UC Senior Secondary College Lake Ginninderra

Report of Review, 2019

Date of School Review: 20, 21 and 22 August 2019
Principal of Review School: Gerard Barrett

National School Improvement Tool Review Report prepared by:
- Lead Reviewer: Christina Rogers, *ACER Senior School Improvement Consultant*
- ACT Review Team members: 1. Craig Edwards, *Principal of Dickson College*
                            2. Julie Murkins, *Principal of Lake Tuggeranong College*

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Overview of the School Review process

Approximately a fifth of all ACT public schools are reviewed each year. Reviews provide quality, independent, feedback tailored to individual school contexts. Findings from Review are considered alongside system and school level student achievement, perception and demographic data as the evidence base for development of the school's next 5-year School Improvement Plan.

Reviews are undertaken by a team of experienced educators trained in the use of the *National School Improvement Tool* (NSIT) and are led by a Lead Reviewer from the Australian Council of Educational Research. Review Team size depends upon a range of factors, including the size and context of a school.

Through the lens of the NSIT, an internationally recognised framework for reviewing teaching and learning practices, reviewers gain an accurate picture of current school practices. During Review evidence provided by schools is considered alongside evidence gathered through consultation with staff, students, parents and community members.

Following Review, the school receives a planning report, which is used as an internal working document, outlining key findings and recommended strategies for continued school improvement. The Education Directorate uses this planning report as a basis for the final *Report of Review* provided to school communities.

The *Report of Review* includes detailed Review Team findings for each of the nine Domains of the National School Improvement Tool, and Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations for continued school improvement.

Where does School Review sit within the broader school improvement cycle?
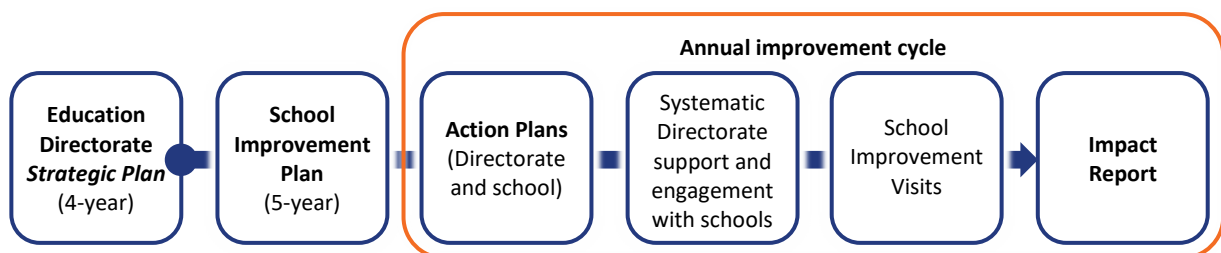
ACT public schools utilise systematic integration of evidence and data collection, access and analysis to inform sharp and narrow 5-year School Improvement Plans. Annually, all schools utilise a suite of tools to expand, monitor and report on these priorities. School Improvement Visits (SIVs – which include School Review) provide differentiated support and feedback to schools through varying levels of in-school immersion. SIVs progress in relation to a school's needs and improvement cycle, with School Review typically occurring at the end of this cycle.

What are Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations?

Commendations
The commendations highlight positive actions the school has taken over its last improvement cycle. Typically these actions are either complete, or embedded in school practice.

Affirmations
The affirmations verify specific actions being undertaken by the school that are impacting positively on school improvement. These actions are typically either not yet complete and/or not yet embedded.

Recommendations
The recommendations provide the school with evidence-based advice regarding high-value areas for future school improvement efforts. Drawn from the NSIT, recommendations are key to the school developing a sharp and narrow improvement plan.

NSIT Domain 1: An explicit improvement agenda

Domain descriptor
The school leadership team and/or governing body have established and are driving a strong improvement agenda for the school, grounded in evidence from research and practice and expressed in terms of improvements in measurable student outcomes. Explicit and clear school-wide targets for improvement have been set and communicated to parents and families, teachers and students, with accompanying timelines.

Findings
- School improvement planning documentation reflects recommendations made when the college was last reviewed. Both the Strategic Plan and subsequent annual action plans demonstrate alignment to the *ACT Government's Future of Education* policy paper and reference the *National School Improvement Tool*.

- The Strategic Plan articulates three college priorities: high quality teaching, dedication to excellence, and targeted used of educational resources. Key improvement strategies, actions, targets and reporting are evident in college planning documents.

- Targets have remained consistent over the life of the Strategic Plan, although leaders reflected with reviewers on the relative usefulness of some of the original targets as drivers of improvement.

- The principal monitors school-wide progress and provides key data sets for leaders to discuss and use. School-wide routines to facilitate regular discussion and reflection of a range of key data sets are not yet evident.

- Reviewers noted in discussions with staff that there was variability in the understanding of whole-of-college priorities and targets for improvement. Staff could describe the focus on feedback to students.

- There is evidence in some faculties of data-driven improvement planning and strategies being enacted, and these align to the intent of the Strategic Plan. Some faculties are seeing improvement in student outcomes as a result of the strategies they have employed.

- Leaders have enacted a professional learning team model that is faculty-based. This brings teachers together to reflect on practice and to identify areas that could be improved. This is starting to build a culture of shared responsibility for meeting targets for improvement.

- The college principal provides regular updates to the Board about the enactment of improvement plans and key documentation is available on the college website.

NSIT Domain 2: Analysis and discussion of data

Domain descriptor

A high priority is given to the school-wide analysis and discussion of systematically collected data on student outcomes, including academic, attendance and behavioural outcomes, and student wellbeing. Data analyses consider overall school performance as well as the performances of students from identified priority groups; evidence of improvement/ regression over time; performances in comparison with similar schools; and, in the case of data from standardised tests, measures of growth across the years of school.

Findings

- The college collects a range of student wellbeing and performance data, including where available, systematic cohort testing. Formal collection of summative student performance data is evident and informs reports on student progress.

- A summary of school performance data is presented by the principal to staff annually. A data plan has been developed, although it has not been regularly revised or widely used by staff across the college.

- Leaders participated in a data mining research project in collaboration with two other colleges and a local university, which sought to identify reliable predictors of student performance.

- Significant work has been undertaken in the past two years to register and curate student wellbeing and progress data in the Student Administration System (SAS). This has resulted in centralised records that support teachers and leaders in understanding individual student profiles.

- Regular collections of data for students with English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) are analysed and inform decisions about how these students are supported. Students who are identified with additional needs are closely monitored using a range of diagnostic tools. Progress for athletes in the Centre of Excellence program is also closely monitored and includes data from external partners.

- Localised spreadsheets specific to student academic performance are maintained by senior school leaders, although these are not widely accessed by all classroom teachers.

- Professional Learning Team (PLT) projects are building a data culture; these provide opportunities for teachers to reflect on student performance related to their practice.

- Leaders are looking to monitor growth in student learning through an analysis of Grade Point Average (GPA) performance. For some identified groups in the college and in some faculties these data are used to monitor learning.

- The college places a priority on the collection of student perception data in relation to their learning in class. These data are provided to individual teachers at the end of each unit, and inform teacher reflection on practice.

- Student services staff regularly hold conversations with individual students regarding progress towards an ACT Senior Secondary Certificate. They draw upon attendance, participation, and assessment data for those conversations.

- Students enrolled in tertiary packages participate in Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) estimates conversations to support them in monitoring progress towards their goals.

NSIT Domain 3: A culture that promotes learning

Domain descriptor

The school is driven by a deep belief that every student is capable of successful learning. A high priority is given to building and maintaining positive and caring relationships between staff, students and parents. There is a strong collegial culture of mutual trust and support among teachers and school leaders and parents are treated as partners in the promotion of student learning and wellbeing. The school works to maintain a learning environment that is safe, respectful, tolerant, inclusive and that promotes intellectual rigour.

Findings

- The college values of accountability, skills, respect, responsibility and commitment to learning are visible on the website and in key documentation.

- A *Supporting Positive Behaviour, Policies, Procedures and Management* document outlines the expectations for maintaining a safe and supportive college environment. The approach is underpinned by the Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) program.

- The college presents as a calm environment for learning. There are very few obvious behaviour issues that are impacting on learning.

- Students, staff and parents speak positively about the respectful and caring relationships that are developed across the college.

- Some students reported variability in the levels of expectations for their learning and the degree of engagement and challenge they experience across course options.

- Teachers mentor a group of students (support groups), meet weekly to monitor attendance and support their wellbeing through the delivery of a social and emotional learning program.

- Teachers are well supported by the student services team which maintains detailed records on interventions and adjustments. Staff speak highly of the way in which they are informed about individual student needs.

- The college holds 'Semester Excellence Awards' ceremonies to recognise students who have excelled academically or who exhibit college values. Sporting and cultural achievement is also regularly acknowledged.

- Students have regular opportunities to participate in a very broad range of co-curricular events and programs.

- Staff report their enjoyment in being part of the college community and value the collegiality and opportunities to work and socialise together.

- There are a number of interest-based student groups, supported by staff. The recycling and waste management project is an example of how students have meaningfully contributed to the college environment.

- An active Parents and Citizens Association (P&C) and the college Board work collaboratively to support students and staff. Broader parental engagement generally occurs through scheduled parent-teacher interviews. Parents expressed their appreciation for the way in which staff respond to their inquiries.

- There are agreed guidelines on greeting visitors, taking messages and responding to queries promptly and respectfully.

NSIT Domain 4: Targeted use of school resources

Domain descriptor
The school applies its resources (staff time, expertise, funds, facilities, materials) in a targeted manner to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of all students. It has school-wide policies, practices and programs in place to assist in identifying and addressing student needs. Flexible structures and processes enable the school to respond appropriately to the needs of individual learners.

Findings
- The principal and other school leaders have allocated resources to a range of strategies to address student need.

- There is evidence of detailed processes to support students who have identified additional learning needs. Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) are developed in consultation with teachers and parents, and are regularly monitored; adjustments are communicated to teachers.

- The 'Adapt' program supports students for whom regular attendance on campus is not possible. This occurs largely through accessing online learning. For example, the Centre for Excellence and Outdoor Education programs utilise flexible curriculum delivery options and are resourced accordingly.

- There is privileged time in the timetable for PLTs to meet regularly.

- Students and staff are using technology innovatively and regularly to maximise student learning.

- An academic excellence program provides enrichment opportunities for gifted and/or talented students. Teachers have been allocated additional time to develop, coordinate and support this program.

- The college implements a curriculum delivery approach that is driven by student choice and need which subsequently informs staffing decisions.

- College leaders, supported by the Board, are seeking to refurbish college facilities and have developed a maintenance plan to progress this work.

- An example of the creative use of space is evident through initiatives like the 'Makerspace' and in specialised learning areas. However, the majority of learning spaces reflect traditional learning spaces.

NSIT Domain 5: An expert teaching team

Domain descriptor
The school has found ways to build a school-wide, professional team of highly able teachers, including teachers who take an active leadership role beyond the classroom. Strong procedures are in place to encourage a school-wide, shared responsibility for student learning and success, and to encourage the development of a culture of continuous professional improvement that includes classroom-based learning, mentoring and coaching arrangements.

Findings
- The college is building a professional learning community, as evidenced by the establishment of PLTs; the enacting of annual professional development plans for teachers; and opportunities for staff to participate in college-based and external professional learning.

- Expectations of professional learning are articulated in the Staff Handbook. A professional learning schedule for staff meetings is evident.

- The approach to PLTs has evolved since their inception in 2017. The model is underpinned by a research base and built around a central idea of teacher efficacy. In 2019, teams are focusing on the importance of providing explicit and timely feedback to students about their learning.

- Teachers report that the current approach to PLTs is providing them with opportunities to work closely with colleagues on a common goal for improvement. Teams are encouraged to present their findings to colleagues.

- Teachers speak of the feedback on their practice that is provided through regular student surveys.

- Discussions about classroom practice occurs informally and frequently between colleagues and their faculty leaders. Formalised processes for classroom observation, feedback and aligned coaching models are not yet evident.

- Staff members are encouraged to participate in formal study and certification. Opportunities also exist for staff to take on acting leadership roles.

- Teachers new to the college and/or new educators express their appreciation for the way in which their faculty leaders and colleagues support them. Leaders are currently exploring ways in which more formalised induction processes can complement the support received within faculties.

- Annually, all teachers develop personal professional development plans with their faculty leaders who support them in setting goals. Teachers reported that they find these conversations valuable.

- Leaders are recruiting strategically to maintain expertise across the curriculum.

NSIT Domain 6: Systematic curriculum delivery

Domain descriptor

The school has a coherent, sequenced plan for curriculum delivery that ensures consistent teaching and learning expectations and a clear reference for monitoring learning across the year levels. The plan, within which evidence-based teaching practices are embedded, and to which assessment and reporting procedures are aligned, has been developed with reference to the Australian Curriculum or other approved curriculum and refined collaboratively to provide a shared vision for curriculum practice. This plan is shared with parents and families.

Findings

- The college is delivering a curriculum plan approved by the Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS). The curriculum program provides a wide range of tertiary, accredited and Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses. These courses are delivered in single year cohorts, mixed, or simultaneously, and this flexibility enables maximisation of choices for students.

- In all faculties teachers have collaboratively developed (or are currently developing) 'Programs of Learning'. These planning documents provide a rationale for the course, articulate the outcomes to be achieved, and include a week-by-week overview to support consistency in curriculum delivery.

- A range of strategies support families in making decisions about their program of study from year 10. These include information nights, a curriculum handbook, individual pathway meetings, and ongoing support from members of the student services team. Parents expressed their appreciation for the way in which the college supported their children's transition from high school.

- Flexible VET opportunities are delivered through the Belconnen Registered Training Organisation (RTO). Students can access a range of Certificate I and II courses. Apprenticeships (ASBA) and traineeships with external providers are also available. Students are encouraged to participate in work experience (WEX).

- An academic skills handbook supports student to understand and apply key academic skills (for example, researching and referencing).

- Internal and external moderation processes occur in line with BSSS requirements. A number of teachers also participate as subject group leaders and course writers.

- The General Capabilities and Cross Curriculum Priorities have some visibility in curriculum planning documentation, although a school-wide approach to embedding these is not yet evident.

- Leaders have engaged in professional learning about cultural integrity to support them in learning how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and cultures are recognised and celebrated.

- Students expressed to the review team that, in many cases, teachers provide comprehensive support materials in their Google Classrooms. Some teachers also provide additional tuition and support which assists students to revise and catch up.

- Students with additional learning needs are supported to access the curriculum and teachers make considered adjustments to enable them to participate fully.

NSIT Domain 7: Differentiated teaching and learning

Domain descriptor

The school places a high priority on ensuring that, in their day-to-day teaching, classroom teachers identify and address the learning needs of individual students, including high-achieving students. Teachers are encouraged and supported to monitor closely the progress of individuals, identify learning difficulties and tailor classroom activities to levels of readiness and need.

Findings

- A range of curriculum offerings provide opportunities for tailored learning programs.

- Students can access extension programs through local universities.

- Some teachers provide students with agency to shape their experiences and assessment.

- The use of formative assessment to check regularly for understanding has been an area of focus and some teachers described the range of strategies they employ to monitor learning. Specific mention of formative assessment is made in the Programs of Learning templates.

- Differentiated teaching and learning is not consistently understood and applied across the college, although there are pockets of responsive teaching aligned to student need.

- There is evidence of some faculties developing their own diagnostic tests that students complete on enrolment. This data guides teachers in refining curriculum programs according to student prior knowledge.

- Some faculties are refining their assessment practices to introduce multiple ways for students to demonstrate their understanding of concepts. Some tasks include additional scaffolding and are implemented in a way that is improving timely submission and outcomes.

- Assessment feedback and semester reports provide explicit advice to students on how they can improve.

- ILPs are readily available and most teachers were aware of students who may require some adjustments and could describe how they are supporting their individual needs.

- Reports include individualised feedback directly targeted to students and include suggestions for how they can improve.

NSIT Domain 8: Effective pedagogical practices

Domain descriptor
The school principal and other school leaders recognise that highly effective teaching is the key to improving student learning throughout the school. They take a strong leadership role, encouraging the use of research-based teaching practices in all classrooms to ensure that every student is engaged, challenged and learning successfully. All teachers understand and use effective teaching methods – including explicit instruction – to maximise student learning.

Findings
- Leaders have engaged teachers in discussions about evidence-based teaching practices at staff meetings. One presentation centred on research about making learning visible and this has resulted in PLTs focusing their attention on how feedback is provided to students.

- Leaders have also discussed possible approaches to the development of a pedagogical model that would best suit the needs of learners but do not yet have a clear and well-known position on the kinds of teaching practices they wish to see occurring.

- PLTs have undertaken action research projects to reflect on how feedback to students is impacting on their learning.

- The college hosts a number of pre-service teachers as part of its partnership with the University of Canberra. A range of experienced teachers mentor these university students, which generates regular discussion about teaching practices.

- In the main, teachers are located in staffrooms with colleagues from related teaching areas. Many teachers reported to reviewers that this supports them in working collaboratively, sharing and reflecting on effective teaching practices. Regular faculty team meetings also provide opportunities for discussions about pedagogical practice.

- Some students reported that lessons are engaging and interesting when linked to real life contexts or when it allows them to pursue areas of personal interest. Students also reported that whole-class instruction is the predominant approach in many of their classes.

- Unit outlines provide students with clarity about course requirements.

- Students indicated that they often receive timely and detailed feedback about their learning, although there is some variability across subjects.

NSIT Domain 9: School-community partnerships

Domain descriptor

The school actively seeks ways to enhance student learning and wellbeing by partnering with parents and families, other education and training institutions, local businesses and community organisations. Parents and families are recognised as integral members of the school community and partners in their children's education. Partnerships are strategically established to address identified student needs and operate by providing access to experiences, support and intellectual and/or physical resources not available within the school. All partners are committed to the common purposes and goals of partnership activities. Procedures are in place to ensure effective communications and to monitor and evaluate the intended impacts of the school's partnerships.

Findings

- Leaders have deliberately sought partnerships of significance to provide a range of student experiences and opportunities. Noted partnerships include those with the University of Canberra, the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS), and Scouts Australia.

- As partnering arrangements have evolved, the college has been able to respond and, in some cases, seek out new partners to support students and college priorities.

- The partnership with the University of Canberra provides access for college staff (and students) to researchers, lecturers and facilities. There is considerable evidence of mutual benefit in this partnership.

- The college enjoys a long-standing reputation for supporting elite athletes who are attached to squads at the AIS. Many of these students are living away from home, and are aspiring to scholarship places overseas once they complete school. AIS and the college work seamlessly to support these athletes.

- The flagship Outdoor Leadership Mentor Program is conducted in partnership with Scouts Australia. The arrangement is building the capacity of teachers across the ACT education system.

- As a member of the Belconnen Training Registered Training Organisation (RTO) the college is partnered with various local industries and employers for the placement of students in the workplace.

- Students connect internationally through the Global Classroom program. They participate in research tasks linked to an annual theme. This program has been active for many years and the community hold it in high regard.

- Members of the alumni community volunteer their time and skills for current students.

- Strong connections with the Belconnen network of primary and high schools are evident. This provides younger students and their families with access to teachers and facilities. An example of this is the science project designed to encourage a love of the sciences.

- Many partnerships are regularly reviewed through ongoing conversation and communication. Formal evaluation processes are not evident for all.

Commendations

- University of Canberra Senior Secondary College Lake Ginninderra is to be commended for its rich and sophisticated partnering with external organisations, which provide quality opportunities for students. A range of long-standing high impact partnerships, which are of mutual benefit, underpin the positive relationship enjoyed by the college in its community and beyond.

- Significant investment has been made in support of student wellbeing. Comprehensive monitoring processes ensure that the needs of students are known and closely monitored. The college is recognised in the community for the way in which it cares for students.

- Individual talents and aspirations are nurtured and supported across a wide range of interest areas. Students can pursue excellence in their chosen field and their achievements are acknowledged and celebrated.

- The college actively seeks to provide flexible curriculum delivery options for learners who may need to be off-site to pursue their field of specialisation.

- Students take an active part in college life, as evidenced by their involvement in a range of interest-based groups. Students are commended for their initiatives in promoting an environmentally friendly school and the way in which groups support peers. Students and staff speak of a welcoming and inclusive school culture where diversity is valued and celebrated.

- Genuine and nurturing relationships are apparent, and students speak of the way in which teachers respect and value them as young adults.

- The college's ongoing commitment to mentoring pre-service teachers is commendable.

Affirmations

- The college investment in developing a sustainable professional learning community is beginning to pay dividends. Staff are investing in the PLT model as it provides the opportunity to engage in professional dialogue with their colleagues.

- The college is an integral part of the educational community in Belconnen. Opportunities are regularly provided to primary and high school students to participate in a range of enrichment and transition activities.

- Students with additional needs are provided with support in student-centred learning environments. Students and parents who access these services speak of how well their needs are being met.

- The commitment to seek feedback from students about their learning through unit surveys is an example of valuing student voice in learning.

- The college has implemented an evidence-based social and emotional learning program as part of the way in which students' wellbeing is supported.

- There are examples of teams of teachers identifying the particular outcomes they wish to achieve, using data to set targets for improvement, and enacting strategies with precision that have resulted in achieving targets.

- Teachers work collaboratively and speak of how they value the collegiality.

Recommendations

- Collaboratively develop an explicit improvement plan which focuses the whole college's attention on the specific improvements sought in student learning and wellbeing. Ensure that targets set are well defined, time bound and measurable. Implement processes of support and accountability to drive this agenda.

- Establish consistent routines that enable the systematic analysis and discussion of overall college performance as well as the performance of identified priority groups, cohorts, classes, and growth over time for individual students.

- Continue to support teachers to tailor their teaching to student needs and readiness; this will be informed by a range of purposeful learner data.

- Develop a comprehensive and systematic approach to classroom observations, induction, feedback, mentoring and coaching of staff. Continue to build a professional learning community characterised by opportunities for teachers to work together and learn from each other's practice.

- Develop an explicit and agreed position on the research-based teaching practices expected at the college.

- Review policies and procedures across the college to ensure that there are consistently high expectations for all learners.