

Priority Review Report

Laverton P-12 College School

South Western Victoria Region

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1. Executive Summary

Laverton P-12 College was selected for a Priority Review on the basis of learning and engagement outcomes which fell below state thresholds. The review examines issues related to achievement, student engagement and well being and productivity to diagnose possible impediments to improved outcomes. Areas specified for particular attention are set out in the Terms of Reference.

The reviewers were most impressed by the high degree of cooperation afforded them by the College and by its desire to use the outcomes as the basis for future improvement. The review methodology, which included: focus group meetings, interviews, classroom visits, staff survey and document studies provided the reviewers with a good understanding of the history, context and culture of this newly merged College and of the challenges it faces. The reviewers were impressed by the dedication and professionalism of the leadership team and the staff.

Achievement

An overview of the school's achievement data sets shows the following

- The Student Family Occupation (SFO) of Laverton P-12 is .74 which is significantly higher than the state mean of .51. The school's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is 901 compared to the national average ICSEA of 1000. Expectations based on SFO and ICSEA suggest performance below the state and national mean. Comparison with schools of a similar SFO and ICSEA profile provides a reasonable benchmark for performance.
- Teacher generated AusVELS levels place school below schools with a similar student profile.
- Overall results on the 2013 Year 3 and 5 NAPLAN *Reading* and *Numeracy* are below schools with a similar profile. The 2013 Year 3 results show a slight improvement in *Numeracy* and *Reading* and a greater improvement in *Writing*. The 2013 Year 5 NAPLAN results show a slight improvement in *Reading* and a decline in *Numeracy*. (Note. Some school level NAPLAN results for 2014 are now available and should be considered by the school leadership along with the Senior Advisor, in conjunction with the 2013 data)
- Relative Growth figures for *Numeracy* and *Reading*, for each of the past three years, show few students achieving high relative growth and over 35% of students in the low growth category. In *Writing* the majority of students were in the medium growth category.
- Relative Growth figures for Years 5 – 7 show that all strands have higher than 25% in low growth category and that 56% of students were in the low growth category for Grammar and Punctuation compared to the state mean of 25%.
- Relative Growth figures for Years 7 – 9 largely reflect the state means.
- Compared to other schools with a similar student profile, in 2013 Laverton students performed better in Year 9 NAPLAN *Numeracy* and *Reading*. There was a slight overall improvement in results when compared to previous years.
- Year 9 NAPLAN results, however, show less than 25% of students performing above the state mean on any strand.
- Teacher generated AusVELS results place the Year 7-10 students below schools with a similar student profile.
- The College's VCE results in 2013 and for the past three years at least, were below schools with a similar student profile. The mean scores for Accounting, Business, Legal and Physics were near the state means while Maths, English, PE, HHD, Studio Arts, Outdoor Ed all had very low mean scores.
- The College's All Study mean of 21.7 when compared to the state mean of 28.7, is very low
- VCAL completion outcomes for the past three years match the state mean at around 87.7%

The Year 3 NAPLAN Writing result for 2013, which places the College slightly above the state mean and well above schools with a similar student profile is a cause for celebration. It reaffirms the value of work being done by the PLTs, leadership and coaches to lift student performance. Results obtained at the other levels are yet to show improvement commensurate with the well planned, well documented and well resourced efforts being made to improve learning outcomes across the College.

The reviewers identified a number of factors affecting achievement outcomes including:

- Noise and high levels of distraction inherent in open plan, so called “flexible”, learning spaces were seen as the greatest impediment to improved learning outcomes. Interviews with teachers, ES staff, students and observations by the reviewers confirmed that these spaces are, in fact, inflexible. They greatly restrict the range of learning strategies available to teachers, place limits on the pedagogical models practiced, have high levels of distraction and greatly impede the progress of EAL students and students with auditory processing issues.
- The policy of the College to run VCE classes in the Year 9-12 open learning space when quiet, walled classrooms were available seemed to add an unnecessary impediment to VCE students’ chances of success.
- Low expectations of students were apparent in: lessons pitched to the middle and lower achieving students, modest Learning Intentions, VET / VCE timetabling which necessarily reduced students’ class time and a lack of urgency in pursuing improved VCE outcomes. There was no provision, apart from some in-class differentiation, for higher achieving students. High expectations in practical operational terms do not appear to be part of the College mantra.
- Loss of time on task due to excursions, incursions, lateness, and slow period changes and the ‘open’ classroom design
- A developing but not yet fully effective EAL program for the College’s high percentage of newly arrived Karen students
- Inconsistencies and adjustments as students move from Learning Community to Learning Community. There was little evidence to show that, middle school while doing its job well, added extra value to student learning. There was a perception among many staff that the College was really more like ‘three schools’ in practice rather than a P-12 with smooth transitions.

Student Engagement

Absences:

- The overall average number of days absent for the Primary section (P-6) is much higher than state average. Laverton P-6 students = 20.33 days per student. State = 14.47 days per student.
- The overall average number of days absent for the Secondary section (7-12) is higher than state average but not significantly so. Laverton 7-12 students = 20.34 days per student. State = 18.21 days per student.

Comment: Absence data at both levels are affected by the high levels of transience in the student body particularly by Pacific Islander students. Close analysis of the data shows that statistical outliers account for many of the days of absence. The school has good processes in place to encourage students to attend.

Student Attitudes to School Survey 2014 data shows:

- Year 5&6 Teaching & Learning data is at or above 50th percentile

- Year 7-12 Teaching & Learning data is at or above 75th percentile
- Year 5&6 Wellbeing data near the 50th percentile
- Year 7-12 Wellbeing data near the 85th percentile
- Year 5&6 Relationships data below the 50th percentile
- Year 7-12 Relationships data near the 85th percentile but not in *Classroom Behaviour*
- The results for the past three years have been similar.

Comment: These results are generally excellent and are a testament to the work of the College staff in building a caring and respectful environment. The strong *Teaching and Learning* data indicates that students generally enjoy the work and appreciate the preparation and effort teachers put into their teaching. They find their teachers approachable and caring. The *Wellbeing* data shows that students feel safe and connected with perhaps a concern regarding morale and connectedness at the Year 5&6 level. The reviewers observed well mannered and respectful students.

The College has a comprehensive Welfare and Discipline Policy and the staff handbook provides clear instructions and expectations regarding the College's approach to welfare and discipline. The data above would confirm that the policy is working well. However, comments from a number of sources highlighting inconsistencies in the application of policy between Learning Communities and between individual teachers, particularly when it came to 'consequences', suggest that it might be time to put welfare and discipline back on the staff meeting agenda.

Concerns:

- The reviewers believe that the student welfare structure may be ready for review. A number of schools have moved from using teachers as welfare officers to using trained welfare workers or counsellors, paid as ES staff.
- The reviewers noted that the Learning Community Principals seemed to spend a considerable amount of time on welfare matters and while these are important, they are not core business and could be handled more effectively by a person who had responsibility for welfare, particularly in drawing in outside services to assist.
- Providing a private space for welfare consultations seems to be an issue. There is no designated place in the College.
- While there is a comprehensive Welfare and Discipline Policy in place, the school does not seem to have a class based program in place to promote school values and positive behaviours. These are commonly seen in Primary schools and, when done well, make a significant difference to student attitudes and behaviour.

Productivity

While the College seems to have good processes for resource allocation and operates on an effective budgeting system, there seemed to be a number of resourcing issues which may need to be addressed:

- The staff survey and interviews conveyed a strong perception that the College is over administrated. To operate a school for around 600 students, the College has a Principal and four Assistant Principals. It also has 6.6 Leading teachers and has placed an admin officer in each of the Learning Communities. The lead reviewer compared the cost of managing this school with two others and found that Laverton P-12 needs about 56 more hours of coordination time than two other similar sized schools, one of which is P-12. This figure equates to about three teachers' salaries. (See appendix 1).
- There is duplication in the management of student attendance and welfare

- The College received \$350,000 in its SRP budget to support its EAL program. The lead reviewer estimates that about \$270,000 is being spent in this area. It may be time to reconsider how EAL is delivered at the College.
- There is a perception in the College that the cost of providing the VCE is subsidised by the rest of the College. Classes of 28 in Year 4 as opposed to classes of 5 and 6 in VCE are cited as examples. To clarify this issue, the reviewers would suggest that the College examine its SRP budget to determine level by level budget inputs and level by level actual costs. The cost of managing the College could also be part of that calculation.
- The VCE blocks can determine all that follows in the timetable. To an extent, the P-12 structure has made aspects of school organisation less flexible. The College might consider extending the teaching day and /or other rotating timetabling approaches (Eg 6 day timetables etc) to provide more flexibility in the VCE blocks and reduce the impact on the other levels
- The balance in the curriculum is tilted to English, leading to imbalances and unintended consequences. For example, the entire Year 9 English program is taught by teachers who are not English trained and some important learning areas have been either lost or greatly reduced in the timetable.
- The ICT program needs an overhaul – a number of complaints were heard regarding the absence of a policy, protocols, processes for establishing the most suitable e-learning objects and about equipment issues. The Library seems to be underutilised particularly for small independent groups in the junior levels.
- A complaint often heard was that the Learning Communities are very hot in summer – too hot for effective learning.
- The BER building, known as the CLC, is underutilised and would make an excellent VCE centre.(A cost benefit consideration of the region language centre would be needed)
- There appear to be a number of teaching spaces that could be used as quiet teaching spaces which are left unused.

Concluding comment

The College leadership has put in place, or is about to put in place, many of the elements which should lead to improved learning outcomes. Some areas of concern are relatively easily addressed and are already on the executive's agenda. The larger problems associated with a structure which was designed to create highly effective, 21st century learning spaces and a unified school with seamless transitions, but which seems to produce the opposite, will take courageous leadership to address. Good leaders strive to make things better. In the absence of improved student outcome data, leadership cannot persist with a structure which is costly to manage, has inherent faults and delivers less than optimal outcomes.