Nullawil Primary School

Nullawil Primary School negotiated review is an impressive example of best practice in a very small, relatively isolated school with limited resources. The strengths of the review process included:

• Significant ongoing support from the region
• A range of independent and expert perspectives and inputs into the review
• Conclusions informed by evidence, presenting a rationale for action that valued the community input and encouraged confidence in the future proposals.

School context

Nullawil Primary School is a rural school of 18 students in the Loddon Mallee Region. The school is staffed by a principal who teaches fulltime, a part time teacher, teacher aide and business manager.

Review focus

Student learning, engagement and wellbeing, pathways and transitions were the foci for the review, with improved accuracy of assessments, utilisation of ICT and greater personalisation of learning as particular aspects for attention. The methodology followed the standard review process and included a review day meeting.

Highlights of the review process

• Extensive community involvement. Consultation forums run by an external consultant encouraged an authentic expression of community opinion.
• The input of several ‘critical friends’ – the RNL, principal’s mentor, additional principal colleague.
• A rigorous process. The author (RNL) of the structured report was independent of the school: the findings referenced data and community feedback to derive the recommended strategies.
• A valuable outcome – a complete School Strategic Plan for the new review period.
Negotiated School Review Report

Prepared for
Nullawil Primary School
Loddon Mallee Region
School Workforce Reform and School Improvement Division
Department of Education & Early Childhood Development
2009

- School Number 3301
- Principal Ms Kate Wilson
- School Council President Ms Colleen Hogan
- Critical Friend Peter Davey
- Author(s) of report Robyn Blackie
- Review team members Greg Vallance, Geoff Barrett
- Date of this Report (final version) 26th October, 2009
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1.0 Executive Summary

The aim of the School Review was to develop a clear understanding of the school’s strengths and challenges through detailed analysis of the school’s data sets from the past four years.

Focus areas included:
- the improvement of student outcomes in English and Mathematics
- improved alignment between teacher and standardised assessments
- greater personalisation of student learning
- improved utilisation of ICT to support student learning
- enhancement of student engagement and wellbeing
- optimising student transition

The Review methodology included briefings for staff and School Councilors and articles in the school newsletter were used as a means of providing the same information to the school community. A meeting was held with the School Council to present relevant data and to encourage critical reflection with particular regard to Students Learning, Student Engagement and Wellbeing and Student Pathways and Transition issues arising from the data sets, use of resources and possible future focus areas.

The services of Amanda Wheeler, Student Wellbeing Officer from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, were engaged to conduct focus group sessions with staff, students and parents. The relevant sections of the report were written up by the Principal and presented to staff and School Council for review and discussion. The Review meeting was held in September.

The review highlighted the school’s current strengths and achievements. The small size of the school, and the town, means there is very good parent and community involvement and all students feel a sense of connectedness with their peers and the school. The school’s student achievement data is generally at expected levels, but there is considerable disparity between the current achievement levels and the expected level according to SFO. This can be attributed in part to inconsistencies in the use of SFO as a measure in small rural communities. Parent Opinion data is high however data is not available for 2008.

Staffing levels remain a source of community concern, with the principal assuming full time teaching duties and responsibility for teaching both classes on two days of the week. The school needs to assess strategies for addressing this issue.

The school purpose is to provide an encouraging, stimulating, supportive and engaging learning environment that fosters learning and enables students to develop the emotional, social, physical and academic skills required to adapt to and contribute to an ever changing world. Nullawil Primary School also seeks to ensure that all students, regardless of their ability or style of learning, have the opportunity to reach their full potential in a positive learning environment. It is acknowledged that each child has unique interests, needs and abilities and the educational program takes this into account. We strive to foster individual student’s interests, encourage active participation in the learning process, and assist students to develop their ability to apply knowledge and skills to real life experiences and challenges.

The review has identified goals, targets, key improvement strategies and suggested actions for Student Learning, Student Engagement and Wellbeing and Student Pathways and Transitions, as detailed in the Conclusions and Recommendations.
2.0 Aim / Purpose

To develop a clear understanding of the school’s strengths and challenges through detailed analysis of the school’s data sets from the past four years. The resulting School Strategic Plan will inspire and empower the school community to envision and confidently implement innovative learning opportunities that will prepare our students for their entrance into the 21st century workplace. Through a challenging and stimulating learning environment, Nullawil Primary School will produce confident, independent, reflective learners who are driven to be resourceful problems solvers.

Focus areas will include:
- the improvement of student outcomes in English and Mathematics
- improved alignment between teacher and standardised assessments
- greater personalisation of student learning
- improved utilisation of ICT to support student learning
- enhancement of student engagement and wellbeing
- optimising student transition

3.0 Methodology

The Review process commenced during Term 1 with the Principal attending a Review briefing facilitated by Regional Office staff member, Lois Cawthan. Upon return from the briefing, staff and School Councilors were informed of the process and the rationale behind the Review. They were also provided with an insight into the main aspects of the self-evaluation and its purpose. Articles published in the school newsletter were used as a means of providing the same information to the school community.

A meeting was held with the School Council to present relevant data and to encourage critical reflection with particular regard to Students Learning, Student Engagement and Wellbeing and Student Pathways and Transition issues arising from the data sets, use of resources and possible future focus areas.

The services of Amanda Wheeler, Student Wellbeing Officer from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, were engaged to conduct focus group sessions with staff, students and parents. The focus groups were designed to gather information from students about what it feels like to be a student at Nullawil Primary School. The students were asked about safety at school, relationships between students and staff, teaching and learning in the classroom and discipline. The parent forum prompted feedback about the same areas. These forums were employed so as to ensure students and parents were provided with the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings in a non-threatening environment, without the Principal in attendance.

The relevant sections of the report were written up by the Principal and presented to staff and School Council for review and discussion.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Action officer</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>02/03/09</td>
<td>Attend Regional Briefing</td>
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<td>Lois Cawthan</td>
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<tr>
<td>09/03/09</td>
<td>Briefing to staff on upcoming review</td>
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<td>Kate Wilson</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Inform community through school newsletter</td>
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<tr>
<td>15/07/09</td>
<td>Consultation with community</td>
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<td>Amanda Wheeler</td>
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<td>– Amanda Wheeler</td>
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<tr>
<td>15/07/09</td>
<td>Consultation with students</td>
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<td>Amanda Wheeler</td>
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<td>– Amanda Wheeler</td>
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<tr>
<td>05/08/08</td>
<td>Staff review of data</td>
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<td>Kate Wilson</td>
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<tr>
<td>05/08/09</td>
<td>School Council review of data</td>
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<td>Kate Wilson</td>
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<tr>
<td>24/08/09</td>
<td>Completion of School Self Evaluation</td>
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<td>Kate Wilson</td>
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<td>24/08/09</td>
<td>School Review Meeting</td>
<td></td>
<td>Robyn Blackie</td>
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<tr>
<td>24/08/09</td>
<td>Presentation to school council</td>
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<td>Robyn Blackie</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 2009</td>
<td>Submission of report</td>
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<td>Robyn Blackie</td>
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### 4.0 Findings

The challenge for the review panel was the small enrolment of the school and the size of individual cohorts when analysing data sets. Whilst generalisations could be made, the cohort size meant that annual data sets could vary significantly and was reliant on individual performance. As a result the panel chose to focus instead on the broad trend data.

The review confirmed that ‘…there is a very strong positive ethos at work in the school, the sense of community amongst the children and the parents is very strong. They genuinely care for, and feel cared about by, their fellow students and the staff … there are some clear and consistent values running through the school community…’ Amanda Wheeler.

Teacher knowledge of individual students can be optimised due to the low numbers of students in each class and in the entire school. Parent involvement was very strong and all members of the school community had a strong sense of connectedness to the school. Staff commitment to the students and community is high and the buildings, grounds and resources reflect the value placed upon the school in Nullawil.

The review found that student learning outcomes in English and Mathematics were generally consistent and at the expected level. Student Attitudes to School survey data has fluctuated in recent years and is currently high in all variables, except Learning Confidence and Student Motivation. Parent Opinion survey data is generally high except for the Transitions and Social Skills variables.
The provision of regular, quality teacher professional development was identified as a challenge and that this links with the focus areas of improved student outcomes, improved alignment between teacher and standardized assessments, greater personalization of student learning and improved utilization of ICT. Teacher professional learning should be prioritised and opportunities provided for more frequent interaction with peers.

**Improvement of Student Outcomes in English and Mathematics**

The review identified the need for intervention strategies for those students at risk and for those students performing above the expected level of achievement. Whilst the small cohort size means individual student progress can be accurately monitored, strategic intervention is required for a small number of students. This will include:

- A Year 1 intervention strategy to support Prep students who have not reached benchmark level. This may be provided through the use of parents who have been trained to support classroom learning
- Extension of students who are performing above the expected level. The strategic use of ICT will support this, as will greater personalisation of teaching and learning
- Intervention programs will be provided as appropriate for any students identified at any year level
- All teaching staff need to be fluent in teaching all year levels and appropriate learning opportunities in Literacy, Numeracy and ICT needs to be organized to support this. For example, the teaching of Early Years can be provided by the trained EY teacher and the Network Literacy Improvement Officer can provide professional learning
- Participation in classroom peer observations with schools in our Network in order to continually improve practice

**Improved Alignment between Teacher and Standardised Assessments**

The review found there is a lack of alignment between teacher judgements and standardized assessments. This is typical of many schools and the following recommendations are made:

- Regular moderation of student work needs to occur between teachers. This can be done within the school, but also across other local schools, due to the small size of the school
- Greater use should be made of the VELS progression points and NAPLAN marking guides
- The use of On Demand testing and other appropriate standardized assessments to provide additional data for the triangulation of student data

**Greater Personalisation of Student Learning**

The complexity of personalization of student learning in a small school is the range of abilities within one class. The advantage of the small class size however, means the teacher has detailed knowledge of each student and can target student learning accordingly. All teachers will:

- Use regular assessment to monitor student progress
- Use assessment data to inform their teaching
- Develop 5 week Individual Learning plans as appropriate
• Meet regularly with parents to discuss student progress and to develop new ILPs as appropriate

**Improved Utilisation of ICT to Support Student Learning**

The effective implementation of ICT to support teaching and learning will address the relative isolation of Nullawil PS. This will be supported by:

- The introduction of the DEECD 1 to 1 netbook strategy
- School Council commitment to the purchase of further hardware and software resources
- Access to regional and network professional learning opportunities
- Networking with local teachers

**Enhancement of Student Engagement and Wellbeing**

The work of Amanda Wheeler in the review process identified a number of strengths in the school's current practices. Workshops with all students led to the following recommendations:

- A clear set of positively framed expectations around school rules and wrongdoings should be developed
- The implementation of Restorative Practices and the use of Restorative Chat questions when students do the wrong thing to ensure consistency in practice across the school
- Provision of formal opportunities for the younger students to provide the older students with feedback about their interactions
- The PALs (Peer Activity Leaders) resource could be used to train older students to provide some fresh and easy playtime activities. These are designed to be inclusive and to encourage participation.
- Facilitate community involvement to provide activities for students, including knitting, woodwork, etc
- The establishment of the timetabled formal Circle Time Social and Emotional Learning Program to build on the school’s current strengths
- Strengthen links with surrounding “like schools”, such as Woomelang Group School, Tempy Primary School, Lalbert Primary School and Quambatook Group School to enable students to be provided with further opportunities, such as travelling performances and learning opportunities across the curriculum

**Optimising Student Transition**

The review found anecdotal evidence that students from Nullawil make successful transitions to primary school and secondary college. The prep transition program is highly effective as students have formal and incidental contact visits to the school throughout the year and their transition is seamless.

Secondary transition is to Birchip and Wycheproof Secondary Colleges. The transition opportunities currently consist of timetabled orientation days, however the school would like to see an increased number of transition days and a greater range of activities. The
secondary schools currently organise the transition process and greater input from the primary schools would be advantageous.

The following recommendations were made:

- A district transition team be formed
- Transition opportunities for primary students be increased

## 5.0 Conclusions and recommendations

### Student Learning Goal

- To sustain continuous improvement in student learning in literacy, numeracy and ICT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Targets</th>
<th>Key Improvement Strategies</th>
<th>Suggested Actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To ensure all students demonstrate the expected VELS growth or better:</td>
<td>Continue to provide professional learning to encourage improved pedagogy</td>
<td>Attendance at Network and Regional professional learning programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prep                     1.0 per year</td>
<td>Build capacity of teachers to use multiple data sets to inform assessment of student achievement</td>
<td>Greater collaboration with other teachers</td>
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<td>Yrs 1-6                  0.5 per year</td>
<td>Provision of appropriate intervention for identified students at all year levels</td>
<td>Implementation of effective assessment practices including:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- moderation of student work</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- use of VELS progression points and NAPLAN marking guides</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- use of on Demand testing</td>
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<tr>
<td>To attain all Network Strategic Plan Targets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suggested school-specific targets:</td>
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<tr>
<td>By end of 2012, English and Mathematics (all dimensions) NAPLAN targets:</td>
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<td>Year 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>100% at or above Band 2</td>
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<td>50% above Band 4</td>
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<td>Year 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>100% at or above Band 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>75% above Band 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strengthen the instructional leadership capacity of the school</td>
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<td>Provide regular professional learning opportunities for the principal through:</td>
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<td>- Regional programs</td>
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The effective integration of ICT to support improvement in student learning outcomes

- Network meetings
- Principal P&D cluster meetings
- RNL support visits

Continue to develop effective use of ICT resources to ensure that teachers’ capabilities are enhanced (ePotential) and students’ opportunities for individual and collaborative learning with ICT increase.

**Student Engagement and Wellbeing Goal**

To ensure students are engaged in their learning, and feel safe and connected to school, thus promoting student attitudes that support academic excellence, the development of resilience and the building of social skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Targets</th>
<th>Key Improvement Strategies</th>
<th>Suggested Actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain Student Attitudes to School survey variables at 2009 levels and increase Student Motivation and Learning Confidence variables to 4.5 or higher</td>
<td>Ensure all members of the school community have a shared vision for student engagement and wellbeing</td>
<td>Develop a clear set of positively framed expectations</td>
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<td>Implement Restorative Practices to ensure consistency in practice across the school</td>
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<td>Facilitate community involvement in school programs</td>
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<td>Improve opportunities for student voice throughout the school</td>
<td>Establish timetabled formal Circle Time Social and Emotional Learning Program</td>
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<td>Provide opportunities for younger students to provide feedback to the older students</td>
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</table>
**Student Pathways and Transitions Goal**

- To ensure informed and effective transitions for all students at all stages of schooling

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<tr>
<th>Targets</th>
<th>Key Improvement Strategies</th>
<th>Suggested Actions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain Parent opinion</td>
<td>Enhance the level of involvement with the local secondary colleges to support the transition programs and to share information about the individual needs of the students</td>
<td>Establish a local Yr 6-7 transition team</td>
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<td>Survey variable Transitions above 6.0.</td>
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<td>Utilise the expertise of district secondary teachers in programs at Nullawil PS</td>
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<td>Review and revise the current transition processes</td>
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<td>Develop an effective transition information form</td>
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