

Strengthening and improving teaching and learning in schools across PNG

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Introduction

This paper provides brief background information on the development, implementation and review of the School Learning Improvement Plan (SLIP) in Papua New Guinea (PNG). SLIPs – often called School Development Plans elsewhere – are a statement of the key things that the school wants to change or improve (objectives); how these things are to be achieved (strategies); and what the impact will be (outcomes) on students' learning achievements. The SLIP process provides a purposeful and efficient way for all schools to improve the following:

- The effectiveness of classroom practice on students' learning outcomes.
- The management of the whole school.
- Decisions about the allocation of resources.
- The transparency and accountability processes.

Different components

SLIPs are set within a broader context that is described by a school's statement of purpose, vision and mission. They may be thought of as providing a public statement of how schools are attempting to address specific issues within the overarching goals contained in their statement of purpose. A SLIP enables a school to make a brief and concise public statement outlining the proposed major themes for its development. The processes by which the SLIP objectives are identified, planned, implemented and reviewed are critical to its success. These objectives must be designed to promote increased education outcomes for students as the number one priority. The processes associated with the SLIP will assist schools to:

- Identify the focus and boundaries of change.
- Direct their efforts more effectively to relieve the pressures that arise from many competing priorities.
- Be efficient in the use and deployment of resources.
- Further strengthen staff, student, parent and community teamwork.
- Raise public awareness of what schools are doing and how they plan to achieve their objectives.
- Communicate progress and the achievements of schools to the wider public.

A SLIP is only one aspect of a school's total planning process. It pinpoints the school's priority areas for development, but it does not encompass the ongoing maintenance activities of the school. The objectives for development that are identified in the SLIP arise from

two sources: the programmes and policies that the Department of Education wishes to implement in schools and the particular aspirations of schools and communities. The Department of Education in PNG has established its priorities and strategies within the National Education Plan (2005–2014) and the Universal Basic Education Plan (2009–2018) for the provision of resource allocation and support to schools (Department of Education 2005; 2009).

SLIPs vary according to the size and complexity of individual schools in elementary, primary and secondary sectors. Manageable and achievable objectives are set for each year of the plan. These will reflect the system and school's priorities. It is recommended that schools work through the management and organisational implications of a limited number of their high-priority objectives before expanding the number that they plan to address in any given year. A small number of objectives often appears to be a relatively limited task; however, the objectives fan out into a larger number of strategies that must all be managed.

Schools are encouraged to be creative and develop a SLIP that is responsive to the Department of Education's legislative requirements and policy priorities, any international obligations and the needs of their school community. Schools therefore need to ensure that the processes used to develop their SLIPs are inclusive of all groups in the school community. The choice of the strategies to address individual objectives should be informed by knowledge of effective practice in schools, but these strategies also provide the basis for innovation and new thinking in schools as the way forward to meet local needs and international pressure for change.

The essence of a SLIP should provide an overview of a school's identified areas for major growth and development over the next three years and include objectives, strategies and verifiable outcomes. Objectives need to be expressed in a way that clearly indicates the nature of the planned improvement. Outcomes need to be stated so that their achievement is easily recognisable.

These are more detailed descriptions of the strategies to be implemented to achieve the objectives as stated in the three-year SLIP rolling plan. The breadth of specific strategies will vary according to the size and complexity of a school as well as the nature of the specific objective being addressed in the particular setting.

Review of SLIPs

A SLIP is a living thing and goes through five stages: awareness, planning, implementation and internal and external reviews. SLIP stages are tools to facilitate development rather than ends in themselves. Review processes within a school consist of three strands:

1. Continual monitoring of the effectiveness of the strategies within a SLIP.
2. An annual internal review of the SLIP by the school community.
3. An external review by the Standards and Guidance Division (SGD) and other partners in education every three years.

The three-yearly external reviews focus on the progress that the school has made towards achieving its stated outcomes and will result in the production of a public report that will be shared with the community. They involve a review of:

- The effectiveness and inclusiveness of the planning process that resulted in the production of the SLIP.
- The management of the change process associated with the implementation of the SLIP.
- The effectiveness of the strategies employed by the school in implementing the yearly action plan.
- The extent to which the school has achieved its objectives and stretched its performance in improving outcomes for its students.

Stakeholders' responsibilities

All members of the educational community have responsibilities for the SLIP. These include the following.

Principals and/or head teachers

- Preparing, implementing and managing the SLIP.
- Involving students, staff and parents in the preparation, monitoring and review of the SLIP.
- Implementing the strategies at both school and classroom level.
- Taking appropriate action in response to internal and external reviews of the SLIP.

Teachers of all levels

- Participating in the development and internal review of the SLIP.
- Implementing the strategies at both school and classroom levels.

Box 1

An example of transformation in teaching and learning

At Barola Primary School in Kainantu District, Eastern Highlands Province, teaching and learning has improved. Each day, teachers arrive at school early, well dressed and with lesson notes and up-to-date materials. Students respond well by also coming to school early, looking smart and bringing their lunch. Lessons start on time and school finishes late because there is overwhelming enjoyment due to active engagement and participation. Lesson exercises and termly and summative assessment results show that from elementary right up to upper primary the results have improved in all subject areas. With very good community support, the school is a model for the district, province and nation.

Boards of management/governors/ governing council

- Articulating the educational needs and aspirations of the school community.
- Participating in the development and internal review of the SLIP.
- Supporting the implementation of the SLIP.

Regional inspectorate

- Providing support to principals in the preparation and implementation of SLIPs.
- Approving SLIPs.
- Establishing district, provincial or regional plans that indicate systemic priorities for school development.
- Taking appropriate action in response to school reviews.

Conclusion

SLIP has transformed over 11,000 elementary, primary and secondary schools in PNG (see Box 1 for an example). There have been widespread improvements in students' learning outcomes, staff development based on the school's needs, better support for students' needs and welfare, and improved infrastructure maintenance and development. Shared school leadership has improved administration, and many schools are directing school funds and other resources towards SLIP activities.

SLIP transformation is rapidly being understood and adopted by all levels of community, school and leadership in the education sector as being the critical school planning, management, quality and engagement tool. Individual schools are able to attest to a SLIP's value and impact in improving learning, retention and behaviour management, and SLIPs are a significant contributor to universal basic education that is cost-effective and is being delivered in a geographically hostile environment (Kants, 2008).

References

- Department of Education (2005). 'National Education Plan (2005–2014)'. Port Moresby: Department of Education.
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