

Commissioned Review Report Palmerston Senior College

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Context for the review

Palmerston Senior College is a co-educational Independent Public School catering for around 500 students in Years 10 to 12. The college is located on spacious grounds in Palmerston, the fastest growing city in the Northern Territory and includes a Special Education Centre to cater for students with an intellectual disability from Year 7 through to Year 12.¹ The college has modern, custom-built facilities that include: a dedicated Careers Centre; specialist commercial and home economics facilities including a commercial standard kitchen that enables the provision of a VET-accredited hospitality course; a well-equipped library with access to advanced technology; a music room and fully-equipped recording studio; up-to-date science laboratories; a fully-equipped theatre; arts facilities including a ceramics studio; a range of sporting facilities including a gymnasium, oval and basketball courts. In addition, students have access to laptop computers and interactive whiteboards and are encouraged to use these for class work and other related activities.

The college vision is to ensure that every student is given the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve their individual goals and potential way beyond the school gate. The range of programs and pathways the college provides helps to ensure that regardless of a student's interests or talents, they will be given the best possible opportunity to thrive, grow and learn.

The college is part of a hub of schools known as the Palmerston City Schools who work together to provide a seamless Pre-school to Year 12 curriculum, shared professional learning, values and a student support focus across all the phases of school.

The most significant factor impacting the college at the time of this review is the fact it is merging with the nearby Rosebery Middle School to create a two-campus 7-12 school that will provide students with continuity of teaching and learning throughout their secondary years. Since this significantly impacts the entirety of senior college operations it is the focus of an introductory section to the detailed findings of the review.

Aside from this, the college does already have a Strategic Improvement Plan for the period 2015-2018, and to which any recommendations arising from this review will need to be integrated. That said, the plan is specific to the senior school and will need to be revisited as the merger continues to unfold and a new 2018-2021 strategic plan is devised.

Nature of the student cohort

¹ It should be noted that a review of special education in the NT has been mooted which may impact the future of the Special Education Centre within the merged college entity. It also means that the SEC is less of a focus in this review report than otherwise might have been the case.

According to the MySchool website² the college Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA)³ is 944 compared with the average of 1000, suggesting it is a disadvantaged school. More specifically, 32% of students are in the bottom quartile, 58% in the middle two quartiles and only 9% in the top quartile. Approximately 27% of students identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 16% of students have English as an Additional Language, and 7% are members of Defence Force families. There is significant student mobility in the school within each year.

College enrolment trends are discussed further in the overview of student performance that is provided later in this report.

The commissioned reviewer and review team

The review was conducted by a team comprising Bryan Hughes and Anne White from the Northern Territory Department and led by the independent education consultant Vic Zbar who was commissioned directly by the school.

Vic Zbar is a Director of *Zbar Consulting*. He has extensive consultancy and project management experience and is recognised internationally for his writing on education and range of education reports.

Prior to the establishment of *Zbar Consulting*, Vic was the Assistant Director of Human Resources in the Victorian Department of Education, having earlier been principal advisor to the Chief Executive, giving him an in-depth knowledge of the work of most aspects of the then Office of Schools. Vic is a widely published author in both education and management. He is the author of the best selling *Managing the future*, published by Macmillan in 1995 and its sequel, *Key Management Concepts* published in 1996.

More recently he co-edited four volumes of *Leading the Education Debate*, published by the Centre for Strategic Education (CSE), and co-authored *Better Schools, Better Teachers, Better Results*, published in 2007 by ACER. He has written numerous articles and papers, and in July 2014 authored *Meeting the Challenge of 21st Century Schooling*, published by CSE. Together with Pamela Macklin, he has written *Driving School Improvement: A Practical Guide* being published later in 2017 by ACER.

Vic has reviewed more than 50 schools in Australia and overseas, and in 2014 he completed a Ministerial Review of Middle Schooling for the Northern Territory Department of Education which the government accepted in full.

Bryan Hughes is the Regional Director of the Palmerston and Rural Region.

Anne White has worked in schools in the Territory for over 25 years, most recently as the Principal of Katherine High School 2010 – 2016. In her current position as

² <https://www.myschool.edu.au/>

³ The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) was developed for the MySchool website as a measure for making meaningful comparisons of advantage and disadvantage across schools.

Director Performance and Development, she facilitates the delivery of school reviews across Territory schools.

The nature of the review recommendations

The report contains a number of recommendations to help guide the school's deliberations on how best to move forward to improve student learning outcomes and ensure a fulfilling and successful working life for its staff.

These recommendations are designed to be:

- **Pragmatic**, so they are manageable for the school to implement and can realistically be delivered across the whole of the school.
- **Strategic**, in that they focus on what matters most to make the difference at Palmerston Senior College, rather than seeking to tackle everything the school does. The focus in this context, is on those areas where action is most needed, is most likely to achieve significant improvement and is likely to require a manageable level of resourcing by the school.
- **Aligned**, to strategies, approaches and support already in place so the school can build on what exists, rather than seeking to reinvent the wheel.

This reflects the experience of many Australian schools seeking improvement and change, that they try to take on too much that is new at any one time, with the result that implementation suffers and cynicism breeds in the school. It is better to do fewer really important things, and make sure to do them well, than to tackle everything that may need change in the school.

This is especially important at Palmerston SC at the moment because it is in the throes of a merger with Rosebery Middle School with all of the cultural and logistical challenges that this brings. The reviewers have therefore been cognisant not to unnecessarily add to the range of strategies and amalgamation measures already in the mix, but rather to point to some strategic directions the college can consider that dovetail to what it already does and intends as the merger unfolds, and align to successful school experiences and the findings of relevant educational research. In this way, the college can build on its strengths and begin to tackle the challenges that will enable it to become and remain great.

Methodology

The process adopted for the review comprised the following steps.

1. Detailed analysis of data and documents the college provided in advance to help maximise the value of the in-college visit time, including: student achievement data; student attendance data; student suspension data; enrolment trend data; student retention data; student destination data; staff, student and parent opinion data; the college vision statement and annual plan; list of subjects offered at each year level and enrolments in each; the college instructional model along with any support material for staff; the college professional learning policy and data on

professional development undertaken by the whole staff; the school behaviour policy and any associated support materials; relevant documentation on the merger with Rosebery Middle School; and any other documentation the college believed the reviewers should read.

2. Three days in the college for targeted interviews, classroom observations and focus groups. The college developed a schedule for the reviewers' time that included:
 - a tour of the school with the principal at the commencement of the visit
 - discussions with each member of the principal class team
 - interviews with leaders responsible for student wellbeing, curriculum and assessment, teaching and learning, and professional learning in the college
 - a focus group of faculty/department heads
 - a focus group of teachers who have been in the college for more than five years
 - a focus group of teachers who have been in the college for less than three years
 - a student focus group
 - a parent focus group
 - classroom observations
 - a meeting with appropriate leaders at Rosebery to gain their perspective on the merger and its implications
 - any other respondent the college felt the reviewers should speak with to ensure a fully rounded review.
3. Ongoing liaison with the principal including a daily debrief.

Structure of the report

The report provides a snapshot of college performance and then a detailed discussion aligned to the key elements associated with how school improvement occurs, reflecting the school improvement model that the college has chosen to adopt.⁴ More specifically, the report addresses:

- Leadership for whole school improvement.
- An orderly learning environment where students are well-known by the staff.
- Curriculum and assessment.
- Ensuring consistently good teaching.
- Professional learning for improved practice.

These five headings encompass the eight components of the Teaching and Learning School Improvement Framework developed by Professor Geoff Masters from ACER⁵, as outlined in Table 1.

⁴ See for example, Zbar, V. (September 2013) *Generating whole school improvement: The stages of sustained success*, Occasional Paper Number 132, CSE, Melbourne.

⁵ Masters, G. (2020) *Teaching and Learning School Improvement Framework*, State of Queensland and ACER, Camberwell.

Table 1: The structure for the report matched to the Masters’ framework

Structure for the review and report	Alignment to the Masters’ framework
Leadership for whole school improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An explicit improvement agenda • Analysis and discussion of data • Targeted use of school resources
An orderly learning environment where students are well-known by the staff	Not specifically present in the framework
Curriculum and assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic curriculum delivery • Analysis and discussion of data
Ensuring consistently good teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An expert teaching team • Differentiated teaching and learning • Effective pedagogical practices
Professional learning for improved practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A culture that promotes learning

It should be noted that the college produced a comprehensive self-evaluation report for the review which examines performance against the targets it set for student learning, community, governance and the school’s workforce, in terms of what was achieved, why the outcomes were achieved/targets were not achieved, and what the college can do in future to continue to improve. The self-evaluation provides a realistic analysis by the college of its performance which the reviewers would generally endorse, along with strategies that have been identified in it to ensure continued improvement in the future. It also amply demonstrates that substantial progress has been made over the last three years, both in terms of improving student outcomes, and setting the groundwork for ensuring that proven, effective practices are more consistently implemented through the school.

As far as possible, we have avoided repeating the analysis in the college self-evaluation, which means that ideally the two reports should be read side by side. Beyond this we have in this report sought to add value to the self-evaluation, including recommendations which, as the self-evaluation states, ‘will be used to inform the strategic direction of the *Palmerston College Strategic Improvement Plan, 2018-2012*’.

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The reviewers want to put on record their appreciation for the openness and warmth with which they were welcomed in the college and the efficient and responsive support they received for the review.

Detailed findings of the review

The pending merger

As noted earlier, Palmerston Senior College is involved in a merger with Rosebery Middle School to create a dual campus Year 7 to 12 college in Palmerston. A Joint Executive Leadership Team has been established which meets fortnightly and, with the support of a number of teams, is setting the direction and focus for the new school. More specifically, the executive, with the support of Pamela Macklin and Glenn Proctor⁶ is establishing key improvement priorities for both campuses, developing a college-wide positive behaviour framework, implementing an explicit instructional model (EIM) across both campuses, growing a culture of collaboration through creating professional learning teams, and working towards developing a schedule for curriculum working groups in key learning areas to enable the development of a guaranteed and viable curriculum from Year 7 through to Year 12.

It should be noted that Sue Healy has been appointed the inaugural principal for the dual campus college and is based in the Senior College on Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoon, and the Rosebery campus on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday morning so all staff have access to her in this role.

Consistent with the structure for this report outlined earlier, whole of college professional development at the start of the year focused on the four preconditions for whole-school improvement as a prelude for further work in this regard. A number of sub-committees are working to define the parameters for ensuring quality teaching and learning, student wellbeing and the day-to-day effective operation of the merged school. These include:

- A Curriculum, Assessment and Pedagogy Sub-committee which is developing an explicit instructional model to operate across the two campuses and drafting a scope and sequence template to guide the College Curriculum Teams in developing their own scope and sequence document including assessments and additional documentation to support the implementation of the EIM.
- A Wellbeing Sub-committee which is developing a college-wide positive behaviour framework (SWPBF⁷), along with a college behaviour matrix and a process to ensure that the SWPBF aligned to the NT's Safe Schools Wellbeing and Behaviour Policy is embedded across the college as a whole.

There are also sub-committees dealing with communications, human resources, finance, infrastructure and information and communications technology (ICT). The

⁶ Pamela Macklin has been engaged by the Department of Education in the Northern Territory to coach the leadership teams of all stand-alone middle schools and, in the case of these merging schools, Palmerston Senior College and Rosebery Middle School. In the interests of transparency, it should be noted that Pamela is the Managing Director of Zbar Consulting and is married to Vic Zbar. Glenn Proctor is an experienced principal who successfully led the newly-merged three-campus Hume Central Secondary College in Melbourne and the principal of Glenn Proctor Consulting. He is working specifically to support the two schools merger.

⁷ School Wide Positive Behaviour Framework.

campuses are also working to align their schedules to ensure common start and finish times and breaks.

As the merger unfolds, the college has sought to particularly develop capacity in formulating a guaranteed and viable curriculum for Years 7 to 12 and the implementation of an explicit instructional model underpinned by a process of peer observation to drive consistency of practice through the new school. Work is also continuing to ensure a whole-school Positive Behaviour framework is in place, consistent with the model of improvement the college has chosen to adopt.

The two schools' councils are transitioning to a common body and elected a joint council chairperson at both schools' annual general meetings earlier in the year. The inaugural joint council meeting was held on 28 March and the council is helping to create the vision statement that will drive Palmerston College and ensure that it is the local school of choice.

Looked at overall, substantial progress has been made in preparing for the merger in a very short time indeed, which is a credit to all involved.

While the progress of the merger itself is not specifically within the brief of this review, it naturally affects the discussion that follows and is referred to when relevant to the performance of the Senior College over the past three years and its approach to improvement in the future as it becomes part of this larger, 7-12 school.

An overview of student performance

The Senior College enrolment of 482 in 2017⁸, is down from 499 last year and 522 in 2013, in the context of significant competition from a number of non-government schools that have recently been established in the area. There has been an equivalent decline in Middle School enrolments as well, to 605. This, it is noted, is a factor in the merger since together, the campuses can work to provide high quality and continuous learning pathways and specialisation, underpinned by a six-year relationship with students and their parents, a seamless transition from middle into senior schooling and a consistent approach to student wellbeing, curriculum delivery and pedagogy from Year 7 to Year 12 that will attract more students to the merged school.

Approximately 85% of the students who started at the college in 2016 were still enrolled in December of that year, which is consistent with previous years. The level reflects significant student mobility in the area and the fact that the pathways approach the college pursues sees a number of students transition to traineeships, apprenticeships or full time employment during the year, which reflects positively on the college pathways approach.

Student retention in this context was 60.4% in 2016 and 71.6% from Year 11 to Year 12. The rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were less than this at

⁸ It should be noted that each of the figures includes a number of students in Years 7 to 9 in the Special Education Centre. For example, there are 53 students in those years in the college in 2017.

50% and 53.7% respectively. While the issues of mobility raised earlier have an impact in this regard, these are figures that the college should be seeking to increase over the coming years. The sort of home group program arrangement that is recommended later in this report should contribute positively in this regard, by helping to ensure students at risk of dropping out of school are better known and supported to succeed at school. Consideration could be given in this context to setting targets for retention from Year 10 to 11 and Year 11 to 12 which are a stretch from the percentages achieved over the last three years.

Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET) data for the Senior College indicates student attainment levels that are comparable to other senior secondary schools. There has been a steady and continuing improvement in NTCET completion rates, from 58% in 2011, to 81% in 2014 and 95% in 2016 which matches the target set for 2018, but is down slightly from 98% in 2015. This has been accompanied by an increase in the number of students achieving an ATAR and an improvement in Stage 1 and 2 grades since 2012. It is suggested that a significant factor in the marked improvement in 2016 is attributable to the 'Bright Buttons' tutor support program which provides high ability students and students with potential with access to additional support after school. In 2017, this program is being extended from students in Years 11 and 12 to encompass students in Year 10. Beyond this, the college has instituted student pathway planning processes that provide all students with mentoring and guidance regarding their intended pathway, and which encourage parents/guardians to become involved.

In 2016, 80 Year 10-12 students completed a Vocational Education and Training (VET) Certificate, 14 at level III. Eleven students were engaged in school-based apprenticeships/traineeships and almost 28% of NTCET completers included a VET course.

The college has a Student Support Team that meets regularly, though less regularly in the context of the merger work, to discuss student progress and to review strategies for improving it. Some of the key strategies in use include the conduct of a study group in the college library, the home room program focus on career development and independent learning skills, tutoring support for high achieving students, a range of targeted personnel support (eg, Career Advisor, Counsellor, Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker, Home Liaison Officer, etc.), and support for student leadership and student voice.

Of the 73 students whose destination beyond Year 12 in 2016 is known (out of a total of 110), 32% went into full-time and 4% into part-time employment and 30% progressed to university. Ten percent found an apprenticeship/traineeship and 9% went on to a VET program or other tertiary education provider. There were only six non-completers (8%) and a small number of students moved interstate. This suggests that the overwhelming majority of Year 12 completers do find a pathway of some sort. The Special Education Centre supports students in their final year of study to transition to work or a Community Pathways program, but for reasons of privacy, the details of post-school destinations are not included in this report. Suffice to say that all of the current class have work experience placements of at least a day a week.

The college provided detailed student performance data for the review, particularly for Years 11 and 12, which shows that the college noticeably improved its proportion

of students in Year 11 achieving an A and B grade in NTCET between 2015 and 2016 from 7.59% to 11.42% of As and 24.33% to 25.45% Bs. That said, this is still below the Territory-wide percentages of 15.0% and 16.77% for an A, and 35.13% and 35.16% for a B respectively. More than 40% of students achieved a C in each year, while between 12 and 15% achieved a D and 5-6% an E. This means that the challenge the college faces is to progressively shift the proportion of students achieving a C to a B over the coming years as the greatest point of leverage for improving outcomes, while also continuing to reduce the proportion of students gaining a D or E.

In Year 12 in the same two years, a bit over 5% of students achieved an A of some sort⁹, around a quarter or more of students achieved a B, a half or more a C, around 10% a D and only a very small proportion an E. Around one third of students achieved either an A or B in each year, and the proportion was markedly better in 2016 (39.32%) than in 2015 (29.4%), with one student achieving an A+. That said, as is the case for Year 11, the proportion of students achieving an A or B across the full range of studies in either year is well below the NT level as a whole (58.54% in 2015 and 57.74% in 2016), presenting the college with the same challenge to increase the proportion of A and B scores at the expense of C to E.

While not the subject of a recommendation it is suggested that, in the context of the merger with Rosebery Middle School, the college would benefit by considering a target to increase the proportion of students achieving an A or B score in NTCET in each of Year 11 and 12 to 45% over the next two years, as the basis of setting a further improvement target in 2019.

Such targets, it is noted, are consistent with the efforts the college has already made to set and move towards higher targets for Year 10 and 11 subjects between 2015 and 2016. For example, the college increased its pass target for Year 10 and 11 English from 75% in 2015 to 77.5% for Year 10 and 81% in Year 11 and achieved an increase of 5% and 4% respectively, though it experienced more mixed results in meeting targets for the smaller cohorts of Humanities students where the percentage pass rate in Year 11 increased by 8% but the Year 10 outcomes saw a 4% drop.

Beyond this, achieving the recommended Year 11 and 12 NTCET targets can build on the valuable data the college collects through the NTCET-related moderation activities it conducts¹⁰ and the way in which it identifies movements in assessments (ie, whether the 70% of school-based assessments have held, moved down or moved up) for students across the different subjects it provides. Collaborative analysis of this data in professional learning teams can unpack the reasons the movements occurred in order to capitalise on why there was movement up and/or address instances where the movement was down.

⁹ It should be noted that at Year 12 each grade is broken down with a plus or minus (eg. A+, A and A-) compared with a simple A to N at Year 11. There were negligible N scores in the college at either year level in both 2015 and 2016.

¹⁰ The South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) Board conducts a moderation process to confirm school assessment results and ensure that standards are applied consistently across schools. A report is provided on each subject that is moderated to inform the teacher(s) involved.

It needs to be acknowledged in this context that the ‘all study’ score does mask some significant differences between subject areas. Table 2 sets out the proportion of students achieving a B- to A+ in Year 12 in studies offered in both 2015 and 2016 where at least 20 students participated so any individual student does not account for more than five percent of the overall score.

Table 2: Proportion of students achieving B- to A+, 2015 and 2016

<i>Study</i>	2015	2016
Business, Enterprise & Technology	51.61	46.78
Cross Disciplinary	21.42	30.32
English	24.65	48.78
Mathematics	28.56	18.34
Sciences	38.44	40.79

Apart from some volatility between the two years, it can be seen that some areas are tending to achieve proportionately more A and B grades than others. This should not be taken as a judgment of those areas, since there may be reasons for this that are not readily evident, such as the nature of the cohorts in different subjects, the students’ formative learning experiences in earlier years, etc. However, it does support the whole of college focus that is underway as part of merger preparations to use an instructional model to inform better collaborative lesson planning in professional learning teams, as discussed later in this report. It also may signal a need to move beyond just faculty deliberations around the instructional model centred on learning intentions, to also look at how successful practices in ostensibly higher achieving studies can be transferred to other studies to progressively improve student grades informed by the SACE moderation reports. It is noted that the same exercise could be undertaken for Year 11 leading to the same conclusion for sharing at that year level.

There would be value in the college examining the reasons why some studies achieve higher level grades for students than others with a view to codifying any practices that should be spread through the college as a whole and thereby contribute to meeting improvement targets for the outcomes that students achieve.

There are mixed results for English and Humanities related to higher targets set for 2016 as outlined above. Beyond this, the college uses the Holborn Recognition Test as an indicator of reading proficiency and the Progressive Achievement Test (PAT) for reading comprehension at Year 10. The Holborn test, which is something of a quick diagnostic check of student proficiency suggests first, that a significant proportion of students are well below the expected Year 10 reading level and need to be brought up, and second that the college is making inroads in this regard as evident in the reduction of this proportion from 49% in semester one 2016 to 30% in semester 2.

Similarly the PAT tests demonstrate both the challenge the college faces and the inroads it has made, whereby the 57% of students who scored well behind the expected Year 10 level in the first semester was reduced to 43% by the end of semester two. This puts a premium on both the nature of literacy teaching in all classes – and hence the planning of good lessons using the college instructional model and appropriately targeted learning intentions for the class – and the effectiveness of intervention programs the college uses for students who are most at

risk in this regard. This is taken up in more detail in the discussion of teaching and learning later in this report.

The college collected staff, student and parent opinion survey data in each of 2015 and 2016¹¹ which included material relevant to student performance in those years; particularly about the students' motivation to learn. Questions about student motivation in a staff opinion survey are a surrogate for determining their belief that students can learn. The majority of college staff do either agree or strongly agree that the students they teach are motivated to learn, albeit declining between the two years, from 68% in 2015 to 57% in 2016. That said, around ten percent of staff in each year either disagreed or strongly disagreed that this was the case, and 22% in 2015 rising to 34% in 2016 adopted a neutral stance, in contrast with their willingness to agree or disagree on other variables the survey contained. While not the subject of a recommendation in this report, since it is more in the way of advice to leaders in the school, it does suggest a need to emphasise the importance and power of high expectations for raising student performance, particularly as the newly-merged school takes shape.

Interestingly, the student view of this issue mirrors the staff to some extent, though in this case the level of 60% agreement/strong agreement in 2015 increases to 65% in 2016. Bearing in mind that fewer than ten percent of the student body has responded to the survey, more than 10% of students disagree in some form that their teachers motivate them to learn, and a quarter or more in 2016 adopt a neutral stance. Around 60% of students agreed in some form that their teachers make sure they understand the work they are asked to do, and a slightly lower 48% in 2015 and 56% in 2016 agree that their teachers understand how they learn. At a more positive level still, almost all students in each year felt that their teachers expect them to do their best.

Taken together, these data tend to confirm the challenge to leaders to promote higher expectations amongst both students and staff. Parents, it is noted, are noticeably more positive in their ratings regarding motivation than either the students or staff.

Leadership for whole-school improvement

The existence of a cohesive leadership team, with a clear sense of what needs doing, why and how, is the difference between whole school improvement and pockets of improvement in the school. In any school there will be areas that are performing particularly well, and better than other parts of the school. In the absence of leadership, however, their achievements rarely if ever spread across the school, since there is no-one to drive it through, with the requisite authority to bring others with them on the way. Leadership is arguably even more important when a major change in structure, such as the merger with Rosebery Middle School occurs, since a new and merged leadership team needs to be built.

¹¹ The staff opinion surveys are arguably more credible than those completed by students and parents, since most staff responded to the survey in each year, whereas only a minority of students and parents who were sampled for the survey returned it to the school.

The College principal class team comprises the principal and three assistant principals one of whom is responsible for the Special Education Centre. As the merger with Rosebery Middle School proceeds, the team will comprise the current principal as the whole of merged college principal, two campus heads and assistant principals at each site, all of whom will also have a whole of college role. Senior Teacher 1 positions now and in the merged college are responsible for leading professional learning teams in the school.

The principal of the senior college was described by teachers interviewed as highly visible in the school, positively influencing the consistency of implementation of college policies and student behaviour, and as having contributed to other leaders being more visible as well. In addition, it was suggested that the way in which she and other leaders are managing the amalgamation is changing the conversations in the staffroom as the common language being developed takes hold.

The staff opinion survey reveals that the overwhelming majority of staff in this context agree/strongly agree that the school has a clear vision and direction for improvement (89% and 90% in 2015 and 2016 respectively) and that they personally contribute to the improvement agenda in the school (85% and 88%). Beyond this, and crucially as far as the community would be concerned, is the fact that around 85-90% in each year would recommend the school as a workplace to others, as well as recommending it as a school for others to enrol their children.

The college had instituted faculty-based planning that involved the development of faculty improvement plans which, it is acknowledged, have now been put on hold in favour of other merger priorities. Nonetheless, they are briefly discussed here because they clearly were provided to the reviewers for a reason, they provide clues to some planning approaches in the college, and also the context for making an important point about change and how it successfully occurs.

The unfinished plans for 2016 provided to the reviewers indicate the outcomes to be achieved and then specify the key actions to be undertaken, by who and when, performance measures, baseline information, faculty/program performance targets and evidence. The overarching sense the plans give is of faculties that were trying to do too much in a short period of time, and without a clear connection to the overarching strategic approach of the school. For example, one faculty was seeking to simultaneously engage its staff in implementing Visible Learning strategies for students, creating differentiated programs for students with differing abilities, confirming teacher knowledge and understanding of NTCET performance standards, grading targets established for cross disciplinary subjects, and more. Each of these is a major undertaking in its own right and requires significant capacity-building work.

It needs to be remembered that one of the main enemies of whole school improvement is when the school, or its constituent parts take on too much. It inevitably means that implementation suffers and nothing is seen properly through. This in turn feeds cynicism about change and any naysayers who will say, 'I told you it wouldn't work'. It is preferable to do fewer things and do them well; to consistently drive them through the school as the new baseline on which subsequent action can be built. This is something the college and its leadership team increasingly recognises and is working to ensure with the support of its leadership mentor and coach.

The other aspect of doing too much in this way is that teachers lose strategic focus and an understanding of how the bits fit. Acting strategically involves doing the most important things now to drive improvement based on an analysis of where the school is at; not doing everything we can think of even if it has a basis in research. The inevitable consequence of trying to do everything, which is manifest in the faculty example cited, is the vagueness that emerges, as evident in the key action, 'create differentiated programs for students with differing ability' which is then manifest in the equally vague performance measure that '100% teaching staff will implement differential programming to meet student needs'. In other faculties, it manifests not only in equivalent levels of opacity, but also a lack of clarity between an action and a target as evident in one plan's key action 'to have an increase in the number of A's across the year levels'.

Put simply, when the time is right faculties and their leaders should be supported to develop action plans for consistently implementing a whole of college approach to supporting more teachers to work like the best in the context of the school merger, since this is the greatest source of improved student outcomes in any school. This is something the leadership team can lead, with the support of its coach and mentor, as it strives to implement a common instructional model that is used as the basis of planning better lessons in professional learning teams.

It is also consistent with the continuing focus the college has on building curriculum and program leaders' capacity for strategic thinking and planning so they can perform more effectively as 'leaders of learning' in the newly-merged school.

Recommendation 1

That the college leadership with the support of both its coach and mentor seek to align the work of all teams and hence the focus of their plans to a manageable whole of merged college set of priorities and strategies for supporting more teachers to work like the best. The college should in this context consider providing site-based leadership development support for its middle level (team) leaders to drive the preconditions for whole school improvement, the college instructional model and collaborative professional learning through the merged college and its campuses.

An orderly learning environment where students are well known

The existence of an orderly learning environment – established through positive rather than negative means, whereby there are high levels of teacher consistency about how it is 'enforced' and structures in place to ensure that all students are known well by at least one adult in the school – is a fundamental precondition for improved teaching and learning to occur on which the subsequent improvement in student learning outcomes can be based.

Aside from the fact you cannot have effective teaching and learning in a disorderly classroom or school, developing an orderly learning environment also provides a mechanism for getting teachers working more consistently and towards a common end. That in turn creates the basis for further united action within the school,

particularly to the extent it is linked to knowing the students well, and hence developing a more personalised teaching and learning approach to ensure their needs are met.

The college has a strong focus on student wellbeing and ensuring an orderly learning environment is maintained. The college wellbeing and behaviour policy and management plan sets out a student wellbeing code of conduct predicated on rights, responsibilities and rules. The college has been using the Good Standing approach which assumes that students all have good standing unless it is forfeited by poor behaviour for two weeks, in which case such privileges as participating in sport, camps and the like can be lost. Good standing can be regained after a further two weeks provided a satisfactory resolution is determined at a meeting between the principal/assistant principal and the student themselves.

The Good Standing program in the college is supplemented by the use of the Restorative Justice process between all members of the college community where required. There are, in this context, clear consequences for unacceptable behaviours that are included in a colour-coded flow chart¹² that is displayed around the college, which includes blue slip monitoring, community service, parent involvement, time out and, as already noted, a loss of Good Standing and the privileges it affords.

There was some suggestion during the review that the Good Standing program has dropped off a bit as the college works to develop a whole of merged school SWPBS framework which, it is noted, may require some targeted professional learning support if it is to be consistently driven through both campuses of the college from 2018.

Beyond this, policies that undermine consistency need to be reconsidered by the college since they undermine the orderly learning environment it is seeking to build. For example, the reviewers were advised that teachers can determine themselves the approach they adopt towards mobile phones in class. This contributes to inconsistency, since inevitably a teacher who wants students to put their phones away will be told that 'X' other teachers allow us to have them. In the classes the reviewers observed, mobile phones were used to text or listen to music while whole class instruction was underway, and not for any educational purposes at all. While not the subject of a recommendation, there would be value in the college revisiting this policy and adopting a common, educationally-based and consistent approach.

There is a range of internal and external wellbeing-related support for students including a school counsellor, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Worker(AIEW) and Aboriginal Resource Officers (AROs), a school-based constable, a defence liaison officer, a home liaison officer and the college wellbeing team. There is also, as noted earlier, the Clontarf Sports Academy and Palmerston Girls Academy, as well as the Special Education Centre that meets the needs of identified students from Years 7 to 12.

The reviewers were advised in this context that there is no member of the non-teaching support staff on the college wellbeing committee referred to earlier in this

¹² The chart sets out the requirements for maintaining Good Standing in green, and the consequences of various low-level misbehaviour in blue, repeated misbehaviours in yellow and high level misbehaviours in red.

report. This is a gap in terms of direct experience and expertise that ought to be filled to ensure a comprehensive approach to wellbeing in the merged entity.

Recommendation 2

That the college leadership consider expanding the membership of the wellbeing committee to include at least one support staff member from each campus.

As is the case with other areas of college activity, wellbeing and behaviour management is the focus of work together with Rosebery Middle School leaders and staff, including professional development, to ensure a common and consistent approach in the merged college entity from the start of 2018.

While there were 21 suspensions amounting to 73 days in the first quarter of this year, these related to the behaviours of only 15 students, only one of whom was in Year 12.

To the extent that the orderly learning environment is an issue in the college, it is not related to serious behavioural issues, but rather a degree of low-level disruption which detracts from learning in class.

Student behaviour in assemblies (which are held for the whole school on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and for year levels on the other days) was extremely good, with students sitting in year-level lines, generally attentive and respectful through what were short, sharp events. In contrast, there are some behavioural concerns in and around classes related to things like:

- lateness, and what students who were interviewed described as 'loitering after breaks' which then detracts from their learning in class – albeit improving in their view because of the increased intervention of the principal class team; and
- some general disengagement, particularly evident in Year 10.

This suggests that the challenge is consistent implementation of behavioural expectations throughout the college and then the merged entity, including by ensuring that policies that undermine consistency are tackled, such as the phones policy mentioned above. In addition, the college could consider the possibility of investing more in classroom routines to support more focused and attentive learning in class; particularly since there is research to show that effective teachers use routines for daily tasks more than their ineffective counterparts and hence this is an area of practice to address.¹³

From the classes observed, there is a particular need to address routines for drawing students' attention to the teacher when whole-class teaching is required, breaking into groups for particular tasks, and moving between different activities. There would also be value in this context in considering the use of seating plans, at least in

¹³ See, for example, Stronge, J.H., Ward, T.J., Tucker, P.D. & Hindman, J.L. (2007). What is the relationship between teacher quality and student achievement? An exploratory study. *Journal of Personal Evaluation in Education*, 20(3), 165-184.

Year 10 and, as the merger occurs, the earlier years, to contribute to more effective lessons in the school.

Beyond this, issues such as lateness require that teachers consistently implement the policy that exists, rather than ignoring late-comers as sometimes was observed. This is a challenge for leadership on both campuses, especially as the SWPBS framework is rolled out.

Recommendation 3

That the college prepare to invest in developing a set of agreed routines for more effective classrooms from the start of 2018 including, where appropriate, seating plans to operate across the two campuses. Such preparation should include a consideration of professional learning needed to drive it through and the use of classroom observation to monitor its implementation over time.

As an aside to this recommendation, it is noted that there is one area of the college – G Block – where the acoustics are very poor, with the result the ‘loitering’ referred to has a disproportionate effect on classes, and where even a video being shown in an adjoining room can be disruptive to another class. While beyond the scope of this review, the independent reviewer at least would wonder aloud if the Department might not contribute to some soundproofing as part of its already significant commitment to the college merger, and as a positive contribution to teacher effectiveness and student learning on the senior campus.

Both the Clontarf Football Academy and Palmerston Girls’ Academy support Aboriginal students to achieve success in their studies, to improve their self-esteem and life skills, and assist in securing employment opportunities related to a pathway of their choice.

The flip side of the orderly learning environment in the school is ensuring that students are well-known and feel that there is an adult in the school who knows and cares about them. This not only contributes to better student behaviour at school, but their academic outcomes as well. In a meta-analysis of over 800 studies, Scales¹⁴ found that, ‘schools that nurture positive relationships among students and teachers are more likely to realise the payoff of more engaged students achieving at higher levels’; though he does caution that it’s not enough to just nurture the students involved, and they need to be challenged as well. It’s a matter of simultaneously being ‘warm and demanding’ in the way that good parents are. This puts a premium on the structures the school adopts to systematically connect students to teachers and thereby ensure that they feel well known.

The school operates home groups for students at each year level which are conducted for a timetabled session once a week. How effective these are is questionable, given the students interviewed noted that the home group teacher does not necessarily teach the group, and hence cannot really get to know them well;

¹⁴ Scales, P.C. (1999) ‘Care and challenge: The sources of student success’, Middle Ground, 3(2); 21-23.

though these same students also felt there generally is an adult in the college who knows and cares about them. These students also felt that the home group sessions were often a waste of time, because they are not used well, though this was more noticeable for Years 11 and 12 than for Year 10. Despite the fact that a formal program does exist, the students at least felt the sessions either did not reflect this, or the program was not one that really meets their needs.

Taken together, this suggests a need for some more strategic matching of teachers to home groups, to ensure there is sufficient connection and time to get to know the students, particularly students who are less well connected than the student leaders interviewed for the review, and some targeted advice to teachers on how to most effectively use the time.

Consideration could be given in this context to a more differentiated approach to home group matching, whereby smaller groups could be established to cater for students experiencing more difficulty at school, including by exhibiting unacceptable behaviours, so they are more closely connected to an adult at school. For example, it was suggested by one leader that there are at most 30-40 higher needs students across the college outside of the SEC in behavioural terms. Others thought this too high (citing more like 15 to 20 as their figure), but regardless, it is possible to envisage a home group arrangement whereby these students are appropriately grouped and matched to teachers on a 1:5 or even 1:3 basis (ie, accounting for around 8 groups compared with other larger ones), to connect them more closely to school and generally contribute to better behaviour in each and every class and a greater likelihood they will experience success.

Such an arrangement, it is noted, not only will help to ensure that students are better known by the staff, but could also provide a means of ensuring better planning of programs and pathways for the targeted students involved as their home group 'mentor' works with them from the time of their enrolment to craft an appropriate individual learning and improvement plan.

Recommendation 4

That the college consider a more strategic grouping of students for home groups, including a differentiated model to more effectively support students who are disengaged from school. Further, the college should seek to ensure that wherever possible, home group teachers are timetabled to teach at least one subject to the students in their group.

While the student opinion survey includes questions related to the orderly learning environment, and the extent to which students are well known, there are no such questions asked of the staff. This is a gap that would be worth filling as it could provide a source of data on the consistency of implementation of the orderly learning environment in the school.

In a context where the variables on the opinion survey are rated positively by students, discipline stands out as the one variable that is rated neutrally in each year. In 2015, only 36% of students who responded to the survey strongly agreed or agreed that student behaviour is well managed at the school, though this increased to 42% in

2016. A slightly larger 38% disagreed/strongly disagreed in 2015, compared with 39% in 2016 and more than a quarter in each year who took no defined stance.

There may be value in the college seeking to unpack the reasoning behind these ratings by conducting some appropriately-structured focus groups of students to determine how generalised the view is (ie, beyond the sample who completed the survey) and what, if any remedial action is required. This is especially the case since almost half of the students (47% in 2015 and 44% in 2016) were neutral or disagreed that their teachers treat them fairly, and a third falling to a quarter of parents respectively adopted the same view.

Parent opinion on the issue of student behaviour swung markedly between 2015 and 2016, perhaps reflecting different cohorts of respondents and the relatively small response rate of parents compared to either students or staff. In 2016 only 43% of responding parents agreed that student behaviour is managed well, compared with 63% agreement the previous year. Parents in 2016 were more inclined to adopt a neutral stance (48% compared with 19%) which means that fewer also disagreed that behaviour is well managed (10% compared to 19%).

Despite the concern about behaviour that is expressed, half of the students in 2015, rising to 66% in 2016 like being at school, though this does mean that 50% and 34% respectively either are neutral or do not, which also would be worthy of exploration in the focus groups that are proposed.

Almost two-thirds of students in 2015 rising to three quarters in 2016 agreed/strongly agreed that there is an adult at the school who cares about and knows them well. There is still, however, a significant group of responding students for whom this does not apply, thereby signalling another focus group issue to address.

Recommendation 5

That the College consider adding questions relevant to the orderly learning environment and the extent to which students are well known to its staff opinion survey as a means of monitoring the consistency of implementation of the orderly learning environment through the school. In addition, the College should consider conducting focus groups with a balanced sample of students to determine how effectively its behaviour policies and structures to ensure students are well-known are being implemented, and to inform the development and consistent implementation of a whole of merged college orderly learning environment where students are known by the staff.

The college Special Education Centre focuses heavily on transition and has a significant orientation program in place from intake at Year 7 to ensure a manageable and supportive entry to secondary school for students with special needs and their families as well. The program includes: visits to observe students in situ by senior staff from the Centre; development of individual student profiles for SEC staff by these senior staff; scheduled visits that progressively grow in length and which are customised to the individual student; participation in existing middle year's classes and programs that, over time, progresses to involve staying for recess and lunch so

social interaction can occur; and parent tours of the Centre to demonstrate that they are welcome too.

All the students have individual education plans and there are individual behaviour plans for students who need them which are rigorously pursued. This is all designed to contribute to the Centre’s overarching work to support students to transition to independent living and, where possible, the workforce after school. It’s an approach that parents who were interviewed valued and endorsed.

Student attendance data reveals an average attendance level for students that hovers around 80% since 2013 and stood at 82.1% in 2016. Significant numbers of students in this context have attendance levels noticeably below 80% as evident in Table 3 for 2016, which is not dissimilar to the figures in earlier years.

Table 3: Attendance levels by group and year level, 2016

<i>Year level</i>	<i>Attendance Group</i>	<i>Number of students</i>	<i>Percentage of students</i>
Year 10	0% to <20%	21	6
	20% to <40%	29	8
	40% to <60%	53	14
	60% to <80%	90	24
	80% to 100%	184	49
Year 11	0% to <20%	12	4
	20% to <40%	16	5
	40% to <60%	43	13
	60% to <80%	90	27
	80% to 100%	169	51
Year 12	0% to <20%	7	4
	20% to <40%	9	5
	40% to <60%	22	12
	60% to <80%	51	37
	80% to 100%	97	52

As can be seen, only around half of the students have attendance levels that exceed 80% at each year level. This means that a significant number of students are experiencing much less than optimal learning time at school which inevitably impacts on what they can achieve.

Put simply, the college must continue and even intensify its efforts to reduce absenteeism and maximise the number of days that students attend. It is noted that the college strategic plan, which may need to be reviewed as the school merger proceeds, includes a target to increase the average attendance to 90%. This is a worthy stretch target which the reviewers would endorse, and one that will not be easy to achieve. In pursuing it, there may be value in the college considering a targeted approach rather than seeking to tackle all levels of unsatisfactory attendance at the same time. More specifically, it can be seen from Table 3 that a quarter or more of students fall into the 60-80% attendance range and raising this group’s attendance would have a significant impact on both their own participation at school and the attendance average for the college as a whole. This does not mean easing up on efforts to improve the attendance of all students, but rather narrowing the number of students who are the focus of intensive follow up to a more manageable amount.

The college could in this context consider targeting the attendance of students in the 60 to 80% attendance range at each year level in order to increase it to 80 to 100% as it moves towards its target of 90% attendance for the college as a whole.

The clear message from the foregoing is that an orderly learning environment generally prevails in the college, albeit with a degree of low-level disruption which needs to be addressed, but there are also significant challenges in ensuring it is strengthened as the merger continues to progress. There are always vulnerabilities related to the orderly learning environment which need to be kept in mind in this context, since this is work that is never done, and can relapse quickly if leaders in particular, but also the staff take their eye off the ball. This is especially the case when major change occurs, such as the pending merger between the two schools. It is imperative in this context that consistency of implementation of the orderly learning environment is assured across both campuses of the new college and that common expectations and practices apply.

Curriculum and assessment

The college provides a comprehensive curriculum for students in Years 10 to 12 that includes strong specialist programs in the Arts, academic extension, specialist education and its information and communication technology qualifications have gained recognition through the Cisco Academy.¹⁵ The college provides extensive VET programs and offers specialist programs in transport and logistics, along with a Police, Fire and Emergency Services Cadet Program in partnership with the relevant agencies in the NT. The college, as noted earlier, also runs a Clontarf Football Academy and Palmerston Girls' Academy together with Rosebery Middle School to promote positive role models and school engagement for the Aboriginal students who make up nearly a third of the college population.

The core program in Year 10 comprises English, SOSE, Mathematics and Science and there are extension classes in each of these domains. There is a range of electives in Arts, HPE and Business Transition and Enterprise, such as Visual Art, Music, Drama, Computing, Legal Studies and more. Year 11 and 12 students undertake English and Maths and have a wide range of studies to choose from in the Humanities, Arts and HPE and Business Transition and Enterprise, while a small number of students also learn Japanese. There are some subjects, such as Modern History, Physics and Maths Methods where classes are combined to ensure viable groups for SACE.

Pathways available to college students through the programs it provides include:

¹⁵ It should be noted that the Special Education Centre provides its Year 7 to 12 students with a wide range of experiences designed to assist them to gain knowledge and understanding of the world. These Life Skill Programs are grounded in the NT Curriculum Framework and each student's individual education plan. There is explicit teaching and experiences related to financial literacy, functional literacy, health and physical education, science, technology, society and environment, daily living skills, community access, bus travel and map work.

- completion of a NTCET with an Australian Admissions Rank (ATAR) for students seeking entry to university studies;
- completion of a NTCET and a VET qualification, usually achieved through participation in a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship such as the Work Ready Program;
- completion of a modified NTCET pathway through the college Special Education Centre;
- completion of a dedicated VET qualification, usually achieved through participation in a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship; and
- flexible learning options for students seeking to remain engaged with education at school.

The curriculum and its pathways are underpinned by course selection guides the college has produced to support students moving from Year 10 to Year 11 and then from Year 11 to Year 12, along with the work of the college careers adviser, particularly at Year 10.

Literacy intervention is needed to support a significant number of students in the college and arguably has suffered of late as the smaller, ability-level classes in English and maths that existed in semester one, were combined due to budget cuts in semester two, with the result they are now around 25 rather than 14. As the college moves forward into the merger, it is looking at ways to more systematically address literacy intervention, such as: a possible Guided Reading program with professional learning for teachers to be implemented consistently across the college; academic vocabulary to help ensure that all teachers take responsibility for literacy development; and no longer requiring students struggling with English to take a second language so they can develop their English literacy instead. These are all measures that the reviewers would endorse to help ensure that the literacy needs of all college students can be met and essential elements of any merged college curriculum plans.

More than three quarters of staff feel that the school provides suitable programs or pathways for its students ((88% in 2015 falling to 78% in 2016) and that the flexibility exists in the delivery of programs to suit the needs of the local community (85% and 86% respectively). There was a noticeable fall in this context in the level of student agreement that the school gives them opportunities to do different things, from 72% in 2015 to 44% in 2016. Acknowledging that the small number and shifting cohort of respondents is relevant in this regard, it is noteworthy that this reflects an increase from 6% to 21% over the year in the proportion of students who disagreed that this is the case. There may be value in this context in pursuing this further in the focus group sessions that are proposed in Recommendation 5 above.

Beyond this, students interviewed for the review felt that the college offers insufficient extra-curricular activities, in particular to generate a whole-school ethos and feel. One suggestion that did emerge in this context was that, as a centre of excellence for the arts, Palmerston should at least have an annual production that brings together all parts of the school. This is an idea that warrants consideration in future, especially as a means of forging a whole of merged school identity and involvement in a common activity that engages many students and staff. The same, it is noted, could be said of whole college sports activities and days.

While faculties did, as noted earlier, develop action plans aligned to the college annual improvement plan that included targets based on data from preceding years, these pre-dated the work to create a dual campus school, and hence have not really been pursued in favour of the priorities associated with ensuring a successful school merger occurs. This is welcome in light of the earlier comments about leadership to avoid doing too much and ensure a strategic approach to work that various teams undertake.

Meetings of maths and English teachers across the two schools were conducted in 2016 to begin planning assessments and conditions from Year 7 to 10 that would then articulate into the SACE requirements in Years 11 and 12. Curriculum Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) were established across the sites with scheduled meeting times during the first half of this year, using a common template developed by the Curriculum and Pedagogy sub-committee and approved by the executive leadership team. There was also a joint planning day involving staff from the two schools in late May that focused specifically on progressing the development of a guaranteed and viable curriculum in all subjects from Year 7 to 12 in curriculum teams, as well as a session for leaders conducted by their coach that focused on initiating classroom observation in the school. Encouragingly the scope and sequence documents being developed have backward mapped from Year 12 to identify not only the content required, but also the key skills, academic vocabulary needed, assessments and the like that contribute to also building the capacity of the staff.

A sample of the initial work undertaken in Science provided to the reviewers shows a developing scope and sequence for the subject at different year levels that outlines the achievement standards to be met and then provides for each of the subject's strands, an outline of sub-strands along with the suggested allocation of time for it, a detailed description of the intended student learning, formative and summative assessments to be used, and possible resources.

This, it is noted, is all important work that continues to progress and needs to be consolidated as the merger moves through to reality in 2018 and beyond.

Beyond this, the merger creates the opportunity for much better transition between middle and senior schooling than exists when students move between different schools. However, this depends on the continued work highlighted throughout this report to develop a common language, ensure coherent scope and sequence throughout the Year 7 to 12 student experience, and to track and share student data based on common expectations of progress from one year to the next.

This requires the development of a clear transition plan between the campuses, including the transfer of all relevant student information and data, as a priority for merger preparations and the implementation of the new two campus college from 2018.

As well as providing a comprehensive curriculum, the college must ensure that it has in place an assessment regime that both diagnoses students' learning needs and evaluates their progress. More specifically, an approach to assessment that would be familiar to most teachers, in concept at least, which comprises:

- **Assessment for learning** – i.e., formative assessment to help teachers determine what students know and how to plan for further instruction;

- **Assessment of learning** – i.e., summative assessment after the learning process to provide evidence of students’ progress; and
- **Assessment as learning** – i.e., where students are encouraged and supported to monitor their own learning, ask questions and use a range of strategies to decide what they know and can do, and how to use assessment for new learning.

The college has a complete assessment schedule for students in Years 11 and 12 that outlines in colour-coded detail when the full range of final assessments are due, on a week-by-week calendar for each term. There is no reason, therefore, why students and teachers should not know when required assessments are due, with the result they can plan to ensure they are received.

Students receive three reports per semester to ensure they and their parents/guardians are kept apprised of their progress and action needed to ensure that it improves. Progress reports provide a rating on a three point scale – always/good (1), usually/satisfactory (2), and needs attention/poor (3) for the student’s attitude, attendance, participation and submission of work for each subject, along with a progress grade. Parents/guardians are encouraged to contact teachers to discuss progress and the contents of the report.

As part of the SACE moderation process outlined earlier, teachers receive reports to confirm feedback from the moderators that indicate whether or not all results have been confirmed, with elaborations if they have not, and some specific positive feedback and/or advice to enable the teachers’ assessment processes and judgments to be improved. This is rich data that can be used by professional learning teams as they plan lessons to meet the learning intentions for the course and, in particular, ensure that any identified gaps that exist can be filled.

This implies a need to ensure the requisite capacity exists within the college and its teams to analyse and use data to inform planning and the adoption of strategies for driving improvement through the school and/or team. It was suggested during the review that there is substantial variability between faculties and teachers in this regard, and hence a capacity gap that needs to be filled. Given the fact that, in common with most schools, some people know how to analyse and use data to inform teaching in ways that others do not, there may be value in the college considering the provision of professional learning on data to targeted members of staff, to enable them to lead the analysis and use of data in their teams and/or appointing a data manager to work with teams on sharing and using data to good effect.

Recommendation 6

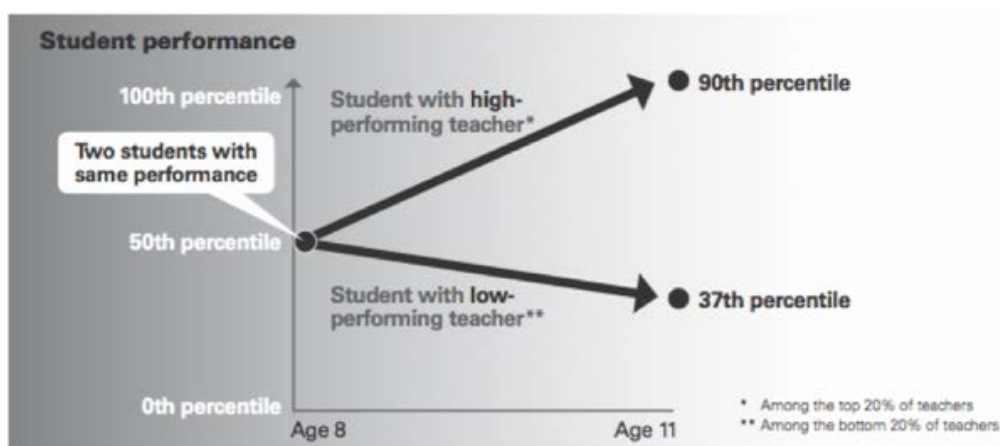
That the college consider the appointment of a Data Manager to oversee the gathering and use of data for improvement and support teams in using these data to good effect and/or providing professional learning for targeted members of staff to support the analysis and use of data in their teams.

Ensuring consistently good teaching

Hattie (2003)¹⁶ has demonstrated that teachers and, even more particularly their teaching, is the variable within the control of the school that has the biggest impact on student learning outcomes.

That said, we also know that not all teachers have the same effect. Figure 1 illustrates the difference in student learning outcomes generated by the highest and lowest-performing teachers in the US state of Tennessee. The greatest source of improvement in schools comes from narrowing this gap by supporting more teachers to work like the best teachers in the school, with the result that consistently better teaching occurs in each and every class.

Figure 1: The Difference Teachers Make¹⁷



It is noteworthy in this context that 90% of staff in 2016 feel they have the knowledge and skills to perform their role at school, which is slightly down from the stellar level of 96% in 2015. That said, this may not be an entirely objective view, since only 51% in 2015 and 54% in 2016 agree that they have a performance development plan that is supported by the school with access to appropriate professional development. The sort of classroom observation that is referred to below could help inject some more objectivity into these views.

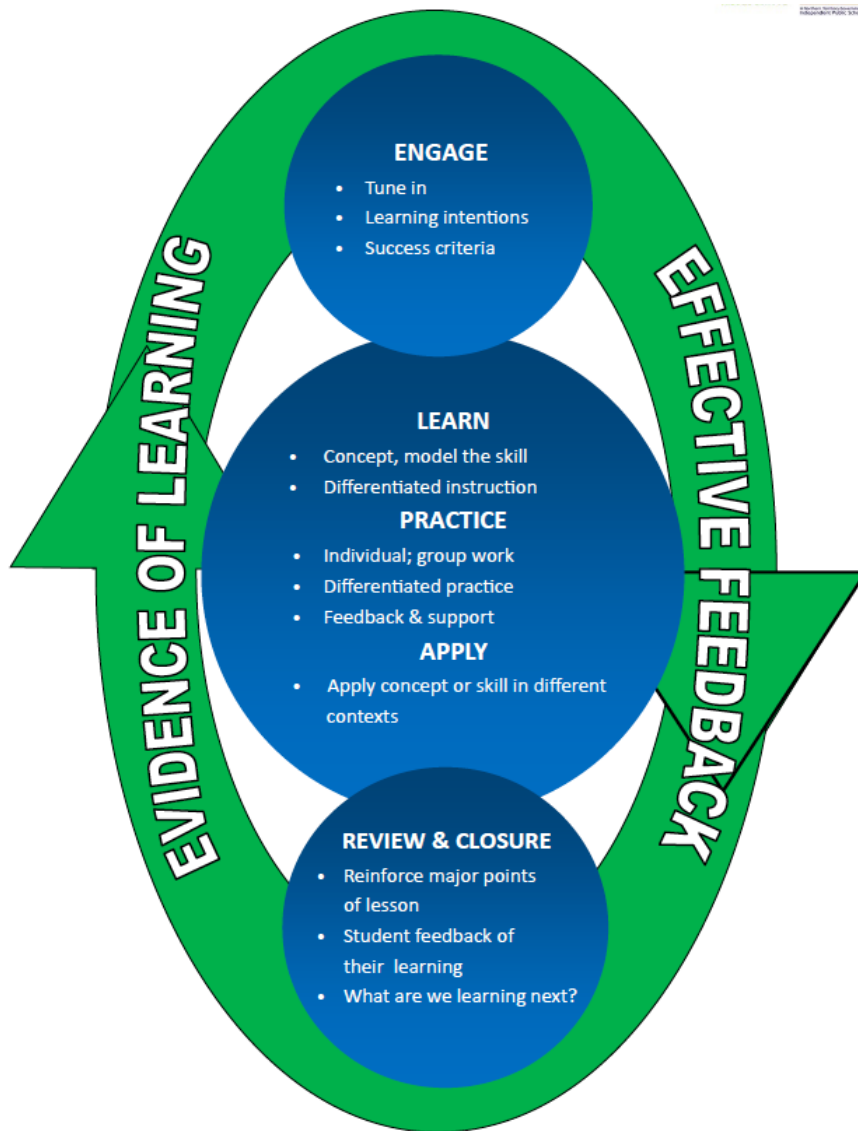
Good planning, and especially collaborative planning, is arguably the key means to support more teachers to work like the best. More specifically, teachers need to plan lessons/units that will effectively achieve their purposes and ensure that student learning occurs. Using an instructional model or other means of ensuring consistency across teachers and classrooms can help to improve teacher planning in schools. In addition, the college needs to ensure that such planning is informed by relevant research and successful practice in other schools.

The college, along with its merger partner has developed the draft explicit instructional model in Figure 1 along with a plan for its finalisation, trialing and then full implementation by the end of 2017.

¹⁶ Op. cit.

¹⁷ Sanders, W. L. and Rivers, J. C. (1996) Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement, Value-Added Research and Assessment Centre, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Figure 1: Palmerston and Rosebery draft explicit instructional model



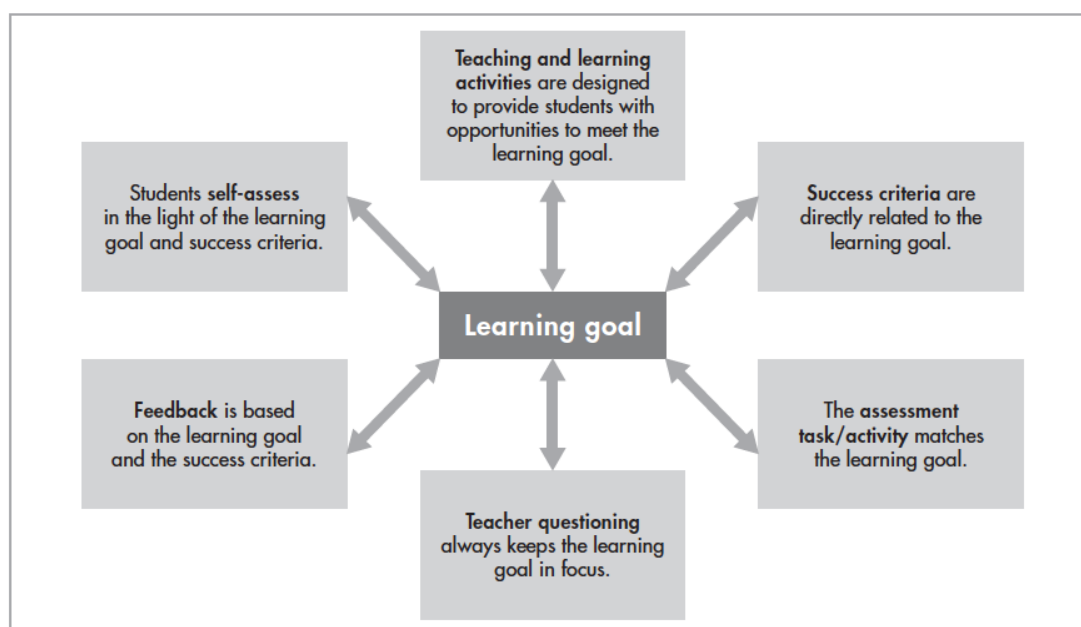
The model conforms to those in use in many schools around Australia, including Territory middle schools, and hence successful practice in supporting more teachers to work like the best. The challenge then is to ensure it is used effectively by professional learning teams to plan better lessons and then consistently applied in each and every class.

This is something the college is pursuing with vigour through initial consultation on the draft model produced, and trialling by the leadership team prior to full implementation from the start of term four. Important work is underway in this regard through the production of a 'companion document' that will help to embed a shared language and practices around the use of the instructional model through the college as a whole. In addition, the college is beginning to introduce a more systematic approach to classroom observation, as outlined below, which needs to be continued and consolidated to drive the implementation of the instructional model

through the merged college and its campuses linked to the valued student learning behaviours the two schools are already seeking to promote.

Learning intentions are central to the instructional model and planning better lessons across the school. This is because, when used appropriately, learning intentions frame the planning of lessons that teachers individually and collaboratively undertake. Having decided what students should know, understand or be able to do, the teacher(s) can then determine the teaching and learning activities that will enable them to achieve this, the success criteria that support the students to know the extent to which they have achieved it, and the assessments to determine whether they have or not. The learning intention also provides the anchor for teacher questioning and feedback, and can be used by students to self assess. This is clearly depicted in Figure 2 which could be reproduced in the middle of an A3 page and used by teams of teachers as a lesson planning tool.

Figure 2: Learning goals as the frame for teacher planning¹⁸



A very significant proportion of the learning intentions observed in walking around the college and observing classes were activities rather than learning intentions in a real sense.¹⁹ The learning was not clear and the stated intentions did not really frame the planning as outlined above. This suggests a need for targeted professional learning on developing good learning intentions to then inform the planning of better lessons as the instructional model continues to be rolled out.

¹⁸ The figure, from Macklin, P. & Zbar, V. (2017) *Driving School Improvement: A Practical Guide*, ACER Press, Camberwell (p. 118) uses the term 'learning goal' which is interchangeable with 'learning intention' and means the same thing.

¹⁹ The reviewers have refrained from citing examples as this would identify the teachers concerned.

Apart from anything else, this could help overcome the tendency observed in a number of classes for teachers to do too much of the thinking for the students rather than prompting them to do the work themselves.

An important factor to consider in relation to the implementation of the instructional model and collaborative planning based on learning intentions as they take hold, is the views of students themselves. Many schools around Australia are finding that student feedback can contribute positively to the improvement of teaching while also supporting the development of a strong student voice. More specifically, a growing number of schools are using targeted surveys to supplement classroom observation and gain an understanding of the teaching that students feel they are experiencing to balance the teaching that teachers feel they provide. It helps to highlight areas of student concern that teachers may need to address as they strive to generate better learning outcomes on a consistent basis through the school. This is something that in time the merged college will be able to address, though not at this stage.

Recommendation 7

That a major focus of college professional learning to support the implementation of the explicit instructional model be the development of quality learning intentions, and using these to plan better lessons at all year levels from 7 through to 12.

Professional learning for improved practice

Professional learning is central to ensuring consistently good teaching, and arguably the key means that schools have to build the collective capacity and effectiveness of their staff. That said, not all professional learning that schools provide has a positive effect. Cole²⁰ for example, who once described professional development as a great way to avoid change, argues that schools '*waste thousands of dollars on professional development, as many of the activities typically undertaken to develop teachers produce very little return in terms of improved teacher competency and increased learning*' (189). Ensuring more productive professional learning in schools, he suggests, requires a greater focus on workplace based learning rather than external workshops, staff sharing experience and expertise, integration of teacher work and learning, professional learning as a routine practice and group pursuit of professional learning.

The best way to achieve this is for more professional learning to occur in school-based teams, focused on what happens in the classroom and the student learning outcomes that result; so that learning, as Hawley and Valli (2000) put it, '*is considered to be part of the work*'.²¹

²⁰ Cole, P. (December 2005) 'Leadership and professional learning: Forty actions leaders can take to improve professional learning', in Zbar, V. and Mackay, T. (eds) (2007) *Leading the education debate, Volume 2*, Centre for Strategic Education, Melbourne.

²¹ Hawley, W. and Valli, L. (2000) *Learner-centred Professional Development*, Research Bulletin No. 27, Phi Delta Kappa Centre for Evaluation, Development and Research.

Developing a strong professional learning culture within the college to underpin more effective teacher performance, and hence better student learning outcomes, depends on both the process to support quality collaborative planning between teachers, and the guidance to ensure that the planning focuses on the right things.

The college initially focused its professional learning in pursuit of its strategic plan targets on building the collective capacity of teachers in the area of pedagogical practice, and provided substantial in-house opportunities drawing on staff with particular expertise. This included professional learning related to ESL pedagogy, deconstructing learning tasks to support student engagement, Visible Learning teaching strategies and so on. This was supplemented by efforts to build leadership capacity across the college by more widely distributing leadership responsibilities and developing teachers' coaching knowledge and skills. Teachers were also encouraged and supported to seek accreditation at higher levels, with the result that there are now significantly more Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers in the college which, it is suggested, has contributed to better quality conversations amongst the staff.

The challenge the college has identified in this context is to develop a staff induction process that will enable new staff to work in the way that the new, merged college intends.

More recently some of the professional learning opportunities outlined have been, to use the college's own words, 'halted or parked', to allow professional learning to focus more clearly on the strategic priorities associated with creating a new and successful dual campus secondary college in Palmerston. This, as indicated, includes a focus on ensuring that the explicit instructional model guides teacher planning across the campuses, supported by classroom observation as outlined below.

The college did initiate action at the start of 2016 to support the development of teachers' knowledge and skills to support the implementation of classroom observation, in particular to drive the use of the explicit instructional model through the school. While some peer observations have occurred, primarily through the leadership team as the instructional model is trialled, this is yet to be consistently adopted, and hence needs to be a focus, as the college itself acknowledges, of continuing activity over the coming years. In particular, it needs to be an important focus of the ongoing work of the whole of college professional learning teams.

It was noted by the reviewers walking through the college that most rooms either have blinds which are down, or windows that are blacked out. In addition, many rooms are locked while classes are on. This gives the impression, whether intended or not, that work within these rooms is private and not subject to scrutiny in any way. While not the subject of a recommendation, there may be value in the college opening the doors, lifting the blinds and unblocking the windows to contribute to developing a culture where it is encouraged, expected and welcomed to observe each others' work.

<u>Recommendation 8</u>

That the review notes and endorses the work undertaken to develop and implement a whole of college explicit instructional model and to use classroom observation to ensure its implementation across the college as a whole. In doing so, the review recommends that implementation of the instructional model and classroom observation (including the professional learning outlined in Recommendation 7) be a key focus of the work of all professional learning teams for at least the next three years to ensure they become part of the 'Palmerston College way'.

Conclusion

It is clear that the college is very much on the right track, and is improving over time. The challenge, in common with many schools around the country, is not so much knowing what to do, as its consistent implementation, especially as it seeks to ensure a successful merger with Rosebery Middle School to become the City of Palmerston's secondary college of choice.

In pursuing this, the college needs to ensure that it only takes on a manageable amount, and that this comprises the key strategies aligned to the model of improvement being pursued by the school. Central to this will be:

- the continued development of leadership and its distribution through the merged college;
- the implementation of a common and consistent approach to ensuring an orderly learning environment where students are well known by the staff; and
- the progressive improvement of teaching and learning in all classes through the use of a common instructional model, underpinned by collaborative planning in professional learning teams and mutual classroom observation to drive consistently better practice through the school.

The recommendations in this report are designed to support the college in this regard as it crafts and finalises its 2018-2021 strategic improvement plan.

Consolidated list of recommendations

Recommendation 1

That the college leadership with the support of both its coach and mentor seek to align the work of all teams and hence the focus of their plans to a manageable whole of merged college set of priorities and strategies for supporting more teachers to work like the best. The college should in this context consider providing site-based leadership development support for its middle level (team) leaders to drive the preconditions for whole school improvement, the college instructional model and collaborative professional learning through the merged college and its campuses.

Recommendation 2

That the college leadership consider expanding the membership of the wellbeing committee to include at least one support staff member from each campus.

Recommendation 3

That the college prepare to invest in developing a set of agreed routines for more effective classrooms from the start of 2018 including, where appropriate, seating plans to operate across the two campuses. Such preparation should include a consideration of professional learning needed to drive it through and the use of classroom observation to monitor its implementation over time.

Recommendation 4

That the college consider a more strategic grouping of students for home groups, including a differentiated model to more effectively support students who are disengaged from school. Further, the college should seek to ensure that wherever possible, home group teachers are timetabled to teach at least one subject to the students in their group.

Recommendation 5

That the College consider adding questions relevant to the orderly learning environment and the extent to which students are well known to its staff opinion survey as a means of monitoring the consistency of implementation of the orderly learning environment through the school. In addition, the College should consider conducting focus groups with a balanced sample of students to determine how effectively its behaviour policies and structures to ensure students are well-known are being implemented, and to inform the development and consistent implementation of a whole of merged college orderly learning environment where students are known by the staff.

Recommendation 6

That the college consider the appointment of a Data Manager to oversee the gathering and use of data for improvement and support teams in using these data to good effect and/or providing professional learning for targeted members of staff to support the analysis and use of data in their teams.

Recommendation 7

That a major focus of college professional learning to support the implementation of the explicit instructional model be the development of quality learning intentions, and using these to plan better lessons at all year levels from 7 through to 12.

Recommendation 8

That the review notes and endorses the work undertaken to develop and implement a whole of college explicit instructional model and to use classroom observation to ensure its implementation across the college as a whole. In doing so, the review recommends that implementation of the instructional model and classroom observation(including the professional learning outlined in Recommendation 7) be a key focus of the work of all professional learning teams for at least the next three years to ensure they become part of the 'Palmerston College way'.