



**CATHOLIC  
EDUCATION  
MELBOURNE**

# School Review Report

Prepared for

**St Mary's Primary School  
Ascot Vale**



**2016**

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|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| • School E Number                     | E 1082              |
| • Principal                           | Mr Graham Spence    |
| • Parish Priest                       | Father Justin Ford  |
| • School Reviewer                     | Mrs Maree Xuereb    |
| • Dates of Review                     | March 15 & 16, 2016 |
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## 1. Executive Summary

Since the 2012 review St Mary's Parish Primary School Ascot Vale has enjoyed a period of development marked by growth in all spheres of its operation. Staff morale is strong; an expanded and cohesive leadership team is working actively to build better staff teamwork and improved capacity. Students and staff have responded positively to a new style of leadership, the priority being to share a vision of keeping student learning and wellbeing at the forefront of their focus.

The review confirms that practices for student wellbeing are outstanding. Students are motivated learners, are connected to each other and feel safe at school. Opportunities for student leadership and voice have been enacted. Student leaders have a sense of pride in their school and enjoy learning in the spaces which have all been updated and are particularly well resourced. Parents speak very highly of practices for student wellbeing and consider that the way special needs are addressed is a strong feature of St Mary's. Management of student behaviour is well addressed through a Restorative Practice strategy.

Parents verbally affirm St Mary's as a Catholic school, though areas for improvement are to raise their perceptions of the importance of St Mary's Catholic culture and identity and to gain greater parent engagement in education in faith. Parents, students and staff recognise and acknowledge the many opportunities the school provides for liturgical celebration, the focus on living Gospel values and taking action in social justice. Exploring current perspectives and building understandings of staff and families on Catholic identity remain aspects for further attention.

Major refurbishment of the entire school, which is over one hundred years old, has resulted in the development of attractive spaces which are very well-resourced for learning and teaching. Staff resourcing of ICT through the investment in technology and appointment of an ICT leader is optimising the engagement and motivation of students, interlinking student learning and wellbeing. Although progress is inconsistent, most staff members are building capacity in using ICT in learning. There is emerging use of flexible learning spaces in the senior classes to group students to target teaching, sharing teaching expertise.

Most staff across the school scaffold student learning and make learning intentions explicit, however consistency of team practices is an area for improvement. New leadership positions have been created in this period; leaders are building their skills in facilitating professional learning team meetings and supporting staff to plan for learning. Some modelling of strategies is commencing but feedback on practice has not yet been implemented. The reviewer perceives that staff members are

fortunate to have colleagues in the school to draw on for their own professional learning and development.

Being a St Mary's student is a very positive experience, a perspective endorsed by students and parents alike. Students told the reviewer that they enjoy their English and mathematics learning activities, their inquiry units, use of ICT and opportunities across the range of domains. Nonetheless, as there are many capable students at St Mary's, a challenge exists to improve their perceptions of the level of stimulation in their learning activities.

Reading standards in the early years have been consistently strong. Most students in Foundation to Year 6 are achieving the standards. The majority are performing above state NAPLAN means in numeracy and literacy, with writing continuing to be the lowest dimension. High proportions of students are surpassing state means (especially in reading and numeracy at Year 3) and numeracy at Year 5. An analysis showed that of these students a majority are twelve months ahead of the state. In the same dimensions, those students who are twelve months below the state give cause for concern. Therefore, an imperative for the future is to address both enrichment and support within class teaching.

As learning growth over two years in NAPLAN literacy and numeracy is lower than similar schools and below students with the same starting points, the utilisation of data needs to be heightened. The careful monitoring of student learning data to identify the next step in students' learning will be a key focus for improvement. Substantial professional learning will be required in two areas: the use of data and the moderation of student learning.

Engagement of the school community is an area St Mary's will continue to target for improvement in the next period. The panel concluded that whereas 'involvement' occurs, parent 'engagement in partnership' for their children's learning requires broader parent representation. It was agreed that the school community sphere has a vital influence on student learning. As parent data continues to be low, the review recommends that the school implement strategies to inform parents of the importance of their partnership and to seek fresh ideas on ways to strengthen processes.

The review finds that St Mary's school is committed to ongoing improvement. In the next school improvement period it will be important to collaboratively and strategically identify key priorities and to ensure that processes and practices are shared in partnership with the school community. On this basis the reviewer offers the following advice as to possible goals derived from the school's own self reflection and the review process over two days in the school.

**ADVICE ON STRATEGIC INTENT**

*Emerging from the panel discussion the following elements were identified as possibilities to be considered when developing the strategic intent statement of the next School Improvement Plan:*

- \*To build students' knowledge of their faith and empower them to enact it in relevant ways
- \*To strengthen teaching capacity through teamwork, a whole-school understanding of personalised learning and effective use of student learning data
- \*To develop elements of performance and development: peer observation, coaching, feedback
- \*To engage parents in their children's learning, educating them on the importance of partnership

<b>Sphere of Schooling</b>	<b>ADVICE ON BROAD GOALS</b>	<b>INTENDED IMPROVEMENT OUTCOMES</b>	<b>KEY IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES</b>
<b>Education in Faith</b>	To strengthen students' knowledge and understanding of their faith and empower them to live it in today's world	That students will be more challenged and engaged in religious education	Explore our Catholic tradition and identity by teaching Catholic principles in meaningful and current ways
<b>Learning and Teaching</b>	To personalise learning for optimal growth of student outcomes	That student engagement in their learning will improve That student outcomes in literacy and numeracy will attain targeted growth	Build the capacity of staff to use formative assessment and evidence of learning, including data, to drive teaching and identify the next step for student learning
<b>Student Wellbeing</b>	To strengthen the relational culture within the school	That staff connectedness with students will impact effectively on student engagement That student resilience will improve	Embed a whole school approach that cultivates student wellbeing, recognising that it is central to improved student learning outcomes and student engagement
<b>Leadership and Management</b>	To strengthen the professional learning culture at St. Mary's	That staff will be more engaged in effective teamwork That staff professional knowledge and teaching practice will improve	Develop a culture across the school of high levels of teamwork and ownership which enhance performance and development
<b>School Community</b>	To strengthen parent engagement in their children's learning	That parents will be engaged more effectively as partners in their children's learning	Engage with parents in processes that improve their children's learning, faith development and social and emotional competencies

## 2. Methodology

The review process commenced on February 23, with a preliminary visit to the school by Maree Xuereb, reviewer. During this visit, the reviewer discussed background details regarding the school with the principal and visited all classrooms to observe learning and teaching. The programme for the two review days was developed with the principal and the VRQA compliance check commenced. The reviewer met the Parish Priest and was introduced to the staff. Data provided by the school included the Self Reflection Report (SRR); the School Improvement Survey (SIS) reports 2014 and 2015; the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and Annual Action Plan (AAP); NAPLAN data; Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) School Improvement Reports and Teacher Assessment of Student Achievement (TASA) reports 2015. In advance the reviewer was provided with access details to VCAA for NAPLAN. Most of the other documents requested by the reviewer were available on the school website.

On the first day of the review the reviewer met with seven focus groups including a Year 3- 6 student group. On the second day, the reviewer met with a school panel consisting of:

Graham Spence	Principal
Sandra Lind	Deputy Principal and Student Wellbeing leader
Fr Justin Ford	Parish Priest (for Education in Faith sphere)
Teresa Mercuri	Religious Education leader and Reading Recovery teacher
Michael Dwyer	Learning and Teaching leader
Nicola Toney	Numeracy leader (Years 3-6) and Year 5 teacher
Vanessa Moreira	Numeracy leader (F-Year 2) and Year 2 teacher
Dot Crowley	Literacy leader
Genevieve Moss	Principal Consultant
Snjezana Singh	School Advisor Learning and Teaching
Bernadette Venables	School Advisor Religious Education
Melissa Albers	School Improvement Parent Committee
Shelley Lynch	School Improvement Parent Committee

The panel reflected on progress and achievements in each sphere and developed a framework for the next School Improvement Plan. A draft of this written report was provided to the principal prior to its finalisation and the review process concluded with verbal presentations by the reviewer to the

staff and School Improvement Parent Committee.

### 3. School Context

St Mary's Catholic Primary School, which is now one of two parish schools, was established in the parish of Ascot Vale in 1913, by the Sisters of Mercy. Some years ago the socio-economic status of the population was lower than at present. In this review period St Mary's profile has become less diverse, a trend seen since 2008. There are now relatively few LOTE background students.

With the announcement this term of the retirement of the principal after five and a half years of leadership of St Mary's, at the time of the review the community was awaiting the appointment of a new principal.

The school is situated alongside St Mary's church and the entire site is particularly well-presented and maintained. A master plan was completed by the time of the last review to establish refurbishment priorities for the older spaces so as to be integrated into the contemporary buildings that were built as part of BER funding. The school has since been impressively refurbished and developed incorporating flexible learning spaces and optimum enhancement of technology (SRR page 6). All learning areas are situated in the same building, and comprise 14 classrooms, a library/ICT (Global Learning) centre, rooms for small group teaching and an administration area. Resourcing of mathematics was given significant priority throughout this improvement period with the appointment of leaders for junior and senior levels and associated professional learning (PL).

- The 2016 enrolment is 353 students.
- There are 14 classes in discrete groupings: two x Foundation and two each by Years 1-6
- 2% of students are from a LOTE background.
- There are 14 LNSLN funded students.
- The SES classification is 112. 14% of families are receiving the CSEF.
- 96% of the Foundation students are Catholic.
- Of the 20 teachers, 83% are accredited to teach in a Catholic school and 77% to teach RE.
- Reading Recovery is provided for Year 1.
- Specialist programmes include: LOTE Italian, Library, Performing Arts, ICT and Health/Physical Education.

## 4. Evaluation of Performance

### A. EDUCATION IN FAITH

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

In the sphere of Education in Faith the school's intentions were (SRR page 7):

**Goal:** *To strengthen and promote the Catholic culture and identity of the school community with a focus on living the Gospel values*

**Intended outcomes:**

*That student engagement in Religious Education will improve*

**Targets:**

*The Education in Faith – Learning & Teaching Survey for students – has a mean of 4.2*

*The Education in Faith – Learning & Teaching Survey for staff – has a mean of 4.1*

*At least 25% of students will receive an A or B in Religious Education (TASA)*

As the TASA tool does not incorporate Religious Education and as there was a lack of attention over the period to tracking teacher judgements in the assessment programme (NForma), achievement of the third target was unable to be determined.

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

The review finds that, in promoting the Catholic culture, St Mary's has met with considerable success amongst students and staff. Conversations during the review confirmed a shared belief across all groups that behaviour indicative of Gospel values, alongside the display of pastoral relationships and the enactment of action in social justice, show achievements of intended outcomes.

The school has met with noteworthy success as seen through student and staff Catholic Culture surveys. Catholic Culture Aggregate indices for students have grown incrementally from well above the Australian Schools mean in 2012 to a particularly high level. The Catholic Culture staff index has fluctuated in this period, yet has always surpassed the mean. Trends show all staff survey indicators have increased over the period. By notable contrast, the parent Aggregate indices were static over this period, being *slightly* above the mean. Compared with Australian Catholic primary schools parent Catholic Culture responses are primarily in the middle band. Parent scores for importance declined progressively over the period. Although parent data and feedback were not as strong as

desired, parents clearly affirm St Mary's as a Catholic school. They stated that they are satisfied with their children's faith education; it appeared that they entrust this to the school. During this period there has been a focus on teaching Gospel values; it was evident from conversation that parents approve of this approach, believing that it links what children learn in RE to their behaviour. Parents acknowledge the opportunities for celebration of the faith and enactment of social justice. Discussion indicated that parents are very supportive of the sacramental preparation and, where possible, attend the celebration of weekday and Sunday masses.

In the focus group students expressed their enjoyment of Religious Education (RE) lessons. Their engagement in RE was evident as they readily articulated details of units studied and the input given to some of their RE units when the Parish Priest speaks to classes. Students enjoy their leaders' roles during mass, attendance at weekly mass and their daily prayer.

Years 3 to 6 student responses about their faith education via the RE Pedagogy Student Survey indicate perceptions that they learn in many different ways in RE, have opportunities to explore their own questions and ideas and to discuss what they believe (SRR page 9). Pedagogical practices in RE will remain a focus as achievement was 75% of the target. Mean responses of staff in the RE Pedagogy Teacher Tool were higher than students', though very mixed. Targets were attained in elements *Supporting the Learner* and *Engaging the Learner in the Contemporary World* (SRR page 8), yet feedback indicated that a need exists for greater understanding of the pedagogy of inquiry learning in RE and in allowing for student voice in planning RE.

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

At St Mary's there is a clear focus on making Catholic culture overt. In corridors and shared spaces throughout the school religious icons and art works can be seen. During visits to classes the reviewer noted the consistency in all learning areas where prayer tables are maintained as sacred spaces. Students spoke of the range of approaches they enjoy in RE: scripture reading and discussion, projects, viewing multimedia, having Father Justin speak to them. Senior students have roles related to Education in Faith taking on responsibilities as leaders in Church, Social Justice and choir. They spoke enthusiastically about these to the reviewer and are clearly responding to responsibilities such as organising the Caritas boxes during Lent and activities to raise funds for groups such as the St Vincent de Paul society.

Inquiry learning in RE and interlinking RE and literacy lessons, strategies used by some teachers when units permit, appear to be impacting on student engagement in RE. Having many able students,

St Mary's identified a need to provide more challenge in lesson content beyond that of *To Know, Worship and Love*. Implementation of inquiry into RE lessons was introduced in the last period. The panel discussed the need to provide staff professional development (PD) to support teachers build their confidence and knowledge in how to use this strategy in RE.

Although teachers in the Education in Faith focus group perceived that most students attain the CEOM RE Framework Standards, attention to tracking student learning in an ongoing manner will be a priority area. Processes for PD in moderation of student learning will be a focus across all domains in the next period to ensure consistency of judgements by teachers.

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

During the review, observations of the school environment and interaction amongst staff and students in particular affirmed the enactment of the vision: *We are a welcoming, inclusive and supportive community that values positive and genuine relationships.*

Discussion during the review highlighted the awareness of living the Gospel values. Connections with the parish at weekday and Sunday masses throughout the year and the presence of the Parish Priest in classes demonstrate the vision of *connectedness between school and parish.*

With increased staff faith formation opportunities, the school may be able to more strongly connect vision and practice in the vision of *nurturing spiritual development.*

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

The strengthening of staff knowledge and understanding of the faith, plus practices which further engage and challenge students in RE, have been identified in the self reflection to improve Education in Faith at St Mary's. These suggestions have merit and will assist the school to meet the goals and intended outcomes in the next School Improvement Plan. The reviewer offers the following suggestions to complement those of the school:

In the coming school improvement period it will be important to continue to address the goal from the last period: *to strengthen and promote the Catholic culture and identity of the school community.*

The reviewer recommends that the school broaden its familiarity with current perspectives on Catholic culture and identity in order to determine how these can inform future progress. The review panel has referenced Catholic identity through the strategy developed for the future School Improvement Plan.

The school (self reflection page 10) identified that opportunities for staff faith formation need to be increased. The reviewer suggests that the school provide PD on Catholic social teaching plus PD to further support teachers' use of scripture with their classes. Building teacher capacity in RE pedagogy, furthering understandings of using inquiry in RE and moderating and reporting on student knowledge will all be important foci in the next period.

vi. **Recommendations for CEM School Review Reports 2016**

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]	Key Strategies for this Sphere	Examples of actions that may assist the school in the implementation of the key strategies and/or the achievement of intended outcomes
To strengthen students' knowledge and understanding of their faith and empower them to live it in today's world	That students will be more challenged and engaged in Religious Education	Explore our Catholic tradition and identity by teaching Catholic principles in meaningful and current ways	<p>Build staff understanding of Catholic social teaching</p> <p>Continue social justice initiatives and diversify the scope _ local and global</p> <p>Ensure that planning for RE encourages student voice and promotes opportunities for dialogue</p> <p>Provide staff PL in using Inquiry learning in religious education</p> <p>Provide staff PL in moderation of student learning in RE based on gathering of evidence_ ensure consistency of practice</p> <p>Make explicit to students the Catholic traditions behind particular school practices and significant religious symbols</p>

## **B. LEARNING AND TEACHING**

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

In the sphere of Learning and Teaching the school's intentions were (SRR page 12):

#### **Goal:**

*To create a vision for contemporary learning and to actively engage staff and students in a highly effective learning environment, focusing on consistent and innovative practices*

#### **Intended outcomes:**

*That student outcomes in numeracy and literacy will improve*

*That student engagement in their learning will improve*

#### **Targets:**

*65% of students will receive scores above the state mean in numeracy at Years 3 & 5 (NAPLAN)*

*65% of students will receive scores above the state mean in reading and writing at Year 5 (NAPLAN)*

*30% of students will achieve scores above the expected level in domains and dimensions of AUSVELS (TASA)*

Achievement of the last target (for Foundation to Year 6) was unable to be determined during the review as the school had not monitored data on teacher judgements. The data across the period (SRR page 14-15) did not match the TASA report (Semester 2, 2015) provided to the reviewer. That TASA report did however indicate that cohorts were meeting the target in reading, writing and numeracy.

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

In this period St Mary's has had a mixed degree of success in its intentions in learning and teaching. Within the School Improvement Plan (SIP) priority areas for improvement (reading, writing and numeracy) reading is the strongest dimension throughout the school. Years 3 and 5 numeracy standards are improving and writing remains an area for growth.

It is clear that the school has effectively prioritised student engagement. Student Survey scores have increased markedly since 2013; scores for 2014-2015 place the school in the top 25% of Australian primary schools. High and closely aligned student survey percentile scores were attained for the *Engagement in Learning* variables; these highlight school strengths. Nonetheless the staff's Teaching

Climate Aggregate index has fluctuated and some aspects of teacher practice (discussed in the Leadership and Management sphere) will be areas for improvement.

In conversations with Years 3 to 6 students their engagement in a range of domains was evident. Students used explicit language in discussing the inquiry learning they have enjoyed and outlined the way they learn in reading and mathematics. During class visits the reviewer witnessed a diversity of practices. These varied from highly engaging learning, (such as research, innovative tasks using ICT, small group learning, teacher modelling of writing, explicit reference to learning intentions/success criteria) to less engaging whole-class activities. Despite low SIS parent survey percentile scores for Learning Focus and Student Motivation, parents in the focus group said they are satisfied with their children's learning and level of motivation.

Of the priority areas for improvement the review finds that reading is strong in Foundation (F) to Year 2, where students have achieved CEM target standards throughout the period. The school self reflection (pages 12-13) provides a clear and succinct summary of achievement of targets in numeracy, reading and writing over 4 years. NAPLAN five-year trends show that reading is the strongest dimension, better at Year 3 than Year 5; Year 3 students performed well above state means in 2015. Writing and numeracy means for Year 3 have been above the state for the last 5 years and at Year 5 over the last 3 years. Writing will remain an area for improvement. The reviewer commends the practices in mathematics which have been implemented in this period. The school intends to sustain these in order to raise standards.

In three of the focus groups the reviewer initiated a detailed discussion of the attainment of Years 3 and 5 individual students in reading, writing and numeracy. At Year 3 the proportions of students performing 12 months ahead of the state means in reading and writing shows a need to prioritise enrichment; numeracy data also shows the need to challenge these students. Year 5 data of 2014-2015 shows the need to cater for students both 12 months ahead and 12 months below state means, as the diversity of Year 5 student achievement was more pronounced than that of Year 3 students. This will be an aspect for improvement.

Of concern is the level of growth of matched cohorts over the four years in these NAPLAN dimensions. There is a need to improve the growth in writing, despite positive data for spelling, grammar and punctuation. Discussion of Student Gain compared with those with similar starting points and against similar schools (ACARA- *My School*) showed the need to increase growth particularly in persuasive writing and numeracy. Monitoring and assessing student learning and using data to plan the foci of learning will be vital aspects for improvement.

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

As a result of the building programme, the physical environment of St Mary's features optimal learning spaces and staff work environments. The school community recognises that the school is very fortunate. Programmes are ably resourced through the Library/ICT Global Learning Centre, interactive TVs, provision of 1:1 Chrome books and tablets for Years 3-6, and iPads and tablets for F to Year 2s.

Leadership in literacy and numeracy is prioritised. Literacy leadership is contributing to the high standards attained in F to Year 2 reading. Data is used to identify students for reading recovery and Levelled Literacy Intervention, the latter lessons being taken by the literacy leader. Structured reading and writing blocks, incorporating both whole class and small group teaching, occur across the school. An assessment schedule is in place across F-Year 6 for literacy. This data is collated by the literacy leader who facilitates Professional Learning Team (PLT) meetings and works with teachers across the school on a cyclic basis. Although Assessment Record books, referencing AusVELS standards are now being used by class teachers, a key aspect for attention will be to raise staff knowledge of how to understand and utilise data to plan for the next step in students' learning

In this period two leaders, both very enthusiastic and focused in their roles, have been appointed for junior and senior numeracy respectively. Leaders plan with teachers, lead PLT meetings, model strategies and team-teach in classes. As for literacy, Assessment Books are used to record Learning Intentions/Success Criteria. St Mary's has instituted new practices for staff meetings whereby all meetings are primarily for PD. Feedback elicited that much PD has been presented slowly in order to allow for teachers to incrementally accommodate new knowledge. Nevertheless, the transference into practice *across* the school will be an aspect to be improved.

The review recommends that, for growth, the effective use of data needs to be prioritised, PD provided and that new strategies be sought. It is apparent that there is a need to improve staff knowledge of the standards, with the domains of English and Mathematics the first priorities. Processes for team-based planning for teaching, based on student need across the range of abilities, and of moderating with consistency of judgement, are key areas for development across the school.

Finally, in order to improve and maximise the learning growth of all student cohorts, the future strategy will be to *build the capacity of staff to use formative assessment and evidence of learning including data to drive teaching and the next step for student learning.*

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

Despite some variance, the practices of St Mary's overwhelmingly reflect the school vision. In the school setting staff and students experience a *nurturing* environment. Discussion and observation highlighted demonstration of the vision that learning and teaching intersect with student wellbeing, the vision being that: *We work with each child to ensure that they feel happy, safe and valued as a unique individual where self-esteem, respect, positive relationships and resilience are promoted.*

*We educate children to become life-long learners, actively engaged in a challenging world.* The reviewer formed a belief that the environment is *supportive* and that the school is working actively towards implementation of: *innovative and consistent teaching and learning practices that cater for individual needs and encourage student reflection.*

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

In the self reflection (Page 17) several future intentions and associated actions have been identified by St Mary's. Whilst the reviewer endorses all of these, the following suggestions are offered as key priorities for future improvement:

Firstly, it is vital that the effective use of student learning data become an absolute priority in the cycle of determining students' prior knowledge, planning for learning and assessing achievement. There are many capable students at St Mary's. Data shows two priorities:

- a need to address the learning needs of students across the range of abilities
- a need to raise two-year growth in learning

It will be critical to challenge students and improve their perceptions of the level of stimulation in their learning activities. The reviewer suggests that heightened attention to using data in order to determine the next step in student's learning is *the key* to improved outcomes.

Secondly, despite a focus on raising standards in writing in the last period, improvement in student outcomes hasn't been attained. It is vital that this be re-addressed. The reviewer therefore recommends that current pedagogy for the teaching of writing be carefully reviewed and alternative practices and approaches be investigated. The consistent implementation of Learning Intentions and Success Criteria (the Change<sup>2</sup> focus) remains a priority, the purpose being that the lesson's focus is explicit and student engagement in their learning is enhanced.

Thirdly, the reviewer agrees with the school that moderation of student learning based on thorough knowledge of the standards must be addressed. This will require a sustained process for PD and a strong collegial approach to attain consistency of judgements across the school.

A final suggestion is for the school to build upon the practices whereby some teams of teachers are grouping students in flexible learning spaces to cater for the range of learning needs. The sharing of pedagogical knowledge through this type of teamwork, within planning and at PLT meetings may provide opportunities to broaden knowledge of teaching strategies which will engage and challenge students *within* class teaching. The reviewer suggests that this be built upon to move from strategies for differentiation of learning activities towards personalisation of learning.

vi. *Recommendations for CEM School Review Reports 2016*

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]	Key Strategies for this Sphere	Examples of actions that may assist the school in the implementation of the key strategies and/or the achievement of intended outcomes
To personalise learning for optimal growth of student outcomes	<p>That student engagement in their learning will improve</p> <p>That student outcomes in literacy and numeracy will attain targeted growth</p>	Build the capacity of staff to use formative assessment and evidence of learning including data to drive teaching and identify the next step for student learning	<p>Provide PD to develop whole-staff understandings of ‘personalised learning’ and how this encompasses more than ‘differentiation’ (see CEM definition)</p> <p>Provide PD in utilising peer observation, coaching and feedback on goals to improve practice</p> <p>Strengthen planning processes to incorporate data, its analysis and usage to create a highly-effective learning environment</p> <p>Ensure the middle/upper cohort of students increase their learning growth (as well as lower achievers)</p> <p>Revisit assessment practices_ compile assessment tools/rubrics to develop clarity and consistency of judgements in moderating student learning based on strong knowledge of the standards</p>

## **C. STUDENT WELLBEING**

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

In the sphere of Student Wellbeing the school's intentions were (SRR page 18):

**Goal:**

*To improve learning outcomes and resilience by promoting student voice, respect, positive relationships and personal awareness*

**Intended outcomes:**

*That student social/emotional learning will improve*

**Target:**

*The Student Engagement Index will be at least 85.6*

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

All who know St Mary's recognise that student wellbeing is an outstanding strength of the school. Leadership has been instrumental in inspiring staff to keep students at the centre of the school focus. Leaders use the term, a relational culture. Students are connected and speak positively of life at school, their peers, their friendships, their learning and opportunities to be leaders. Parents recognise and value St Mary's as a school where their children's wellbeing is paramount. With the Student Wellbeing Aggregate indicator at the 93rd percentile, the target was easily surpassed.

Across this period there has been steady and incremental improvement in students' experience at school. All Student Survey indicators have risen since 2012 and are in the top 25% of primary schools. The goal to promote student voice, respect, positive relationships and personal awareness has been prioritised. Feedback and observations within the school show that St Mary's is cognisant of the relationship and inter-dependency between student wellbeing and AusVELS domains, including the teaching of Gospel values. Students have responded to the increased opportunities for student voice. Parents in the focus group endorsed the school's practices in providing for student voice, managing behaviour and engendering responsibility in their children. They acknowledge the high level of attention to students' social and emotional wellbeing and the opportunity to work with the staff in a range of situations which arise: learning, emotional, behavioural and relationships.

Components of the Student Wellbeing goal, such as positive relationships and personal awareness, due to their nature, will be ongoing. Through the self reflection, the school has identified resilience

as an area to remain a focus. The review finds that St Mary's has a clear understanding that student wellbeing is central to improved student learning outcomes and student engagement.

It is noteworthy that students' perceptions of Classroom Behaviour increased by 14 points between 2014 and 2015. The reviewer witnessed on-task behaviour in classrooms; students told the reviewer that they rarely encounter distractions from their learning in class. Nevertheless, lower percentile scores for students' perceptions of stimulating learning, cross-referenced with the fact that teachers rated whole-school behaviour management above that in the classroom, seemed to be indicative of a need for all staff to provide learning which better engages students. The outcome would be two-fold: engaged and stimulated students displaying, in the opinion of teachers, improved behaviour.

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

A prominent contributor to achievement of intentions is that the vision and modelling by the principal and student wellbeing leader of the relational culture has been disseminated amongst the staff. The focus has been on transcending from interactions based on rapport to those of relationships.

Several processes and practices have been implemented to ensure the wellbeing of students and address the intention for improved social/emotional learning. Underpinning student experience at school is the Restorative Practice management strategy which the school considers is embedded (SRR page 18). Feedback indicated that this is implemented consistently. Leaders are aware that the mechanics of Restorative Practice are a little more difficult for specialist teachers to use.

The CASEA programme (SRR pages 18-19) was highlighted by staff and parents as a most beneficial strategy. Discussions confirmed that it has been embraced by staff and parents, impacting as *a whole school, multi-level, multi-system and team approach*. The reviewer formed an opinion that the partnerships formed between staff and parents, with children as the focus, is another benefit of CASEA.

Parents acknowledge the careful attention to students who present with needs and issues, and the support and liaison between themselves and staff at these times. It was stated in the focus group that issues of concern are dealt with in a timely manner until resolved. The quality of these teacher/parent connections were endorsed by parents. The availability of a counsellor at the school for families who wish to use this service is another contributor to student wellbeing practices.

The school had fourteen funded students at the time of the review. Programme Support Group meetings are held as needed. Careful attention is given to monitoring progress; the class teacher, Learning Support Officers (LSOs), parents and other relevant professionals are in attendance.

Parents are able to contribute to developing goals and monitoring progress in Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) and addressing the many issues which may arise for children with special needs.

Learning and teaching is a key feature of student wellbeing. A range of strategies including Circle Time, Bounce Back and Better Buddies complement other strategies. ICT is effectively used to engage students and encourage their voice in processing social/emotional learning. In 2015 at the CEM Student Wellbeing Festival St Mary's won the Film Award category for a presentation by students focusing on the identification of bullying and its impact on individuals. During the review, senior children were completing a multimedia presentation on Cyber-Bullying to be shown to classes on *National Day against Bullying and Violence*. The school has also written *St Mary's Peace Pledge* to remind children of the necessity of endeavouring to eradicate violence and bullying.

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

Strategies implemented to foster wellbeing for students closely reflect the school's vision, being based on a vision of ensuring *nurturing* and *inclusion*. The inter-weaving of learning and teaching, education in faith and student wellbeing is permeating children's experience at school. The vision, *we work with each child to ensure that they feel happy, safe and valued as an unique individual where self-esteem, respect, positive relationships and resilience are promoted, was demonstrated in two key instances during the review:*

- School leaders accompanied the reviewer to classroom visits, articulating pride in and knowledge of their school and their involvement in leaders' roles: the vision being *promotion of student voice and personal awareness*
- A large group of student representatives shared conversation about their experience at school, the vision being *practices that cater for individual needs and encourage student reflection.*

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

With student wellbeing an outstanding sphere at St Mary's, awareness of students is very strong. The reviewer endorses the future foci identified by the school in its self reflection (page 20) and offers the following suggestions for what may be prioritised in the future School Improvement Plan:

Through the self reflection process St Mary's has identified resilience as an area to remain a focus. Conversation indicated that the parents of students who need to develop greater resilience often find such aspects of their children's experience somewhat challenging. As the school has discerned a need exists to increase parent engagement in parent training programmes, the reviewer suggests that these provide an ideal vehicle to encourage parents to be *on-board* with resilience. It is recommended that St Mary's explore how best to engage in partnerships with parents both in resilience education programmes and other programmes such as those addressing specific special needs. The PEAR resources of the CEM contain useful tools for creating dialogue and facilitating home-school engagement.

The panel also perceived as a priority that staff will recognise the necessity of building connectedness with each student in order for children to increase their self confidence and motivation, thus contributing to their own learning and relationships with peers. Provision of regular updates for staff on Restorative Practice will be important to monitor progress, ensure consistency across the school and to provide a forum for discussion and questioning. It would be evident that all staff members need to feel confident in managing students both in their classes and in the playground. The provision of induction into the Restorative Practice strategy for all new staff, or those in new positions, is also recommended.

vi. **Recommendations for CEM School Review Reports 2016**

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]	Key Strategies for this Sphere	Examples of actions that may assist the school in the implementation of the key strategies and/or the achievement of intended outcomes
To strengthen the relational culture within the school	That staff connectedness with students will impact effectively on student engagement  That student resilience will improve	Embed a whole school approach that cultivates student wellbeing, recognising that it is central to improved student learning outcomes and student engagement	<p>Ensure that all staff work more closely together by recognising the interdependence of student wellbeing and learning &amp; teaching → to increase student engagement</p> <p>Investigate and be open to new SEL programmes or initiatives</p> <p>Use different tools to gauge the wellbeing of students</p> <p>Have a formalised induction policy and process where all new staff have the opportunity for PD in the school's student wellbeing practices</p> <p>Provide staff PD on understanding students with special needs, such as ASD</p> <p>Increase parent engagement in parent training programmes. Seek parent opinion on what they need to know/areas of interest.</p>

## **D. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

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

In the sphere of Leadership and Management the school's intentions were (SRR page 21):

#### **Goal:**

*To engage all members of staff in a culture of continuous improvement through collaborative teamwork and a shared vision*

#### **Intended outcomes:**

*That staff engagement will improve*

*That staff learning will improve*

#### **Targets:**

*The Staff Climate Index will be at least 83.0*

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

The review affirms the growth which St Mary's has made in the practices in leadership and management over the last four years. This review cycle has been a period of substantial development in both the physical site and in school practices across the SIF spheres. Students have responded positively to the approach in learning and teaching adopted by leadership.

Many practices have been instigated to engage staff in a culture of continuous improvement. Progress has been attained. The Staff Climate Index target was achieved each year and was surpassed in 2013 and 2015. Morale is positive; staff members view leadership as highly supportive, also believing that there is clarity around staff practice. Although consistently above the mean since 2012, Organisational Health and Teaching Climate Aggregate indices have fluctuated and, when viewing staff practice across the entire staff, growth has been not as strong as desired. The reviewer noted variance of practice in classes.

Staff members are feeling empowered and, with morale being high, their perceptions of their work demands are in the 'ideal' range. Percentile scores in the four cultural pillars have all risen between 2014 and 2015, most notably that for Empathy. The culture of continuous improvement is modelled by a cohesive team of leaders who are supporting teachers and LSOs with planning and pedagogy. All leaders, including the principal have class teaching roles, remaining current in their teaching practice.

Examination of the cultural pillars of Engagement and Learning reveal some vital aspects for improvement. Percentile scores for the Learning pillar showed that feedback provided to staff needs to move from positive *feedback* to that which *challenges them and helps them to learn* (SIS interpretation Guide page 16). Differences in percentile scores comparing Student Management and Curriculum Processes indicate a need to improve *the way staff work together to effectively coordinate the curriculum* (Guide page 20).

SIS data of the Performance and Development lead indicators (compared with primary schools) shows a clear need to improve the indicators of Teacher Confidence, Engaging Practice and Quality Teaching. Teachers' and parents' perceptions of Student Motivation are much lower than students' perceptions of their own motivation. It is clear that having all staff recognise that their students are motivated and capable is an aspect for growth.

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

Leadership has had a prominent influence on progress in this period, yet some challenges remain in engaging certain staff. Leaders are competent professionals, passionate in the domains which they lead. A second layer of leadership has been created with three level coordinators and a coordinator of the specialist teachers. Coordinators meet regularly with the principal for communication to and from leadership and their teams. Some modelling of practice is occurring, in the Years 5 and 6 flexible learning spaces, where teachers group students for teaching based on the learning intention and the students' abilities and needs. However, this practice is in the introductory phase, neither is it general practice or linked to coaching or feedback. Parent conversation endorsed these groupings in targeting the range of needs. At the time of the review, appraisal was mainly centred on the annual review meeting with the principal. The review recommends that the model for appraisal encompass ongoing feedback on goals via the Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework.

Staff learning is being carefully addressed *within* the school. PLTs are now held in four cycles in literacy, numeracy, ICT and inquiry (the latter being facilitated by the learning and teaching leader). The purpose of staff meetings has been re-aligned to centre on staff learning. Data, observation and feedback indicated that some staff members remain challenged by new practices, such as that of using ICT in learning, in using Google Docs and continuous implementation of the Change<sup>2</sup> focus (Learning Intentions and Success Criteria).

Leaders are dynamic, and engaged in building their own capacity. They stated *there is cross-fertilisation between us* in building their knowledge. Several in the team have embarked on post-

graduate study and some other staff members are likewise completing professional study. The review finds that changes to leaders' roles to address the foci of the SIP and to support staff PD are building staff engagement. The literacy leader's role has moved from F-Year 4 to leader of F-Year 6, thus building clarity of expectations and alignment of processes. An increased allocation has been provided for mathematics leadership. F-Year 2 and Years 3-6 leaders have been appointed for numeracy and another for ICT (SRR page 23). The literacy leader is keeping data of student progress in assessments and, together with the numeracy leaders, is working with staff to assist planning for learning. The school has trialled a few different planning structures and has now adopted *supported* planning in order to build teacher capacity and provide for greater staff voice. Despite these developments, the review recommends that the use by class teachers of student learning data at planning, and knowledge regarding what it shows, are key aspects for improvement. Stronger curriculum knowledge will also be paramount alongside better teamwork with consistency of judgements when moderating student learning. The reviewer anticipates that these aspects will require substantial PD.

A future imperative will be that student learning moves beyond being differentiated to that of personalised learning. It is evident that PD will be necessary in reading and interpreting data, together with recognition that data and evidence underpin school improvement. In the implementation of the learning and teaching strategy, leadership and management will be critical. Other aspects for improvement centre on the necessity that all staff members are accountable to school expectations of Performance and Development and take responsibility for their own PD and growth.

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

Practices in leadership and management have been instrumental in the progress made in this period. It is clear that the overall staff culture has a positive vibe, as witnessed during the review visits to classes, observations of interactions in the staff areas and discussions with the seven focus groups and panel. The reviewer endorses the work and commitment in which *St Mary's leadership teams value, support and empower all members of the school community*. Nevertheless, in the next period a greater emphasis may need to be placed on building staff collective capacity to more closely reflect the vision of: *In this supportive environment, we implement innovative and consistent teaching and learning practices .....We strive for continuous improvement.*

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

The school acknowledges that a future focus will be to strengthen the professional learning culture at St Mary's and has identified 3 key actions to address this (self reflection Page 23). The reviewer recommends the following to build upon the growth in this period. These are listed in priority order:

Staff and PLT meetings have the potential to be further focused if it is made explicit that the agendas emanate from the SIP. It is anticipated that this will make clearer to staff how the Learning Intentions in staff meetings relate to the SIP and AAP.

It is highly recommended that formalised processes are commenced to lift performance and development (P&D). Key to this priority will be that staff members engage in PD on *Performance and Development in Catholic schools* (CEM). Opportunity needs to be given to develop professional goals, to observe peers, be observed and learn how to give and receive feedback (appraisal).

As the transference of PD into classroom practice shows variance across the school, it is vital that staff take personal responsibility for their PD and the implementation of their learning, thus demonstrating accountability to school practices. An example would be that the development of Learning Intentions and Success Criteria, to make explicit the foci of all learning, would be visible in *all* classes. Closely linked to the aforementioned, the reviewer recommends that the school highlight that staff need to work collaboratively in classrooms and that teamwork needs to be effective in *all* teams.

SIS data showed that teachers had a lower perception of students' motivation than parents and students. It is clear that having all staff recognise that their students are motivated and capable is an important aspect for attention. It is suggested that the school explore why this is so. With more regular use of data when planning and attention to personalisation of learning, it is perceived that all teachers may be better able to engage students and raise their perceptions of students' motivation.

As an overall summary the panel agreed that the key areas for improvement are:

- That highly-professional teams exist across the whole school
- That all staff members are engaged in appraisal, key PD areas being goal-setting, observation of peers and having one's teaching practice observed, plus knowledge of how to give and receive feedback.

vi. **Recommendations for CEM School Review Reports 2016**

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

<b>SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN</b>			
<b>ANNUAL ACTION PLAN</b>			
<b>Developing the broad goal[s] for this sphere</b>	<b>Intended outcomes</b> [Specific areas for improvement]	<b>Key Strategies for this Sphere</b>	<b>Examples of actions</b> that may assist the school in the implementation of the key strategies and/or the achievement of intended outcomes
To strengthen the professional learning culture at St. Mary's	That staff will be more engaged in effective teamwork  That staff professional knowledge and teaching practice will improve	Develop a culture across the school of high levels of teamwork and ownership which enhance performance and development	Strengthen the understanding of all staff of the requirement for professional responsibility and ensure accountability  Strengthen the performance and development of staff: formalise peer observation, coaching, mentoring and feedback →PD  Build understanding of what constitutes Appraisal and Recognition  Provide regular feedback for teachers on their practice, linked to their individual goals and the SIP  Make explicit on the schedule and agendas of PLT meetings how they are derived from the SIP  Refine decision making processes to ensure the opportunity for all to contribute where appropriate

## **E. SCHOOL COMMUNITY**

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

In the sphere of School Community, the school's intentions were (SRR page 24):

#### **Goal:**

*To strengthen the learning community through partnerships, positive relationships and promoting service beyond the community*

#### **Intended outcomes:**

*That parent engagement in their children's learning will improve*

#### **Target:**

*The Parent Satisfaction Index will be at least 76.3*

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

In the School Community sphere some discrepancies exist between qualitative and quantitative data. Feedback is much more positive than the data suggests, although it must be stated that challenges remain in the goal for this period: *To strengthen the learning community through partnerships, positive relationships and promoting service beyond the community*. The SIS Community Engagement Aggregate Indicator, static over 2012-2014, improved markedly in 2015, though is still below the Australian schools' mean. The review panel concluded that there are many opportunities for *involvement* in the school whereas *engagement* of parents is an aspect for improvement.

St Mary's parents recognise the promotion of *service beyond the community*. Catholic Culture parent survey data for Social Justice, and focus group conversation about social justice initiatives, are very positive. Composition of the parent focus group ranged from parents whose connection with St Mary's spanned many years to those whose children had commenced in 2016. The overwhelming experience was that the school is addressing their children's learning and wellbeing needs, with wellbeing a definite strength. Nevertheless, attainment of aspects to address the goal, to *strengthen the learning community through partnerships*, was not evident. Feedback from some in the focus group appeared to indicate that they do not feel clear about current pedagogical practices. There were exceptions to this perception however, and those who were classroom helpers and those who attended the recent information night, endorsed such opportunities as being very helpful in gaining

a better knowledge of learning and teaching. Others stated that they rely on homework tasks and/or approaching their children's teacher to gain relevant information.

Parents themselves perceived that the response of other parents needs to improve wherein the school provides opportunities for them to partner with the school, and to engage in their children's learning. Parents stated that the information night (a change from the format of last year) was very valuable yet attendance was lower than they'd expected. Two parents (review panel members) on the School Improvement (Parent) Committee stated that it can be difficult to gain participation in activities and in surveys.

Scores for the SIS Community Engagement and Learning Opportunity groups of indicators improved between 2014 and 2015. However major challenges lie in the fact that the Parent Engagement data relative to Australian primary schools, received low percentile scores for:

- School Improvement and Approachability
- Parent Partnerships and Parent input
- Reporting, Learning Focus, Transition and Homework

St Mary's staff perceptions of the same indicators are similarly low. During the review it was stated that the school hasn't been able to determine why the Parent Opinion survey responses are so low. In the panel discussion, *questions* initiated by the leadership team and School Improvement Committee members, rather than *potential answers*, were forthcoming.

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

Improvement in the Community Engagement Aggregate Indicator in 2015, following lack of movement over 3 years is heartening. Nevertheless, research on how parent engagement impacts on student learning provides a sense of urgency on the need to elevate the School Community sphere.

As the Board is a parish board, the school established a Parent School Improvement Committee after the 2012 review, instead of a School Advisory Board. This committee, *the role of which is primarily to assist the staff to achieve the goals set for all spheres of schooling* (SRR page 24) has a large number of members. The invitation to join the committee is transparent and members take responsibility for a diversity of areas related to the school, an example being seeking parent opinion on how St Mary's report format could best meet their needs. Feedback that the changes in 2015 are an improvement

on previous (mandated) reports was reflected in a substantial lift in parent scores for Reporting in 2015. These scores nevertheless are still in the bottom 25% of primary schools.

In order to inform and engage parents in their children's learning, in 2014 a process called Learning Conversations was introduced. These will re-occur at the end term 2 this year. The school perceives that *through this initiative, parents, students and teachers have collegially set individual and realistic goals for each student*. Feedback from staff was that this *has also been most beneficial in engaging parents more actively in student learning*.

Where progress has been attained it relates to activities which have clearly met family needs. With maths learning and teaching a priority in this period, the positive response to Family Maths Nights in 2013-2014, confirms that when parents attend with their children attendance lifts! Feedback showed that these were valuable. Parent attendance can be relied on at sacramental preparation nights. Multicultural day held in 2014 received a very positive response. There have also been some invitations to join classes in activities related to their inquiry units; families have attended. Priorities will centre on seeking new ways to engage parents in their children's learning and investigating how home-school dialogue, optimal communication and parent education can be addressed.

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

Practices reflect the vision, specifically to *support connectedness between school, parish and the global community*. Structures and resources aim to enact this. Although the school seeks to be *a welcoming, inclusive and supportive community that values positive and genuine relationships* the discussion in this sphere shows a need to strengthen home-school relationships based on learning. If parent engagement can be raised, school practices will more closely reflect the vision *we value, support and empower all members of the school community. We strive for continuous improvement*.

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

As St Mary's demographic has changed the reviewer recommends that the school further investigate why trends in the SIS parent data are low. It is suggested that the school explore opinion (using face-to-face processes) on how parents may best be assisted to engage in partnership. The CEM (PEAR) resources will optimise these processes for dialogue. Important components will be to provide parent education on what research shows on the impact of partnership on children's learning. The reviewer affirms that policy development is strength of St Mary's; many handbooks and guides are available to parents. The existence of such informative resources may need to be better promoted.

The newsletter may be lengthier than parents are seeking and perhaps other approaches should be investigated on how to optimise home-school communication; it is intended to develop a blog.

vi. *Recommendations for CEM School Review Reports 2016*

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]	Key Strategies for this Sphere	Examples of actions that may assist the school in the implementation of the key strategies and/or the achievement of intended outcomes
To strengthen parent engagement in their children's learning	That parents will be engaged more effectively as partners in their children's learning	Engage with parents in processes that improve their children's learning, faith development and social and emotional competencies	<p>Build parents' understandings of their children's learning and social and emotional competencies through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• access to class blogs on the website</li> <li>• celebrations of learning</li> </ul> <p>Use technology more effectively within the classroom to engage parents in their children's learning</p> <p>Seek parent opinion on areas on interest/ aspects on which they seek to be informed. Vary the approaches</p> <p>Schedule (wherever possible) the opportunities for parents to engage with the school at times when most families are available</p> <p>Use dialogue tools to commence discussion ( CEM Parent Engagement in Action resources )</p>

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