



CHAPTER 6

INTELLIGENT ACCOUNTABILITY

The myth that external accountability results in sustained school reform

The global interest in school reform has accelerated in recent years partially as a consequence of a system-level desire in many countries to move up the PISA league tables. In many cases this has resulted in a common curriculum of policy options. Some commentators have reacted positively to such a policy consensus and have posited an international process of ‘mutual learning’ resulting in the adoption of a similar range of policy options. I am not so sanguine and believe it is more a case of what Halpin and Troyna (1995) have called ‘policy borrowing’ largely for symbolic purposes. ‘Faddism’—the adoption of any current vogue, irrespective of its fit to a particular problem or challenge, just to be seen to be doing something—is a well-documented response to the pressure for external change at the school level (Slavin & Madden 1999). It seems to me that ‘policy borrowing’ is the same phenomenon raised to a system level on an international scale.

One of the central features of policy frameworks within education systems worldwide is the introduction of structures and processes for external accountability. Think, for example, of *No child left behind* in

the USA, the 'My School' website in Australia and league tables, national testing and school inspection in England. It is important to recognise, however, that the use of large-scale educational assessment for external accountability purposes is not a new concept, as Peter Hill (2010, p. 416) describes: 'The practice of basing selection for the bureaucracy on results achieved in national examinations or tests can be traced back to the Han dynasty (206BC–220AD).' Although large-scale testing may well be efficient in stratifying a society, one could ask whether it has a role to play in decreasing inequity and enabling all to reach their potential. Furthermore, it's only recently, as a result of the effective schools movement, that schools have begun to be held to account for student performance. There is also a further sleight of hand at work here, illustrated in the quote from Hill (2010, p. 417) below:

The shift in logic from the notion that it is possible to create schools that systematically adopt mechanisms for bringing about ongoing improvements in student learning to the notion of holding schools and school systems directly accountable for the progress of their students as measured by scores on tests was a small one, and one that resonated well with increasingly frustrated and anxious voters who were losing confidence in the capacity of public school systems to deliver a quality education.

The myth to be exploded here is that the introduction of an external accountability policy will necessarily have a positive and sustained impact on student achievement scores. As with all the other myths there is a grain of truth in the proposition, but it is not a panacea. It is certainly true that such an approach is efficient in selecting students for elite positions on the basis of competitive examinations. It is also true that the use of external accountability measures in seriously underperforming and dysfunctional schools or education systems will administer a short, sharp, shock—either shaking them out of complacency, or directing

their attention to a limited number of measurable goals. The problem is that such top-down strategies have a very limited half-life. Once the school or system has begun to improve and to take ownership of its own development, then the continuing pressure for external accountability becomes oppressive, alienating and counter-productive. The 'levelling off' of literacy achievement in English primary schools in the early 2000s is an example of this phenomenon. Although external accountability may be a useful strategy at the early stages of an improvement process, its continued use will reduce both performance and motivation. Not only this, but such an approach gives little guidance as to how to create more productive, instructional and curriculum pathways for students. This in essence is the myth.

This is not to argue that the concept of accountability in education is redundant; far from it. The point is that as a school or system continues to improve, there must be a concomitant shift away from external to internal forms of accountability, which help build more effective instructional opportunities for students and serve to decrease the variation between them, by both raising the bar and closing the gap. The relationship between external and internal forms of accountability needs to reflect that implied by the system reform diagram presented in Figure 1.3 at the end of Chapter One. In the move from prescription to professionalism, any accountability framework needs to be able not only to fulfil its original purpose, but also to build capacity and confidence, particularly in designing productive learning environments for students. There will always be a place for some form of external accountability in any system, but it will move over time from being the key driver of improvement to a function that maintains high aspirations, ensures quality and triggers intervention when necessary. The concept of 'intelligent accountability' in education was developed as a way of illustrating this progression. The term was first coined by John Dunford of the Secondary Heads Association in the UK (SHA 2003, paragraph 45, p. 9):

Intelligent accountability is a framework to ensure that schools work effectively and efficiently towards both the common good and the fullest development of their pupils. It uses a rich set of data that gives full expression to the strengths and weaknesses of the school in fulfilling the potential of pupils. It combines internal school processes with levels of external monitoring appropriate to the state of development of each individual school.

How the concept of accountability in education evolves through the phases of system development and in the process becomes increasingly intelligent is the key issue addressed in this chapter. In exploding the myth that external accountability results in sustained school reform and presenting the idea of intelligent accountability as an impactful alternative, the discussion that follows focuses on four key themes:

- a framework for intelligent accountability
- tracking student progress
- school self-evaluation and review
- school performance and formative assessment.

A framework for intelligent accountability

The debate surrounding external accountability is often a fraught one with staunch advocates on both sides. For example, Sir Michael Barber (2004, p. 10), part-architect of the English system of external accountability, claims that:

For pupils and the performance of the system the benefits have been huge. Standards of achievement have been put in the spotlight, expectations have been raised, teachers' efforts have been directed to making a difference and performance has undoubtedly improved.

Many others, however, have been highly critical of the accountability framework. Oft quoted examples are of teachers 'teaching to the test', schools increasing their 'competitiveness' in league tables through adjusting their admissions policy and adopting examinations that for whatever reason offer more passes or are deemed easier. Many would also agree that an over-emphasis on external accountability increases the degree of dependence and lack of innovation within the system (Hopkins 2007).

As argued in the introduction, the solution is not to abandon the accountability framework, but to make it more intelligent by achieving a more even balance between external and internal accountability. Most forms of accountability are externally dominated—the clarification of expected standards at various ages, the setting of targets to be met, the publication of results at school and local level and the use of inspection schemes to ensure quality. Once in place, these pillars of the external accountability framework are often difficult to dismantle. Because of the resilience of external forms of accountability, it is necessary to compensate by increasing the emphasis on internal forms of accountability as confidence and competence in the school or system increases. The most common approaches are: the use of teacher assessment; bottom-up target setting; progress measures of student performance; value-added measures of school performance; and schools publishing their own profiles of strengths, weaknesses and benchmark comparisons. It is these forms of accountability that both allow a sharper fix on the focus of personalisation and develop the professional skill of the teaching staff involved. As a consequence, when the balance between external and internal accountability becomes more even, it also becomes more intelligent (Hopkins 2007).

In drawing a picture of an intelligent accountability framework in *Every school a great school* (Hopkins 2007) I set out a comprehensive schema for balancing internal and external accountability. In doing

this I drew on my experience in England where I was partially responsible for helping that system move from one dominated by external forms of accountability, to one where there was a better balance with internal forms. I must stress that I am not advocating the English framework as an ideal, although it does serve to raise issues that are generalisable to other contexts, particularly in mapping the shift from externally dominated forms of accountability to more intelligent accountability informed by a better balance with bottom-up school reform efforts. As indicated previously, in the mid-1990s the education policy framework in England was dominated by external forms of accountability based on the 'four pillars' of tests, targets, tables and inspection. A summary of this position is seen in the 'Pre-1997' column of Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Summary of the accountability framework in England pre-1997, in 2004 and in the future (Reproduced from Hopkins 2007, p. 103)

	Pre-1997	2004	Future
Tests	External/ summative tests at KS1–3, GCSE and A-level	External (with pilots in teacher assessment)/ summative (with drive on AfL)	Synergy between formative and summative; external and internal
Targets	Top down/school- level, but no targets required at KS1 and 2	Top down at KS3 and GCSE. Bottom-up at KS1–2/improved pupil-level data	Bottom-up, school-owned/ student-level to drive individual performance
Tables	Raw data at KS2, GCSE and A level	Raw and value- added from KS2 to GCSE	Raw results and contextual value-added
Inspection	External/detailed, long notice, massive preparation	External/focused: shorter notice, significant preparation	External/focused, combined with self-evaluation

Although by 2004 a better balance had been achieved between internal and external accountability measures as indicated in the '2004' column of Table 6.1, the preferred direction of travel was towards the position indicated in the 'Future' column as described in more detail below:

- ▶ **Tests**—a mixed economy with a presumption of external testing in core subjects at key stages, but with a gradual move to teacher assessment in other cases.
- ▶ **Target setting**—with a move to bottom-up school-owned targets, informed by individual student-level data, to drive up performance.
- ▶ **Tables**—with a move to contextual value-added tables, combined with the school profile to give a clear picture of progress.
- ▶ **Inspection**—with a move to short duration inspections with minimal observation, informed by self-evaluation; small teams; and a short, sharp report with clearer recommendations for improvement (Hopkins 2007, p. 103).

One of the most contentious issues in most systems is that of testing. Interestingly, there is a marked difference in approaches between high-performing school systems. Finland, for example, eschews any form of testing, whereas it is dominant in South Korea and Singapore. Context and cultural specificity obviously apply here and in the latter two cases testing has been an important strategy in securing rapid improvement from a relatively low baseline. My own preference would be for a mixed economy with the balance of testing shifting from internal to external as students move through school stages. Looked at from the perspective of the previous two chapters, there are strong arguments for moderated teacher assessment being the default approach to assessment. If it is done properly, it can be very reliable and links well to personalised learning, supports teacher

professionalism and through external moderation encourages the transfer of curriculum innovation between schools. As the effectiveness and reliability of teacher assessment and school self-evaluation increases, capacity is built into the system, and the need for 'high stakes' testing can be confined to key points of transition in a narrower range of subjects. This leaves the opportunity open for schools to become increasingly responsible for their own assessment through a 'chartered examiner' approach, with a national or local perspective being given through randomised sampling (Hopkins 2007).

The way in which the accountability system has evolved to achieve a better balance between internal and external accountability is seen in the diagram below which includes reference to standards as well as performance management. It represents a reasonable, if not ideal, balance between internal and external assessment and provides a platform for building capacity and professional accountability towards the next phase of reform (Hopkins 2007).

Table 6.2 A framework for building intelligent accountability

	Internal	External
Test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Assessment for learning using a range of tools at all stages ▶ Teacher assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ External tests at regular (two yearly) intervals together with randomised national testing ▶ Test results published
Targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Targets for every child—part of the learning culture ▶ Self-evaluation identifies priority areas for targets and action ▶ Use pupil performance data to inform target levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Schools must set targets at all stages ▶ High quality data means LA or region can check targets are stretching ▶ Floor targets bite on low performers



Table 6.2 (continued)

	Internal	External
Tables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ VA and CVA help establish strengths/weaknesses relative to peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Raw at key stages ▸ VA at key transition points
Inspection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Rigorous self-evaluation throughout school required to demonstrate sound management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Every 3 years at no notice ▸ More frequent in weak schools
Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Benchmarks used as a framework in which to consider students' individual learning paths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ National standards set at range of ages and all students assessed against them
Performance management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ To be based on portfolios emerging from teachers' involvement in triads related to specifications of teaching and learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ 360 degree assessment ▸ Diagnostics all linked to professional development

Any system of accountability at the system level will not be easy to achieve and will inevitably be politically contentious. This will always be the case. The problem is that changes to the accountability framework are usually achieved piecemeal, rather than as part of a strategic and purposeful rebalancing. Because of this, opponents of accountability will perceive the framework as continuously open to change through attrition. This is inevitably destabilising and no way to build a platform for schools utilising an inside-out way of working to achieve successful school reform. It is therefore important to make clear that the move towards intelligent accountability is part of an explicit strategy in pursuit of building capacity within the system to ensure that the personalisation of learning and the professionalisation of teaching lead to success for every school in terms of student achievement. The following two sections of this chapter look in more

detail at tracking student progress and school self-evaluation as two of the most prominent strategies for achieving this.

Tracking student progress

Central to the concept of intelligent accountability is the shift from the use of data for the purposes of holding schools to account to using school data directly to monitor the progress and drive the performance of students. According to PISA (OECD 2010, p. 46):

Although the use of standardised tests tends to be unrelated to school performance, it does relate to levels of equity within school systems. School systems that have high proportions of students in schools that use standardised tests tend to show a lower impact of socio-economic background on learning outcomes within schools.

It is clearly implied by this analysis that those schools that use data to monitor the progress of their students significantly reduce the variation in student achievement and performance within the school. This is further reinforced by research findings (NCSL 2006a) from the study of reducing within-school variation in pupil outcomes in England, where *Tracking for success* (DfES 2005a) and the *Making good progress* initiative (DfES 2006) have further illustrated the importance of tracking student performance, both for the individual student and for the cohort as a whole. As Peter Matthews (Ofsted 2009b, pp. 18–19) points out in evaluating the practice of 20 outstanding primary schools that have excelled against the odds:

An undoubted feature of all the schools' success is the rigour of their assessment. This starts in the Early Years Foundation Stage classes where continual observation and assessment of individual children are key activities ... With older children, assessment is an

integral part of teaching and learning ... In Key Stage 2, the schools make much use of tests to supplement and benchmark teacher assessments ... This allows progress to be tracked ... and challenging targets to be set.

Although some schools still analyse their student level data using their own, often idiosyncratic, methods, many schools are finding that national or regional schemes serve their purposes best. Among the best of current approaches to tracking student progress are those outlined in the following sections.

Student tracking in the Northern Metropolitan Region, Australia

The implementation of student tracking systems in the region was a two-stage process. The first stage, led by Professor Patrick Griffin from the University of Melbourne, focused not just on testing of students, but also on the nature and purpose of Professional Learning Teams (PLTs). The PLTs evaluated student performance and growth and used tests to provide feedback for teachers to adjust their teaching.

Professor Griffin emphasised that PLTs were about teachers challenging each other on the impact of their teaching on student performance and that judgements on performance can only be made on the basis of what students say, make, do and write. In terms of testing, Professor Griffin emphasised three key points:

1. The tests are fair.
2. In heterogeneous groups of students there will be three or four 'zones of proximal development' and teachers should ensure that their teaching meets the needs of those groups.
3. Teachers should review progress of students on a regular basis to ensure teaching is targeted appropriately and also to adjust student groupings.

While Professor Griffin's work had, and continues to have, a profound impact on teacher culture, it was, by the nature of its reliance on the University of Melbourne, not readily accessible by all teachers in the region. So, in 2008, all schools were provided with a licence for Philip Holmes-Smith's 'Student Performance Analyser' (SPA), which is now widely used in schools across Melbourne's north. SPA can be used by all teachers and allows teachers to manage and analyse data from a range of sources including NAPLAN (National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy), ACER (Australian Council for Educational Research) tests, online adaptive tests and other data such as teacher judgements.

The data is analysed in four different ways:

1. SPA instantly identifies students who are performing one or more years below expected level, at expected level or one or more years above expected level.
2. SPA shows trends over time.
3. SPA shows the growth from one test period to the next.
4. SPA provides item analysis for individual test items (SREAMS 2011).

Teachers in professional learning teams now regularly review the progress of various student groups and adjust both their teaching and the composition of student groupings on the basis of data from SPA.

Using Fischer Family Trust data to track student performance in the UK

The Fischer Family Trust (FFT) data analysis project began in 2000. Following initial development work with schools in Islington, Local Authorities (LAs) in England were invited to join the project in 2001. Initially, 45 LAs joined and this grew to all LAs (150+) by 2004. In parallel, work with all LAs in Wales was undertaken from 2002 onwards.

The overall aims of the project are to support the processes of self-evaluation, target setting and, consequently, school improvement through the provision of data, analyses and support. Key principles which the project aims to embody are that:

- ▶ data should provide questions not answers
- ▶ data analysis should be used by schools to promote discussion, evaluation and planning
- ▶ analyses are available for different groups of pupils, and a range of indicators, to help identify strengths or areas for development/intervention
- ▶ information about the past (previous attainment and value-added) should inform, but not determine the future (FFT 2007).

The project involves the matching and analysis of national datasets (around 650 000 students per year for each stage) covering attainment at different Key Stages (KS). Initially, this included National Curriculum assessments (both test and teacher assessment data) at KS1 (age 7), KS2 (age 11), KS3 (age 14), KS4 (age 16) and KS5 (ages 17–19). More recently, analyses using data from the Foundation Stage Profile (age 5) have been added. Analyses cover a range of levels from overall indicators to individual subjects (including the full range of subjects now taken at KS4 and KS5).

From 2003 onwards, data on attainment has been linked to details collected through the school census. This has enabled detailed analysis about the progress made by students with different characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnicity, language) and also led to the development of contextual value-added models. Rather than focusing on just one model, analyses have always provided a range of approaches—including attainment, value-added and contextual value-added. Also, a range of indicators is used. This is because no one model or output measure is appropriate to all situations and an overly simplistic

approach does not provide the information needed to support detailed self-evaluation.

The introduction of the online system 'FFT Live' in 2005 provided schools and LAs with more immediate and more flexible analyses and is now the main delivery method. FFT Live is used widely by schools and LAs across England and Wales. As the project has developed it has become increasingly clear that key issues in the effective use of data are ethos and levels of data literacy. Schools where data is used in a top-down approach with little room for discussion tend to be less successful in using the data to enhance expectations than those where the data is used and presented in a manner which encourages discussion with individual students, active participation and agreed targets. Developments in recent years have introduced new areas on FFT Live, notably:

- ▶ Student Explorer, which provides a set of tools to enable users to select students with particular characteristics, look at their 'history' and inform planning for their specific needs. This can also help to identify students who, for example, have considerably more potential than might be thought if their previous attainment alone was used.
- ▶ Analyses to enable groups of schools to compare outcomes and progress. Where this is done within an ethos of collaboration it is usually more effective than when imposed from above.
- ▶ Looking to the future, the project aims to continue to provide a wide range of analyses to support the varied needs and contexts of users. Research into patterns and trends within the data will continue to inform such developments.

These approaches to tracking student progress have the advantage of both emphasising student progress as well as giving whole-school data to allow for comparisons. When choosing an approach, schools must

not only be intelligent consumers, but be clear about how they contribute to a whole-school approach to intelligent accountability as seen in the following sections.

School self-evaluation and review

Before discussing contemporary approaches to school self-evaluation a short history lesson may be instructive. There was a marked change in the character of school improvement efforts in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which was largely the result of an increase in demands for school accountability. In the United Kingdom, for example, the reaction to the pressure for accountability took the form of a variety of local authority schemes for school self-evaluation. At this time, it was viewed as one of the few improvement strategies that could not only strengthen the capacity of the school to develop or renew itself, but also provide evidence for accountability purposes as well as a structure for managing the change process. The OECD *International School Improvement Project* (ISIP), in particular, took a leading role in conceptualising and disseminating examples of school evaluation (Bollen & Hopkins 1987; Hopkins 1987b, 1988).

Research (Hopkins 1987b) on school self-evaluation efforts suggested that schools found carrying out a full review very time consuming. It also found an apparent lack of rigour and objectivity in the evaluation processes used and, more importantly, difficulties in impacting directly on classroom practice. It was for these reasons that more comprehensive strategies for self-evaluation including development planning were advocated. In England in 1989 when the then Department of Education and Science issued its first advice, development planning was regarded as a means of helping schools manage the extensive national and centrally driven change agenda, and also enabling schools 'to organise what it is already doing and what it needs to do in a more purposeful and coherent way'

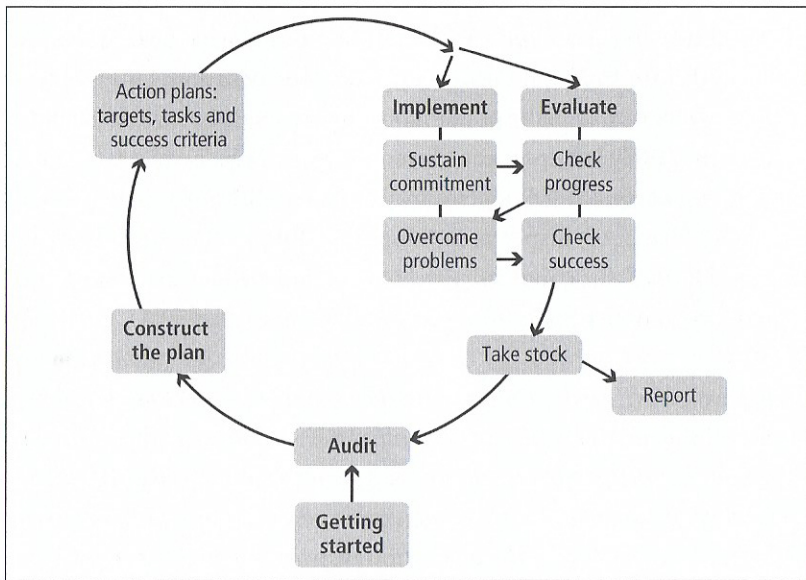


Figure 6.1 The planning process
(Reproduced from Hargreaves & Hopkins 1991, p. 66)

(Hargreaves et al. 1989, p. 4). Priorities for development are planned in detail for one year and are supported by action plans that are the working documents for teachers. The priorities for subsequent years are sketched in outline to provide the longer-term program (Hopkins 2007). An overview of the planning process is shown in Figure 6.1.

Research into school improvement during the 1990s (Hopkins et al. 1996; MacGilchrist et al. 1995; MacGilchrist, Myers & Reed 1997), as was seen in Chapter Three, showed that schools that exhibited best practice in development planning used it as a strategy to enhance directly the progress and achievement of students. The focus was on students' learning, their progress and achievement; what was needed to improve it and how this was best supported. Crucial to this shift was the closer integration of implementation and evaluation as illustrated in Figure 6.1 (Hopkins 2007).

So although school self-evaluation lost popularity during the late 1980s and early 1990s, it is now enjoying a renaissance. This seems to be due to its links to student learning where the work of John MacBeath (2006) is important, the enhancing of teachers' professional judgement, whole school improvement (Ofsted 2006b) and as we shall see, new forms of inspection (Hopkins 2007). As the Office for Standards in Education in England acknowledge in setting out inspection guidance for school self-evaluation (Ofsted 2011, p. 2):

Rigorous self-evaluation is at the heart of effective school improvement. The accuracy and clarity of the school's self-evaluation helps to inform the inspectors' initial view of the quality of leadership and management and the school's capacity to improve ... During the inspection inspectors will need to focus on the impact which the school's self-evaluation has in driving improvement and demonstrating the school's capacity to improve.

In identifying the factors that contribute to effective self-evaluation, recommendations from Ofsted's report *Best practice in self-evaluation* (2006a) stress the importance of a strong impact and outcomes focus. In reporting on research findings from schools, colleges and local authorities, the survey showed 'that good self-evaluation led to improved outcomes for children and young people' (p. 2). The report also acknowledges that although participants' institutions were at very different stages of development, all 'were revising their self-evaluation systems to cope with change' (p. 2). In light of this, there was a recognised need to ensure that self-evaluation systems and processes are closely aligned with development planning priorities and rigorously focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning (2006a, p. 2):

... self-evaluation should focus specifically on the impact provision makes on outcomes for children and young people; the views of a

wide range of stakeholders should be used to inform it. The findings from self-evaluation should inform priorities in development planning, and schools ... should identify the precise characteristics of strong and weak pedagogy to help them focus more rigorously on improving the quality of teaching and learning.

The contribution of this enhanced, more holistic and contemporary approach to school self-evaluation to intelligent accountability in England was most concretely expressed in *A new relationship with schools* (DfES 2004d). Central to this was the role of schools evaluating themselves through the 'Self-Evaluation Form' (SEF) (DfES 2004b). The SEF required schools to provide evidence on their performance, on their strengths and weakness, identify precise issues as their key priorities for improvement and plan on how they intend to improve them. These were then fed through into the 'School Improvement Plan' where schools set specific targets for each of these areas (Hopkins 2007).

A new relationship with schools (DfES 2004d, pp. 7–10) poses the following questions, shown by Ofsted (2006a) to be most frequently used by schools where evaluation was perceived to be effective:

- ▶ Does the self-evaluation identify how well our school serves its learners?
- ▶ How does our school compare with the best schools and the best comparable schools?
- ▶ Is the self-evaluation integral to our key management systems?
- ▶ Is our school's self-evaluation based on a good range of telling evidence?
- ▶ Does our self-evaluation and planning involve key people in the school and seek the views of parents, learners and external advisers and agencies?
- ▶ Does our self-evaluation lead to action to achieve the school's longer-term goals for development?

Of course, these questions are very important in self-evaluation, but in order to increase the quality of the process we have to be aware that it is a dynamic and continuous one (Ofsted 2006a; Blanchard 2002). It constantly needs revisiting, incorporating the processes of analysis, reflection, evaluation and target setting. This way it becomes more powerful and a part of the school's improvement culture.

In preparing this section, I inevitably reviewed the work that we did on school self-evaluation some 25 ago. Interestingly and happily, that advice and commentary still holds good today. In concluding this section then, I cite with minimal editing the characteristics of effective school self-evaluation taken from that work (Hopkins 1988, p. 117):

- ▶ *School self-evaluation is a systematic process, not simply reflection.*
- ▶ *Its short-term goal is to gain valid information on the progress of students and school functioning.*
- ▶ *The evaluation leads directly to action.*
- ▶ *It is a group activity that involves participants in a collegial process.*
- ▶ *Optimally the process is 'owned' by the school i.e. it exemplifies inside-out working.*
- ▶ *Its purpose is school improvement, the raising of achievement and the establishing of the 'problem-solving' school.*

School performance and formative assessment

The argument to this point goes something like this: there is dominance in current policy formulations on forms of external accountability. As previously argued, this approach has its place, particularly in giving a

short, sharp jolt to a system or school that is under-performing. As a strategy for enhancing student learning and achievement and reducing inequity in the system, however, it has serious limitations.

An alternative approach has been proposed in this chapter—through altering the balance between external and internal forms of accountability with the aim of creating those conditions conducive to enhanced levels of student learning and achievement. Strategies for tracking student progress and for school self-evaluation are critical here, as are the approaches to assessment for learning discussed previously in Chapter Four. In this section the argument is sustained by discussing some of the lessons that schools need to heed in order to ensure that the pressures for external accountability are translated into the conditions for enhancing student learning. After reviewing these lessons, examples are given of schools that have made this journey and then some guidelines for formative assessment at the school level are proposed.

Peter Hill's work is particularly helpful here. In the chapter already cited, Hill (2010, p. 420) says this: 'While large-scale assessment for accountability purposes is now widespread, much remains to be done to ensure that it is effective'. He then proposes a series of lessons to assist school and systems in achieving this goal:

- ▶ **Lesson 1**—Ensure that what you seek to measure, the use you make of the results and what you intend to achieve by using results in this manner are in alignment.
- ▶ **Lesson 2**—Build into the accountability system tests that probe students' ability to apply the knowledge and understandings they have learnt in school to solving real and challenging problems.
- ▶ **Lesson 3**—Make certain that you have a way of confirming whether gains on accountability tests reflect real improvements in learning.

- ▶ **Lesson 4**—Avoid policies and perceptions of high-stakes negative consequences for those charged with bringing about improved performance.
- ▶ **Lesson 5**—Be cautious in assuming that providing schools with detailed information on the performance of their students on accountability tests is going to be useful to teachers in improving instruction.
- ▶ **Lesson 6**—Make use of multiple indicators in judging the performance of a school, including measures that give an indication of trends over time having adjusted for student intake characteristics.
- ▶ **Lesson 7**—Involve the profession (as well as stakeholders, especially parents) in the design and implementation of the accountability system. Accept the notion of reciprocal accountability and ensure that you can provide schools and teachers with the capacity to meet your expectations.

The application of these lessons can be seen in the following case study examples drawn from England and Australia, which present practical illustrations of how performance has been successfully managed in both primary and secondary school contexts.

Example in action: England

Keys to the sustained success of Berrymede Junior School (Ofsted 2009b, p. 30)

Teaching, leadership and teamwork

- ▶ an insistence on high-quality learning and teaching, and continuous self-evaluation
- ▶ excellent communication and team work, with teaching assistants playing a key role

- ▶ an induction and 'buddy' system for all new staff, including lunchtime supervisors
- ▶ support for succession planning through the development of middle and senior leadership skills.

Targets and tracking

- ▶ close, termly tracking of each child's progress
- ▶ individual targets—every child has a 'promises book' (the name used by a child) which has their targets for English and mathematics
- ▶ targets for the curriculum, each class and groups within a class, reviewed every six weeks
- ▶ extensive analysis and use of data, with standardisation of assessment across all year groups.

Developing positive attitudes to learning

- ▶ rewards for children that enhance positive attitudes, such as 'stars of the week' badges, certificates and team points, Year 6 leaders and elected Head Boy and Girl
- ▶ an exciting and relevant curriculum which makes full use of space in and outside the building
- ▶ displays of children's work that celebrate their achievements and stimulate further learning.

Involving parents

- ▶ Close links with parents through 'reading record books', two outreach workers who are accessible to parents and pupils at the beginning and end of a school day and an 'open door' policy.

Example in action: Australia

Hume Central Secondary College: an integrated strategic approach (Zbar 2011, p. 12)

The school's explicit instruction model, based on John Hattie's research (2009), supports teachers to adopt a common lesson planning approach based on what has been proven in practice to work. This in turn supports peer observations of classroom practice, through triads the school has established,

and from 2011 it is expected that peer coaching, which is part of all job descriptions in the school, will include around seven observations a year.

Use of the model is underpinned by the systematic use of data to enable teachers both to know their students well and to know what and how to teach. Data is used to inform meetings of the leadership team, including data that illustrates how each student has performed in relation to NAPLAN and other tests and analyses of how different students performed against expected levels in the VCE. Data is also used to identify and target students who are especially at risk due to poor attendance.

To support a relentless focus on achieving 'two years learning in one', the school has also instituted regular reporting to parents about the progress of their children through the year. Parents now receive a progress report every three weeks, which enables the school to more proactively work with students to help them to succeed and ensure timely engagement with parents. Students at Hume Central receive around 12 reports a year which reinforce the expectation they will work hard and achieve as a result.

These case examples give some indication of how schools are creating an intelligent accountability culture in the pursuit of higher outcomes for their students. Crucial to this approach is how information and knowledge is best presented to most effectively generate action. Some years ago Matthew Miles set out some of those conditions under which knowledge is best acted on and added some comments on this process (cited in Hopkins 1988, pp. 170–1):

- ▶ **Clarity:** The knowledge must be understood clearly, not be fuzzy, vague or confusing.
- ▶ **Relevance:** The knowledge is seen as meaningful, as connected to one's normal life and concerns, not irrelevant, inapplicable or impractical.
- ▶ **Action images:** The knowledge is or can become exemplified in specific actions, clearly visualised. Without such images, knowledge-based action is unlikely.

- ▶ **Will:** There must be motivation, interest, action orientation, a will to do something with the knowledge.
- ▶ **Skill:** There must be actual behavioural ability to do the action envisioned. Without skill, the action will be either aborted or done incongruently with the knowledge undergirding it.

Matthew Miles continues this analysis by commenting that although there is a rough sequence from clarity to skill, the conditions are interactive. For example, seeing clear action images may result in an increased relevance, or added skill may increase will, since a good outcome is expected. In line with a theme emphasised throughout this book, Miles adds a further reflection. He remarks that it is sad, but true, that plenty of school improvers think that skill can be developed through reading, lectures or watching videotapes. It can't.

Improving skill requires doing, practice, getting feedback, reshaping the doing until the doing makes sense, is smooth and gets you where you want. We know this about skiing, tennis and golf, but not quite it seems about those behaviours in educational change. (Miles 1987, pp. 3–4)

This crucial point is addressed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Coda

Exploding the myth of external accountability is relatively easy to do. Although PISA suggests that improving countries do use standardised testing particularly in the early phases of a reform program, higher levels of student performance and increased equity—reducing the variation in student achievement—is enhanced when data are used to

map the progress of students. The PISA report *What makes a school successful?* continues (OECD 2010, p. 47):

One explanation for the positive association between the prevalence of standardised tests and improved equity in school systems is that such tests provide schools with instruments to compare themselves with other schools. This, in turn, allows schools to observe the inequities among schools, which could be considered the first step towards redressing them. The results from PISA also show higher levels of socio-economic equity in school systems that use achievement data to make decisions about the curriculum and track achievement data over time.

Another OECD project that has global reach but this time on teacher attitudes—the TALIS project—points to school leadership as playing a crucial role in shaping teachers' working lives and development:

Schools with strong instructional leadership are those where teachers engage in professional development to address the weaknesses identified in appraisals, where there are better student–teacher relations, where there is greater collaboration among teachers, and where greater recognition is given to innovative teachers. (OECD 2010, p. 31)

The key issue in drawing this chapter together and in exploding the myth of external accountability is to point to the crucial idea of data being used formatively to create the most effective learning conditions in schools for students. This is a point that is also made in a book by Michael Fullan, Peter Hill and Carmel Crévola (2006) ambitiously entitled *Breakthrough*. In this book Fullan and his colleagues examine the pedagogic implications underpinning much of Fullan's recent work, some of which we have already reviewed (Hopkins 2007).

Simply put, they claim that there are numerous examples of good curricula that provide the necessary degree of specification and well-designed teaching approaches that work effectively in classroom settings when used at the right time with the right students (Hopkins 2007). What was missing, they argued in 2006, was a clear focus on formative assessment. They identified the following four key features of classroom practice that were virtually non-existent at the time (Fullan et al. 2006).

1. A set of formative assessment tools tied to the learning objectives of each lesson that give the teacher access to accurate information on the progress of each student on a daily basis, and that can be administered without undue disruption to normal classroom routines.
2. A method to allow the formative assessment data to be captured in a way that is not time-consuming, of analysing the data automatically and a means of converting it into information that is powerful enough to drive instructional decisions not some time in the future, but tomorrow.
3. A means of using the assessment information on each student to design and implement lessons that deliver differentiated instruction that optimise the effectiveness of classroom teaching.
4. A built-in means of monitoring and managing learning, of testing what works and of systematically improving the effectiveness of classroom instruction so that it more precisely responds to the learning needs of each student in the class.

They conclude:

One can think of instances where current practice comes close to achieving one or more of the above, but we are aware of none that integrates all four ... If classroom instruction could be organized

... this would lead to quantum, ongoing improvements in the rate of student learning but, more important, to a transformational change in thinking about teaching. This is because, for the first time, classroom instruction would be organized so that teaching followed the student. (Fullan et al. p. 37)

The inspirational sentiment contained in the final sentence captures well the spirit of intelligent accountability proposed in this chapter. The OECD quotes at the start of this section have confirmed the fallibility of the myth of external accountability in school reform. Then the example from *Breakthrough* gives a powerful image of intelligent accountability in action. The important point is that the various strategies for intelligent accountability combine to form a coherent framework for formative evaluation that has a sharp and sustained focus on using the knowledge to enhance the learning and outcomes of students. We turn in the next chapter to consider how these evolving practices can contribute more directly to system reform.