Applecross Senior High School

2014

Independent Review Findings

Independent Review of Independent Public Schools
Disclaimer

This document reports the findings of the Department of Education Services’ review and verification of the school’s self-review. The school’s self-review has been complemented by information provided by the Department of Education, the School Curriculum and Standards Authority and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

The findings of the independent review are forwarded to the School Principal, the Board Chair, the Director General of Education and the Minister for Education.

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School and Review Details

Principal: Ms Glenys Campbell
Board Chair: Mr Digby DeBruin
School Location: Links Road, Ardross WA 6153
School Classification: SHS Class 6A
Number of Students: 1198
Reviewers: Mr David Carvosso and Mr Gerry Chapman
Review Dates: 12, 19 and 20 March 2014

Purpose of the Review

The purpose of the independent review is to provide assurance to the school and its community, the Director General of Education and the Minister for Education on the extent to which the school has met its commitments as outlined in its Delivery and Performance Agreement (DPA) and associated Business Plan. Additionally, the findings inform school improvement.

The focus of the review is on:

- how well the school has implemented self-review
- how well the school has improved student learning (achievement, progress and engagement) for all students
- how well the school has created an environment that promotes learning and student wellbeing
- how well the school is placed to sustain and improve its performance.
Review Methodology

The school has been required, under the DPA, to undertake annual self-assessments of its performance. The outcome of these assessments formed the basis for the school's self-review which was presented to the reviewers at the commencement of the review.

Prior to the presentation of the school's self-review conclusions, reviewers were provided with information on the school's achievements, its processes and its student performance data from a number of sources which included:

- the My School® website
- the Department of Education School Performance Monitoring System
- Schools Online reports
- School Curriculum and Standards Authority Year 12 Student Achievement data.

Department of Education Services reviewers met with the Principal and the Board Chair on day one to determine the school's conclusions from its self-review. Subsequently, reviewers analysed the evidence presented in the school's self-review documentation and developed lines of inquiry where further verification was required.

An agenda for days two and three was then negotiated with the school to enable the gathering of evidence to verify claims made by the school. During these two days the reviewers sourced evidence to support the school's self-review claims through observation and discussion with teaching and support staff, board members, parents and students.

The evidence provided by the school, along with information gathered by the reviewers prior to and during the review visits, was used as the basis for the verification of how well the school has met its commitments as outlined in the DPA and Business Plan.

This document reports on the findings of the independent review.
School Context

What are the important features of this school’s context that have an impact on student learning?

Applecross Senior High School, established in 1958, and located 8km south of the city of Perth, embraces a tradition of excellence and maintains a reputation for high academic, cultural and sporting achievements for 1200 secondary students from Years 8 to 12. The school’s Business Plan makes clear links between the school’s vision, goals and priorities with a focus on improvement in student achievement, wellbeing and opportunity for engagement.

Currently, the school is undergoing a major $56m redevelopment building program. During 2013, the new Visual Arts block and south wing was completed and throughout 2014/15 work is continuing on the refurbishment of the original school buildings. The project has necessitated the use of additional temporary accommodation onsite. The building program is causing ongoing technical difficulties with ICT and communication across the school. Preparation for the Year 7 intake in 2015 is on schedule. The redevelopment will have significant long-term benefits for student learning, providing a new and contemporary learning environment. The school leadership team and staff are commended for their professionalism in ensuring high-quality educational outcomes for students during the period of the building program.

Students at Applecross Senior High School come from a diverse range of backgrounds. Thirty-nine per cent of students are born overseas, predominately in Asian countries, with 54 different languages spoken by students. English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) is resourced with two specialist teachers. The school has an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) of 1114 placing it in the first decile, a student transiency rate of 8.7% and a high student attendance rate of 97%. During 2013, the school accommodated 23 international fee-paying students which added additional diversity to the multicultural blend.

The school has a gifted and talented student intake through its Visual Arts program, specialist tennis program and is a language hub for Japanese and French.

Exchange programs with schools in Japan and France complement the teaching programs. Engagement with a number of sustainability projects
provides partnerships and links to the wider community and universities. These programs have the goal of broadening student involvement as well as improving student learning.

The school's Workforce Plan addresses future needs by identifying key focus areas within which strategies to improve the capacity of teaching and support staff are detailed with the explicit target of improving student learning. The staff is experienced with 32% over the age of 55 and a 2:1 female to male staff ratio. This includes nine Level 3 classroom teachers (plus two teachers currently progressing Level 3 teacher applications) and 47 senior teachers. Independent Public School staffing flexibilities and links to the university teaching faculties have enabled the school to select quality graduates, 10 of whom have achieved full registration.
The School's Self-Review Process

How effective was the school's self-review in accounting for its performance during the period of the DPA and Business Plan?

The Applecross Senior High School Business Plan 2012–2015 identifies seven primary targets for student achievement and three main priorities for school improvement. The school has conducted a rigorous review of the seven targets and the three priorities. The priority areas are consistent with the school’s ethos and are aligned to community and system directions. While the school’s Business Plan covers a period of four years, it is noted that the DPA requires the Business Plan to have the same time span as the DPA, a period of three years. In the next planning cycle it is recommended the duration of the Business Plan be aligned with that of the DPA.

The school’s self-review analysis examines the extent to which each of the targets has been achieved. The targets are quantitatively measurable and focused on percentage increments in student achievement. Benchmark (target) data is compared with performance (achievement) data to ascertain levels of improvement. A number of targets have been modified to provide more meaningful data and to more accurately reflect student achievement. Commentary in the analysis outlines the extent to which the targets have been achieved and in most instances alludes to future actions and follow-up strategies.

The priority areas have identified targets, benchmarks and performance outcomes with commentary on effectiveness and future directions. A number of the self-review comments/recommendations could be more specific about future actions and strategies with a view to setting more specific future targets.

Surveys are used strategically to inform planning and target setting.

Learning-area planning, implementation and review are closely aligned to and consistent with whole-school processes, comprehensive and reflective of specific targets for student improvement.

There is clear evidence of systematic collection and analysis of data across all levels of school operations. The school’s self-review processes are incorporated into the Business Plan and embedded in operational planning at the learning and program area levels.
Self-review data provided through the independent review process was comprehensive, systematic and derived from a broad and appropriate range of sources and stakeholders.

The school staff is commended on the thorough embedding of school self-review as an ongoing process for school improvement.
School Performance—Student Learning

_How well has the school performed in improving learning (achievement, progress and engagement) for all students?_

The school's self-review, together with verification of the analysis of the data by the reviewers, indicates the school has achieved, or is well on its way to achieving its student improvement targets. Each of the seven targets is set out below with the verified findings.

_To increase the overall student progress in Year 9 NAPLAN tests so that students are achieving at or above the expected level._

The school has improved its performance in all NAPLAN areas since 2012. Historically, the school has consistently performed above State averages but below like-schools; however, recent 2013 Year 9 NAPLAN data indicates the school is currently performing equal to or above like-schools in all aspects of literacy and numeracy. The school attributes the improvement to teachers having improved confidence in accessing data to inform their teaching and to the embedded, explicit NAPLAN teaching strategies in both literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. It was evident in speaking with heads of learning areas and visiting a number of classrooms that the teaching of the skills, as tested in NAPLAN, was the responsibility of all staff and not the sole responsibility of English and mathematics teachers.

_To increase by 5% the number of Academic Extension students in Years 8 to 10 who achieve a minimum of four 'A' grades per semester inclusive of their Academic Extension course/s._

The school found it difficult to extract the data to substantiate achievement or otherwise of this target. The move to the Australian Curriculum also makes comparative data problematic. Nevertheless, the school has put in place targeted intervention for those students who are just below 'A' level and Academic Extension students who are not achieving at the 'A' level. Evidence compiled by the school indicates that although this target has probably been achieved, the target needs to be reworded to simplify data collection while at the same time maintaining the integrity of the thinking behind it.

Evidence from results in the areas of English, mathematics, science and society and environment from 2013 indicates a generally high percentage of 'A's with a noted increase in 'A's between semester 1 and semester 2 results.
in Years 8 to 10. It was noted by the reviewers that in a number of subjects in each of the three year levels, more than 90% of students were achieving an ‘A’ grade. The reviewers therefore concur with the school’s analysis that this target is problematic and needs to be reconsidered for the next iteration of the Business Plan.

80% of Year 12 Gifted and Talented Visual Art students will score in the “High” or “Excellent” achievement band of Stage 3 Visual Arts and Design courses.

Analysis of the Year 12 data by the school and presented to the reviewers indicates that 79% of students in the visual arts course achieved the target in 2013, compared with 82% in 2012.

The school identified that the same target set for Design was unattainable as this subject attracts a completely different cohort of students. The number of students scoring in the ‘High’ or ‘Excellent’ range has, however, improved from 43% in 2012 to 70% in 2013. The school has planned to address this target in the next Business Plan.

85% of Year 12 Specialist Tennis students will score in the “High” or “Excellent” achievement band of Stage 3 Physical Education Studies—practical examination.

The school identified, post the publication of its Business Plan 2012–2015, that this target was incorrectly phrased. The practical component of examinations is measured as a percentage and the terminology “High” and “Excellent” represents a combination of the practical mark together with the mark achieved in the written examination.

In light of this, the school has adjusted its target to read “85% of Year 12 Specialist Tennis students will score 65%+ on the Stage 3 Physical Education Studies—practical examination”. School data indicates that 80% of the specialist students achieved this revised target in the 2013 WACE examinations, up from 50% in 2012. As a result of the analysis of 2012 data, the school employed a variety of strategies to address the weakness identified and these strategies have resulted in considerable improvement, albeit the target has not quite been met at this point in time. Given the rate of improvement, this target could well be achieved by the end date of the current Business Plan.
To increase to a minimum of 15% the number of Year 12 students who sit a Stage 3 WACE course examination and achieve a scaled score of 75 or more.

The school’s analysis of the data relevant to this target has resulted in some serious thinking about the target itself, course counselling and the aspirations of students and their parents within the school community. Student achievement in the more than 20 subjects offered in Stage 3 WACE improved significantly between 2012 and 2013, even though only seven courses achieved the target in 2013, down from nine courses in 2012. Only one course in 2013 had no students achieve a scaled score of 75 or more compared to six courses in 2012.

The school achieved a median ATAR of 81.6 and nine courses were listed in the published results as one of the top performing schools.

To increase by 5% the number of Vocational Education & Training students who attain a Certificate II or higher by the end of Year 12.

The school has placed considerable emphasis on VET courses to cater for students who do not seek an ATAR. Particular emphasis has been placed on these students gaining their Certificate II or higher by the end of Year 12.

In 2012, 54 students achieved a Certificate II or higher and this was increased to 75 students in 2013.

The school is commended on the strategies it has employed, the effort it has put in and the outcomes it has achieved with this group of students. Applecross Senior High School has demonstrated through commitment and achievement that it is catering for not only ATAR students but has high expectations of those in the VET pathway.

To increase the Year 12 Attainment rate to 90%.

The school achieved an Attainment Rate of 84% in 2012 and this improved to 86% in 2013. In both years the school had a graduation rate of 100%.

Through improved course counselling and the offer of additional Certificate II courses in 2013, the school holds some confidence that it will achieve its 90% target by the 2015 end date of the school’s Business Plan.

In addition to the seven student achievement improvement targets, the 2012–2015 Business Plan details three key priority areas:
• high quality teaching and learning
• collaboration and partnerships
• academic, social and emotional development.

These priority areas are instrumental in supporting and enhancing the improved achievement outcomes:

The school has placed considerable effort into ensuring high-quality teaching and learning that is aligned to the needs of the students. In 2012, 48 teachers completed instructional strategies training and this was expanded in 2013. The program, entitled TOP@AX by the school, involves teacher observation of other teachers in their classrooms. Discussions with staff indicated this program was rated very highly. Although many of the teachers, especially experienced teachers, were initially uncomfortable and unaccustomed to peer observation, the program has been embraced by the majority of staff. Staff commented that they have learnt from their peers and have modified their teaching practice to better meet the range of learning needs of their students.

The school has also embraced the use of ICT with the provision of data projectors in all classrooms, including temporary transportable classrooms during the extensive building program.

A significant number of staff have also embraced the use of CONNECT: an online connection between the student, teacher and parent. All staff have received 1.5 hours of professional learning in the use of CONNECT and although some staff are yet to embrace this technology, others use it extensively. Discussions with students identified how highly they valued this connection with their lessons out of school hours. Parents interviewed also expressed a positive view about CONNECT and the way the school was supporting their child through this technology.

The school has invested considerable resources into ensuring the teaching and learning program is enhanced through strong collaboration and partnerships.

The careers and vocational education coordinators have established strong links with employers and training institutions to cater for the needs of students who are vocationally rather than academically orientated. Students are engaged in a range of traineeships that have been sourced by the school. Students and parents interviewed by the reviewers were praiseworthy of the school’s efforts in providing flexibility to accommodate the different learning
styles of students. In 2013, three students achieved a Diploma, four achieved a Certificate IV, 18 achieved a Certificate III and 18 achieved Certificate II qualifications. In addition, seven students completed traineeships in four different industries. Although the school is generally considered in the community to be an academic school, these numbers are a strong indication that it is catering for the needs of all students.

The school has established strong links with community groups, university academics and organisations to benefit students. These range from participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award through to the engagement of students in environmental projects. As one example: the school has linked into sustainability as one of the aspects of the Australian Curriculum and to this end has established links with rural environmental projects and is growing and experimenting with plants that are salt tolerant.

Applecross Senior High School has demonstrated to the reviewers, as verified in interviews with staff, students and parents, that it is catering for the range of abilities and learning styles of their student cohort. All data indicates an improvement in student outcomes, especially in the past two years, which coincides with the time the school has been an Independent Public School.
School Performance—Quality of the Learning Environment

How well has the school performed in creating an environment that promotes learning and wellbeing for all students and the attainment of the school vision?

The Applecross Senior High School Business Plan outlines a clear link between the school vision, beliefs, values and the school priorities and academic targets which enunciate high expectations for student achievement in specific areas, for key programs, and for improvements in national testing outcomes.

Priority 3 specifically outlines the strategies used to reinforce the school’s culture and values aimed at achieving academic progress and creating a positive learning environment. The school’s self-review demonstrated the extent to which this is being achieved.

School Board minutes demonstrate the Board’s involvement in discussions regarding improvement of school ethos, academic achievement, behaviour and dress code, indicating that the Board is monitoring and contributing to the development of the school’s ethos and culture with a focus on creating a quality learning environment.

Students, parents and classroom teachers were unanimous the school had an inclusive learning environment in which students were valued and supported. Surveys conducted by the school in 2013 confirmed this feedback and provide the school with considerable additional information about levels of parent satisfaction. Accordingly, the school conducted a thorough examination of the data and formulated a series of recommendations to address areas of concern.

Discussions with the literacy coordinator confirmed parent input that students with literacy, EAL/D and special needs are well supported and appropriately resourced. Focus groups in Years 8–10 further provide differentiated curriculum to support these students.

Representatives of the school’s student services team demonstrated that the school has developed a range of strategies to support students at risk. Individual education plans are implemented: year coordinators develop a holistic, individual student perspective to ensure specific student needs are
addressed. The team focuses on monitoring student achievement, early intervention and regular communication with parents.

The school has deployed a wide range of strategies and resources to meet the breadth of student learning needs. Provision for both academic extension and focus classes to meet the specific needs of these groups is evident.

A whole-school and cross-curricular focus on literacy is being systematically implemented to address identified areas from NAPLAN data and this has been supported by the appointment of a literacy coordinator and the establishment of a literacy committee. The literacy committee has volunteers from all learning areas indicating the importance placed by staff on this element of the Business Plan. The literacy coordinator has been skilling teachers to ensure consistency of pedagogy.

The Year 12 “Early Start” and Upper School revision programs provide additional support for students and ensure learning time and opportunity are optimised.

A “High Flyer” strategy is used to extend ATAR students and a flexible learning program provides for students wishing to pursue a combination of WACE and Certificate courses.

Student learning opportunities are further enhanced by a broader range of Vocational Education and Training courses to better meet student learning needs and the school’s focus on technology with laptops and tablets for each student and ICT resourced with considerable technical support.

Staff collaborative structures are established with learning area meetings regularly focused on student performance and pedagogy. Internal moderation processes are a scheduled feature of these meetings and are supported by cross-marking and analysis of common assessment tasks. Heads of learning areas engage staff in thorough data analysis of NAPLAN, WAMSE and WACE results. Teachers use the information to inform, refine and differentiate curriculum delivery.

All teaching staff have completed the Classroom Instructional Strategies professional learning program and many are engaging with the TOP@AX peer observation and mentoring program. The initiative to involve staff in cross-faculty professional learning teams is supporting these processes. This whole-school approach to curriculum improvement, with a strong focus on professional learning, is creating a positive and progressive learning
environment. Collegial discussions around pedagogy and refinement of curriculum provision are common, with professional learning and performance management processes aligned.

Effective and regular email and SMS communication provides parents with progress reports and timely information on pastoral issues. Use of the CONNECT program to provide online access for parents is being implemented. Reporting is via the School Information System (SIS) and parent meetings.

The school partners with primary schools via a “Super Science” program providing science enrichment opportunities for prospective Year 6 students. In addition, the Primary-Secondary teacher network reinforces partnerships with local primary schools and strengthens the transfer of student performance information as part of the school’s transition program.

Students are involved in sustainability/environment projects in the local community with further links to universities and an excursion program involving the planting of seedlings grown by the school.

Career links involving university visits and the Fremantle Public Schools Partnerships program provide additional enrichment opportunities for students.

Student exchange programs to France and Japan complement the school’s language courses and expand the learning environment, providing staff and students with authentic learning opportunities.

The school is commended for the breadth and variety of additional programs provided.
School Performance—Sustainability

*How well placed is the school to sustain and improve its performance into the next planning cycle?*

In documentation received, and in discussions with heads of learning areas, teachers and support staff, the reviewers were impressed with the linkages between the Business Plan and leaning area plans. Each learning area reports and plans in accordance with, and in a style similar to the Business Plan. The embedded knowledge of the Business Plan across the school was impressive. Interviews with teachers verified the way faculty members were individually addressing requirements in the Business Plan.

NAPLAN data is used in many faculties for class organisation purposes and the early identification of students with special needs. For example, mathematics testing is carried out in Year 6 and the results, together with Year 7 NAPLAN data, are used to place students in appropriate pathways for Year 8. Students are not locked into these pathways but are transitioned between pathways according to their ongoing achievement.

The student services team has established partnerships with local intake primary schools and is involved in the network of these primary schools. This has enhanced the flow of information from primary to secondary schooling and was reported anecdotally to the reviewers as very well received by the primary schools.

Just as there has been a change of leadership within the school, there has similarly been a change of leadership on the School Board. Discussions with members indicate that the Board is maturing as the role of the Board is learned and then consolidated into practice. The Board is keen to recruit community members representing business/industry in order to strengthen community ties and gain specific expertise in the various aspects of the Board’s functions.

Currently board members have a two-year term with half stepping down each year. Discussions with the Board Chair and another member of the Board indicated the difficulty in the Board having continuity of understanding with such a short prescribed term of office.

Examination of records of previous Board minutes indicates the Board would benefit from a schedule of review over the calendar year. Although members
indicated school performance data was brought to the Board, evidence for this is generalised in the minutes. There is evidence the Board was provided with and had the opportunity to read the “Student Improvement Achievement Targets (2012) as an example of the school’s self-assessment process”. There is no evidence Board members discussed the school assessment or whether all Board members have the knowledge and skills to make appropriate judgements. There is a need for the Board to have a cycle of review established and where necessary the relevant training for Board members to interpret the student performance information they are given.

The school has experienced two changes of principal since October 2013 due to the retirement of the substantive Principal. This has resulted in the subsequent shuffle of other positions to backfill vacancies created. The reviewers noted, however, that there was a strategic and coordinated approach to the review of student performance embedded in the school’s operations. As previously stated in this report, the reviewers were impressed with the links to the Business Plan by the individual teacher, through the learning area, to the senior executive of the school. It was also noted in discussions with staff that the Business Plan, together with personal professional learning needs of staff, is a focus of the performance management process within the school.

The building program, currently being undertaken, will enhance the physical appearance and functionality of the school. The school is well resourced and has a supportive community as evidenced by the high percentage of voluntary fees and charges that are collected by the school.

The school’s Workforce Plan identifies 32% of staff being over 55 with 10% of teaching staff being over 60. The school has also identified that recruitment of teaching staff in 2014 for 2015 will be critical. The move of Year 7 students into secondary schooling and the subsequent need for additional staff affords the school the opportunity to address some of the issues of age and gender imbalance in its recruitment.

Discussions with a number of teaching and non-teaching staff indicate that the school has developed clear, strategic review mechanisms that should ensure the school can sustain and improve its current performance into the next Business Plan cycle. This review will be enhanced if all Board members are given the training to undertake their role and become an integral and critical part of the review cycle of school performance.
Conclusion

Applecross Senior High School has demonstrated to the reviewers through documentation and interviews with staff, parents and students that it has worked fastidiously to meet the targets set in the school's Business Plan. The improvement in Year 9 NAPLAN results over the last two years indicates the effectiveness of the school's strategy to improve student performance and augurs well for ongoing sustained improvement.

It is recognised that the school has achieved what it set out to achieve in its Business Plan despite changing leadership and the need to work around the disruption an extensive building program generates. The school is confident its performance against the targets and priorities set in the Business Plan will be further enhanced by the time it completes the final review of the current plan.

The success the school can demonstrate is attributable to the commitment of the school leadership and staff, together with the embedding of review processes closely linked to the Business Plan.

Commendations

The reviewers commend the school for excellence in the following areas:

- the professionalism shown by the school leadership team and staff in ensuring high-quality educational outcomes for students, especially during the period of the building program
- the improvement demonstrated in student achievement across all year levels as evidenced in school performance information including NAPLAN and WACE data
- the embedded processes across all learning areas and student services for reviewing achievement against the Business Plan
- the strategies employed, the effort, the high expectations of the students and the outcomes achieved with non-ATAR pathway students in the provision of VET, traineeships and flexible learning programs
- the thorough embedding of school self-review as an ongoing process for school improvement
- the breadth and variety of additional programs provided to supplement the learning environment.
Areas for Improvement

The reviewers identify the following areas for improvement:

- a number of the self-review comments/recommendations need to be more specific in terms of future actions and strategies with a view to setting more specific future targets for improvement and planning
- the School Board investigates the availability of training for all members in order that members are familiar with and confident in their role
- the School Board reviews its processes to further enhance its ability to perform its governance role more effectively.
Declaration

We, the undersigned, hereby confirm that the information provided in this findings document is to the best of our knowledge true and correct and is based on the verification of the evidence provided by Applecross Senior High School as part of the Department of Education Services' independent review process. The Principal and Board Chair have had an opportunity to comment on any matters of fact contained within this document.

6 May 2014
David Carvosso, Lead Reviewer

7 May 2014
Gerry Chapman, Reviewer

8/5/2014
Richard Strickland, CEO, Department of Education Services