In the beginning:

1. What were things like before you participated in the program?
The teaching staff has always been in an environment that is highly collegiate and very much of a team nature. The physical learning spaces are such that teachers team teach and implement programs that have been developed as teams. Given that teachers had a mentality of teaching together for the benefit of the students, the opportunity to build on the existing culture presented itself through the accreditation process of achieving a Performance and Development Culture which is an initiative of the Victorian Department of Education.

2. How did you decide what you needed to do?
While working through the self assessment grid for demonstrating a P&D Culture, the element related to using multiple sources of feedback presented us with an opportunity to add greater rigour to our current reflective data driven evaluation of our teaching practice ie to consider the implementation of peer coaching. When this was raised with the teachers, it was enthusiastically embraced. The AGQTP funding opportunity provided support for the work that needed to be done to gain a shared and collective understanding of the concept and also of the process. Our research led us to Dr Ray Daniels who had done some significant work in this area. His consultancy and series of tailored made sessions formed the basis of our common understandings of how to utilise peer coaching to enhance our individuals and collective teaching practices.

During:

1. What did you do during the program and what did you learn?
The program with Ray Daniels was sectioned into 7 sessions of which 4 were attended by all teachers while the last 3 were attended by those who were continuing on to become the actual coaches. During the program teachers learnt about the 5 step process that is recommended to be followed to maintain the integrity of the effectiveness of the tool in order to have an impact on a teacher’s practice. No Blame No Praise is the essence of this approach to teacher development where teachers feel secure in that the process of invitation, observation, data collection based on an agreed proforma followed by a meeting that is used to share the collected data and/or to be followed up with coaching.

The peer coaching professional development series has significantly strengthened the understanding and depth of teacher pedagogical knowledge and skills. All teachers have been involved in a process that has taken them from being effective teaching teams to a place where they are able to identify areas of practice as individuals that they would like to further develop and improve, request a colleague to observe their practice who then collects data based on the request and then receive feedback based on that data. Colleagues then provide the option of coaching where suggestions to alter or amend practice is offered. Given that the context is authentic, meaningful, purposeful, just in time type of learning for the teachers, it has become a particularly powerful feedback tool to address the specifically identifies area(s) of concern.

As the process of peer coaching is structured and located authentically in place and time for improved teacher practice, the data collected and then analysed for results, can then be used to inform changed practice, thereby empowering teachers to add rigour and reflection to their teaching to improve student inclusion and engagement. Our teachers are mindful of personalising learning for all students and use a range of formative assessment (for/as) learning. Peer coaching has provided a tool and forum through which teachers can further enhance individualised learning for themselves first which then translates into more effective and reflective practice. Given that the school is on a journey of creating a culture of performance and development where teachers support each other in practice improvement, the peer coaching PD and subsequent implementation has shown significant evidence of professional interaction and dialogue, where shared language and focus has supported a whole school culture of continuous improvement of student outcomes and engagement.

2. What changed in you and / or the school?
One of the main changes evolving is the shift in balance in professional learning from more out-sourced PD experiences to more workplace based professional learning where there is greater integration of teacher work and student learning. It is professional learning as routine practice and further consolidates collegiality and group professional learning.

3. How do you know things changed?
The journey has only really begun and as we know that embedded change takes 3 – 5 years. So although it is early days, we have a very professional staff who see the relevance of peer coaching and the personalisation of this approach to professional improvement of practice. Additionally, the performance and development culture that we have firmly in place allows peer coaching to be easily located within such a culture.

After:
1. What has been the long term impact?
As mentioned, it is still early days and so the long term impact is still yet to be realised, however, the research is very clear that this is a sustainable practice when used in an organisational culture that locates its professional learning within its teaching capital and where distributed leadership promotes collective responsibility to continuously seek improvement of practice for student outcome improvement.

2. How have you sustained and spread the learnings?
The leadership team is supporting the impetus of the use of peer coaching as a valuable approach to professional learning. Each PLT has ensured that it is an agenda’d item and teachers have been given responsibility to seek out a colleague who they feel they can comfortably ask into their classroom to either observe and /or coach. Each teacher is expected to include the use of peer coaching on their own professional performance plan as a strategy that they will undertake to add to the range of multiple sources of feedback that informs their teaching. Additionally, time has bee provided for teachers to peer observe/coach over and above their allocated AP time. Given that it is seen as professional development, the PD budget is seen as supporting this approach to professional learning. Given also that much of our PD is conducted through our Innovations and Excellence cluster, the cost of external PD is minimal. Attending large one off conferences that have little impact on teacher effectiveness are drawing less from our PD budget and so making peer coaching very affordable and more effective in the long term.