

MEDIA RELEASE

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Turning around troubled schools: it can be done

Some of Australia's most troubled schools are turning around their performance to achieve remarkable results and serve as a model for low-performing schools across the country, a new Grattan Institute report has found.

Turning around schools: it can be done examines two secondary and two primary schools to show that all of them have succeeded by following the same five steps.

They are: strong leadership that raises expectations, effective teaching with teachers learning from each other, development and measurement of student learning, a positive school culture, and engagement of parents and the local community.

"People think turning around a school only happens with superhuman leaders and teachers – it doesn't," says Grattan Institute School Education Program Director Ben Jensen.

"Many of these schools have inspirational figures but the lesson of both Australia and overseas is that any school that rigorously follows these five steps can succeed."

Dr Jensen stressed that governments had a key role in supporting schools to make behavioural and cultural change, but they had to do more than simply focus on the five steps.

"Governments need to find a way to commit all parties – government, the education sector and schools – to lasting change" Dr Jensen said.

Governments and schools must develop the skills for change in the five steps for school turnaround, and then reinforce them with comprehensive evaluation and accountability mechanisms.

But Dr Jensen said these mechanisms had to focus on achieving change in the five steps, not just on test scores.

"If school turnaround is done well, it will make huge dent in inequality and enrich the lives of the students who need it most," he said.

The four schools examined in the report are Ellenbrook Primary School in Perth, Ravenswood Heights Primary School in Launceston, Holroyd High School in Sydney and Sunshine College in Melbourne.

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