Element 4: Quality Professional Development to meet individual development needs and school priorities.

The Professional Learning and Development Policy of Waverley Meadows specifies that, What teachers know, do and believe has a major influence on what students learn. To improve the quality of teaching and learning, investment in the learning of teachers and support staff is imperative. This learning must support the growth of the individual as well as contribute to the realisation of the goals and priorities of the school and the system.

All teacher professional development experiences reflect the seven principles of highly effective professional learning which is inclusive of improving student outcomes. The provision of professional development is integrated seamlessly into the organisational processes of the school. There is a strong sense of sharing and growth in the development that occurs. Teachers are highly reflective and collaborative and seek feedback through colleagues and data to further their effectiveness.

The leadership at Waverley Meadows recognises that quality teachers is arguably our most important resource. All teachers are given the opportunity to reflect on their performance and enhance their professional knowledge and skills through customised performance and development plans that also take into account DE&T and school priorities as outlined in the Charter. This process is initiated through the Performance and Development Plans and is ongoing. Individual staff members discuss areas of strength and improvement with the Principal when deciding on their goals and professional development that will address those needs. The Professional Development Coordinator supports staff by disseminating information and opportunities to them regarding conferences, workshops and other professional development forums which are specific to their goals and developmental needs.

Waverley Meadows believes that the best way for our students to achieve success is for the teacher to direct the learning from a thorough understanding of where the students are positioned and to provide explicit skill instruction in order for students to progress. In order to support this premise, we enjoy an individual and collective sense of responsibility at all levels of the school.

All individual staff members are connected through membership of a PLT. These teams meet formally at least fortnightly to review their planning and implementation, and to evaluate progress and strategies. A large component of these meetings is centred around professional learning and members of the team share, discuss, clarify and explore their understandings particularly in relation to all areas identified in our school Charter. In addition, this shared conversation is facilitated by a team member who may have undertaken professional development or by the PLT coordinator. Curriculum area coordinators support the sharing of professional knowledge through staff meetings and their PLT’s. (Appendix 7) Meetings are a forum for discussion and reflection of curriculum developments and professional insights. Much of our professional development is classroom/school based. At staff and PLT meetings feedback is given and supportive documents/summaries are distributed and discussed based on professional development attended, reflecting on its usefulness and how it might be implemented in our context.

A number of teachers also participate in local, regional and cluster network meetings that contribute to enhancing and furthering knowledge regarding literacy, numeracy, Early Years of Schooling, Middle Years of Schooling, Gifted Education, VELS implementation and assessment and reporting. The teacher representatives who attend these network meetings record their experience in the professional development data base on the intranet in order to disseminate and share the understandings while additionally discussing the experience at staff and PLT meetings. The synergy evident through this dialogue and interdependence results in areas of ongoing and new growth for all. (Appendix 8)
In order to improve student learning, teachers analyse a range of data including Prep – 2 reading, SLR teacher assessments against the CSF (VELS) and AIM results, highlighting areas of student achievement and learning needs. Reflecting the principles of highly effective professional learning with regard to being informed by best available research, we have undertaken specific professional development in language disorders that has impacted on teaching and learning throughout the school. The support and modelling provided has been powerful in influencing pedagogical practice as the teachers’ knowledge of the content and strategies they use has deepened. Additionally, all teachers have embedded a range of thinking tools into their practice as a result of a focus through the I&E cluster action plan. This has occurred through a series of professional development sessions with Tony Ryan, a recognised researcher and educator, who worked with teachers in 2005 and then in classrooms in 2006 to enrich the previous professional development experience, once again, reflecting one of the principles of highly effective professional learning where professional development is ongoing and fully integrated with the operation of the school. The longitudinal effect is evident in our unit planners and in resources used by teachers and students, including software that supports the use of graphic organisers and thinking tools. The teachers have a common language and repertoire that is transferable across all levels and is recognised and used by students. The effectiveness of this professional development is clearly evident. Teaching staff demonstrate a sophistication and high level of professionalism through deliberately abandoning practice that is ineffective and seeking evidence-based, research sound strategies to address identified student needs. Teachers demonstrate enthusiasm and openness in questioning established conventions or strategies and seek evidence for new understandings and professional growth.

Each term, all classroom teachers are released together for a whole day to plan for the following term. The term planning day for all PLT’s provides the opportunity for considerable reflection on practice, evaluation of programs and professional growth. Reflections also provide a form of feedback to teachers as to the success or otherwise of planned units of work for innovation and modification. At times, the invitation for others to be involved such as the Innovations and Excellence Cluster Educator, provides added focus for this reflection, further discussion and consideration of alternative pedagogical practices. The value of the professional learning experienced is determined to be effective only if it can be readily applied in the classroom or in response to identified needs of particular students. Staff members reflect honestly and openly about the value of what they have experienced. The collaborative and reflective nature of our culture supports that which we value.

Planned and focussed professional development has led to improved learning opportunities and outcomes for students and is consistent with the principles of highly effective professional learning as is evidenced by the responses of teachers to the staff opinion survey and the Performance and Development Culture on-line survey. Staff members have become increasingly confident in implementing new classroom strategies (72.7% strongly agree) and feel their students are more engaged. The on-line questionnaire indicates that 81.8% of teachers believe their students are more actively engaged in learning activities. Teachers have an increased knowledge of curriculum content (81.8% strongly agree), how students learn and how to access materials and resources (72.2% strongly agree). There is a greater understanding of how to use assessment to improve student learning, focusing on formative assessment to inform ‘just in time learning’ in addition to summative assessment. Students are given considerable opportunity to work collaboratively, reflect on their learning and respond to peer and teacher feedback. Our professional development is informed by research, is ongoing, evidence based and data driven.

In recent years the staff opinion surveys have been testament to the collegiality, professional interactions and professional growth of all staff. 95% of teachers currently believe that they
have had increasing opportunities to grow professionally compared to 73% in 2005. Teachers also believe that their opportunity for professional interaction is in the ‘excellent’ range at 95% in the 2006 staff opinion survey.

Our current challenge is to create further opportunities for conversation and reflection through the five step Peer Coaching model with the principal purpose of improving student outcomes. Through this process we are discovering the varied expertise in our midst that we can continue to utilise and draw upon.

We plan to sustain and improve professional development in our school by continuing our current practice and introducing across the whole school component mapping and the professional development modules from the “Principles of Learning and Teaching” program. Additionally we will incorporate the Assessment Professional Learning Modules, Curriculum Planning Modules and Curriculum Planning Guidelines available on SOFWEB which will support us in continuing to focus on improved student outcomes and enhance teachers’ professional knowledge, skills and attitudes.