



ACT
Government
Education

Melrose High School

Report of Review, 2023

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Publication and independent Review Team details

Date of School Review: 8, 9, 10 and 11 May 2023

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National School Improvement Tool Review Report prepared by:

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Report of Review, 2023 prepared by:

ACT Government Education Directorate
Education Services Division, School Improvement Branch

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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 support annual implementation of a school's 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.

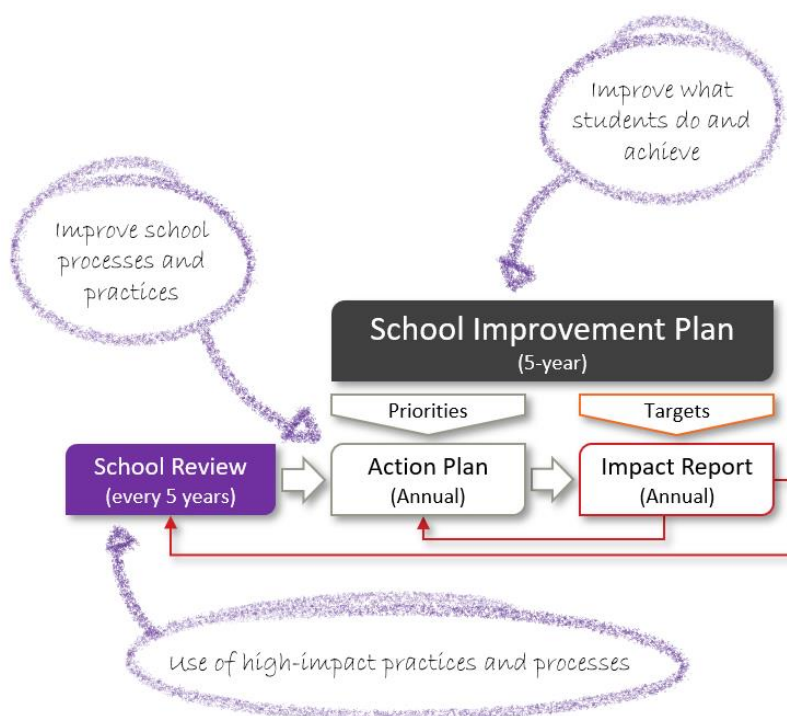
Following Review, the school receives a planning report, which is used as an internal working document, outlining key findings and recommended strategies for continued school improvement. The Education Directorate uses this planning report as a basis for the final *Report of Review* provided to school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

The *Report of Review* includes detailed findings for each of the nine Domains of the National

School Improvement Tool, as well as Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations for continued school improvement.

Where does Review sit within the 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. Additionally, schools are provided differentiated support and feedback by internal and external experts. School Review is one way that this differentiated feedback is provided and typically occurs at the end of the 5-year school improvement cycle.



What are Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations?

Commendations

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

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

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 effectively implementing its 5-year School 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

- The principal and school leaders articulate their commitment to improving the learning outcomes for all students and the school communicates that it expects all students to learn successfully and to attain high levels of attendance and engagement.
- The Melrose High School (MHS) 2019-2023 Improvement Plan guides the direction the school is taking. It states the school's vision as being "a place of learning supported by safe and respectful behaviours" and their mission to "deliver and develop educational services through explicit instruction so students can build foundation skills" by "providing inquiry-based learning so students can develop their 21st Century skills". The three priorities identified are: to increase growth in writing skills of students; to increase growth in numeracy of students; and that students are engaged in a positive and respectful learning culture. Targets are established for these priorities.
- The Action Plan 2022 has the same three priorities as the MHS 2019- 2023 Improvement Plan. The action plan outlines what the expected impact on learning will be, what will be produced, who will lead the strategy, and what resources will be allocated. Explicit school-wide targets are yet to be identified.
- All faculties have their action plans in place which describe faculty-identified priority areas and strategies for addressing these.
- The Impact Report 2022 details progress made during the year to meet the school's five-yearly targets. It also outlines future directions based on this data.
- School surveys indicate varying levels of agreement with the expectation that students are expected to do their best. These show agreement levels of parents 80%, staff 89% and students 69%. Leaders and teachers articulate this expectation clearly to students.
- Most school staff members expressed a desire to improve the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school.
- Staff members interviewed from across all faculties confirm their commitment to, and involvement in, strategies designed to improve writing, a priority within the school.

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

- Melrose High School (MHS) has developed school documents which outline the systematic collection of student outcome data. The MHS Data Plan 2019-2023 lists commercial and teacher/school constructed tests, assessments, surveys, and observations used within the school. The universal assessment schedule within the data plan outlines school assessments, when they are to be conducted, and where the data collected from these assessments are stored.
- The MHS student data spreadsheet contains each student's data to give a total representation of all student performance. The school is currently working on this document to make it more user friendly and to broaden its purpose.
- Data analysis of system- and school-implemented assessments is conducted by the data team. This analysis is then disseminated to the staff and the wider school community. Professional learning to improve data literacy is ongoing for the staff. School performance and wellbeing data are regularly discussed at staff meetings.
- Members of the school leadership team express their desire to use current school-collected data to investigate reasons why their National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and Progressive Achievement Test (PAT) results are inconsistent between year cohorts and why MHS struggles to meet the performance of like schools.
- The school has implemented the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) program. Under this program, student wellbeing and behaviour data are collected and analysed to give the school information about individual student wellbeing as well as sub-group, cohort, and whole-school wellbeing and behaviour trends. These data, together with attendance, discipline, and other behaviour data are used to guide school decision-making in terms of individual student needs and whole-school policy and program development.
- Tier 2 testing includes the Test of Word Reading Efficiency¹ (TOWRE), the York Assessment of Reading Comprehension², and Macquarie Literacy Program (MacqLit) and is conducted to identify students with special needs and what those needs may be.
- Discussion with school leaders confirms that some staff members are using data to identify starting points for learning and gaps in the teaching and learning program. Surveys of staff, parents, and students are regularly conducted and used as a source of

¹ The Test of Word Reading Efficiency is a measure of an individual's accuracy and fluency regarding two efficiencies: Sight Word Efficiency (SWE) and Phonemic Decoding Efficiency (PDE). For more information, visit: <https://www.pearsonclinical.com.au>

² The York Assessment of Reading Comprehension enables teachers and specialists to assess the reading comprehension skills of children ages 5 to 18 years. See: <https://paa.com.au/product/yarc-australian>

information to guide school policy and program development.

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

- School survey data confirms that the school has high expectations that all students will learn successfully and always perform to their best. These expectations are conveyed to the staff at the beginning of each year.
- The PBL program, linked to the Melrose values points and house points program, is credited by staff members for improving both student behaviour and students' sense of belonging to the school. This program outlines clear strategies to promote appropriate behaviour and includes agreed-to responses and consequences for inappropriate behaviour. As part of the PBL program, the school has developed a behaviour flowchart which outlines the procedures teachers, the executive team, and the engagement team follow.
- The MHS Behaviour Expectations Matrix identifies expected behaviours for students in all areas of the school in respect to what they need to do to be safe, respectful learners.
- School surveys indicate a belief in the school community that the school's physical environment needs improving. School leaders acknowledge this, and measures are already in place to improve the school environment, including improvements to the library, quiet spaces in student engagement areas, and the development of an outdoor physical education space.
- MHS has prioritised the formation of a student engagement team to oversee student welfare within the school. This team reports that there have been ongoing issues with poor engagement with some students since the COVID pandemic and the team has implemented programs to support these students.
- Parent and student surveys identify student safety at school as an issue for some students. The student engagement team believes that these data were attributable to the behaviour of a small number of students who are now being case managed. School behaviour statistics show that the situation has improved.
- A peer support program is implemented where all year 10 students are trained to mentor year 7 students using Peer Support Australia as a scaffold for the program. Many staff members express a belief that this program has assisted in improving the sense of belonging of students to the school.
- Discussion with students confirms that there is a strong student voice. Examples include strong roles of student leaders and a student School Board chair.
- A Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) scope and sequence has been developed to outline topics to be covered for each year level for each term and SEL has been timetabled for all students. Feedback from some staff and students indicates that this program needs to be implemented more consistently.

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 Continuum of Education Support Interventions Checklist and Action Sheet is used to identify and record the application of resources targeted to meet student needs.
- The student engagement team is well resourced and has flexible structures and practices in place to enable responses to individual student needs, including small group interventions and individual case management.
- The assessment schedule provides data to support and guide staff in systematically identifying and addressing student learning needs and interventions. The range of programs available to provide additional support to students is valued by the community, including teachers, parents, and student leaders.
- A full-time careers transition officer has been employed to facilitate work experience placements and Australian School Based Apprenticeships (ASBAs). Students, parents, and staff members identify that the work of the transition officer and the programs facilitated are beneficial and have positive impact.
- The leadership organisational chart confirms the school has prioritised meeting the needs of individual students and student wellbeing by allocating a deputy principal to manage this as a major part of their responsibilities.
- The leadership structure is set up to ensure the staff has ready access to support, with staff members reporting that the executive staff are available for support as needed.
- Whole school roles, responsibilities, and allowances are clearly documented including year coordinators, case managers, and the Disability Education Coordinator (DECO).
- The school has budgeted for the improvement of facilities (library upgrade and furniture, quiet spaces in student engagement areas, and outdoor physical education space) and students report having access to resources in a range of subject areas. The school has budgeted for more improvements.

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

- A suite of observation templates, including a clinical observations template, has been provided for staff members to select what best suits their current needs for feedback on classroom practice. This has replaced quality teaching rounds.
- Faculty observations undertaken by the executive staff occur for some staff members including a mixture of formal and informal observations.
- Positive Behaviours for Learning (PBL) classroom relationships and PBL language are a focus, and informal peer observations take place for some staff to receive feedback.
- The executive undertakes teacher performance and development meetings with all staff members. Reference is made to the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) teaching standards, school improvement agenda, and observations.
- Executive staff members are supported in their development through professional learning in areas such as conducting difficult conversations, building a collaborative team through the Herrman Brain Dominance Instrument profiling³ and in Growth Coaching⁴.
- The school has prioritised the retainment and development of new staff by appointing a teacher to oversee the induction of new educators and to ensure they have mentors allocated. The new educators articulate that these actions have been well received, with most especially liking fortnightly meetings.
- In response to feedback from the school satisfaction survey data, supervising staff meet with teachers fortnightly and executive team members weekly for one-on-one coaching conversations regarding teaching and learning, general wellbeing, support, and workload issues. This takes the form of an informal check-in. Some staff members express a desire to formalise this process with a template to structure these discussions.
- A formal induction session led by executive leaders took place on Day 0 for all staff and outlined school expectations, processes, and policies.
- A student engagement support pack gives staff members a range of support documents for use within the school, including behaviour flowcharts and referral processes for students.

³ The Herrman Brain Dominance Instrument profiling tool identifies an individual's preferred approach to emotional, analytical, structural, and strategic thinking. It teaches how to use 'whole brain thinking' to build alignment, engagement, and agility across an organisation. It is useful for teambuilding. See: <https://herrmann.com.au/hbdi/>

⁴ Growth Coaching International is an Australian-initiated program aimed at developing coaching skills in educational leaders to better benefit learners, educators, and leaders. See: <https://www.growthcoaching.com.au/>

- Since 2019, Professional Learning Communities (PLC), with an action research approach, have focused on cultural integrity, data collection and use, PBL, and writing. In 2023, this focus has moved to faculty-based PLCs with a student-centred learning approach. Staff members identify that they contribute to, and value, their faculty PLCs.

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

- MHS uses the Australian Curriculum as a basis for all courses and acknowledges that the move to Version 9 will require some changes to course documents. Staff members are working collaboratively in curriculum planning particularly in the planning of learning activities.
- The school has developed a range of documents to support staff in planning courses of study and for students and parents to understand course requirements. These include:
 - > Course outlines that include an overview, content, general capabilities (from the Australian Curriculum), cross-curriculum priorities, achievement standards, assessment plan and requirements, and materials required for the course.
 - > Scope and sequence documents that outline yearly overviews of topics in each term for each year level.
 - > MHS unit planners that describe a weekly outline of what will be taught in each course.
- Developing Written Language at MHS describes the reasons for prioritising writing at the school. This writing priority is evident in planning documents and practices throughout most faculties.
- Assessment templates align with planning documents and the Sentral Markbook⁵ records. This provides transparency and a clear link for assessment and reporting purposes.
- An executive teacher oversees cultural integrity and leads collaboration and planning to embed this learning. NAIDOC Week offers a well-documented variety of activities and external community resources used to promote cultural integrity. Parents, students, and staff members report strong, trusting relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait families. Staff members have their own personal acknowledgement of country to use as required.
- Other cultures are acknowledged and celebrated at the school through multi-cultural day performances and embassy links.
- Executive leaders articulate that the school recognises the changing demographic and cultural profile and the need to support, develop, and acknowledge the needs of all groups.

⁵ The Sentral Markbook is an online program that allows for cohort assessment through tasks, calculations and rubrics to align with learning outcomes and aggregate data. Teachers can evaluate work of evidence-based student learning. For further information, see: <https://www.sentral.com.au/>

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

- MHS teachers consult with parents and with students to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to meet the needs of students with disabilities, including through the development of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs). The school has developed a clear, documented process for identifying students requiring ILPs and for the development and monitoring of these plans.
- MHS uses MacqLit (an explicit systematic reading intervention program) as a Tier 2 Program to support students with identified needs under their Multi-Tiered Systems of Support⁶ (MTSS) framework.
- The MHS student engagement team has developed the Variation to Learning Spreadsheet which identifies students that require differentiation and classroom adjustments.
- Tailored and sustained interventions are in place for students identified as requiring additional support. Individual student needs are identified and supports are actioned through the Educational Supports Checklist and action sheets.
- The school uses a range of differentiated programs, including equine therapy and mindfulness yoga to support students with anxiety and class attendance issues.
- The Big Picture Program has been established over several years at the school as a differentiated approach for students and families seeking an alternative to traditional schooling. This program provides for students to learn in a more student-centred approach using scaffolds around their area of interest and passion as well as assessment by exhibition.
- In 2023, a case management approach has been implemented to support students with complex needs and utilises a staff mentor to support these students.
- The student services framework outlines the roles, responsibilities, and processes of the student services team.
- Communication with parents and families provides information about where students are in their learning, what progress they have made, and what they can do to support their child's further learning. A parent communication schedule, shared with the community, outlines when and what information will be shared.
- Students with aptitude and interest in particular subjects can apply for entry to extension classes known as Academic Curriculum Enrichment (ACE). ACE is offered in the learning areas of mathematics, English, science, history and social sciences, woodwork, music, dance, art, and drama.

⁶ A Multi-Tiered Systems of Support is a systematic, continuous, improvement framework that focuses on the positive educational experiences and outcomes of all students. Under MTSS, continuous data-based problem-solving and decision making is practised across all levels of the school system.

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

- Melrose High School has developed a pedagogical framework to guide the teaching and learning in classrooms across the school. These are based on the six High Impact Teaching Strategies (HITS) of: planning for student-centred learning; high expectations; aligning of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment; evidenced-based decision making; targeted, explicit and scaffolded instruction; and safe, supportive connected and inclusive learning environment.
- Melrose High School has also developed a toolbox of templates and strategies (writing scaffolds, assessment tools) for staff, students, and parents to access support for student learning.
- A range of lesson plan templates are used by teachers to guide the contents of each lesson. This includes learning intentions, success criteria, and explicit teaching.
- The school leadership team keeps abreast of effective pedagogical practices and has used the enabling pedagogies professional learning provided to all staff at induction and through faculty professional learning communities.
- Recently there has been a shift from committees to faculty-based PLCs. The faculties have now developed their own faculty action plans with key priorities aligned to the school's goals and pedagogical framework.
- The staff has placed an emphasis on the literacy priority particularly in the use of glossaries and metalanguage, articulated through the faculty action plans.
- School leaders provide most teachers with ongoing feedback on their classroom practices through formal and informal observations and regular individual meetings and check-ins.
- The school is working towards the development of a consistent model and documentation of agreed pedagogical practices.
- In addition to having system endorsed plans and mentoring arrangements, new staff members hold regular scheduled meetings to share their ideas, senior teachers and other staff members provide professional learning on teaching strategies, and collegial support is gained from one another.

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

- Melrose High School has several formal and informal partnerships that support the academic and wellbeing needs of students.
- There are formal Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with two sister schools in Japan and Taiwan and informal partnerships with the national bodies (embassies, offices, and societies) of Japan, Taiwan, Indonesia, and France. These support school language programs and provide opportunities for students to experience international travel and contact with students from overseas and thus improve language development. While these programs have been interrupted during COVID, digital and other means of communication between students and school leaders have persisted and there are plans to reintroduce direct contact in the future.
- The school's international partnerships have existed for a long period of time, are sustainable, and have become an accepted part of the culture of the school community and partner organisations.
- There is a formal third-party agreement between Melrose High School and The Smith Family to provide the Learning for Life program which is designed to meet the academic and financial needs of families. It also provides a financial literacy program for year 10 students.
- Melrose High School has partnered with the Lions Club Canberra City for support. This includes providing breakfast in their breakfast club, financial assistance, and opportunities for students to be involved with public speaking at a range of levels.
- While there is not a Parents & Citizens Association at Melrose High School, there are several ways families are invited to engage with the school through academic achievement celebrations, information evenings, parent/teacher evenings, and transition visits. During COVID, the school engaged with families through online platforms such as Webinars and the Happy Families website to provide opportunities to improve student connectedness and wellbeing.
- MHS has a relationship with the local senior secondary college, Canberra College, through transition programs and links with specialist areas in visual arts and technology. The school also has an ongoing relationship with the Canberra College Registered Training Organisation (RTO) supporting vocational education and training and certification in hospitality.
- Melrose High School has partnerships with local primary schools through hosting Thinking Carnivals for year 5 and 6 students, come and try days, transition visits, and through MHS students assisting with these schools' sports carnivals.

Commendations

Melrose High School is commended for:

- Developing a strategic approach to school documentation.
- Encouraging a commitment from all faculties to be strategically involved in contributing to the priority of writing in the school improvement planning process. Each faculty has developed strategies to support this school priority.
- Developing its own MHS student data spreadsheet where student performance and wellbeing information is stored and available to all staff.
- Fostering caring and respectful relationships between staff and students.
- Developing a strong student voice within the school.
- Clearly documenting processes for the identification of students with a variety of needs and for implementing programs and processes to support these children.
- Developing high quality school documentation outlining the school curriculum and its alignment, which is shared with the school community.
- Prioritising the need for meeting the requirements of individual students and general student health and wellbeing by allocating a major part of the responsibilities of one of the two deputy principals to this.
- Resourcing the student engagement team and ensuring it is able to oversee processes to identify students with complex needs and working with the staff to support these students.
- Implementing innovative programs which engage students who have had challenges participating in regular school programs, for example, equine therapy, mindfulness yoga, and a culture and connection program.
- Embedding and resourcing alternative schooling through the Big Picture Program.
- Developing a range of formal and informal partnerships with the wider community to enhance learning opportunities for students.

Affirmations

Melrose High School is affirmed for:

- Planning and delivering professional learning to support staff to differentiate lessons for the varying ability groups within the usual classrooms.
- Developing data collection documents which inform the school community about what data are to be collected and when, who is responsible for collection of the data, and where it will be stored.
- Prioritising the provision of professional learning to develop the data literacy within the school.
- Providing staff opportunities in taking leading roles and responsibilities.
- Effectively using school survey data to inform decisions within the school.
- Modifying the purpose of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) so that they have a

focus on student learning and are aligned with the school improvement program.

- Managing the individual cases of students with complex needs.
- Implementing the PBL program to guide the school community to develop a positive safe, respectful learning culture.
- Implementing a social and emotional learning program.
- Developing and utilizing the behaviour expectations matrix and behaviour flowcharts which outline the process for managing student behaviour.
- Engendering a collaborative staff that displays high levels of supportiveness.

Recommendations

- Develop explicit and narrow targets to focus school teaching and learning on specific identified gaps in student learning.
- Formalise a whole-school professional learning plan that:
 - > aligns with the school's improvement agenda and focuses on individual staff performance enhancement including through observation, feedback, mentoring, and coaching
 - > references the implementation of agreed and explicit evidence-based teaching and learning strategies across the school
 - > references the relevant professional standards for staff.
- Clarify, establish, and document an explicit and agreed position on the research-based teaching practices that:
 - > is evident in every classroom
 - > supports teachers in their understanding and implementation of effective teaching methods subscribed to by the school
 - > ensures that there is consistency of practice evident in every classroom.