Coodanup College

2015

Independent Review Findings
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 Vicki Mckeown
Board Chair: Ms Beth Aitken
School Location: Wanjeep Street, Mandurah WA 6210
School Classification: SHS Class 6C
Number of Students: 561
Reviewers: Ms Margaret Banks (Lead)
Ms Maureen Lorimer
Mr Rod Baker
Review Dates: 12 and 13 November 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 well-being
- 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 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
- School Curriculum and Standards Authority Year 12 Student Achievement data.

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 the two review visit days was subsequently 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 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?*

Since Coodanup College was established as a years 8 to 12 senior high school in 1989 the school has undergone a number of significant changes. It became a middle school for students in years 8 to 10 in 2000 then returned to a combined middle and senior college for years 8 to 12 in 2010. In 2015, the Year 7 cohort was included. This history had a destabilising, negative impact upon the culture and reputation of the school, the turnover of staff, and student performance. This background provided the foundation for the school when it became an Independent Public School (IPS) in 2013.

As an IPS, led by a newly appointed leadership team, the school welcomed the opportunity to build relationships with its community, utilise the flexibility afforded in staff selection and respond to the needs of its students. The school has an ICSEA of 884 with students drawn from an area with high levels of unemployment and reliance on welfare benefits.

The school is located in the eastern suburban area of Mandurah. The buildings and grounds are attractive, well maintained with clear signage throughout including in Noongar language, welcoming and informing students, parents and visitors.

There are 561 students attending, of which 109 (20%) are Aboriginal students. A high transiency rate of 33% provides challenges to the school and the attendance rate of 78.5%, while below like schools, is trending upwards. The attendance rate for Aboriginal students is 71.5%.

There are 101 (82.1 FTE) staff members including the Principal, two Deputy Principals, four heads of learning area, a student services manager and a partnership coordinator, 40 teaching staff, 22 education assistants and five Level 3 administration staff. An additional Deputy Principal currently assists with transition in leadership arrangements. A balanced mix of ages, experience and duration of tenure at the school has now been achieved and a gender imbalance of predominantly female staff is being addressed.
The staff has placed a strong emphasis on developing comprehensive partnerships with a range of organisations. The value of these partnerships is acknowledged through the allocation of a leadership position to link the college with the community. The benefits of additional resources and expertise for the college as well as improved relationships have been the result. Partnerships with the local primary schools have promoted transition of students into the college. A partnership with the Aboriginal community has fostered, valued and embedded Aboriginal culture into the school. Business and not-for-profit organisations have attracted resources and created opportunities for employment pathways. A partnership with Murdoch University has brought to the college significant resources and expertise to lift students' aspirations, created opportunities for undertaking an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) program and enabled support for and promotion of pathways for students to gain university entrance.

In order to establish the Board, the college advertised positions in the community newspaper. Members of the Board are highly experienced in governance, higher education and school education, local politics, business and community. Membership includes an Aboriginal Elder. Feedback from the Board indicated a clear focus on governance including strategic issues, school data, lifting of student performance standards and extending the aspirations, opportunities and pathways for students. It is a highly effective Board and a significant asset to the college.
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?_  

Throughout the last three years, the college staff has undertaken a number of processes to review performance and progress. In 2015, a comprehensive summative self-review of the Business Plan was conducted by the Leadership Team. Student data, surveys of staff, parent and students as well as feedback from teachers, committees and the Leadership Team formed part of the self-review.

The targets were reviewed by means of tracking and analysis of student data from 2013 to 2015. Commentary and conclusions for each target are detailed, illuminating and helpful as a guide for the next round of business and operational plans.

For the six key improvement strategies, a traffic-light system showed progress and completion of the 11 or 12 components of each strategy. An overall analysis was made of where each strategy was successful, why a component of the strategy had not been achieved, what had been learnt and should be addressed in future plans.

In addition, to assist with monitoring of progress, the Principal commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to conduct external reviews using the National School Improvement Tool. A baseline review and analysis was conducted in 2013 and a progress review and analysis in 2015.

The staff reflected on the findings of these reviews and drew on the information to affirm what they are doing well, to guide improvement strategies and to make recommendations for the next stages of planning for improvement.

During the cycle of the Business Plan 2013-2015, the college has achieved the goal of developing an explicit improvement agenda, a culture that promotes learning, in targeting resources and developing partnerships. Discussions with college leaders, teachers and support staff showed programs and strategies are tracked for student attendance, performance and other effectiveness measures.
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The Principal reported priority attention was given to stabilising the college by focusing on targets linked to improvements in attendance, behaviour and engagement, as demonstrated by reductions in suspensions and significant improvements in student attitude, behaviour and effort.

Programs have been implemented to address the literacy and numeracy targets through the CLAN and changes made to curriculum for the English and mathematics.

However, the approaches to self-review are ad hoc and do not systematically and regularly inform the school of progress against the targets. This progress should be presented in the Annual Report. The staff is fully aware of inadequacies in monitoring student performance. A whole-school approach to the collection, monitoring and analysis of student data has not been adopted, nor in the way responses to the findings are made. The current topic for discussions between the Leadership Team and the Board is how to set the improvement targets for the next Business Plan in order to drive the progress of each student at the college.
School Performance—Student Learning

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

The commitment to the transformation of the college since becoming an IPS has, at its core, the expectation to improve student performance. This is embodied in the everyday operations and the wide range of opportunities and programs made available to students.

The Business Plan 2013–2015 sets the vision of Explore, Dream and Discover, the mission, philosophy and aims of the college and the staff commitments around the values. Improvement strategies are listed for the six priorities: Quality Teaching and Learning; Learning Intervention; Innovative Curriculum Delivery; Aboriginal Education; Community Perception and Partnerships; and Creative, Curiosity and Inquiry Learning. Fourteen targets were set for improvements in reading, writing and numeracy, attendance, reductions in suspensions and improvements in attitude, behaviour and effort. Educational research to influence and drive the reforms was also cited.

Targets 1–9 focus on achievement, with the first three targets directed at overall NAPLAN achievement in reading, writing and numeracy. The annual reports for 2013 and 2014 include information on lower-school achievement but do not specifically report on the Business Plan targets. In 2015, a comprehensive review of student performance in relation to these targets has been undertaken and demonstrates a need to clarify and refocus targets for specific sets of students.

The My School® data indicates that in 2012 all four literacy areas and numeracy tested in NAPLAN are either below or substantially below those of statistically similar schools. By 2014, the averages in all literacy areas have improved to be close to those of statistically similar schools. My School® data for 2015 is not available at this time.

The college’s numeracy target has been met; however, the targets for reading and writing have not been met. A need has been identified for explicit teaching and a requirement to plan for the unique requirements of each cohort. The school is at the point of introducing a whole-school approach to literacy and using the curriculum expert teams (CET) to discuss, plan, implement and monitor the effect on student performance.
Targets 4 to 6 are specific to improved performance for Aboriginal students. The college met its target for numeracy in all three years of the span of the Business Plan and the possibility of the target not being ambitious enough is acknowledged. Conversely, to varying degrees the writing and reading targets are acknowledged as being too ambitious. The decline in numbers of Aboriginal students at and above national minimum standards between NAPLAN Year 7 and NAPLAN Year 9 is consistent with whole-school data sets. The staff is aware of this and an Aboriginal education committee oversees Aboriginal student performance, currently focusing on relationships and attendance. It is recognised that the next planning cycle will require the committee to provide more specific input to achieve the set targets by addressing the gaps in students' performance in literacy and numeracy.

The Clontarf Academy is a program for young Aboriginal students aimed at improving their education, discipline, life skills, self-esteem and employment prospects. Students have a range of supports including before-school football training and breakfast club, assistance with post-school options, plus a variety of excursions and camps. Aboriginal student attendance improved by 3% in 2015, higher than the State average. Other success measures have not been documented; however, a variety of evidence could be collected in the future to demonstrate the achievements of these students.

Targets 7 to 9 focus on senior school student achievement. Two of the targets have been met, with 100% of students achieving their Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE) in 2014, and 20% of students who achieved their WACE gaining university entry through a portfolio process. The target focusing on Certificate II attainment was not met, but a creditable 65% of the Year 12 cohort achieved a Certificate II qualification or higher. This figure is comparable to like schools and of note is that attainment by college mainstream students is significantly higher than the students in the college’s Senior School Engagement Program.

It is evident that the staff has put in place a number of programs to address the needs of the students in Year 11 and 12 since transitioning back to a comprehensive secondary (Year 7 to 12) school in 2010. The issues are complex, with up to 35% of senior students choosing to transition to John Tonkin College, thereby perpetuating the difficulty of offering a full suite of courses. Over the last three years, the college has added Stage 2 courses and in 2014, 13.25% of Year 12 students were enrolled in these courses.
In 2015, with the assistance of Murdoch University, English and mathematics ATAR courses were offered to Year 11 students and in 2016 human biology will be added to the ATAR program. With a high percentage of students at educational risk, the college has developed senior school engagement programs such as SUCCESS and FLEXI-Link which service the whole Mandurah region. A learning support coordinator has a team of support staff who work with these students in a supportive environment that recognises their individual needs. The college structures have been adapted to better engage the students. Whilst it is noted that many of these students did not complete their courses, closer monitoring of their successes would provide the college with strong evidence of the value of the programs.

Targets 10 and 11 focus on behaviour (engagement), with suspension rates steadily falling over the last three years, and attitude, behaviour and effort improving. This can be attributed to the success of Key Improvement Strategy 2 as the catalyst for an explicit and positive approach to managing behaviour. A school-wide approach to behaviour management was introduced—Positive Behaviour Support—which includes a matrix that clearly outlines behaviour expectations for the college. The college has thoroughly reviewed the program and a number of conclusions have been drawn for ongoing implementation. The links between improved behaviour and attitude/effort as demonstrated in end-of-year reports (Target 11) should ultimately be reflected in improved student learning. The staff is encouraged to cross-reference data sources to enable the link to be made and reported upon between improved behaviour and learning outcomes.

Targets 12 to 14 focus on attendance. The desired outcome for all three targets was not achieved; however, there has been an upward trend in attendance over the last three years, whilst both like and State school attendances are trending downward. Of particular concern is the 44% of students in the indicated and moderate at-risk categories as well as 18% in the severe category. College staff are well aware of these concerns and are implementing a new system in 2016 for managing whole-school attendance. The implications for student learning are apparent and the college is in a good position to build upon the progress made in the last three years.

The intent of the six key improvement strategies is to improve student learning. The recent review of the strategies was comprehensive and clearly demonstrated the areas of success and those that required adjustments or greater focus.
The importance of building staff capacity to monitor student learning through a thorough understanding of available data sources and using this information to inform planning is acknowledged. The ability to use the data to profile the strengths and weaknesses of individual students is crucial for the college where up to 50% of students are on group or individual education plans.

The college has been most successful in Strategies 2 and 5 that concentrated on a whole-school approach to supporting student learning using a 'pyramid of intervention' model and the creation of opportunities to celebrate success and develop community partnerships. Whilst these strategies have certainly contributed to a more positive culture and supported stronger community relationships, there has not been a commensurate level of improvement in student performance.

Arguably, the focus has been on relationship building at all levels over the last three years and indeed the performance indicators within Strategy 6 of developing creativity, curiosity and inquiry learning were largely deemed as irrelevant at this point in time and have been abandoned. A re-focus in 2016 on the teaching strategies already in place within the college, together with a rejuvenated approach to curriculum delivery through the CET are part of the self-review conclusions. The Leadership Team has identified a number of potential strategies to support a coordinated approach to improve student achievement to be outlined in the next reiteration of the Business Plan. The commitment to this journey of sustainable school improvement is at all levels of the organisation and is supported by thorough research and policy structures.
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?*

Coodanup College has a vision ‘to foster a supportive community that empowers students to explore their strengths, dare to dream, and discover the positive impact that they can have on their own lives, the lives of others and that of the wider community’. Creating a safe and supportive environment in support of this vision has been a priority during the life of the current Business Plan. Extensive historical information presented during the review showed that change was necessary and that previously the college’s public image was affected by generations of unemployment amongst the families of students, more than half of its enrolment having a diagnosed physical, mental health or learning disability, poorly behaved and disruptive students, educational programs that did not reflect the needs of the community, and regular leadership changes that affected the likelihood of long-term progress. Many families, faced with the challenge of having their children attend Coodanup College, opted to enrol them at other schools in the Mandurah area.

Steps taken to address these issues have included the complete rebranding of the school name and logo, uniform and vision, together with public acknowledgement of the importance of effective and stable leadership. Considerable emphasis has been placed on developing the skills and competencies of the Principal, Deputy Principals and heads of learning areas, ensuring that other staff members have confidence in them and see them as effective in their roles. Comments made during interviews, together with the observations of the reviewers, suggest there has been a significant transformation in leadership led by the Principal, now in her fourth year in the position, who has a deep understanding of the needs of the school community and the steps that the school staff must take to achieve them.

Student and staff safety has been an area of strong focus and is closely monitored by the Students at Educational Risk Team, implemented in 2013. Positive Behaviour Support, described as a Tier 1 intervention, forms the basis of the college’s approach to managing behaviour after a staff audit showed that a universal, school-wide approach was needed. This has been implemented in close association with Department of Education personnel but has used trained staff members to guide the development of others.
Acknowledging that the introduction of Positive Behaviours Support did not resolve all behaviour issues, the Students at Educational Risk Team introduced Tier 2 interventions for students requiring additional social skills, self-management skills, teacher monitoring and home-school communication, and Tier 3 interventions for students who require individual case management, including support from outside agencies.

The college’s recent evaluation, using the School-Wide Evaluation Tool shows that there is now a consistent framework for managing behavioural issues in place and staff confidence that the college has the resources and skills to cope with most situations that arise. This was supported by the ACER review that showed significant improvements when compared with results from 2013.

To encourage attendance and engagement and extension opportunities for students, the college has a number of programs customised to meet their academic and social needs. These programs include Inspire Academy, Success, Centre for Literacy and Numeracy (CLAN), Focus, Clontarf Academy, Goals for Girls, Robotics, Circus, Flexi-link (on-line) and Eyes Wide Open (off-campus). Extra-curricular opportunities are offered after school through the Rangers Program and homework classes. The Chaplain runs a breakfast club before school.

The desire to further provide suitable learning opportunities for all students is evidenced by three specific programs—Inspire, CLAN and Focus, as follows:

- the Inspire Academy assists students to achieve academic potential for university entrance in partnership with Murdoch University; students need to maintain a B grade or higher average, a high attendance percentage, good behaviour and participate in after school extension learning
- CLAN classes are run for Years 7, 8 and 9 on a primary model for mathematics, English, science, humanities and health where there is one teacher, one class; the aim is to increase engagement, confidence and learning outcomes; in 2014 eight students transitioned back into mainstream schooling from the program
- the Focus program targets senior school students and provides Year 10, 11 and 12 students with the option of completing WACE graduation and/or Australian Qualifications Framework training certificates to suit their career industry areas; similar to CLAN, the Focus pathway allows the building of a relationship with one teacher within a nurturing environment.
These three programs, together with a broad range of pathways and programs for students at educational risk targeting boys and girls, respond to learning needs and reflect the college's commitment to the care of every student. It would be beneficial to have clear accountability processes in place to measure the success and achievements of students within these programs.

While it is evident that a strong focus has been given to catering for students with educational needs, the staff is keen to capitalise on the partnership with Murdoch University to lift academic standards and has established the Inspire Academy which supports students with aspirations for university, and introduced some ATAR subjects as part of senior school course options.

While the supporting class and organisational structures are now well established, the college staff acknowledges that the next stage of the improvement program needs to include a focus on the development of curriculum materials and teaching and learning programs. Using the implementation of the Australian Curriculum for impetus, work has commenced on these within the college's CET with a focus on scope and sequence, course outlines, assessment outlines and common assessments, with the expectation that there will be consistency across all learning areas. Some preliminary work has also been done on developing a coaching model with staff, based on classroom observation and feedback leading to improved teaching practice.

With Aboriginal students making up 20% of the enrolment, an Aboriginal education committee has been established to assist in enrolling new students and assess their capabilities, identifying the best college program available to suit their needs. The team liaises closely with families, providing counselling support to them, as well as maintaining close observation of student progress. The Aboriginal Education Committee has also led cultural activities and staff training, including visits to local areas of significant interest and relevance to Aboriginal people in the area. An engagement program for boys in partnership with the Clontarf Foundation and the recently commenced, Goals for Girls are programs aimed at specifically supporting the attendance and progress of Aboriginal students.

The focus on improving the image of Coodanup College and having families consider it as a realistic option for their children has resulted in closer ties with the local Dudley Park, Greenfields and Riverside primary schools. Transition activities now start with Year 5 students, the first step involving the dissemination of information and opportunities at Coodanup College to the
students and their families, with more regular transition activities occurring in Year 6, together with parent/student interviews.

The relationship with parents and families and the broader community are highly valued, with effective measures implemented through the college website, newsletters, annual reports and personal contact to ensure that stakeholders are informed about overall college progress and future directions. In a meeting with parents, where support for the college was very much in evidence, comments were made about the quick action taken on parental concerns, ability to resolve difficult issues, and willingness to take on students with challenging behaviours and particular needs. There is a strong belief across the college that the extent of the improved relationship with parents and the school community can be measured in numbers attending the 2015 Graduation Ceremony, considered to be the best in memory.
School Performance—Sustainability

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

Interviews with the Board, Principal, leadership team, staff, parents and students confirmed Coodanup College has made significant progress in changing the culture to a safe and friendly learning environment for all students. Sound processes and systems for attendance, positive behaviour support and pastoral care have been developed. The college has established itself as a learning community and is on a journey to making more effective use of data and whole-school strategies to lift the performance of students.

Ongoing positive and productive relationships within the local community will challenge long-held negative perceptions of the college and are critical to the ability to attract and retain academically able students. Improved student performance will assist in this goal to be a truly comprehensive senior college that provides a broad spectrum of programs and pathways to suit the learning needs of all students.

The Principal has provided strong direction for the college and made evidence-based decisions to change both culture and processes. This has resulted in distributed leadership amongst the Deputy Principals, heads of learning areas, manager and coordinator. They are empowered to lead their portfolios and processes are sufficiently stable to accommodate small changes to leadership positions. Committees and staff working as a learning community provide the structure and experience to support curriculum development and pedagogical improvements. The passion and commitment of all staff sets the scene for further capacity building and learning improvements.

A key issue for the sustainability of the college is student enrolment figures. Current enrolments for a Year 7–12 secondary school are low and this, combined with the large number of students who require additional support by a large pastoral care team, impacts on the scope of curriculum offerings that can be offered within budget, especially in the senior secondary ATAR program. The lower numbers also limit the number of leadership positions resulting in multiple portfolios for people holding Level 3 positions. The numbers may grow as a result of the partnership arrangements with local primary schools and the significant investment of time and expertise in transition arrangements and enrolment procedures.
This detailed profiling of new students to the college gave the reviewers confidence in the ongoing capacity of the college to provide effectively for the educational needs of the students. However, a new high school being considered for the Mandurah Lakes area provides the college with added concerns for school enrolment growth.

The foundations have been laid for improving the outcomes for all students through the focus on whole-school strategies to improve literacy and numeracy as well as extending student aspirations and opportunities. The introduction of ATAR subjects and the Inspire program supporting students on a pathway to university has set the direction for lifting expectations for an increasing number of Coodanup College students. In the longer term, the college intends to ‘normalise’ participation and achievement in ATAR rather than as a separate program for a selected few, particularly as the current funding source for the Inspire program is due to conclude in the next 12 months.

The Board members bring to the college high levels of skills and experience and as a result governance is particularly strong. The Board is committed to extending opportunities and raising standards. Robust discussions and rigorous processes are applied to agendas on strategic issues, planning, data and annual reports. The Board is well placed to support the college’s future developments.
Conclusion

Coodanup College has demonstrated through documentation and interviews with staff, parents and students that a diligent effort has been made across the college to meet the targets set in the Business Plan. The terms of the DPA were generally met. There were several areas where achievement was marginal with a number of Business Plan targets not achieved. Whilst there has been no significant improvement in student performance, it was evident that a culture of change has reinvigorated the college and translated into an improvement in both attendance and engagement.

The challenge for the leadership team and staff is to maintain and build on the good work that has occurred over the last three years. The next iteration of the Business Plan will require on-going monitoring at all levels of the organisation with a clear focus on targeting sustainable improvements to student outcomes.
Commendations

The following areas are commended:

- a culture that is inclusive, welcoming and provides, through a range of programs, a sense of belonging and purpose for all students
- strong, distributed leadership working collaboratively with the energetic, dedicated and enthusiastic staff to make a difference for all students
- programs, initiatives and pastoral care customised to improve support for students
- the introduction of pathways to university through ATAR courses and the Inspire program
- the partnership with Murdoch University enabling the changing of opportunities, expectations and beliefs of students and the community of what is possible for a student to achieve at the college;
- interaction with the Aboriginal community, improved attendance of Aboriginal students and support for Aboriginal students through an Aboriginal education committee, staff relationships and Aboriginal engagement programs
- the highly effective governance of the college provided by the Board.

Areas for Improvement

The following areas for improvement are identified:

- develop explicit targets for student improvement in the next Business Plan, with priorities/strategies clearly linked to achieving the targets and operational plans reflecting these targets, priorities and strategies
- include in annual reports the progress towards achievement of the targets
- embed annual cycles of review across all levels of the college with a focus on collection and analysis of data so as to monitor progress of students, programs and initiatives, respond to and modify classroom and whole-school practices
- improve literacy and numeracy achievement
- consolidate current progress to further extend ATAR participation and achievements to ensure pathways to university are 'normal' expectations for significant numbers of students.
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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 Coodanup 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.

11 December 2015
Ms Margaret Banks, Lead Reviewer

14 December 2015
Ms Maureen Lorimer, Reviewer

14 December 2015
Mr Rod Baker, Reviewer

21/1/16
Mr Richard Strickland, Director General, Department of Education Services

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