Baldivis Secondary College

2015

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 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: Mr Keith Svendsen
Board Chair: Mr Tim O'Keefe
School Location: Stillwater Drive, Baldivis, WA
School Classification: SHS Class 6A
Number of Students: 1095
Reviewers: Mrs Audrey Jackson AM (Lead)
Mr Phil de Garis
Mr Rodney Nunn
Review Dates: 18 and 19 May 2015

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.

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. The school sent its self-review documentation to the Independent Public School (IPS) Review Team, Department of Education Services, one month prior to the commencement of the review.

The IPS reviewers supplemented the information provided by the school 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.

Reviewers analysed the evidence presented in the school’s self-review documentation to verify achievement and developed lines of inquiry where further verification was required.

An agenda for the review visit was subsequently negotiated with the Principal to enable the gathering of evidence to verify claims made by the school. During the review visit the reviewers sourced evidence to support the school’s self-review claims through observation and discussion with leaders, 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?

Baldivis Secondary College opened in 2013 with 220 Year 8 students. It is located in a semi-rural residential area which is experiencing significant population growth. The college currently has 1100 students in Years 7 to 10 and remains the only public secondary school in the Baldivis area. It has experienced rapid growth and is anticipated to have an enrolment in excess of 1850 when the Year 12 cohort commences in 2017. The student attendance rate is 89.2%, which is comparable with like schools, and the transiency rate is minimal.

The school's Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is 1011 compared with an Australia-wide mean value of 1000. A new and rapidly expanding suburb, the Baldivis community includes a significant number of migrant families with the largest groups being from New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom. Aboriginal students make up less than 1% of the student population. Many of the students are the eldest sibling in the family and parents have varying expectations of the learning environment, communication strategies, study regimes and standards of student work required.

As a newly established school, teaching facilities are still being developed, with a new multi-media and creative arts centre about to open. In addition to general learning areas, specialist dance and music studios have been incorporated. Both the external and internal design of the college is innovative. Internally, teaching facilities incorporate a number of open learning spaces and classrooms are designed to allow flexibility. All learning areas are equipped with interactive whiteboards and a sound system and the campus has a wireless network.

The school has 67 teaching and administrative staff with 29 support staff. In 2014, the administrative staff increased with the appointment of two deputy principals to support the Principal and the Associate Principal. As the school has yet to reach its full complement of year levels, staffing numbers increase annually. Currently, 53% of staff are below the age of 35.

The Board comprises community members, parents and staff. It is a relatively large Board with 12 parent/community members and five college
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representatives. Members have a diverse range of professional expertise to contribute to decision making.

The college has sought to establish itself as, and is perceived to be, a hub for the community and there is significant after-hours use of school facilities by community groups. Partnerships have been established with Murdoch University, training organisations, local businesses, industries, community groups and sporting clubs. The Baldivis United program has been initiated as a partnership with local agencies and businesses to engage in projects to enhance the community.
The School’s Self-Review Process

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

The college opened as a greenfield site with only Year 8 students. The Business Plan was developed with the input and endorsement of the Board. The priorities of the Business Plan were: Quality Teaching, Learning and Leadership; Curriculum Differentiation; and Access and Partnerships. The Business Plan was underpinned by operational plans and curriculum area plans. Targets for student performance in the Business Plan were generic and hence not easily measured or evaluated. The Annual Report contains a generalised analysis of the degree to which goals have been achieved.

The key goal of the Board and the leadership team was the establishment of a strong culture within the college, based on the fundamental principle of respect, supported by the concepts of excellence, knowledge, integrity and unity. The self-review indicates that to date this goal is being achieved and this was affirmed during the review visit. However, by its nature this goal is difficult to quantify and will be an ongoing focus as the college grows.

A comprehensive self-review schedule has been established which engages the senior leadership team, Student Services Manager, year leaders and the Board. The review schedule contributes to a three-phase self-review: data collection and analysis; an executive summary identifying achievements; and targets for improvement which will provide the basis for the 2016–2018 Business Plan. The first hard data on student performance did not become available until the results of 2014 Year 9 National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing were published. Comparative data in numeracy, reading and writing was as expected when compared to like schools. Analysis of this data by the college raised some concerns and resulted in the decision to conduct the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) Progressive Achievement Tests for reading (PAT-R) and maths (PAT-M) for Year 8 and 9 students at the college and for Year 6 and 7 students entering the college in 2015. This data will provide a basis for establishing future targets for student achievement.

As more extensive sets of information become available to the college, it will be important to establish a comprehensive student database to record attendance, behaviour and achievements in all forms of standardised testing to inform the self-review processes. As the college continues to expand to
include senior year levels, the database should extend to record data on upper-school achievement including WACE, ATAR and Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualifications.

As an outcome of the review, the college leadership and Board acknowledge that the next Business Plan targets must meet the SMART construct; that is: be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time bound.
School Performance—Student Learning

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

Targets for student learning were established in the absence of any performance data for enrolled students; neither was like-school data available as a basis for planning. Consequently, the targets for student learning in the 2013–2015 Business Plan focus on trends as opposed to specific levels of achievement and hence progress is difficult to quantify. The use of PAT-R and PAT-M testing both in the college and with students from feeder primary schools has provided base data on individual student performance. In planning for 2015, the college has used Year 7 NAPLAN data from feeder primary schools, together with the PAT results, as a basis for the planning of teaching and learning programs.

The availability of longitudinal data on student performance will remain limited until 2017 when the current Year 7 students sit NAPLAN tests in Year 9. The ongoing use of PAT testing will provide information on individual student progress. Nevertheless, as data becomes available it is analysed and the results are incorporated into college planning. The college has analysed the performance of its Year 10 students in the Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (OLNA) and has identified that significant progress has been made in the writing component, which was an area of concern in Year 9 NAPLAN results. For those students who may not achieve OLNA by Year 11, plans have been put in place to support them with the introduction of the Certificate II in Literacy and Numeracy for the Workplace.

The college places a significant emphasis on internal analysis by the curriculum teams of student performance to assess the effectiveness of teaching and learning programs. The development of skills in data analysis and in the moderation of student achievement has therefore been a focus of the leadership team. Workforce planning has incorporated the appointment of experienced teachers with the skills to support less experienced teachers in this aspect of the teaching and learning program. Internal mentoring and the sharing of expertise is central to the staff development and professional growth programs of the college, with opportunities provided to engage in professional learning communities with colleagues.

In the context of a new and rapidly growing school with significant increases in both student and staff numbers, strategies to ensure the culture of the school
is embraced by new members of the community are essential. Equally essential is ensuring there is a common approach to pedagogy among teachers so that teaching teams are cohesive and students learn effectively.

In order to support student learning the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program is used throughout the college as both a teaching and a learning strategy. It provides a common approach to pedagogy and is used to reinforce the concept of scholarly behaviour that is a central part of the college’s culture. The program operates at two levels. In the delivery of the curriculum, teachers use AVID strategies to explicitly teach content. The key strategy is a consistent approach to learning based on the use of a standard approach through an ‘interactive notebook’ as a basis for planning and developing assignments. The notebook could be developed on line, but is currently an exercise book, widely used in all classes. In the ‘AVID hour’, the teacher explicitly teaches a range of skills to reinforce and enhance skills used in the classroom and to introduce additional skills and techniques. As appropriate, the program is also used as part of the college’s career development program aiming to provide students with the skills and knowledge to make informed career choices. The college commits resources to provide a co-ordinator for AVID to ensure the consistency of the approach and to continue to embed the program in such a rapidly developing environment.

Curriculum differentiation is a target area in the Business Plan focusing on pathways to enhance students’ educational opportunities and outcomes and the creation of individual education plans (IEPs) for students at educational risk. The AVID approach supports curriculum differentiation within the classroom both for students capable of extension and for those in need of additional support. The development of an IEP in a learning area is the responsibility of the class teacher using the AVID framework. Support is available to the teacher from the Curriculum Differentiation and Access Committee to ensure that the IEP appropriately addresses student learning needs.

Both the Board and college leadership have acknowledged that targets in the 2016–2018 Business Plan will be far more focused on measures of student achievement that are quantifiable and which reflect the effectiveness of the teaching and learning program. As more data sources become available, it will be necessary for the targets and their supporting programs to be reviewed and, if necessary, revised in the light of the available data.
School Performance—Quality of the Learning Environment

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

The college website states that 'as a new school built on a greenfield site, the college seeks to create a learning environment that ensures each person is valued and that creates a sense of belonging and a productive learning experience for students'. The review team was impressed with the evidence that showed the success of the college in achieving this outcome in a short timeframe, within a developing and diverse community where few other unifying agencies and facilities were obvious. The college has a very welcoming and positive 'feel', a theme that was consistently highlighted by students, parents and staff during the review process.

The quality of the college leadership group and their commitment to the strategies created to achieve this positive cultural outcome was considerable. One example was the implementation of *Toe-by-Toe*, an individualised program to enhance literacy and numeracy for identified students. Staff were asked to mentor individuals through the program in the spirit of making a difference for all students. The Principal and Associate Principal were the first to volunteer as mentors, which set the example to staff members. Throughout the year, individualised support was provided for 28 students. This imbued cross-college commitment was replicated in other programs observed by the review team. The positive and highly professional approach across the campus saw staff provide time and effort before classes, during schooling and after hours in many learning, sporting and cultural events.

The leadership groups highlighted that the strength of the college in this developmental stage lay in their ability to focus on the growth of a specific school-wide culture and not on change management within an established school environment. The flexibility provided by its IPS status has enabled the college to establish a workforce profile and select dedicated staff to implement an approach to teaching and learning that underpins the culture they seek to establish. Importantly, the commitment of the leadership group to sit on all selection panels helps to ensure that teaching and non-teaching appointments fit the context of the school and will help achieve the college vision for the future.
In implementing the Workforce Plan, the college has participated in an intern program in association with Murdoch University, and employed a number of graduate students both through the program and local selection processes.

The graduate teachers and interns confirmed that the quality of the support provided has enabled significant professional growth for these teachers. The role of the Associate Principal in working directly with these enthusiastic staff has helped to inculcate a collaborative professional culture in the group. Additionally, examples of 'growth coaching' and support for all teaching and non-teaching staff were demonstrated to have assisted in the development of a positive learning environment in the college.

This commitment to professional learning across the college is demonstrated by the committee structure, another example of the teaching staff volunteering time and expertise to enhance student learning. The Literacy and Numeracy Group ensures that literacy and numeracy is 'everyone's business' with a whole-school approach to these key learning areas. This literacy/numeracy strategy is based on research, extensive PAT testing and analysis of all results alongside the implementation of programs to address identified needs at an individual and group level. The ability of the group to identify baseline data, implement testing and data analysis and then establish a variety of responses to identified student needs was impressive. Similarly, positive and engaging presentations made by the Sustainability (environmental) Professional Learning Community gave the review team confidence that this positive approach was embedded across the college. The Curriculum Differentiation and Access Committee provides support to teachers to help ensure that IEPs are effective and that the learning needs of all students are addressed. Examples of differentiated teaching and assessment strategies within a classroom learning program provided evidence that this approach was implemented across the college and that access to suitable curriculum for students at both ends of the learning scale is catered for at a classroom level.

The Student Services Team demonstrated a broad commitment to work with the external agencies in their community in order to support families in providing for the learning needs of all students: further evidence of the caring environment that is developing.

Increased teacher work load was discussed, with a general consensus that the achievements were worth the effort. Staff felt the commitment was shared and their efforts recognised by both the community and the college. Given the rapid growth of the college and the associated expansion in staff appointments, the embedding of this culture across the school is a significant
achievement. Continuation of this success, once senior school courses commence in 2016/17, will be an added challenge to the school leadership and curriculum groups.

The programs provided for students with educational needs (SEN) were strongly supported by parents and the review team noted well developed programs in the multi-sensory environment for these students along with the success of integrated classes during classroom visits. The very effective and positive involvement of the college leadership group in the supervision and management of these students was fully appreciated by parents and staff and continues to embed the collaborative team approach across the college.

Within this positive approach to learning, there is also a commitment to a culture of personal responsibility with an awareness of the consequences of inappropriate behaviour. In the establishment phase, this approach has resulted in comparatively high suspension rates. In discussing this outcome, the staff indicated they were committed to this approach and have implemented a number of processes to reduce recidivism, including:

- a focus on in-school suspensions with set work outcomes
- a return from suspension program
- a Good Standing policy.

The rapid increase in enrolments each year has made it necessary to reinforce these policy positions with each new intake. However, recidivism is low and, as the school population settles beyond 2017 and the student leadership group matures, the suspension rate is expected to fall considerably.

The infrastructure provided at the college is state-of-the-art, well designed and has impressed the local community. As such, the college must plan ongoing provision of curriculum access to take full advantage of these resources as it continues to grow. The current learning environment is very inclusive with significant pastoral care programs, access to developing sporting opportunities and a culture of leadership, support, acceptance and respect across the campus. It will be important to maintain this culture while expanding the academic and vocational learning opportunities as the college moves into the provision of educational programs for senior secondary years.

Communication with families was commented on positively by board members, the Parents and Citizens’ Association and individual parents.
Communication is underpinned by the extensive use of email and CONNECT, a program that provides two-way on-line communications for teachers, parents and students. CONNECT records student progress through assignment completions and assessment, allowing students and parents to source results, understand assessments and set active learning goals. This has been an important communication tool in bringing together a disparate community and increasing the knowledge of the assessment processes among parents and students. Likewise, the open-door policy of the leadership group has played an important role in creating a positive relationship between the college and its community.

Determining the satisfaction levels of parents, students and staff is largely an anecdotal process at this time. Although survey tools have been used, the response rate has been as low as 12% in the case of the Student Survey, making it difficult to evaluate any outcomes. The response rates for the Parent Survey (22%) and the Staff Survey (40%) being higher were of more use to the school in its review processes. The ongoing growth in the area, the stress associated with families moving to a new environment and high migrant numbers all contribute to the low response rates to date. However, these same factors reflect positively on the responses from individuals and groups as reported to the review team. The college and the Board acknowledge the situation and are working on an approach to achieve higher survey response rates and suitable responses to any issues identified.
School Performance—Sustainability

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

While observing the success of the college in establishing a positive and caring culture across Years 7–10, it must be noted that it will be important to maintain this collaborative whole-school approach once the Year 11–12 classes and courses commence over the next three years. The college has put in place processes and people to help ensure the continued implementation of the vision for the college. The Year 10 students are receiving counselling to help prepare them for senior secondary studies and decisions on the courses of study are being finalised in order to inform workforce planning for the future.

The college used the establishment period to document sound self-review practices to be implemented across the campus. However, in this initial period, the need to develop a school-wide culture in line with the college vision, together with limited access to external data, rapid growth and changing clientele, has made it difficult to assess the sustainability of the college’s review processes. All staff interviewed were open and honest in the external review process and reviewers are confident that the college and the Board will implement effective, data-based review processes into the future.

The Board was clearly aware of progress to date, and has been proactive in discussions related to the Business Plan and the Annual Report. The Board indicated an awareness of the need to review its own membership and skill set and to organise for succession planning refreshment over time. The college leadership is committed, professional and highly energised, with a clear direction planned for a demanding growth environment. The review team has confidence that the governance of the college will ensure ongoing valued reflection and a thorough oversight of the college’s performance.

The next iteration of the Business Plan will need to move beyond a ‘getting started’ mind set. As enrolments become more manageable and significant data is available across a Year 7–12 environment, the setting of SMART targets with greater analysis and follow-up will be expected. The Business Plan will need to address these issues with agreed goals, strategies and success indicators that represent the expectations of the Baldivis community and the public school system. As the full cohort will not attend the college until 2017, it is realistic to set some milestones throughout the next three-year plan.
and to revise them as necessary given the changing demographics and expectations.

The requirements of the DPA appear to have been addressed in so far as is reasonable with such rapid development and in such a changing environment. In particular, the college has demonstrated a commitment to meeting the educational needs of all students in a most impressive manner. In relation to student attendance, the college results indicate an acceptable level in the first semester data; however, there is a significant move towards lower than expected standards in the second semester. The staff are aware of this and have undertaken an analysis of the causes. Along with the establishment of more effective student and parent survey strategies, this issue would appear to be an area of focus and a likely target area for the next iteration of the college’s Business Plan.

Through its workforce planning and profile management the college has established a team with a culture of cooperation and contribution towards continued improvement. The leadership commitment to participation in the selection process and the targeted use of the IPS staffing flexibility will be important to the sustainability of this culture in a Year 7–12 environment. Currently, the leadership in the college is found at all levels. The Principal and Associate Principal set an excellent example that has filtered through to the wider leadership group, the professional learning committees and committee system and all staff. Leadership within the student group is developing and will continue to grow as it approaches greater maturity in Year 12. Continuation of this level of shared leadership will be important to sustain the current culture and staff commitment to structures in a Year 7–12 environment.

Grassroots innovation such as the literacy/numeracy strategy, sustainability, differentiation and the SEN group give confidence that the staff have an ongoing capacity to implement improvement programs across the college. The development of the AVID program and the college-wide ‘buy-in’ to the approach adds to this perception. Sustainability of this commitment across a senior school environment will require the leadership group to maintain all current processes with a significant degree of attention to the college vision and culture in staff selection and performance development opportunities and procedures.

The new physical environment provides an opportunity to allow a broad curriculum program to meet the expectations of the community and the ability
of the students. The Board, college leadership and staff are aware of the need to focus on maintaining and enhancing the learning environment as the college continues to grow. Suitable partnerships to support this approach, while enriching the community, are being identified. The staff showed a strong belief in the leadership to get these issues right in a manner that will ensure that the currently valued culture and environment of the school are maintained.
Conclusion

In the establishment phase of Baldivis Secondary College, the principal goal of the Board and the leadership team has been the establishment of a strong culture within the college, based on the fundamental principle of respect, supported by the concepts of excellence, knowledge, integrity and unity. Through discussion with Board members, leadership and teaching staff, parents and students, the reviewers were able to verify the significant progress made in embedding the desired culture in school practice.

The four priorities of the Business Plan—Quality Teaching, Learning and Leadership; Curriculum Differentiation; and Access and Partnerships—have resulted in the implementation of innovative programs and the creation of a culture of professional learning among the staff.

The staff are already planning for the next phase of development, namely the development of the senior years program. It will be important to integrate the new programs with the current programs and to continue to focus on the creation of a shared culture to promote student learning. The reviewers are of the opinion that the college is well placed to achieve this.

Commendations

The following areas are commended:

- the leadership of the Principal and the Associate Principal, supported by the Board, in defining the culture of the college, and their work with staff to develop a team committed to embedding the culture in college practice
- the model of distributed leadership which reinforces the college culture at all levels and fosters enthusiasm and commitment among the growing staff and student populations
- the engagement with the community through the provision of services and the sharing of facilities in order to establish Baldivis Secondary College as a hub for the local community.
The following areas for improvement are identified:

- focus on establishing appropriate targets for student achievement in the 2016–2018 Business Plan
- develop a comprehensive monitoring process of student engagement which combines results in NAPLAN, WACE, ATAR and VET qualifications with data on attendance and behavioural matters
- review the applicability of targets as student performance data becomes available for the full enrolment of Years 7 to 12.
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 Baldivis Secondary College 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.

Date 19 June 2015
Mrs Audrey Jackson, Lead Reviewer

Date 19 June 2015
Mr Phil de Garis, Reviewer

Date 18 June 2015
Mr Rodney Nunn, Reviewer

Date 25/6/15
Mr Richard Strickland, Director General, Department of Education Services