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

Cambridge International is committed to the ongoing improvement of educational outcomes for all Cambridge learners around the 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 the Cambridge Teacher and School Leader 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 International 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.

We recognise that classroom teaching has a substantial impact on the quality of 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 eight Cambridge Teacher Standards and eight Cambridge School Leader Standards. Each Standard contains a number of individual standard statements 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 eight 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. **Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of students and how they learn**

It is important for teachers to understand the diversity of students’ needs and characteristics so that teaching can be carefully targeted to maximise learning outcomes. Teachers need to understand how students learn and develop, and the key role of mindset on student outcomes (Mourshed et al., 2017).

They need to be aware of the preconceptions and misconceptions that students bring to the classroom in order to help students make progress (National Research Council, 1999). It is important to recognise the diversity within any class and to use strategies to engage and support students of differing needs and prior attainment levels (Wiliam, 2018).

2. **Know subject and curriculum content and how to teach it**

Effective teachers must possess a deep understanding of the subject they teach. They must also be aware of the potential and opportunity that imparting this understanding can have on the lives of their students (Coe et al., 2014, Young & Lambert, 2014).

Furthermore, they need to know how to apply this knowledge within a teaching context (Shulman, 1986), to respond effectively to students’ questions, to sequence ideas in ways that make learning coherent and accessible (Hattie, 2009) and to identify misconceptions (Coe et al., 2014). Student mindset has a significant impact on attainment (Mourshed, 2017) so creation of a suitable classroom climate that includes, challenges and motivates all students is important.

Literacy and numeracy skills continue to be a focus for improvement in most education systems. It is clear that digital technologies can be useful tools, but do not necessarily raise student attainment alone (Chen et al., 2017). Teachers therefore need to know how to maximise the effectiveness of digital technologies in the classroom.

3. **Demonstrate professional teacher values and attributes**

Teachers make a considerable impact on their learners (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). They should have high expectations of all learners (Rowe et al., 2012) and should avoid any practices known to have a negative impact on learners, such as labelling (Hattie, 2009). Part of their role is to maintain up-to-date professional knowledge, including subject and pedagogical knowledge (Coe et al. 2014, OECD 2011). They should be dedicated and passionate (Hattie 2009). All teachers also need to maintain safe and ethical conduct.

4. **Establish professional relationships to develop and support learning and teaching**

Teachers need to develop and maintain professional relationships with learners and supporting adults. These relationships affect both student outcomes and teachers’ own job satisfaction (OECD, 2011). Continuing professional development is vital to equip teachers to work effectively within changing educational systems (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Learning is a social process, both for adults and for 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 (Wenger, 1998).
Implement effective planning, teaching, learning and assessment practice

There is strong evidence for the relationship between quality of instruction and student outcomes (Coe et al, 2014). This includes all elements of the plan–teach–assess or diagnose–implement–evaluate cycle ('clinical teaching') (Melbourne, 2018). Learning goals and success criteria need to be precise and clearly understood by both teachers and learners (Hattie, 2009), so that the most effective teaching strategies are put in place.

New elements of learning need to be introduced progressively and the understanding of individuals and groups needs to be assessed in order to inform teaching (Coe et al, 2014, Wiliam, 2018). Feedback needs to be both specific and accessible to the learner. Teachers then need to give learners enough time to act on that feedback (Wiliam, 2018). Teachers need to manage this process carefully so that they maximise students' learning, while ensuring teaching practice remains efficient (Elliott et al, 2016).

Demonstrate innovative and effective classroom practice

Teachers need to understand and be able to select from a repertoire of teaching approaches that are appropriate for the age of pupils, subject topic and context. For example, they may draw on teacher-directed and inquiry-based approaches to support their learners’ progress effectively (Mourshed, 2017). Active learning approaches are those that encourage students to construct knowledge (Moore, 2000): they do not always involve group work or physical activity, though these may be very appropriate at times. Classrooms should be places where children are encouraged to take risks in learning and where failure is seen as a useful resource for learning rather than as a threat to self-worth (Hattie, 2009).

Effective learners have strong metacognitive skills. They are aware of their learning and able to modify their strategies to maximise progress (Hattie, 2009). Effective teaching can encourage these skills, along with the critical and creative thinking skills that the 21st century learner needs. Self-reflection is a valuable way to improve practice (Rowe, et al 2012).

Create and maintain a safe and inclusive learning environment

A safe and stimulating classroom environment is an important pre-condition for learning (Coe et al, 2014, Hattie, 2009). The effective teacher creates a calm, purposeful and secure classroom climate (Rowe et al, 2012). As the use of digital technologies grows across the world, teachers are responsible for ensuring that students use age-appropriate tools in the classroom and that they use them safely, ethically and effectively (OECD, 2012).

Engage professionally with parents and communities

Learners and teachers are part of a wider web of relationships. Teachers need to work with parents so that they understand and can support their child’s education (Hattie, 2009). It is also important that teachers are part of professional learning communities, continually developing their subject and pedagogical skills with a framework for reflective practice, for example by engaging in teacher enquiry (Baumfield et al, 2013, Gilchrist, 2018).
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 knowledge and understanding

Effective school leaders have a clear, shared vision of high achievement and improvement that is understood by all staff (Day et al, 2010, Ontario Leadership Framework IEL, 2013). They provide a strong sense of direction and recognise that, to achieve deep and lasting change, leaders need to transform the school’s culture through changing values and developing a common purpose (Fullan 2007, Hallinger, 2003).

This culture will be unique to each school and will be tailored for the school’s community and its context, as well as leaders’ own leadership roles in the school (Day et al, 2010, OECD, 2008, Robinson et al, 2009). Theory and research provide reflective leaders with essential guidance to help them meet the school’s and their own particular circumstances (Sorum-Brown, 2013, Preedy, 2013).

2 Skills and practices of leadership


Leaders who seize opportunities to develop leadership skills in themselves and in others model and promote lifelong learning. By doing so, they also help to achieve a shared purpose and commitment to the school’s vision and objectives. As a result, school improvement processes are made more secure (Harris, 2003, Robinson, 2011, OECD, 2013).
3 Leadership values and attributes

The most powerful way for school leaders to make a difference to all students’ learning is for leaders to promote and participate in teacher learning and development (Robinson, 2007). Cambridge International believes it is fundamental that leadership is both a shared and an individual enterprise and should be distributed and exercised at every level (Developing your School with Cambridge, 2015). To make sure that Cambridge teacher development activities produce maximum impact, leaders are encouraged to develop their own leadership as well as that of their teachers (MacBeath & Dempster, 2009, OECD, 2008). Effective school leaders work constantly on developing relationships at all levels of the organisation and beyond, and model ethical conduct for the school community.

4 Professional relationships in leadership

Effective school leaders understand the importance of building trust throughout the school community, offering a balance of challenge and support for improvement for all (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, Louis et al, 2010). Emotionally intelligent leaders are reflective learners (Loughran, 2002), know themselves, are sensitive and empathic to others, and build strong, professional relationships within the school, locally, nationally and internationally to inspire them (Goleman et al, 2002).

5 Leading teaching and learning

Improving teaching is the single most important intervention that a leader can make to improve student learning and performance (Robinson, 2007). School leaders should, therefore, create a positive culture that not only focuses on student learning but which also supports and promotes the professional learning of all staff (Timperley, 2008, Lee & Spillane, 2008).

Hargreaves and Fullan write about ‘professional capital’ (2012) and recognise that effective leaders build this capital while focusing on the aspirations of their staff members. Effective leaders also monitor and assess the impact changed teacher practices and refined curricular programmes have on student learning (Cordingley et al, 2015, Guskey, 2002).

Cambridge leaders also demonstrate that they value the Cambridge learner attributes, interpreting them in their own school’s context and using them to shape the aspirations of teachers, students and parents.

6 Leading innovation and improvement

Professional development that is carefully designed and has a strong focus on student outcomes has a significant impact on student achievement (Cordingley et al, 2015, Robinson 2007, Timperley, 2008). To achieve this objective through improving classroom practice, effective leaders create a learning environment for all, encouraging and nurturing innovative practice and collaborative enquiry. Leaders of successful schools develop professional learning communities among their teachers and beyond (Lee & Spillane, 2008). The suite of Cambridge Professional Development Qualifications supports leaders in doing this.

Strong school leaders lead a robust improvement planning process with areas for development identified through rigorous evaluation (Developing your school with Cambridge, 2015), understanding that planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum has significant impact on student outcomes (Robinson, 2007).
Establishing management systems

Both leadership and management are critical to school development (OECD, 2008). Effective management systems make sure that the school is running well and help to enable leaders to deliver their vision and mission for improvement (Leithwood, 2012). Building the organisational context and establishing robust management systems are crucial aspects of a school leader’s role (Hallinger, 2003, Bush & Glover, 2003). Clear policies and procedures will define the values, principles and practices of the school and will guide school evaluation and development (Developing your school with Cambridge, 2015). Establishing procedures and responsibilities for the assessment and development of all teachers is key to providing accurate evidence of practice and to identifying teacher development needs (OECD, 2009, TALIS, 2009).

Community engagement

One of the many factors that influence learners’ achievements is parental involvement. Parents are key partners in the drive to improve student learning. Their active participation in this partnership makes a difference, and so engaging with parents is a key priority for any school. The literature reinforces that parent involvement in education can foster positive learning outcomes (Epstein, 1992; Sammons et al, 1995).

Engaging with the wider community locally has a positive impact on students’ attitudes towards school: ‘When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.’ (Henderson and Mapp, 2002). Other practices can contribute to improvements in education provision generally as well as in leaders’ individual schools (Bryk and Schneider, 2002, Chapman & Muijs, 2014, Stoll, 2015, Armstrong, 2015, Sharratt, 2017). These include developing professional relationships nationally and internationally, working collaboratively with other schools, as well as engaging with educational bodies such as Cambridge International to develop a shared purpose (Leithwood et al, 2010).
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 these national standards, 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.** STP 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.
Cambridge Teacher Standards and Cambridge School Leader Standards continued

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