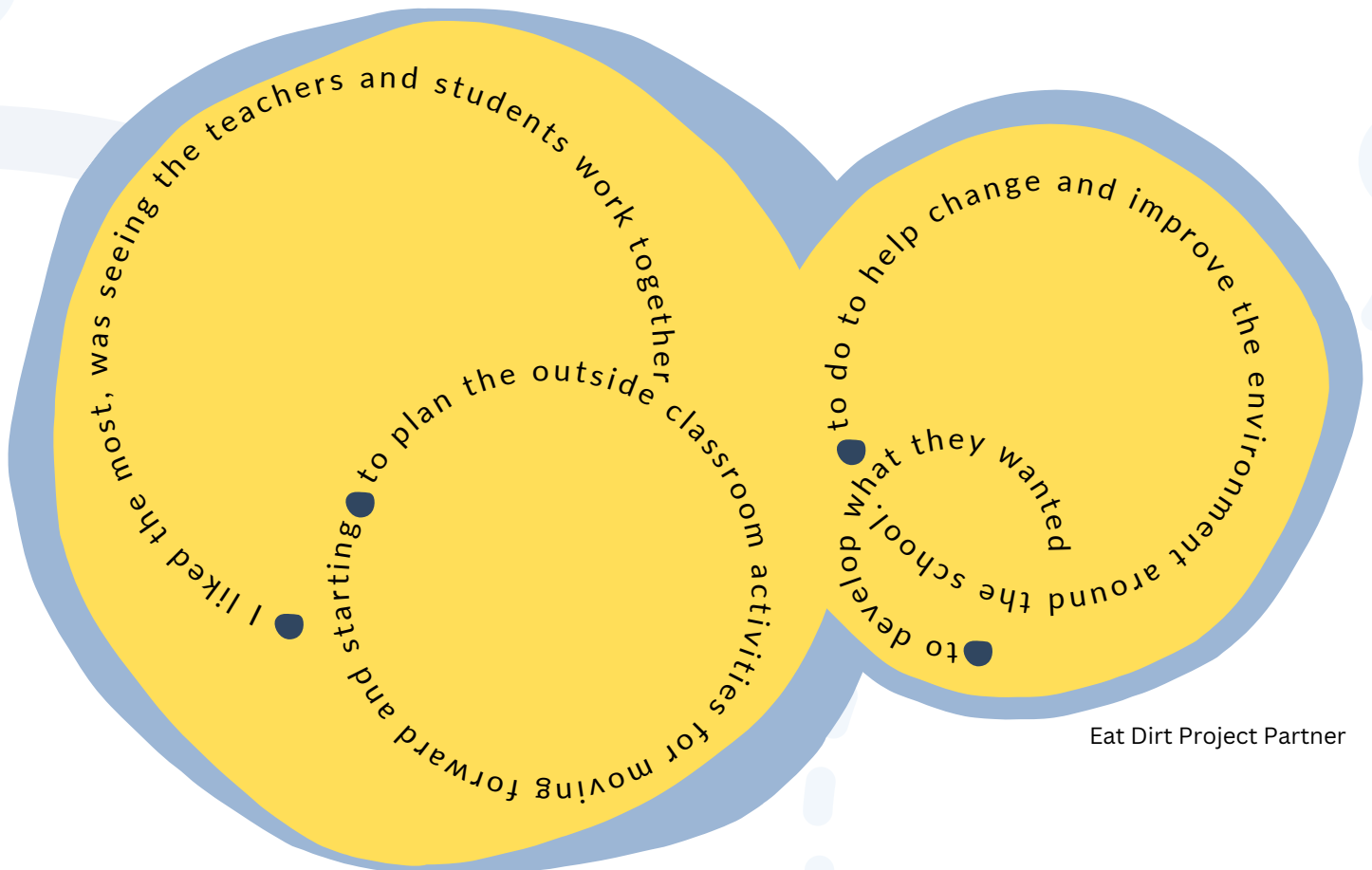


## INTRODUCTION

The concept for the Eat Dirt Program emerged partly from contemplation on pursuing the priorities outlined in the Gonski Report (2011). This review recommends supporting continuous innovation in schools and the creation of classrooms that improve learning outcomes. As stated in the Productivity Commission Report (2022), academic achievement is not the sole indicator of success in education, but it is only one aspect. Instead, the aim is to empower every student with the skills to thrive in a dynamic world. The involvement of parents, carers and family members plays a crucial role in a student's educational success. When these stakeholders actively participate in the school community, they contribute to creating a nurturing and supportive environment that positively impacts student wellbeing.

The report also emphasised that implementing school-community engagement initiatives that are tailored to meet specific student needs can be an effective approach to enhancing the applicability of learning and fostering personal growth and student learning progress. Collaborations between schools and industries, mentoring programs, volunteering opportunities, and participation in extra-curricular activities are valuable forms of engagement that can contribute to these goals.

The Report also pointed out, that there is compelling evidence that demonstrates the positive impact of parent and community engagement on children's learning. Finding 1 emphasised attaining high-quality education in Australian schools necessitates emphasizing learning growth and achievement for all students, accompanied by policies that facilitate an adaptable, innovative, and consistently advancing education system.



Eat Dirt Project Partner

According to the Department of Education and Training (2017) to improve the quality of schools in Australia it is recommended, that more focus is needed to support students to:



Demonstrate creative and complex thinking and problem-solving skills by analysing and producing viable solutions to problems with no known or single right answer.



Understand critical scientific concepts, engage in scientific reasoning, and apply the processes of scientific inquiry to understand the world and explore possible solutions to global problems.



Have the experience of achieving expertise by researching, understanding, and developing new knowledge about a world culture or an internationally relevant issue.



Learn how to manage their own learning by identifying options, evaluating opportunities, and organising educational experiences that will enable them to work and live in a global society.



Understand how the world's people and institutions are interconnected.



Understand how international economic, political, technological, environmental, and social systems operate interdependently across nations and regions.



The facilitated interactive educational activities in this teaching program give the students a solid grounding in critical thinking, teamwork and personalised learning incorporating the above listed aims of school education. The teaching plan revolves around the following key concepts:

Communication and inter-personal skills	Coping and self management skills	Skills for managing feelings	Skills for managing stress
<p><b>Inter-personal communication skills:</b> verbal/non-verbal communication, active listening; expressing feelings (giving feedback without blaming)</p>	<p>Skills for increasing internal locus of control</p>	<p>Anger management</p>	<p>Time management</p>
<p><b>Negotiation/refusal skills:</b> negotiation and conflict management; assertiveness skills; refusal skills</p>	<p>Self-esteem/confidence-building skills</p>	<p>Dealing with grief and anxiety</p>	<p>Positive thinking</p>
<p><b>Empathy:</b> ability to listen and understand another's needs and circumstances and express that understanding</p>	<p>Self-awareness skills, including awareness of rights, influences, values, attitudes, strengths and weaknesses</p>	<p>Coping skills for dealing with loss, abuse and trauma</p>	<p>Relaxation techniques (Gillespie, 2002)</p>
<p><b>Co-operation and teamwork:</b> expressing respect for others' contributions and different styles; assessing one's own abilities and contributing to the group</p>			
<p><b>Advocacy skills</b></p>			

LESS  
STRESSFUL  
THAN  
USUAL SCHOOL

Bellingen High Eat Dirt Student

Furthermore, Eat Dirt Phase 2 is making sure that the following aspects as identified in the key literature are incorporated into the program.

- Critically assess issues of social justice and ethical responsibility and take action to challenge discrimination and inequality
- Critically examine ways in which different levels of identity interact and live peacefully with different social groups
- Critically assess connectedness between different groups, communities and countries
- Develop and apply values, attitudes and skills to manage and engage with diverse groups and perspectives
- Propose action for and become agents of positive change
- Different points of view, subjectivity, evidence and bias
- Factors influencing viewpoints (gender, age, religion, ethnicity, culture, socio-economic and geographical context, ideologies and belief systems or other circumstances)
- How the individual relates to the community (historically, geographically and economically)
- How we are connected to the wider world beyond our immediate community and through different modalities (media, travel, music, sports, culture)
- Empathy, solidarity, conflict management and resolution, preventing violence, including gender-based violence, and bullying
- Negotiation, mediation, reconciliation, win-win solutions
- Regulating and managing strong emotions (positive and negative)
- Resisting negative peer pressure
- Commitment to the promotion and protection of personal and collective well-being
- Recognising and respecting diversity
- Analysing factors that can strengthen or limit civic engagement (economic, political and social dynamics and barriers to representation and participation of specific groups such as women, ethnic and religious minorities, disabled people, youth)

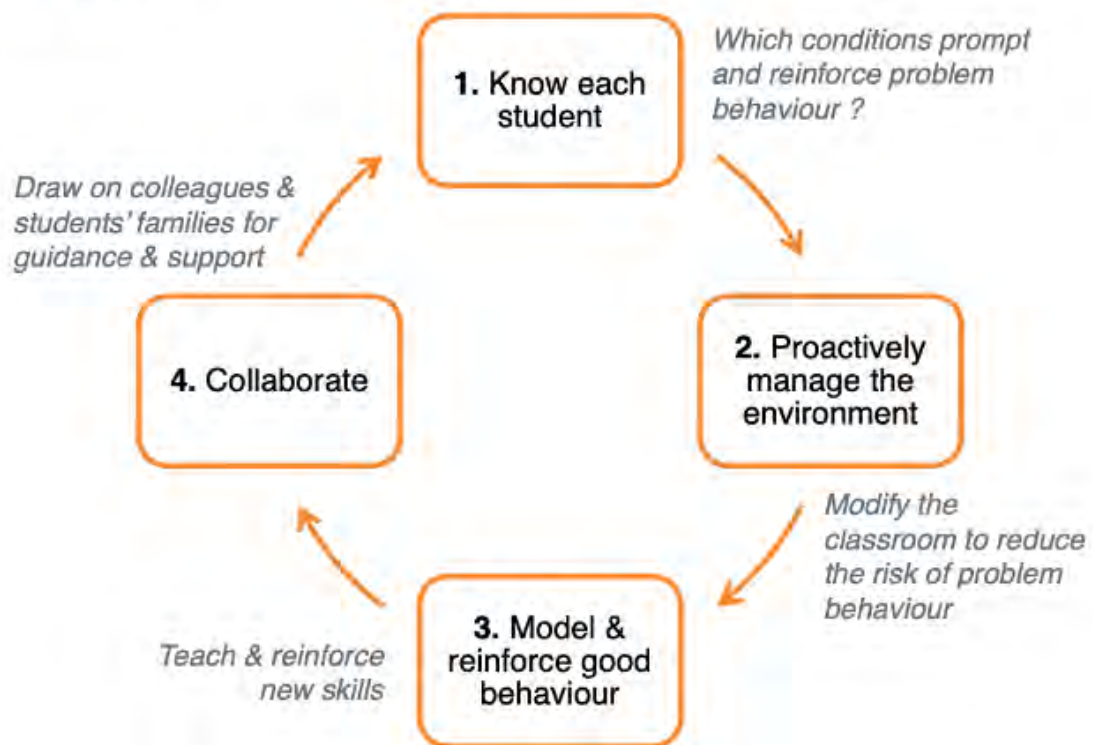
According to the Department of Education and Training (2017) social and emotional skills have a major role in shaping young people's ability to:

- Identify underlying beliefs in discussions and formal reasoning and differentiate between various types of reasoning.
- Clearly define and analyse problems accurately.
- Cultivate personal creativity in various areas of learning.
- Evaluate specific situations recognising values.
- Reflect about the fundamental principles of customs, values, virtues, and societal norms.
- Be ready to act in alignment with personally chosen values and the convictions of one's affiliations.

In recognition of this, the Eat Dirt Program places central focus on these skills.



**Figure 4.1: The process for learning how to use evidence-based techniques**



Source: Adapted from Epstein et al. (2008).

A research study of eleven improving remote schools emphasises the importance of school-community partnerships for inclusive education making learning content engaging, accessible and culturally responsive (Halsey, 2017). Most of these themes have been incorporated into the areas addressed by the Literature Review which was conducted as part of the evaluation process. Evidence also shows how good quality schooling should provide students the opportunity to:

- Investigate the world beyond their immediate environment, framing significant problems and conducting well-crafted and age-appropriate research.
- Recognise perspectives, others' and their own, articulating and explaining such perspectives thoughtfully and respectfully.
- Communicate ideas effectively with diverse audiences, bridging geographic, linguistic, ideological, and cultural barriers.
- Take action to improve conditions, viewing themselves as players in the world and participating reflectively.

**ENJOYED  
EVERYTHING**

**FREE, CALM, COMFORT**

I liked being outside the classroom

Bellingen High Eat Dirt Students

The following table shows the interconnectedness of interdisciplinary learning



### Educating for Global Competence: Preparing Our Youth to Engage the World

Successful education systems recognise the importance of a well-rounded education that focuses on the holistic development of the child (Deloitte, 2017). Research confirms that the evaluation of education quality should not rely solely on literacy and numeracy test scores. Effective education systems prioritise the holistic development of students, wellbeing, and inclusion as crucial components of the curriculum. The review identified further factors in the research literature, suggesting a more student-centred design of education needs to be based on evaluating educational outcomes with an increased focus on:

- **Whole-Child Development:** Education should not only focus on academic achievement but also on nurturing the physical, social, emotional, and creative aspects of a child. A well-rounded education recognises that each child is unique and has diverse talents and interests.

- **Equity and Inclusion:** Successful education systems aim to provide equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students, regardless of their background or abilities. By offering more innovative educational approaches schools can cater to different learning styles and abilities, promoting inclusivity and equal access to education, especially for First Nations students.
- **Wellbeing:** Education is not just about acquiring knowledge; it is also about promoting the wellbeing of students. By including more non-academic activities in the curriculum, education systems can foster the development of well-rounded individuals.
- **Critical Thinking and Creativity:** It is crucial to foster critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. This is achieved by encouraging students to think outside the box, express their ideas and emotions, and develop their imagination. These skills are essential for success in a rapidly changing world that demands innovation and adaptability.
- **Cultural and Personal Enrichment:** Including multicultural perspectives and First Nations education play a vital role in cultural enrichment and personal growth. They provide opportunities for students to explore their cultural heritage, express their identity, and develop an appreciation for diversity.

Embedding all the above core principles is essential to prepare our students for the future.

Overall, the research shows that successful education systems recognise that education is a human-centered endeavour that requires collaboration, trust, and collegial responsibility (Department of Education and Training, 2017). By fostering these principles, schools can create supportive environments that promote effective teaching, positive student outcomes, and the overall wellbeing of the education community.

- **Holistic Development:** Education is not solely about achieving high test scores or measurable outcomes. It aims to foster the holistic development of students, nurturing their intellectual, social, emotional, and physical wellbeing. Collaboration and trust among educators can create a supportive environment that prioritises the overall growth and well-rounded development of students.
- **Shared Learning:** Education is a collective endeavour that involves both teachers and students. Collaboration among students allows for the sharing of knowledge, experience, and best practices. When students work together, they can learn from one another, engage in professional development, and continuously improve their learning.
- **Student-Centred Approach:** Education should focus on meeting the needs of individual students and promoting their learning and growth. A collaborative approach allows schools to better understand and address the diverse needs of students. When community, educators and families work together, they can design differentiated instruction, share strategies for student support, and create inclusive learning environments.



- Positive School Climate: Collaboration and trust contribute to creating a positive school climate where students feel safe, supported, and motivated to learn. When students collaborate and work together, they can establish a sense of community within schools, which positively impacts their engagement, behaviour, and overall wellbeing.
- Professional Autonomy: Teachers are professionals who require autonomy and trust in their work. They need the freedom to make instructional decisions based on their expertise and the needs of their students. A collaborative and trust-based approach empowers teachers, allowing them to take ownership of their teaching and promote innovation.



*I learned that  
life can get better*

Bellingham High Eat Dirt Student



# Gonski Report Findings and Recommendations



Deliver **at least one year's growth in learning for every student every year**



Equip every student to be a **creative, connected and engaged learner** in a rapidly changing world



Cultivate an **adaptive, innovative and continuously improving** education system

... and made recommendations across five areas to address them

<p><b>1</b>  <b>Laying the foundations for learning</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote high-quality early learning and seamless transitions into school</li> <li>• Engage parents and carers as partners in their children's learning throughout school and develop tools and resources to support this</li> <li>• Ensure all students have the opportunity within schools to be partners in their own learning</li> </ul>
<p><b>2</b>  <b>Equipping every student to grow and succeed in a changing world</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce new reporting with a focus on learning attainment and learning gain</li> <li>• Revise the structure of the Australian Curriculum to present the learning areas and general capabilities as learning progressions</li> <li>• Prioritise the acquisition of foundation skills in literacy and numeracy in curriculum delivery during the early years</li> <li>• Give more prominence to the acquisition of the general capabilities e.g. critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability</li> <li>• Strengthen community engagement to enrich learning</li> <li>• Review senior secondary schooling to equip students with skills for the future</li> </ul>
<p><b>3</b>  <b>Creating, supporting and valuing a profession of expert educators</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create the conditions and culture to enable and encourage more professional collaboration, observation, feedback and mentoring amongst teachers</li> <li>• Develop an online and on demand student learning assessment tool for teachers for the purposes of formative assessment and tailored teaching</li> <li>• Provide teachers with high-quality professional learning</li> <li>• Develop a comprehensive national teacher workforce strategy</li> <li>• Implement effective induction practices for early career teachers</li> <li>• Create meaningful career pathways which value and utilise teaching expertise and keep excellent teachers teaching</li> </ul>
<p><b>4</b>  <b>Empowering and supporting school leaders</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and revise the Australian Professional Standard for Principals to prioritise leadership of learning and include accountability for individual student learning growth</li> <li>• Ensure principals have the autonomy required to lead their school on the improvement journey most relevant to their starting point</li> <li>• Create and implement a structured career pathway for school leaders</li> <li>• Provide school leaders with high-quality professional learning</li> </ul>
<p><b>5</b>  <b>Raising and achieving aspirations through innovation and continuous improvement</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance school and system internal self-review and external quality assurance processes for the purposes of monitoring and reviewing student learning gain</li> <li>• Accelerate the introduction of a Unique Student Identifier</li> <li>• Establish an independent institution to coordinate, source and generate the development of a national research and evidence base that can be easily accessed and implemented to improve student outcomes</li> </ul>

## Recommendations

1

Embed a focus on individual student achievement through continuous learning progress in the policies and practices of all school systems, with the expectation that each student should achieve each year of schooling.

2

Develop and disseminate evidence-based tools and resources to assist early childhood education providers, primary, and secondary schools to implement best practice approaches to supporting parents and carers to engage in their children's learning throughout their education.

3

Ensure all students have the opportunity within schools to be partners in their own learning.

4

Introduce new reporting arrangements with a focus on both learning attainment and learning gain, to provide meaningful information to students and their parents and carers about individual achievement and learning growth.

5

Revise the structure of the Australian Curriculum progressively over the next five years to present the learning areas and general capabilities as learning progressions.

6

Prioritise the implementation of learning progressions for literacy and numeracy in curriculum delivery during the early years of schooling to ensure the core foundations for learning are developed by all children by the age of eight.

7

Strengthen the development of the general capabilities, and raise their status within curriculum delivery, by using learning progressions to support clear and structured approaches to their teaching, assessment, reporting and integration with learning areas.

8

Strengthen school-community engagement to enrich student learning through the establishment of mechanisms to facilitate quality partnerships, including engagement in mentoring, volunteering and extra-curricular activities, between schools, employers, members of the community, community organisations and tertiary institutions.

9

Establish a comprehensive, national and independent inquiry to investigate and review the objectives, curriculum, assessment provisions and delivery structures for senior secondary schooling, to report within 12 months.

10

Accelerate the development of contemporary pedagogy through the use of collaboration, mentoring, observation and feedback, including from colleagues and students, by incorporating these practices into the core role of teachers and creating the conditions to enable teachers to engage in them.

## Recommendations

11

Develop a new online and on demand student learning assessment tool based on the Australian Curriculum learning progressions.

12

Create the conditions necessary to enable teachers to effectively engage and benefit from professional learning in the use of the Australian Curriculum learning progressions, the new online formative assessment tool and tailored teaching practices to maximise student learning growth.

13

Create a continuously improving profession through the provision of high-quality professional learning for teachers; appropriate to their career stage, development needs and the changes rapidly occurring in society.

14

Develop a comprehensive national teacher workforce strategy to better match supply with workforce demands, including skill and capability requirements.

15

Create the conditions to enable teachers to engage in effective induction practices aligned with the nationally endorsed Graduate to Proficient: Australian guidelines for teacher induction and monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the practices implemented by schools.

16

Create and provide opportunities for implementation of structured career pathways for teachers with clearly defined roles and development streams that allow for accelerated progression and provide the opportunity for remuneration, recognition and allocation of responsibilities based on expertise.

17

Review and revise the Australian Professional Standard for Principals to prioritise leadership of learning and make maximising the learning growth of every student every year the key focus.

18

Ensure principals have the professional autonomy and accountability required to lead their school on the improvement journey most relevant to their starting point.

19

Create and provide opportunities to implement a structured career pathway for school leaders which articulates clearly defined roles and development streams for middle leaders through to experienced principals and provides the opportunity for remuneration, recognition and allocation of responsibilities appropriate to the role.

20

Provide school leaders with access to a variety of professional learning opportunities appropriate to their career stage and development needs and recognise and harness the skills and experience of high-performing principals by enabling them to share their expertise across schools and throughout the system.

## Recommendations

21

Enhance school and system internal self-review and external quality assurance processes, for the purposes of monitoring and reviewing student learning gain and achievement.

22

Accelerate the introduction of a national Unique Student Identifier for all students to be used throughout schooling.

22

Establish an independent institution to coordinate the strategic development of a national research and evidence base through the sourcing and generating of research, and the synthesising and promotion of educational evidence that can be easily accessed and implemented to improve student outcomes.





Time spent at beach learning  
we class exploring  
for the ocean &  
environment

school based traineeships.  
opportunity to try  
potential career paths.

FOOD

Look at kids  
passion/hobbies and  
how they can use these  
skills.

FOOD

FOOD

## Findings

### Finding 1

Achieving educational excellence in Australian schools will require a focus on achievement through learning growth for all students, complemented by policies which support an adaptive, innovative and continuously improving education system.

### Finding 2

Early childhood education makes a significant contribution to school outcomes. The transition between preschool and school education should be seamless. Ongoing reforms that lay the foundations in the early years for future learning and close the learning differential between advantaged and disadvantaged students, are essential to ensure all children have the best start in life.

### Finding 3

There is strong and developing evidence of the benefit of parent engagement on children's learning. This will be further enhanced through the work currently underway to develop an evidence-informed definition of parent engagement, which will allow for a core set of agreed measures aligned to the definition to be established and used to drive improvements in policies and practice.

### Finding 4

Teaching curriculum based on year or age levels rather than levels of progress leaves some students behind and fails to extend others, limiting the opportunity to maximise learning growth for all students.

### Finding 5

Reporting against year-level achievement standards hides both progress and attainment for some students and does not amount to a diagnostic assessment of real learning needs which—if met—would lead to growth in learning.

### Finding 6

Fit for purpose school-community engagement undertaken to respond to identified student needs is an effective way to improve the relevance of learning, and to support personal development and student learning growth. School-industry collaboration, mentoring, volunteering and extra-curricular activities are effective forms of engagement to help achieve this.

### Finding 7

There is compelling evidence, in Australian schools and internationally, that tailored teaching based on ongoing formative assessment and feedback are the key to enabling students to progress to higher levels of achievement.

### Finding 8

Research and experience internationally confirms that ongoing professional development for teachers—some mandated by the school or system, and some through participation in professional learning communities—is an essential part of a teacher's workload in high-performing education systems.

### Finding 9

To continue to grow student outcomes, we need to attract and retain the best and most effective teachers in the profession. Teaching must become a high-status profession of expert educators.

### Finding 10

There has been significant national progress made towards achievement of the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group reforms to improve the quality of Australian initial teacher education. It will be important, however, to maintain an unrelenting focus on the rigour of their implementation to achieve the goal of raising the quality of our initial teacher preparation and improving the classroom readiness of graduate teachers.



### **Finding 11**

Implementation of effective induction practices and appropriate conditions are critical to support the transition from initial teacher education into the profession for early career teachers and play an important role in promoting retention and professional growth.

### **Finding 12**

Certification at the Highly Accomplished and Lead levels of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers recognises and promotes the development of collaborative learning professionals who strive to continually reflect upon and improve their practice and that of their colleagues. Such acknowledgement can play a key role in keeping excellent teachers working with students and helping to improve colleagues' pedagogical practices.

### **Finding 13**

Aspiring school principals require clear pathways leading to the role, and comprehensive training and preparation to a quality standard before their appointment.

### **Finding 14**

To have an impact, strategies for school leadership development need to be aligned to the nationally endorsed *Australian guidelines for school leadership development* with implementation approaches monitored and evaluated for their effectiveness.

### **Finding 15**

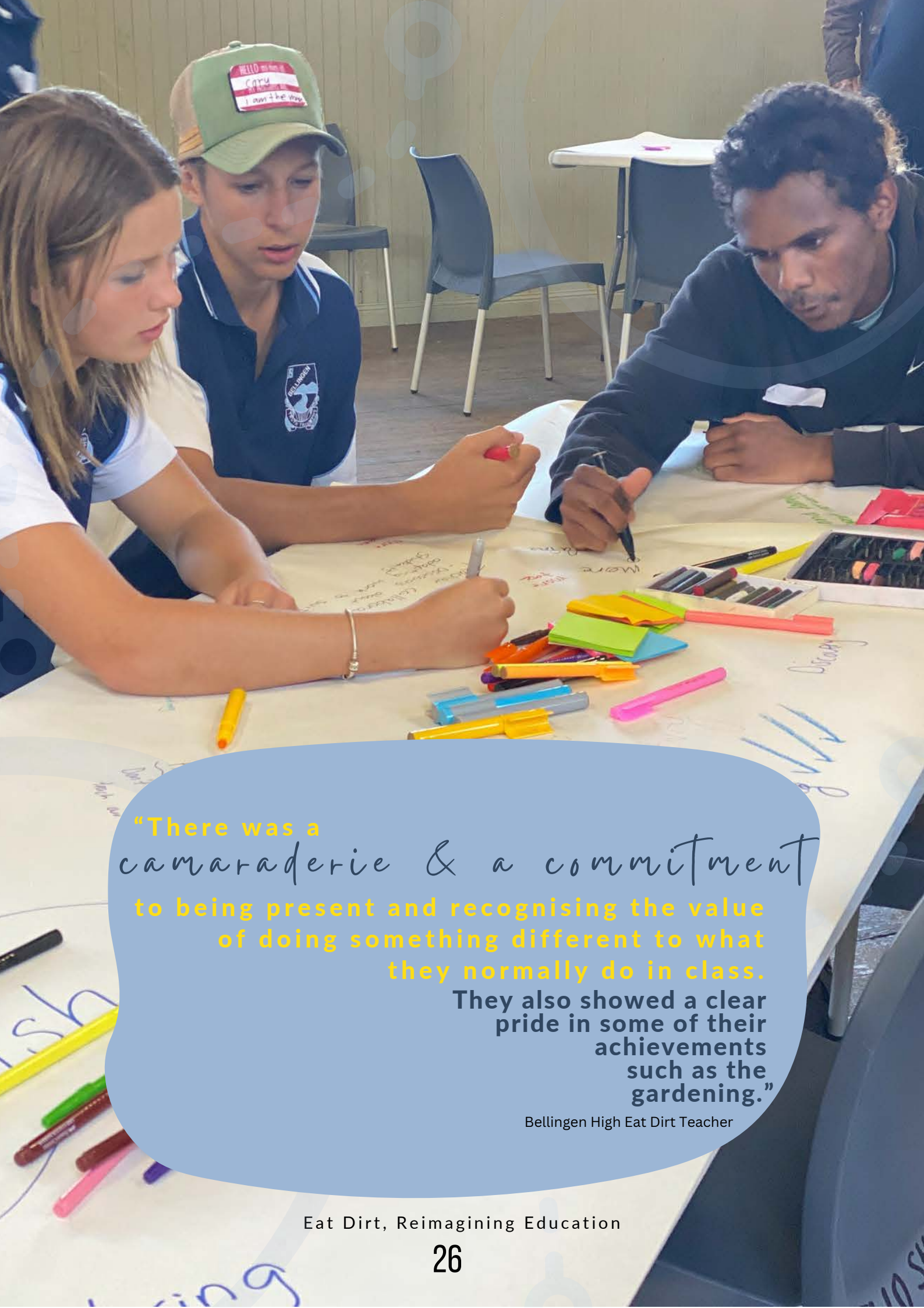
School leaders are called upon to play a variety of roles, including leaders of learning, business administrators, and culture setters. Participation in ongoing quality professional learning is essential to help school leaders to continue to develop across each of these dimensions, with a particular focus on their role as leaders of learning.

### **Finding 16**

As Australian schools transition to diagnostic assessment and differentiated teaching within the framework of learning progressions, there will be increasing opportunities for, and benefits to be gained from, external quality review processes at school and system level. Continuous improvement in Australian education will be supported by the variety of quality assurance processes increasingly utilised by Australian school systems and schools.

### **Finding 17**

To sustain continuous improvement, Australian schools need access to valid and reliable evidence of effective teaching practice; independent and rigorous evaluations of commercial and other teaching and educational interventions; and the most recent findings on educational innovation and research—in an accessible format that can be readily translated into classroom use.



**"There was a camaraderie & a commitment to being present and recognising the value of doing something different to what they normally do in class.**

**They also showed a clear pride in some of their achievements such as the gardening."**

Bellingham High Eat Dirt Teacher