A statewide case-management approach to improving literacy and numeracy skills

Summary

The case-management approach as a model for service delivery has traditionally been implemented in the health sector. In Western Australia, the case-management model was selected as an appropriate way to address students' learning needs, to raise expectations of student performance, and to utilise funds available through the National Partnership for Literacy and Numeracy project (NPLN). Case management, as applied in this model, is a whole-school approach to school improvement, aimed at ensuring that the literacy and numeracy learning needs of all students are identified, monitored and achieved. The process results in differentiated curriculum, particularly for any student not achieving their potential, including those achieving at or below the National Minimum Standard.

Effective case management involves a team approach, supporting the classroom teacher to deliver an effective program for case-managed students. The model depends on effective systems and processes combined with collaborative whole-school planning practices, rather than specific resources or strategies. There is no one 'right' way to implement a case-management approach, but there are common elements in the ways that schools implement it. The common elements are outlined in this document and exemplified in a specific case study. The model reflects the Western Australian Department of Education and Training's School Improvement and Accountability Framework (2008).

Case management for students operated in approximately 70 primary schools across six education regions in WA, including metropolitan, regional, rural and remote locations.

The initiative was integral to the effectiveness of the Literacy Numeracy National Partnership project (NPLN). A statewide project-management team was responsible for assisting implementation, checking school reviews at the end of each term and assisting with decisions about the directions in which schools were heading and whether any modifications needed to be made to the project as a whole. All expenditure was against the initial funding from the Australian Government under this agreement. As a result of the initiative, improvement in reading and numeracy across all years exceeded the average for all public schools.

> "There is no one 'right' way to implement a case-management approach, but there are common elements in the ways that schools implement it."

Target student group

In total, 8,556 primary students from years K–7 who were at or below the National Minimal Standard were case-managed (ie 29 per cent of WA's NPLN school students). The socio-economic index (SEI) for schools is expressed numerically, ranging from 50.72 (greatest disadvantage) to 127.27 least disadvantage). The NPLN schools' SEI compared with the state range is shown in the table below.

Table 1: The NPLN schools' SEI compared with the WA state range

	Lowest	Mean	Highest
State SEI range	50.72	99.7	127.7
National Partnerships SEI range	81.29	96.14	109.24

Note: At the time of writing in 2012 kindergarten and Pre-primary are optional. From 2013 Pre-primary will be the first year of compulsory schooling in WA. Primary schools in WA have students from K–7.

Method

Case management and the school improvement and accountability framework

> 'Case management is more than just a student's educational plan. It is what the school community is doing to improve identification, assessment, planning and addressing target students and their needs.' (Literacy Specialist Teacher)

Case management is a collaborative process of assessment, planning, implementing service arrangement, and monitoring and evaluation. There is extensive literature on the use of a case-management approach as a model for service delivery, as traditionally adopted in the health sector. It is a process of a team working with clients to focus on their needs and goals, and developing flexible strategies to help them achieve those goals.

The case-management model has more recently been adapted to a wider range of settings, including at-risk populations in schools. In this instance, it was selected because it fitted with the conceptual model of the WA Department of Education School Improvement and Accountability Framework.

The school improvement and accountability framework

The framework's school-improvement cycle has three components: schools *assess* data and other evidence related to student achievement and school operations; schools *plan* to improve the standards of student achievement; and schools *act* to implement planned strategies. It is a continuous process that is central to effective school improvement and accountability. Because the school-improvement cycle is an ongoing process, the three components are seen as dynamic and interactive; continuous self-assessment recognises that the act of implementation may cause planning decisions to be modified and may re-focus assessment questions.

The school-improvement cycle provides a structure for a case-management process. It is a whole-school approach aimed at ensuring the literacy and numeracy learning needs of all students are identified, addressed and monitored for improvement. The specific expertise and knowledge of team members are drawn upon to work towards individual student success. It is a process that results in differentiated curriculum, particularly for any student not achieving their potential, including those achieving at or below the National Minimum Standard.

There is no one 'right' way to implement case management, but there are common elements in the ways that schools assess, plan and act to implement the approach.

Common elements of case management

Assess
- Establish a whole-school self-assessment process to gather information related to academic and non-academic performance.
- Identify students requiring case management, considering academic, social and physical needs (NAPLAN, Student Achievement Information System, Literacy Net, Numeracy Monitoring Tool, ESL/ESD Progress Map).
- Collect relevant assessment information to identify specific areas for improvement.
- Conduct a case-management team meeting to analyse data and prioritise factors for intervention.
- Establish case-management review processes.
- Establish communication practices.

Plan

- Establish a case-management team.
- Align classroom planning to strategic and operational planning.
- Devise case-management planning as a component of classroom planning.
- Set long-term targets and short-term milestones.
- Select appropriate teaching strategies.
- Make decisions related to monitoring tools.
- Resource strategies appropriately.
- Delegate roles and responsibilities.
- Conduct relevant professional learning aligned to the performance management process.

Act

- Implement the plan, differentiating the curriculum to meet student needs.
- Provide targeted support utilising available internal and external experts.
- Monitor progress and adjust teaching strategies as appropriate.
- Inform key stakeholders about progress.

"Case management gave us the opportunity to focus on those students we knew we could help progress, who had previously had no set process for improvement." (*Smarter Schools Literacy and Numeracy Partnership; Success and achievement of the Partnership Schools,* Price Waterhouse Coopers, p 12)

The process

Typically, case-management team members include the classroom teacher; a parent or carer; a member of the school leadership team; specialist literacy, numeracy or EAL/D teachers; and expert stakeholders, eg school psychologist, speech therapist, Centre for Inclusive Schooling visiting teacher.

The team works together to identify students who require case management, set realistic long-term improvement targets, identify short-term milestones and help the classroom teacher to differentiate the curriculum. The team implements a regular monitoring and review process.

"I can see immediately that the collaboration with teachers for the target setting and assessment is the glue that holds the whole school together." (A principal, new to the school)

Training and mentoring

School leaders were trained or mentored by National Partnership Consultant Principals and the Principal Consultant Professional Support to retrieve and analyse data from NAPLAN results, create graphs and determine trends.

Review

'Sixty-one per cent of ATSI students on literacy case-management plans are on track to achieve their target.'
(Example from NPLN spreadsheet data collated for a term-review process)

Ongoing assessment of student performance is built into the case-management model at school level. It was also a requirement of the NPLN project that schools complete and return a review at the end of each term. For many schools this was a collaborative process involving administration and teachers.

The purpose for this review was twofold:

- It gave schools the opportunity to reflect and assess where they were sitting in terms of their plans and what, if any, adjustments they needed to make.
- It helped the project-management team make decisions about the directions in which schools were heading, and whether any modifications needed to be made to the project.

"We know exactly where each student is, their achievements and the gaps in their learning, so we can plan for the next stage in their learning."
(Teacher)

A school-based example

The following scenario illustrates common elements of case management, although the process may look and feel quite different in individual school contexts.

Background

A primary school in Perth's eastern suburbs, with an SEI of 90.34, has 307 enrolments, including 45 Aboriginal and 84 ESL students with 24 languages represented; this includes 13 EAL Stage 1 learners. Enrolments have increased by 25 per cent in the last two years and student transience can affect up to one-third of the school population annually.

A strong pastoral-care program has been successfully implemented, controlling most extreme behaviour; however, a number of students remain challenging, especially some of the boys. Attendance is good, with an average of 93.2 per cent, including attendance rates of 91 per cent for Aboriginal students.

Implementation
The case-management approach was implemented in this school in the following way.

Assess
Teachers were provided with time to mark their own NAPLAN assessments, and students in years 4 and 6 were also assessed using NAPLAN. While comprehensive analysis of NAPLAN data was a starting point, online resources such as the Department Of Education online Literacy and Numeracy resources, the Numeracy Monitoring Tool and Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) were also used to identify the zone of proximal learning and learning needs for those students. Year-level targets for individual and groups of students were first set by specialist teachers, but this evolved into class teachers working collaboratively to set their own targets with specialist teacher support. Capacity to provide differentiated curriculum was seen as important.

Plan
Examples of programs and initiatives documented in the school planning include:

• target setting: implemented at the classroom level

• conducting testing for Performance Indicators for Primary Schools

• using First Steps Numeracy Monitoring Tool to diagnose case-management students

• pastoral-care programs targeted at behaviour management

• using ESL/D Progress Maps, moderation

• persuasive writing

• embedding First Steps teaching strategies across the school

• NAPLAN preparation: tasks linked to standardised criteria

• strategic staffing: School Support Program Resource Allocation provided funding for Curriculum Deputy and three Education Assistants to bolster school programs

• collaborative meetings: staff voluntarily attended formal planning sessions after school on a regular basis.

Act

Case management at this school resulted in an increased level of engagement and a measurable improvement in student performance. The school's success is a result of targeting specific learning needs for groups of students. Effective allocation of resources, including non-teaching staff, has supported flexibility and intensive support programs across the school. The school attributes its success to extreme goodwill and a positive school culture, where success is celebrated and work is valued in a supportive, collaborative environment. There is a strong sense of collective responsibility among all staff to improve student achievement. Teachers are confident in seeking help from colleagues when required. Staff are supported and encouraged to identify their own professional learning needs relating to achieving case-management targets. They are adequately resourced to address these needs.

> "The balance between central direction and local autonomy struck in the implementation of the partnership was the right one […] combining elements of both an autonomous approach and empowered collaboration resulted in highly effective change."
> (Smarter schools literacy and numeracy partnership: success and achievement of the partnership schools, Price Waterhouse Coopers, p 31)

Results

Improvement in reading and numeracy across all years exceeded the average for all public schools. In the case of year 3 reading, the increase for National Partnership schools was four times the average improvement for public-sector schools as a whole. Progress, measured as the average increase in the test scores of the cohort of students who completed the year 3 test in 2009 and the year 5 test in 2011 (or the year 5 test in 2009 and the year 7 test in 2011), suggests that the [National Partnership schools] have achieved more substantial gains than public schools as a whole.
(*Smarter schools literacy and numeracy partnership: success and achievement of the partnership schools*, Price Waterhouse Coopers 2011, pp 4–5)

Overall, WA NAPLAN data showed that the increase in mean scores and mean progress year 3–year 5 and year 5–year 7 was greater in National Partnership schools than in non–National Partnership schools.

Lessons learned

The main factors for the success of this approach were:

- collection of relevant pre-strategy reading and numeracy data
- setting of school improvement targets based on this data
- identification of students to be case-managed
- professional learning for teachers in explicit teaching, learning, monitoring and assessment strategies
- monitoring of student improvement.

In November 2011, the project held a sustainability forum for schools to come together and decide how they would continue to implement the changes and strategies arising from the project. The responses were recorded during a session called 'WOWW – What obviously worked well' and included the following:

- A number of schools identifying the review-monitoring tool as a useful process for staying on track with their strategic and operational plans.
- The visibility or presence of EAL/D goals and outcomes in school strategic and operational plans being improved.
- Case management with documented planning and identification of target groups being seen as working well. Integral to this and mentioned a number of times were 'curriculum differentiation' and 'collaboration'.

The initiative is seen as sustainable where there is a pedagogy of differentiation and entitlement in teaching and learning; where teachers work collaboratively in teams with coaches or mentors; where whole-school planning is evidence-based, facilitating the formulation of targets and programs designed to be inclusive and meet the teaching and learning needs of all students.

Possible challenges include the following:

- Insufficient funding for collaborative meetings to analyse data, select students to be case-managed, determine targets, develop new teaching and monitoring strategies as required, and assess progress.
- Selection and availability of staff with requisite skills to establish the program in the school.
- Ensuring that the school pedagogy supports this differentiated approach. One-size-fits-all programs will not support this strategy.

Next steps

Schools are now allocating time for collaboration and case management into their own resources and organisational structures. At the sustainability forum, schools came up with the following ways in which they would continue these National Partnership initiatives:

- Formalise process and structures for collaborative planning through, for example, restructured timetabling for duties other than teaching (DOTT).
- Use school funding to maintain the case-management approach.
- Utilise the networks they built up around the project to collaborate with other schools.

Further reading and links

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Contacts

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