Concord School Case Study  
*Moving forward by seeing what we couldn’t see before!*

### Who we are.................

- **P - 12 Special School**
  - Principal - Colin Schot
- **247 students**
  - Assistant Principal (Acting) - Sheryl Hall
- **41 Teaching Staff**
  - Junior School Team Leader - Kath Moore
- **Located in Bundoora**
  - Middle School Team Leader - Chris Norman
- **Northern Metropolitan Region**
  - Secondary School Team Leader - Jason Coningsby
- **Opened in 1973**
  - Transition Team Leader - Marg McCrohan

### Where we started............

Our path toward accreditation began when, in March 2005, two members of the Concord School’s leadership team attended a briefing on Performance and Development Culture Accreditation. By morning tea they recognised that our school already demonstrated level four of the guidelines. By lunch time they had expressed interest in being considered for accreditation in the first round of schools.

Upon their return to school, this notion was agreed upon by leadership and further acknowledged by staff, as accreditation could not be sought without staff agreement. The decision to move forward was made.

The current culture at Concord, which is rapidly evolving and continues to improve, did not happen overnight. As with all schools, the context and infrastructure play a major role in the establishment of, and ability to sustain a performance and development culture.

Here at Concord, we are strongly supported by a leadership team who focus on building a learning community through school improvement, staff development and student well being. The curriculum leaders drive curriculum, all expert teachers take on substantial organisational roles and leadership capabilities are recognised and developed across the whole school community.

School policies, procedures and protocols are extensive. There is a formal induction program and school organisation and roles and responsibilities booklets are produced, all of which provide staff with accessible information on ‘how we do things around here.’ Individual teacher development plans are primarily working documents, supporting improvement to teaching practice.

With technology a school priority, all staff are well trained in the effective use of ICT. As a result, electronic communication is swift, Sharepoint is a vital cog in the dissemination of information and trivial email is minimal.

Time is valued and resources are distributed effectively with staff consultation. Wherever possible staff are released to pursue professional growth opportunities. This may be to attend formal or informal professional development programs or planning sessions, to provide support for one another, to give and receive feedback, share information, take on new initiatives and generally move the school forward.

After participating in a unifying and affirming process to become accredited, in July 2005 the whole staff joined in a heart-warming celebratory lunch to acknowledge how far we had come and kick start our journey towards attaining level five.
What we do............

**Induction**

In recognition of an imminent and rapid change in teaching staff and the emergence of a new generation of teachers, Concord school maintains a formal induction program supported by an induction policy. Induction is the collective responsibility of the whole school, although team leaders are the designated coach/mentor accountable for the implementation and documentation of the program.

This program lays the foundation for, and is a critical phase of the continuum of professional growth for

- All new staff
- All new volunteers
- Newly promoted staff or those taking on higher duties
- Staff acting in or taking on a different role
- Staff returning to the school

An induction program will

- Help staff gain a sense of belonging, security, reduce anxiety and build confidence
- Introduce the staff member to the culture expectations and goals of the school, region and the department
- Enable experienced staff to participate in a two way learning experience
- Provide opportunities for professional conversations, role clarity, goal setting and employment structures and conditions
- Build on a culture of effective communication and acceptance of feedback to improve effectiveness
- Promote ongoing professional learning

The program is

- Commenced before the official starting date using a Welcome Pack and school visits
- Formalised with an Induction Workbook that outlines the process step by step
- Structured to provide formalised forums for professional conversations and mentoring
- Staggered in its implementation
- Embedded with opportunities for peer observation, reflection and for giving and receiving feedback
- Team based and supported by structured activities that promote networking
- Enhanced through access to effective professional development
- Responsive to individual needs of both the inductee and the mentor/coach
Multiple sources of feedback
In order for a person to see what they couldn’t see before and move forward, they need feedback. We all have blind spots. Our objective is to make these as small as we possibly can. Although the findings and recommendations generated from feedback are important and can drive change, often, improved teaching practice comes about just from the fact that feedback is being sought.

We use external and internal processes which utilise assessment tools that are both qualitative and quantitative. The school Annual Report and the Community Report are extensive documents that publish the data from across the school. Feedback opportunities include

- Staff opinion survey
- Parent opinion survey
- Student attitudinal survey
- School organisational health survey
- Internal questionnaires to students, staff and parent/carers
- Full circle feedback for school leaders
- Student attendance rates
- Data collection on literacy and numeracy student results
- Peer sharing and observation
- Audio and video technology
- Mentoring (VIT) and coaching
- Our leadership and section meetings provide forums for professional conversations, case studies, data analysis and workshops

Using the Victorian Essential Learning Standards as a guide, we are currently developing core standards to measure and collate annually. This will provide quick and reliable data on large numbers of students. Against each standard, students are described as ‘competent’ or not ‘yet competent’ to give a broad picture of teacher effectiveness.

Teacher Development Plans
Professional learning teams and the role of the team leaders are essential to the development of customised Individual Teacher Development Plans (ITDP). In collaboration with the leadership team, the staff developed a school guide for all teaching levels.

This guide assists in setting individual goals for staff through the provision of examples of the outcomes for each standard. The outcomes are aligned with the 2004 Victorian Government Schools Agreement, Blueprint Flagship Strategies and are described in the context of Concord School. The ITDP also includes a detailed Professional Development Plan to reinforce our commitment to being life long learners. Tracking individual teacher development is done through

- Staff meetings to workshop school guides and the processes of implementation
- Staff working together in professional learning teams and with the leadership team to develop and implement the plan
- An informal appraisal with the principal at the beginning and end of the year
- All staff meeting with a member of the leadership team at mid year to discuss progress and again at the end of the year to demonstrate their development
- Regular use of the ITDP as a guide to track and reflect on their own professional growth and acknowledge their successes

Support for PD is extensive and is a fundamental strategy to ensure that staff development is linked to the achievement of positive outcomes.
**Professional Development (PD)**
The development of professional skills is fundamental to our school improvement. In addition to the day-to-day learning through professional conversations and reflective teaching practice, deliberate opportunities are created to support our teachers’ commitment to personal and collective professional learning. The whole school PD plan focuses on the needs of the school with the overall aim to improve student learning outcomes through improved, effective teaching practice. Our approach includes

- The allocation of a personal PD budget, which is supplemented by curriculum initiatives and leadership development budgets
- PD is not an ‘add on.’ Wherever possible, pupil-free days, staff meetings and team meetings are utilised
- Consultation throughout the planning process ensures PD is founded on teacher and student needs, is relevant and is flexible to accommodate these needs
- Invitation for staff participation rather than mandating attendance. This approach is more conducive to learning, it recognizes teachers as learners who need to make a connection to their own classroom and experiences within their own context
- Staff are encouraged to attend relevant PD, visit other schools and to participate exchange visits to classrooms within the school
- Team attendance for programs and follow up sessions to facilitate further opportunities for learning through the provision of support and professional conversations
- The appointment of a PD coordinator to monitor and record individual and collective PD
- All staff develop individual PD plans in accordance with their personal requirements and developed through their appraisal and individual teacher development plans

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**What we’ve achieved.............**

- Through reflection, celebration and recognition of what we have achieved so far, the process of accreditation was, in itself uplifting for the whole school. Today, the staff genuinely believe in a performance and development culture and they can readily articulate why, and demonstrate how as they continually optimise opportunities to bring about improvement
- Feedback from multiple sources is gaining momentum and is embedded in all programs at all levels as staff are willing to become more transparent and reduce our ‘blind spots’
- Staff commitment to PD is growing and we have become more discerning in what we attend and who attends. This commitment, the time, resources, follow up and support provided allows teachers to stay up-to-date with the latest research and approaches to teaching and learning and results in improved student learning outcomes
- There is a gradual shift from the Teacher Development Plan being used solely as an accountability measure. It is now becoming a working document and is the impetus for professional conversations and supporting the framework for effective teaching practice.
- It is important that we continue to build upon the platform of success as existing staff become more self reliant. The comprehensive induction program ensures sustainability and our Strategic Plan will be the scaffold towards achieving level five accreditation