



National School Improvement Tool School Review Report

School Name: Mother Teresa School

Review Dates:

7,8,9 September 2015

Principal:

Peter Hughes

Reviewers:

Dianne Pekin, Lead ACER School Improvement Consultant

Carmel Ryan, Senior ACER School Improvement Consultant

Contents

Foreword to the Principal

Report Findings

- 1 An explicit improvement agenda
- 2 Analysis and discussion of data
- 3 A culture that promotes learning
- 4 Targeted use of school resources
- 5 An expert teaching team
- 6 Systemic curriculum delivery
- 7 Differentiated teaching and learning
- 8 Effective pedagogical practices
- 9 School-community partnerships

Commendations

Affirmations

Recommendations

Further Details

Foreword to the Principal

Thank you and congratulations on your school's decision to engage in the ACER Committed to Excellence (c2e) program by commissioning a National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) review.

The NSIT was endorsed by the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) at its meeting on 7 December 2012 and has been made available to all Australian schools for use in their school improvement planning from 2013.

The NSIT Review is specifically designed to equip Principals, Boards and Staff with the data they need to plot their school's current position against international effective practice and to plan a focussed approach to school improvement appropriate to the context of their school.

This report details the key findings of the NSIT consultants who conducted the review of your school on February 17, 18. The report provides feedback on the assessments made against each of the nine interrelated domains of effective school practice, gathered through evidence collection and consultation within your school. Summary findings and comments are also provided at the conclusion of each domain assessment.

The review team have also concluded with a set of 'Commendations', 'Affirmations' and 'Recommendations' to assist in future planning and to support school-wide improvement.

We hope you find the information in this report a valuable contribution to assisting with your journey to set goals and develop strategies to improve student learning and foster a culture of excellence in your school.



Professor Geoff N Masters
CEO ACER

1

An explicit improvement agenda

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

Outstanding	High	Medium	Low
<p>The school leadership group, including, where appropriate, the governing council, has developed and is driving an explicit and detailed local school improvement agenda. This agenda is expressed in terms of specific improvements sought in student performances, is aligned with national and/or system-wide improvement priorities and includes clear targets with accompanying timelines which are rigorously actioned.</p> <p>The school improvement agenda has been effective in focusing, and to some extent narrowing and sharpening, the whole school's attention on core learning priorities.</p> <p>There is a strong and optimistic commitment by all staff to the school improvement strategy and a clear belief that further improvement is possible. Teachers take responsibility for changes in practice required to achieve school targets and are using data on a regular basis to monitor the effectiveness of their own efforts to meet those targets.</p>	<p>The school has developed an agenda for improvement in partnership with parents and the community and school leaders can describe the improvements they wish to see in student behaviours and outcomes. This agenda is communicated in staff meetings, school newsletters, parent-teacher meetings and on the school website using a variety of formats to suit local needs.</p> <p>The leadership team has analysed school performance data over a number of years and is aware of trends in student achievement levels. Targets for improvement are clear and accompanied by timelines.</p> <p>The school leadership team is clearly committed to finding ways to improve on current student outcomes. This is reflected in an eagerness to learn from research evidence, international experience and from other schools that have achieved significant improvements.</p> <p>There is evidence of a school-wide commitment to every student's success and staff of the school tell stories of significant student improvement.</p>	<p>The principal and other school leaders articulate a shared commitment to improvement, but limited attention has been given to specifying detail or to developing a school-wide approach (e.g., plans for improvement may lack coherence, be short term or without a whole-school focus). Plans for improvement do not appear to have been clearly communicated, widely implemented or to have impacted significantly on teachers' day-to-day work. Targets for improvement are not specific (e.g., not accompanied by timelines).</p> <p>The school's focus on data is driven more by external requirements (e.g., NAPLAN, My School) than by an internal desire for good information to guide school decision making and to monitor progress.</p> <p>Although there is an expressed commitment to improvement, this is not reflected in a high level of enthusiasm for personal change on the part of staff. The communication of performance data to the school community tends to be sporadic and/or is limited only to information that the school is required to report.</p>	<p>There is no obvious plan for improving on current achievement levels. School leaders appear to be more focused on day-to-day operational matters than on analysing and understanding school data, setting targets for whole-school improvement or communicating an improvement agenda to the school community.</p> <p>Minimal attention is paid to data and there is very limited communication of school results or of intentions for improvement to parents, families and the wider school community.</p> <p>Expectations for significant school improvement are low and staff tend to 'explain' current achievement levels in terms of students' socioeconomic backgrounds and/or geographical location. There is little evidence that the staff of the school have a shared commitment to improving outcomes for every student, and this appears to be contributing to a culture of underperformance. There is little evidence that the school is looking to external sources to identify evidence-based strategies for improvement.</p>

Comments:

- The school strategic plan and annual action plan identify the core priorities for 2015 of Student Wellbeing, Prayer, Literacy and MTS Express (Peer Observation.)
- Teachers and leaders could articulate the possible value of collecting data to evidence these priorities and use it to impact teaching and learning, however the current systems do not support ease of access. The school is in the process of setting up system changes to facilitate this happening.
- Numeracy was the improvement focus in 2014, resulting in a comprehensive curriculum map across Kinder to Year 6 based on the Australian Curriculum incorporating Key Concepts, Enduring Understandings and Essential questions.
- The 2015 improvement agenda identifies Literacy as a focus area, including an MTS Express priority. Further refinement of curriculum planning, assessment and measurement of student progress are being undertaken.
- A recent parent forum has identified improvement priorities, which will be considered in future Community Council and Strategic Planning processes.

2

Analysis and discussion of data

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

Outstanding	High	Medium	Low
<p>The principal and other school leaders clearly articulate their belief that reliable data on student outcomes are crucial to the school's improvement agenda. The school has established and is implementing a systematic plan for the collection, analysis and use of student achievement data. Test data in literacy, numeracy and science are key elements of this plan.</p> <p>Data are used throughout the school to identify gaps in student learning, to monitor improvement over time and to monitor growth across the years of school. A high priority has been given to professional development aimed at building teachers' and leaders' data literacy skills. Staff conversations and language reflect a sophisticated understanding of data concepts (eg, value-added; growth; improvement; statistical significance).</p> <p>Teachers are given test data (including NAPLAN) for their classes electronically and are provided with, and use, software (e.g., Excel) to analyse, display and communicate data on individual and class performances and progress, including comparisons of pre- and post-test results.</p> <p>Teachers routinely use objective data on student achievement as evidence of successful teaching.</p>	<p>There is evidence that the principal and other school leaders view reliable and timely student data as essential to their effective leadership of the school. There is a documented school plan and timetable for the annual collection of data on student achievement and wellbeing.</p> <p>One or more members of staff have been assigned responsibility for implementing the annual plan, analysing the full range of school data, and summarising, displaying and communicating student outcome data for the school. The school has ensured that appropriate software is available and that at least these assigned staff have been trained to undertake data analyses.</p> <p>Time is set aside (e.g., on pupil free days and in staff meetings) for the discussion of data and the implications of data for school policies and classroom practices. These discussions occur at whole-school and team levels. The school can illustrate through case studies, meeting minutes and project plans how data have been used to identify priorities, take action and monitor progress.</p>	<p>School leaders pay close attention to data provided to them about the performance of the school (e.g., NAPLAN results; Year 12 results) and identify areas in which the school is performing relatively poorly or well.</p> <p>Tests (e.g., commercially available reading tests) may be used by some teachers, but generally are not used as part of a whole-school assessment strategy.</p> <p>An ad hoc approach exists to building staff skills in the analysis, interpretation and use of classroom data.</p> <p>Software may be used for the analysis of school results, including the performances of priority groups, but analyses generally do not extend to studies of improvement or growth.</p> <p>School data are presented to staff in meetings, but presentations tend to be 'for information' rather than a trigger for in-depth discussions of teaching practices and school processes. Information about the school's performance is communicated to the school community, but may lack explanation or analysis. There is limited engagement with parents and families around school data.</p>	<p>There is very little evidence of school leaders' practical use of school-wide student outcome data. There is either no annual data collection plan for the school or the plan is being implemented in a minimalist fashion. The school makes little or no use of tests beyond those that the school is required to use.</p> <p>Teachers do not systematically analyse test and other data for their classes and teachers make little use of data to reflect on their teaching.</p> <p>The school is unable to demonstrate how data have been used in meetings or with parents to analyse and discuss current achievement levels and strategies for improvement.</p>

Comments:

- Data systems to track academic performance originally established for a small school, are no longer efficient given the new school growth. A solution is being worked on.
- Evidence indicated that the analysis of academic data collected for the CEO, was inconsistently used as formative assessment to inform learning programs.
- The ELC collection of achievement evidence was demonstrated through high quality floor books, learning portfolios and teacher judgements made against the Early Learning Framework.
- In general moderation in teams occurs prior to Semester reporting. Wider moderation across year levels would be welcomed.
- Kinder to Year 2 teachers were aware of school level reading benchmarks and some teachers used running records between reporting cycles to as formative assessment to guide instruction.

3

A culture that promotes learning

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

Outstanding	High	Medium	Low
<p>The school ethos is built around high expectations and a commitment to excellence. There is an expectation that every student will learn and achieve positive outcomes. Classrooms are calm but busy and interruptions to teaching time are kept to a minimum. There are no obvious behavioural problems, very high rates of school attendance and engagement, and staff morale is sustained at a high level.</p> <p>There is a happy, optimistic feel to the school.</p> <p>High levels of trust are apparent across the school community. Interactions are focused on the learning and wellbeing of students and on continually improving the school's ability to meet the needs of all students. Parents and families are valued as partners in student learning, and parents, school leaders and teachers work together in mutually supportive ways. There is a strong sense of belonging and pride in the school.</p> <p>A strong collegial culture has been established. Teachers have an overt and shared commitment to the improvement of teaching and an openness to critique by colleagues. This is reflected in the fact that teachers regularly invite leaders and colleagues to visit their classrooms to observe their teaching.</p>	<p>The 'tone' of the school reflects a school-wide commitment to purposeful, successful learning. There are very few obvious behavioural, attendance or engagement problems and behaviour management takes up very little, if any, time of school leaders and classroom teachers.</p> <p>There is a strong focus on quality learning and on the creation of a culture in which all students are expected to learn successfully, in their own ways and at their own pace. Individual talents are valued. Class 'busy work' is kept to a minimum, and an attempt is made to ensure that all students are engaged in challenging, meaningful learning.</p> <p>Respectful and caring relationships are reflected in the ways in which staff, students and parents interact and in the language they use in both formal and informal settings.</p> <p>Parents and families are encouraged to take a genuine and close interest in the work of the school and are welcomed as partners in their children's learning. There are agreed guidelines on such matters as greeting visitors, taking messages, and responding to queries promptly and respectfully.</p> <p>Staff morale is generally high.</p>	<p>Classrooms are generally orderly, although some are more so than others. Non-attendance is an issue for a small minority of students. However, many other students appear to be minimally engaged in productive learning activities.</p> <p>The school effectively implements its policies, for example, by ensuring that disruptive behaviour, bullying and harassment are dealt with promptly. The school has clear expectations for how students should behave and interact with one another, and in the main, relationships are caring and respectful. Some staff time is taken up dealing with behaviour problems.</p> <p>Most parents take an obvious interest in their children's learning. Engagement is primarily through regularly scheduled parent-teacher interviews.</p> <p>Staff morale is satisfactory.</p>	<p>Behavioural problems, disengagement and non-attendance are issues for a significant proportion of students. In a number of classrooms students are clearly not engaged in productive learning activities.</p> <p>The school may have policies and agreed procedures relating to student behaviour but these appear to have had little impact in practice. Much of the time of school leaders and teachers is taken up dealing with inappropriate behaviour. Interactions between parents, staff and students are not always productive and respectful. Staff tend not to value or engage parents as partners in student learning.</p> <p>Some teachers appear to work in isolation from colleagues. Staff morale is low and staff turnover is high.</p>

Comments:

- School behaviour support plans, a management flow chart and functional behaviour observation forms exist to support student wellbeing and facilitate a learning environment conducive to learning for all.
- Student Mental Health Programs, Kids Help Line, Yr 4-6 TILT interest groups, Seasons Program, Social Skills and Values Programs were strongly embedded and valued by teachers, students and parents. Anecdotal evidence was used as a measure of success for some of these programs and activities.
- The pastoral care of defence force families was strongly evident and highly valued.
- Demonstrated high levels of teacher support and trust were evident across the whole school with most teachers commenting that they could easily access collegial and executive support.
- Respectful relationships between teachers and students exist from the ELC to Year 6.
- Students expressed that they were happy, felt safe, loved coming to school and have friends.
- Parents supported the views expressed by students.
- Executive thank you's at staff meetings were seen to be genuine and appreciated by teachers

4

Targeted use of school resources

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

Outstanding	High	Medium	Low
<p>The principal and other school leaders have given a very high priority to understanding and addressing the learning needs of all students in the school. This is reflected in the implementation of systematic strategies for identifying student needs and the development of creative school-wide solutions for addressing those needs.</p> <p>A school-wide process has been established for identifying specific student learning needs. This process includes systematic testing to establish learning gaps and special needs. School records of individual student needs, achievements and progress are maintained centrally and shared across year levels.</p> <p>A range of initiatives (e.g., across-class and across-grade groupings for literacy and numeracy; the sharing of specialist teachers with neighbouring schools, if they exist) is being implemented to make more effective use of available resources to enhance teaching and learning. The school deploys staff in ways that make best use of their expertise (e.g., specialist reading/science teachers).</p>	<p>The principal and other school leaders have introduced programs and strategies to identify and address the needs of students in the school and are sourcing and applying available resources to meet those needs.</p> <p>The school has developed processes (e.g., systematic testing and assessment) for identifying student learning needs, although there may not always be good school records of student achievement and progress.</p> <p>Programs to meet individual learning needs (e.g., programs for gifted students, students with learning difficulties, students for whom English is a second language, Indigenous students, refugees) are prioritised, where possible, in the school budget.</p> <p>Physical spaces and technology are used effectively to maximise student learning. Learning spaces are organised for whole group work, small group work and individual work.</p>	<p>The school uses its human and physical resources to address the needs of students, although this may not be preceded by a systematic analysis of those needs.</p> <p>Specialist diagnostic testing is organised for a small number of students with special needs, but teachers do not routinely administer tests to better understand specific learning difficulties (e.g., problems in learning to read) or individual learning needs (e.g., LBOTE, gifted).</p> <p>There are very few school-wide programs or policies designed to address the learning needs of particular student groups (e.g., gifted students, students with disabilities, students for whom English is a second language). School leaders encourage teachers to address individual learning needs in classrooms, but there are very few agreed school-wide strategies for doing this.</p> <p>Physical learning spaces are used creatively and technology is accessible to the majority of staff and students.</p>	<p>The improvement of student outcomes does not appear to be the driving consideration in the allocation of school resources (e.g., the use of discretionary school funds). There is very little, if any, systematic testing of students to identify individual learning needs. The school does not always make best use of available staff expertise. School leaders have developed very few, if any, school-wide policies or programs to address individual needs, which are left to classroom teachers. School learning spaces tend to be used traditionally, with limited flexibility to support different kinds of learners and learning.</p>

Comments:

- Funding does not extend to support specific programs for gifted/extension students. Teachers are making curriculum modifications to cater for the learning needs of these students.
- Due to rapid student population growth, most expendable financial resources are directed towards significant building projects.
- Due to this growth there is a high call from teachers for more classroom/library books and learning resources, including banks of laptops and gross motor manipulatives. There were no collaborative process around program budgeting/resource identification, enabling teacher input and accountability that could be identified.
- Existing ICT infrastructure enables a BYOD program in Years 5 and 6 and banks of ipads exist for shared use in Kinder to Year 4. Work is currently being undertaken to enhance ICT infrastructure and access for learning. Learning trials of new IT tools are being undertaken.
- Student access to the Library at daily break time, supports literacy and student wellbeing.
- A flexible use of financial resources has supported student learning/wellbeing needs in the past
- Enhanced communication and system effectiveness, due to school growth has been identified by staff as important eg: the intranet.

5

An expert teaching team

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

Outstanding	High	Medium	Low
<p>The teaching staff of the school are experts in the fields in which they teach and have very high levels of pedagogical knowledge and skill, including expert knowledge of evidence-based teaching strategies.</p> <p>Teachers and school leaders take personal and collective responsibility for improving student learning and wellbeing, working together and learning from each other's practices. The sharing and showcasing of best practice are common. In team meetings there is an emphasis on the joint analysis of student work and on teaching strategies for improving student learning. Teachers collaboratively plan, deliver and review the effectiveness of lessons.</p> <p>School leaders place a very high priority on the ongoing professional learning of all staff and on the development of a school-wide, self-reflective culture focused on improving classroom teaching.</p> <p>School leaders participate in professional learning activities, learning alongside teachers, and the school supports teachers to continue formal study and celebrates professional success.</p>	<p>There is evidence that the principal and other school leaders see the development of staff into an expert and coherent school-wide teaching team as central to improving outcomes for all students.</p> <p>There is a documented professional learning plan and the school has arrangements in place for mentoring and coaching. Teachers visit each other's classrooms and welcome opportunities to have principals and other school leaders observe and discuss their work with them.</p> <p>Attention is paid to strengths and weaknesses in the school-wide team, with strategies in place to recruit staff with particular expertise, to train staff to address particular needs, and to support staff who find it difficult to commit to the school's improvement agenda.</p> <p>The school provides opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles outside the classroom.</p>	<p>The school undertakes professional learning activities, although these may not always focus on the development of knowledge and skills required to improve student learning and there may not be a coherent, documented learning plan.</p> <p>The principal and leadership team are seen as supportive of, but not generally involved in, the day-to-day practice and learning of teachers.</p> <p>Teachers are open to constructive feedback and provide feedback to colleagues, although there may not be formal mentoring or coaching arrangements in place.</p> <p>The school is implementing a formal process for conducting professional discussions with staff.</p> <p>The school's professional learning agenda is made explicit to staff at induction, and in staff handbooks.</p> <p>Where it is necessary to manage unsatisfactory staff performance, this is done professionally and effectively, and in accordance with agreed guidelines.</p>	<p>The development of a professional school-wide team does not appear to be a driving consideration of the principal or other school leaders (e.g., no reference is made to the National Professional Standards for Teachers, there are no mentoring arrangements in place, teachers work largely in isolation from one another 'behind closed doors').</p> <p>There is little evidence that school leaders are proactive in the recruitment and retention of staff.</p> <p>There is little sense of a whole-school coordinated approach to professional learning and a low priority is given to enhancing staff performance.</p>

Comments:

- MTS Express is seen as a valuable support to improve practice.
- Collaborative partners establish a team charter, plan, observe and reflect on their teaching practices. They meet at regular intervals and identify one literacy, and one personal goal.
- The school values the professional gifts that new teachers bring to the school to share, allowing good ideas to flourish.
- Teachers are involved in COSA action research, which is embedded in 2015 literacy programs and professional action plans developed from leadership responsibility statements. In 2016 teachers will investigate if an inquiry and UBD Literacy approach will enhance learning outcomes?
- Mentors and teaching partners are selected to take account of teacher experience.
- The CEO provides valued human resources to support ECT teachers with their Literacy block implementation along with effective guidance from the Learning Support Teacher and leaders.
- 'Sandpit' collaboration to share different approaches to Literacy differentiation is valued.

6

Systematic curriculum delivery

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

Outstanding	High	Medium	Low
<p>The school has a clearly documented whole-school plan for curriculum delivery. This plan is aligned with the Australian or other approved curriculum and, where appropriate, system curriculum documents. The plan makes explicit what (and when) teachers should teach and students should learn. The curriculum delivery plan is being implemented throughout the school and is shared with parents and the wider community.</p> <p>A strong alignment has been achieved between the overall curriculum delivery plan, term and unit plans, classroom teaching and the regular assessment of student progress in relation to curriculum expectations.</p> <p>Considerable attention has been given to ensuring ‘vertical’ alignment of the curriculum so that there is continuity and progression of learning across the years of school, with teaching in each year building on to and extending learning in previous years. General capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities are understood, valued and used as active learning streams for all students.</p> <p>A high priority in curriculum planning is given to the progressive development of students’ deep understandings of concepts, principles and big ideas within learning areas, as well as to the ongoing development of cross-curricular skills and attributes, including teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving, and the evaluation of information and evidence.</p> <p>The school places a priority on making the curriculum locally relevant and accessible to all students and values and builds on to students’ existing knowledge and varying backgrounds.</p>	<p>The school’s curriculum delivery plan identifies curriculum, teaching and learning priorities and requirements. The curriculum delivery plan reflects a shared vision (by the school’s governing body, principal, school leadership team, and teachers) for the school, and provides a context for delivering the curriculum as detailed in the Australian or other approved curriculum and, where relevant, system curriculum documents.</p> <p>The school curriculum plan and curriculum delivery (including the time allocated to particular learning) balance requirements to address all learning areas, to give priority to English, mathematics and science, and to embed the fundamental skills of literacy, numeracy and higher order thinking in all school subjects.</p> <p>The school leadership team ensures that the enacted curriculum remains a focus for discussion among, and collaboration between, teachers and that the curriculum plan is the reference against which flexible delivery is designed, assessment tasks are developed and student learning is reported. Curriculum delivery is designed to meet the needs of the range of students within each year level as well as those with disabilities and other particular needs.</p>	<p>The school has a documented plan for curriculum delivery that includes year level and term plans, but the progression of learning from year to year is not always obvious and the relationship between the pieces of the plan (the year, term and unit plans) would benefit from further clarification.</p> <p>School leaders talk about embedding fundamental cross-curricular skills such as literacy, numeracy and higher order thinking within all subjects, but there is little evidence that school-wide strategies are in place to drive a consistent approach. Literacy tends to be seen as the responsibility of English teachers and numeracy, the responsibility of mathematics teachers.</p> <p>Discussions about curriculum delivery tend to be sporadic and reactive with a year level focus rather than being driven by a leadership team with a whole-school approach.</p>	<p>School leaders and teachers have limited familiarity with national or system-wide curriculum documents.</p> <p>The school may have a documented plan for curriculum delivery but there is little evidence that the whole-school plan drives the lesson plans of individual teachers.</p> <p>The enacted school curriculum is not seen as a central concern of all teachers (e.g., it is not a regular topic of conversation, a focus for assessment design or a framework against which student learning is reported).</p>

Comments:

- Teachers identified the need for sequenced curriculum plans that ensure consistent teaching and learning expectations for all learning areas with vertical alignment.
- A sequenced curriculum plan for Numeracy has been developed to ensure consistent teaching and learning expectations in this area. The ‘Atlas’ software being rolled out will enable sharing and easier accessibility of programs and teacher planning.
- Collective accountability for regular and accessible program planning is a priority for Term 4 2015.
- A cross curriculum learning map is being developed.
- Some team moderation practices were identified by teachers for writing.

Differentiated teaching and learning

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

Outstanding	High	Medium	Low
<p>The school leadership team actively promotes the use of differentiated teaching as a strategy for ensuring that every student is engaged and learning successfully. It is recognised throughout the school that some students require significant adjustments to their learning programs (e.g., accelerated programs, special support) if they are to be optimally engaged and challenged, and individual learning plans have been developed for those students requiring them. Differentiation is a priority of the school and a feature of every teacher's practice.</p> <p>Regular data on the achievements, progress, strengths and weaknesses of individual students are used in all classrooms to make judgements about individual needs, to identify appropriate starting points for teaching and to personalise teaching and learning activities. Reports to parents and carers include details of how learning opportunities have been tailored to individual needs and of the progress individuals have made.</p>	<p>School leaders explicitly encourage teachers to tailor their teaching to student needs and readiness. This includes the systematic use of assessment instruments (standardised assessment tasks and teacher developed assessment tools) to establish where individuals are in their learning and to identify skill gaps and misunderstandings. Teachers also are encouraged to respond to differences in cultural knowledge and experiences and to cater for individual differences by offering multiple means of representation, engagement and expression.</p> <p>Planning shows how the different needs of students are addressed, and how multiple opportunities to learn are provided, including multiple pathways for transition to external studies (e.g., apprenticeships) for students in Years 10-12. Students' workbooks also illustrate differentiated tasks and feedback.</p> <p>Reports to parents show progress over time and include suggestions for ways in which parents can support their children's learning.</p>	<p>School leaders are committed to success for all, but do not drive a strong classroom agenda to assess and identify individual learning needs or to differentiate teaching according to students' needs.</p> <p>Some use is made of assessment instruments to identify individual strengths and weaknesses and starting points for teaching, but this appears to be at the initiative of individual teachers rather than a school-wide expectation.</p> <p>Some use is made of differentiated teaching (e.g., differentiated reading groups in the early primary years), but in most classes teachers teach the same curriculum to all students with similar levels of individual support.</p> <p>Regular assessments of student learning are undertaken, but these often are summative and disconnected (e.g., relating to different topics) rather than exploring long-term progress in students' knowledge, skills and understandings over time.</p> <p>Reports to parents generally do not show progress or provide guidance to parents on actions they might take.</p>	<p>School leaders do not place a high priority on teachers identifying and addressing individual learning needs, but are more focused on ensuring that all teachers are teaching the core year level curriculum.</p> <p>Little or no classroom use is made of assessment instruments to establish starting points for teaching. Assessments tend to be used only to establish summatively how much of the taught content students have learnt.</p> <p>Teachers tend to teach to the middle of the class, with the expectation that some students will not master the content, and finding ways to occupy more able students who finish work early.</p> <p>Reports to parents tend to be summative reports of how students have performed, with little guidance on what parents might do to assist in their children's learning.</p>

Comments:

- Identified students have personal plans for improvement and these plans are reflected on each term at Parent Support Group meetings.
- The establishment of a team approach to the coordination of learning support was suggested to build a culture of shared responsibility.
- Evidence supported some differentiation in the Kinder Literacy Program where like ability students across different grades worked together.
- Comprehensive transition activities from ELC to Kinder strongly support a smooth change for students, including a range of testing and information that is transferred about students.
- Evidence suggested that oral presentations to parents through learning journey, 3 way conversations, often identify learning growth to parents, where written reports do not.



Effective pedagogical practices

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

Outstanding	High	Medium	Low
<p>The principal and other school leaders have accepted personal responsibility for driving improvements in teaching throughout the school. They demonstrate a strong conviction that improved teaching is the key to improved student learning and have clear and well-known positions on the kinds of teaching that they wish to see occurring.</p> <p>All teachers and leaders are committed to identifying, understanding and implementing better teaching methods, and a high priority is given to evidence-based teaching strategies (strategies that have been demonstrated through research and practice to be highly effective. School leaders spend time working with teachers to improve their teaching practices, including modelling, evaluating and providing feedback on classroom teaching.</p>	<p>School leaders are committed to continuous improvement in teaching practices throughout the school and expect team leaders and teachers to identify ways of doing this, although the principal and other senior leaders may not themselves have clear positions on the kinds of teaching they wish to see occurring across the school or be ‘hands on’ in driving improved teaching practices.</p> <p>There is a particular focus on improved teaching methods in reading, writing, mathematics and science, and professional learning activities are focused on building teachers’ understandings of highly effective teaching strategies in these areas.</p> <p>Clarity about what students are expected to learn and be able to do, high expectations of every student’s learning, explicit teaching of skills and content, individualised attention as required, and timely feedback to guide student action are key elements of the school’s push for improved teaching and learning.</p>	<p>School leaders are explicit about their desire to see effective teaching occurring throughout the school, but are less clear about what this might look like. They do not appear to be driving a strong agenda to improve and/or enhance teaching practices across the school, except perhaps indirectly through a focus on school results and targets. School leaders take a close interest in the school’s literacy and numeracy results, but generally do not engage in discussions with staff about effective teaching strategies.</p> <p>Discussions of specific teaching practices are rare and generally occur only in the context of concerns about a teacher’s performance.</p> <p>There is some clarity about what students are expected to learn, but a lack of balance in teaching methods (e.g., over-reliance on whole-group teaching or very little explicit teaching).</p>	<p>School leaders do not appear to have strong views on the characteristics of highly effective teaching. There is little evidence that they are driving an agenda to change or enhance teaching practices across the school.</p> <p>The principal and other school leaders spend very little time on issues related to teaching. Questions of pedagogy appear to be viewed solely as the responsibility of teachers. There is little obvious school-wide discussion or consideration of highly effective teaching methods.</p> <p>There may be a lack of explicitness about what students are expected to know and be able to do as a result of classroom activities, very little explicit teaching, limited attention to individual learning needs, or low expectations on the part of teachers that all students in the room will master the content of lessons. Classroom activities frequently have the appearance of ‘busy work’.</p>

Comments:

- Professional Development is aligned to TQI accreditation. Further alignment to the Australian Professional Standards for teachers is an identified need.
- There was evidence of high variability regarding ‘agreed practice statement’ implementation.



School-community partnerships

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

Outstanding	High	Medium	Low
<p>The school leadership team makes deliberate and strategic use of partnerships with families, local businesses and community organisations to access intellectual, physical and/or other resources not available within the school for the purposes of improving student outcomes. There is a range of currently operating partnerships, each carefully planned and designed to enhance student outcomes (for example, to broaden student knowledge, build new skills, develop more positive attitudes, increase engagement levels, create applied learning opportunities for students, or facilitate successful transitions to work or further education or training).</p> <p>Each partnership has been established in response to an identified need. Considerable effort has been put into understanding students’ needs, identifying appropriate partners to address those needs, planning the details of partnership programs and clarifying partner roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>Careful consideration has been given to the benefits of the partnership to each participating partner. Explicit processes are in place to ensure ongoing and effective communication – sometimes across networks of partners – and there are documented plans for monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of each partnership.</p> <p>The school’s partnerships are being successfully implemented and appear to be adequately resourced and sustainable. There is clear evidence that partnerships are having their intended impact.</p>	<p>The school has established one or more partnerships with families, local businesses and/or community organisations with the express purpose of improving outcomes for students. Partnerships have generally been initiated by the senior leadership team and have their support.</p> <p>Each partnership brings staff and students of the school together with external partners such as families, other education or training institutions, local businesses and/or community organisations. All partners have a high level of understanding of, and commitment to, the purposes of the partnership and clear objectives have been set, expressed in terms of improved outcomes for students.</p> <p>Attention has been given to communication and to the sharing of experiences within the partnership; however, there may be no formal plan for reviewing the partnership’s outcomes and effectiveness.</p> <p>There is evidence that the school’s partnerships are being implemented as intended. However, there may be limited evidence of improved student outcomes as a result of partnership activities – possibly because there has been insufficient time for them to demonstrate an effect.</p>	<p>The school has external ‘partnerships’, but rather than being built around a coherent, jointly planned program of activities to improve outcomes for students, these ‘partnerships’ tend to be mutually convenient arrangements (eg, exchanges of expertise or the sharing of facilities between institutions or organisations). Such ‘partnerships’ often are established by individual members of staff and have limited whole-school support or engagement.</p> <p>The student needs that partnerships are designed to address may not be made explicit and, rather than being carefully planned, individual partnerships tend to be opportunistic in nature. Communications between partners are largely unplanned and infrequent.</p> <p>No plans exist to systematically review the effectiveness of partnerships, which typically are very dependent on the efforts of a small number of individuals and so have limited sustainability.</p>	<p>There is no evidence of planned, deliberate partnerships with other institutions or organisations. Contacts with families, other education and training institutions, local businesses and community organisations, when they occur, are limited to isolated events. Although references may be made to ‘partnerships’, these partnerships are not based on collaboratively planned programs of activities with clear goals, roles and responsibilities.</p>

Comments:

- The School Bag app and emails are used by parents in regular communication with teachers and working in partnership to support learning is encouraged.
- Evidence supported the fact that assemblies showcase student learning and values.
- Parents support the reading program in a number of Kinder to Year 2 classrooms.
- Literacy/Numeracy Showcases, Information evenings and newsletters each term all inform parents about learning programs and how they can be involved in the life of the school to support their child’s learning.
- Parents conduct a Mum’s and Bubs play group and they support extra school curricula programs.
- Informal and formal partnerships exist between Mother Teresa and the following external providers:- Kids Help Line, the local Health Centre, Fresh Taste, Water Polo Australia, local sporting clubs, Connecting Kids, Before and After School Care, Tennis Australia, Instrumental teachers, the local church and a range of providers who support school sports clinics across the year.
- A possible partnership will be explored in 2016 with a nearby special school being built.

Commendations:

- The tone of the school and atmosphere created is a real credit to the staff, students and families of Mother Teresa. The school places a high priority on student and staff wellbeing and has processes in place to provide both academic and non-academic support to address individual needs. There is an obvious sense of belonging and pride in the school and staff students and parents speak highly of the school and its welcoming environment.
- The Pastoral Care policy, Restorative Justice practices, Mental Health initiatives and Community Outreach programs contribute significantly to the life of the school and wider community.
- The charism of Mother Teresa underpins the values and beliefs of the school. Programs and activities to support the school's vision 'Do small things with great love' and supporting the Catholic World View include, but are not exclusive to: the Tree of Life focus, Mini Vinnies, Kids Help Line, Prayer, Year 6 leadership activities, value based assemblies, rewards, values and behaviour themes, buddy programs, sustainability initiatives and gardening/fresh taste.

Affirmations:

- In a period of rapid school growth there has been a genuine openness to accept ideas and strategies, to be able to determine future consistent school wide approaches to curriculum and pedagogy.
- The curriculum leader and the literacy and numeracy teams have worked hard over the last 2 years to ensure Mother Teresa is now able to determine in a collaborative way, what consistent agreed practices will be. The curriculum leader has engaged teachers on the journey and worked in a highly professional manner.
- Teachers commented overwhelmingly that they valued the MTS Express (peer mentoring) program which involves one cycle of planning, observation and reflection each semester.
- Effective differentiation, including the formulation of student learning goals is happening in some areas of the school where classroom teachers are identifying and addressing the learning needs of individual students, including high achieving students and tailoring their classroom activities to levels of readiness and need.
- The Learning support program is effective in addressing the needs of approximately 55 students. The Learning support teacher is a valued and trusted member of staff. She monitors the work of the learning assistants, liaises with parents and other professional support staff. Teachers have flexible, informal access to her for support and guidance providing a flexible response to meet the identified individual learning needs students.
- The Early Learning Centre is to be affirmed for its high standard of professional practice across all areas.

Recommendations:

- Narrow and sharpen the school's improvement agenda, grounded in evidence from research and practice and express in terms of measurable student outcomes. Set explicit and clear school-wide targets for improvement with accompanying timelines and rigorously monitor the progress towards these targets. This needs to be established collaboratively and communicated to parents, families, teachers and students.
- Refine the plan for the systematic collection and analysis of the range of student outcome data including both test data and quality classroom assessments. Set aside time for school leaders to regularly have in-depth discussions with staff on achievement data and strategies for the continuous improvement of student outcomes.
- Assign one or more members of staff for the collection and analysis of the full range of school wide data and for summarising, displaying and communicating data including to parents and the school community.
- Develop a whole school curriculum framework that makes clear what and when teachers should teach and students should learn. Ensure that the enacted curriculum remains a focus for discussion among and collaboration between teachers and that the curriculum delivery is designed to meet the range of students within each year level.
- Continue to develop a whole school pedagogical framework. Ensure that all staff members enact the pedagogical framework by making daily use of agreed evidence based practices aligned with the explicit improvement agenda. Ensure clarity about what students are expected to learn and do high expectations of every student's learning, explicit teaching of skills and content and timely feedback to students.
- Build on the current MTS Express model to develop expert teaching teams who can improve on their current teaching practices to develop a school wide self-reflective culture to improve student learning. Align this to a documented professional learning plan that is linked to the AITSL standards.
- Formulate collaborative processes to determine the use of human and physical resources to address the learning needs of students.

Further Details

Information about the ACER Committed to Excellence (c2e) program and the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) is available at: <http://www.acer.edu.au/nsit>

Further enquiries about the NSIT School Review process and school improvement service may be directed to:

Robert Marshall, Senior Project Director, School Improvement
Australian Council for Educational Research

t: +61 3 9277 5346

m: +61 0439 665 965

e: robert.marshall@acer.edu.au www.acer.edu.au