

Independent Progress Review

Basic Education Sector Transformation Program

Final Report

February 2018

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Acronyms

ACTRC	Assessment, Curriculum and Technology Research Centre
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ALS	Alternative Learning Systems
ANU	Australian National University
AR	Action Research
ARMM	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
BEPS	Basic Education Planning System
BESMEF	Basic Education Sector Monitoring Evaluation Framework
BESRA	Basic Education Sector Reform Agenda
BEST	Basic Education Sector Transformation
BHROD	Bureau of Human Resources and Organizational Development
BRAC	Building Resources Across Communities
CICL	Children in Conflict with the Law
CHED	Commission on Higher Education
CI	Continuous Improvement
CO	Central Office
COT	Classroom Observation Tool
CQA	Curriculum Quality Audit
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DepEd	Department of Education
DO	Departmental Order
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
EBEIS	Enhanced Basic Education Information System
EDG	Education Donor Group

EGMA	Early Grades Mathematics Assessment
EGRA	Early Grades Reading Assessment
EFA	Education for All
EOPO	End of Program Outcomes
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
GAD	Gender and Development
GIS	Geographical Information System
GPH	Government of the Philippines
GRBE	Gender Responsive Basic Education policy
ICT	Information Communications Technology
IPR	Independent Progress Review
JAB	Joint Advisory Board
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
JHS	Junior High School
K	Kindergarten
KEQ	Key Evaluation Questions
LAC	Learning Action Cell
LET	Licensure Examination for Teachers
LIS	Learner Information System
LRMDS/P	Learning Resource Management and Development System/Portal
LRN	Learner Registration Number
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEA	Monitoring Evaluation and Adjustment
MOOE	Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses
MTB-MLE	Mother Tongue Based – Multi lingual Education
NAT	National Achievement Test
NCR	National Capital Region

NEAP	National Educators Academy of the Philippines
NEDA	National Economic and Development Authority
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
ODE	Office of Development Effectiveness
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
PBEEd	Philippine Business for Education
PBSP	Philippine Business for Social Progress
PDD	Program Design Document
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
PMIS	Project Management Information System
PMC	Project Management Committee
PMS	Project Management Services
PPST	Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers
PROBE	Philippine Australian Project for Basic Education
PSC	Project Steering Committee
PSCO	Project Services Coordination Office
PTDNS	Pre-service Teacher Development Needs Study
PNU	Philippine Normal University
MIPE: PRIME	Muslim and Indigenous People’s Education: Philippine Response to Indigenous Peoples’ and Muslim Education
RatPlan	Rationalization Plan
RCTQ	Philippine National Research Center for Teacher Quality
RPMS	Results-based Performance Management System
SAT	Self Assessment Tool
SBIS	School Building Information System
SBM	School-Based Management
SEA-PLM	South East Asia Primary Learning Metrics

SEDIP	Secondary Education Development Improvement Project
SHS	Senior High School
SIL	Summer Institute of Linguistics
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SPED	Special Education
SPHERE	Support to the Philippine Basic Education Reforms
STRIVE	Strengthening Implementation of Basic Education in selected provinces of the Visayas
TAF	The Asia Foundation
TDNS	Teacher Development Needs Study
TEDNS	Teacher Educator Development Needs Study
TEI	Teacher Education Institution
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
ToC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
TWG	Technical Working Group
UDL	Universal Design in Learning
UIS	Unified Information System
UNE	University of New England
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UP	University of the Philippines
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

The Basic Education Sector Transformation (BEST) Program is Australia's largest partnership in the Philippines. It commenced in 2013 with four implementing partners continuing the work of previous education investments. A Facilitating Contractor was officially mobilised in August 2014. The program was originally designed as a 12 year program with corresponding end of program outcomes (EOPOs).

The aim of BEST was to help the Philippines Government improve the quality of educational outcomes by providing more equitable access to all levels of basic education with improved service delivery through better governance, and to assist implement the K–12 school system.

BEST involves seven key partner organisations (1) Department of Education (DepEd) as the main beneficiary and strategic lead agency; (2) Commission on Higher Education (CHED); (3) Cardno Emerging Markets as the Facilitating Contractor; (4) Philippine Business for Education (PBE) implementing student teacher scholarships; (5) Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) undertaking classroom construction; (6) Philippine National Research Center for Teacher Quality (RCTQ) a research partnership between the Philippine Normal University (PNU) and the University of New England (UNE); and (7) Assessment, Curriculum, Technology Research Centre (ACTRC), a research partnership between the University of the Philippines (UP) and University of Melbourne.

BEST has been affected by changes of government from its inception. Australian elections in 2013 led to a year-long mobilisation delay eventually commencing officially in August 2014, followed by a significant reprioritisation of the aid budget in 2014/2015 with a reduction in funding. In 2016 there was a change in Government in the Philippines (GPH) with the Duterte administration coming to power. This new administration resulted in significant changes to the senior executive arrangements in DepEd, particularly affecting the structure and functional responsibilities in the central office.

The purpose of this Independent Progress Review (IPR) is to provide the evidence that the program is on track, still relevant, and coordinated with other DFAT programs. DepEd and DFAT will use the evaluation to improve BEST implementation to 2019. The IPR also will inform Australia's future engagement in national education within the scope of the current Philippines Government policies and priorities. The IPR takes into account the challenges that have taken place outside of the BEST's control.

Key Findings

BEST has only effectively been implemented in its current form for two and half years. This is due in part to the slow mobilisation period and the changes in government policy, administration, budgets and programming. Despite this BEST, as a partnership program, has achieved significant results by building on previous Australian Government initiatives:

- BEST has made major contributions to organisational development and results-based performance management; continuous improvement programs; implementation of the rationalization plan; and to developing a culture of monitoring, evaluation and evidence-based planning. The introduction of the K–12 program has been a major achievement of the Philippines Government supported by technical assistance through BEST.
- BEST has also supported DepEd to develop and implement a range of important policies supported by research from the two associated research centres including RCTQ's development of the Philippine Professional Teaching Standards (PPST). The standards were internationally benchmarked and linked to the ASEAN 2015 agenda and the Philippine Qualifications Framework.
- BEST has delivered 700 teaching scholarships through PBE to help improve the quality of teachers through innovative selection and support programs. More than 250 new classrooms have been built by PBSP, incorporating improved standards for disaster risk reduction, gender equality and social inclusion.
- BEST has supported the ongoing development of ICT functions in the DepEd including: the Enhanced Basic Education Information System, Learner Information System, Learning Resources Portal, School Building Information System, Project Management Information Systems and support for the Human Resources Information System.

In terms of **progress towards intended program outcomes** the IPR found that for **teacher development** and **student mastery of the curriculum**:

- There are major difficulties in attributing progress of teacher development to BEST. Most of the BEST interventions in teacher development were not initiatives developed by the program but a continuation of practices that had been introduced by other programs.
- On present progress, teachers do not yet have sufficiently enhanced capability to effect improvements in student mastery as a result of the BEST program. Regional and divisional offices, however, as well as school heads, seem to have vigorous continuous improvement (CI) practices and information-based planning cultures which can be attributable to BEST. These provide a strong basis for targeted, systemic support and monitoring of teacher development for improving students' mastery of K–12 curriculum.
- BEST-supported training has been used to improve delivery of the curriculum, however this has been limited. It may not yet have reached classroom teachers to an adequate level.
- BEST has mainly worked through DepEd's national in-service training institute, the National Education Academy of the Philippines (NEAP), to cascade training to school heads and teachers to improve teaching of Filipino, English, Mathematics and Science in line with the K-12 curriculum.
- The National Achievement Test (NAT) scores for 2015-16 have not been released at the national and regional levels preventing any comparison of student performance within and outside of BEST regions.
- Students' scores at the elementary level show potential for attaining an improvement in the passing rate on the NAT achievement test, particularly if strategies to target specific cohorts and areas are developed to maximise impact during the remainder of the program.
- For junior high school, improvements in passing rates are not as attainable. It is likely that the junior high school (JHS) curriculum will need revision, which is not achievable within the remaining time.

In terms of **girls' and boys' participation and completion rates**, the IPR found that:

- Increases in participation rates have been observed nationally, however there is no significant difference between BEST and non-BEST regions.
- Key informants suggest that BEST has been able to enhance existing processes used for identifying those learners that have been traditionally marginalised and isolated. BEST has supported community mapping, strengthening programs for indigenous peoples, Muslim learners and those with special needs, and encouraging the return of drop-outs through Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) support.
- BEST has enhanced programs and services for children with disabilities to encourage participation. However this has been limited to a few clusters of schools in BEST regions. It involved orientation and training on inclusive education (capacity building) rather than a school-based integrated approach.
- Completion rates have remained generally lower than targeted, with more boys dropping out of school in the elementary grades and even higher rates in the secondary level. The ALS supported by BEST may address this to some extent.
- In terms of progress towards **a more gender responsive and inclusive basic education system** the IPR found: DepEd's progress on gender and development since 2013 has been significant with some support from BEST.¹ However, BEST has not comprehensively considered how to mainstream or target attention to gender equality and women's empowerment in implementing its sub-components.
- Progress in gender equality and social inclusion has largely been the contribution to the development of various policies and departmental issuances, foremost of which is the Gender Responsive Basic Education Policy and the development of a framework for institutionalisation.

¹ For example, DepEd has already achieved sex-disaggregated data on DepEd learners and employees, an annual GAD plan and budget (which was supported by BEST but not yet endorsed by the Philippine Commission of Women), and integration of gender in the learning curriculum and textbooks.

- There is selective rather than comprehensive attention to gender equality, and it is unclear whether the recently-produced 'BEST Gender Strategy' has any buy-in from DepEd.
- Mainstreaming disability-inclusion is starting to take root some of which can be attributed to the work of the BEST program in Region 8. BEST's progress to date on disability-inclusion has demonstrated Australia's value-add, and suggests an increased focus in this area may be warranted. There appear to be some significant localised results that should be evaluated for scale up.

There is unanimous agreement amongst stakeholders that **BEST is still relevant**. However, the degree of relevance has been affected by DepEd's requirement to use BEST as a flexible fund to meet its emerging needs, deviating from the intended programmatic approach. Relevance to the Philippines and Australia could be enhanced with a greater focus on Australia's comparative advantage such as gender responsive education, inclusive education and education-employment linkages.

In terms of the **program modality and implementation** the IPR found that:

- The strength of the approach to BEST was in the co-design and co-development which instilled a strong sense of ownership with DepEd. The weakness is in the co-implementation approach, lack of full adoption of governance structures, limited collaboration, no co-location, and informal decision-making processes, resulting in fragmentation of resources and a lack of cohesion.
- The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system established for BEST has not been adequately implemented to properly report on the contributions DFAT has made towards achieving intermediate or end of program outcomes (EOPOs).
- The research undertaken by RCTQ and ACTRC was found to be of high quality with evidence of its application within DepEd. However the extent of its use for policy and practice was not clearly discernible. There did not appear to be a suitable process for DepEd to capture all of its value given the technical working groups (TWGs) have not been operational.

The IPR found that donors had experienced a decline in coordination with each other during the BEST implementation period. This does not imply BEST contributed to the decline. However, the IPR found that a number of donors felt that many opportunities to create more value through joint programming were being missed. There is an opportunity to help DepEd to build the capacity of its Project Management Services (PMS) to enable better donor coordination, particularly to donor investments to improve areas such as budget execution and resource mobilisation.

Recommendations

The findings in this report support the following recommendations:

1. Implement formal program governance structures and improved contractual arrangements with partners, based on a pragmatic revision of the program design, to counteract the informal decision-making processes and improve accountability, transparency and formal communication. (High priority)
2. Improve mechanisms to better support DepEd to evaluate and adopt the research produced by RCTQ and ACTRC into policies and practice in DepEd. (High priority)
3. Strengthen the program's M&E to better understand the contribution BEST is making towards achieving end of program outcomes (EOPOs), and to improve accountability, transparency, and to understand what works, what doesn't and under what conditions. (High priority)
4. Sharpen the focus on, and increase resources to, improving teaching, learning, participation, gender equality and inclusion, and education-employment linkages in target divisions through the whole school approach, in line with the intentions of the BEST design. (High priority)
5. Develop a clearing house for local innovative strategies, policies and practices at the school level. (Medium priority)
6. Assist DepEd to implement more effective donor coordination to create more value from available donor resources. (Medium priority)

1. Introduction

This Independent Progress Review (IPR) for the Philippines Basic Education Sector Transformation (BEST) Program was commissioned by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) through an open tender process. It was conducted by Coffey International Development (Coffey) between August and October 2017. Terms of reference are provided in Annex 1 along with a summary of the approach and methodology.

The purpose of this Independent Progress Review (IPR) is to assess whether the program is on track, still relevant, and coordinated with other DFAT programs. DepEd and DFAT will use the evaluation to improve BEST implementation to 2019. The IPR will also inform Australia's future engagement in national education within the scope of the current Philippines Government policies and priorities. The IPR takes into account the challenges that have taken place outside of the BEST's control.

Specifically, the objectives of the IPR are to:

1. Provide evidence-based assessment to demonstrate whether the program is on track to deliver what the design committed to achieve.
2. Assess whether the program is still relevant to Australia and Philippines policy priorities and highlight areas for improvement for the remainder of the implementation period.
3. Evaluate whether the modality of the BEST program supports or impedes the efficient and effective delivery of the program.
4. Assess how BEST collaborates with other programs funded by the Australian Government, programs delivered by the Philippines Government, and other international organisations.
5. To provide advice and lessons learnt to inform the scale and possible options for Australia's future engagement in national education within the scope of the current Philippines Government policies and priorities.

The IPR conducted 48 interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with over 220 informants (groups are listed in Annex 3). Secondary information was obtained through document reviews, progress reports and information systems maintained by the Department of Education (DepEd).

1.1. Background

BEST is Australia's largest partnership in the Philippines. It commenced in 2013 with four implementing partners continuing the work of previous education investments. It has a high profile as a DFAT flagship education program and now involves seven key partner organisations:

1. Department of Education (DepEd) as the main beneficiary and strategic lead agency
2. Commission on Higher Education (CHED)
3. Cardno Emerging Markets as the Facilitating Contractor
4. Philippine Business for Education (PBE) implementing student teacher scholarships
5. Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) implementing classroom construction
6. Philippine National Research Center for Teacher Quality (RCTQ) a research partnership between the Philippine Normal University (PNU) and the University of New England (UNE)
7. Assessment, Curriculum, Technology Research Centre, a research partnership between the University of the Philippines (UP) and University of Melbourne.

BEST was developed to support the reform agenda of the Aquino administration (2010-16). This reform has at its core the development and delivery of a K-12 school system of improved quality and inclusiveness, and strengthening of the Basic Education System Reform Agenda (BESRA), introduced in 2006. BESRA was concerned with the organisational reform and decentralisation of responsibility and authority for service delivery to regional and divisional offices and school principals.

The BEST program covers a period of six years from July 2013 to June 2019 although it officially commenced in its current form in August 2014. BEST is now in its fourth year of implementation, with

some components having started earlier and having been assimilated into the program in between 2014 and 2015.² The Facilitating Contractor, Cardno Emerging Markets, commenced in August 2014.

The goal of BEST is that girls and boys have the competence and skills to make an increased contribution to economic growth and stability in the Philippines. The targeted end of program outcomes (EOPOs) are that:

1. More children are able to demonstrate improved mastery of basic education curriculum competencies (especially in English, Mathematics and Science) and differences in learning outcomes for boys and girls are reduced in target areas.
2. More boys and girls participate in and complete basic education in target areas.
3. DepEd is better able to deliver basic education services that are more gender responsive, inclusive and with increased accountability.

The program design is based on the theory that the third EOPO supports the other two, which are organised under two program components:

Component 1: Improving teaching and learning comprises the following strategies: (i) pre- and in-service education; (ii) curriculum and assessment reform; (iii) materials development and accessibility (iv) inclusive curriculum strategies for distinctive populations; (v) effective school leadership; and (vi) increased education facilities.

Component 2: Strengthening systems which covers evidence-based policy and planning, organisation development, Unified Information Systems and specifically gender equality mainstreaming through a gender strategy.

1.2. Current situation

This Independent Progress Review (IPR) takes into account the design, development and implementation of BEST against a background of significant changes from the time of the completion of the design in September 2012 to August 2017.

BEST was affected by changes of government from its inception. Australian elections in 2013 led to a year-long mobilisation delay eventually commencing officially in August 2014. In 2016 there was a change in Government in the Philippines (GPH) with the Duterte administration coming to power. This new administration resulted in significant changes to the senior executive arrangements in DepEd, particularly affecting the structure and functional responsibilities in the central office. The transition to the new administration has been protracted due to the new senior personnel and structural changes and changing roles and responsibilities. Part of the delay has been due to the review and updating of the Rationalization Plan, particularly in relation to the central office structure.

The Rationalization Plan was approved in 2015 and subsequently implemented at the regional level where it is now complete. At the central level, however, it is still a work in progress with the new administration appointing new executives and implementing a new accountability structure in which senior officers report individually rather than as thematic teams to the Secretary.

During the implementation of BEST, DepEd has transitioned to the full implementation of the K–12 program. Despite some changes in strategic priorities, the K–12 program is secure and being fully implemented at the sub-national level. Support for the K–12 program is integral to the GPH's inclusive growth agenda and part of the new administration's 'brand' (Government of the Philippines, 2017). As Secretary Briones has emphasised: "*K to 12 is not about simply adding school years to basic education to be at par with international norm, but more about the content and the intended outcomes in terms of upgrading education quality*". (Briones, 2016)

² The classroom construction program delivered through PBSP started in August 2013 to respond to the national classroom shortage. The research centres (ACTRC and RCTQ) originally started in 2012 through a PSLP grant and were eventually incorporated in the BEST program through an amendment of the contract in April 2015.

Education has retained its importance under the new Duterte administration, with the largest budget among line agencies.³ The priorities of the Briones administration in DepEd currently focus on budget utilisation, reflecting the slow spending of previous administrations and the significant increases in the education budget over the last year. As of June 2017 DepEd had only obligated 34% of its total budget, causing concerns that it will not be able to spend its allocated budget by the end of the financial year. Financial monitoring will be a priority to ensure budget utilisation rates are improved. This will be supported by procurement reforms and improved disbursement of funds to regions. Other priorities now include implementing the Alternative Learning System (ALS), preventive drug education, and reproductive health and disaster preparedness.

Although BEST officially commenced in its current form in August 2014 it has only been effectively implemented for two and a half years up until August 2017 due in part to the slow mobilisation period and the changes in administration and programming. The design was originally for a 12-year program with corresponding end of program outcomes (EOPOs).

Reductions of the Australian aid budget during implementation of BEST resulted in adjustments to BEST planned activities, including reducing the number of classrooms constructed (from 1000 to 500). Further reductions in budget in 2015 resulted in additional changes and dropping some activities (DFAT, 2015-17). BEST was designed as a scalable program, and DFAT considered the changes had little impact on effectiveness (DFAT, 2015).⁴

The program has built extensively on previous Australian Government initiatives (and other donors), notably STRIVE, EPIP, SEDIP, PRIME, HRODF, SPHERE and PROBE, and made significant contributions to the DepEd's reforms. This is an effective use of resources with a focus on continuing organisational development, continuous improvement (CI), information systems, and institutional monitoring and evaluation. It has resulted in improvements at all levels of the education system, with a nationwide impact.

The work of the RCTQ and ACTRC has produced quality research to support the education system in the Philippines. These initiatives have increased the status of both partner universities through their association and continue to publish significant pieces of research which will attract funding and support. Demands for services from both research centres appear to be increasing which is indicative of the quality and relevance of their work.

PBE, PBSP and ACTRC are essentially on track in terms of their plans, given the reduction in budget. However, RTCQ reported that it was behind its planned schedule in the expected release of the Philippines Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST). The delay may be attributed to the difficulties translating research into policy and practice, and being unable to make a start on the pre-service curriculum reform because of CHED's timetable. RCTQ in consequence changed the order of expected deliverables with NEAP and BHROD to develop and pilot key tools supportive of PPST by addressing different tools linked to Career Stages with the Classroom Observation Tool (COT), the Self Assessment Tool (SAT), and a more robust and quality-teacher focused Results-based Performance Management System (RPMS).

³ Education increased from 11.4% of the national budget in 2010 to 17% in 2017 (Briones, 2016).

⁴ Other reductions included: dropping planned lighthouse schools (inclusive education), science and computer laboratories, a UIS data centre, Grade 4 reading, DRR assistance and small grants for schools.

1.3. Major achievements

BEST has achieved some significant milestones and although interventions have been generally fragmented they are producing results in key areas. These are discussed in more detail in the next sections. Annex 4 summarises the major achievements of the program based on an analysis of all six monthly progress reports.⁵

The major achievements from all BEST partners include:

- **Pre-service teacher education:** 700 teaching scholarships provided under the STEP-UP program (PBEEd); *Pre-service Teacher Development Needs Study*, the *Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers – Career Stage 1*, Curriculum Quality Audit program, *Teacher Educator Development Needs Study* (RCTQ).
- **In-service teacher development and support:** Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers – Career Stage 1 to 4; *Teacher Development Needs Study* (RCTQ) (subject strengthening) - systems developed and trainers trained; trainings delivered in Action Research, formative assessment, Learning Action Cells for Information Communications Technology (LAC ICT); career guidance and counselling modules for year 10 students; support for the integration of mother tongue into lesson plans.
- **Education leadership:** School Heads Development Program (SHDP) developed and the National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP) supported to roll out it nationally to 23,000 school heads. Training of superintendents and assistant superintendents in educational leadership, organisational transformation and continuous improvement.
- **Senior high school implementation:** Funding for a DepEd technical team to implement SHS (See Box 1). Senior High School (SHS) Assessment Models: Policy Level Concept Report completed (RCTQ-SiMERR).
- **Education facilities:** Construction of more than 250 classrooms to new standards for disaster risk reduction, with facilities for children living with disabilities and male and female toilets; an extensive social preparation program with local stakeholders to prepare for school maintenance and support (PBSP).
- **Planning, policy and evidence base:** BEST contributed to more than 56 policies, guidelines and studies supporting evidence-based policy development.⁶ A full list of policies, guidelines and studies developed with assistance from BEST are given in Annex 5. Monitoring and evaluation training and guidelines at all levels in DepEd to support evidence-based policy and continuous improvement was provided, supported by development of nationwide pool of continuous improvement experts and support for harmonising plans from national to local (Basic Education Planning System – BEPS), support for the Basic Education Research Agenda, and roll out of the School Improvement Plans (UNICEF and BEST).

Box 1. Implementing Senior High School (SHS)

In the period between mid-2014 and 2016 DepEd managed to set up the entire sub-sector of Senior Secondary School from scratch. Undoubtedly the enterprise of establishing this new high stakes sector was the most urgent undertaking preoccupying DepEd during the years of BEST. The program provided key support, including the provision of 15 additional advisers, 'extra pairs of hands', to enable this timetable to be met. It helped DepEd develop a policy and guide for hiring SHS teachers. It assisted all the regions and School Division Officers with technical assistance to prepare and implement Senior High School plans and prepare resources (including an SHS manual of operations, school program offerings, Curriculum Guides for Senior High School Core Curriculum Subjects, Applied Tracks and Specialised Subjects). Resources were uploaded and made accessible online for use by all educators. A Senior High School communication strategy contributed to high public awareness on the importance of Senior High School, and the high transition rate from Grade 10 to Grade 11. Successful implementation owed much to BEST's support in achieving its SHS agenda. Australia was the only donor providing this support.

⁵ RCTQ adopted a systems approach within its own areas of responsibility to ensure research activities were properly aligned. DepEd is now interested in adopting this approach.

⁶ Annex 5 provides a list of DepEd policies supported by BEST with a corresponding list of policies and studies identified in BEST progress reporting. There is a slight discrepancy between the two lists which requires further resolution by the BEST team in order to determine the actual number of policies supported.

- **Unified information systems:** Hardware, software, development and training support for the Enhanced Basic Education Information System (EBEIS), Learner Information System (LIS), Program Management Information System (PMIS), Learning Resources Management and Development System (LRMDS or LR Portal), and the School Building Information Systems (SBIS).
- **Organisational development:** Extensive support for implementing the Rationalization Plan (RATPLAN); implementation of the Results-based Performance Management System (RPMS) and continuous improvement (CI) program; training in strategic human resource management and merit-based recruitment.

2. Progress towards intended outcomes

This section discusses IPR's findings on BEST's current contribution towards achieving the intended end of program outcomes, specifically improvements in:

- Teacher development
- Student mastery of the K–12 curriculum
- Girls and boys participation and completion in target areas
- Gender responsive and inclusive basic education.

Judgements made by the IPR team relied heavily on information from key informants and research studies rather than standardised quantitative data. Measuring progress towards intended outcomes for BEST was somewhat problematic due to the following:

- The programmatic M&E system was poorly constructed and not adequately implemented to monitor and evaluate BEST's contributions towards intended outcomes.
- BEST built on previous initiatives without establishing a clear baseline for all investments on commencement, which limits the ability to determine the impact of BEST's contributions.⁷ There are baselines for some key areas, for instance RCTQ's research on pre-and in-service teacher knowledge, teacher educator concerns and understandings, and the differences between current pre-service TEI program outcomes compared with those mandated within the PPST (Career Stage 1).
- DepEd focused on building foundational capacity at the central level during the first few years of implementation with many impacts unlikely to affect teachers and learners at the local level at this stage.
- A fragmented approach to implementing reforms makes it difficult to determine the contribution BEST has made compared to other key contributors.
- National achievement test (NAT) scores were not available for 2015/2016, limiting any quantitative analysis of BEST and non-BEST regions in terms of educational improvements for the implementation period.

DepEd's continued focus appears to be on establishing its core foundational elements at the central level with which to support decentralisation efforts. This investment in foundational outcomes aligns with the original design document. However there needs to be a balance between focus at the central level and testing the impacts of these investments and policies at the local level through complementary interventions. Feedback from the local level is critical in order to ensure local needs are met to improve teaching and learning, and lessons can be used to inform scale up strategies.

2.1. Teacher development

The intended outcome for Teacher Development in the design document is that "*Teachers are better qualified and capable to deliver the curriculum*".⁸

⁷ For instance what was the status of the EBEIS, LIS or M&E systems when BEST had commenced? How much work had been done?

⁸ BEST PDD, 2012, p. 111.

The Teacher Development Needs Study (TDNS) was developed by RCTQ to test teachers' K-12 competency knowledge in English, Filipino, Maths and Science at the Grades 6, 8 and 10 levels to assess teachers' competency and knowledge in the K-12 curriculum subjects. The survey was intended as an empirical base for developing in-service programs.⁹ Its key findings were that:

- Teachers possess substantial subject knowledge.
- Most teachers show insufficient skills in higher-order thinking; i.e. analysis, synthesis and evaluation in all subjects.
- Teacher performance in junior high school (JHS) science competencies is more problematic than in other subjects.
- In-service training should jointly target teacher pedagogical skills and content knowledge development to improve teaching for students' deeper conceptual understanding.¹⁰

These findings lay an evidence base, with a strong theoretical developmental perspective, to build national ways for DepEd Bureaus and NEAP to create professional learning programs that will address the specific needs of classroom teachers. Also, these findings with in-service teachers mirrored the results of the findings of the Pre-service Teacher Development Needs Study (PTDNS) with final-year pre-service teachers. This meant that the results of Graduate teachers did not perform at levels much different to practising teachers with years of experience. This casts doubts on both the quality of pre-service subject knowledge training, and the nature and focus of recent in-service support. It also follows that the performance of beginning teachers in the near future will perpetuate the low performance level that currently exists unless improvements to pre-service teacher education are instigated, such as the improvement of pre-service teacher education programs.

The ACTRC study on teacher practices in formative assessment yielded valuable information about the capacity of teachers' feedback to enable and extend students' own learning. The findings of the study were that teachers mainly stayed at the lower, closed end of feedback, through teaching at the whole class level and mainly seeking student responses in the form of right or wrong answers to closed questions. These are not practices consistent with initiating students' thinking or developing higher order skills.

There are no available DepEd data on teacher competency levels. Although teachers conduct competency-based assessments annually at their schools, data do not appear to be aggregated beyond the school, in spite of the intention of the Rationalization Plan that national planning for teacher competency development should be based on needs identification at the level of the school.

Against this information on teachers' competency, progress can be measured against whether the intended teacher development is *relevant* to, and *adequate* for, delivering the new curriculum.

The new curriculum aims to develop critical thinking, problem solving, and technology-assisted teaching (21st century skills), and the progressive deepening of students' grasp of core concepts. It incorporates curriculum contextualisation strategies to provide for all learners. Significant amongst these is the introduction of the mother tongue-based multi-lingual policy (MTB/MLE) from Kindergarten to Grade 3.¹¹ These features all require teachers to be equipped with new skills.

There are major difficulties in attributing progress of teacher development to BEST. Most of the BEST interventions in teacher development (Learning Action Cells – LAC and Action Research) were not initiatives developed by the program but a continuation of earlier practices institutionalised by DepEd. All of the organisational and systemic improvements that affect teachers' work, such as results-based performance management, needs-based planning, divisional support for schools, school-based management (SBM) and monitoring evaluation and adjustment (MEA) originated in earlier donor

⁹ Philippine National Research Centre for Teacher Quality, Teacher Development Needs Assessment (TDNS) Summary Report, p. 2.

¹⁰ TDNS, pp.5-6.

¹¹ Leonor Magtolis Briones, Secretary, Department of Education Quality, Accessible, Relevant, and Liberating Basic Education for All, Education Summit 2016, 3 November 2016; DepEd Strategic Directions, 2017-2022.

programs. It is good development practice to keep building on improved systems and capacities, but it makes it very difficult to be able to attribute the effectiveness of their operation to BEST's involvement.

In addition, there are no data at central level (either in DepEd or the Facilitating Contractor) on the scope of intended participation in training activities, on actual participants, nor evaluations of the effectiveness of capacity building or training. A baseline (school year 2014/15) was developed by BEST for DepEd in line with the scope of BEST's agenda. But on most targets it is nationwide and does not serve as a baseline for comparative assessment of BEST-supported regions, divisions or schools.

In the face of these challenges, the evidence used for appraising BEST's contribution to teacher development is firstly identification of BEST's engagement through its planning and reports, and secondly, through evidence from documents, stakeholder interviews, focus group discussions and site visits.

2.1.1. In-service teacher development

Frameworks for competency development

The Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) was developed by RCTQ-SiMERR. The PPST elaborates, for the first time in operational terms, what is meant by teacher quality in the K-12 Reform. The findings of the Teacher Development Needs Assessment (TDNS) in relation to the new K-12 curriculum provide concrete evidence to support the focus of the first Domain in the PPST, Content Knowledge and Pedagogy. The PPST have been formally adopted by DepEd (DO No. 42, S. 2017). This adoption will ultimately ensure that pre-service teacher education, all in-service curricular training, and the teacher career progression all align with curriculum requirements. As stated in the Departmental Order (dated August 11, 2017), *"the PPST shall be used as a basis for all learning and development programs to ensure that teachers are properly equipped to effectively implement the K to 12 Program. It can also be used for the selection and promotion of teachers. All performance appraisals for teachers shall be based on this set of standards"*. This prospect validated the decision of RCTQ to pursue the development of the tools, Classroom Observation Tool (COT), Self Assessment Tool (SAT) and Results-based Performance Management System (RPMS), based on the PPST.

When ready the PPST will be rolled out with prepared manuals, teacher assessment tools and training programs, and will need to be aligned to the qualification standards and standardised salary scales of the Department of Budget and Management (DBM).

The BEST Teacher Development team also worked with RCTQ to use both National Assessment Test (NAT) results analysis and the TDNS to scope the development of the main in-service training supported by BEST, teacher training for improving learning. This is the training known as the PRIMALS (English, Filipino, Science and Mathematics). However, the target group of the PRIMALS is elementary Grades 4-6, not junior high school (JHS), where teachers' competency in Mathematics and Science is much more in need of development.

BEST has supported two other kinds of in-service training: Action Research and training for establishing effective Learning Action Cells (LACS), the Philippines' mechanism for school-based professional development. Both of these are mechanisms for demand-driven professional development, enabling teachers to make their own choices for developing their understanding and skills.

Action Research (AR) proposals from National Regional Capital (NCR) (this activity was undertaken mainly in NCR) show eclectic teacher choices. Only ten of the 54 AR proposals have a focus on areas of weakness identified by the TDNS, indicating perhaps that an opportunity has been missed to direct trainers' attention to the implications of the TDNS for teacher improvement.

Learning Action Cells Knowledge and experience of the LACs are the most widespread amongst stakeholders of any of reforms for improving teaching. The policy establishing them was promulgated in June 2016 and the universalisation of LACS is new. BEST supported DepEd's policy on the LAC with starter kits, materials and 'least learnt skills training' which addresses competency weaknesses that come out of individual teacher performance assessments. LACS occur frequently (often once a fortnight) and are integrated into regional and school plans, and divisional supervision. This all suggests that the BEST-supported establishment of LACs has been successful.

Much discussion in focus groups in NCR, Region 8 and Region 6 was held on the functioning of the LACs. While it is evident that they are active in the urban schools visited, teachers' planning for the focus of professional development is typically unstructured.¹²

The LACS could be a mechanism to support more systematic and in-depth training than BEST is able to achieve with the cascade model, and could be much more targeted to teachers' skills development. As an example, DepEd reported that the 28 modules in early literacy and language developed by USAID had been rolled out through the LACs over a two-year period. The policy mandating LACS in 2016 specifies as their purpose supporting teachers' capacity to meet new challenges in the K–12 curriculum.¹³

The development of teacher competencies

This subsection is concerned with training directly related to improving practicing teachers' skills to deliver the K–12 curriculum. The training is focused on improving subject pedagogy in English, Filipino, Mathematics and Science (the PRIMALS), formative assessment training, and training for using Information Communications Technology (ICT) in teaching.

Subject related training. It is unlikely that BEST-supported training to improve delivery of the curriculum has been adequate. It may not yet have fully reached classroom teachers. BEST has mainly worked through DepEd's national in-service training institute, the National Education Academy of the Philippines (NEAP), to cascade training to school heads and teachers. Figure 1 showing the number of beneficiaries of BEST-supported training is likely to be a record of the first step of the cascade which involves capacity building of trainers for on-training of head teachers and teachers.

Neither DepEd Central Office nor BEST has been able to retrieve data on participants trained through the cascaded program or its effectiveness, so whether on-training of teachers has occurred extensively across the target regions cannot be readily ascertained. But the trainer training is recent (2017), making it unlikely that the former has taken place, except where trainers were school heads or master trainers, who on-trained their own school staff, as was evident in some city schools visited.

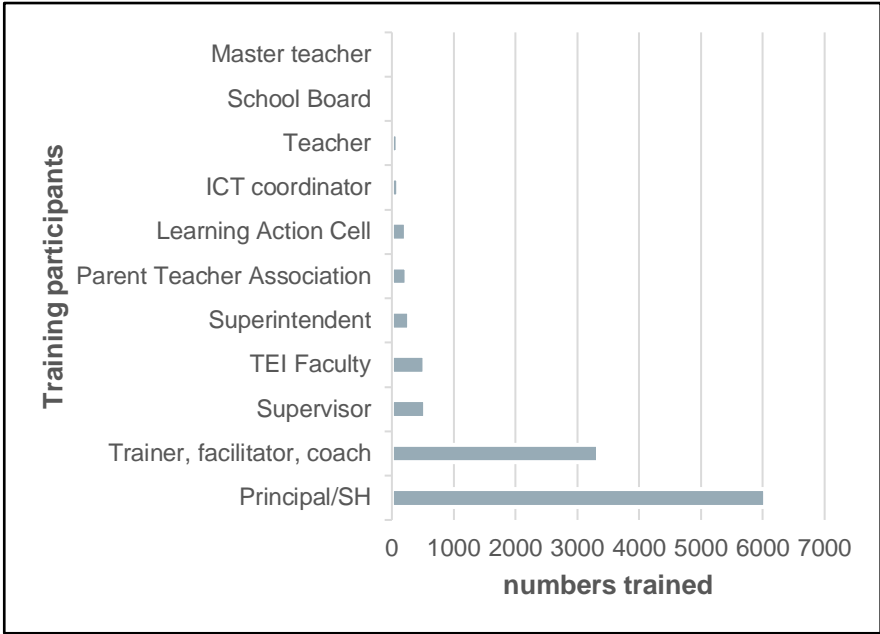


Figure 1 BEST Records of beneficiaries of BEST supported training

The brevity of BEST training limits its adequacy. The main curriculum-relevant training is short and fragmented. It is only one week for all subjects and appears not to have been delivered to all six BEST supported districts. The PRIMALS have so far mainly occurred in Region 6, 7 and 10. However, work focused on PRIMALS 7-10 is scheduled for the current annual plan. Other regions have featured

¹² Comment in the Interview with school staff in Iloilo City, 12 September.
¹³ DepEd, 2016. Policy on the Learning Action Cell as K to 12 Basic Education Program School Based Continuing Professional Development Strategy for the improvement of Teaching and Learning.

contextualisation (Region 7), LAC set up, ICT (NCR), Region 8 and 6) and Action Research Training (NCR).

Formative assessment. BEST has also supported in-service teacher training in formative assessment, which DepEd had mandated for implementation in schools in 2015. The second stage of ACTRC's study noted that after the issuance of the policy guidelines (DepEd Order 8), formative assessment practice had broadened in the classrooms investigated in the first stage of the study.¹⁴ This result may perhaps be due to the efforts of both ACTRC (supporting formative assessment guidelines) and BEST-supported training. In two of the BEST supported regions the training implementation involved the BEST curriculum adviser. BEST IPR classroom visits in Regions 6 and 8 showed formative assessment in use and understood by the teachers.

ICT training. Where ICT training has been rolled out, stakeholders in FGDs in the three regions visited affirmed some experience of transformative effects. A key one was enabling teachers to share and network electronically, like a virtual LAC. ICT significantly eased their administrative burdens through quick uploading of student enrolment, performance and tracking data. It has also enhanced their conditions of work. For example, teachers are now being informed by payroll that they are due for an increment, instead of having to make the paper case for it. ICT training had improved the delivery of materials to the classroom through the use of PowerPoint and videos. However, these tools are just another mode of didactic teaching. ICT is not yet helping interactive teaching.

However, the use of technology in schools has also created an information divide, with many teachers, students and schools being left behind if they cannot access these systems or alternative modes of access cannot be provided.

Overall, the resourcing of teaching improvement by BEST has been underdeveloped. For the period from the first to the third Annual Plan, related activities account for around 28% of activity expenditure. Not implementing the grants¹⁵ for decentralised teacher development proposed in the design document has contributed to this low expenditure. In 2015 the under-spend in Teaching and Learning was moved to other areas of the program.

2.1.2. Pre-service teacher development

STEP-UP, a Philippine Business for Education-PBEEd intervention, has provided models worthy of emulation in candidate recruitment and mentoring. Of the approximately 700 teachers selected and enrolled, 79 have graduated. A focus group discussion with students revealed a high level of comprehension, competence and commitment. In the scale of the Philippines' teacher workforce the value of this investment lies in its demonstration effect. BEST should consider developing a case study analysis for CHED to demonstrate the features of the STEP-UP program that could be scaled-up in the future reform of the pre-service degree.

Parallel to the in-service teacher development needs assessment, a Pre-service Teacher Development Needs Study (PTDNS) was completed in 2014. As with the TDNS findings, less than half of the graduating teachers were found to be competent in elementary or JHS science knowledge or in elementary mathematics.¹⁶

However, CHED has not yet approved the pre-service curriculum review that RCTQ had expected to run concurrent with the K-12 reforms. RCTQ calculates that this delay has set the Philippines back two years in its agenda.¹⁴ Since 2016, RCTQ has been working instead through a PNU Memorandum of Understanding with a network of 23 selected Teacher Education Institutions (TEI) on gap analysis of their pre-service curriculum based on the Beginning Teacher indicators of PPST, which articulate required professional practice at Career Stage 1.¹⁵ Further, the equivalent findings and implications of the TDNS and PTDNS have added additional pressure for Teacher Education

¹⁴ ACTRC, 2016. Formative Assessment Research, 2014-2016 policy brief.

¹⁵ The decision not to proceed with the grant program was made by DFAT as a result of budget reductions.

¹⁶ Philippine National Research Centre for Teacher Quality, 2016. Pre-Service Teacher Development Needs Study Project Overview.

Institutions (TEIs) to address fundamentally the focus and depth of the courses in subject content that they offer.

Nevertheless, this delay to CHED's authorisation of the pre-service reform directly affects the attainment of the intended BEST outcome on teacher development: *Annual improvement in passing rates* and *Teacher Licensure Test (LET) scores*, expected as a result of the reform. There is no possibility of pre-service students even enrolling in a reformed pre-service degree in the remaining time of BEST, let alone graduating.

During the period of the reforms CHED has had major pre-occupations of its own to manage as a consequence of the introduction of senior secondary levels, including the re-development of large sections of its own degree offerings to replace content moved down into Grades 11 and 12, training of teachers for SHS positions (80,000 positions to be filled), and the displacement of some 25,000 academic staff during the two-year moratorium on TEI enrolment.

In retrospect, it could be said that the BEST design did not take adequate account of the seismic impact on both DepEd and CHED of constructing a senior secondary sector while overhauling the whole school curriculum.¹⁷

2.1.3. Improving teachers' access to teaching and learning materials

Access to quality teaching materials appears to be closely linked to the level of access to the Learning Resources (LR) Portal.¹⁸ Teachers in urban centres with good internet access had very positive responses on access to up-to-date materials, being inspired to share knowledge themselves by uploading innovative contributions, and earning certificates of achievement. There was some criticism from contributors that the 5mb upload limit prevented more interactive materials from being developed and used more widely.

For teachers and students in areas where connectivity or access to computer assistance was poor, the LR Portal, EBEIS and LIS had made little difference to their work. The increasing dependence on online services for teaching and administration, when coupled with poor connectivity, is potentially creating a locational divide between the quality of teaching and learning. Solutions are being developed for schools disadvantaged by lack of internet or computer access. BEST is supporting DepEd to develop offline versions of the LR Portal for remote schools with no online access. The offline system is pre-installed on computers prior to distribution to schools.

The IPR found that gender is effectively mainstreamed in the development of the K–12 curriculum and in the production of learning and instructional materials through the LR Portal, including lesson exemplars with gender integration. However, orientation on gender equality and responsiveness have yet to be well established among classroom teaching for the materials to be genuinely useful. BEST has supported training to regional offices but this is yet to be implemented at the divisional or school level, and quality systems have not been implemented to monitor the effectiveness of the training.

2.1.4. Systemic support for teachers' development and performance

BEST's priority in approaching teaching and learning improvement seems to have been focused on strengthening the policies, systems and organisations that deliver and support schools, teachers and learners.¹⁹ This prioritisation was influenced by a variety of factors, including the take-up throughout DepEd at the start of BEST of the Continuous Improvement and MEA models of planning action and adjustment, developed through the Human Resources and Organisational Development Facility (HRODF). National training of both superintendents and school heads has occurred through programs BEST has designed: the Superintendents' Leadership Program (179 trained) and the School Heads Development Program (~23,000 trained). NEAP has been BEST's main counterpart in in-service Teaching and Learning, including NEAP's partners in local delivery: regional superintendents,

¹⁷ Interview with Faculty from Leyte TEI, Region 8, 8 September.

¹⁸ See <https://lrmds.deped.gov.ph/>

¹⁹ Referred to as the foundational outcomes in the BEST design document

personnel from the Regional Curriculum and Learning Division (RCLD), school division supervisors, school heads and master teachers.

As a result of this organisational development, BEST IPR found that regional and divisional offices, as well as school heads, seem to have vigorous MEA practices and information-based planning cultures. These provide a strong basis for targeted, systemic support and monitoring of teacher development for improving students' mastery of K–12 curriculum. In addition, NEAP's use of local facilitators and the institution of Master Teachers in schools has provided a local source of skills to addvalue to teachers' LAC meetings.

The relationship between planning and performance systems is coherent. Schools are intended to adjust their school improvement plans based on data aggregated from individual teacher performance appraisals and their student performance profiles, and feed them to the divisional office. These then develop priorities for support based on an aggregated assessment. Likewise the region responds based on the divisional aggregation. In terms of organisational capacity to support teachers' development and performance, the BEST program is quite well placed to produce improved student mastery of the curriculum by the end of 2019.

There are two weaknesses, however, in the systemic support so far:

1. Improved student mastery of the curriculum is the outcome of a whole school orientation to improving learning outcomes. In recognition of this, the BEST design document nominates the school as the unit of measurement for the end of program outcome on improved student scores. A whole school orientation to learning improvement requires a school-based strategy, rather than a cascade of parts down from the national level. The BEST design further specifies tracking school performance to see what it takes to move a school from poor to better performance and from good to excellent.
2. In the educational leadership capacity building programs, the development of the competence of superintendents, supervisors and school heads for supporting learning has been under-developed relative to generic capacities for leadership. There was evidence of this in the discussions with school staff and the exploration of school plans. 'Least learnt competency' discussions with teachers in performance assessments did not end up informing LAC plans or school plans. A sampling of school plans for the latter's components for learning improvement showed improbable goals for reducing learning related problems within yearly timeframes and no specificity around proposed actions for achieving the goal.

The fact that the National Assessment scores for 2015-2016 have not yet been made available to schools plays a crucial part in taking attention off the learning. The situation is the same with the Early Grades Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grades Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) tests. None of the participant supervisors or heads in the FGDs has had students' results reported back to their school, preventing the development of any follow-up interventions.

Finally, it is possible that under-emphasis on school based management (SBM), has also played a part in the loss of a whole school focus on improving learning. The school improvement plan (SIP) is dominated by responsibilities of the school for collecting data on, and conforming to, nationally set agendas for school effectiveness. The BEST team was assured that the disappearance of the school grant, a hallmark of SBM, has no significance for schools' discretionary choices. Whether this is the case or not would repay investigation in any strategy to refocus BEST in its last two years on bringing all the potential of the reforms to come together in the school, the only place where they realise their purpose.

2.1.5. Summary assessment of progress

Are teachers better qualified and capable of delivering the curriculum to the extent that learners' improved mastery of the curriculum is possible by the end of 2019? Certainly in respect of qualification they are not, as no student teachers will graduate or possibly even be enrolled in a reformed pre-service degree, or sit a reformed Licensure examination, by the end of 2019.

This is not to say that there will not be a valuable legacy of pre-service related work by the end of the program. A curriculum framework grounded in teacher need, based on policy directions and evidence from the PPST and PTDNS has been developed. A network of leading TEIs has been generated and

engaged ready to exemplify the reforms through the Curriculum Quality Audit (CQA). The political will on the part of CHED to use this work is the unknown.

In respect of the extent of the capacity of the existing workforce in the BEST targeted regions, the judgement is also that on present progress teachers do not yet have sufficiently enhanced capability to effect improvements in student mastery, as a result of the BEST program. This is a judgement made on the basis of the level of resourcing rather than on the evidence of effect, as there is none available. That is a problem in its own right for tracking the difference that the BEST investment in teacher development has made to the end of program outcome.

Reasons for the state of progress have been suggested, and they are of a kind that mean the program could still be effective if strategic choices were immediately made to sharpen the targeting of teacher and school improvement. To some extent, the distinctiveness of the school as a learning organisation has been obscured by the corporate approach to organisational development and continuous improvement. This is illustrated by some school plans viewed by the IPR team where outcomes are called 'Market Results' and outputs 'Client Satisfaction'.²⁰

There is a need for a localised, integrated whole school effort to improve the school's performance in learning. That could still be selectively achieved. One very positive result of the bias towards organisational effectiveness is the culture of data-based planning and monitoring at all sub-national levels that many other countries would envy, and which are indispensable for the effective and sustained support of schools and their learners.

2.2. Student mastery of the K to 12 curriculum

The intended end of program outcome for BEST is "*More children are able to demonstrate improved mastery of curriculum competencies in English, Mathematics and Science; and difference in learning outcomes for boys and girls is reduced in target areas*". The indicator is National Achievement Test (NAT) scores in target regions. It has an indicative target based on the percentage of target schools stratified in groups from low to high performing that improve their (NAT) score performance by one standard deviation by 2019.²¹

Besides the skilling, resourcing and support of teachers, described above, there are two additional pre-requisites to achieving the outcome of improved student mastery. The first is that the scores of students are sufficiently close to the mastery levels defined in the NAT typology of student performance to be able to reach them in two years' time. The second is that the curriculum is sufficiently aligned with students' developmental capabilities throughout the grades of schooling to be mastered, if other variables such as good teaching and adequate class resources are in place.

The NAT scores for 2015/16 have not been released at the national and regional levels preventing any comparison of student performance within and outside of BEST regions, including comparing boys and girls, children living with disabilities, indigenous students and those considered marginalised.

The BEST program has data extracted from national databases for the NAT scores for 2014/15 for each region. The passing rate for students is 75%. For the baseline year 2014/15, all BEST regions were below a mean performance score of 75% at JHS level (Grade 10 exam), and all except Region 8 at elementary level (Grade 6 exam).

Table 1 shows where the learning challenge lies.

²⁰ It is understood that the Continuous Improvement program implemented by Human Capital and captured in the School Improvement Plans was based on the Kaizen model which advocates incremental positive change as the responsibility of everyone involved. It originates from the manufacturing industry so some of the language is foreign to the educational sector. School improvement plans are seen as a component of School Based Management (SBM).

²¹ The quality of NAT data needs to be regarded with some caution. The degree to which recent NAT versions reflect the changed vision of K-12 is unclear, notwithstanding the recent work undertaken by BEA with ACTRC is more explicitly targeting higher order competencies.

Table 1 Mean Performance Score in target subject areas nationwide 2014/15.

MPS	English	Mathematics	Science	Filipino
Elementary NAT (Grade 6)	71	70	67	70
JHS (Grade 10)	46	47	47	49

From this it can be seen that elementary students are not far from passing, whereas for JHS students the distance to go is considerable and not likely to be attainable in BEST target regions even with any alterations to program strategy.

Sex-disaggregated data likewise are not provided for the BEST regions. Nationwide, there is a significant difference between sexes on the subject results at both elementary and JSH level, but the effect size is small (less than 0.2).²²

DepEd also ranges schools' performance into four categories based on their level of achievement in the NAT scores. This measure is pertinent to the BEST target for EOPO 1 of schools improving their performance similarly across a range of four categories: poor to fair (Group 1), fair to good (Group 2), good to great (Group 3), great to excellent (Group 4).

Table 2 presents the baseline results, grouped by NAT score range for the elementary schools in BEST supported regions on the DepEd categories of performance, SY 2014-2015.

Region	Group 1 0-24	Group 2 25-49	Group 3 50-74	Group 4 75-100	Total schools
5		11%	51%	38%	3072
6		3%	33%	64%	2973
7		3%	31%	66%	2642
8		8%	23%	69%	3167
10		5%	34%	61%	1908
NCR		25%	58%	17%	530

Table 3 shows the baseline results for JHS schools in BEST supported regions using the DepEd categories of performance. Source: BEST Baseline Study (draft), 2016.

Region	Group 1 0-24	Group 2 25-49	Group 3 50-74	Group 4 75-100	Total schools
5		65%	35%	1%	673
6		33%	65%	2%	667
7		36%	61%	3%	791
8		37%	61%	2%	491
10		38%	61%	1%	345
NCR		61%	35%	3%	249

For elementary schools it can be seen that four of these regions have a majority of schools with a mean passing score on the NAT, and in the desirable Group 4 range. These school results should be

²² The Baseline Study clarification of effect sizes. "Effect sizes are interpreted as follows: "small, $d = .2$," "medium, $d = .5$," and "large, $d = .8$ ". (Reference: Cohen, J. (1988). Statistical power analysis for the behavioural sciences (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.)". p.30.

used to develop a strategy for improving the overall NAT scores in the BEST-supported regions, by targeting schools with the largest numbers of non-passing students.

There may also be a link with class size. NCR, with the smallest number of schools and by far the lowest passing level, has by far the highest pupil class ratio: 1:65, as against a BEST region average of 1:37.

For JHS the same analysis would apply, except that the achievable improvement is much lower than the passing rate regionally or by school level.

2.2.1. Curriculum alignment with student development

The new curriculum for JHS, starting from Grade 7, was implemented in 2012 and completed to Grade 12 in 2017. This was a very fast roll out dictated by the need to move the first cohort without disruption through the new curriculum to the end of senior high school. A role that ACTRC has undertaken has been to gather evidence on the performance of the curriculum. One important study was the *Progress of Students through the Science curriculum, 2015-16*, (Grades 7-10; Chemistry as the focus area). This study tested the levels of conceptual knowledge and skills of students for being 'ready' for the grade level. The findings of the study show that conceptual knowledge and skills decreased with every successive year, from 39% students 'ready' in terms of competence in Grade 7, to 11% ready in Grade 10. This decline over successive grades is attributable to the fact that competence depends on understanding the curriculum in previous years, due to 'the cumulative nature of science concepts and skills'.²³

A view of the ACTRC Director is that levels of fit of the curriculum with students' developmental capacity contributes to learning performance, as well as issues of teacher capability and access to materials.²⁴

No quantitative results are available on the results of the EGRA conducted in mid-2016. These would be desirable to assess the impact of the MTB/MLE introduced in 2012.

Reportedly DepEd intends a curriculum revision in 2018, now that the roll out is completed, and some stakeholders are hoping that it will be based on analysis of classroom performance.

In conclusion, students' scores at the elementary level show potential for attaining an improvement in the passing rate on the NAT achievement test, particularly if strategies are developed that target specific cohorts and areas to maximise impact.

For JHS such a goal is hardly attainable, and in this sub-sector the problem is compounded by the likely need for revision of the new JHS curriculum in particular, which is not achievable within the remaining BEST program.

The teaching variable as a pre-requisite for student improvement is well catered for in the design. However, improvement in class size is not part of the Theory of Change (ToC) and yet there are indications that this is an important factor in students' performance. Large classes seem to be mainly associated with urban schools. In interviews with senior students on the BEST IPR visits to schools this was the factor that students found most obstructed their learning, and is identified as an important issue in the recent World Bank study on education expenditure.²⁵

2.3. Girls and boys participation and completion in target areas

Increases in participation rates have been observed nationally, however there is no significant difference between BEST and non-BEST regions. Anecdotal evidence from interviews suggests that BEST has been able to enhance existing processes in terms of identifying those learners that have been traditionally marginalised and isolated. BEST has supported community mapping, strengthening programs for indigenous peoples, Muslim learners and those with special needs, and encouraged the return of drop-outs through Alternative Learning Systems (ALS) support.

²³ ACTRC, 2016. *Progress of Students through the Science Curriculum: Chemistry*.

²⁴ Interview with ACTRC Directors, 30 August.

²⁵ World Bank 2016. *Assessing Basic Education Service Delivery in the Philippines. The Philippines Public Education Expenditure Tracking and Quantitative Service Delivery study*.

The Department Order 72 series of 2009 on inclusive education encourages local practices to increase the school participation rate. These practices mainly include the thorough mapping of children of school age in the communities in close partnership with the local government authorities, and the tracking of learners through the LIS. Through an online Learner Registration Number (LRN) the LIS enables every student to be tracked and identified, including those who have transferred to other schools and those who are at risk of dropping out. In this way individual strategies can be developed to assign appropriate alternative modes of delivering education services. This has raised awareness amongst teachers of the diversity of learning needs and home or family conditions among its students. The LIS and student identifier has also cleansed the list of 'ghost' students and removed duplicate data (see Box 2). All of these systems have been strengthened by BEST support.

Box 2. The impact of 'ghost' students.

'Ghost' students are falsified records which increase the number of students in schools, justifying additional teachers, resources and promotions, often in remote areas. The removal of 'ghost' students from enrolment records using information systems to enforce unique student identifiers, has had a significant impact. It has been estimated that 'ghost' students previously represented an estimated 5-10% of enrolments and subsequent drop outs. Correcting this situation not only improves resource allocation to those schools in need but also corrects erroneous drop-out rates. 'Ghost' students invariably drop-out during the school year providing a distorted record of participation and completion rates. By correcting the data the dropout rate should immediately improve. The information systems used to improve the data (the Electronic Basic Education Information System and Learner Information System) have received significant support from the Australian Government through BEST.

Many student capture processes had been introduced before BEST but were further strengthened by the program through the introduction of the CI program at the local level and its encapsulation in the SIP. This enhanced schools' drive in various divisions to improve participation and completion rates. Absenteeism and preventing drop-out rates were identified as major localised CI projects often in conjunction with other stakeholders and donors. School heads work with local officials, Barangay Captains, Parent Teacher Associations, local business and donors to identify children absent from school, implement school feeding programs, build infrastructure, and to coordinate financial and equipment contributions from the local and international community (e.g. tablets for ALS centres).

BEST has enhanced programs and services for children with disabilities to encourage participation. However, this has been limited; focused on a few clusters of schools in BEST regions. It involved orientation and training on inclusive education (capacity building) rather than a school-based integrated approach.

These measures to get all children of school age into school have resulted in enrolments and participation rates among girls and boys at the elementary level progressively increasing over the last three years.²⁶ The conditional cash transfer program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) has likewise contributed significantly to improving completion rates at the elementary level. However, no significant difference in this increase can be found in the aggregated results of BEST targeted regions compared to those without BEST interventions²⁷ at this point in the program. Targeted case studies might demonstrate otherwise based on feedback from local school heads during the IPR.

The completion rate has remained generally lower than targeted, with more boys dropping out of school in the elementary grades and even higher rates in the secondary level. As expressed in the field, the ALS may address this to some extent with its structure and design more responsive to the needs and profile of male learners who have less interest in rigorous schooling and a demand for immediate productive employment, as traditionally ascribed to males in the family. Contextualisation of learning materials (e.g. capturing themes such as local fishing traditions) was also seen as a mechanism for making school more relevant to local learners.

With intensified campaigns, enrolment and demand for education facilities and services increases. Supply of suitable education facilities and services remains a challenge, including qualified teachers, especially those needing more specialised forms of education.

²⁶ Based on discussions with school principals.

²⁷ Analysis undertaken by the BEST Facilitating Contractor.

2.4. Gender responsive and inclusive basic education

2.4.1. Gender responsive education

Gender responsive education refers to a system of education that actively takes measures to reduce the detrimental effects of inequitable gender norms, roles and relations. It means:

1. Eliminating all forms of stereotypes such as sex-role dichotomy and sexist attitudes which are barriers to full development of a learner's potential.
2. Reducing vulnerabilities to all forms of abuse, exploitation and marginalisation that can be a cause for a learner to not stay, perform and complete basic education or in the learning environment, particularly those with disabilities, victims of war and violence, indigenous peoples and other individuals and groups traditionally excluded from the system.
3. Broadening the range of career options especially those being promoted to girls.

The first element must be explicit in all the teaching and learning plans and materials (curriculum, instructional and other supplemental materials, career counselling) while the second may be included in the creation of mechanisms and structures of alternative forms of delivery and child protection within the educational system. The third element can be gleaned from career guidance and counselling specifically for girls and undertaken just before their entrance to senior high school.

The Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development (1995-2025) spells out its declaration of commitment and intent to mainstream and integrate gender in all dimensions and stages of the development process. It instructs and guides all government agencies on integrating and mainstreaming gender in all its programs, services and institutional structures, processes and mechanisms, including a Gender Focal Person for each national government agency and corporation.

BEST has not comprehensively considered how to mainstream or target attention to gender equality and women's empowerment in implementing its sub-components. The main gender equality challenges relate to schooling and retention of boys in school; encouragement and retention of male teachers as role models for boys; and women's leadership at the school and DepEd levels.

DepEd's own progress on gender and development since 2013 may have exceeded any improvements under BEST.²⁸ BEST reporting and IPR field visits and focus groups found selective rather than comprehensive attention to gender equality, and it is unclear whether the recently-produced 'BEST Gender Strategy' has any buy-in from DepEd. The majority of efforts and resources on gender and development have to date been focused centrally, with little evidence of initiatives at the division level where the schools are directly supervised and guided.²⁹ According to program expenditure approximately \$128,000 has been allocated to specific gender-related inputs (0.6% of the activity budget), not including any inputs embedded within activities. BEST has found it difficult to recruit and retain gender expertise (DFAT, 2015-17).

Progress in the area of gender in the BEST Program has largely been in the development of various policies and departmental issuances, foremost of which is the Gender Responsive Basic Education Policy (approved June 2017) and the development of a framework for learning and development aimed at institutionalising Gender and Development (GAD) in the basic education sector. GAD has likewise been integrated in the institutional processes such as ensuring sex-disaggregated data within the M&E framework of plans developed at different levels of the organisation. Much effort and resources have been used in strengthening the internal GAD governance system through the Gender Focal Persons (from the central office down to the school level) through a series of capacity building activities. It is too early in the process to determine what outcomes will be achieved by this policy, however this is a sound approach for developing and sustaining behavioural change in such a large

²⁸ For example, DepEd has already achieved: sex-disaggregated data on DepEd learners and employees, an annual GAD plan and budget (supported by BEST but not yet endorsed by the Presidential Commission of Women), and integration of gender in the learning curriculum and textbooks.

²⁹ For example, school visits revealed that GAD budgets are frequently used to meet school costs rather than support initiatives to improve gender equality in teaching and learning.

system. Critical next steps that could be supported by BEST include supporting the implementation of the M&E system based on the gender mainstreaming framework and providing orientation and training supervisors and teachers.

DepEd's draft gender responsive basic education policy reiterates the Philippines' national GAD policy and utilisation of the 5% GAD budget in education.³⁰ It may provide a mutual basis for BEST to re-engage with DepEd's Gender Focal Point and other specialists to implement the agenda in a more comprehensive way, with greater effort on teaching and learning in schools, and greater connection to the Philippines' considerable capacity in gender and development.

At the sub-national level, it is apparent that the mechanisms are very much in place, with each level producing their GAD plans and corresponding GAD budget in compliance with national policy on the Philippine Gender Responsive Development Plan and executive orders on GAD budget. It is a common observation though that GAD budgets are used for school and division-level activities, such as team building, that cannot be funded from the Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE operational funds). Critical in this process therefore is ensuring that local level GAD plans are aligned with the strategic GAD plans of at least the division schools and integrated in the core institutional processes such that budgets allocated for GAD are expended programmatically.

Likewise, the continuing consciousness raising and constituency building and advocacy for GAD mainstreaming does not only strengthen the governance system but develops GAD champions in all levels of governance in the department. Monitoring progress and provision of technical assistance particularly at the sub-national levels then becomes crucial to achieving the goal of promoting a gender responsive and inclusive education.

It is observed, however, that GAD-related interventions have been largely undertaken and accomplished so far at the national level (policies and issuances). There are less significant results at the sub-national levels, specifically at the division and school levels where ultimate outcomes will be measured and assessed if the basic education system is to be assessed as gender responsive or not. Reducing gender-based biases in teaching and learning, expanding career options particularly for girls, and even developing more leadership at higher organisational levels for females in the department, are critical indicators by which the program will be assessed.

2.4.2. Inclusive basic education

The BEST program defines inclusive education as mainly the inclusion of children living with disabilities into regular schools. As the concept of inclusive education has gained currency globally, students who previously have been referred to specialised forms of education are now believed to belong in mainstream classrooms and their potential not judged anymore as 'less able' but differently abled.

As observed, BEST has focused on inclusive education as largely assisting children with disabilities to be mainstreamed in the regular formal schools. The IPR team observed that this has found a lot of promise in an elementary school in Baybay, Leyte, and in a cluster of schools in the Biliran Division Schools as pilot sites. With a more intensive monitoring and coaching for these sites, after initial capacity building interventions given to their special education (SPED) teachers, remarkable changes on mindsets and behaviours of both the children living with disabilities and their families, their classmates and communities, have been strongly demonstrated. Children with different learning needs and abilities gain more confidence and self-esteem; they take more initiative in school activities while their parents become less fearful and anxious about their children, giving them greater room to do independent tasks. Their classmates who used to imitate their gestures and make fun of them, now call them "Ate" or "Kuya" as a form of respect and endearment, and would even call the attention of other children who bully these children.

Progress in expanding the program, however, has been observed to be slow and targets of establishing so-called Demonstration Inclusive Schools in two other regions were not met. Moreover, targeted schools are unaware of a broader plan on how to develop more strategically. Policies

³⁰ DO, No.32, series of 2017.

providing for more support in terms of resources and personnel are still wanting. Volunteer inclusion assistants, mostly licensed teachers, extend support to regular SPED teachers and act like regular teachers in some occasions but are only paid P100 per day.

DepEd has largely understood inclusive basic education as the 'no child left behind' policy drawn from the EFA goals in "*achieving universal primary education especially for girls, ethnic minorities and marginalised children*". For DepEd, promoting inclusive education has evolved to include all programs and services that intend to capture those that have been traditionally marginalised by the formal school system such as:

- children living with disabilities to move from SPED Centres to regular classes
- out of school children/youth/adults through the ALS
- geographically isolated areas or areas with not enough pupils to start monograde classes through the multi-grade system
- Muslim children, whose parents still generally feel isolated from the dominant Christian culture, through the ALIVE Program in Madrasahs
- indigenous peoples through the IP education programs, such as feeding programs.

Interventions in these other areas of inclusive education have largely been very limited and are generally perceived to be unsupported by BEST. While teaching and learning materials and resources are shared in the LR Portals, and are actually used, their respective curricula have yet to be fully aligned with K to 12 curriculum. With poor connectivity and minimal resources made available, classroom teachers are left on their own at their own personal expense (buying printed copies from colleagues who have greater means to access, reproducing learning materials for students, etc.). With the incumbent DepEd Secretary's priority on ALS, this may be an opportune time to refocus with increased counterpart funds from DepEd.

While the BEST design aligns well with Secretary Briones' 10-point Agenda for Education, there are also different understandings among stakeholders on inclusion.³¹ Mainstreaming disability inclusion is starting to take root, some of which can be attributed to the work of the BEST program in Region 8. Children with disabilities are not mentioned in Secretary Briones 10-point Agenda, even though illness and disability are reported as the third major reason for boys not attending school (girls give other reasons, especially marriage). (Briones L. M., 2016)

BEST's progress to date on disability inclusion has demonstrated Australia's value-add, and suggests an increased focus in this area may be warranted. There appear to be some significant localised results that should be evaluated for scale up.

3. Relevance to Australia and the Philippines

Relevance concerns the extent to which a program meets a need in the community and country it is intended to benefit, and aligns with the policies and interests of the donor (OECD-DAC, 2010). It concerns the extent to which changes in the political, economic or social context affect relevance during implementation. For DFAT, relevance incorporates comparative advantage, and whether Australia's value-add is clear. (DFAT, 2017, p. 11) This section assesses the relevance of BEST considering experience and changes in the context since 2013-14, and suggests ways for the program to respond.

There is unanimous agreement amongst stakeholders that BEST is still relevant, in particular because K–12 is still central to GPH's education agenda. However, DepEd has the resources and reform agenda to deliver K–12, so relevance is strongly tied to Australia bringing unique perspectives

³¹ For example, Philippines Business for Social Progress (PBSP), one of the implementing partners for BEST, has a broad definition of inclusion which encompasses: children with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples (IPs), extremely poor families, Internally Displaced People (IDPs), and inclusion of the children of undocumented migrants. PBSP considers inclusion should be a high priority in locations such as Iloilo, Marawi and typhoon-affected regions. PBSP and DepEd consider DFAT has been more concerned about disability-inclusion than about other pupils at the periphery of the schooling system who have dropped out or are at risk of early drop-out.

and experience for DepEd and other partners to draw on.³² As one senior official put it, “*The greatest contribution of BEST would be to look to see how we, DepEd, could improve*” (DepEd official).

BEST risks becoming irrelevant if it does not understand and respect what capacity already exists, and facilitate productive partnerships between the key stakeholders for teacher preparation, teaching, learning and participation in basic education.³³

From 2014, Australian aid operated under a ‘new development paradigm’. It acknowledged the decreasing significance of aid in a rapidly developing world, and shared accountability for development results (See Box 3).

Economic diplomacy is integral to the new paradigm³⁴. It commits Australia to supporting development in ways that create opportunities for trade, investment, economic growth and private sector development (DFAT, 2014). Australia’s 2015 education strategy aligns closely with the ‘lifelong learning’ approach outlined in the Philippine Development Plan. The strategy conceptualises education as a continuum from childhood development, through elementary and secondary schooling, to further education and productive employment. It is about aligning education and skills with labour market needs. The strategy commits Australia to taking a ‘systems-based approach’ i.e. considering how interventions impact on education delivery as a whole (DFAT, 2015).

To increase relevance there may be potential for BEST to create stronger links between its basic education inputs, the work of other stakeholders, and the expected outcomes of an educated, innovative, employable workforce. Pursuing this would require good communication and collaboration between leaders and senior managers in NEDA, DepEd, CHED and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and with donors and implementing partners.³⁵

The governance component remains relevant to the persistent need to improve budget execution, so that DepEd can address teaching, learning and infrastructure needs more efficiently and effectively (World Bank, 2016). DepEd is struggling to spend its annual budget given the significant increases, and may welcome an increased focus on budget execution, provided the ‘funding basket’ approach can be renegotiated.

BEST’s focus on teaching and learning remains highly relevant to addressing current needs. It could be stronger with a sharper focus on improving teacher competence (pre-service and in-service), and improving classrooms and facilities (NEDA, 2016). A DepEd inventory of classrooms, teachers and schools in 2016 found the biggest need is in the large urban areas, where “exhaustion of buildable space is a major challenge, especially in Metro Manila” leading to multiple shifts with large class sizes.³⁶ This is a challenge where DepEd would value additional technical assistance.

For DepEd the relevance and significance of the K–12 reform is in developing youth skills to the international standards needed for the Philippines’ inclusion in the global economy and the ASEAN economic region in particular. Evidence of this commitment to these standards is DepEd’s recent engagement with international student assessments such as TIMSS (Grade 4), PISA (Grade 10), regional

³² BEST may be supporting lots of things DepEd could well do on its own; this is very hard to justify as ‘relevant’, or adding value, when DepEd is so well-resourced.

³³ Extending to CHED, TEC, TESDA, but also Philippine Commission on Women, Department of Social Welfare and Development, Social Services, TAF, WB, ADB etc.

³⁴ Economic diplomacy is ‘the use of Australia’s diplomatic, trade and aid resources to support Australia’s economic interests by increasing trade, supporting economic growth, encouraging investment and assisting business’ (DFAT, 2014).

³⁵ Some tensions may need resolving between, for example: the ideal of keeping all school-aged children in school; the reality of children and youth outside the system who may be difficult to reintegrate regardless of age; and generational differences in post-school aspirations (from traditional expectations of college education as ideal, towards increasing acceptance of other post-school options such as TVET, business, and skilled employment in the formal labour market).

³⁶ The IPR team visited a high school in Iloilo where there were 2 shifts (6am – 1pm and 11am – 6pm) with class sizes ranging between 50 and 70. There were inadequate teaching materials and no equipment for running practicals in science. The school was the only high school in a municipality with a population of 56,000 people.

SEA-PLM (Grade 5), and EGRA and EGMA which assess the implementation of MTB-MLE and Kindergarten.³⁷ The new engagement by the Philippines in PISA is being technically supported by ACTRC.

4. Program modality and implementation

At this stage of the program (three years after commencement) the efficacy and effectiveness of the modality and implementation should be judged by:

1. Achieving tangible and sustainable results (targeted outputs and immediate outcomes) in key areas of investment that have a clear 'line of sight' to EOPOs.
2. The level of partnership commitment to the program and achieving the EOPOs.
3. All partners having a clear understanding of their role in achieving successful outcomes.
4. The stability of operations provided by the Facilitating Contractor to enable efficient and effective delivery of services and strategic allocation of resources.
5. A programmatic M&E system that supports concise reporting of progress, transparency and accountability, learning, and decision making.³⁸
6. The ability to clearly identify and account for contributions made to the program by the Australian Government.

The modality has been both a program and a facility. For the most part DepEd has used BEST funding as a facility which is its preference.³⁹ Essentially this is a pool of funds that it can use to address unplanned expenditure items (workshops, training and equipment) and technical assistance. In this way BEST's contribution was not always strategically focused through a programmatic approach, but used to supplement DepEd's implementation of its reforms and the K–12 program. Its value was in helping to accelerate crucial reforms at a time of significant change. However, there were also several strong programmatic themes that built on previous and existing programs such as Organisational Development, Monitoring and Evaluation, Information Systems development and Continuous Improvement.

Box 3: The Australian development paradigm

"To be effective in this new context, aid needs to be more nimble and catalytic, helping to unleash these other drivers for development. We need to recognise that aid alone cannot solve the problems of development; developing country institutions and policies need to lead. Where developing country institutions are weak and policies inappropriate, the impact of aid is compromised. This means that we need to build mature development partnerships—based on principles of mutual accountability—with partner governments and organisations" (DFAT, 2014)

4.1. Effectiveness of the modality

BEST was intended to be a mechanism of support to DepEd's implementation of educational reforms and at the same time constitutes a highly prescribed program of activities and outputs to achieve specific measurable outcomes. The modality was intended as a broad program refined through joint annual planning, with a formalised governance structure to maintain its focus and relevance to both governments. It had some inherent flexibility but was not intended as a facility model.

The strength of the approach to BEST was in the co-design, co-development and co-implementation processes between DepEd and DFAT, using the supporting partners to deliver key priorities. However, the period between the completion of the design document and appointment of the Facilitating

³⁷ IEA, 2017, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study— TIMSS; OECD, 2017, Program for International Student Assessment— PISA; UNICEF and ACER 2017, Assessment for Quality Education: Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics-SEA-PLM; DepEd 2015, Early Grades Reading Assessment— EGRA; Early Grades Mathematics Assessment— EGMA.

³⁸ Programmatic M&E in this sense means an M&E system that is designed to account for the use of program (or BEST) resources in achieving results. The M&E system developed for DepEd reports on changes to indicators irrespective of where the inputs come from whereas donors are concerned about how their money is being used and what difference they are making.

³⁹ Key informants revealed that the new administration would prefer donors to provide resources that the Department could use as required to accelerate its programs and direct funds where most needed. While technical advice is welcome, DepEd does not want to be donor or specialist driven as has happened in the past.

Contractor, with the prior contracting of other partners and the subsequent political changes, resulted in a more flexible and fluid approach to planning and implementation.

The modality can be characterised by three implementation phases which have impacted progress in different ways:

1. The first phase, between August 2014 and January 2015, was a mobilisation and start-up phase for the Facilitating Contractor. This was much slower than anticipated in the scope of services⁴⁰ resulting in the organic development of the program and relationships with partners. A scoping study was conducted to identify program needs and to schedule priorities. This was used to frame the first annual plan and recognised the time lag between the completion of the design (in 2012) and implementation in 2014.

The Facilitating Contractor was originally expected to be embedded within DepEd to work closely together and build internal project management capacity. However, this arrangement did not proceed due to workplace safety issues with the accommodation available within DepEd.⁴¹ This placed a strain on working relationships.⁴²

The Team Leader and Advisers were not completely mobilised until January 2015. Due to the gradual start-up it does not appear that a partnership meeting with all existing partners (PBE, PBSP, RCTQ and ACTRC) and specialists was convened to discuss reporting arrangements, work programs and to establish working arrangements. These partners had pre-existing direct contractual relationships with DFAT so a formal acknowledgement of the new working relationships under BEST was critical. Formal arrangements for monitoring, evaluation and reporting, with all partners, have still not been adequately implemented.

2. The second phase was dominated by a build-up of resources within the Facilitating Contractor and in DepEd to address emerging issues and program demands. Significant portions of the program were driven by DepEd's continuation of pre-existing programs such as organisational development, continuous improvement, information systems development and monitoring and evaluation. Others appear to have been more ad hoc and 'specialist driven' such as the investment in the LACs and Inclusive Education. At one stage the Facilitating Contractor had over 100 staff.

Key informants interviewed during the IPR partly attributed this rapid growth to the need to meet expenditure targets as well as urgent program requirements in DepEd such as implementing the K-12 program.

During this period the Facilitating Contractor to some extent replicated the project management roles that should have been assigned to DepEd under its Project Management Services (PMS) and Project Support and Coordination Office (PSCO). Significant resources were used to organise workshops, training events and make travel arrangements for DepEd staff during this period. Towards the end of this phase the culture and relationships within and between implementing partners was under stress for a myriad of reasons, including professional differences among advisers, research institutions and DepEd senior staff.⁴³

⁴⁰ The scope of services called for a rapid mobilisation and recruitment of the team leader, within one to two months of commencement. In reality this took about six months.

⁴¹ The decision to not co-locate was based on a full cost assessment of options (including renovating buildings to meet standards) undertaken by the Facilitating Contractor and endorsed by DFAT.

⁴² Several informants within DepEd contrasted the perceived expensive accommodation options adopted by the contractor with the benefits of co-locating within DepEd to build a more unified and focused team. Many of the specialists, however, did effectively work within DepEd for the duration of their contract.

⁴³ Unresolved professional differences were commonly reported as a barrier to implementation by many partners (e.g. protecting legacy systems) and is perhaps symptomatic of the lack of formal decision making structures, such as technical working groups, to reach consensus on these issues. In one instance it was reported that implementation was delayed by 1-2 years until issues could be resolved.

3. The third phase followed the National Election in May 2016. This coincided with changes in DFAT staff, a new executive administration in DepEd, and a review of the organisation created by the Facilitating Contractor. Following the election, programs such as BEST were not a focus of the new administration, however, a decision was also made not to disrupt existing programs.

Between October and December, 2016 the Facilitating Contractor conducted a review and did not renew the contracts of the M&E Specialist, OD Specialist and Team Leader, and significantly cut staffing. Within the next six months all senior positions within the Facilitating Contractor had changed, and a new team appointed with two component leads instead of six specialists. The decision not to renew the contracts of key specialists was poorly communicated resulting in significant tensions between partners in 2016. Some programs were left unfinished. DepEd assigned resources at the sub-national level to ensure many of these could be completed for regions where they had commenced.

This phase represented a 'reset' of the program and should now lead to greater stability and focus for the remaining life of the program. Further changes are not advised, instead there should be a focus on formalising many of the arrangements originally identified in the design document.

All of the three major implementing partners – DFAT, Cardno and DepEd – underwent major changes during the initial period of implementation with significant staff changes and loss of knowledge about the program. In contrast the staffing in the research centres was relatively stable. The instability in personnel was exacerbated by a dominant informal decision-making process within the program between key individuals in Cardo, DFAT and DepEd and to some extent the research centres. The counter balance would normally be the formal structures (as outlined in the design) and programmatic M&E that help retain knowledge of program decisions and progress despite staffing and organisational changes. While the informal structures help expedite activities and can get things done quickly, formal structures are needed for accountability, transparency and risk management.

There was universal acknowledgement that the manner and frequency of personnel changes has affected relationships and made cooperation difficult. The 'reset' of BEST, with a new team leader and more coherent organisational structure, provides a good starting point to better match the modality to the scale and complexity of challenges in basic education in the Philippines.

The Program Support and Coordination Office (PSCO) was not properly established within DepEd; there was no systematic programmatic monitoring and evaluation until recently, and the technical working groups (TWGs) were not established or operating as designed resulting in a significant gap in technical oversight and decision making. The Project Steering Committee (PSC) and Project Management Committee (PMC) did not meet regularly as prescribed in the design despite the instability of the program. In other words the checks and balances required to ensure the strategic use of DFAT funds was not fully in place and was largely dependent on DepEd's immediate priorities as identified by its executives or the interests of specialist advisers.

The cohesion and performance of the program with other partners such as the RCTQ, ACTRC, PBEd and PBSP was affected by direct contracting arrangements with DFAT, and sometimes strained relationships during various phases of the program with the Facilitating Contractor due to compliance and accountability requirements. These contracting arrangements should have been updated to reflect the structures and reporting required under the BEST umbrella. Despite these distractions each of these Partners has made significant contributions to education in the Philippines.

4.2. Monitoring and Evaluation

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system established for BEST has not been adequately implemented to report on the contributions DFAT has made towards achieving intermediate or end of program outcomes (EOPO). While the contributions to institutional M&E established for DepEd have been extensive, the M&E needed for accountability, transparency and learning, from DFAT's perspective, has not been as useful. BEST did attempt to develop a unified M&E system that incorporated DepEd M&E requirements with those of the BEST partners but this was not fully implemented. It did not recognise the challenges of dealing with a flexible delivery modality that had built upon a range of previous initiatives, or the range of partner requirements for M&E.

Pre-existing partners, prior to the full implementation of BEST, have been required to complete comprehensive annual reporting to DFAT through the terms of their grants. Under the Facilitating Contractor these existing arrangements should have been modified to allow for integrated reporting under the umbrella program without an added burden.

DepEd's M&E system was established prior to BEST, building on SEDIP, BESRA, STRIVE and PRIME. BEST continued to work on this initiative and expanded it to include M&E for the new K–12 program and Senior High School, and undertook extensive training on Monitoring, Evaluation and Adjustment (MEA).⁴⁴ Local M&E officers were placed in each region to provide ongoing training and support. During field visits by the IPR Team it was evident that the M&E training and implementation had introduced an M&E culture from the school level (through School Improvement Plans) to the Division and Regional levels.

BEST produced a range of documents to support implementing a comprehensive M&E system:

- M&E Framework (or Performance Assessment Framework in the design document) – a table showing the results hierarchy, indicators and means of verification aligned with a program logic model or theory of change diagram.
- Baseline studies of selected key performance indicators.
- K–12 M&E Framework – A learner-centred approach M&E framework focusing on academic performance of learners and other indicators of learners' performance (e.g. wellbeing).
- Basic Education Sub-sector M&E Framework (BESMEF). A work in progress with the K–12 M&E framework elements used as the main input (indicators) in designing the BESMEF. The BESMEF also adopted the decentralised M&E system approach.
- Senior High School (SHS) M&E design – an M&E system for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of SHS. It was used by Region 10 (schools, divisions, and region) in tracking the efficiency of implementing SHS in their area.
- Unified M&E – a document describing the Unified M&E system incorporating DepEd's needs with those of BEST. This was intended to be used to operationalise the Theory of Change and M&E Framework.
- M&E Frameworks for each sub-component activity – tables listing the indicators for each of the intervention areas for use by each Specialist to monitor results. While the documents describe rating systems there were no accompanying rubrics to describe how the results could be interpreted.
- A decentralised approach to M&E and organisational assessments – a diagnostic tool for determining the M&E 'maturity' of organisations from the school level to the regional level.

The BEST M&E Adviser had also developed a guide to implementing and operationalising the M&E Systems for DepEd. However, there is no evidence that these systems were fully or uniformly implemented apart from those data captured as part of the information systems supported by BEST. According to the M&E Adviser the M&E Frameworks were supposed to be implemented through the Project Management Services (PMS) and PSCO in DepEd. These structures were never adequately supported.

Some of the more basic information (e.g. enrolment, completion, dropout rates, building and program information) is now being captured systematically through the information systems being supported by BEST such as the Electronic Basic Education Information System (EBEIS) and Learner Information System (LIS – student identifier, census and basic performance (pass/fail) records). These can be reported nationally with over 90% of schools now accurately geocoded so they can also be mapped. These data have proven valuable for preparing budgets and ensuring resources are being directed where they are most needed. However, other areas such as student performance, in terms of standardised tests (NAT scores) have not been available since 2014-15 and existing systems do not consistently capture student performance data (other than pass or fail).

There was evidence that some schools are beginning to capture more extensive information such as student report cards in their information systems to evaluate school performance, and some informants mentioned undertaking school level performance studies, but there was no evidence this was being consistently practiced or aggregated up to the divisional or regional levels as described in

⁴⁴ This was conducted in the 6 BEST regions and also Region 4a. It was funded by BEST and Regional Offices.

the M&E Framework.⁴⁵ Specific case study analysis at these schools would reveal what has worked and why, rather than relying on aggregated statistics. Even if interventions are highly successful, changes in aggregated statistics at the regional level are unlikely to detect any significant level of change due to the fragmentation of interventions and lack of uniform application.

The Theory of Change (ToC) for BEST resembles a program logic model that captures the essential building blocks for DepEd's transformational education program under each outcome statement. This is useful as a conceptual framework for aligning activities and outputs (investment areas) with outcomes but does not adequately describe how change happens. It would be more useful to unpack the ToC diagram into a series of charts showing how the activities or interventions work together to achieve the intended outcomes. These diagrams would resemble a set of 'road maps' showing how activities and outputs, through partners, contribute to achieving outcomes.

In the absence of a fully functioning M&E system and PSCO for monitoring and verification, the BEST team compiled six monthly progress reports based on feedback from the Technical Specialists.⁴⁶ Without systematic approaches to evaluating contributions towards outcomes (e.g. through specific evaluative studies), or an adequate understanding of the baseline situation, most reporting was focused on documenting activities and outputs (e.g. number of documents produced, number of people trained etc.).

5. Coordinating and collaborating amongst partners and donors

The level of partnership commitment to BEST has fluctuated during the various stages of its development affecting coordination and collaboration:

- Following the appointment of the Facilitating Contractor there were issues between pre-existing partners⁴⁷ who had direct contracts with DFAT and the new coordination arrangements. The new arrangements were considered to be introducing another layer of management (without a contractual obligation to comply) and an overhead cost for existing partners. This perception currently persists.
- The realignment of DFAT's budget following the DFAT-AusAID merger, and Australia's aid budget cuts in 2014-15, required a refocus by partners in some areas and delays in commitment to key areas of the program. This created uncertainty around Australia's commitment to the longer term goals of the program.
- The Philippine national election in 2016 created a perceived period of uncertainty. Changes in staff and technical specialists being managed by the Facilitating Contractor in 2016-17 resulted in some key executives in DepEd disengaging with BEST. These issues appear to have been resolved and the program is beginning to get back on track.

One indicator of partnership commitment is the adherence to formal governance structures and regular executive meeting schedules to provide strategic guidance and direction. Between August 2014 and August 2017 there were four PSC meetings – 16 December 2014, 22 July 2015, 11 November 2016 (including one out of session meeting on 4 July 2017), and eight PMC meetings – 15 December 2014, 21 July 2015, 8 November 2015, 28 January 2016, 21 June 2016, 16 September 2016, 9 March 2017, 23 June 2017 (including an out of session on December 2017). This is about half the number expected in terms of the design. It was also noted that the formal government arrangements and technical working groups (TWGs) were not implemented consistently throughout the program affecting coordination and collaboration.

The operational effectiveness of the Facilitating Contractor has improved with the recent organisational changes. The staff turnover in the past is indicative of an unstable operational environment. Feedback from key informants and partners suggested that the culture and management approach was not conducive to optimal performance. Partners also made comments regarding poor

⁴⁵ MEF March 2016.

⁴⁶ This was intended only as a stop-gap measure until the PMS and PSCO was properly implemented.

⁴⁷ PBE, PBSP, RCTQ and ACTRC.

quality services and reputational concerns. The decision not to co-locate (embed within DepEd) limited the ability of the Facilitating Contractor to support DepEd project management staff and systems as envisaged by the design. The decision not to co-locate was due to not being able to agree suitable accommodation. This was perceived negatively by DepEd and continues to be a point of contention.

Feedback from other donors involved in the education sector indicated that coordination among the donors had declined since BEST was implemented. Australia, as the biggest education donor in the Philippines, has a strong and trusted relationship with DepEd and there are opportunities to help DepEd improve coordination and facilitate improved dialogue between donors, BEST partners, private sector organisations and other stakeholders.

Coordination of research activities to directly benefit BEST was also deemed problematic. In terms of support for BEST, it is clear that some research has been adopted, for instance the updated professional teaching standards. However, it is currently unclear what the conduit or coordination mechanism is for translating research into policy and practice without active technical working groups, policy forums or other facilitating structures.

6. Lessons learnt for future programs

There are many lessons to be derived from the initial implementation of BEST that have implications for future investments in education and other sectors. These are given below with brief discussions on their implications.

Policies and strategies of partner governments frequently change over the life of a long-term program often reducing its relevance to both partners.

Changing government administrations, strategies, policies and budgets should be factored into programs using strategic risk management processes. These should be anticipated and managed. These should be jointly identified and managed on commencement. Flexible programming arrangements should be built into contracts and agreements to ensure relevance can be maintained through programming cycles.

Using a flexible fund to provide technical assistance has advantages and disadvantages. While it can provide targeted assistance to alleviate bottlenecks, it can also result in fragmentation of interventions and a loss of program impact and relevance if not well managed.

Using a flexible facility to provide targeted technical assistance needs to operate within a carefully defined strategic envelope to maintain relevance and avoid exploitation. For instance as a catalyst to unlock existing resources, or to support specific policy research that will result in evidence-based policy development in areas relevant to both governments. It should not duplicate assistance that can be procured locally using counterpart government budgets, but provide a mechanism to access international expertise.

Building on previous programs and interventions is a good use of resources, however a stocktake or baseline analysis is needed on commencement to understand the value of the added contributions.

One of the strengths of BEST has been that almost all interventions have built on past initiatives. However, it is difficult to evaluate what added value BEST has contributed without a good understanding of the situation for each of these initiatives on commencement of BEST. For instance BEST built on previous M&E frameworks using significant investment but it is difficult to ascertain the extent of new work compared to what existed before.

Collaboration and coordination between partners does not occur without either contractual arrangements or clear and agreed mutual benefits occurring. Poor collaboration and coordination has resulted in fragmentation and a lack of program cohesion.

Under a diverse partnership arrangement, particularly where partners are contracted at separate times and directly with DFAT (rather than through a Facilitating Contractor), there needs to be formal mechanisms in place to encourage collaboration and the development of a cohesive, integrated program. This currently represents a lost opportunity to leverage from the wide-ranging work being undertaken across the partnership. If the Facilitating Contractor is given this

responsibility then they need either direct contractual agreements with all partners (e.g. through a contract amendment) or the ability to develop mutually beneficial arrangements in areas such as information management and data sharing.

Implementing partner relationships should be monitored as part of the M&E system and carefully managed in order to ensure ongoing commitment to the program goals and outcomes.

Where there are complex partnership arrangements in place, the M&E system should actively monitor partnership relationships, including attitudes and perceptions of partners at various stages of the program. This includes commitment to meetings and formal structures, reporting and accountability. This is important for monitoring and mitigating reputational risk and facilitating policy dialogue so that the program remains relevant.

If partners have been contracted at different times and staff mobilised progressively then there is an ongoing need to ensure all are aware of the program's goals and objectives, and they have a clear line of sight between their contributions and the program's intended outcomes.

A well-structured co-design, co-development and co-implementation process is a powerful mechanism to ensure ownership of, and commitment to, a comprehensive long-term program.

The strength of a program such as BEST was its co-design and co-development approach based on a well-structured program logic model that built on previous initiatives. Its weakness was that overall implementation was fragmented, due in part due to the need to build project management capacity within DepEd. This resulted in a more organic approach to implementation.

Co-implementation can be strengthened by translating the program logic model into a more practical road map showing partner inputs, activities and outcomes over the full implementation period. This would enable all partners to clearly identify their roles within an overall framework to co-implement in a collaborative way. Similar to the systems approach being used by RCTQ, it enables each partner to understand how they contribute to the development of the education system.

The value of the Facilitating Contractor being embedded within the counterpart organisation should also not be underestimated to support co-implementation. This did not happen due to inadequate occupational and health standards⁴⁸, however, it nonetheless had a significant impact on implementing arrangements and relationships.

The annual planning process is critical and should be strategically led by partner governments with consultation with all partners to ensure the program remains cohesive and relevant.

Support from the Facilitating or Managing Contractor is required to provide coordination but not to be the strategic lead. The M&E system must be structured to provide direct support to the annual planning process.

Formal and informal relationships are equally important for ensuring the program remains on track and risks are mitigated.

Formal arrangements (e.g. governance and reporting structures) counteract or support informal decision making processes to ensure transparency and accountability. Where informal structures dominate through personal relationships, fragmentation can occur, accountability is challenged, and the program becomes driven by specific interests. DFAT and DepEd risk losing the ability to provide strategic direction through formal governance arrangements. This occurred to some extent in BEST due to the complex nature of the partnership and the many actors involved.

⁴⁸ The designated buildings for co-location were not compliant with Australian occupational health and safety standards. The decision not to co-locate was based on a cost assessment of meeting the standards and was to be mitigated through a communications strategy.

The importance of the M&E system in guiding program implementation, accountability, risk and reporting is frequently underestimated, and problems are recognised and addressed too late in the program.

The M&E system is critical for maintaining program performance, cohesion and decision support. It needs to support transparency, accountability, management and strategic decisions, and document lessons learnt. If the M&E system is not properly implemented from the start then Progress Reports and Aid Quality Checks will lack integrity. These were questioned during the BEST IPR because they did not correspond to overall findings. The M&E system should be designed from a user-perspective (a user-focused approach). The M&E system under BEST needed to meet the needs of DFAT, the Facilitating Contractor and all other partners and not just DepEd.

Complex programs, such as BEST, can benefit from adopting case study research methods to better understand what works, what doesn't and under what circumstances. This approach serves many important purposes for stakeholders, including public diplomacy.

Local case studies, using mixed method research, can be a valuable source of information for understanding program outcomes and promoting achievements with real examples. This is particularly relevant where the program involves many discrete interventions. While using aggregated descriptive statistics for regions (e.g. BEST versus non-BEST regions) may imply cause and effect, there are many confounding factors that limit proper interpretation. Case studies provide a greater understanding of how improvements can be achieved and how these can be scaled up.

If train the trainer training (or cascade training or echo-training) is used as a way of training thousands of people from the national to local levels then the training should be designed based on the limitations of the lowest level of training.

Factors such as time available, access to equipment and systems, competency levels and time between training events, need to be taken into account. Such training programs must be designed systematically from top to bottom to avoid a deterioration in training quality and knowledge or technology transfer. For instance if the LACs are being used at the local level, then the national level training should be designed based on this format. Training effectiveness needs to be carefully monitored and evaluated to ensure it is effective and there is minimal time lag between when the trainers have been trained and when the echo-training occurs.

Coordination and communication across the sector requires a strategic approach and must be adequately resourced and monitored, supported by appropriate facilitating structures.

Considering the many donors and actors in the education sector, good coordination to maximise the impact of donor investments in education is logical. However, it is often assumed that coordination does not need to be resourced and will happen through mutual need. This is not often the case and donor coordination needs to be clearly led by the relevant agency and supported by stakeholders to deliver this responsibility effectively.

Programs such as BEST undergo a lot of change due to the dynamics of the partners and governments involved, as well as natural attrition of staff in each of the organisations. In BEST these have been poorly communicated disrupting critical relationships between partners. Communication strategies must involve explaining organisational changes and their rationale, so that partners and staff can quickly adapt.

The information systems developed and supported by BEST have been transformative for many but a burden to others. This has created an information divide that requires alternative strategies to address.

The support for the development of information systems for DepEd have been transformative for most, building on years of previous investment. They have improved budgeting and planning potentially saving millions of dollars; reduced the burden of administration on teachers; improved communication with the workforce; improved the ability to track students; increased the ability to deliver curriculum materials and resources to teachers; and established an inventory of all school facilities. These are all essential to good planning and resource mobilisation. However, the lack of access in some locations means that there is now a technology or information divide. Alternative strategies will be required to ensure these locations do not get further behind and more disadvantaged.

7. Recommendations

The IPR team conducted a recommendations workshop with key implementing partners following the development of the initial draft of the IPR. This was an opportunity to refine the IPR's initial recommendations, with feedback from implementing partners, into pragmatic and coherent solutions.

The IPR team makes six major recommendations in order to improve results, accountability, value for money and sustainability for the remaining life of the program. Four of these are high priority and two are medium priority. They are presented below, including a brief rationale. Annex 6 provides additional notes on implementation strategies for each of these recommendations.

Recommendation 1

Implement formal program governance structures and improved contractual arrangements, based on a pragmatic revision of the program design, to counteract the informal decision making processes and improve accountability, transparency and formal communication. (High priority)

There is a need for a more formalised and mature partnership with coordinating structures that engage and add value to implementing partners, including DepEd and CHED and other Philippine Government agencies, as well as private sector partners (PBSP and PBEEd) and research centres (RCTQ and ACTRC). A formalised approach is needed to ensure the use of funds is strategic, transparent and accountable, and takes into account the roles and responsibilities of various actors in the education sector.

A starting point would be to map out a meeting schedule working backwards from the end date of the program; revising the terms of reference for the PSC, PMC and TWGs so they are up to date and relevant to the needs of the partners; formalise communication channels; reiterate the commitment to the end of program outcomes and overall goal; and strengthen the PSCO to provide internal coordination within DepEd. The focus of the PSC and PMC should be oriented towards achieving measurable results and ensuring sustainable benefits as the program comes to completion through an agreed exit strategy.

DFAT should also consider addressing the direct contracting arrangements with partners. Many reporting, coordination and accountability issues could be addressed by having partners directly contracted to the Facilitating Contractor. This could streamline administration, financial management and monitoring and evaluation.

Recommendation 2

Improve mechanisms to better evaluate and adopt the research produced by RCTQ and ACTRC into policies and practice in DepEd. (High priority)

The research centres have produced important research that should influence education policy, however, it is evident that some of this research is either not being adopted, lacking appropriate influence, or not understood by policy analysts, planners and decision makers. The research centres have operated at many levels and with many actors within DepEd to get uptake, however this is problematic. In the instance of the Professional Standards for Teachers, up take took 12 months longer than anticipated.

A formal mechanism is needed to help DepEd assess and adopt the research emanating from the research centres and perhaps have greater influence over the direction of the research undertaken. The Facilitating Contractor, as a knowledge and information broker, could play an important facilitation role to ensure the research is understood, evaluated and used to guide policy decisions or programs. This function could be further developed within DepEd with the assistance of BEST. The Facilitating Contractor should work with the Policy Research Division (PRD), as the research hub in DepEd, to ensure it has the capacity to benefit from the work of the research centres and can translate their findings into policy and practice.

Recommendation 3

Strengthen BEST's M&E system to better understand the contribution BEST is making towards achieving end of program outcomes, and to improve accountability, transparency and understand what works, what doesn't and under what conditions. (High priority)

BEST's M&E system does not currently record the contributions BEST makes to each intervention, along with other contributions from DepEd, or establish a baseline prior to each implementation (detailing the situation on commencement). It is difficult to disentangle BEST contributions from other initiatives.

In the past there has been little accountability or transparency in the use of Australian Government funds. This has improved with the recent annual planning process, however BEST's M&E system needs to be revised to capture these contributions and the contributions of other actors.

BEST's M&E redevelopment should adopt a user-focused approach, use case study research to understand what works, what doesn't and under what circumstances, and undertake a series of rolling evaluations on key program investments such as the cascade training programs, learning action cells and learning resources portal.

A successful M&E system will be shared by all partners to derive mutually beneficial outcomes. For instance the Facilitating Contractor should work with PBSP and PBE to capture lessons from their programs to inform policy and practice.

The Facilitating Contractor should consider developing information and data brokerage services to improve the flow of information and data between partners. As a data broker the Facilitating Contractor would act as an intermediary to document and distribute data between partners to facilitate its use for research, policy development or decision making.

Recommendation 4

Reorient some program resources to enable a sharp focus on improving teaching, learning, participation, gender equality and inclusion, and education-employment linkages in target divisions through a whole of school approach. (High priority)

There is a need for a localised, integrated whole school effort to improve the school's performance in teaching and learning to demonstrate the impact of BEST's investments. This was a feature of the BEST design. Due to the fragmented way in which BEST has been implemented it is difficult to see how combined interventions will lead to significant improvements without some examples of where these come together at the local level. Schools need to be identified where national policies and systems can be combined with local interventions to improve teaching and learning for the remainder of the program in order to evaluate the impact of BEST interventions at the local level. This information can then be used to inform scale up. Central to this recommendation is improving teaching and learning, but also to rationalise the efforts put into school based management, school improvement programs, continuous improvement, monitoring and evaluation and adjustment, and information systems development.

In order to improve the relevance to the Australian Government it is also recommended that there is a focus on gender responsive education, inclusive education and education-employment linkages as part of this whole school effort. The addition of Grades 11 and 12 has created a new need for 1.4 million senior high school graduates to find employment or business opportunities when they complete school in 2018. Secondary schools and colleges need assistance developing career paths and options for graduating senior high students to realise the benefits of their extra schooling.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ DepEd has a memorandum of agreement with 13 industry partners, for SHS graduates to complete 80 hours for training and certification. However, this may not be sufficient for them to obtain work, due to high rates of youth unemployment. The share of working-age youth not in education or employment was estimated to be 22% April-October 2016 (NEDA, 2017, p. 146).

Recommendation 5

Develop a clearing house for local innovative strategies, policies and practices at the school level. (Medium priority)

The BEST design document has the school as the unit of measurement in terms of end of program outcomes on improved student scores. A whole school orientation to learning improvement requires a local strategy, policies and practices, rather than a cascade of parts down from the national level. This is particularly so in the case of BEST, where the design specifies targeting schools with the aim of tracking, in an experimental way, what it takes to move a school from poor to better performance and from good to excellent. These local strategies, policies and practices could be captured in a similar way curriculum content is captured, from the bottom up and shared nationwide through an information portal.

The innovation grant will be one way to generate innovative local projects that may lead to new local policies and practices. This clearing house could be used to capture these innovations for sharing.

Recommendation 6

Assist DepEd to implement effective donor coordination mechanisms to create more value from available donor resources. (Medium priority)

Donor coordination can avoid duplication of effort leading to more effective and efficient use of donor investments. The Project Management Service (PMS) within DepEd includes a donor coordination and monitoring function and would be a logical area to focus building this capacity. During the conduct of the IPR, donor coordination by DepEd was being strengthened through the current administration using an external consultant to augment PMS capacity and conduct Development Partner Coordination Forums on key themes. BEST has also provided some technical support to the PMS to establish the project information system as a source of information about donor activities and outputs. BEST has an opportunity to build on this work and assist DepEd by building its capacity to apply this system to strengthen coordination with donors through effective communication flows, governance, monitoring and evaluation, and program management.

Donors appear to be pursuing their own approaches to coordination and have commented on the challenges to coordinate with DepEd on technical assistance because of their internal structures. Performance of the donor coordination function may have suffered during the implementation of the Rationalization Plan (2014-15) and perhaps poor communication with donors on the role of the PMS has affected interaction. Some donors found it more convenient to communicate through personal contacts.

At a sector-wide level, donors recognised Australia's leading contribution to education in the Philippines and would like to leverage from this in a collaborative and coordinated way. A strengthened collaborative effort between donors through the Education Donor Group (EDG) could result in better coordination of technical support and expertise that can support DepEd to deliver better services with greater responsiveness.

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Annex 2: Terms of Reference and Approach and Methodology

Independent Progress Review

Background

The Basic Education Sector Transformation (BEST) Program is Australia's response to the Philippine Government's request for support to the implementation of the 2013 Enhanced Basic Education Act (Republic Act 10533) which adds a mandatory Kindergarten and years 11 and 12 to the 10-year education system, known as the K-12 Reform Agenda. Before K-12, the Philippines was the last country in Asia and one of three countries worldwide with a 10 year basic education system. Restructuring the Philippines basic education system through K-12 is the most significant education reform undertaken by the country. It is a highly ambitious agenda that poses major technical and resourcing constraints for the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). But if implemented well, K-12 will have a transformative effect on the quality of Filipino graduates that will produce a higher skilled and more employable workforce for long-term economic growth prospects. BEST provides the framework for consolidating more than 10 years of Australian aid investment in education. Elements of previous investments that ended in 2014 and aligned with the objectives of BEST were included in design and implementation.

BEST is a 6-year program (2013-2019) with the following target outcomes:

1. More children are able to demonstrate improved mastery of the basic education curriculum competencies (especially in English, Mathematics and Science).
2. More boys and girls participate in and complete education in target areas.
3. DepEd is better able to deliver basic education services that is gender responsive and inclusive, with greater decentralisation of management and accountability to the field offices and schools.

To achieve these outcomes, BEST areas of focus include improvements in curriculum and learning materials, teacher development and governance, including classroom construction and provision of equipment for the Unified Information System. These areas align with DepEd priorities and responsibilities. BEST also supports the Commission on Higher Education to align teachers' tertiary education with K-12 requirements. Types of support include technical assistance, capacity building and research.

BEST interventions are national in scope with intensive support directed to six regions – National Capital Region, Bicol, Northern Mindanao, Western Visayas, Central Visayas, and Eastern Visayas. The review will also assess the implementation progress in the focus regions.

BEST is delivered through the following mechanisms:

- Facilitating Contractor – Cardno Emerging Markets
- Not-for-Profit corporate organisations:
 - Philippines Business for Social Progress (classroom construction)
 - Philippine Business for Education (1,000 teachers program)
- Academic Institution Consortia partnerships between Australian and Philippine universities:
 - University of New England with Philippine Normal University (Research Centre for Teacher Quality – RCTQ)
 - University of Melbourne with University of the Philippines (Assessment, Curriculum, Technology Research Centre – ACTRC)

BEST is now in its fourth year of implementation with the agreement with Cardno commencing August 2014. The classroom construction program delivered through PBSP was started earlier (August 2013) to respond to classroom shortage brought about by disasters. The contribution to PBed 1,000 teachers program started December 2014. The research centres (ACTRC and RCTQ) originally started in 2012 through a PSLP grant and was eventually folded to the BEST program through an amendment of the contract in April 2015.

Current Situation

In the four years BEST has supported the DepEd to transition to the full implementation of the K to 12 program, including the implementation of the DepEd Rationalization Program. Recent developments include:

- Rationalization program was implemented in DepEd with personnel moving to new offices in the new organisational structure.
- A new administration has started in June 2016 with a new DepEd Secretary and executives appointed.
- The first batch of senior high school students (Grade 11) started in June 2016 and we are expecting the first graduates of the program in March 2018.
- While K–12 implementation remained a priority, the new administration have new emerging priorities such as Alternative Learning Systems, Drug Education, Comprehensive Sexuality Education, and improving budget utilisation.

With the completion of the first K to 12 implementation in March 2018, it is unclear how this will change the landscape in terms of youth employment.

Purpose of the Review

A midterm independent progress review (IPR) is now required to provide the evidence that the program is on track, still relevant, and aligned with other DFAT programs. The Philippines Department of Education and DFAT will use the evaluation to improve BEST implementation to 2019. The review will also consider information on the future outlook for Australia and other donors to engage in the national education sector the Philippines.

The review aims to:

1. Provide evidence-based assessment to demonstrate whether the program is on track to deliver what the design committed to achieve.
2. Assess if the program is still relevant to Australia and Philippines policy priorities and highlight areas for improvement for the remainder of the implementation period.
3. Evaluate if the modality of the BEST program supports or impedes the efficient and effective delivery of the program.
4. Assess how BEST collaborates with other programs funded by the Australian Government, programs delivered by the Philippines government, and other international organisations.
5. To provide advice and lessons learnt to inform the scale and possible options for Australia's future engagement in national education within the scope of the current Philippines Government policies and priorities.

The primary audience of the report will be:

1. Philippines Department of Education
2. Philippines National Economic Development Authority
3. DFAT Manila and Canberra

Scope and focus

The review will assess the program at the National, Regional, Division, and the five BEST implementing partners on progress against end of program outcomes. This will include the modality of the BEST partnership arrangements.

The review will answer the following questions:

1. Given the change in leadership in both the Australian and the Philippine governments, is the program still relevant to both governments' priorities?
2. What are the implications of progress to date for the Philippines Government's education reform agenda/implementation of K–12 under the Duterte administration, how can BEST continue to respond to challenges/these implications or are there alternative strategies to improve progress?
3. To what extent has the program contributed to the development of teachers given the change in curriculum (both in-service and pre-service)?
4. To what extent has the program contributed to:
 - a. girls' and boys' improved mastery of the K to 12 curriculum competencies (especially in English, Mathematics and Science), including girls and boys with a disability, indigenous girls and boys, and girls and boys from groups who are marginalised in the Philippines;
 - b. more boys and girls participating in and completing education in target areas, including girls and boys with a disability, indigenous girls and boys, and girls and boys from groups who are marginalised in the Philippines; and
 - c. DepEd being better able to deliver gender responsive and inclusive basic education with greater decentralisation of management and accountability to the field offices and schools in target areas?
5. How appropriate and effective is the BEST program modality in achieving progress towards outcomes and/or in supporting DepEd to deliver basic education services with greater decentralisation of management and accountability?
6. How has the M&E system collected and used data for program decisions at national, regional, division and school levels, and what tools/changes to the framework are needed in order to assess progress towards outcomes by the end of the investment?
7. How appropriate are the strategies in place to ensure that DepEd continues the activities of the program without Australian Government funding?

Approach and methodology

The objectives of the IPR were addressed using the key evaluation questions (KEQs) to develop the evaluation framework and guide the research methods.⁵⁰

Given the time and resource constraints the approach used a 'convergent parallel mixed method design'.⁵¹ This involves collecting qualitative and quantitative information in parallel and merging the primary and secondary data during the synthesis of results into an overall judgement of performance. Data is collected independently and used as a means for triangulation and corroboration of evidence.

Interviews and focus group discussions were the main source of primary information (see Annex 3 for a list of key informants). Secondary information was obtained through document reviews. Quantitative data were accessed through existing M&E systems and DepEd databases where available, although this was limited for the period of interest. Perception surveys with open and closed questions were conducted but the responses from stakeholders were limited and subsequently not included in the review.

An evaluability assessment conducted during the early phase of the field work revealed that:

- There has been a high degree of staff turnover and instability in each of the key partners involved (DFAT, DepEd and Cardno) during the period. Corporate knowledge has been lost. The review included informants who have moved on to new positions to corroborate evidence and fill in knowledge gaps.
- Many of the interventions have built on previous initiatives without a baseline account of what was in place prior to BEST being implemented. It is difficult to ascertain progress during the period of BEST without a clear understanding of the situation on commencement for many interventions.
- Activities and training have not been uniformly implemented at the sub-national level. It has been difficult to obtain data on what interventions have been implemented where. In some instances interventions have occurred outside of the designated BEST regions and other training has occurred using a cascading approach but this has not been captured. This fragmentation makes it difficult to assess the combined impact of the program in terms of teaching and learning at the local level.
- The Monitoring and Evaluation interventions have focused on the institutional requirements of DepEd and the education sector rather than for accountability and learning purposes under the program. This limits what information is available to assess the contribution Australian Government funds have made to improving educational outcomes.
- National standardised academic scores, participation and completion rates (at the national and regional levels) are not available beyond 2014-15. This limits the ability to compare BEST regions with other surrounding regions, given BEST officially commenced in August 2014. The databases developed under BEST (and previous programs) are going through a data validation and cleansing phase, including incorporation of records from private schools. This means that any baseline data (from 2014) will still contain many erroneous records (duplicates and 'ghost' student records).

These factors affected how the IPR team approached the evaluation study and subsequently interpreted key findings.

⁵⁰ An Evaluation Plan and accompanying evaluation framework was produced prior to conducting field work. This document provides a more detailed description of the intended methodology.

⁵¹ Cresswell, J.W and V.L. Plan-Clark (2011) *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, SAGE publishing 457pp.

Annex 3: Key informants and focus group discussions

To maintain confidentiality, individuals associated with organisations have not been identified.

- Interviews with current and previous DFAT staff at Post in Manila involved in the BEST program
- Interviews with current and previous Cardno staff, including specialists, involved in the BEST program in Manila
- Interviews with current and previous executives from Department of Education, Central Office, Philippines
- Interviews with Department of Education staff in the ICT section, Project Management Services and Project Support and Coordination office
- Focus group discussions with regional staff from Division 3 and the National Capital Region (knowledge café approach with 26 participants)
- Focus group discussions with regional and divisional staff in Region 8
- Focus group discussions with regional and divisional staff in Region 6
- Focus group discussions with teachers and special education teachers in Regions 6 and 8
- Focus group discussions with local stakeholders including local government and the parent teachers association in region 8
- Interviews with school heads in Region 6
- Focus group discussion with STEP-UP student teachers in Iloilo Teacher Education College
- Focus group discussion with senior high school students in Region 6, Pavia High School
- Key informant interviews with key partners and donors
 - Research Centre for Teacher Quality
 - Assessment Curriculum and Technology Research Centre
 - Philippine Businesses for Education
 - Philippine Businesses for Social Progress,
 - UNICEF
 - Asia Development Bank
 - The Asia Foundation ADB

Annex 4: Major achievements summarised from BEST Progress Reports

Basic Education Sector Transformation (BEST): Summary of implementation progress

Component	Expected outputs ⁵²	Implementation progress ⁵³
1.1 Pre-service teacher education	1.1.1 National TEI curriculum audit designed and implemented	<p>RCTQ Teacher Development Needs Study (TDNS) and Teacher Educator Development Needs Study (TEDNS) completed in 2014, and presented to participating TEI Presidents and teacher educators in workshops and other fora in 2015.</p> <p>In 2016, RCTQ conducted additional curriculum mapping/gap analysis with 34 TEIs, and consulted with the TEIs on the findings and implications of the TDNS and TEDNS.</p> <p>In 2016-17, BEST and the Research Centre for Teacher Quality engaged the first batch of 10 TEIs to review the Teacher Education curriculum and course syllabi vis-à-vis the demands of the new K–12 Basic Education program.</p> <p>RCTQ provided technical support to introduce Curriculum Quality Audits (CQA) and trained 30 selected faculty members from the 10 TEIs. In turn these group have trained a total of 500+ faculty in their respective sites. The trained faculty organised and implemented onsite CQA processes to review their course syllabi with technical assistance from BEST and RCTQ.</p>
	1.1.2 Philippines Professional Standards for Teachers Implementing Guidelines developed	<p>RCTQ worked with DepEd to introduce the National Developmental Competency Based Teachers Standards (D-NCBTS) in 2014, and to validate/field-test them in 2015. Two teacher performance assessment tools (individual performance plan and review form; and Classroom Observation Tool) were developed and trialed in DepEd schools in Region 1 and CAR in 2015.</p>
	1.1.3 TEI pre-service teacher educators trained on competencies aligned to teacher professional standards	<p>RCTQ conducted workshops with TEIs, in particular, with Centers of Excellence (COEs) and members of Philippine Association of State Universities and Colleges (PASUC) (n=200) on PPST.</p>

⁵² Outputs are from the DepEd-approved revised BEST Theory of Change, Sept 2017.

⁵³ From Six Monthly Progress Reports (SMPR): SMPR1 July-December 2014; SMPR2 January-June 2015; SMPR3 July-December 2015; SMPR4 January-June 2016; SMPR5 July-December 2016; SMPR6 January-June 2017; and from additional documents and interviews during field-work.

Component	Expected outputs ⁵²	Implementation progress ⁵³
	1.1.4 CHED Research and Reform Agenda for Teacher Education developed and advocated to TEIs	In 2015, BEST worked with CHED on how to implement the Master Plan for Pre-Service Teacher Education, which included plans for: regional actions to align the teacher education curriculum with K–12, and teacher standards; pre-service programs and course syllabi; upgraded Licensure Examination for Teachers qualification; outcomes-based education in pre-service programs; new graduate/masters programs for in-service teachers; new routes into teacher training; and raising the quality of teacher research.
	1.1.5 TEI pre-service student selection strategy and mentoring program piloted with 1,000 scholars	Philippine Business for Education's Scholarships for Teacher Education Programs to Upgrade Teacher Quality in the Philippines (BEST STEP-UP) has promoted teaching as a profession, and awarded around 700/1000 planned scholarships to date. Eighty-five (85) undergraduates and 179 Certificate in Teaching Profession scholars have completed their studies in BEST's 10 focus TEIs. 19/16 pre-service scholars who took the March 2017 Board Licensure Examination for Teachers passed the examination (84%). Only three scholars are teaching in DepEd, with the remaining 82 in temporary positions in private high schools, State Universities and Colleges, while they wait for a [better-paid] DepEd position.

Component	Expected outputs ⁵²	Implementation progress ⁵³
<p>1.2 In-service teacher development and support</p>	<p>1.2.1 Teacher professional development program including Learning Action Cells (LAC) on applied Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) designed and delivered</p>	<p>In 2015, BEST helped draft a policy on Revitalising the Teacher Induction Program (TIP). SMPR6 reported that in 2017 the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) had ‘informed crafting of the Teacher Induction Policy (with TEC), and draft implementing guidelines for Continuing Professional Development (with NEAP, TEC and BHROD)’.</p> <p>In 2015, RCTQ reached agreements with Directors of BHROD and NEAP to collaborate on tools for teacher professional development: self-assessment career stage tool to inform teacher PD needs; Classroom Observation Instrument for monitoring and enhancing teacher performance; and Results- based Performance Management System (RPMS) teacher position and competency profile to evaluate teachers’ yearly performance.</p> <p>In 2015, BEST including RCTQ provided technical advice on the development of the Learning Action Cell (LAC) National Policy, including re-drafting different versions of the policy and preparing a comprehensive set of guidelines for schools.</p> <p>In 2015, RCTQ as part of the sub TWG on Teacher Assessment, chaired by Director Pantoja, helped draft a revised K–12 Teacher Assessment Policy, and reviewed policies on teacher assessment.</p> <p>In 2016-17, a Learning Action Cell (LAC)⁵⁴ Starter Kit was developed in conjunction with DepEd, and 156 schools were oriented (Level 1 training) on LACs.</p> <p>BEST commenced a partnership with Microsoft Philippines, using the resources and expertise of Microsoft Education Ambassadors in 17 regions, to create ICT Learning Action Cell activity cards for office productivity, teaching with technology, coding, STEM and accessibility tools for Special Education. The Ambassadors work with DepEd classroom teachers, ICT coordinators, Education Program Specialists, Information Technology Officers, School Principals and Division Superintendents on ICT awareness and quality assurance.</p> <p>RCTQ worked with the Philippines Science High School (PSHS) in 2016 and 2017 to design a professional development program for PSHS teachers based on the PPST. RCTQ has trained key people from sixteen PSHS campuses across the country on the Standards and the tools. These people will subsequently train the teachers on their campuses on the PPST and PPST tools.</p>

Component	Expected outputs ⁵²	Implementation progress ⁵³
	<p>1.2.2 Teacher Educator Program on English, Mathematics, Science and Filipino subject specialisation designed and delivered at Regional, Division and School level</p>	<p>In 2016, Grades 5 and 11 National Training of Trainers was designed and conducted. Regional master plans for the professional development of teachers were developed, and 16 trainers per region were trained on Early Language Literacy and Numeracy.</p> <p>In 2017, BEST provided technical assistance to develop English, science, mathematics, and Filipino (ESMF) training and resource packages, and helped select and organise trainers for DepEd's 'Pedagogical Retooling in Mathematics, Languages and Science' (PRIMALS) for Grades 4–6. Two trainings were held in May-June 2017: i) regional training of 183 division supervisors, public school district supervisor, principals and master teachers in Region 6 covering Grades 4-6 ESMF, Collaborative Lesson Planning (CLP), and Learning Action Cells (LAC); ii) national training of 234 trainers on PRIMALS 4–6 to develop national, regional, and division trainers on ESMF content and pedagogy, who can in turn train teachers at the district and school levels.</p> <p>District and school clusters in support of LAC were formed to foster collaborative lesson planning implementation.</p>
	<p>1.2.3 Contextualised and GESI sensitive teaching and learning materials developed and disseminated to teacher educators and teachers</p>	<p>In 2015, BEST designed a comprehensive training program for early language literacy and numeracy for all K–3 teachers and school heads. RCTQ developed and piloted (Regions 1 and 7) technology-supported PD materials on Early Literacy Development and Instruction for newly hired (induction) K-3 teachers. Modules on Child Development Principles and Literacy and Numeracy Instruction were also developed for teacher PD (with Community of Learners Foundation). BEST developed a module and sub-modules on Career Guidance and Counselling for teachers to aid Grade 10 students in choosing their Senior High School track.</p> <p>Curriculum guides for Kindergarten to Grade 12 were made available online early in 2016, with an accompanying procedure manual for the Bureau of Learning Resources (BLR). BEST trained staff in the Regional Curriculum and Learning Management Division, and helped move functions from the Instructional Materials Council Secretariat (IMCS) to BLR.</p>

⁵⁴ LAC is a school-level tool to establish a professional learning community for teachers to improve practice and learning achievement (DepEd order No 35 2016). The materials cover themes such as Positive Discipline, Inclusive Education, Multigrade and Action Research.

Component	Expected outputs ⁵²	Implementation progress ⁵³
		<p>In 2016-17 BEST supported three seminar-workshops to review and integrate mother tongue resources into lesson plans, for staff of the Bureau of Learning Resources and learning resource evaluators from the Bureau of Curriculum Development and Bureau of Learning Delivery, facilitated by trainers and software from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). The workshops produced two volumes of teaching and learning packages, including 200 teaching-learning materials in Mother Tongue (Science, Math, AP, Mother Tongue) and English. The SIL software was entered in an international competition on reading access supported by DFAT, USAID, World Vision and the Global Reading Network. Mother tongue materials were made available through the NCR Regional Office using Bloom software (a free and open software).</p> <p>ACTRC's extensive research into MTB-MLE, led to the convening of a conference in 2017 primarily to showcase ACTRC's inputs (First National Conference on MTB-MLE, August 2-4, 2017, Mariveles, Bataan). The objective of the conference was to present best practices on how the MTB-MLE is administered based on policies and guidelines issued by DepEd.</p> <p>Informed by earlier consultations with local communities (including Coordinators from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples), in 2016-17, all 30 divisions in Region V were guided to consider the uniqueness of each division in the context of the K–12 curriculum and produce a 'Divisional Local Heritage Matrix' (DLHM) and 'Division Curriculum Contextualization Matrix' (DCCM). BEST is planning to evaluate implementation and impact in Region V before rolling the process out across the system.</p>
1.3 Education leadership	1.3.1 Education Leadership and Management training program delivered at Regional, Division and School level	<p>Curriculum framework and content for the school heads development program (SHDP) was approved in 2015, to strengthen school-based management and enable K–12 and senior high school implementation. The school heads' training complements the one-year Superintendents' Leadership Program (transitioned from PAHRODF into BEST).</p> <p>BEST trained 179 Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents on education leadership, organisation transformation, building learning communities, leading change with continuous improvement, and the spirituality and ethics of leadership. In 2015, all regions were close to reaching their target of training more than 5000 SHS principals.</p> <p>In 2017, BEST assisted with the first draft of DepEd 'leadership competency models'.</p>

Component	Expected outputs ⁵²	Implementation progress ⁵³
	1.3.2 National Educators' Academy of the Philippines (NEAP) institutional strengthening program developed	<p>NEAP's charter and strategic plan was developed in 2015-16. BEST trained 85 NEAP learning facilitators (mostly supervisors from regions and divisions) to roll-out the School Heads Development Program (SHDP) Training at the RO level. BEST also trained: 56 DepEd Staff in Facilitating Adult Learning (23) and Learning Design and Evaluation (33); and NEAP staff on designing and evaluating learning interventions.</p> <p>In 2017, BEST provided capacity building on quality assurance and M&E to the National Educators Academy of the Philippines.</p>
1.4 Curriculum and assessment	1.4.1 National Curriculum and Assessment Framework developed and implemented	<p>In 2015, ACTRC contributed to the formulation of a draft K–12 assessment system and sub-systems, including national assessment of student learning, teachers and supervisors' assessment, and classroom assessment. An omnibus policy on classroom assessment was promulgated in April 2015.</p> <p>ACTRC worked with DepEd's National Education Testing and Research Centre on: assessing 21st century skills; an audit of K–12 for 21st Century skills integration; review of draft items for Grade 6 National Achievement Tests, incorporating 21st century skills; and possible use of ACTRC assessment tools and research to support BEST M&E Plan on student achievement and teacher practice in formative assessment.</p> <p>The following studies informed DepEd's work on assessment in 2016: ACTRC report on International Large-Scale Assessments presented to DepEd and other forums; ongoing ACTRC research on formative assessment practices in the classroom; draft policies and resources on National Assessment of Student Learning; the Classroom Assessment Resource Books; and validation of K to 6 Classroom Assessment samples to accompany the finalised Classroom Assessment Policy.</p>
	1.4.2 Curriculum contextualisation policy developed and implementation supported	<p>In 2015-2016, BEST provided initial technical assistance to develop DepEd's Contextualisation Policy, which was endorsed by DepEd (expected launched by Sec Briones in March 2017).</p> <p>In 2016-17, through a review and 'write shop', representatives from all regions of the Philippines developed the Curriculum Contextualization Policy drawing on existing policies and practices including the Indigenous Peoples Education Framework.</p>

Component	Expected outputs ⁵²	Implementation progress ⁵³
	1.4.3 K–12 curriculum implementation research conducted and findings disseminated/used	In 2015, a BEST workshop on K–12 Curriculum Implementation in the Regions included Regional directors, Curriculum and Learning Management Division (CLMD) chiefs, CLMD program specialists, regional planning officers, bureau directors, assistant directors, NEAP director and Office of Planning Services (OPS) Planning and Programming Division (PPD) chief. The workshop gathered feedback on implemented Regional Office CLMD action plans, determined data needs for CLMD work, analysed regional data to contextualise CLMD work, and clarified processes for localising and indigenising the curriculum.
	1.4.4 Professional development program on curriculum and assessment designed and delivered	<p>In 2015-16, three out of five planned training modules were conducted for Regional Curriculum and Learning Management Division (CLMD) Chiefs and Education Supervisors to enhance skills in managing the K to 12 curriculum, contextualising the curriculum, managing and analysing education indicators, and strategic planning.</p> <p>In 2016-17, informed by ACTRC indicators showing skills progression, staff from BEA were trained in developing test items for the '21st Century Skills'⁵⁵ indicators of the National Achievement Test. The training developed 27 test questions for English, Math, Science, Filipino, and Araling Panlipunan (AP, social sciences).</p>
	1.4.5 DepEd classroom assessment resource book developed and disseminated	<p>In 2016, curriculum guides for Kindergarten to Grade 12 were developed and made available online. A Code Book on all learning competencies was commenced in 2016, a Kindergarten Policy was drafted, and a Language Mapping policy was released.</p> <p>To support implementation of the Policy Guidelines on Classroom Assessment for the K–12 Basic Education Program, in 2017 the Classroom Assessment Resource Book (CARB) was reviewed and finalised with relevant bureaus and DepEd's office of Curriculum and Instruction. The book is intended as a resource for: teachers, school heads, trainers, and supervisors at national, regional, division, district, and school levels; for DepEd cascade training; and in school-based Learning Action Cells (LACs).</p>

⁵⁵ '21st Century Skills' in the K–13 Curriculum are: Information, Media and Technology Skills, Learning and Innovation Skills, Effective Communication Skills, Life and Career Skills.

Component	Expected outputs ⁵²	Implementation progress ⁵³
	1.4.6 DepEd roadmap for Senior High School implementation expanded	SY 2016-2017 marked the start of Senior High School, with the introduction of Grade 11 nationwide. BEST assisted all the regions and SDOs with TA where needed to prepare and implement Senior High School plans and prepare resources (including an SHS manual of operations, school program offerings, Curriculum Guides for Senior High School Core Curriculum Subjects, Applied Tracks and Specialised Subjects). Resources were uploaded and made accessible online for use by the school heads, SDOs, and the regions. BEST helped DepEd develop a policy and guide for hiring SHS teachers . A Senior High School communication strategy and content contributed to high public awareness on the importance of Senior High School, and the high transition rate from Grade 10 to Grade 11.
	1.4.7 Multi-grade teacher development and learning materials	<p>In 2015, BEST helped to produce an Omnibus policy on Multigrade schools and conducted Training of Trainers on Differentiated Instruction for Literacy and Numeracy Skills for Multigrade schools.</p> <p>In 2016-17, teachers and supervisors from several regions and divisions developed lesson exemplars for various grade combinations and across learning areas, informing 70 percent of what is required for teachers of multigrade classes. The package includes K–12 aligned Integrated Daily Lesson Plans for Science, Math, AP, Filipino, and English; and Integrated Multigrade Daily Lesson Plans for Cluster 1 (Grades 1-3), Cluster 2 (Grades 3-4), and Cluster 3 (Grades 4-6). The materials have been evaluated and edited by subject experts and Multigrade consultants and will be ready by the end of 2017 for Multigrade teachers in the Philippines.</p>
	1.4.8 DepEd Alternative Learning System (ALS) design and implementation supported	<p>In 2014, BEST developed a framework to report on the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the Learner Information System, for the Office of Planning Services (OPS) and the Bureau of Alternative Learning System (BALS). The Universal Information System (ALS) could register and track learners enrolled in Alternative Learning System (ALS) by June 2015.</p> <p>In 2015, BEST developed a profile of learners in the Alternative Learning System and those using Alternative Delivery Modes, and helped draft a policy and revised guidelines for implementing ALS and ADMs.</p>
1.5 Gender and social inclusion	1.5.1 DepEd Inclusive Education Policy Framework developed addressing learners with	In May 2015, two disability consultants (one local and one international) reviewed the Program Design. Working with BEST specialists and partners in DepEd, the consultants: analysed and identified progress in developing inclusive policies and approaches in schools; developed a

Component	Expected outputs ⁵²	Implementation progress ⁵³
	<p>disabilities, Muslim and IP learners and ALS</p>	<p>detailed activity plan on including children with disabilities (CWDs); and provided an overview of policy development, examples of successful provision for children with disabilities in the Philippines, and recommendations for strategic development. They consulted with DFAT, DepEd, Council for the Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities, Assessment Curriculum and Technical Research Centre (ACTRC), Community of Learners Foundation, National Council on Disability Affaires, Save the Children and elementary schools. Field visits in 2015 observed practice in disability, and supported policy development on disability (and gender), awareness of international best practice and action planning.</p> <p>In 2016, Student Inclusion Division (SID) personnel (central, region and division) visited Vietnam to strengthen disability awareness and develop common understanding of Inclusive Education in DepEd at all levels. BEST conducted a Disabled People Organisation (DPOs) Workshop in May 2016 to create a working agreement and common understanding between DPOs, NGOs and different local and international agencies towards Inclusive Education.</p> <p>The Human Resources Baseline study analysed if HR processes and systems are aligned with the Magna Carta on Disabled Persons.</p> <p>BEST's work around advocacy, value, quantitative and qualitative measurement, and the Theory of Change of Inclusive Education and Disability were shared at an International summit in Bangkok in December 2016.</p> <p>In 2017, the BEST strategy included entry points and a checklist of actions for technical advisers to identify how their work can contribute to achieving gender, disability and socially sensitive and responsive outcomes in DepEd. BEST is involving local partners such as the Disabled People Organisation and the Asia Foundation in meetings, training and developing inclusion resources and strategies.</p> <p>On 22-24 February 2017, 1000 participants from the education sector attended the International Leadership Summit in Inclusive Education. Vice President Leni Robredo and Australian Ambassador for the Philippines Amanda Gorely attended and acknowledged BEST for paving the way to establish the Philippine Network for Inclusive Education (PNIE). This network, led by the National Council for Disability Affairs and made up of Disabled People Organisations, is a strong advocate of Inclusive Education and involved in policy development.</p>

Component	Expected outputs ⁵²	Implementation progress ⁵³
		<p>BEST and DepEd Region VIII office in partnership with LGUs and Disabled People Organisations are documenting Gender, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) best practices to inform DepEd's Inclusive Education Framework, which is being developed by DepEd's Bureau of Learning Delivery Student Inclusion Division (SID).</p>
	<p>1.5.2 Inclusive Education pilots implemented at Region, Division and school levels</p>	<p>In 2016, BEST Inclusive Education started work with a specialist on impact mapping and evaluation to clearly articulate the theory of change for Inclusive Education within BEST. Demonstration Inclusive Education schools were planned in clusters across BEST Regions, to begin in AP3 in Regions 8, NCR in the first 6 months of AP3 and then Regions 6 and 7 in the second half of AP3.</p> <p>The BEST Inclusive Education and Disability team worked with the new Student Inclusion Division (SID) to finalise the Special Education framework and policy, identify areas to collaborate, and develop clusters of Inclusive Education schools in Region 8 (to capture best practices and inform policy on inclusive education).</p>
	<p>1.5.3 DepEd Gender Responsive Basic Education Policy developed and mainstreaming support provided</p>	<p>In 2015, a Gender Specialist prepared discussion papers on gender and education in the Philippines, which recommended: an omnibus department order on gender and development in DepEd; reconstituting gender and development training teams; stabilising membership in gender and development focal committees; formulating a gender and development plan and budget; aligning student council activities with gender and development principles; ensuring collection and use of sex-disaggregated data; and providing pre-service training for future teachers on gender sensitivity.</p> <p>In 2016, BEST assisted with: drafting the 'Gender-Fair Education Policy'/Gender Responsive Basic Education Policy (to be issued in Feb 2017); revising the Gender Plan and Budget 2016-2018; drafting the BEST Gender and Development Action Plan; a Gender Analysis Workshop; and incorporating Gender and Development related and sex disaggregated data in outputs (planning framework, organisational assessment tools, quality assurance tools).</p> <p>BEST worked with the Gender and Development Focal Point System (GFPS) and NEAP, guided by the BEST GAD Assessment Tool, to ensure all subcomponents implement GAD specific activities or mainstream GAD. For example: gender analysis is included in the human resources baseline study; the continuous improvement project team and coaches were trained</p>

Component	Expected outputs ⁵²	Implementation progress ⁵³
		<p>on gender sensitivity and using a gender checklist; GAD was integrated into LAC materials pilot tested in selected schools; a Classroom Resource Guidebook, published by DepEd in the Learning Resource Management and Development System (LRMDS), includes a section on how to make classroom assessment gender inclusive; BEST supported procedures in the Bureau of Learning Resources (BLR) to ensure gender equity principles were applied throughout; and BEST held initial discussions on embedding GAD in the ongoing School Heads Leadership Development Program (SHLDP). SMPR5 reported 'Overall, BEST is on track to deliver its commitment to achieve gender equality.'</p> <p>BEST support contributed to the DepEd Gender Responsive Basic Education (GRBE) Policy being approved on 29 June 2017. The policy commits DepEd to gender mainstreaming in education to: address enduring and emerging gender and sexuality-related issues in basic education; promote the protection of children from all forms of gender-related violence, abuse, exploitation, discrimination and bullying; and promote gender equality and non-discrimination in the workplace across all governance levels.</p> <p>The Gender Plan and Budget 2018 was submitted to the Philippine Commission of Women, so DepEd can access funds to implement gender mainstreaming.</p> <p>BEST facilitated a draft MOU between DepEd and the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) for developing and certifying a pool of gender and development experts in DepEd. Philippine Commission on Women's assistance to DepEd is considered critical to sustain initiatives that BEST has supported.</p>
1.6 Education facilities	1.6.1 School infrastructure built and meets standards for GESI, IE and WASH	<p>SMPR5 reported that 253 classrooms had been completed in BEST regions and Pablo-affected areas, and 23/101 classrooms in Yolanda-expansion areas were under construction. All classrooms have a toilet, students and teacher's tables and chair sets, clean water and ramps to improve access of learners with disabilities. Locations were based on need and determined by DepEd as part of their national infrastructure program.</p> <p>Since 2014, 169 classrooms⁵⁶ have been completed out of a project target of 288 [fewer than reported in SMPR5]. There is ongoing construction of 119 classrooms, at various stages of</p>

⁵⁶ SMPR6 used trend analysis, pre-post-test analysis, and two-group pre-post-test analysis to test the statistical significance of changes in education indicators in BEST regions. The report says 'The analysis suggests that BEST interventions *may* be contributing positively to the secondary net enrolment rate and average dropout rates, both in Elementary and Secondary', and that BEST's classrooms may have contributed to the changes. This seems implausible, considering: the absence of reliable information on

Component	Expected outputs ⁵²	Implementation progress ⁵³
		<p>completion. Delivered through Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), the classrooms provide ramp access for teachers, students and community members with physical or learning disabilities. Water tanks and collection have increased water security for schools and the local community; new WASH facilities have enabled improved hygiene. The classrooms can resist fire for 3 hours, withstand 250kph wind load, withstand intensity seven earthquakes, and prevent floodwater from entering classroom.</p> <p>BEST is liaising with PBSP on how to disseminate findings from PBSP interviews with the affected communities, and BEST and PBSP are considering further collaboration (in particular, on opportunities to maintain positive community engagement with the new schools beyond physical maintenance).</p>

the geographic targeting of BEST interventions to date; there are more than 15,000 elementary schools and more than 3,000 secondary schools in the BEST regions; and BEST reporting to date suggests the bulk of expenditure and implementation has been focused on DepEd centrally (mainly involving IT systems, organisational and policy reforms, and HR development), *not* in the regions, schools divisions, or schools (i.e. not involving teaching and learning to a significant degree).

Component	Expected outputs ⁵²	Implementation progress ⁵³
<p>2.1 Policy, planning and evidence-base</p>	<p>2.1.1 Basic Education Planning, Budgeting and Performance Measurement Framework developed and implemented</p>	<p>In 2015, the PPD team was trained in using the new program expenditure classification (PREXC) budget structure and FORM for DepEd budgeting and planning from 2017 (to move from the output-based Organisational Indicator Framework/OPIF). Training for OPS personnel covered: setting national targets for cascading to regions, divisions and schools (focus on planning and M&E); qualitative and quantitative forecasting methods; and targeting approaches.</p> <p>In 2016, BEST conducted a demonstration activity on the Basic Education Planning System (BEPS) in Region 7, to harmonise the National Education Development Plan, Regional Education Development Plan, Division Education Development Plan, SIP continuum, and the planning processes of the schools, SDOs, regional offices and the Central Office. BEST delivered training and planning workshops to demonstrate the application of the BEPS with participants from DepEd regional office 7, and the SDOs of Cebu, Bohol, and Cebu City.</p> <p>In 2016, BEST provided technical advice on the Education Planning and Budget Strategy and Philippine Development Plan targets for basic education. BEST provided TA to assist in developing Regional Educational Plans in all BEST Regions.</p> <p>As of June 2017, 100% of DepEd offices had uploaded their Work and Financial Plan for Fiscal Year 2017 into the Program Management Information System (see 2.2.2 below).</p>
	<p>2.1.2 M&E Training Program and Research Management Program designed and delivered</p>	<p>The Basic Education Agenda for Research (BEAR) was developed for discussion in Feb 2016, and formally adopted by DepEd in June 2016 DepEd. Research themes are: (i) teaching and learning, (ii) child protection, (iii) human resource development, and (iv) governance; with disaster risk reduction and management, gender and development, and inclusive education as cross-cutting themes.</p> <p>In 2016-17, BEST completed an assessment of DepEd research management capability, which will serve as a baseline and basis to identify specific competency-based learning, and establish a culture of research/evidence use within DepEd.</p>
	<p>2.1.3 Policy Development Training Program designed and delivered</p>	<p>In 2015, baseline missions in BEST Regions were conducted to determine capacity of key DepEd personnel to: develop strategic and operational plans; formulate policy and develop research; and implement school-based management.</p>

Component	Expected outputs ⁵²	Implementation progress ⁵³
	<p>2.1.4 School-based Management (SBM) and Assessment Policy Framework developed and implemented at Region, Division and School levels addressing SBM, SIP and School Governance Councils</p>	<p>In 2015, BEST trained trainers, School Effectiveness Division, Regional SBM Coordinators, and Human Resources Development Division, and selected school heads on enhanced SBM and SIP, so they could roll out the enhanced SIP in their respective field offices. BEST and DepEd developed the SIP Quality Assessment (QA) tool for schools to ensure their SIPs meet quality standards before submission to Division offices.</p> <p>BEST documented and evaluated ongoing continuous improvement projects in the original 34 model schools, and 2,000 expansion schools, including five case studies on different aspects of continuous improvement in the 34 model schools. BEST developed a nationwide pool of internal experts on continuous improvement, and a Final Trainer's Toolkit for the Enhanced School Improvement Plan integrating continuous improvement tools and approaches in the enhanced School Improvement Plan.</p> <p>In 2015, PBSP trained: PTA members on strategic planning (89), personal effectiveness (44), and leadership (9); school heads (78) on how to review the school improvement plan (SIP); and 16 members of Municipal Local School Boards (LSB) on education agenda formulation (including how to appropriate Special Education Fund and other resources from local government units, and how to access financing from real estate tax collection.). PBSP also assisted 92 schools to review their School Improvement Plans.</p> <p>In 2016, BEST harmonised the Enhanced SIP with the basic education planning system and the School Effectiveness Framework, including: SIP Training of Trainers, SIP communication plan, SIP session guides, SIP planning worksheet with DepEd organisation outcomes and SIP/continuous improvement/LAC communication plan. In developing the School Effectiveness Framework, existing policies regarding SBM were reviewed, international benchmarks for SBM were identified, and the SBM framework and assessment tool were reviewed and enhanced.</p> <p>BEST Regions at the regional, division and school levels are being coached and mentored on Monitoring, Evaluation and Adjustment (MEA).</p> <p>In 2016-17 BEST helped to develop the School Governance Council policy for shared governance in school-community engagement, which is expected to 'serve as an avenue for stakeholders (i.e. parents, community, local government, and other organisations) to demand more accountability from the school head and teachers'.</p>

Component	Expected outputs ⁵²	Implementation progress ⁵³
	2.1.5 Capacity development program on DRRD and DRRMIS	<p>In 2015, BEST reviewed a draft Environmental Safeguards Plan, to discuss with DepEd and inform policy and activities in 2015-2016.</p> <p>In 2016, an Environmental Safeguards Plan was developed with requirements for environmental assessment, mitigation and enhancement, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Classrooms built by PBSP are disaster-resilient and are designed to withstand earthquakes and strong winds. Potential schools sites are assessed for hazard vulnerability to ensure that the site are suitable for classroom construction.</p>
	2.1.6 Innovation Fund grant mechanism established with eligibility criteria	Proposed for implementation between 2017-2019
2.2 Unified Information System	2.2.1 DepEd ICTS-UIS architecture designed and implemented in CO and target regions	<p>In 2015, BEST procured and installed 'state-of-the-art converged servers providing increased storage and processing capacity for data and information systems, and an enterprise grade wireless network system', at DepEd's Central Office. BEST provided TA for: detailed engineering design of the DepEd Data Center; DepEd Computerisation Program (DCP) packages for DCP budget of 2015, 2016 and schools without regular electricity; developing the web-based Help Desk Ticketing System; and developing national ICT policies and standards and a framework for inter-agency cooperation (including Public WIFI Internet Access and Review of DOST's Government Cloud Computing Strategy).</p> <p>In 2015, BEST ICT Technical Advisers helped to maintain (performance monitoring, Trouble-shooting, configuration and adjustment) DepEd's information systems, including the DepEd website. Technical assistance included at least 60 technical support users at the school and field offices (12 per region).</p> <p>The IT server was handed over to DepEd in May 2017 (one year ahead of schedule).</p> <p>SMPR6 reported 'Support to the UIS has enabled efficient and reliable communication links between school, divisional, regional and national levels.'</p>

Component	Expected outputs ⁵²	Implementation progress ⁵³
	2.2.2 Core information systems expanded and enhanced	<p>In 2015, the Enhanced Basic Education System (EBEIS) was maintained as the ‘single source of truth’ on schools and learning centres: enrolment data by school determines resource requirements; existing inventories determine remaining needs; other data like buildable space and electricity supply determine prioritisation for resource allocation; enrolment, teacher and classroom inventories are used to compute Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE); school addresses are used to identify and alert schools of typhoons; languages/dialects and ethnicity are used to enhance programs on IPEd and MTB-MLE; enrolment in SPED and data on learner exceptionalities are used to enhance the SPED and other related programs. Data on health, nutrition and waste management in all public elementary and secondary schools were added in 2015-16.</p> <p>With the technical and resource assistance of BEST, the Learner Information System (LIS) supported DepEd in school year 2016-2017. Data from the LIS on enrolment, programs offered and school locations, assisted DepEd’s planning to commence Grade 11.</p> <p>The Program Management Information System (PMIS) was implemented in March 2017 in the central office, 18 regional offices and 220 schools’ division offices. The PMIS supports DepEd’s monitoring of program and project implementation, budget forecasting and utilisation (with the aim of reducing the 27 percent underspend against the recurrent budget).</p> <p>In 2016-17, the relaunch of the enhanced learning resource portal (LRMDS) allowed schools to access quality-assured resources for Senior High School, Alternative Learning System and professional development. As of June 2017, there were 485,722 registered users (teachers, principals and DepEd officials) in the system with access to 58 senior high school materials and 6,233 unique published resources.</p> <p>The Learner Information System ‘is resulting in better availability of management information for education planning and budgeting; and improve[ed] regulation of the school system since DepEd now has access to real-time information that it can utilise to perform its regulatory function. For example, during the first week of June 2017, DepEd reported that about 2,428 displaced learners from Marawi had been enrolled in eight regions. Tracking of these learners was made easy through the Learner Information System (LIS).’</p>

Component	Expected outputs ⁵²	Implementation progress ⁵³
	2.2.3 Operational information systems developed and implemented	<p>BEST TA has supported development of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the School Building Information System (SBIS) and training to regions, to monitor the construction and repair of school buildings and classrooms • Enhanced School Building Inventory System, implemented in February 2017 to inform rational planning and distribution of resources to schools, and school-level inventory management • the Enterprise Human Resource Information System (EHRIS) technology, for managing human resources • Online Applications System (Human Resources Information System employment application component) • a Personnel Registry Module (to pilot in Central Office in 2016) • modules for personnel tracking, training and development, and performance management • the Learning Resources Management and Development System (LRMDS) portal, which is the main facility for uploading and downloading learning materials for teachers and schools, with portals in Regional Learning Resource Centers.
	2.2.4 UIS management and maintenance institutionalised in DepEd ICTS and Process Owners	<p>In 2015, BEST provided training, coaching and mentoring of trainers and DepEd region and division personnel in the UIS and associated systems, so they could on-train school ICT Coordinators and teachers in their respective divisions. The LAC Team and UIS Team developed a course and materials to train ICT Coordinators and teachers as trainers in ICT Literacy Skills Development, and delivered pilot training in 100 schools in Tacloban, Leyte (before nationwide training).</p> <p>In 2016-17, the Learning and Development System manual was developed with the National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP) staff, to be piloted for one year then updated as required.</p>

Component	Expected outputs ⁵²	Implementation progress ⁵³
2.3 Organisation structure and processes	2.3.1 Human Resource- Organisational Development and Continuous Improvement training program designed and delivered	<p>In 2014, BEST agreed a framework and work plan with DepEd for rationalization plan (RatPlan) implementation and transition to new structures, including TA roles and responsibilities. Strategies were developed for: communications; coaching and monitoring; TA for the Results Based Performance Management System (from PAHRODF); and Total Quality Management in Basic Education Continuous Improvement (to be integrated into the School Improvement Plan Guide of DepEd, see 2.1.4 above).</p> <p>In 2015, change management strategies were developed and implemented for recruitment and selection, structure strengthening, and moving from old to new physical office spaces. Training was provided to DepEd central office on effective recruitment and selection, and job applications; and for the new Bureau of Learning Resources (BLR), Regional Curriculum and Learning Management Divisions (CLMDs), and the National Educators' Academy of the Philippines (NEAP). Capacity-building was provided for regional and schools division DepEd personnel. BEST conducted Organisational Chartering workshops with the Bureau of Human Resource and Organisation Development (BHROD), National Educators Academy of the Philippines (NEAP), Legal Service, Planning Service, and Project Management Service (PMS). Further chartering workshops were reported in 2016-17 'delineating accountabilities across governance levels'.</p> <p>In 2016, BEST provided workshops and training programs to BHROD, NEAP staff and regional officers with HR and OD functions to transition to their new roles. Staff were trained in strategic HR management and development, change management and large systems organisation development, and were expected to 'cascade processes and training on hiring the right people to all Regions'. BEST helped DepEd personnel roll out two HR systems: the Results-Based Performance Management System (RPMS) and the Competency-Based Recruitment, Selection, Placement and Induction (RSPI).</p> <p>In 2016, BEST assisted with a Senior High School video show, and business process improvements commencing with the Bureau of Learning Resources, Finance, Planning Service, and Field Technical Assistance Divisions (FTADs) of Regions 6 and 7.</p> <p>In 2016-17, 585 continuous improvement Masters (who will train and coach on continuous improvement in schools) reached satisfactory standards, and 118 continuous improvement projects were implemented across 16 regions and 104 divisions. With BEST TA, Region II and Region IV were 'A ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System certified'. A Framework for Organisational Effectiveness and tool for office diagnosis were also drafted.</p>

Annex 5: Education Policies, Guidelines and Studies developed with assistance from BEST

Three tables are provided to triangulate policy references. The first is from the Department of Education and is considered the most complete.

The second is from an analysis of progress reporting and highlights the discrepancy between BEST progress reporting and tracking policy development and implementation. This should be a focus of the revised M&E system.

The third table highlights the studies conducted. This represents the evidence-base for policy development supported by BEST.

Policies supported with assistance from BEST (from DepEd)

	Policies supported by BEST contributions	DepEd Order No.	Document Status
1.	Omnibus Kindergarten Policy	DO 47, 2016	Policy released
2.	Language Mapping Policy	DO 55, 2015	Policy released
3.	Draft Policy on Implementation Guidelines of ALS & ADMs		For validation
4.	Draft Framework on ICT Integration in T&L		For validation
5.	Guidelines in Forging Partnerships for SHS	DO 1, 2016	Policy released
6.	Policy Guideline on Implementation of SHS		For validation
7.	Hiring Policy & Guidelines for SHS Teachers	DO 3, 2016	Policy released
8.	Policy Guidelines on Madrasah Education in the K to 12 Basic Education Program	DO 41, 2017	Policy released
9.	Draft Special Education Framework		For validation
10.	Implementing Guidelines on Kariton Klasrum		For validation
11.	Teacher Induction Program Policy	DO 43, 2017	Policy released
12.	Policy on Adoption of LAC as a K–12 Tool	DO 35, 2016	Policy released
13.	Omnibus Policy on Multigrade Schools		For validation
14.	Revised K–12 Teacher Assessment Policy (draft)		For validation
15.	Draft Policy on the Utilisation of EGRA and EGMA Tools for System Assessment	DO 57, 2015	Policy released
16.	Draft Policy on Use of Revised Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI)		For validation
17.	Policy on national assessment of student learning	DO 55, 2016	Policy released

18.	Policy Guidelines on Classroom Assessment for the K–12 Program	DO 8, 2015	Policy released
19.	Policy Guidelines on System Assessment in the K–12 Basic Education Program	DO 29, 2017	Policy released
20.	(Adopting of) IPEd Curriculum Framework	DO 32, 2015	Policy released
21.	Continuous Improvement Policy		Drafted
22.	Basic Education Research Agenda	DO 39, 2016	Policy released
23.	Enhanced School Improvement Plan (SIP) Policy	DO 44, 2015	Policy released
24.	Draft K–12 M&E Framework		Drafted
25.	Gender Responsive Basic Education Policy	DO 32, 2017	Policy released
26.	National Adoption and Implementation of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers	DO 42, 2017	Policy released
27.	Curriculum Contextualization Policy		Being developed
28.	Inclusive Education Policy		Being developed
29.	Policy on Policy Agenda		Being developed
30.	Policy on School Governance Councils		Drafted
31.	Department Order for the Planning & Budget Strategy		Drafted
32.	Recruitment Policy		Being developed
33.	Compendium of Office Charters		Drafted
34.	SBM Policy and Framework		Being developed

Education Policies and Guidelines associated with BEST contributions reported in progress reports

Sub-component	Policy
Teaching	National Adoption and Implementation of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (DO_s2017_042)
	Policy on Revitalising the Teacher Induction Program (TIP)
	Learning Action Cell (LAC) National Policy (and guidelines for schools)
	K–12 Teacher Assessment Policy
	Policy and guide for hiring SHS teachers
Learning assessment	Omnibus policy on [formative] classroom assessment (with Classroom Assessment Resource Book, CARB, and sample assessments)
	Policy Guidelines on Classroom Assessment for the K–12 Basic Education Program (DO_s2015_2008)
	Policy Guidelines on the National Assessment of Student Learning for the K–12 Basic Education Program (DO_s2016_55)
Curriculum	Curriculum Contextualisation Policy
	Indigenous Peoples Education Framework
	Kindergarten Policy
	Language Mapping policy
	ACTRC support to BEA for integration of 21st century skills into the curriculum.
	ACTRC research into MTB-MLE contexts in the Philippines and DepEd’s used in policies and guidelines and showed it its first national MTB-MLE conference, 2017.
Participation and inclusion	Learner Registration System and related policies
	Omnibus policy on Multigrade schools
	Policy and revised guidelines for implementing ALS and ADMs
	Special Education framework and policy
	Gender Responsive Basic Education Policy (GRBE, to be issued in Feb 2017)
Schools	School Governance Council policy
	Environmental Safeguards Plan
Research	Basic Education Agenda for Research
Governance	National Education Planning and Budget Strategy

Studies developed with assistance from BEST reported in Progress Reports

Sub-component	Study
Teaching	LAC case studies (by BEST LAC Project Team)
	RCTQ Teacher Development Needs Study (TDNS)
	Teacher Educator Development Needs Study (TEDNS)
	ACTRC studies on formative assessment
Curriculum and assessment	ACTRC case studies on factors associated with use of tablets in classrooms
	ACTRC Science Curriculum Study (Pre-Grade 7 to Grade 10)
	Baseline on Kindergarten Implementation
	Baseline on Learning Competencies and Formative Assessment
	Study on mapping the Grades 4 to 10 continuum
Participation and inclusion	ACTRC and UP validation study of an assessment tool for use by teachers with students with additional needs
	Asian Institute of Management/AIM case studies on Transition from Grade 6 to Grade 7 (ten school/feeder school case studies were planned)
	Baseline on Marginalised Learners
	ACTRC Longitudinal Study of Learning Achievement of Students in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (LEARN-ARMM)
	Profiling of learners in the Alternative Learning System and the Alternative Delivery Modes
	Four studies on Mother Tongue Based-Multi Lingual Education (MTB-MLE): Baseline; large scale descriptive; case studies; student learning outcomes focussed on best practices across language type.
Schools	AusAID/DFAT baseline classification of 2293 elementary and 425 secondary BEST-targeted schools [as poor, fair, good, great or excellent]
	Evaluation (by BEST TA) of ongoing continuous improvement projects in the original 34 model schools, and 2,000 expansion schools, including five case studies on different aspects of continuous improvement in the 34 model schools.
	School Profile Baseline Study (Regional Profiles of BEST Regions) profiling each region's implementation of the basic education program, school's practices on teaching and learning, school based management, and public kindergarten implementation
Governance	Baseline Assessment of NEAP Capacity and Competency
	Baseline Study (Macro Perspective), presented by Dir. Roger Masapol in 2016
	Human Resources Baseline Study (to assess 2014 state of all Human Resource Management and Development Systems)
	Inventory of Competencies, Work Processes/bottlenecks and M&E practices in the six Regions of BEST (commenced May 2015)

Research	Assessment of DepEd research management capability
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Annex 6: Discussion paper on recommendations and approaches to implementation

Recommendation 1

Implement formal program governance structures, based on a pragmatic revision of the program design, to counteract the informal decision making processes and improve accountability, transparency and formal communication. (High priority)

There is a need for a more formalised and mature partnership with coordinating structures that engage and add value to implementing partners, including DepEd and CHED and other Philippine Government agencies, as well as private sector partners (PBSP and PBE) and research centres (RCTQ and ACTRC). A formalised approach is needed to ensure the use of funds is strategic, transparent and accountable, and takes into account the roles and responsibilities of various actors in the education sector.

A starting point would be to map out a meeting schedule working backwards from the end date of the program; revising the terms of reference for the PSC, PMC and TWGs so they are up to date and relevant to the needs of the partners; formalise communication channels; reiterate the commitment to the end of program outcomes and overall goal; and strengthen the PSCO to provide internal coordination within DepEd. The focus of the PSC and PMC should be oriented towards achieving measurable results and ensuring sustainable benefits as the program comes to completion through an agreed exit strategy.

The formalised structure should be supported by a communications strategy to ensure all partners are fully engaged.

Implementation approach

- Discuss implementing regular meetings of the Project Steering Committee (6 monthly) and the Project Management Committee (quarterly) with DepEd and ensure they are appropriately structured to support decision making.
- Implement the two Technical Working Groups and ensure their terms of reference reflects the need for addressing technical and policy issues. Provide secretarial support to ensure they function appropriately and decisions are captured.
- Strengthen the Project Management Services in DepEd and support DepEd to implement the Project Support and Coordination Office for BEST as a joint effort. Work with DepEd to align the terms of reference for this office to provide the services required by BEST and DepEd to align and coordinate activities, as well as establishing clear lines of communication between partners and other donors.
- Develop a short communications strategy recognising the formalised governance arrangements.

Recommendation 2

Improve mechanisms to better evaluate and adopt the research produced by RCTQ and ACTRC into policies and practice in DepEd. (High priority)

The research centres have produced important research that should influence education policy, however, it is evident that some of this research is either not being adopted, lacking appropriate influence, or not understood by policy analysts, planners and decision makers. The research centres have operated at many levels and with many actors within DepEd to get uptake, however this is problematic. In the instance of the Professional Standards for Teachers, up take took 12 months longer than anticipated.

A formal mechanism is needed to help DepEd assess and adopt the research emanating from the research centres and perhaps have greater influence over the direction of the research undertaken. The Facilitating Contractor, as a knowledge and information broker, could play an important facilitation role to ensure the research is understood, evaluated and used to guide policy decisions or programs. This function could be further developed within DepEd with the assistance of BEST. The Facilitating Contractor should work with the Policy Research Division (PRD), as the research hub in DepEd, to ensure it has the capacity to benefit from the work of the research centres and can translate their findings into policy and practice.

Intellectual property ownership also appears to be a barrier to the adoption and sharing of research. Under the contracts with DFAT, research paid for by the program is the property of the Australian Government. This needs to be reinforced to ensure research results are widely shared amongst partners.

Implementation approach

- Review the research products being developed by the research centres to understand what has direct and immediate application to DepEd; what has been adopted and what has not. For instance the findings from the Teacher Development Needs Study (TDNS) has implications for teacher development that should be built in to local training and development programs (e.g. using LACs).
- Establish a process to simplify the research products so they will be better understood by DepEd in terms of their application to policy development or other application.
- Look at existing structures such as the Technical Working Groups to assess whether they could operate as a forum to share and evaluate research for use within DepEd and channel the research to the appropriate areas for action.

Recommendation 3

Strengthen the program's M&E to better understand the contribution BEST is making towards achieving end of program outcomes, and to improve accountability, transparency and understand what works, what doesn't and under what conditions. (High priority)

The M&E system does not currently record the contributions BEST makes to each intervention, along with other contributions from DepEd, or establish a baseline prior to each implementation (detailing the situation on commencement). It is difficult to disentangle BEST contributions from other initiatives.

In the past there has been little accountability or transparency in the use of Australian Government funds. This has improved with the recent annual planning process, however, the M&E system needs to be revised to capture these contributions and the contributions of other actors.

The M&E redevelopment should adopt a user-focused approach; use case study research to understand what works, what doesn't and under what circumstances; and undertake a series of rolling evaluations on key program investments such as the cascade training programs, learning action cells and learning resources portal.

A successful M&E system will be shared by all partners to derive mutually beneficial outcomes, for instance the Facilitating Contractor should work with PBSP and PBE to capture lessons from their programs to inform policy and practice.

The Facilitating Contractor should consider developing information and data brokerage services to improve the flow of information and data between partners.

Implementation approach

- Adopted a user-focused approach to understand how each partner will use BEST's M&E system, how it can integrate its own M&E, and the value the Facilitating Contractor can add to each partner.
- Establish a baseline on DepEd's capabilities in each of the intervention areas to understand how BEST is making a difference (e.g. for systems strengthening interventions).
- Monitored the types of requests from DepEd for support, what was actually provided, and how they were contributing to overall program activities.
- Unpack the theory of change into a series of 'road maps' which illustrate the contributions made by each partner towards immediate, intermediate and end of program outcomes.
- Map where interventions have occurred and in what combination – including the impact of national programs at the local level.
- Using the road map, undertake a series of systematic evaluations of key elements of the program to test their effectiveness at the local level to improve teaching and learning. Develop these into specific case studies and success stories to promote good practice.
- Evaluate the efficacy of the cascade approach to training from the national to local level and develop a system for monitoring staff training and training effectiveness.
- Use case study research to demonstrate what works and what doesn't and under what conditions at the local school level. The success case method could be used at the whole of school level to understand how different interventions work together to improve teaching and learning.
- Use the lessons from the case studies (or pilot programs) to inform scale up to other divisions and regions, taking into account those schools with ICT/internet access and those without.
- Work with PBSP and PBE to document their processes and evaluate the benefits of their approach including undertaking an analysis of costs and benefits of each approach. Work with DepEd to determine which aspects could be scaled up or implemented through policy changes.

Recommendation 4

Reorient some program resources to enable a sharp focus on improving teaching, learning, participation, gender equality and inclusion in target divisions through a whole of school approach. (High priority)

There is a need for a localised, integrated whole school effort to improve the school's performance in teaching and learning to demonstrate the impact of BEST's investments. This was a feature of the BEST design. Due to the fragmented way in which BEST has been implemented it is difficult to see how combined interventions will lead to significant improvements without some examples of where these come together at the local level. Schools need to be identified where national policies and systems can be combined with local interventions to improve teaching and learning for the remainder of the program in order to evaluate the impact of BEST interventions at the local level. This information can then be used to inform scale up. Central to this recommendation is improving teaching and learning, but also to rationalise the efforts put into school based management, school improvement programs, continuous improvement, monitoring and evaluation and adjustment, and information systems development.

In order to improve the relevance to the Australian Government it is also recommended that there is a focus on gender responsive education, inclusive education and education-employment linkages as part of this whole school effort.

Implementation approach

- Adopt a school based focus by targeting divisions within each of the six districts, and then schools likely to make the biggest difference to the quantum of students passing.
- Shift TA support to the BEST regions while continuing technical assistance at DepEd central level vital to achieving the objectives of improved learning participation and inclusion. In particular this would be to continue support to NEAP, to the Bureaus of Curriculum and Instruction, to the Bureau of Educational Assessment and the Planning Service.
- Establish pilot areas where the interventions and policies established can demonstrate how the progress made at the central level supports the intended program outcomes at the local level.
- Increase the focus on gender sensitive teaching and learning to ensure policies translate into practice.
- Accelerate the establishment of Demonstration Inclusive Education Schools to bring together best practice.
- Design case studies around these areas to demonstrate the impact on teaching and learning, what works, what doesn't and under what conditions.
- Confine BEST's focus of attention to upper elementary and readying students for JHS, conceptually and in terms of skills, so that BEST is making a contribution to the Philippines goal of employable youth.
- Reform the approach to subject strengthening training by focusing on sharpening the institution and operation of the LACs in schools; making it a central activity in which school heads and teachers participate together, with the iterative study of student performance the focus of problem assessment, planning and action.
- Support regional DepEd in the design of in-service modules targeting in a sequenced, progressive course of study regionally identified student difficulties in the Maths, Science and language (comprehension) areas of the primary curriculum, including higher order thinking skills.

- Support the training of master teachers, school heads and subject supervisors in delivery of the modules to target school staff (as shown by the Early Literacy and Numeracy Modules being delivered through the LACs by DepEd).
- Reassess how BEST can work constructively with DepEd's gender specialists and organisations such as the Presidential Commission of Women, to have a real impact integrating gender considerations in the education system.
- Reinstate plans to establish Demonstration Disability-Inclusive Education schools in NCR, Region 6 and Region 7, building on the successful work in Region 8.
- Focus more on boys and youth in teacher education, teacher development and teaching and learning in schools. Address the low numbers of male teachers in the school system through promoting to males teaching as a career option.
- Support the Philippine Government segue reformed secondary education into the technical-vocational sector.
- Work with the Coalition of Change in exploring innovative partnerships for work experience components of secondary education.
- Work with NGOs who have a long history of providing education services to marginalised peoples to learn from their strategies and strengthen participation.
- Provide technical assistance to DepEd for delivering higher order skills in mathematics and science through Junior High School and the Secondary curriculum.
- Support the development of monitoring teams to own and monitor targeted interventions in the regions. Members should be from DepEd Central office, regions and divisions, comprising technical leads in the key bureaus concerned with improving teaching and learning, and CLMD leads, superintendents and head subject supervisors to track and review progress in the target schools, identify successful strategies and practices, and pilot scale ups in other divisions.

Recommendation 5

Develop a clearing house for local innovative strategies, policies and practices at the school level. (Medium priority)

The BEST design document has the school as the unit of measurement in terms of end of program outcomes on improved student scores. A whole school orientation to learning improvement requires a local strategy, policies and practices, rather than a cascade of parts down from the national level. This is particularly so in the case of BEST, where the design specifies targeting schools with the aim of tracking, in an experimental way, what it takes to move a school from poor to better performance and from good to excellent. These local strategies, policies and practices could be captured in a similar way curriculum content is captured, from the bottom up and shared nationwide through an information portal.

The innovation grant will be one way to generate innovative local projects that may lead to new local policies and practices. This clearing house could be used to capture these innovations for sharing.

Implementation approach

- Undertake research into the local policies, practices and projects of schools to see the extent to which they are innovative and can be shared.
- Work with the ICT group to develop a basic concept for the system design and evaluate the total cost and capacity for DepEd to manage a new system.

Recommendation 6

Implement donor coordination and collaboration mechanisms to create more value from available donor resources for DepEd. (Medium priority)

Other donors are requesting greater coordination to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure the best use of funds across all ODA activities. Donors are pursuing their own coordination mechanisms. Some have commented that it is difficult to coordinate with DepEd on technical assistance due to its internal structures. A collaborative effort between donors could help support DepEd to provide better structures and greater responsiveness.

DepEd receives donor contributions at various levels (local, divisional, regional and national) and from many sources (e.g. UNICEF, PLAN, Save the Children, TAF, USAID, ADB). The degree to which the success of many initiatives (e.g. ALS) is dependent on donor contributions as well as national policies is unclear.

There is also an opportunity for the donor community to work collectively on issues such as budget execution. This is a priority of the current administration will assist all donors going forward.

Implementation approach

- Support DepEd to re-establish pre-existing donor coordination mechanisms (e.g. Education group under the Philippine Development Forum (PDF) with DepEd/BEST providing secretariat services) and establish an agreed meeting timetable and agenda that will encourage donor involvement.
- Support DepEd to implement its internal donor coordination and management mechanisms, including documenting and mapping donor activities in relation to the BEST program and DepEd's education reform agenda.
- Cooperate with other donors and DepEd on points of common interest such as improving budget execution (World Bank, ADB, UNICEF).
- Coordinate with UNICEF and ADB to leverage immediately from their technical assistance to develop complementary interventions.