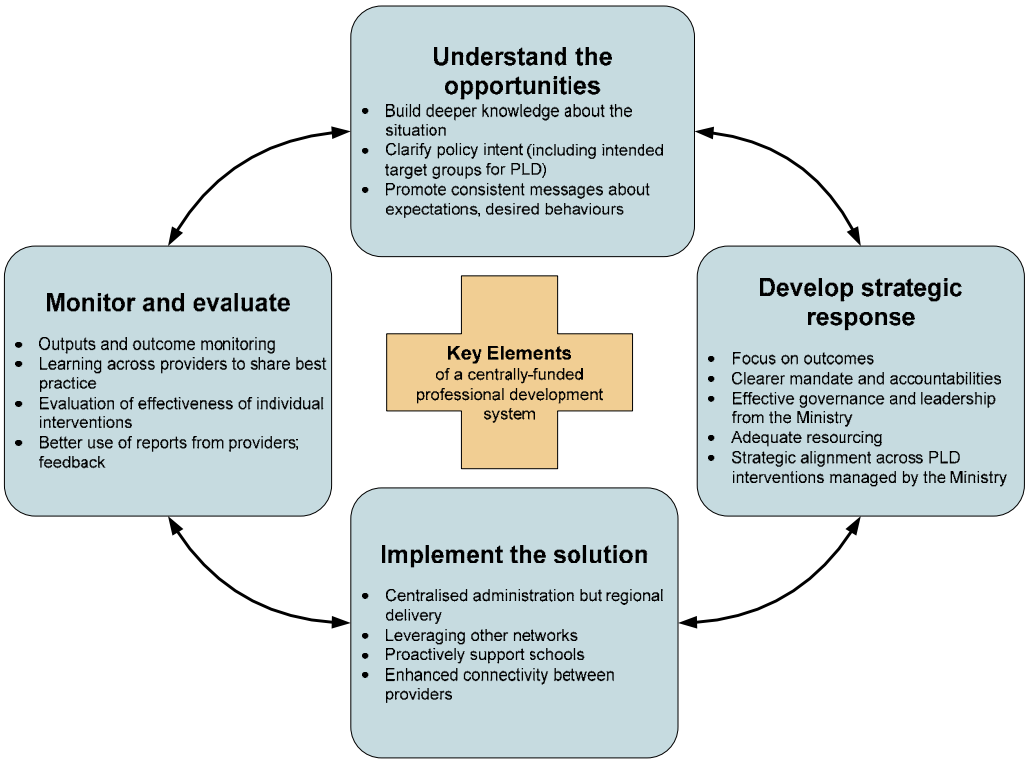
It may be timely to reflect on the extent to which the current design of the SSS meets emerging needs and shifts in policy. Likewise, it is an opportunity to consider how the Ministry can best support and contract PLD services from the sector.

The findings from the evaluation show that there is value in maintaining a centrally-funded PLD infrastructure as it ensures that the design and delivery of all support is underpinned by cultural responsiveness, teaching as inquiry, and pedagogical content knowledge. The challenge the Ministry faces is to better understand which type of PLD investment is most appropriate given current government's priorities, how best to deploy them and the conditions that achieve success. Further, the current government has fewer, clearer priorities for education and it may be appropriate to reflect on whether the current approach to PD provision and PD contracts are still relevant. The following section has been written with cognisance of the Ministry's intention to redesign centrally-funded professional learning and development for the school sector.

A way forward

The evaluation activities undertaken have collectively identified the growing importance of good planning, targeting, effective service delivery, and ongoing monitoring and evaluations to inform future decisions. Applying these findings suggests the need to structure the design of any future PLD infrastructure around effective processes for policy development beginning with an understanding of the opportunities. These include clarifying the policy intent; developing and designing the response; implementing the response; and reflecting on and learning from the intervention (monitoring and evaluation). However, these conversations relating to provision of PD support need to take place within a wider context and cannot be held in isolation of the Ministry's priorities and direction for PLD. Figure 16 illustrates the critical elements of a centrally-funded professional development infrastructure that has to be in place in order for interventions to have a good chance of achieving their intended outcomes.

Figure 16: Key elements of a centrally-funded professional development system



The following caveats, however, are important.

- If the key elements are in place, they will not necessarily guarantee the desired effect. The needs of schools are varied and a mix of interventions is needed to ensure the sector receives information to support government initiatives and has access to flexible and in-depth support. Moreover, PLD is only one of many elements that contribute to lifting student achievement and learning. For these reasons, there is not a perfect or complete relationship between PLD and the achievement of government's goals for education.
- If the key elements are not all in place, it is still possible to have a successful intervention (albeit not necessarily due to good planning and management).

Based on our findings, the four most important priorities for the Ministry are:

1. Understanding the opportunity

Underpinning the Ministry's strategies and interventions, there needs to be a very clear understanding of what the opportunities are that can be leveraged through investment in PLD and why. Developing the clarity of purpose and direction of the policy are critical to ensuring that the design of the infrastructure meets stated needs.

In short, the objective is to arrive at a clear definition of the need. An element of needs identification is to have a good understanding of the populations that need to be influenced and this includes populations that the Ministry has already identified. Effective interventions need to be targeted in nature and adaptable to the different circumstances and motivators of different groups. In turn, this means that environmental scanning needs to be both broad (covering many different populations) as well as deep (capable of informing a sophisticated understanding of the characteristics of specific populations).

There is a strong need to describe a relationship between the theory and the evidence to support effective interventions. This will enable resources to be used more effectively and to establish stronger alignment between different initiatives that have similar objectives. There is also a need for promoting consistent messages about expectations, desired behaviours so as to build a shared understanding of the problem across the different stakeholders.

Some questions for reflection

- What is the policy intent of the redesign programme? Who is the intended beneficiary? What needs does it serve?
- What are the anticipated short, medium and longer-term outcomes?
- What are the assumptions underpinning the new policy direction and thinking?
- What is the point of leverage for the Ministry?

2. Developing a strategic response

Central to any strategy or response is having a clear sense and articulation of the goal or outcome that the organisation and/or the contracts for services are working towards. In the context of SSS contracts, the evaluation indicates that providers have focused on outputs (namely, outputs/schedules in the contract eg literacy, numeracy etc) and plan their resourcing and delivery of PLD around these outputs, resulting in a siloed approach. Developing a strategic response requires a shift towards an outcomes focus as it will enable providers to take all aspects of the wider system into consideration, in order to support cultural change at the school. Adopting this approach requires the Ministry to *manage for outcomes* and to promote a stronger connection between outputs and outcomes across all PLD providers. This shift needs to be supported by a clearer mandate and accountabilities.

Effective governance and leadership from the Ministry was also identified as key elements of success and for strengthening administrative efficiency of the current system. The Ministry has different governance arrangements for the PLD contracts, resulting in a high level of variability in practice. This needs to be urgently addressed. While the Ministry has sought to influence and lead the direction and shape of the services, it is timely to review the contracts and to reiterate their purpose and aspirations. This will need to be translated to agreed measures by which impact will be monitored and measured.

There needs to be durable structures to consolidate the purchase of PLD for the Ministry, particularly with respect to establishing alignment across Ministry initiatives. This means that groups with representation from relevant areas will need to be established, and roles and responsibilities clearly assigned (with accountabilities to match).

Development of a strategic response needs to be matched with adequate resourcing. There are strategic questions as to how the funding should be allocated across the different PLD interventions. Also of interest is the process for decision-making that is deployed to arrive at these decisions.

Some questions for reflection

- Given the policy intent, what are the resources that are needed to deliver effectively and efficiently on the intent? What is the process of decision-making for allocation of resources across the range of PLD contracts purchased by the Ministry?
- What are the governance and leadership arrangements within the Ministry to ensure PLD contracts are managed in a consistent and coherent way?
- How can providers collaborate and work in ways that promotes a strong regional response? What are the challenges associated with this? How can these be addressed?

- How can a national community of practice be developed/maintained?
- What is the mandate and accountability requirements of all key actors in the infrastructure, namely, the providers; regional Ministry office; National office?

3. Implementing the response

The SSS agreements were negotiated and funded centrally by the Ministry of Education and delivered regionally by six universities located across New Zealand. The Ministry manages and structures the contract and how providers deliver PLD with the expectation that schools receive PLD in a flexible, coordinated way. It is important to allow regions to innovate and not try to force them into centrally-determined frameworks and processes. The trade-off for giving more degrees of freedom to providers is the need to strengthen governance and management arrangements at the centre to ensure that effective accountability is maintained, particularly relating to identifying priority groups; establishing clear criteria and focus for the PLD; and providing training, guidelines and templates, and other forms of administrative support to ensure consistency in delivery. Development of a regional plan for the programme of work that is aligned with other regional initiatives (such as initiatives purchased through the range of Ministry professional development contracts, support provided to the regional Ministry office be it professional development support or other support) will be a critical first step in ensuring stronger linkages between the national office and regional offices.

It is important to point out that while sound structures, policies and processes can all support effective governance and management, the role that individual providers play will directly impact on how well these work in practice.

The nature of the issues surrounding PLD is such that providers will be required to interact with a wide range of schools and stakeholders on a day-to-day basis. This requires providers to be connected to regional stakeholder networks. The effectiveness of these networks is an element of success because it helps to identify opportunities for providers to leverage off, or assist, the work of others; and it reduces the risk of ‘capture’ of the service by a small number of schools.

The range of initiatives and actions taken by providers to respond to their regional context can offer useful lessons for providers across the country. Therefore, creating opportunities to share across providers requires effective management of knowledge and information. Several providers commented that there are opportunities to undertake analysis of what works and use this to inform or drive effective practice across the service nationally. Having mechanisms and processes in place to promote such discussion and dialogue will further enhance connections across providers and contribute to the growing knowledge base about what works in PLD.

Some questions for reflection

- How can providers be supported to balance national and regional interests when providing services to schools in their region?
- What collaborative and partnership arrangements are in place to support implementation?
- What are ways that investment in training and professional development of all actors within the PLD can help to promote consistent messages and understandings?
- What are the best methods for creating knowledge networks or hubs to promote sharing of best practice and continuous learning?

4. Monitoring and evaluating

The overarching purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to inform understanding of:

- the level and rate of change in the desired outcome (monitoring activities)

- whether activities are having the impact intended and what is working well, what is not and why (evaluation activities).

Tracking progress towards outcomes is an essential way to inform the ongoing development, refinement and improvement of an intervention. Given the complex nature of the PLD and school environment, the ability to respond to issues and opportunities as they arise is essential in ensuring that risks are minimised and opportunities leveraged.

Given the complex nature of PLD and the myriad of factors that contribute to achieving desired change, it is often difficult to 'unpack' the impact of particular PLD strategies and interventions. However, evaluation of a small number of initiatives can contribute to the growing knowledge base about what works to improve quality of teaching and lifting student engagement and achievement.

Some questions for reflection

Based on the above discussion, the critical questions for reflection by the Ministry include:

- What is the desired impact of a centrally-funded PLD infrastructure – at an outputs level? At an outcomes level?
- What are the meaningful performance measures that can be used to tell the performance story of the infrastructure? What monitoring systems are in place to help track progress over time?
- What is the evaluation framework and criteria for determining success?

Being able to clearly articulate the results that the intervention is seeking to achieve is paramount in delivering meaningful monitoring and evaluation. The desired impact from the PLD infrastructure should build on the outcome of the intervention identified in the strategy phase and link back to the intervention's overarching strategic objectives.

Appendix: Description of the methodology

As noted in the Methodology section of this report, there were 7 projects undertaken within the overall evaluation over the three-year period. A detailed description around the evaluation approach and key stakeholders involved in the data-collection has been provided in this section.

Project #1: Developing the evaluation framework and plan (April 2007)

In developing the framework and plan for the evaluation, evaluators took a collaborative approach and actively sought the views and opinions of key internal and external stakeholders with regard to the evaluation's purpose, questions and *use* of findings. The rationale for this participative approach was based on the belief that for the evaluation to be meaningful and relevant, it must meet the needs and expectations of the individuals responsible for delivering the 'intervention' (in this case the Ministry and the SSS providers) and those receiving it (teachers and school leaders). This approach also reflected the relationship-based nature of the SSS contracting environment. The framework was developed on the basis of knowledge and understanding gathered from:

- a review of the SSS contracts and other related documents
- interviews with the six SSS Directors and the contract managers
- interviews with four National Ministry staff

The first iteration of the framework was tested through a workshop with the six Directors and with a Reference Group set-up for the evaluation. The framework was refined in response to the comments and a final version signed off by the team overseeing the evaluation contract from within the Ministry.

Project #2: Data Analysis project (August 2007)

In order to understand issues relating to *access,* evaluators designed a template and requested all six providers to provide the relevant information for the 2006-07 school years. By examining coverage issues, the aim was to also examine participation by subgroups of the target population for the given period. This would help ascertain if there were any patterns in terms of the type of schools that were accessing or not accessing professional development services offered. There were some definitional issues around *access* and *participation*, and evaluators worked closely with the SSS Managers to develop an agreed definition - *access* was referred to hours accounted for the under the SSS contract.

The key questions that were explored through the data analysis project included:

- What is the number of schools accessing[6] PD from SSS in the requested school year?
  - Breakdown by school size; urban/rural; decile rating (clustered into three groups: 1-2; 3-7; and 8-10); type of school (primary, intermediate or secondary).
- In schools that have accessed PD provision by SSS in the 2006-2007 period, what is the distribution of hours i.e. average number of hours of PD, that schools receive across all output areas?
- What number of schools that accessed SSS in the requested school year were referred to by regional Ministry office?

[6] In the first instance, we could see access as "hours accounted for under the SSS contract".

- In how many schools do SSS have a MOA in place? What is the duration of the MOA?
- Of the schools that accessed PD through SSS in the said year, how many:
  - did not access your services in the year prior to the requested year?
  - accessed your services in the previous year also?
  - accessed your services in the previous two years?
- What is the number of schools with high Māori[7] rolls accessing PD from SSS?
- What is the number of schools with high Pasifika rolls accessing SSS?

Project # 3: Key Informant Interviews (October 2007)

The key purpose of this project was to build an understanding of the contextual influences that helped/hindered SSS providers' ability to achieve the outcomes desired through SSS, namely, effective teaching practice leading to improved student outcomes. In developing the evaluation framework, evaluators identified a range of factors or influences in the wider environment that impacted on what providers do in their regions, including:

- the extent to which providers are able to maintain and build a strong and responsive service within the structure of the contract
- the nature of the relationship between the curriculum facilitators, the providers and the advisors
- the culture of the provider organisation and its systems and processes for attracting and retaining quality advisers
- the individual advisor's own pedagogical knowledge, skills and attributes in teaching, learning and facilitation
- school readiness and support
- the influence of wider government policy.

This project was undertaken to explore these influences and to examine how and in what ways they contributed to providers' ability to be effective.

In total, 24 interviews were undertaken across the six regions. The interviews included:

- six SSS Directors and their contract managers
- six Regional Ministry of Education staff
- two advisors per region to provide the implementation perspective.

Project # 4: Qualitative research with schools that have a less intensive relationship with School Support Services (November 2007)

In order to understand current perceptions, attitudes and beliefs regarding PD in general and PD offered by SSS, evaluators undertook interviews with school leaders in a sample of schools who have a less intensive relationship with SSS and/or access PD from non-SSS providers. The aim was to identify trends and patterns that appear to impede participation or access to PD by schools. The definition of 'less intensive relationship' was discussed with the SSS providers and it was agreed to view schools accessing 5 hours or less over a two-year period as having a 'less intensive relationship'. Each provider gave the evaluators a list of their ten lowest accessing primary, intermediate and secondary schools.

[7] Over 20% Māori in student population is defined as 'high' as per the Te Kotahitanga project.

In total, 18 interviews were conducted by phone with school principals from across the six regions. The breakdown was as follows:

Region	Number of schools	Access of PD	Demographics
Auckland	1	Access PD (non-SSS)	Urban, High Māori/Pasifika student population
	1	Infrequent access of PD offered by SSS	Rural. High Māori/Pasifika student population
	1	Infrequent access of PD offered by SSS	Rural
Waikato	1	Infrequent access of PD from SSS	Rural, low-decile
	1	Infrequent access of PD from SSS	Rural, high-decile
	1	Access PD (non-SSS)	Urban
Wanganui	1	Infrequent access of PD from SSS	Rural
	1	Access PD (non-SSS)	Rural, low-decile
	1	Infrequent access of PD from SSS	Urban
Christchurch	1	Infrequent access of PD from SSS	Rural
	1	Infrequent access of PD from SSS	Urban
	1	Access PD (non-SSS)	Urban
Dunedin	1	Infrequent access of PD from SSS	Rural
	1	Infrequent access of PD from SSS	Urban
	1	Access PD (non-SSS)	Urban
Wellington	1	Infrequent access of PD from SSS	Rural
	1	Infrequent access of PD from SSS	Urban
	1	Access PD (non-SSS)	Rural
Total	18 interviews		

Project #5: Research to examine the effectiveness of the leadership and management support offered within the SSS contracts

The evaluation approach to evaluating the contribution and value of SSS Leadership and Management support was based on two data-collection phases – a qualitative phase, followed by a quantitative phase.

- The qualitative phase included:
  - interviews with 28 school principals, identified as having received leadership and management support, to better understand their experiences and perceptions of L & M support from SSS providers in their region
  - two focus group discussions with leadership and management coordinators from the six SSS institutions to understand the factors that enable/hinder the delivery of L&M support to school principals.

The analysis and understanding gained from these two activities informed the development of the survey instrument.

- The quantitative phase included a survey of all school principals in New Zealand to assess the extent to which SSS L&M support was used by principals and perceptions of quality of the support received.

Qualitative phase: interviews and focus groups

Interviews were conducted with 28 school principals, identified by SSS providers as having recently received L & M support. The respondents were selected from a list compiled by each SSS region identifying principals who had, within the past year, accessed leadership and management (L&M) support from the provider. The intention was to gather a diversity of views about the quality of L&M support provided by SSS and to inform the design of the national survey. A cross-section of schools was selected and the final sample included a mix of:

- the six SSS regions
- location (urban / rural)
- school size (small, medium and large)
- SSS L&M contract output areas (such as first-time principals, at-risk schools, middle leaders)

The two focus groups were conducted with SSS leadership and management coordinators during regular meetings between SSS and the Ministry. The purpose of the focus groups was to:

- explore and test the underlying theory that supports L&M advisors' work – the relationship between their day-to-day practice and the intended outcomes from this type of support
- identify factors that helped / hindered their ability to achieve positive outcomes for school leaders
- ascertain the relative emphasis across the four identified output areas
- assess the level of support needed by L&M advisors to deliver on the professional leadership strategy.

Quantitative phase: survey

Design considerations

The design of the survey took into account issues identified in the qualitative phase with regard to correctly identifying SSS L&M support and the great diversity in how this support might be delivered.

The qualitative research found that some principals interviewed, despite being hand-picked by SSS as having recently received support, found it hard to recall whether they had accessed professional development through L&M advisors and whether it had been delivered by SSS. This can be explained by the following features that characterise the PD landscape:

- School principals and their schools are often involved in a range of PD at any given point in time which makes it difficult to isolate these as leadership and management support delivered through SSS.
- Advisors delivered L&M support under the auspices of other PD contracts held by the University. Therefore, it was virtually impossible for the school principal to accurately identify the support as SSS PD contract.

The qualitative research also found that the SSS L&M 'intervention' has many forms which can best be described as flexible and context specific. It varies in terms of:

- who it targets: principals, school leaders, senior management teams, teachers aspiring to be principals
- what it focuses on: an individual, a team, or a whole school
- what its boundary is: a specific 'project' or be general and ongoing
- how it is delivered: face-to-face meetings, telephone calls, emails conversations, facilitated sessions, or delivered programmes
- how it is planned: whether it has been proactively planned or reactively

- how frequently it is delivered; whether it is once a year; a term; fortnightly
- the intensity of the support: whether it is limited to a number of sessions or open-ended.

The survey was designed to take into account these issues by:

- explicitly testing the level of awareness of SSS
- presenting the questions about SSS and engagement in L&M PD in the context of both PD provided by other providers and the entire PD that principals are engaged with
- focusing on general issues about the service and types of professional development sought.

The design also considered the practicality of distributing the survey to one individual to complete. Consequently, the scope was limited to questions that the principals could comment on and the L&M support they had received. Questions about the provision of SSS L&M professional development to senior leaders were excluded.

Design and Administration

Key features of the survey design were:

- use of an online web-based survey instrument, designed to take 10 – 15 minutes to complete
- school principals contacted by email to participate
- survey sent to all schools to enable statistically-robust analysis by region.

The survey design and administration process was:

- sample frame – a list of all schools and contact details were obtained from the Ministry of Education (February 2009)
- questionnaire design in consultation with the Ministry of Education and SSS L&M coordinators, and finalised with the Ministry
- the questionnaire was programmed into Vovici and tested with Ministry staff and the evaluation team
- 10 schools were sent the survey in advance of the main roll-out to ensure that there were no programming errors
- the survey was open to schools from 20th March – 7th April 2009
- two reminders were sent to non-respondents on the 26th and 31st of March.

Response rate

An overall response rate of 50% was achieved, with 1104 school principals responding to the survey from the total 2191 invited to participate[8] (see Table 1). While this represents a good overall response rate, the response rate for secondary schools was low, with only 21 secondary schools responding. This was caused by inaccuracy in the contact details provided for the secondary schools. In consultation with the Ministry, it was decided to keep the secondary schools as part of the final dataset and to include them in the analysis. Where the results were different between primary and secondary schools this is highlighted in the text.

The findings presented are based on a robust sample of primary schools, with a good representation of schools-based in each of the SSS regions, school decile, school size and/or location (see Table 4).

[8] Of the details sent to us, 397 schools did not have email contact details.

Table 3: Proportion of types of schools responding to survey

Type of School	Total number	% within sample	National Spread
Primary	993	90%	79%
Secondary	21	2%	13%
Composite schools	23	2%	6%
Special schools	20	2%	2%
Missing information	47	4%	1% (other)
Total sample	1104	100%	100%

Table 4: Profile of sample by SSS region

		Team	Waikato	Massey	Victoria	UC Plus	Otago	National
SSS contract output	First-time principal (FTP)	33%	30%	30%	30%	23%	31%	30%
	FTP In post <5yrs	20%	22%	20%	8%	15%	26%	
	At-risk[9]	14%	20%	19%	20%	19%	19%	18%
	Combined FTP & at-risk	8%	10%	11%	8%	7%	4%	8%
Decile	Low (1 – 3)	33%	37%	35%	19%	18%	18%	28%
	Medium (4 – 7)	31%	44%	49%	31%	45%	45%	40%
	High (8 – 10)	36%	19%	16%	50%	37%	38%	32%
Location	Rural	22%	35%	36%	11%	31%	35%	28%

Project #6: Research to examine the effectiveness of in-depth PD offered within the SSS contracts

Understanding effectiveness of in-depth intervention required evaluators to gather data from multiple perspectives so as to make informed judgements about the role and contribution of the PD/PL delivered. Effectiveness in this context was also about change and the extent to which there was evidence that new practices were embedded or existing practices strengthened. For the purposes of the evaluation, in-depth support was defined as support offered by:

- an advisor to a school for a significant length of time
- an advisor to a department or a syndicate in a secondary school
- many advisors to one school.

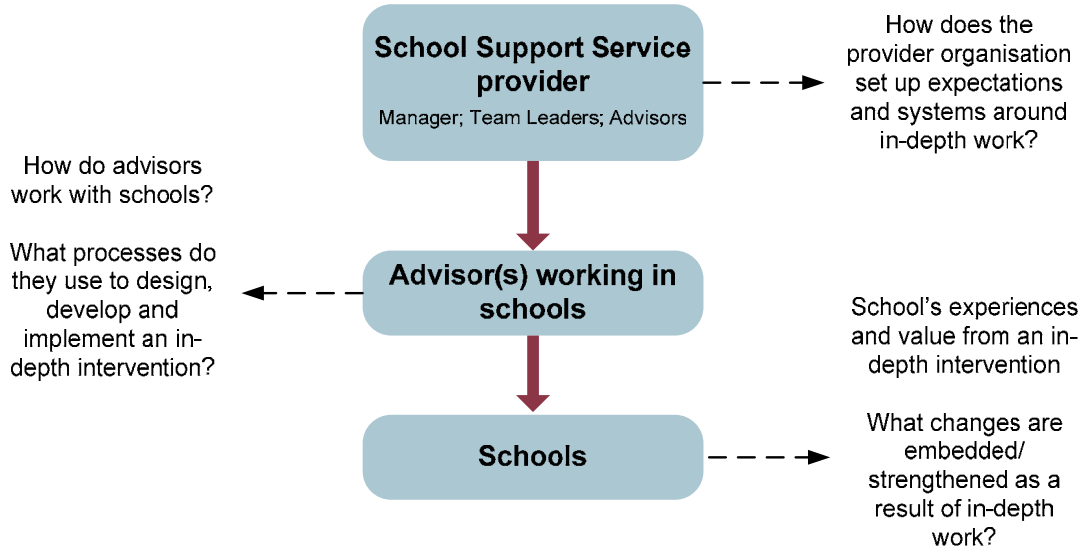
Definition of the 'case'

Since the Ministry's contract for provision of whole-school, in-depth support was with the six providers, the evaluation used the *school support service provider* as the unit of analysis to investigate the extent to which ongoing professional

[9] Indicator asked for was whether or not ERO has identified issues for schools to address

development that was focused on teacher practice was effective in influencing teacher behaviour and learner outcomes. This provided rich insights into provider practices in relation to planning, designing and delivering in-depth support and the factors that were taken into consideration when making decisions in this regard. Figure 17 illustrates the linkages between the providers, advisors and schools and the high-level question that was explored at each level.

Figure 17: Definition of the case



The process for selecting schools began with an invitation to providers requesting a list of schools in their region that received in-depth support in 2008 (for whom an MOU had been signed off) and that continued to receive support in 2009. The analysis of this data revealed the dominant operating model for each provider. Based on this, the evaluators asked providers to nominate five schools each from primary, secondary, and areas schools in their region and schools were picked out of this list at random. We then sought to interview individuals across the three groups to gather the organisational perspective (by interviewing the director and/or the Contract Manager), the advisor perspective and the school perspective. In total, we visited 12 schools and each case-study visit was spread over two days.

Limitations of the methodology

Given the qualitative nature of the research, there are methodological limitations around the generalisability of the findings. However, given the robustness of the data-collection process and the triangulation mechanisms built into the design and analysis of the findings, we believe that it is possible to make 'analytic' generalisations[10].

Project # 7: Formative evaluation to assess impact of the changes introduced to the SSS environment

The original focus for the third year of the evaluation was to provide insights around the higher-level outcomes, namely their impact on teaching and learning. However, in light of the changing context for SSS (which led to significant change in focus of the SSS contracts for 2010) and feedback from earlier evaluation activities, the Ministry felt that it was necessary to focus the evaluation at the formative end. This allowed the Ministry to gain real time feedback about the changes as they were being implemented to identify what was working well and not working well with a view to improving/enabling the SSS to operate effectively and efficiently. In consultation with the Ministry, the formative focus for the evaluation was to describe how SSS providers (management and advisors), Regional Ministry staff and Regional

[10] Yin, Robert K. Case Study Research: Design and Methods, 3rd edition (2003). Sage Publications Inc, Thousand Oaks, California.

stakeholders responded to the changes in expectations and focus of the SSS contracts; identify the enablers and barriers and how might these be overcome/addressed to strengthen the SSS system.

Gathering data on the nature and impact of the changes triggered by the wider environment and/or the evaluation required a number of different perspectives to be considered, including:

- National Ministry office (Project team; national representatives on numeracy, literacy and leadership and management)
- Regional Ministry Office (Regional Manager and/or schools performance manager)
- School Support Management (Director and contracts manager)
- Team Leaders and/or advisors employed by the SSS
- Regional stakeholders (such as Primary Principals' Association; Secondary Principals' Association).

In total 38, one-on-one interviews (8 interviews at the national Ministry level and 30 spread across the regions) and three focus groups discussions were conducted to gather the breadth of perspectives needed for examining these questions.