

DICKSON COLLEGE

EXTERNAL VALIDATION REPORT
2011

ACT Department of Education & Training

Section A: School Context

Dickson College, a senior secondary college situated in the inner north of Canberra is one of the original ACT Colleges. It is located close to Canberra's civic centre and the Australian National University.

College facilities include a large library, theatre, cafeteria, gymnasium, computer rooms, multimedia studio, music practice rooms and recording studio, weights room, adjacent playing fields and specialist rooms for practical subjects. The college is committed to providing a supportive, innovative and educationally enriched learning environment to its 800 students.

Together the school community works to develop informed, caring, creative and confident global citizens. The College prides itself on an excellent academic record and aims for individually tailored programs for students across the curriculum. These include a 'Bridging Program' for students with a refugee background, a Special Education program, an Intensive English School and an alternative Year 10 Program.

Dickson College is a nationally Registered Training Organisation and provides numerous vocational options. A counselling system and a transition and careers program support all students as they make a range of choices. The College works in close partnership with the community and is involved in several productive school community projects.

Section B: Student Outcomes

Leadership and Community Outcomes

The journey for the College as an organisation post 2020 school reforms has been very successful.

The transition to a new-look leadership team has established a strong sense of collegiality and high expectations at Dickson College. The staff satisfaction survey trends reflect strongly the improved performance of communication at all levels and constructive feedback about performance.

When surveyed in 2010, 93 percent (77 per cent in 2008) of staff considered that the College is performing well in developing students to be good citizens.

Teaching and Learning Outcomes

The College enrolment has increased significantly since 2007. There has been an increase in the number of students attempting the 'T' level and 'non-T' level studies.

The proportion of students doing A level has increased by approximately 10% due to support and individual pathways. The College has continued to provide a rigorous curriculum to enable students to achieve. This is reflected by the increase in percentage of students above University of Canberra cut off (ATAR of 65) Students are given sound advice through the transition program on a variety of occasions through one-on-one meetings with members of the leadership team during Term 3 of Year 10 along with further discussion at the end of Year 10.

The College has a strong inclusive program where students with learning difficulties are integrated into the mainstream classes along with ILP's to support their needs.

The College offers a Connect 10 program where students who have been previously disengaged at other schools are given an opportunity to complete school and be ready for the workforce.

Student Environment Outcomes

The co-location of student services and careers and the philosophy of “red carpet treatment” for students has led to greater access for all and closer case management for those who require it.

The 2010 priority around care for the school environment and behavior management was efficiently achieved through reminders of expectations at assembly, through the My Attitude to Planning and Success (MAPS) Program and respectful classroom relationships. The decision to create pastoral care groups based around shared interests has resulted in improved attendance and more effective dissemination of information and ACT Skills Test preparation. The transition of students has been greatly enhanced and enabled students to connect with a broader peer group.

The ongoing refurbishment of buildings and the use of colour to badge key learning areas and the display of student work, has contributed to a positive environment which students respect and help to maintain.

Section C: Priorities

Priority 1:	In 2010 Dickson College focused on maximizing the positive impact of the teacher to improve student outcomes.
Domains:	Learning and Teaching

Evidence cited and its validation

The aim was that all students experience success in their learning.

Using the Quality Teaching model (QTm) to lead pedagogy it was expected that 100 percent of staff at Dickson College would implement the QTm into their daily teaching practice.

Progress against outcomes and targets:

In 2009 the teaching community at Dickson College undertook comprehensive professional learning to gain a greater understanding of the QTm philosophy and application in the College context. Catch up and refresher sessions were offered in 2010 for those staff new to Dickson in term 1. The Quality Teaching working party led professional learning to disseminate information more easily throughout the many faculties at the College. In 2010 all Staff paired with a colleague and all pairs committed to coding and evaluating practice throughout the year.

Pairs of teachers from across the College volunteered to share their projects with all staff on a half day professional learning session in August 2010. This involved all staff where assessment items and rubrics that had been developed were shared and short films of staff teaching, coding and evaluating their practice were shown. This practice was evaluated using the QTm to code classes and design lessons/assessment by the end of 2010.

The Quality Teaching Working Party in November 2010 showed that 100 percent of staff had embraced the QTm through contributions to the reflective Journals on the coding and team teaching process. Staff enjoyed the opportunity to be paired with a colleague. This was evidenced by the collaborative journal entries by all staff.

There was evidence of the application of QTm practices by teachers in a variety of the key learning areas of the College. This applied to both unit outlines and assessment tasks.

The QTm movie demonstrated an effective support tool for professional learning and the lesson study approach.

QTm working party plans to evaluate the impact on student outcomes. In the future unit evaluations given out at the end of each semester need to be collated to see if the aim of 80 percent of student unit evaluations indicating satisfaction or higher has been met. An example of an online survey for a sample of students was shared with the external validation panel.

Other indicators of student success are the end of year results. For 2010 Dickson College:

- increased the median ATAR from 81.6 to 82.9
- 29 percent of the students received an ATAR over 90 also an increase from 2009
- 311 students were certificated and 159 received at TES
- seven students completed courses at ANU Secondary College
- 68 VET certificates were achieved by students in year 12.

Dickson College teachers have been sharing their practice with colleagues in the wider community as evidenced by the English and IT faculties having run system Professional Learning on aspects of their teaching practice with professional associations. Over 60 teachers from other schools have attended Dickson College led Professional Learning.

Section C: Priorities

Priority 2:	At Dickson College we promote Excellence, Opportunity and Community.
Domains:	Leading and Managing

Evidence cited and its validation

The focus was to embed the beliefs of Dickson College values system so they permeate throughout the College community (excellence, opportunity and community).

“Dickson College is committed to providing a supportive, innovative and educationally enriched learning environment. Together we work to develop informed, caring, creative and confident global citizens.” (Dickson College Values Statement)

Progress against outcomes and targets:

The school leadership conference in April 2010 confirmed that excellence, opportunity and community must be incorporated into school policies and curriculum across key learning areas, “My Attitude to Planning and Success” and assemblies.

The 2011 Open Night video was thematic in the three sections of excellence, opportunity and community reflects progress with this priority.

Enhancing the recent school facility improvements, the words excellence, opportunity and community have been featured in hallways and stairwells, in the College hall and on the lectern.

When surveyed in 2010, 97percent (77 per cent in 2008) of staff knew what College values were. In 2010 55 per cent of students knew what the Dickson College values were.

Dickson College staff ensures that the values are embedded into a common language that is used at all staff and leadership forums and in student assemblies, speeches, events.

There is ongoing explicit modelling of Dickson College values throughout the school community via communications including:

- assemblies and college events
- staff meetings
- newsletter
- website

All faculty business plans use school values as platforms for improvement.

Sixty percent of school assessment or unit outlines embed values into content.

Early in 2011 an evaluation of the working parties decided that staff wanted more individual input and a wider range of opportunities. The working parties have been re named as excellence, opportunity and community projects where small groups will commit to a leadership project focussing on improvements to Dickson College.

Further evidence of student engagement of the college values of excellence, opportunity and community are demonstrated through the following activities and programs:

- The One World Day had a strong community attendance and a wide range of altruistic projects pursued by students.
- Funds were raised that benefitted a number of non-government organisations, charities and worthy causes.

- The Refugee Bridging Program enrolment has increased to 29 in 2010 from 2 in 2009. Over half the students are doing at least one mainstream subject.
- The first year 12 graduates from the Refugee Bridging Program plan to go to CIT and wish to work in community industries like childcare and nursing.
- The College continues to work closely with Companion House and Multicultural Youth Services and Centacare.
- The refugee students have been nominated and received awards from CWA, ACT refugee scholarships and Australian Defence Force community service and leadership awards.
- Students are sharing life experience and stories of hardship and survival with mainstream literature and global classes.

Section C: Priorities

Priority 3:	Strengthen career planning and transition support for students so that all students at Dickson College are individually informed about their college and career options.
Domains:	Student Environment

Evidence cited and its validation

All students at Dickson College are individually informed about their college and career options

Progress against outcomes and targets:

For 2010 the College established a substantive Executive Teacher position for Transition Youth Attainment and Careers. This was a change in the College executive structure to reflect the changes in legislation around Youth Commitment and to better meet the needs of our student body.

In 2010 the College developed a discrete careers centre to focus on these areas with computer access for students, a drop in centre and a designated counselling and meeting place.

Dickson College has also incorporated career and transition support into My Attitude to Planning and Success (MAPS) , with targeted information sessions from local tertiary education providers. In 2009 the My Attitude to Planning and Success (MAPS) program was mapped to the Australian blueprint for career development.

In the seven months from May 2010, 355 students visited the Careers and Uni Advice team for guidance about work experience, Australian School Based Apprenticeships, transitions, pathways, university entrance and class selection. This data-collection has continued in 2011 and will be used to review and tailor career and transition services.

An improvement in the physical infrastructure and co-location of the Careers and Uni Advice team and Student Services team to the centre of the school has improved access and visibility, which is supported by the usage data above.

In 2010 18 students in year 12 completed Australian School Based Apprenticeships (ASBAs) to Certificate II or Certificate III in areas ranging from sport and recreation to plumbing, refrigeration and construction. There were 12 students in year 11 who started an ASBA.

There has been a 27 percent increase in the number of students who have completed work experience in 2010 (122 students) compared with 2009 (96 students).

All staff in the Careers and University advice team has the Certificate IV in Careers and have attended numerous professional learning opportunities, including the ACS Career Adviser Seminar, the Universities Admission Centre Information Session, Australian National University College of Asia and Pacific, Heppell Unleashed, and MindMatters.

Results from the student survey in My Attitude to Planning and Success (MAPS) showed that careers advice was the best activity. Seventy eight percent of students found My Attitude to Planning and Success (MAPS) beneficial because of this. Seventy two percent of students accessed the Careers Connected Learning Community (cLc) page. This was mirrored in the satisfaction survey trend, increasing from 72 per cent (2008) to 80 per cent (2010) when students were asked the question, "I receive information about career options?"

The investment in sustainability of services is supported by the documentation of procedures, roles and responsibilities for student services. The comprehensive operational schedule is further evidence of ongoing capacity.

Section C: Priorities

Priority 4:	Expand existing relationships and develop new partnerships with the inner north community.
Domains:	Community Involvement

Evidence cited and its validation

We planned to maintain and develop successful cluster schools relationship within the inner north and the larger Gungahlin North network.

We hoped to increase the community partnerships across the school with each faculty working at developing links with the wider community.

Progress against outcomes and targets:

In 2010 the College consolidated their community garden partnership. The garden is operational with 15 plots in use, and two of these belong to the Karen community connected to our refugee program. Connect 10 students have set up an Aquaponics system with support and donations from a local hydroponics business. A partnership with Greening Australia has resulted in plantings to compliment our new signs.

Supporting this initiative the Global Relations students have secured funding for two water tanks from a Canberra company and sponsored by the Dickson Tradesman's Club for \$2500.

Cultural diversity is celebrated through the following events and programs:

- Harmony Day celebrations
- Reconciliation Day assembly
- One World Day expanded this year to showcase more faculties from Dickson College. Student projects again were highly commended by the Non-Government Organisations and Government.
- Dickson College organised and participated in the cluster Indigenous celebration of the inner north Indigenous community partnership.
- United Nations assembly. (In 2008 Dickson College was the first senior college to establish an official partnership with the United Nations.)
- Curriculum integration projects

Sustainable community partnerships include:

- A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed with WESTPAC and our business students.
- A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed with the Australian Catholic University and we are working on partnerships in Global Relations and Special Education.
- Canberra Organic Garden Growers (COGGS) partnership
- University of Canberra Aspire partnership with Dickson College Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) program
- The National Museum of Australia has supported the College in storing our valuable Dickson College Arnhem Land Art find and a draft Memorandum of Understanding has been signed with them.

- Filmmaker and Artist in Residence Andrew Boyer from the Australian National University worked with media students.
- Building and Constructions students have sold their Cubby house to Flynn Primary and have another 5 orders for other Early Childhood Schools.
- Dickson College students ran a stall at the Dickson wetlands community day.

In 2010 students participated in community based programs such as:

- The first Dickson College Arts Exhibition which was open to the community.
- The College participated in Earth, Wind and Fire cluster Performing Arts Extravaganza at the Lyneham Centre.
- Year 12 students have volunteered as tutors at North Ainslie Primary with the Gungahlin and inner north early intervention team.

The website is under reconstruction to make it more user-friendly and more reflective of the college. Dickson College has its own facebook page and Wikis with student exemplars are being used by a wide audience.

Section D: Validation comments and recommendations

Commendations:

The external validation panel commends Dickson College in the following areas:

1. On the very evident turn around in enrolments, college culture and physical environment.

The staff commitment to the agreed college values, Excellence – Opportunity – Community. The diversity of impact of this strategy is highly visible in the physical and school culture.


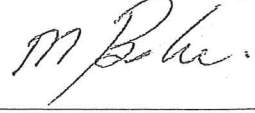
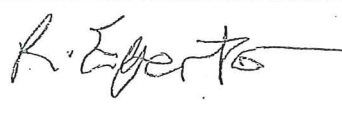
2. For their work in building on the investment in the Quality Teaching model through the collaborative journal involving all staff. Sharing this practice in the school network is to be encouraged.
3. The very evident culture of respectful staff – student relations, the engagement of students in their learning and the industrious tone of the college.

Recommendations

1. Further investment in validating systems to track and analyse college performance will be crucial to building a sustainable high performance college. This will enable the college to grow a culture of accountability whereby there is habit of interrogating student performance and efficacy of program delivery.
2. Expand the My Attitude to Planning and Success (MAPS) pastoral care program to fully engage with the Youth Commitment strategy, including extending the personalised pathways planning for all students.
3. Further develop wellbeing as a priority as this resonates with the improvement in student culture and engagement in programs.
4. Articulate the development of literacy and numeracy skills for all students. Work on integrating literacy and numeracy development with all learning areas and in particular ensure that those students who still require intense literacy and numeracy teaching are provided with appropriate support and instruction to ensure retention and success. This should be supported by a whole of college Literacy and Numeracy Framework that makes these essential success factors in student achievement core policy for the college.
5. Take on the role as the lead secondary school in the inner-north precinct. Invest in sustainable partnerships with school and community groups. Engage with the secondary school reform opportunities within the Excellence and Enterprise framework.

Record of Validation Process:

The following members agree that this is a true and accurate record of the validation process carried out at Dickson College

Panel:		School	Signatures:
Panel Chair	Michael Battenally	Melba Copland Secondary School, Canberra	
Panel Member	Mark Burke	Trinity Catholic College, Goulburn	
Panel Member	Robin Egerton	Lake Tuggeranong College	

As principal of Dickson College I accept the Validation Report on behalf of the school community

Name: Beth Mitchell

Signature: 

Date: 4/8/11

As external lead validators we concur that the panel acted within the guidelines set by the ACT Department of Education and Training

Name: Louise Bywaters

Signature: 

Date: 4.8.11

Name: Susan Boucher

Signature: 

Date: 04/08/11

Date of External Validation	<u>6-7 June 2011</u>	Date of Report (final version)	<u>4/8/11</u>
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