

CASE STUDY:

Leadership in schools

How school leadership affects student achievement and well being

Everyone believes that school leadership is important but what difference does it make to student achievement and well-being? Which particular leadership practices have the most impact?

The Ministry of Education asked The University of Auckland to find out and the result was two very interesting findings.

"Firstly, leadership in schools where students perform above what is expected for their age looks very different from the leadership in schools serving students from similar backgrounds who are performing below the expected level. Clearly, leadership does matter," says Professor Viviane Robinson, who led the project.

"Secondly, we identified the type of leadership that makes the most difference to student outcomes. In general terms, school leadership that is strongly focused on the core business of teaching and learning has two to three times the impact on students than leadership that is more focused on school management."

These findings are particularly important for policy makers as there are high expectations, especially in systems where schools are self-managing, for school leaders to be both managers and educational leaders.

Professor Robinson's conclusions are the result of a systematic analysis of all published national and international research using an approach called Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis (BES), which was developed by the Ministry of Education.

Professor Robinson went on to identify the relative importance of five aspects of this work. The most powerful way that school leaders – whether principals, members of the senior management team or teacher leaders – can make a difference to student outcomes is to promote and participate in the professional learning and development of their staff. The second most powerful impact was through leaders' direct involvement with the co-ordination and evaluation of teaching and the curriculum.

Professor Robinson stresses that the synthesis delivers much more than a list of powerful types of leadership. "We also had to

give clear explanations of why and how they worked. If practitioners understand why they work, then they can adapt our findings, in a principled way, to their own contexts."

The results have already been used by groups of school leaders, policy makers and educational leadership researchers. The Ministry of Education has integrated the findings into the leadership development framework that guides its programmes for all principals.

The results also have an application in the First-time Principals Programme, an initiative where the University is playing a key role, and the Principals Development Planning Centre.



“...leadership in schools where students perform above what is expected for their age looks very different from the leadership in schools serving students from similar backgrounds who are performing below the expected level.”

 niServices

Auckland UniServices Limited



THE UNIVERSITY
OF AUCKLAND

NEW ZEALAND

Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau

The need to strengthen both responsiveness and outcomes for New Zealand's diverse student population



Professor Viviane Robinson

Professor Robinson is an internationally respected educational researcher specialising in educational leadership and organisational and policy learning. She has published five books and numerous research articles in leading international journals. Professor Robinson is also the Academic Director of the First-time Principals Programme – New Zealand's national induction programme for newly appointed principals. In 2007 she was honoured by the Australian Council of Educational Leaders with an invitation to deliver the William Walker Oration and with the Headley Beare award for educational writing.

UniServices

Auckland UniServices Limited is a wholly owned company of The University of Auckland. Established in 1988, UniServices manages all the University's commercial research and consultancy partnerships, forms new business ventures based on University research, and owns and develops the University's intellectual property estate.

Its mission is to apply the University's research and expertise to client needs and business opportunities, enabling organisations based on new knowledge to grow, expand the University's research capability and benefit the broader community.

contact

Sandie Gusscott
Senior Business Manager, Arts & Education
UniServices

Postal address

c/o The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142
New Zealand

Street address

Level 10, UniServices House
70 Symonds Street, Auckland
New Zealand

T +64 9 373 7522 ext 89469

E s.gusscott@auckland.ac.nz

www.uniservices.co.nz

 **niServices**

Auckland UniServices Limited

 **THE UNIVERSITY
OF AUCKLAND**
NEW ZEALAND
Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau

The challenges

- Determine whether leadership practice has a positive impact on student achievement and well-being
- If so, identify the elements or characteristics of those practices that lead to improved student achievement
- Identify the knowledge, skills and dispositions that leaders need to engage confidently in the identified practices

Delivery

Through Best Evidence Synthesis:

- Locate available research
- Analyse the quantitative findings to identify relative impact of various types of leadership
- Use qualitative findings to enrich and explain the quantitative results
- Identify the knowledge, skills and dispositions required to engage confidently in the identified leadership practices
- Engage with practitioners and policy makers throughout the synthesis process

Benefits

- Confirm the importance of school leadership
- Identify the relative importance of different types of leadership for making an impact on student outcomes
- General leadership and management skills do not deliver the expected impact on student outcomes
- Clear identification of gaps and limitations in the research