

Negotiated School Review Report

Prepared for

Narre Warren North Primary School

and the Department of Education & Training

2005

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1.0 Executive Summary

The aim or purpose of this Review is to extend Narre Warren North Primary School in the chosen focus area.

The chosen focus area is “Student leadership and responsibility. To increase students’ responsibility for their own learning and social competency. This will lead to increased student engagement and connectedness to school, and therefore to improved learning and social development.”

The focus area was chosen after consideration of all relevant reports and data, particularly the parent survey data and the student attitude to schooling survey.

The methodology used involved an analysis of data, school reports (School Level Report, Self Assessment, Annual Report), and focus groups involving the Review Team and teaching staff, parents and students.

The discussions in the focus groups and the analysis of the data confirmed that the school is performing very highly in a number of key areas, for example, student learning outcomes (across all year levels), student attendance, parent participation and contribution to the school. The staff and school leadership are highly valued for their professionalism and commitment, and students show a pride in their school. However, there are three identified areas in which the school could, and should be extended. These are: Student leadership; Student responsibility for their own learning; Student connectedness to school and responsibility for their actions (social competency).

The key recommendations arising from this Review are as follows:

1. Student leadership:

Goal 1. Broaden the opportunities for, and development of, student leadership across the school.

Key Strategies;

- 1.1 Broaden the concept of student leadership and foster leadership for all students in the school. This would involve research in the Department of Education and Training (DE&T) Knowledge Bank, other relevant Websites (eg Student Voice in Transforming Education), and publications such as Connect. Appropriate leadership development strategies should be put in place in classes across the school.
- 1.2 Improve the effectiveness of the existing structures/systems in the school (using the Plan Do Study Act Improvement Process where appropriate), including the Junior School Council, the House Captain system, the Student Recognition Award system, and training/support for students chosen to speak at assemblies.
- 1.3 Consolidate the Kids Conference Leadership Program, and expand the concept within the school, with team members acting as mentors for other students.

Please see section 4 for more detail regarding these strategies.

Targets: The school should include appropriate question/s regarding student leadership in the student, staff and parent surveys, or construct a separate survey, and use the response data to show ongoing improvement.

2. Student Responsibility for Their Own Learning:

Goal 2. Increase the scope and effectiveness of student responsibility for their own learning.

Key Strategies;

- 2.1 Consolidate and extend Student Led Conferences (possibly through years 3-6). Some preparation for this process would be provided to students in the younger years.
- 2.2 Increase students' understanding of, and involvement in, the classroom assessment processes.
- 2.3 Review the student reports in the context of the needs of parents, and DE&T initiatives.

Please see section 4 for more detail regarding these strategies.

Targets: Improve the parent opinion survey results in the areas of reporting and feedback to parents. Continuous improvement in the Student Attitude to Schooling Survey results in the areas of connectedness to school and motivation to learn.

3. Student Connectedness and Responsibility for their Actions.

Goal: Increase the level of student connectedness to school and responsibility for their actions.

Key Strategies:

3.1. Consolidate the school Start Up (Start of the year) Program. Institute a reflection/review of the student goals, values/behaviors and other components of the program within school time at the commencement of semester 2. Consideration should also be given to strategies that link values/behaviors between school and home.

3.2. Consider further strategies to enhance social competency, including those developed in the Middle Years Cluster, and align with the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) Interpersonal Development Domain.

3.3 Broaden the “Buddy” system for new students at all levels, consolidate the existing “Buddy” system and consider the introduction of a system of students helping other students to gain understandings (peer tutors).

Please see section 4 for more detail regarding these strategies.

Target: Continuous improvement in the Student Attitude to Schooling Survey results in the area of connectedness to school.

2.0 Aim / Purpose

The aim or purpose of the Review is to extend the school in the area of student leadership and responsibility. This should be seen in the context of the school performing highly in a number of key areas; Student learning outcomes (across all levels), learning extension and support programs, student attendance, anti bullying strategies, parent participation and

contribution to the school. Clearly, staff and the school leadership are highly valued for their professionalism and commitment, and the students show a pride in being part of the school.

The focus area “Student Leadership and Responsibility” was chosen to increase students’ responsibility for their own learning and social competence. This will lead to increased student engagement and connectedness to school, and therefore to improved learning and social development. The basis of this decision was the data from the student attitude to schooling survey, which show concerns with student connectedness to school (years 5&6) and motivation to learn (year 5 boys). In addition, the parent survey has consistently shown concerns with reporting and feedback to parents.

3.0 Methodology

The approach used for this Review involved the careful consideration of the School Level Report, School Charter, Annual Report, Students’ Attitude to Schooling Survey, Parent and Staff Surveys, and the School Self Assessment Report.

The Review Team comprised Ian Norman (Principal), Michael Gonsalves (School Council President), Margaret Matthews (Assistant Principal) Lynn Wayne (Leading Teacher-Literacy) and Alan Taylor (Critical Friend). The team met with three focus groups; teaching staff (Level Leaders), parents (School Council Sub-committee) and students (Junior School Council and the Kids Conference Team).

The key questions for the focus groups were; 1. “How well do you think the school is performing at the moment in the area of student leadership and responsibility?” 2. “Can you comment on the effectiveness of some of the programs/strategies in place at the school ie Start of year program, Student led conferences at years 4&6, Kids Leadership Conference, Fountain Gate Cluster middle years program?” 3. “How do you think the school could best improve upon, or increase student leadership and responsibility, and how could you help?” 4. “Is there anything else you wish to raise?”

The focus groups actively participated in the discussions. Their contributions were well considered, thoughtful and constructive.

4.0 Findings

The Review found that there are clear links between student leadership, student responsibility, motivation and connectedness to school. Consequently, the findings and

recommendations are grouped under 3 headings; Student leadership, Student responsibility for their own learning, Student connectedness and responsibility for their actions.

1. Student Leadership.

There are leadership opportunities for some students in the school through the systems such as House Captain, School Captain, Monitors and the Star of the Week Award system (operating in some grades). However, there is agreement that the concept of leadership should be broadened. Parents talked about students who are “under the radar”, and the need for recognition for all. Not all students want an up-front leadership role, but they can be leaders in their own way. Furthermore, leadership at P-2 may look different to leadership at the higher levels.

The existing student leadership structures and systems in the school operate with some success and enjoy strong “in principle” support. However, there are opportunities to improve and extend their effectiveness. Consideration should be given to the following suggested strategies:

Junior School Council: This is a great concept and there is broad support for the Council. There is a need to lift the profile of the Council, improve recognition for members, review the timing given to the meetings and reporting back process (possibly in class time), consider the selection process, celebrate the appointment and end of the term of office, and improve the interface with School Council and staff.

House Captains: This is also considered to be a valued system in the school. Consideration should be given to the selection process and the provision of leadership training for selected House Captains.

Star of the Week Award system in grades: This is considered to be an ideal way of broadening recognition and leadership for students. A student recognition system needs to be applied across all grades and in a consistent manner.

Student speakers at assemblies: A number of students are chosen to speak at various assemblies, which is a valued process. However, students feel that they would greatly benefit from some formal training/coaching time. This was also echoed by members of the Junior School Council.

Fountain Gate Cluster Kids Conference Leadership Teams: Students valued the training in how to be a leader, and how to work as a team on an improvement project that is important

to the school. This concept could be expanded within the school, with students from the team acting as mentors for other students.

2. Student Responsibility for Their Own Learning:

The review found that there is enormous value in increasing students' responsibility for their own learning. This will help prepare the students for life and work experiences.

To this end, the trial Student Led Conferences at years 4 and 6 were generally considered to be a great success. Over 90% of parents supported the process, together with most of the students who were involved. The comments from parents, staff and students included; Staff; " Students had the parents' undivided attention", Parents; "It linked parents more strongly to the school", "This was real life- everyone has to make presentations in their job", "It generated ownership, responsibility, involvement", Students; "It enabled us to talk about my problems, together", "We could show our parents our goals and how we are going", "You know the improvement areas rather than someone telling you", "You can say your own point of view, and set your own goals", "Some students were embarrassed about doing or behaving badly". The involvement of students in the assessment process (through assessment rubrics and other means) was also considered to be of value. However, it was recognized that some students managed that better than others (who needed extra support). There is also a need to communicate to all parents the value and purpose of Student Led Conferences. Quite possibly, students may need some lead in time, and younger students (eg P-2) may not be ready for a fully fledged Student Led Conference system at that age. Students also expressed the need for rehearsal time. Other issues raised included the need to know how well a student has progressed over the years, sometimes the time was a bit rushed, and some parents wanted some time alone with the teacher as well.

There was a broad consensus that an increase in student responsibility for their learning would be a big step in the right direction to improve the motivation of students, as student responsibility and ownership go to the very heart of intrinsic motivation.

The Student Led Conferences discussion brought the parents to the issue of reports and feedback on student progress. Parents were clearly not satisfied with the current reports; "They (the reports) don't tell us where our child is at, and what should be done next". It is important that any future Student Led Conference and reporting system maintains the needs of parents in this regard. These needs were articulated by the parents as being; "The reports should tell us their effort, behavior, academic performance (clearly/exactly where my child

is), areas of weakness, how to improve in these areas (and how parents can help), social skills development, how my child feels about themselves”.

The broader issue of more regular feedback was also raised, whether by way of reports at the end of each term or more frequent direct contact between the teacher and the parent. This issue may warrant further discussion/exploration.

3. Student Connectedness to School and Responsibility for Their Actions:

The Review found that the School Start Up (Start of Year) program was a significant factor in improving student connectedness to school and their social responsibility.

The Start Up Program: The Start Up program developed a common understanding of routines (processes) and what should happen in classes; enabled students to set personal goals; developed agreed values and behaviors and responsibility for actions; generated student involvement, ownership and motivation; and used many “tools” to generate involvement. The program operated at years 3-6, and could be extended to P-2, albeit in a different form. There was also a consensus that a revisit/review/reflection during the year would provide significant added value, particularly in respect of student goals, and the values/behaviors. This could occur for 1 or 2 days at the commencement of semester 2.

The broader issue of student connectedness to school was also discussed in the focus groups. The school’s Buddy system (Prep and year 6) is highly valued, although it could be “fine tuned” to make it even more successful. The anti-bullying program is also considered to be of great value, and clearly connects students to the school. Suggestions to build further improvement in student connectedness included the alignment of values/behaviors at school and at home; a Buddy System for new students to the school at all levels; expand the strategies to build social competency; and a system of students helping other students who don’t understand. It was also considered important that these strategies be developed in the context of the new Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) Domain of Interpersonal Development.

5.0 Conclusions and recommendations

The conclusions and recommendations of the Review are in the form of suggested goals, strategies, and targets in each of the three areas.

1. Student leadership:

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Key Strategies;

1.1 Broaden the concept of student leadership and foster leadership for all students in the school. This would involve research in DE&T's Knowledge Bank, other relevant Websites (eg Student Voice in Transforming Education; www.newhorizons.org/voices/front_voices.html), and student involvement and leadership publications such as Connect (ph 94899052). Appropriate leadership development strategies should be put in place in classes across the school.

1.2 Improve the effectiveness of the existing structures/systems in the school (using the Plan Do Study Act Improvement Process where appropriate), including the Junior School Council, the House Captain system, the Student Recognition Award system, and training/support for students chosen to speak at assemblies.

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