Cambridge Teacher Standards and Cambridge School Leader Standards
How and why the Standards were developed

We work with schools worldwide to build an education that shapes knowledge, understanding and skills. Together, we give learners the confidence they need to thrive and make a positive impact in a changing world.

We have developed the Cambridge Teacher Standards and Cambridge School Leader Standards to define key characteristics and practices of effective teachers and leaders. This document outlines how we developed those Standards using the latest international research into effective teaching and school leadership.

Cambridge schools operate in a wide variety of local and national contexts. In developing the Standards, we took into account not only a range of national practices, but also input from education experts around the world. This has enabled us to identify a set of practices that are common to the best teachers and school leaders globally.

Aims of the Standards

The main purpose of the Standards is to set out the characteristics that teachers and school leaders need to deliver Cambridge programmes effectively.
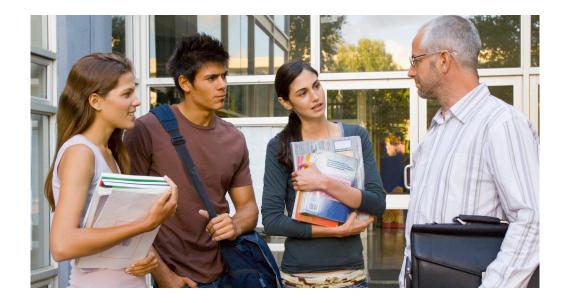
The Standards provide a benchmark of what Cambridge considers to be teacher and school leader quality. They can be used by teachers and leaders to identify what they are doing well in practice and what they can improve through professional development.

Teachers aspiring to develop their career prospects will find the Standards a helpful guide to define areas for their professional development. The Standards provide a common language and framework of expectations that will help the whole community within a school to reflect on the effectiveness of its teaching and leadership.

Although factors, such as home and socio-cultural background can determine the life chances of children and teenagers, which is discussed as the highly influential Fifteen Thousand Hours (Rutter et al., 1979), robust evidence emerged showing a different picture: what we do in schools matters and can change the future chances of learners.

At Cambridge we recognise that teachers have a substantial impact and influence on student learning and educational outcomes (Rowe et al, 2012, Sanders & Rivers, 1996, Wiliam, 2018). It is what teachers know and do that makes the difference in improving student learning outcomes – their knowledge, pedagogical practices and relationships with students (Coe et al, 2014, Hattie 2009). We also recognise that teachers cannot sustain high-quality outcomes for all students without effective leadership (Menter et al, 2010, Rowe et al, 2012).

There are five Cambridge Teacher Domains and five Cambridge School Leader Domains. Each Domain contains a number of individual standards that are detailed and concrete.

The Standards are designed to be applicable internationally, so they do not refer to specific curricula, teaching strategies or programmes. Instead, the domains and standards draw on international best practice in teaching and leadership at a generic level.

As the Standards are provided as a resource for ongoing teacher and leader improvement, rather than accountability (OECD 2009), a single level is provided for each Standard. They focus on supporting all aspects of a leader's or teacher's professional learning and development, recognising the demands and complexity of their role.

Rationale for the Cambridge Teacher Standards

1 Teacher values and attributes

Teaching and learning are multidimensional (Blazar & Kraft, 2017), and the effects that teachers have on a student's growth mindset, perseverance, and effort in class are of similar and even slightly larger magnitude than effects on achievement (Kraft, 2019). Teachers who intentionally underpin their practice with a shared understanding of purpose are a powerful lever of change (Winthrop et al., 2021) – likewise, teachers who positively contribute to the wider community and model a sense of citizenship guided by a strong moral compass to the students.

Teachers who engage in reflective practice, identify issues with their teaching, and are able to consider the directions the situation needs to change also feature strongly in the literature (Minott, 2022; Schön, 1995). Engaging in reflective practice has also been shown to play a significant role in the well-being of students (Baxter et al., 2021). Teachers who demonstrate a consistent commitment to student well-being in all its forms significantly enhance their impact on a school's culture and ethos.

2 Classroom culture and environment

Developing a sense of classroom community generates a sense of belonging, which is an important component of student well-being, because it helps overcome feelings of disconnectedness (Parrish et al., 2023). Research shows that the classroom climate improves when teacher-student relationships are more positive (Rae et al., 2017). The relationships teachers build with students have an impact on student behaviour and outcomes. Intentionally embedding emotional intelligence and empathy in classroom practice is invaluable for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning (Claxton, 2005; Demetriou, 2018; Demetriou & Nicholl, 2022; Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2010). As such, teachers should have high expectations for all learners and for themselves in their professional duty (Rowe et al., 2012).

3 Teaching skills and practices

Teachers should have secure subject and curriculum knowledge and use it to plan coherent, authentic and engaging learning programmes and lessons (Echazarra et al., 2016; OECD, 2016). Teachers must design effective learning sequences helping them deploy teaching strategies and learning activities that extend their students' learning and activate hard thinking (Creemers & Kyriakides, 2013; Wilson & Sharimova, 2019; Coe et al, 2020). This requires knowledge and understanding of how students learn (Shulman, 1986) and matching teaching practices to respond to the developmental needs of all learners (Bandura, 1977; Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978).

Teachers need to understand and select from a repertoire of teaching approaches appropriate for the age of pupils, subject topic and context. For example, they may draw on teacher-directed and inquiry-based approaches to effectively support their learners' progress (Mourshed, 2017). Drilling, memorisation and surface learning have a role to play in education, if only as a first step before moving into more advanced, deeper and authentic learning. Therefore, teachers must know how to balance traditional and modern, teacher- and student-centred teaching, and deep, surface and strategic learning (Echazarra, 2016). This is tied to having secure subject and curriculum knowledge and using it to plan coherent, authentic and engaging learning programmes and lessons (de Almeida & Viana, 2023).

Teachers must understand how to address student diversity and inclusion needs, particularly those from different backgrounds to their own (Buzzai et al., 2023; Kohout-Diaz, 2023; Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2013). Finally, effective teachers fully appreciate the importance of giving students timely, accurate and constructive feedback on their progress in learning, attainment and areas for development (Black et al., 2002, 2003; Marzano, 2006; Sutton, 1995; Wiliam, 2009, 2017).

4 Innovation and improvement in teaching and learning

A crucial component of improvement in teaching and learning lies in teachers evaluating learning programmes and their own teaching. This should be done using reflective practice, incorporating evidence from different sources, including student feedback, to inform planning and to improve future teaching and learning (Echazarra, 2016). Effective teachers encourage the development of students' problem-solving, metacognition, and critical and creative thinking skills, because those directly impact outcomes (Quigley et al., 2018) and model this in their own practice. A focus on digital forms of learning, teaching and assessment is a means of forward-looking knowledge, skills and competencies that students and teachers need in order to innovate and prosper in a world that has been transformed by digital technology (European Commission, 2020). Teachers who demonstrate judicious and effective use of digital technologies extend the learning taking place in their classrooms, enhancing the students' critical thinking, as well as their well-being.

5 Community engagement

Teachers grow professionally when they engage in meaningful interactions around teaching. Learning is a social process for adults and young people involving the development of shared meaning and identities. Teachers should contribute actively to communities of practice within their school, building shared understandings of effective teaching and learning in context (Pyrko et al., 2017; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2020). Teachers' social capital beyond their own school relates to different aspects of school improvement, which have been the focus of education research for some time (Demir, 2021; Johnson et al., 2011).

Evidence suggests that establishing professional relationships with colleagues in other institutions, professional bodies and educational organisations to develop professional practice is a powerful way for teachers to grow (Pyrko et al., 2019; Wenger-Trayler et al., 2014). This will impact their students and the whole school because it also allows teachers to create a sense of identification and belonging to a team or a group (Putnam, 2000).

The positive impact of engaging parents, carers and community partners in student learning has been a consensus for a very long time (Colbert de Arboleda, 1991; MacBeath & Mortimore, 2001; UNESCO, 2021). There are many different levels of how much teachers and schools can reach out to parents, carers and community partners, ranging from inviting guest speakers to more intrinsically embedding the school in the fabric of the community to the extent that a school becomes a community centre (D. H. Hargreaves, 2012).

By encouraging students' contribution to the wider community, teachers enrich their holistic development into global citizens. Teachers can encourage community engagement in school life by promoting and facilitating the involvement of parents and carers (van Poortvliet et al., 2018). Parent and community involvement are key to student engagement, commitment, and learning (Deal & Peterson, 2016).

Rationale for the Cambridge School Leader Standards

"Research also indicates that leadership is crucial in securing improvements in pupil outcomes." (Menter et al, 2010 page 44). While recognising that school contexts differ, there is general agreement about the importance of the school leader's role in instructional leadership to maximise student learning outcomes.

The leader's values and vision are vital to raise expectations, build relationships and enhance teacher quality (Day et al, 2010). Other researchers have confirmed that leadership is also a critical determinant of overall organisational performance and the single most important determinant of attracting and retaining high-quality teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Effective school leaders create the conditions for teachers to maximise the opportunities for all students to progress in their learning beyond normal developmental patterns (Kemmis et al, 2014).

'School leadership has become a priority in education policy agendas internationally. It plays a key role in improving school outcomes by influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers, as well as the school climate and environment. Effective school leadership is essential to improve the efficiency and equity of schooling.' (OECD, 2009, page 9 to page 10).

1 Leadership values and attributes

Values that inform leadership for learning are moral purpose, professional integrity and critical friendship (MacBeath et al., 2018; MacBeath & Dempster, 2009; Swaffield & Mac Beath, 2013). Effective school leaders model trust in their relationships within their own schools and with the leaders of the schools with whom they are in partnership (Hargreaves, 2012). School leaders must provide a strong sense of direction and a clear vision of the school, creating opportunities for all stakeholders to engage with a shared purpose. School leaders should embrace the school as a learning organisation and use evidence for effective decision-making for school improvement (Hargreaves, 2012).

School leaders play a critical role in this by making sure that actions are always guided by the highest standards of ethical conduct in interactions with teachers, students, colleagues, parents, all other members of the wider school community. School leaders who guide the community toward a shared vision, give it a sense of direction and serve as a motivating force for sustained action to achieve individual and school goals, have also been shown to have a powerful impact on student outcomes (OECD, 2016).

Effective school leaders understand that leadership is not exclusively a matter of roles at the top of an organisational hierarchy, but rather something that all members of an organisation should have opportunities to exercise (Hargreaves, 2012). Effective school leaders therefore need to model a consistent commitment to reflective practice and lifelong learning (OECD, 2019) and demonstrate a consistent commitment to well-being in all its forms (OECD, 2021; European Commission, 2021).

2 School culture and environment

A school's purpose and mission serve as the bedrock of its culture (Deal & Peterson, 2016). School leaders must demonstrate emotional intelligence and empathy in leadership because the school climate is a determinant of resilience and well-being (Cohen, 2013). Effective school leaders motivate and encourage teachers to take accountability for the development of effective learning and teaching, because they understand that teachers are important, protective assets for students (European Commission, 2021). Building relationships and developing people is one of the main pillars of effective leadership (Leithwood et al., 2020); therefore, effective school leaders model this by establishing professional relationships with all school community members.

Schools don't operate in a vacuum; they are "open systems" (OECD, 2016) and thus, effective school leaders seek to enrich the learning culture of their school by establishing professional relationships with colleagues in other institutions, professional bodies and educational organisations (Woods and Brighthouse, 2013). Finally, the ethos of a school is highly influenced by how school leaders establish a culture of high expectations and high rewards for all, with regard to learning outcomes, behaviours and attitudes.

3 Leadership skills and practices

Seminal evidence points to four categories of leadership practices used by successful leaders: setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organisation and managing the instructional programme (Leithwood, 2013). Also listed as pivotal traits of highly effective school leaders are attributes such as valuing diversity, support for staff, collaborative leadership style, and valuing teachers' professional learning (Carrington et al., 2022). Therefore, the core skills of an effective school leader involve demonstrating a consistent commitment to the professional learning and development of all staff, including the development of their leadership potential. For that, school leaders must understand the principles and practices of school improvement, leadership and management of change, in order to lead the school's improvement programme (A. Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018).

To support their work, school leaders must maintain a current knowledge of research into child and teenager development, curriculum development, and teaching and learning. In addition to this, effective school leaders demonstrate knowledge and understanding of current research into educational leadership and use it to support the reflective evaluation of their own practice (OECD, 2019). School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Effective school leaders display outstanding skills in planning and running the school's operational side. They use data and reflect on curriculum programme requirements to plan and budget for strategic improvements, and they make sure that the school has appropriate policies and procedures in place, as well as written roles and responsibilities, which are reflected in operational practice. The expectations for skills and practices displayed by effective school leaders are many. Evidence strongly points to school leaders improving teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, ability and working conditions (Leithwood et al., 2020).

4 Innovation and improvement through leadership

School leaders can strongly influence the creation of a professional culture in which innovation and collaboration for the improvement of learning and teaching practice are encouraged. "School should be a place to create a sense of community, each student should be able to realise his or her potential, each teacher should feel fulfilled, and each parent should experience joy in watching his or her child learn and grow" (Deal and Peterson, 2016 p. 80). Effective leaders realise the knowledge and expertise possessed by others and model and promote purposeful collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). They expand this beyond individuals and promote productive collaboration between teams to evaluate and share effective practice and to develop curriculum knowledge and teaching skills. By doing so, school leaders are not only working towards innovation and improvement but also recognising that improvement connects to aspects of teacher well-being and job satisfaction which has direct impact on student achievement (European Commission, 2021; OECD, 2021).

School leaders can impact teacher capacity, school reform, teacher motivation and morale, and student learning (Lipscombe et al., 2023). Nevertheless, meaningful change is only possible with leadership and commitment at all levels (Braun, 2008). Therefore, school leaders must establish whole-school responsibility for implementing, monitoring and evaluating the improvement plan. For that, they must also allocate time and resources for an improvement planning process that is based on data and inclusive stakeholder input. A. Hargreaves (2019) reflected on 30 years of teacher collaboration research and concluded that "many leaders are eager to 'engage' their teachers in collaboration for strategic reasons, but not to 'empower' them through it" (p. 609).

Effective school leaders strive to implement an inclusive, democratic, professionally empowering and responsive process so that they develop a leadership team of qualified staff that meets the school's operational and developmental needs and inspires the whole school community into a path of innovation and improvement (A. Hargreaves & Shirley, 2020).

5 Community engagement

Whether schools are a welcoming place for parents and whether there are strong connections between the school and local institutions have been linked to improvement in the attainment of students for decades and is a well-established consensus in education (MacBeath & Mortimore, 2001; UNESCO, 2021). Influential research in education highlights strong evidence that points to an impressive effect of schools with strong parental involvement being ten times more likely to improve in math and four times more likely to improve in reading than schools weak on this measure (Bryk et al., 2010). School leaders should, therefore, forge partnerships with parents and members of the local community (OECD, 2016).

In addition, students' cognitive, social and emotional growth is substantially influenced by factors outside the school, such as the home environment (Jeynes, 2011; Goodall, 2018). Therefore, school leaders who actively engage stakeholders outside the school community to contribute to the school's life, vision, and mission positively impact student outcomes. School leaders must also continuously work toward establishing their schools as learning organisations. For that, the school must proactively scan the environment to monitor and respond to external challenges and opportunities as appropriate. Therefore, effective school leaders are responsive to, rather than dictated by, the different contextual demands that they face (Leithwood et al., 2020). Finally, school leaders must also inspire students' connections to the wider community, modelling and promoting initiatives that facilitate the development of global citizenship.

Relation to existing standards

In recent years, various countries have produced sets of standards for use in the accreditation of new teachers and in the development of teachers and school leaders within their national education system. The Cambridge Standards were developed in alignment with national standards in mind, but with the aim of enhancing development within Cambridge schools internationally. In addition, certain bodies have produced standards designed to be a resource internationally. The following standards in particular provide reference points:

- **Australian professional standards** for teachers and principals, AITSL, Australia. The teacher standards consist of seven standards across three domains of teaching. There are four career stages used for certification within the teacher standards plus a professional standard for principals that includes leadership profiles showing developmental pathways (AITSL, 2011, 2014).

- **The Commonwealth standards** framework for teachers and school leaders. A consultative version of an integrated standards framework devised following a participatory consultation method involving more than 30 countries. Five categories of professional standards are described at three levels, with a developmental aim (Gallie & Keavy, 2014).

- **Teachers' standards in England.** A number of sequential versions have been statutory over recent years. The current version (DfE, 2012) comprises eight teaching standards and a statement on personal and professional conduct designed to be used for both development and assessment purposes (DfE, 2014). The National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers (DfE, 2015) is non-statutory advice, designed to be used developmentally in order to 'inspire public confidence in headteachers, raise aspirations, secure high academic standards in the nation's schools, and empower the teaching profession' (page 4).

- **The Singapore Teaching Practice. S**TP makes explicit how effective teaching and learning is achieved in Singapore schools as teachers design, empower and motivate learning. There are four core teaching processes at the heart of pedagogical practices, each with corresponding teaching areas, actions and considerations that teachers put into practice. Teachers apply and reflect on these processes and the corresponding teaching areas which have actions and considerations. The aim of STP is to enable teachers to be and become even better.

- **National Board Standards, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.** In the US the five National Board core propositions and standards describe what teachers should know and be able to do to have a positive impact on student learning. The standards are used to support the development and certification of accomplished teaching.

Context of use

The Cambridge Standards are designed to be used as a developmental tool for teachers and leaders, within an ethos of trust and collaboration. Coe et al (2016) concluded that sustained professional learning was "most likely to result" when, among other things, the focus is kept clearly on improving student outcomes, attention is on teachers' learning rather than comparisons with others, teachers are encouraged to be continual independent learners and "an environment of professional learning and support is promoted by the school's leadership" (p. 5). Further, Hattie (2009) concludes that a supportive but aspirational professional environment in school is most likely to lead to excellence in education.

In this spirit, while we recognise that some level of teacher accountability for student outcomes and effective classroom practice is necessary and reasonable in schools and education systems, the dominant purpose of the Cambridge Teacher and School Leader Standards is one of ongoing teacher improvement rather than accountability (OECD 2009). Such an emphasis is possible and desirable for a set of standards that has not been developed to be used for mandatory accreditation within a national context.

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