

Negotiated School Review Report

**Prepared for
Victoria College
Region**

**School Improvement Division
Department of Education & Early Childhood Development
2009**

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- **Date of this Report (final version)** 31st July 2009

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1.0 Executive Summary

Victoria College has worked consistently over the past three years to improve the quality of education for its 1500 students. Some significant new programs, collaboration with the Local Secondary Learning Community in the Leading Schools Fund implementation and improvements to ICT resources and classroom facilities are notable achievements.

In general, student achievement has been relatively stable for a number of years. Students enter at year 7 with comparatively strong outcomes especially in English, but the VCE results have been below the college's high expectations. Accordingly, improving student learning outcomes was adopted as the focus for this negotiated review.

The college adopted an inclusive and collaborative approach to the analysis of relevant data. A critical friend was appointed. The 20 review meeting participants were notified of the review focus and the ensuing discussions on the day were spirited and wide ranging.

A significant numbers of impacts, operational, cultural and educational, were identified. In general, there are many examples of sound processes and high quality practice at the college. Often, however, these are not applied by all personnel nor embedded into practice. Developing common understandings, building consistency and sustaining improvement are future challenges that will require a cultural change in the way teachers work and the role of students in their own learning.

The foundations are in place. Victoria College can look forward with confidence to the implementation of its new strategic plan. The recommendations from the review panel are:

Goals	Key Improvement Strategies
Student Learning Improve the learning outcomes of students at all ability levels in years 7-12	1. Build the operational and educational capacity of the school 2. Adopt teaching practices that personalize the learning and engage all students
Student Pathways and Transitions Improve the transitions and pathways into and through the school to build high expectations and encourage success	3. Track individual student progress and deliver a high quality learning pathway appropriate to their needs
Student Engagement and Wellbeing Improve student motivation, learning confidence and participation in learning	4. Build a student centred learning environment that enhances student attendance and participation in all aspects of learning

2.0 Aim / Purpose

Working with an educational psychologist in 2008, the college leadership team identified a number of potential foci for this review. The analysis of feedback from the staff teams engaged in the preparation of the school self evaluation highlighted the need to focus specifically on student learning outcomes.

Data analysis supports the adoption of this key focus.

1. Real retention figures are strong throughout the school. The college retains the majority of its students for six years.
2. The entry achievement levels of Year 7 students are sound and this is maintained into year 9. AIM means at years 7 and 9 have consistently exceeded the state benchmarks. Significant proportions are assessed above the expected VELs level. English is especially strong.
3. Year 12 VCE outcomes in general are disappointing. VCE allstudy and English results have been relatively stable over the review period, and low in terms of absolute, comparative and adjusted results. Proportions of scores of 40 and above are significantly reduced.
4. For the first time for many years, the number of applications for enrolment in year 7 has dropped below the imposed ceiling of 200. This is perceived, in part, to be a result of a drift to other schools whose performance and reputation is improving.

In the light of this data, 'how do we improve the learning outcomes for our students throughout the school?' was adopted as the key focus question for this negotiated review process.

3.0 Methodology

The college adopted an inclusive and collaborative self evaluation process, accumulating feedback from a number of staff teams in term 1 2009. Further insights were gathered from focus groups of parents and students. The resulting self evaluation document was comprehensive, honest and perceptive.

Joan Cartwright was invited to be the critical friend for the college throughout the review process.

She visited Wantirna on July 13th, toured the site with the principals and met with the principal team to discuss the process and the composition of the review meeting. It was decided to involve as many of the college leaders as possible, with the college directors of operations, curriculum and later years as members of the core team and the heads of the learning areas, student well-being and professional learning attending the meeting in pairs for 30 minutes at a time. In preparation for the discussion, personnel were asked to consider the data sets that prompted the review focus question, explore the underlying issues and pose solutions to address them.

The review meeting was held at the college on 20th June 2007

The core team of participants comprised

Acting Principals

Council President

Acting Assistant Principals

Leading Teachers

Regional Network Leader

Critical Friend

Other teachers were also involved as requested.

This report was completed by our critical friend. She will also report the findings and recommendations for the new planning period to the college council on 31st July 2009.

4.0 Findings

The discussion at the review meeting was broad and far reaching. The findings have been organized using the Effective Schools framework and are interpreted in terms of future directions.

Professional Leadership

Significant changes have occurred in the leadership of the college in the last 6 months. Young leaders have managed their portfolios competently but have experienced difficulty in addressing challenging issues when working with experienced staff due to lack of experience and perceived authority.

While staff opinion indicates a sound level of role clarity (3rd quartile), it appears the expectations and accountabilities of leaders are less clear. Some leaders are sound administrators but do not take responsibility for student outcomes or for staff performance. The school culture is described as 'non-interventionist'. In these circumstances, effective and sustained change management is difficult to achieve.

A number of operational issues were identified. The leadership structure (educational leadership in particular), staff allotments, team allocations were some of the aspects requiring consideration in the new SP.

There are some fine examples of effective leadership that are very personally based –meeting with the staff member individually, scanning through the class and the learning data, discussing individuals and their progress, focusing on one or two, later following up to see if they have moved forward. This type of dialogue provided a strong role model, encouraged accountability and allowed for some intensive targeted mentoring. It is seen to be a good model for the future.

Shared vision and goals

The comparatively strong ranking for goal congruence suggests that the community share a common vision. In discussion however it became clear that this was not necessarily the case, especially where the understanding concerned what made a good teacher, or good teaching and learning at the College and how this might be evidenced.

The varied response to queries about teams in the school highlights the diversity of understanding. Teacher teams operate mainly within year levels and changes to curriculum development and teaching practice are developing. Due to the variety of teams that teachers work in, there are mixed interpretations of what constitutes team teaching. As observed, the extended learning space for year 7, in effect, operates like a double classroom with each class

and each teacher working independently. Shared planning, dual responsibility for the learning of all students, flexible groupings and differentiated curriculum material are emerging aspects.

Implementation of the Principles of Learning and Teaching (PoLT) has commenced and the initial findings are positive. Once the component mapping is completed, college teams will be developed in line with the PoLT criteria. This will bring some commonality to the discussions and reinforce the impact.

Focus on teaching and learning/purposeful teaching

Teaching and learning is, of course, the main work of the college, but the extent to which this occupies a high profile on a regular basis, especially where improvement is concerned, appears to be diluted. As one indicator, there was almost no mention of teacher practice as an impact (negative or otherwise) on student learning outcomes in the published deliberations of the teacher review teams.

As reported, the staff culture is not one of sharing best practice. In 2008, just 50% of the respondents to the staff opinion survey (58% of staff) agreed that 'staff had created an environment that promotes excellence in teaching and learning' and that 'staff at the school always challenge each other to improve the quality' of their practice. Professional interaction ranked at under 40% compared with secondary colleges across the state, with the quality of communication between groups rated good by just 24%.

Although the College has had a Professional Learning and curriculum development focus in relation to an inquiry based model, using the principal of backwards design over the course of the last charter period, there has been limited sustained implementation. The activity material Maths 300 has in the past three years been compulsory at year 8, it has now become an optional activity and therefore some students do not gain the benefit from this high level learning strategy.

Purposeful teaching depends on accurate assessment of learning and the use of this knowledge to deliver teaching explicit to student ability levels and needs, that is 'assessment for learning'. The disparity between the NAPLAN and teacher assessments raise doubts about the first aspect: panel discussions queried the application of the second.

However, the College has gathered information about the achievement standards of every student in years 7-10. Transition tests are administered to every year 7 student on the Saturday before school starts in January (to gain entry assessments and also deliver a message that the school is serious about learning). This is updated each year for all students in years 7-10 and details are handed out to classroom teachers. Some make use of the information.

There is the potential here to really build an effective individual pathway for every student that addresses their individual needs. This can be done by withdrawal or, by appropriate grouping within the class, or groups of classes where team teaching is in place. But by far the most effective is when all class programs are differentiated, where the learning in each unit and lesson is delivered at three different levels, at the standard for the year level, at a lower or modified and a higher or extended level. The VELs assessments in reading, for example, suggest that teachers are teaching 'the course', that is, at the expected level only. The question of how a student can achieve an 'A' is worth consideration.

The school has a TCT coach, employed through the local network, working collaboratively with teachers on quality teaching. This is of great benefit to those who engage, however at this stage of development of a culture of coaching, the focus often involves the coach modeling good classroom practice with the classroom teacher assisting in the delivery of the lesson. In some classes, as observed, the coach does the teaching and the teacher works, rather than collaborate. It would appear that teachers need some very specific expectations and guidelines about how such support can and will be utilised.

Student opinion of teaching and learning varies by year level and gender. Year 7 students rank all three variables – teacher effectiveness, teacher empathy and stimulating learning – in the bottom quartile, with boys more negative than girls. Approval of these aspects generally improves as students move through the school and year 11 students were especially positive in 2007. The school reports some genuine feedback from students about the inactivity of teachers and their lack of preparation.

In a low sample size, parents rate teacher morale in the bottom quartile of state secondary schools. Parent feedback to the school substantiates the variation in teaching and the need for clearer, more focused instruction at all levels including year 12.

Accountability

Data is disseminated to teachers (e.g. at VCE), teachers are asked to reflect but there is often no change in practice, nor, it must be said, no follow up to ensure this happens. The acceptance of responsibility for teaching performance and student outcomes is not totally established. Connecting data to the classroom, gathering data on a class basis, developing a data schedule, analyzing it promptly are suggestions for action.

Professional learning sessions are run on Tuesday evenings. In terms one, four and part of two attendance is optional. Teachers put their name down, some – mainly junior teachers and the senior leadership - attend but, there appears to be very few observable outcomes. In term two there are 3 compulsory professional learning sessions linked to the whole college.

Professional learning focus is conducted by the LSF coaches. Again teachers attend but engagement is variable. In term three Professional Learning Teams are compulsory for all staff. As reported, many of the teachers classified as 'expert' don't actively participate. Some of these are excellent classroom teachers but are, as described, very resistant to change.

Teachers do list this program under their performance review, but attendance is the criteria here, not participation and certainly not implementing the learning. The review meeting heard that mandating attendance at professional learning activities and subsequent action would be a huge cultural change.

The performance review process is run by the leading teachers and the level of rigor varies depending on the personnel involved. In general, teachers do not talk in terms of student outcomes.

Peer coaching is being used by some teachers and the teams in junior classrooms are working well. The level of accountability in some learning areas is moderately effective, due, it is thought, to a focus on producing a desirable outcome rather than engaging in educational conversation in order to improve teacher practice. Generally, however, it is difficult to get teachers, even the best, to take up the initiative. For example staff representative roles on committees are not highly sought i.e. Education Committee and Staff Health and Well Being.

Improving practice is one issue, encouraging innovation and action is another. Devolving the accountability to individuals and teams is suggested. Thus, the expected outcomes are defined, but how, what actions, are decided by the personnel involved. An action research approach with a focus on reflection is suggested.

High expectations

Recent research places this aspect foremost in the development of a school culture that encourages success. As it currently stands, it is believed that the low expectations of staff are reflected in the students who have a lack of respect and responsibility for their own learning journey. The large numbers of students selecting the 'easy' (for some) option of Further Mathematics in year 12 is one indication of this general lack of challenge. Student attendance has improved, but the panel heard that the impact of the transition to an electronic roll marking system may have positively influenced the data. Teachers reported the lowered work ethic and aspirations of many students. The generally low ENTER scores – 4% over 90 in 2007 – exacerbate this situation.

Parents rank student motivation above the state median, but students place this at the 25th percentile. Levels of learning confidence are even lower. Year 12 students were especially cautious about these two elements. Since the motivation variable of the staff survey correlates

with staff expectations of students and with student learning outcomes, the most recent rating of around 40% for this element compared with state secondary schools generally is concerning.

Stimulating and secure learning environment

Student welfare maintains a preventative approach. A Learning Mentor program is run at individual year levels for 7-9 students and within a vertical structure at years 10-12. In intent, this is a pastoral care system that encourages some group activities such as assemblies and guest speakers, allows students to build their portfolios and provides a place in the timetable where explicit teaching of thinking tools and study skills can take place. In reality, feedback from a range of members of the community has indicated that this is a priority for review. The interdisciplinary domains – thinking, and ICT, for example – by their very nature should be applied in every classroom. staff ownership of the program is low: lesson material is provided but few collect it ahead of time, students pick up the staff negativity, they absent themselves, parents consequently have a biased view of the program. The review process accumulated a number of complaints from community members that now need to be addressed through a review of pastoral care.

Classroom behaviour and behaviour management are issues for parents. With the exception of years 11 and 12, students rank classroom behaviour below the state median, and, in the case of year 8 and 9, in the first quartile of secondary schools. Staff, on average, spend 26% of their time dealing with student misbehaviour in class. The range however is extreme, with 21% estimating this to be 5% or below and the same proportion placing it at 50% or over.

Parent perceptions of safety declined from 2006 to 2007. With year 8 the exception, students report feeling at least moderately safe at the school. The 'yellow jackets' worn by staff on yard duty – a recent innovation – heightens their feelings of security.

A Learning Community

While the learning community concept includes the whole school community, the focus here on the holistic engagement of students – in learning, in goal setting and monitoring their own progress and attendance, in taking responsibility for their behaviour, This links closely to the learning pathways concept, with the concept of articulating learning – what do I need to learn, what have I done – part of regular reflective activities. Like so many of the other good practices at the school, the level of implementation of this initiative is sporadic.

5.0 Conclusions and recommendations

The following aspects were identified at the review meeting for inclusion in the new strategic plan:

- Review systems, processes and resource allocations to deliver the intended outcomes of the strategic plan including
 - staff allocations to focus teachers to one year level plus a VCE or other year level subject
 - the composition of teacher teams
 - time for meetings and in house professional learning. Organize resources for best effect – teachers, teams, time, leaders
 - the use of teaching and learning coaches (1)
- Develop a common vision and shared understandings linked to behavioural indicators. Define the expectations of staff at the College. Include teaching practice. (1)
- Review the leadership structure to effect staff cultural change. Consider implementing a system that research has demonstrated to be successful: appoint personnel to leadership positions to enhance distributed leadership and to develop personally based leadership model that includes modeling best practice and encouraging staff and acting as a conduit to other ideas keep this personal relationship on track by reviewing the accountability requirements so that non compliance is reported and addressed by senior leadership. Provide leadership training.(1)
- Clarify roles and responsibilities. Define the teacher and team accountabilities, encourage individual and collective autonomy as to how the outcomes might be delivered. Utilise action planning and action research approaches (1)
- Further develop a coaching and mentoring system. Have regular conversations, peer observation and feedback focused on student learning. Support by walk through management. (1)
- Mandate aspects of professional learning, including in-house activities. Work across the network, build quality professional conversations.(1)
- Focus on evidence and the classroom. Improve the understanding and use of data at the classroom level (use specialists in analysis as needed), including the AIM data. Reflect on 'my role, my responsibility'. Draw up a data schedule, develop action plans to address identified issues. (1)

- Link the accountabilities to the staff performance review process. (1)
- Conduct a whole school conversation – what is good teaching and learning at this school and how is it demonstrated? What makes a good unit, a good lesson? Explore and document in terms of each learning area. (2)
- Establish a data schedule that utilizes common assessment practices to allow students at different ability levels to demonstrate their achievements. Include observation (2)
- Utilise assessment for learning techniques to address the identified learning needs of students. Document the standard, modified and extension material in all learning area programs. (2)
- Explore high level learning approaches. Explore and implement inquiry learning and the development of explicit literacy and numeracy skills within this approach.(2)
- Develop a map of teaching and learning strategies that engage students. (2)
- Commence each students learning pathway on entry into the school. Track progress electronically (Student Mapping Tool), intervene promptly as necessary, address emerging issues. (3)
- Improve the effectiveness and implementation of the transition and orientation program at year 7. Take time to settle in, deliver an integrated unit initially, discuss the expectations of students with regard to attendance, behaviour, participation in learning. (3)
- Build the expectations of students as they progress through the school. In particular review the expectations of students at year 10. (3)
- Review the pathway provision for talented students (3)
- Provide bridging courses into year 12. (3)
- Review the student management and pastoral care programs (4)
- Review attendance gathering and reporting processes. Analyse data to discover root causes. Adopt a case management approach to specific issues (4)
- Increase student participation in learning – assessment as, negotiated curriculum, authentic leadership. Run focus groups to unpack student opinion data (4)
- Include regular goal setting, reflection and self-evaluation in students' individual pathway plan from year 7 on (4)
- Encourage the articulation of the student voice in learning and generally (4)

These actions will be incorporated into the school's strategic plan as appropriate.

School Strategic Plan 2009 - 2012

Suggested goals target areas and key improvement strategies

Goals	Targets	Key Improvement Strategies
<p>Student Learning</p> <p>Improve the learning outcomes of students at all ability levels in years 7-12</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportions of students achieving well above, above, at and below the expected VELS level • All VCE studies to achieve an adjusted score median above -1 • Improvement in maths outcomes through the school and in the VCE 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Build the operational and educational capacity of the school through a review of systems and processes and the development of a collaborative high quality professional learning culture 2. Adopt teaching practices that personalize the learning and engage all students
<p>Student Pathways and Transitions</p> <p>Improve the transitions and pathways into and through the school to build high expectations and encourage success</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • year 7 attitudes to school • parent transition variable score • learning pathway for talented students 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Track individual student progress and deliver a high quality learning pathway appropriate to their needs
<p>Student Engagement and Wellbeing</p> <p>Improve student motivation, learning confidence and participation in learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitudes to school variables • Attendance data 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Build a student centred learning environment that encourages the active participation of students in all aspects of the school and especially in their own learning