



*Catholic Education Office Melbourne*

# School Review Report

Prepared for

**St. Mary's School, Ascot Vale**

**2008**

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- School E Number 1082
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  - Parish Priest Fr Jim Clarke
  - School Reviewer Mrs Rhonda Geary
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## **1 Executive Summary**

St. Mary's Primary School in Ascot Vale is a very happy school which provides a welcoming and caring environment for students, parents and staff. There is a very positive tone in the school and practices and policies are reflective of the school's Catholic vision. Progress has been achieved in all five spheres as a result of a strong and supportive Principal and Leadership Team and a staff committed to ensuring positive outcomes for all students.

**Education in Faith** is central to the life of the school, with prayer being a focal point in classrooms and across the school. The school has a deep Catholic culture and strongly proclaims its Catholic identity. There is a positive and co-operative relationship between the school and the parish, with the Parish Priest being a strong and supportive presence. Parents and students strongly endorse the many practices in place to support the faith development of members of the community. Staff, student and parent surveys were very positive and above average for all Catholic primary schools. There is a strong belief that Christian values underpin behaviour and relationships in the school and that Catholic values are embedded in the learning and teaching experiences of the students. Student engagement in Religious Education has emerged as an area for further development.

The school has had a degree of success in the **Learning and Teaching** sphere. There has been an ongoing commitment to improving student outcomes and the school has introduced many initiatives in its efforts to do this, one of which has been the introduction of Professional Learning Teams across the school with strong and supportive planning structures.

The overall performance in English was quite strong in the early years. Year 3 AIM data for Reading indicates an upward trend in the past three years. Whilst Year 5 achievement was not as positive, examination of "matched cohort" data showed very sound progress, with a mean growth of 1 VELS level (above both State and Like Schools). Writing results indicate that many students were not operating at the expected VELS level and that mean learning growth over a two year period was less than 1 VELS level, with the lower cohort of students managing only .4 growth. Boys outperformed girls in each dimension. The school panel has identified Writing as a priority for improvement in the next School Improvement period. In the past two years the school had a major focus on improving student achievement in Mathematics, which has resulted in upward trends in Year 3 and Year 5 results. Learning growth was sound and above State and Like Schools. Ongoing improvement in student achievement in Numeracy will continue to be a priority. Staff, parent and student surveys suggest that enhancement of the learning environment and student engagement are areas for future development.

**Student Wellbeing** is clearly a strength of St. Mary's School and the school has enjoyed a high degree of success in the achievement of its goals in this sphere. There is a very positive emotional tone in the school and a caring and supportive environment is evident. It is evident that students at St. Mary's enjoy a high level of general wellbeing. Student survey responses indicate that students feel very connected to the school and to their peers and that they feel well supported by their teachers,

rating above average when compared to other Victorian schools. Parents are very supportive of the school's approach to Behaviour Management and are very positive about Student Safety. However some students express concern about bullying issues, which may be an area for further development.

The school has had significant success in the **Leadership and Management** sphere. There is an effective and cohesive Leadership Team with a shared vision and a clear sense of direction and purpose. The Parish Priest, parents, staff and students spoke positively of the school leadership. Whilst many opportunities have been provided for staff professional learning, the Professional Growth variable was not rated highly. The school panel believes that more rigorous Appraisal and Recognition processes could lead to improvement in this area. The critical climate area for the school to address in the next School Improvement period is Engagement, with a particular emphasis on involving staff in decisions which impact on their work.

The sense of **School Community** is a real strength of St. Mary's School. The welcoming nature of the school, the approachability of the Principal and staff and the spirit of community engendered are outstanding achievements in this sphere. Whilst many opportunities exist for parents to be involved in the life of the school, there is some concern expressed about the lack of opportunity for parent input into planning or policy making. Reporting of student progress is another area for further development.

It is clear that St. Mary's School is a very effective school with strong and supportive leadership. It will be evident from the preceding summary that the Principal and staff are committed to ongoing improvement as they move into this next period with the new School Improvement Plan. The reviewer offers the following advice as to possible goals. They emerge from the school's Self Reflection report and the review process over two full days in the school.

#### **Education in Faith**

- To further strengthen the Catholic culture of the school community
- To enhance teaching and learning in Religious Education

#### **Learning and Teaching**

- To improve student outcomes in literacy with a particular emphasis on Writing
- To improve student outcomes in numeracy
- To improve student engagement in their learning

#### **Student Wellbeing**

- To strengthen Student Wellbeing and positive relationships

#### **Leadership and Management**

- To strengthen the leadership of the school through enhanced staff engagement

#### **School Community**

- To further strengthen the partnerships between home, school, parish and the wider community

The following **key strategies** are also suggested as the means for the school to achieve its intended outcomes.

- Provide genuine opportunities for staff members to contribute to decisions regarding curriculum, professional learning and school policy
- Strengthen the school as a learning community
- Further develop learning and teaching practices through a strong focus on the Interdisciplinary Learning Strand of VELs.
- Ensure that there is a whole school focus on contemporary approaches to teaching and learning and on the Principles of Learning and Teaching (POLT)
- Strengthen teachers' capacity in the analysis and rigorous use of performance and attitudinal data to inform planning and development of learning programs and pedagogy

## 2 Methodology

The review visit commenced with a visit to the school. During this visit the reviewer met with the Principal and Deputy Principal to discuss key issues and to develop the program for each of the two days. A tour of the school was conducted, with the reviewer having the opportunity to visit classrooms and to talk informally with students and teachers. The school made available a range of data and other school information, including the School Self Reflection report, SIR data, AIM data, Insight SRC survey results of parents, students and staff (summary graphs and detailed response reports) as well as a copy of the school's Vision Statement. Prior to the review, the reviewer was able to use the Self Reflection report and the data sets to increase the understanding of the school and to prepare for the focus groups and school panel meeting. The review process was spread across two full days.

**Day One** – On the first day of the review proper the reviewer conducted focus group discussions with members of the community. The reviewer met with the Parish Priest, Fr. Jim Clarke, the Principal, Mr. Danny Mogg and the Leadership Team, the Religious Education Coordinator and a teacher representative from each level, the Director of Teaching and Learning, Literacy Coordinator and Numeracy Coordinator, the Student Wellbeing Coordinator and a teacher representative from each level, a focus group of parents and a focus group of students.

The reviewer also met with all teaching staff at the end of Day One to consider the Effective Schools Model.

**Day Two** – The reviewer met with a school panel consisting of Danny Mogg (Principal), Sandra Lind (Deputy Principal), Julieanne LeNoury (Religious Education Coordinator), Dot Crowley (Literacy/School Community Coordinator), Leanne Stramare (Director of Learning and Teaching), Simone Whitehead (teacher), Nancy Surace (parent), Maryanne O'Rourke (Regional Principal Consultant, C.E.O.) and Rhonda Geary (Reviewer).

Following reflection and discussion on the Effective Schools Model, each sphere was considered. A verbal report of initial impressions was presented to the panel. The process included analysis and reflection of all data, the school's Self Reflection report and feedback from the focus groups.

The reviewer has arranged a time to report to the Parish Priest, Principal and staff and the School's Parent Group.

### **3 School Context**

St. Mary's School was opened in 1913. It is one of two Catholic primary schools in the parish of Ascot Vale, a residential community in the North Western suburbs of Melbourne. Its sister school is St. Margaret's School in Maribyrnong. It is well situated, in close proximity to many services and facilities.

The school enjoys a healthy reputation in the local area and enrolments have been stable in recent years. The current enrolment is 376, an increase of 17 since the previous review. Residential development in the area is expected to have a significant impact on student numbers, with a possible future enrolment of 450.

The school population is culturally diverse with 38% of students coming from a language background other than English. Twenty one of these students were born overseas. Sixteen nationalities are represented amongst the families at St. Mary's, which adds a cultural richness to the community. The socio-economic background of the students is also diverse, with 19% of families eligible for the Education Maintenance Allowance. Ninety percent of the students are Catholic.

St. Mary's has 14 grades, comprising two classes for each grade level. Specialist areas are L.O.T.E., I.C.T., Performing Arts and Physical Education.

Since Term 3, 2006 there has been a complete change in the leadership of the school, with a new Principal, D.P., R.E.C., Literacy Coordinator and Learning and Teaching Coordinator appointed.

St. Mary's has a very supportive school community, with strong links between school, home and parish.

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## **4 Evaluation of Performance**

### **A Education in Faith**

#### **i. What outcomes was the school trying to achieve?**

In the school's Self Reflection report (p.7) the Principal and staff identified the strengthening of the Catholic culture of St. Mary's School as their main priority. They aimed to do this by:

- Deepening student and staff understanding and knowledge of the Catholic faith
- Building staff capacity in the teaching of Religious Education
- Providing students, parents and staff with a range of opportunities to participate in prayer and liturgy
- Developing a deeper understanding of the Sacraments and their links to parish life
- Highlighting the importance and significance of Catholic icons and symbols

#### **ii. What did the school achieve?**

St. Mary's School has made substantial progress in achieving its aims for Education in Faith. The school has a deep Catholic culture and strongly proclaims its Catholic identity. The Principal and staff have worked consistently and successfully throughout the past School Improvement period to strengthen this culture. Focus groups spoke about the school as a "*faith filled community*," where a "*sense of welcoming and belonging*" is nurtured. (*Staff and parent focus groups*) The meaningful spiritual symbols which promote the Catholic nature of the school were also highlighted in discussions with stakeholders. Insight SRC Parent, Staff and Student Survey results in the area of Catholic culture (Importance, Opportunity and Behaviour) all attest to the school's success in this sphere. When compared to survey results for all Victorian Catholic Schools, responses were generally in the top range of the middle 50% of schools. Over 80% of respondents in each group consistently believed that Christian values underpin the behaviour and the relationships in the school and 83% of staff believed that Catholic values are embedded in all learning and teaching experiences of the students and that reflection on Gospel values guides policies and decisions. (R.E. Audit Tool).

The school has experienced some success in its goal of assisting members of the community to deepen their understanding and knowledge of the Catholic faith. Although difficult to measure, the school's success is supported by the comments of staff and parents, who acknowledged the strong and supportive presence of the Parish Priest in the school and of the collaborative efforts of the Principal and staff who have worked with him in this area. Focus groups were also very affirming of the many practices in place which support the faith development of parents, staff and students. Whilst significant progress has been made, a small group of staff believe that the school could provide more opportunities for them to develop their own faith. (R.E. Audit Tool)

The school has also enjoyed a degree of success in its aim of building teacher capacity in the teaching of Religious Education. Whilst a whole school approach is evident, teacher and student responses to the R.E. Audit Tool suggest that further development in this area would be desirable. Over 30% of teachers suggest that they are not confident to integrate contemporary teaching and learning strategies into their R.E. program and 25% of staff indicate that they do not use a range of resources in planning and implementation. Student responses also suggest that 16% do not find R.E. lessons interesting or enjoyable and that 35% do not believe that R.E. lessons challenge their thinking. The review panel agreed that the enhancement of student engagement in Religious Education through the use of challenging and stimulating teaching and learning practices would be a priority for the next School Improvement period. The introduction and implementation of the R.E. Curriculum Framework may support this work.

The school has enjoyed great success in the area of prayer, liturgy and Sacramental celebrations. In the Insight SRC surveys there was strong endorsement of the many opportunities members of the community have to reflect on their faith, pray together and celebrate liturgies and the Sacraments. In comparison to other Catholic primary schools, responses for this area rated in either the top 25% or the upper range of the middle 50% of Catholic schools. These opinions were echoed in the reviewer's discussions with parents, students and staff.

Whilst the percentage of teachers accredited to teach in a Catholic School (78.6%) and accredited to teach Religious Education (67.9%) is above Like Schools and All Schools, it does not reach the system target of 80%. The reviewer believes that this also needs to be a focus for improvement in the next School Improvement period.

### **iii. Why did the school achieve / not achieve its desired outcomes?**

A number of factors have contributed to St. Mary's success in this sphere.

The Principal and staff share a clear and articulated commitment to promoting the Catholic nature of the school and to providing a strong Religious Education program. Education in Faith is a clear priority. The school has appointed a Religious Education Coordinator with a .4 time allocation who is acknowledged as a key leader amongst the school community. There is a weekly R.E. section in the school newsletter, which once again speaks of the importance placed on Education in Faith.

The strong Catholic identity of the school is proclaimed throughout the school in symbol and iconography, with each classroom having a designated sacred space or prayer table and vibrant displays evident in corridors and rooms.

The positive relationship between the parish and school and the strong and supportive presence of the Parish Priest has also ensured that the school families are linked in to the sacramental life of the parish. Focus groups identified the parent education sessions as an effective means of nurturing this link. Parish school connections are further enhanced through school displays in the Church,

particularly when students are being prepared for the Sacraments, with parishioners being asked to select and pray for a student during this preparation time.

The Principal and staff have placed special emphasis on providing opportunities for reflection, prayer and liturgy. The school community prays together regularly and staff and children attend a weekly Mass, with a focus on student involvement. Students are given a special leadership role in liturgies, with a student R.E. team, church captains, choir captains and students throughout the school being selected for specific responsibilities. The student focus group was particularly positive about these opportunities for involvement.

Whilst staff are generally positive about prayer and liturgical experiences and there is an annual opportunity for teachers' personal reflection and spiritual development, consultation with staff may assist the Leadership Team to develop a focus which better addresses and nurtures the needs of the group.

A major focus has been placed on building teacher capacity in the teaching of Religious Education, with an effective planning structure recently introduced to provide support and guidance for teachers. Staff members acknowledge the support provided by the R.E.C. in their level planning, which assists teachers in resourcing and implementing the program. Professional development and trialling of exemplar units of the R.E. Curriculum Framework may further enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning and student engagement in Religious Education.

#### **iv. Are the school's practices reflective of the school's vision?**

The school's practices and programs in Education in Faith strongly reflect the belief, as stated in the School's Vision Statement that "*Jesus and the gospel values are central...*" with focus groups and surveys strongly endorsing Gospel values as the basis for school decision making and as the foundation on which behaviour and the relationships in the school are based. The Vision Statement also speaks of developing "*strong links between students, staff, families and the parish community by nurturing spiritual development*" and of being "*a welcoming, inclusive and supportive community...*" Evidence provided in the Self Reflection report, the survey responses and the focus groups suggests that the school's programs and practices in the Education in Faith Sphere strongly support the Vision of the school.

#### **v. What can the school do in the future to continue to improve?**

*The reviewer offers the following advice in relation to school planning in the sphere of Education in Faith*

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN		ANNUAL ACTION PLAN		
Developing the broad goal[s] for this sphere.	Intended outcomes [Specific areas for improvement]	Setting targets	Key Strategies [High order approaches that may be applicable to the achievement of more than one goal]	Examples of actions that may assist the school in the implementation key strategies in this sphere, and the achievement of intended outcomes.
<p>To further strengthen the Catholic culture of the school community</p> <p>To enhance teaching and learning in Religious Education</p>	<p>That Education in Faith continues to be a priority for all members of the school community</p> <p>That all staff are given opportunities to develop their spirituality</p> <p>That students will be more engaged in the R.E. program</p> <p>That teachers will be more confident in the implementation, assessment and reporting of Religious Education, reflecting contemporary approaches to teaching and learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher scores in the Importance variable of the Education in Faith survey (staff, students and parents) The mean response to the Importance variable in the staff, student and parent surveys will be 4.5</li> <li>That 80% of staff will be attain appropriate Accreditation</li> <li>That 90% of students will respond positively to the R.E. audit tool items relating to the Religious Education program</li> <li>That 90% of teachers respond positively to the R.E. audit tool Learning and Teaching Variables (Planning and Pedagogy)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen the school as a learning community</li> <li>Provide genuine opportunities for staff members to contribute to decisions regarding curriculum, professional learning and school policy</li> <li>Further develop learning and teaching practices through a strong focus on the Interdisciplinary Learning Strand of VELs.</li> <li>Ensure that there is a whole school focus on contemporary approaches to teaching and learning and on the Principles of Learning and Teaching (POLT)</li> <li>Strengthen teachers' capacity in the analysis and rigorous use of performance and attitudinal data to inform planning and development of learning programs and pedagogy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that the professional learning program provides opportunities for personal faith development of staff</li> <li>Involve staff in decisions about the focus of staff spirituality/reflection days</li> <li>Provide support for staff to gain appropriate Accreditation to teach in a Catholic School and to teach Religious Education in a Catholic school</li> <li>Develop a whole school approach to the implementation of the R.E. Curriculum Framework, with a strong focus on the delivery of the program</li> <li>Build teachers' capacity to expand the repertoire of teaching approaches they use in Religious Education</li> <li>Provide further P.D. on Assessment and Reporting of student progress in Religious Education</li> </ul>

## **B Learning & Teaching**

### **i. What outcomes was the school trying to achieve?**

In its Self Reflection report (p.9) the school outlined its strategies for enhanced teaching and learning. Through the implementation of Inquiry based learning and the development of whole school agreement about successful pedagogical practices, the Principal and staff were aiming to:

- Improve student literacy outcomes
- Improve student numeracy outcomes
- Improve student engagement and enrich the learning environment

### **ii. What did the school achieve?**

#### **To improve literacy standards**

The school has had significant success in its goal of improving literacy standards across the school with general improvement evident over the past three years.

#### ***Early Years Literacy***

The overall performance in English is quite strong in the early years. Data for these years show steady improvement for students from Prep – Year 2. Students who commence school with a low level of English literacy are reaching System targets over a 3 year period, indicating that the school has made a difference and has been successful in this area. Student performance is consistently above Like Schools and All Schools in both Text Level and Record of Oral Language in Year 1, although results are slightly below the System target for 80% of students. The Burt Word results are not as positive, with student performance consistently below Like Schools and All Schools and suggest that a continued focus on Oral Language and Word Attack skills would be beneficial.

#### ***Reading***

Year 3 AIM data indicates an upward trend in student achievement from 2004 – 2007, with students above Like Schools and the State in the past two years. School Improvement Reports suggest that students do not always reach the system target, with less than 70% performing at or above the expected VELS level. With the exception of 2007 when 82.4% of students were operating at the expected level, results are generally below Like Schools (LBOTE). There is an inconsistent trend evident in Yr 5 AIM results from 2003 – 2007. In two out of five years students performed above Like Schools and the State. In School Improvement Reports the number of students performing at or above the appropriate VELS level is consistently below System Targets and achievement in Like Schools (LBOTE). However, an assessment of Reading Learning Growth from the 2004-2006 and the 2005 – 2007 matched cohorts indicates very positive growth. The mean growth for both groups was approximately 1 VELS level, which was above that of the State and Like Schools Mean. At both

levels Boys are outperforming Girls in Reading, with Yr 5 Girls in 2006 not achieving 1 VELs level across the two years. Students with a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE) are consistently achieving 1 VELs level across the two years. The school panel agreed that Reading, with a particular focus on Girls, would continue to be a focus for development in the next School Improvement Plan.

### ***Writing***

There is an inconsistent trend in AIM data for Year 3 students, but results are generally above the State and Like Schools. Once again Boys are outperforming Girls in this area. Year 5 results, whilst not as positive as Yr 3, show an upward trend from 2005 – 2007. However School Improvement Reports indicate that Yr 5 students are not meeting system targets, with student achievement ranging from 46.9% - 59.2% of students operating at or above the expected VELs level. Analysis of Writing Growth for two matched cohorts indicates that students are not progressing one VELs level across the two years. Mean learning growth was approximately .8, which was below State and Like Schools. The lower cohort of students made only .4 growth. The review panel agrees that Writing, with a particular focus on the lower cohort, would be a priority for improvement in the next School Improvement Period.

### ***Spelling***

Students achieved consistent improvement in Spelling in Yr 3, with results well above State and Like Schools across the 5 year period. School Improvement Reports also show that a high percentage of students (90%+) are consistently operating at or above the expected level. Year 5 results show an upward trend from 2005 – 2007, with achievement above the State in each of the past 5 years and above Like Schools for 3 out of the 5 years. School Improvement Reports also show an increasing number of Yr 5 students operating at the appropriate VELs level and performing above Like Schools (LBOTE) in the past two years. Whilst an analysis of learning growth in Spelling indicates a mean growth of .9, which is above State and Like Schools, the lower cohort is only making .2/.3 growth over the two year period. A focus on improvement for these students is recommended.

### **To improve student numeracy outcomes**

In the past two years the school has had a degree of success in its goal of improving numeracy standards. Year 3 results in Number and Mathematics indicate steady improvement, with an upward trend from 2005 – 2007; students met system targets in Number each year. Results are consistently above the State and Like School performance. Year 5 results also suggest an upward trend in Numeracy from 2005 – 2007, with significant improvement in Mathematics in 2007. These students generally performed below State and Like Schools. However in 2007 students reached the C.E.O. system target for the number of students performing at or above the expected VELs level. Learning growth for the 2005 – 2007 matched cohort was very positive with a mean growth of .9 for Number

and 1 for Mathematics and being above State and Like Schools. A continued focus on improvement in numeracy, with a particular emphasis on students in the upper school is recommended.

### **To improve student engagement and enrich the learning environment**

The school has made some progress towards its goal of improving student engagement and enriching the learning environment. Inquiry based learning is consistently implemented across the school. Parents in focus group discussions spoke positively about teachers' efforts to enrich student learning, although they expressed a desire to see learning more connected with the community beyond the classroom. Students were able to speak confidently and enthusiastically about Inquiries they have undertaken and about the various stages of the process. Displays in corridors and learning journals sighted by the reviewer indicate whole school commitment to this approach.

Student surveys and the focus group were also very positive about the extent to which teachers assisted them with their learning and about the manner in which programs were presented. Students rated the *Purposeful Teaching* and *Teacher Empathy* variables above average, compared to Victorian School Benchmarks. Staff opinion of the quality of *Curriculum Coordination* rated at the very top of the middle range of schools. However staff, student and parent survey results suggest that there is less confidence about the Teaching and Learning practices implemented to engage and motivate students, rating the *Teaching and Learning* and the *Stimulating Learning* variables below average compared to Victorian School Benchmarks. It would also seem that the use of ICT as a powerful tool to enrich teaching and learning needs to be further developed, with results from the Inquiry Based Learning survey suggesting that only 53% of teachers use ICT to enhance student learning.

### **iii. Why did the school achieve / not achieve its desired outcomes?**

It is clear that teachers are committed to improving student outcomes and there is a willingness to explore new pedagogies and initiatives including the Victorian Essential Learning Standards.

The school attributes its success in early years literacy to consistent implementation of the CLaSS program, with focused teaching based on the assessed needs of students. Professional Learning Teams, which examine student performance data, plan focused teaching and engage in robust professional dialogue about improving classroom practice and student outcomes, have been operating effectively under the guidance of a very skilled Literacy Coordinator. To promote further growth in Literacy from Years 3 – 6 PLTs have now been introduced across the school. The impact of these may be reflected in recent improvements and learning growth in the upper levels.

The school has also introduced a very supportive planning structure, which provides support from key leaders for level teams in the areas of Literacy, Numeracy, Religious Education and Inquiry based learning. The panel believes that this support is beginning to impact on teaching and learning and has assisted in the development of whole school agreement about successful pedagogical approaches and more consistent implementation across the school. The appointment of a Numeracy Coordinator and

a Maths Intervention strategy, with utilization of rich assessment tasks, appears to be linked to recent improvements in Number and Mathematics.

Quality professional development in Inquiry based learning has clearly assisted staff to develop common understandings and consistent implementation of Inquiry based learning. Over the past two years an external expert (Kath Murdoch) has been employed in a spaced learning model to inform staff about current research and approaches and to plan for implementation with level teams. Staff focus groups indicate strong endorsement of this professional development.

When reflecting on the Effective Schools Model the staff identified the element of Learning Communities, in which teachers work collaboratively to enhance the curriculum and develop innovative teaching strategies, as the area to be strengthened. 21% of staff believe that staff do not “always challenge each other to improve the quality of the school’s teaching and learning practices.” The school panel is confident that the recently introduced planning structures with key leader support, will lead to improvement in this area. Further development in the school’s appraisal and recognition processes, with the possible introduction of an in-house coaching program, may provide ongoing opportunities for enhanced professional dialogue and feedback.

#### **iv. Are the school’s practices reflective of the school’s vision?**

*“In a stimulating environment, we implement innovative, consistent teaching and learning practices which cater for individual needs and encourage risk taking.”*

The Principal and staff demonstrate a genuine commitment to developing consistent and innovative teaching and learning practices, keeping abreast of current educational trends to ensure improvement in student outcomes. Many programs exist which cater for the needs of the individual students. In focus group discussions students spoke positively about the way their teachers helped and encouraged them and supported them in their learning. The reviewer believes that the school’s programs and practices are reflective of the school’s vision.

#### **iv. What can the school do in the future to continue to improve?**

*The reviewer offers the following advice in relation to school planning in the sphere of Learning and Teaching*

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN		ANNUAL ACTION PLAN		
Developing the broad goal[s] for this sphere.	Intended outcomes [Specific areas for improvement]	Setting targets	Key Strategies [High order approaches that may be applicable to the achievement of more than one goal]	Examples of actions that may assist the school in the implementation key strategies in this sphere, and the achievement of intended outcomes.
<p>To improve student outcomes in literacy, particularly Writing</p> <p>To improve student outcomes in numeracy</p>	<p>That Writing outcomes across the school are improved, with a particular focus on students in the upper school</p> <p>That Reading outcomes are improved, with a particular focus on students in the upper school</p> <p>That Number and Mathematics outcomes for students are improved.</p> <p>That Oral Language and Word Attack skills are improved, particularly in the early years</p> <p>That students are more engaged in a stimulating learning environment</p>	<p>80% of Yr 5 students will be operating a/above the expected VELS level in Writing and Reading</p> <p>80% of Yr 5 students will be operating at/above the expected VELS level in Number and Mathematics</p> <p>Using VELS assessments, there will be a matched cohort growth of at least .9 in Reading, Writing, Number and Mathematics.</p> <p>That 80% of students will score 28 in the Record of Oral Language and 60 in the Burt Word by the end of Year 2</p> <p>Stimulating Learning Variable in the Student and Parent surveys will improve to 90/100</p> <p>Teaching and Learning Variable in the Staff survey will improve to 90/100</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen the school as a learning community</li> <li>Provide genuine opportunities for staff members to contribute to decisions regarding curriculum, professional learning and school policy</li> <li>Further develop learning and teaching practices through a strong focus on the Interdisciplinary Learning Strand of VELS.</li> <li>Ensure that there is a whole school focus on contemporary approaches to teaching and learning and on the Principles of Learning and Teaching (POLT)</li> <li>Strengthen teachers' capacity in the analysis and rigorous use of performance and attitudinal data to inform planning and development of learning programs and pedagogy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to develop a whole school language approach with increased emphasis on oracy</li> <li>Provide PD for staff in effective teaching to enhance student achievement in Writing</li> <li>Increase the focus on the "lower cohort" of students, particularly in Writing and Spelling</li> <li>Explore best practice pedagogy for girls</li> <li>Further develop PLTs across the school</li> <li>Increase explicit teaching within the delivery of Maths</li> <li>Develop the delivery of Maths across Yrs 5 &amp; 6 by using Middle Years approaches</li> <li>Participate in appropriate CEOM Maths initiative</li> <li>Further develop the school's appraisal and recognition processes, with the possible introduction of an in-house coaching (Teaching Buddies)program,</li> <li>Continue implementation of VELS and POLT with a strong focus on the Interdisciplinary Strand</li> <li>Explore ways of linking learning with the wider community (POLT 6)</li> <li>Provide elearning PD for staff to build capacity to use ICT to transform pedagogy</li> </ul>

## **C Student Wellbeing**

### **i. What outcomes was the school trying to achieve?**

In the school's Self Reflection report (p. 12) the priorities in the area of Student Wellbeing were focused on the development of positive relationships throughout the school community to ensure the wellbeing of each child. The development of common understandings and consistent approaches was seen as a critical component of this goal. The school also identified the development of student leadership as a priority, aimed at enhancing students' sense of connectedness to the school and to their peers.

### **ii. What did the school achieve?**

Student Wellbeing is clearly a priority at St. Mary's School and the school has enjoyed a high degree of success in the achievement of its goals in this sphere. There is a very positive emotional tone in the school and a caring and supportive environment is evident.

The school has made very positive progress towards developing student leadership. The student focus group could clearly articulate their roles and responsibilities and could be seen fulfilling their duties in various activities around the school. Student survey responses indicate that students feel very connected to school and to their peers and that they feel well supported by their teachers, rating above average when compared to other Victorian schools. Parent surveys also supported these findings, rating student *Connectedness to Peers* above average and in the top 25% of schools.

Relationships between staff, students and parents are very strong and interactions are based on trust and respect. All focus groups spoke of the sense of belonging and nurturing which students experience. There appears to be a consistent approach to the management of students. Parents are very supportive of the school's approach to *Behaviour Management*, rating this variable above average and *Classroom Behaviour* in the upper range of the top 25% of responses, when compared to Victorian School Benchmarks. Discussions with a parent group further endorsed this opinion. Students and staff similarly rated the *Behaviour* variables above average compared to other Victorian Schools, although students gave it the lowest rating of all variables in the Student Attitudes to School Surveys. The school has made good progress in developing common understandings and consistent approaches in the Student Wellbeing sphere and will continue to focus on this area as a priority in the next School Improvement period.

Although parent survey responses, the parent focus group and staff members believe that the school has good structures and processes in place to ensure the safety of students, the student surveys suggest that a small group have some concerns about their sense of safety in the school, with over 20% indicating that they had been bullied or teased recently. Whilst the student focus group did not see this as a major issue they were not able to articulate specific actions to take if they did experience

bullying. This may suggest that there is a need to revisit anti-bullying policies and protocols in the next School Improvement period.

### **iii. Why did the school achieve / not achieve its desired outcomes?**

Student Wellbeing has been a key priority for the school community in recent years and this focus has clearly assisted the school to achieve its goals in the Student Wellbeing sphere. A range of sound programs and practices have been implemented to support the welfare and wellbeing needs of students. A Student Wellbeing Coordinator was appointed to oversee and promote Student Wellbeing and there is strong collegial and leadership support to deal with student issues. Several programs have been initiated to address specific needs of individual students e.g. Maths Intervention and Extension. There has been a conscious effort to develop resilience in students, with the Bounce Back program just one of the initiatives the school has trialled.

The school is very student focused, which has also contributed to its success in the Student Wellbeing sphere. Students are treated as responsible individuals and are encouraged to experience success. Staff surveys indicate that teachers are very committed to student wellbeing with the *Student Orientation* variable rating in the top 25% of schools. Students also ranked *Teacher Empathy*, above the average compared to Victorian School Benchmarks.

The recently developed Student Leadership Program and SRC has further developed children's self esteem and their sense of pride and belonging to their school community. Discussions with the student focus group reinforced these findings. Students are treated as responsible people and are encouraged to experience success. They have genuine opportunities to participate in the leadership of the school.

The school has made good progress in developing common understandings and consistent approaches in the Student Wellbeing sphere in recent years. The Leadership Team is now keen to develop restorative approaches and practices to guide and nurture the relationships between staff, students and parents. Prior to the decision to adopt this approach and to ensure whole staff commitment to it, the reviewer recommends that teachers have the opportunity to be fully informed about restorative practices through professional development and visitation to schools practising a restorative approach.

**iv. Are the school's practices reflective of the school's vision?**

St. Mary's School lives out their Vision of ensuring that each child feels *"happy, safe and valued...in an environment when self-esteem, respect and resilience are fostered."* This was evident in the daily interactions of the school community, the genuine staff commitment to the children in their care and in the many programs in place to nurture the wellbeing of students.

**v. What can the school do in the future to continue to improve?**

## Recommendations for CEOM school review reports 2008

*The reviewer offers the following advice in relation to school planning in the sphere of Student Wellbeing*

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN		ANNUAL ACTION PLAN		
Developing the broad goal[s] for this sphere.	Intended outcomes [Specific areas for improvement]	Setting targets	Key Strategies [High order approaches that may be applicable to the achievement of more than one goal]	Examples of actions that may assist the school in the implementation key strategies in this sphere, and the achievement of intended outcomes.
To strengthen Student Wellbeing and positive relationships	That student safety and classroom behaviour improve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Safety Variable in the Student survey will improve to 90/100</li> <li>• Classroom Behaviour Variable in the Student survey will improve to 80/100</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen the school as a learning community</li> <li>• Provide genuine opportunities for staff members to contribute to decisions regarding curriculum, professional learning and school policy</li> <li>• Further develop learning and teaching practices through a strong focus on the Interdisciplinary Learning Strand of VELs.</li> <li>• Ensure that there is a whole school focus on contemporary approaches to teaching and learning and on the Principles of Learning and Teaching (POLT)</li> <li>• Strengthen teachers' capacity in the analysis and rigorous use of performance and attitudinal data to inform planning and development of learning programs and pedagogy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide PD for staff in Restorative practices/ approaches</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for staff to visit Restorative practice schools</li> <li>• Seek Accreditation as a Restorative School</li> <li>• Revisit anti-bullying policy and protocols</li> <li>• Continue to develop student leadership</li> <li>• Continue to develop consistent approaches and processes to student welfare, behaviour management</li> <li>• Develop a data base to more effectively track individual student progress and interventions</li> </ul>

## **D Leadership and Management**

### **i. What outcomes was the school trying to achieve?**

In the previous School Improvement period the Principal and staff identified the need to improve the effectiveness of the educational Leadership and Management of the school through the development of supportive and consistent structures and processes for staff, students and parents. They aimed to build staff capacity through improved professional opportunities for staff.

### **ii. What did the school achieve?**

The school has had significant success in achieving its goals in the Leadership and Management sphere. In the past two years there has been a complete turnover of the Leadership team and 10 new teaching staff have been employed. During this time of change, an effective Leadership team structure was introduced. This team appears to operate as a cohesive unit, with a shared vision and a clear sense of direction and purpose. Individual members of the team display a high level of competence in their specific roles and there is strong capacity evident as a team. The Parish Priest was very positive in his comments about the strength of the school's leadership, which remained focused despite some upheaval during the initial transition period. In discussion with the Leadership Team, induction of new staff members was identified as an area for further development.

An analysis of Staff Survey results reveals that school morale is relatively high, rating above average when compared to Victorian School Benchmarks. Staff surveys indicate a high level of satisfaction with the supportive nature of the leadership. Parents and students also support this view. There is a healthy balance between the *Supportive Leadership* and the *Role Clarity* variables, indicating that staff members find the leaders of the school approachable and supportive, whilst still providing clarity of expectation and direction. Once again these areas are ranked above average for all Victorian Schools.

Insight SRC surveys identify the school's relative strength as Learning, which indicates that the school has had a degree of success with the aim of building staff capacity through professional development. However staff surveys rate the *Professional Growth* variable lower than the *Appraisal and Recognition* and *Teamwork* variables. If the school's feedback processes and teamwork are operating effectively a stronger performance in *Professional Growth* could be expected. This suggests that the school's *Appraisal and Recognition* and *Teamwork* processes could be more rigorous and challenging, focused on improving teaching and learning practices. This is also supported by teachers' consideration of the Effective Schools Model. The element of "Learning Communities," in which teachers work collaboratively to enhance the curriculum and develop innovative teaching strategies, was identified as the area to be strengthened. This is further endorsed by 21% of teachers

who believe that staff do not “always challenge each other to improve the quality of the school’s teaching and learning practices.”

Staff survey responses identified the critical school climate area for the school to address as Staff Engagement. The *Ownership* and *Teamwork* variables are rated highly by staff. There is strong staff commitment to the goals and values of the school and many opportunities are provided for staff to work together collegially and to support each other. However the area of *Empowerment* is rated below average when compared to Victorian School Benchmarks. This relates directly to the opportunities staff members have to be involved with and contribute to decisions regarding their everyday work. The *Individual Morale* variable on the staff survey is also a little below average compared to Victorian School Benchmarks.

### **iii. Why did the school achieve / not achieve its desired outcomes?**

The success of the school in the Leadership and Management sphere has resulted from a number of factors. The reviewer formed the opinion that the Principal and Leadership Team shared a strong commitment to providing a supportive Leadership structure for the school community and have worked consistently to do this. Parents, students and staff spoke of the strength of this team and of the approachability and open door policy of all leaders in the school.

The Leadership Team participated in Professional Development provided by the C.E.O. Northern Region which focused on building the capacity of the team and assisted members to identify particular strengths and styles of the individual members of the team. In the focus group discussion with the Principal and Leadership Team, it was clear that this has had a positive impact on the effectiveness of their operation. This has also led to clarity amongst staff and parents about leadership roles and future directions.

Two years ago the decision was taken to redevelop the school’s Vision Statement to guide the community through its next phase of development. The collaborative nature of this process has contributed significantly to the strong sense of staff ownership and shared commitment to the goals and values of the school. Whole school Professional Development, particularly in Inquiry Based Learning, has also assisted teachers to develop common understandings and consistent approaches to implementation across the school.

Effective professional interaction has been encouraged by the extension of PLTs throughout the school and through the introduction of new planning structures. Whilst staff are relatively positive about these arrangements survey results suggest that *Appraisal and Recognition* and *Teamwork* processes could be more rigorous and challenging, focused on improving teaching and learning practices.

Staff surveys indicate that Individual Morale, Individual Distress and Excessive Work Demands are rated below average when compared with Victorian School Benchmarks. The Leadership Team has become an effective unit, meeting regularly to discuss school issues and to set direction for the future. From discussions with the school review panel and from staff survey results it is apparent that staff members sometimes feel left out of the decision making processes of the school. The Insight SRC Road Map of People Management suggests that a focus on improvement in Empowerment/ Participative Decision Making and improvement in Professional Growth will have a positive impact on Individual Morale and Distress and Excessive Work Demands. The school panel agrees that the issue of staff involvement in decisions which impact on their professional responsibilities and day to day work is one which needs further exploration.

#### **iv. Are the school's practices reflective of the school's vision?**

*"St. Mary's leadership and management teams value, support and empower all members of the school community."*

Leadership and Management practices and structures of the school provide strong support for all members of the school community. The school's leadership is seen as supportive and open. Members of the community feel that they are valued and speak of the welcoming and approachable nature of the leadership. Parents, students and staff feel empowered to participate in the life of the school community. However, there may be a need to further explore the issue of empowerment of staff in relation to decision making processes of the school.

#### **v. What can the school do in the future to continue to improve?**

## Recommendations for CEOM school review reports 2008

*The reviewer offers the following advice in relation to school planning in the sphere of Leadership and Management*

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN		ANNUAL ACTION PLAN		
Developing the broad goal[s] for this sphere.	Intended outcomes [Specific areas for improvement]	Setting targets	Key Strategies [High order approaches that may be applicable to the achievement of more than one goal]	Examples of actions that may assist the school in the implementation key strategies in this sphere, and the achievement of intended outcomes.
To strengthen the leadership of the school through enhanced staff engagement	<p>That staff feel empowered and are involved in school decision making processes</p> <p>That staff satisfaction with school feedback and appraisal practices improve</p> <p>That staff confidence in their professional competence will be enhanced</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowerment variable in the staff survey will improve to 90/100</li> <li>• Professional Growth variable in the staff survey will improve to 90/100</li> <li>• Appraisal and Recognition variable in the staff survey will improve to 90/100</li> <li>• Individual Morale variable in the staff survey will improve to 90/100</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen the school as a learning community</li> <li>• Provide genuine opportunities for staff members to contribute to decisions regarding curriculum, professional learning and school policy</li> <li>• Further develop learning and teaching practices through a strong focus on the Interdisciplinary Learning Strand of VELs.</li> <li>• Ensure that there is a whole school focus on contemporary approaches to teaching and learning and on the Principles of Learning and Teaching (POLT)</li> <li>• Strengthen teachers' capacity in the analysis and rigorous use of performance and attitudinal data to inform planning and development of learning programs and pedagogy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further develop the school's appraisal and recognition processes, with the possible introduction of mentoring program for teachers</li> <li>• Strengthen the Annual Review Meeting process as a means of improving professional feedback</li> <li>• Involve staff in decisions which affect their day to day work</li> <li>• Further develop PLTs across the school</li> <li>• Develop an Induction process and manual for new staff</li> </ul>

## **E School Community**

### **i. What outcomes was the school trying to achieve?**

In its Self Reflection report (p. 18) the school identified its main goal as the development of strong relationships between home, school and parish. They also aimed to develop student awareness of the wider community and to enhance their understanding of, and commitment to, social justice.

### **ii. What did the school achieve?**

The school has been very successful in achieving its goals of developing a strong relationship between home, school and parish. The welcoming nature of the school, the approachability of staff and the spirit of community engendered are outstanding achievements in this sphere. Parents are supportive of the school and rate it highly in the areas of student wellbeing and engagement. In the focus group parents spoke positively of the sense of inclusion and belonging that is nurtured and of the supportive nature of the school. The parent survey responses rated the *Approachability* variable well above average, in the very top of the middle 50% of schools. Whilst communication processes are viewed favourably, the *Reporting* variable rated well below average when compared to Victorian School Benchmarks. This may be linked to teachers' perception of the new Reporting system.

Many opportunities exist for parents to be involved in the life of the school, although these are mainly linked to voluntary work in classrooms, fundraising or social activities. Responses to Insight SRC parent survey show concern with the extent to which parents have an opportunity to be involved in planning or policy making. This variable rated in the lower half of the middle 50% of schools.

Parents spoke positively about the school's efforts to make links with the life of the Parish. The school has assisted students to develop an understanding of social justice, with children being provided with regular opportunities to reach out to the wider community to help others in need.

### **iii. Why did the school achieve / not achieve its desired outcomes?**

There are many practices which have contributed to the great sense of community at St. Mary's. The Principal and staff have a genuine commitment to working in partnership with the parish and the parent community. There is a supportive and well organized parent association which raises funds, provides social activities and encourages participation of all community members. The establishment of the Fathers' Association, which provides opportunities for dads to meet socially, has extended the strong sense of community which permeates the school.

The Parish Priest is a supportive and active presence in the community, encouraging the link between school, home and parish. There is a shared Parish Education Board, incorporating the sister school, St. Margaret's and other parish groups. At this stage St. Mary's does not have a dedicated Education Board, which may account for the low rating of the Parent Input variable. The school may need to explore options for involving parents in policy and planning decisions.

**iv. Are the school’s practices reflective of the school’s vision?**

*“We are a welcoming, inclusive and supportive community that values genuine relationships.”*

St. Mary’s lives out its Vision in this sphere. The school’s performance in building a strong partnership and sense of community, involving parish, parents, staff and students reflects the aspirations stated in the Vision.

**v. What can the school do in the future to continue to improve?**

*The reviewer offers the following advice in relation to school planning in the sphere of School Community.*

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN				
ANNUAL ACTION PLAN				
Developing the broad goal[s] for this sphere.	Intended outcomes [Specific areas for improvement]	Setting targets	Key Strategies [High order approaches that may be applicable to the achievement of more than one goal	Examples of actions that may assist the school in the implementation key strategies in this sphere, and the achievement of intended outcomes.
To further strengthen the partnerships between home, school, parish and the wider community	<p>That parents are more involved in the decision making processes of the school</p> <p>That parent satisfaction with reporting is improved</p> <p>That learning is linked to the wider community</p>	<p>Parent Input variable in the Parent survey will improve to 90/100</p> <p>Reporting variable in the Parent survey will improve to 80/100</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen the school as a learning community</li> <li>Provide genuine opportunities for staff members to contribute to decisions regarding curriculum, professional learning and school policy</li> <li>Further develop learning and teaching practices through a strong focus on the Interdisciplinary Learning Strand of VELs.</li> <li>Ensure that there is a whole school focus on contemporary approaches to teaching and learning and on the Principles of Learning and Teaching (POLT)</li> </ul> <p>Strengthen teachers’ capacity in the analysis and rigorous use of performance and attitudinal data to inform planning and development of learning programs and pedagogy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore forums for parents to have input into decision making process of the school</li> <li>Make use of parent focus groups to gather feedback/input on school issues</li> <li>Provide information sessions on Reporting processes</li> <li>Explore ways of linking learning with the wider community (POLT 6)</li> </ul>

