

High performing primary schools: What do they have in common?

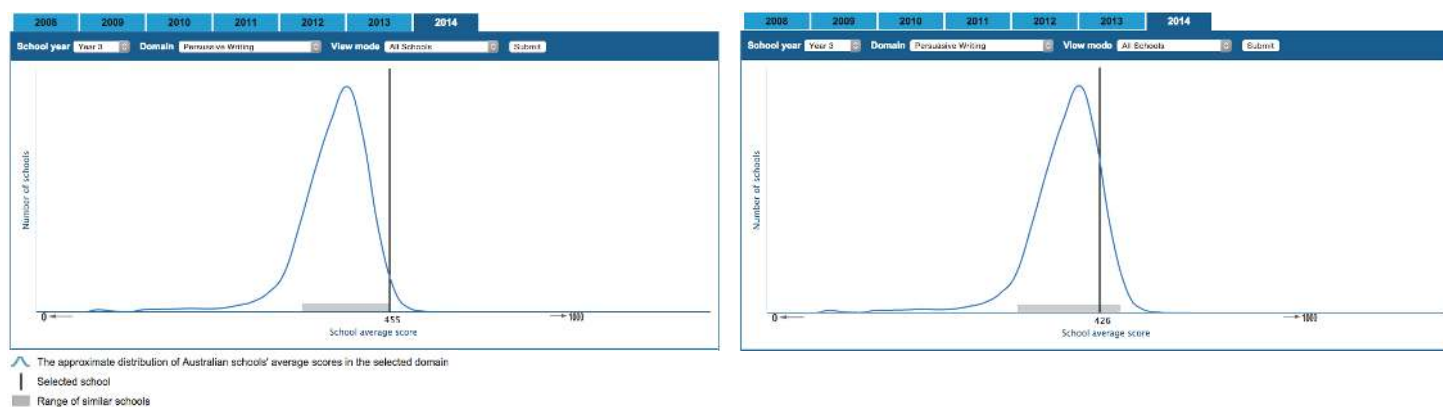
Professor William Louden (2015)

Research commissioned by the Education Department of WA, explored the similarities and differences among high performing West Australian Government primary schools.

Nine schools were selected for the study on the basis of their 2010 to 2014 NAPLAN results. The participating schools were either high achieving schools or schools which had significantly improved their NAPLAN results. The schools had an Index of Community Socio-Economic Advantage (ICSEA) score range from 1084 (Decile 2) to 911 (Decile 9). Two of the schools had students with significant numbers of students with English as a second language, two schools had high levels of indigenous students and one school was a rural school.

The nine schools provided school plans and review documents prior to the visit. School visits involved the researcher conducting classroom visits and several hours of discussion with the principal and curriculum leadership team.

Two of the Case Study Schools:



Conclusions:

While each of the schools were quite different, a series of key common characteristics emerged.

- All nine schools had experienced, stable, senior long-term leadership teams. Each school had the same principal for a minimum of five years.
- All schools had explicit and published agendas for school improvement.
- The bulk of the schools had moved towards what was called '**lower variation teaching**' in which schools had developed positions on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Typically schools had developed scope and sequence progressions, the introduction of specific mandated resources and fine grain achievement targets were established for each term and year.
- All of the schools used explicit teaching strategies for teaching phonological awareness and phonics. Common across all schools was a synthetic phonics approach. The following is a direct quote from the research paper.

"Synthetic phonics is a systematic approach to teaching reading by beginning with sounds (phonemes) and blending (synthesising) these sounds to make words. All of the case study schools have implemented synthetic phonics programs in the early years... PLD Literacy and Learning ... teach[es] phonemes (letter and digraph sounds), letter formation, blending of sounds together to form new words, segmenting sounds in read and write new words, and teaching specific 'tricky words' with irregular spelling." (Page 20-21)

To read the full research paper:

<https://pld-literacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/High-performing-primary-schools-what-they-have-in-common.pdf>