

# Leading Change in Schools: Why It Matters, How We Do It, and What It Requires

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Across our profession, one reality is becoming increasingly clear: if we are not intentionally leading change in our schools, then change is happening *around* us rather than *through* us—and our students are the ones most affected.

## Why change matters

The world our students are entering is complex, fast-moving, and deeply interconnected. Yet many aspects of schooling still reflect legacy structures designed for a different time. If our purpose is to prepare young people not just for exams, but for life, then education must be:

- Relevant to the real world
- Responsive to individual learners
- Grounded in wellbeing and belonging
- Focused on transferable skills, not just content

This is not about abandoning tradition. It is about ensuring that what we hold onto continues to serve our students.

At its core, change in education is a moral imperative. It is about equity, agency, and giving every student the opportunity to thrive in a contemporary world.

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## How change can be led effectively

In my experience across Australia, the UK, and India, successful change is rarely driven by a single initiative. Instead, it emerges from a *coherent approach* that brings people, purpose, and practice into alignment.

### **1. Start with a clear and shared purpose**

Change cannot be imposed—it must be understood. When leaders articulate *why* change is necessary and connect it to student outcomes, staff are far more likely to engage with both confidence and commitment.

### **2. Build relational trust first**

Change lives or dies on relationships. Visibility, listening, and genuine collaboration create the conditions where staff feel safe to take risks, question practices, and grow.

### **3. Use structure to support innovation**

Initiatives fail when they sit on the margins. Sustainable change requires systems:

- Professional learning frameworks
- Collaborative structures (such as teaching and learning councils)
- Aligned curriculum and assessment practices
- Timetable and organisational design that enables different learning approaches

Without structure, innovation becomes inconsistent. With it, change becomes embedded.

### **4. Invest in people, not just programs**

Professional learning, coaching, and mentoring are the engines of transformation. When teachers understand the research, see it modelled, and are supported to implement it, change becomes part of professional identity—not an added burden.

### **5. Respect context while challenging practice**

Every school has its own story, culture, and community expectations. Effective leaders honour this—but are also prepared to respectfully challenge practices that no longer serve students.

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## **What is needed to achieve meaningful outcomes**

From my experience leading curriculum reform, embedding wellbeing frameworks, implementing IB programmes, and developing new school campuses, a few consistent elements stand out.

### **1. Courageous leadership**

Change requires leaders who are prepared to step beyond incremental improvement and think differently about learning, structures, and student experience.

### **2. A shift in pedagogy**

Moving from content-heavy delivery to:

- Inquiry-driven learning
- Conceptual understanding
- Interdisciplinary thinking
- Real-world application

This is where genuine transformation occurs.

### **3. A commitment to inclusion and learner variability**

Frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning and personalised pathways are not “add-ons”—they are essential if every student is to succeed.

### **4. Integration of technology with purpose**

Technology should not be the focus, but it is a powerful enabler when aligned with pedagogy—supporting connection, feedback, and personalised learning.

### **5. Distributed leadership**

Change is sustained when it is owned by many, not driven by a few. Empowering middle leaders and classroom teachers builds both capacity and confidence.

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## **A message to fellow leaders**

One of the greatest barriers to change in schools is not resistance—it is uncertainty.

- *Will this work?*
- *Will staff come with me?*
- *Will the community understand?*

These are valid questions. But what I have learned is this: **confidence in leading change grows through action, not before it.**

When we:

- Ground ourselves in purpose
- Build trust with our teams
- Align our structures
- Stay focused on student outcomes

...we create the conditions where meaningful change not only becomes possible, but sustainable.

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## **Final reflection**

Leading change is not about disruption for its own sake. It is about stewardship—ensuring that the education we provide today genuinely prepares our students for tomorrow.

And perhaps most importantly, when we lead change well, we give others permission to do the same.