



**Diocese of Toowoomba
Catholic Schools**

St Stephen's School Pittsworth

**Quadrennial school review
June 2018**



**School renewal and improvement
Quadrennial school review 2018**



Foreword

Although much has been written about school reform in past decades—national reports, studies, descriptions of findings—insufficient attention has been given to the important relationships among the adults within the school, and to a consideration of how the abundant untapped energy, inventiveness and idealism within the school might be encouraged.

Roland Barth, Harvard Graduate School of Education

The philosophical approach to the review is based on Appreciative Inquiry, a well-established approach used by organisations varying from international corporations to not-for-profit social organisations. Appreciative Inquiry begins with the assumption that there are good things happening in the organisation and identifying these. It then moves to what people see as areas needing attention, improvement or change. The key principle is that these are placed in the context of what the organisation does well, so it moves beyond a problem-solving agenda to an improvement agenda.

Appreciative Inquiry aims to bring ownership to the school. The review team hears 'the story' of the School through its stakeholders, and this informs the key findings and improvement strategies that the review team has recommended. Exactly how the School addresses the key findings and improvement strategies is left for the school to determine, but it is mandatory for the school to address them over the following four years.

Methodology

The review was conducted from Tuesday, 19 June to Thursday, 21 June 2018.

Reviewers

Paul Murphy, Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office (TCSO) Senior Education Leader (SEL), Chair

Roland Poulton, Principal: St Monica's Primary School, Oakey

Norman Hunter, Consultant

The review consisted of structured interviews of the following school community members:

- Principal, Assistant Principal Religious Education (APRE), and Middle Leader (3)
- Parents—Board, Parents & Friends (P&F) and self-nominated (8)
- Class teachers, the teacher librarian and 1 relief teacher (10)
- All school support staff (6)
- Parish Priest (1)
- Students years 3–6 (6)

Excellence in Catholic Education

The reference document informing the review is the 10 October 2017 draft of the TCS School Renewal and Improvement Framework. A supporting background document is the seven principles of the 'Diocese of Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office Excellence in Catholic Education'.

Domain 1: Mission and Identity

- 1.1 Religion Curriculum
- 1.2 Religious Life of the School

Domain 2: Teaching and Learning

- 2.1 Students and their Learning
- 2.2 Curriculum Structure and Provision
- 2.3 Pastoral Care and Student Wellbeing

Domain 3: Continual Renewal

- 3.1 School Improvement Culture
- 3.2 Community Partnerships

Domain 4: Sustainable Resourcing and Stewardship

- 4.1 Staff Development and Wellbeing
- 4.2 Use of Resources Facilities and the Learning Environment

Prologue

The review team found the three-day visit to St Stephen's Catholic Primary School, Pittsworth an uplifting experience. It became clear quite early in the review that this is a very good school. The Principal, staff, students and parents all understand what is important at this school and express their support for it. There is a sense that the members of the school community are proud of what the school is achieving with its students, and at the same time there is a sense of the need to sustain this and look for ways to improve on it.

The review team experienced a climate of trust and respect, where people spoke about what they think the school does well, and where they think improvement efforts are needed. Classroom visits revealed engaged and motivated students working with teachers and support staff who were well-prepared, and there was a sense of purpose in all the classes visited.

The review team thanks the Principal, staff and other members of the school community for the positive and open approach they took to this review, and on the impressive work they are doing with the students. In many ways St Stephen's presents as a very good school. We hope the findings and improvement strategies offered in the report will help to empower St Stephen's to continue its journey to becoming a great school.

Domain 1: Mission and Identity

1.1 Religion curriculum

Findings

Systematic Curriculum Delivery

The religious education curriculum taught at St Stephen's is based on the Toowoomba Catholic Schools' (TCS) Religious Education Guidelines which utilise the resources of the Archdiocese of Brisbane Religious Education Guidelines. The school Learning Area Program (LAP) on the Diocesan Learning Profile (DLP) identifies what content is required to be taught. Teachers undertake 2.5 hours per week of formal religion teaching in their classes as identified on their timetables. The LAP and timetables are endorsed by the APRE.

Teacher unit planning is documented on the DLP using the same protocols expected of teachers for all other learning areas. The LAP also outlines prayers that are to be explicitly taught. Staff advise that they are working towards personalised learning in the planning of religious education units. Teachers report that they are working to connect formal religion lessons with students' life experiences. Cross curricular opportunities are harnessed in order to integrate religious education themes and activities with other subjects, with a particular focus on literacy.

Professional Learning Community

A small number of teachers are formally accredited to teach religious education in a Catholic School. At this stage no teachers have yet completed the Religious Education Accreditation Program (REAP).

School Context

The Annual School Improvement Survey of 2017 indicates that the great majority of students see their study of religion at the school as a positive experience. A Year 6 Student offered the following:

"It's a good Catholic school. When I go to Mass, it's a nice community, and I can talk to my parents about being Catholic."

It is not evident at this stage that academic learning and achievement are directly linked with the Catholic ethos and tradition.

Improvement strategies

- Assist and encourage current staff to gain full accreditation to teach religion in a Catholic School.
- Continue to build on the teaching and learning strategies which are currently clearly engaging students in the school's religious education program.
- Find ways to present academic learning and achievement as integral to the Catholic ethos and tradition.

1.2 Religious life of the school

Findings

Religious Identity and Culture

On entry to St Stephen's Catholic Primary School, it is clear that this is a Catholic School which deliberately seeks to articulate, inculcate and celebrate the Christian heritage and religious charism of the school. The Research Australia Development and Innovation Institute (RADII) annual school improvement survey data from 2015 to 2017, indicates widespread agreement that the Catholic Identity is easily recognisable within the school and that the school has a clear religious and spiritual direction.

There are numerous visual reminders to the Jesus message and the philosophical beliefs and values legacy of Mary MacKillop, the co-founder of the Sisters of St Joseph who established the school in 1916. Each classroom has a sacred space. A sacred space is also present in the office foyer and the staffroom. Walls are adorned with religious art, religious sayings, the Crucifix and displays of student work which portray their understandings of the school's Christian values, beliefs and traditions. Reminders of the sacred presence of God can also be found in the gardens and grounds by way of the Celtic Cross at the school entrance, the Mary MacKillop mosaic and the Peace and Cross gardens. The four values of Mary MacKillop are visually displayed in classrooms and regular reference is made to these by staff. These values provide a thematic backdrop to the term's teaching and learning.

Prayer and Worship

Class and communal prayer and liturgical celebrations are a feature of the school. A copy of the school prayer is clearly displayed in each classroom and it is prayed communally at parade on Mondays and Fridays in the sports hall. At the morning parade in the sports hall, the students also recite the school's vision:

"To know Jesus, to inspire learning and to respect each other."

Each student group participates in class prayer at the beginning of the day, grace before meals and at the end of the school day. One class is rostered to attend the weekday parish Mass once a week. Each class is rostered once per term to lead a prayerful celebration at assembly. A feature of this prayer opportunity is the 'breaking open' of the word for student reflection. The theme of these prayer opportunities is matched to current church, school and community happenings or observances. Several parents comment on the positive value of these times and appreciate the welcome that is extended to them to be part of the celebration. One School Officer has complimented the teachers for the way in which they share their own faith with the students.

Social Action and Justice

The school has an active Mary MacKillop club where social justice issues and service to others are discussed and acted upon. The APRE has a strong involvement with this student group and supports the Club in responding to the needs of others in practical ways. The saying of Mary MacKillop, "Never see a need without doing something about it," was mentioned by several staff members during discussions and it is evident that this message is embedded in staff and student thinking and action.

A very strong Year 6–Prep student 'Buddy Program' operates within the school to share school values, beliefs and culture with the younger students. The positive value of this activity was mentioned by parents, staff and students in discussions during the review visit. RADII data from 2015 to 2017 shows strong agreement that the school promotes justice, compassion and service to the community. A number of parents and Year 6 students have expressed disappointment that the 'Buddy Program' was late starting in 2018.

Improvement strategy

- Continue to nurture and strengthen the 'Buddy Program', and ensure that it is in place and ready for implementation at the beginning of the school year.

Domain 2: Teaching and Learning

2.1 Students and their learning

Findings

Explicit improvement agenda

The school has an Index of Community Socio Educational Advantage (ICSEA) of 1009, placing it slightly above the national average. There are three indigenous students and no students for whom English is their second language.

The NAPLAN data show that Year 3 are achieving at levels slightly lower than the State and National mean in all domains. In Year 5 the trend data for the last few years show that the school mean now generally sits closely at or above the national mean in all domains. The relative gain in all domains with the exception of numeracy, from Year 3 to Year 5 is significant, and the school is to be complimented on the improvement the students are showing.

There is a documented specific improvement agenda each year and in recent years there has been a strong focus on the leading of learning in the school. In collaboration with staff, the leadership team identifies an area for focus, provides professional development, and shares findings on areas of priority and concern. Focus areas for improvement are translated into the school's Annual Action Plan (AAP) and shared with the wider school community. The willingness of staff to step up and take leadership roles in support of the leadership team is a positive reflection on the school culture, and is commented on by a number of parents.

School performance data are regularly shared at Parents and Friends and School Board meetings. Teaching staff consistently use sophisticated professional vocabulary when referring to the school's improvement agenda and to their daily professional work, indicating that significant professional learning on curriculum and teaching strategies takes place in the school.

Teachers meet in Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) and during staff meetings to analyse student performance data and to identify student strengths and gaps in learning, using this to prioritise areas for targeted teaching. The school has provided additional release time for the teachers to meet regularly in PLTs and these opportunities to meet are considered as opportunities to discuss and review the quality of student learning in the school. The PLTs are designed to allow collaboration among teachers in similar year groups as well as from Prep to Year 6, in order to ensure consistency of practice and student learning across the school. Currently the school is moving towards a more coherent application of these targeted teaching goals within teacher planning across all classes.

"The Reading Improvement Strategy has allowed me to paint a very good picture of a student's achievement at parent/teacher interviews" A class teacher

Teachers, students and parents state that the school is focusing on the implementation of the Diocesan Reading Improvement Strategy (RIS) and that this strategy is having a positive impact on how reading is taught and subsequently, on student achievement. All teachers report that they value and believe in this focused approach to reading. At the same time, some staff indicate that they are experiencing an increased workload associated with the full implementation of the RIS. Parents identify a general focus in the school on 'higher standards', which is being well received in the school community.

A greater emphasis on the use of anecdotal records, formative assessment and teacher professional judgement is developing along with the RIS implementation. It is noted by one teacher that she feels subjects such as science and history are in danger of being sidelined as the school focuses its time allocations and human resourcing on literacy and numeracy teaching blocks within the class teaching timetable.

The school has a policy and procedure for teachers' planning expectations and this is available to the wider school community for perusal. The leadership team has developed a plan for the full implementation of Planning for Personalised Learning (P4PL) where two teachers work to become 'champions' in this area. Existing procedures around recording adjustments on the DLP are comprehensive and thorough. Parents report that children with specific learning needs are well supported and feel welcomed.

The high impact Visible Learning practices using Learning Intentions and Success Criteria are evident throughout the school. Most of the Year 6 students interviewed can use the language and identify the beneficial use of these practices within their classroom. It is evident that teachers are using these learning practices in a variety of subject areas.

Teacher goal setting is well established at the school. Teacher goals reflect school and Diocesan priorities and are revisited in individual meetings with the Principal each term.

Analysis and discussion of data

The school has embarked on the systematic collection and analysis of relevant data. This includes external sources such as NAPLAN, and internally generated data mainly drawn from the PM and PROBE resources in support of the RIS. Data are analysed and synthesised by teachers in PLTs. Teachers then use professional judgement to translate their deliberations into classroom practice with individual students and groups of students. It is not evident that teacher professional judgement is regarded as having comparable status with more formal data in school documentation.

A Data Wall has been established in a dedicated planning room adjacent to the staffroom. The progress in reading and writing of every student in the school is tracked on this wall.

Teachers recognise differences in student cohorts, and at the same time they are conscious that this is not an impediment to successful learning.

One of the only areas on the 2016 & 2017 parent satisfaction survey where St Stephen's rated below the Diocesan mean was in response to the section headed "My child gets written feedback from her/his teacher about how to improve her/his learning". The Principal has alerted staff to this and is exploring ways to address it.

Learning culture

The school acknowledges the First Nations peoples through celebration of Aboriginal culture and story telling during organised events. Aboriginal presenters and artists are invited into the school to work with the students. Related Australian Curriculum Cross Curriculum Priorities and General Capabilities are soon to be introduced into teacher planning in conjunction with the planning for personalised learning process.

The students who were interviewed by the review team say that they enjoy learning. This is supported by teachers and by many parents, one of whom describes her children as having "a thirst for learning" which flows over to the home. According to one teacher:

"The kids are hungry for education."

It is clear that teachers across the school recognise that students are at different stages in their learning, and that differentiated teaching strategies will be needed for each lesson. Based on visits to classrooms by the review team, it is evident that teachers are skilled in differentiation, with groupings of students based on their learning needs regularly being evaluated and adapted. Whilst students with special learning needs appear to be strongly catered for, there is less evidence of highly motivated and high achieving students being challenged beyond their current levels of achievement.

Students report that they receive helpful feedback from their teachers which they are able to apply to their learning.

The school has a documented philosophical commitment to the value of homework for its students which states:

"St Stephen's School recognises that homework establishes a connection between home and school. Homework is designed to contribute to the development of sound study habits, research skills, consolidation of classroom learning and self-discipline."

According to the Principal: parents have expressed support for the school's approach to homework. This is important, as the value of homework has been challenged by another primary school in the town. This offers St Stephen's a potential positive point of difference. At the same time, it makes it important to ensure that the quality of homework set for students at St Stephen's is of the highest order, and in the spirit of the

documented policy. In relation to this, the parent of a younger student has said that her daughter sometimes has been set over 30 minutes of quite demanding homework.

Students interviewed report that they are consistently issued with criteria sheets for assessment involving research. It is clear that for research tasks it is normal practice for the students to receive a criteria sheet. A parent has expressed concern that her child recently was required to undertake a research task but was not given a criteria sheet. This was disorienting for the student, since the practice of supplying a criteria sheet for a research task is so embedded in the school.

The following quote from a current parent who also has an older student at high school suggests the school is setting high academic expectations for its students:

"My daughter was getting 'B's' at St Stephen's, now she is in high school and getting 'A's'. I'm pleased that St Stephen's was a tough marking school."

Improvement strategies

- Continue to nurture parallel leadership across the staff so they build on the widespread leadership practices that are already supporting the work of the leadership team.
- Ensure that Professional Learning Team discussions around student achievement data give attention to identified students' strengths as well as gaps in students' learning and ensure that this flows through to teaching strategies that enrich and extend highly motivated and high achieving students in the classroom.
- Ensure that teacher professional judgement is accorded appropriate status in school documentation alongside that of more formal external and internal data.
- Ensure that the homework set by teachers is well thought out and in keeping with the school's documented policy.
- Ensure that research tasks are always accompanied with a criteria sheet for students.
- Maintain the efforts to generate more coherent application of targeted goals through collaborative planning across classes.
- Keep in touch with staff workloads to ensure that they remain achievable without unnecessary stress.
- Explore ways to include learning experiences related to subject areas such as history and science in the mandated learning times for english and mathematics.
- Continue to ensure that while differences in the performances of different cohorts need to be taken into account, they are not seen by staff as an impediment to successful learning.
- Explore reasons for the atypical response on the parent satisfaction survey regarding written feedback with a view to taking action to address it.

2.2 Curriculum structure and provision

Findings

Systematic curriculum delivery

It is evident that the school has well documented and sequenced curriculum programs as recorded on the DLP.

Teachers are expected to meet with the parents of their students on an informal basis each term and formal parent teacher interviews are conducted in Terms 1 and 3. Formal written reports are provided to parents at the end of each semester. The school's reports are personalised and clearly indicate strengths and weaknesses in the students' learning, with advice on how the students can improve.

Due to student numbers it has been necessary to establish combined classes in Years 4 & 5 and in Years 5 & 6. This has created some concern among parents about the rigour of the learning experiences for the Year 5 students in the combined Year 4 & 5 class. To ensure that these students receive the same rigorous learning experiences as their fellow Year 5 students in the Year 5 & 6 class, the school has placed all Year 5 students together for english and mathematics classes.

Improvement strategy

- Continue to reassure parents that combined classes do not disadvantage their children. Ensure that this statement can always be supported through evidence and practice.

2.3 Pastoral care and student wellbeing

Findings

Student social and emotional wellbeing

It is evident that St Stephen's strives to provide a caring and supportive environment for all students. Many of those interviewed express appreciation for the way in which the school encourages the development of positive and supportive relationships within the school.

It is commonly stated by staff, students and parents that all teachers know all students. Student support policies and procedures are well established and well known by students, staff and parents. These are well documented and consistently implemented through a culture of collective responsibility.

The school has a student rewards program that acknowledges positive behaviour and commitment to learning.

Catholic and school vision, mission and values are integrated into the development and documentation of high quality pastoral care and student management policies.

The school has devised an inclusive student leadership model in which all Year 6 students undertake a leadership role. This is launched with a leadership day at the beginning of the school year. The review team finds the concepts underpinning this day as sophisticated and well thought out. At this stage it has not been possible to follow-up the leadership day with consolidation activities to ensure that the students are able to take these concepts and enact them during the year.

Improvement strategies

- Continue to nurture the culture of collective responsibility from staff to students that is currently such a strength in the school.
- Explore ways to consolidate during the year the learnings from the student leadership day held at the beginning of the school year.

Domain 3: Continual renewal

3.1 School improvement culture

Findings

Collective teacher efficacy

There is a vibrant culture of collegiality in the school. The leadership team facilitates structures for teachers to collaborate on goal setting, planning and teaching strategies. This occurs through the formal structures of PLTs, as well as informal collaboration instigated by two or more teachers. PLTs operate horizontally (in same year groups) and vertically (with year groups above and below teachers' own year groups).

Walk throughs and peer observation are integral to the school's routines, occurring approximately four times a year. These collegial practices are seen as essential to the culture of the school, with walk throughs occurring in the first week of term in order to set the scene for a culture of teacher collaboration.

Teachers and teacher aides express keenness to build on their current expertise through professional learning, which occurs both in-school and externally. Teacher aides express pride in their work and say they would appreciate being included in more professional development activities, particularly in relation to the RIS.

Teachers meet individually with the Principal once each term to discuss teachers' individual goals for that term. Goals are designed to be sharply focused and achievable.

Staff meetings mainly focus on curriculum issues and the relevance of data to individual teaching practice. Administrative matters are communicated in ways that do not take up meeting time.

Teachers consistently speak about the way they use their professional judgements to decide how to act on data regarding their students' performance at a particular time. They indicate that they use these judgements to decide on teaching strategies and to regularly adjust student groupings in reading, writing and mathematics. It is not evident that the school overtly recognises teacher professional judgement as important data that influence teaching practice.

It appears that a small number of students are 'stuck' in their progress in reading and finding it difficult to continue to improve. The Education Officer: Reading Improvement Strategy Early Years indicates that in her view the capabilities of the school staff are such that collectively they can support these students and help them to move forward with their reading skills. This presents as a matter of self-belief for the school staff who work with these students, and in the power of collective responsibility that is such an evident strength in the school culture.

School culture

It is clear that the school culture is underpinned by mutual trust and respect between the school leadership team and staff, and it is apparent that this extends to students and parents. The school leadership team speak highly of the competence and professionalism of the staff, and the staff speak highly of the leadership exhibited by the leadership team. Staff describe the leadership of the Principal, APRE and Middle Leader as genuine educational leadership, as opposed to a bureaucratic management model. High expectations are modelled by the leadership team, and these are applied by the staff to one another and to their students. It is clear that the Pygmalion Effect—the power of high expectations—is well understood and is firmly embedded in the culture of the school.

Parents and staff comment on the way increasing numbers of teachers are 'stepping up' into leadership roles, supporting the leadership team in its work.

Leadership is conceptualised inclusively rather than narrowly, and this extends to the students, with all Year 6 students taking on a leadership role. A leadership day is held for Year 6 students at the start of the year. To date it has not been possible to consolidate the principles explored on the day so that students can be helped in implementing them throughout the year.

The leadership team and teachers regularly celebrate individual and collective student and staff successes and relate them to the school's culture.

The school's award system mirrors the school's stated core values. As a Josephite school the Mary MacKillop Awards reward student academic achievement as well as the acting out of one or more of the four key values of Mary MacKillop. Each fortnight has a particular focus, and students are publicly recognised for acting out that focus in outstanding ways. The Spirit of St Stephen Award recognises students who consistently practise key behaviours such as resilience, keenness to learn, and care for others. Other academic awards, sports awards and community awards are presented during the year and at the end of the year.

Teachers new to the school express appreciation at the way they were inducted into the culture of the school, particularly referring to the way they were welcomed by staff and the leadership team, both personally and professionally.

Improvement strategies

- Where possible, include teacher aides in professional learning, particularly relating to the RIS.
- Ensure that teacher professional judgement is included in documentation of the school's conceptualising of data.
- Provide support at appropriate times throughout the year to help Year 6 students to act on the principles established on the leadership day.
- For students who are 'stuck' in moving forward with their reading skills, engage the full collective capacity of the teaching staff in working on ways to assist these students to continue to improve.

3.3 Community partnerships

Findings

Partners

The Parish Priest indicates that there is a strong relationship between the school and the parish. A school family mass is held once a term, and classes attend week-day masses once a term. The quote from the Year 6 student in Section 1.1 is indicative of the way students experience the spiritual life of the school.

The Principal attends parish meetings once a month, and the Parish Priest regularly visits the school, where he is a welcome visitor to the children.

Parents say that they are welcomed at the school and treated with respect, and that most issues raised are addressed quickly and effectively. Advice offered by the School Board is seen to be taken seriously and acted on in most cases.

Parents, staff and students affirm that they see the school as a supportive community, with a strong dimension of mutual care. There were impressive examples conveyed to the review team of the school community rallying to provide support for families experiencing hardship.

School partnerships offer learning experiences to students that they would not experience at school, and a number of community activities include service to the community as well as drawing from it as a resource. The local aged care centre, Beauaraba Lodge, is an established community partner with the school, and the Parish Priest conducts Mass, which is attended by students. The students then mix with residents, with feedback indicating that this is appreciated by the residents and is an uplifting experience for the students. Another unique experience is the school's involvement with the community in recognition of ANZAC Day, where Year 6 students engage in research with their class teachers about a returned serviceman or woman, and the students then march in the town parade wearing the name badge of the veteran they have researched.

Parents whose children have recently joined the school speak highly of the transition process in place to welcome their children to their new school. Some parents indicate that their children have struggled with the transition after Year 6 from a small primary school to a large high school.

The school has a variety of sporting links with the local community including the Catholic Primary Schools' Sports carnivals. The local state primary school has extended an invitation for St Stephen's to engage in further sporting activities with them.

St Stephen's staff play a leading role in the Pittsworth Early Years Network, which brings together early childhood educators in the town to discuss issues such as the transition from pre-school and kindergarten to Prep. The Network also conducts public celebrations with the children, the 2018 event being held at St Stephen's.

Information is conveyed to the school community through a fortnightly newsletter. The newsletter is attractively presented, with visuals illustrating such things as class activities, student achievements and school events. On occasion a school officer has been inadvertently left out of the communication loop, and is embarrassed when a parent makes an inquiry and the school officer is unable to provide the information.

Student needs

The school has built effective relationships with health providers in the Pittsworth community and is an active member of the Pittsworth early years network. Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office allied health support, including occupational and speech therapy and student counselling services have been well utilised by St Stephen's to support student needs and to provide professional development for staff.

Procedures

The roles and responsibilities of the various community partners are clear and understood by all parties.

The value of community experiences for the students is periodically assessed to ensure that the involvement contributes to broadening the students' experiences.

Improvement strategies

- Ensure that a system is in place so the relevant staff have the necessary information, particularly information for parents.
- Strengthen links with the local high schools that St Stephen's students will be attending after completing Year 6 with a view to easing the transition from primary to secondary school.
- Continue to seek ways to involve the students in community sporting activities beyond the school.

Domain 4: Sustainable resourcing and stewardship

4.1 Staff development and wellbeing

Findings

School culture

Parents interviewed report that they see the school as having sound internal processes and structures which communicate the way things are done. They make positive reference to the behaviour management approach where there is clarity in expectations and set parameters in which students conduct themselves. Parents indicate that children understand the ramifications of their behaviour choices.

Positive reference is also made by parents, staff and students to the inclusion of many of the 'Teach Like a Champion' techniques in the daily life of the school. During the visit the review team observed the 'Safety Line' approach to lining-up, and the 'Welcome Handshake' to engage with students on several occasions.

It is clear that irrespective of how long they have been at the school, staff are well-versed and committed to the values and beliefs of the school culture.

Student and staff wellbeing are seen as having high importance by the leadership team and by the staff. Many staff mention the way staff and school leaders look out for one another and care for their colleagues.

Staff and parents refer to the high quality of care for students, and parents and students say that they have not experienced bullying at the school: a significant achievement in the school culture.

Professional learning for staff in academic and faith development is available, and is in keeping with the school's stated priorities.

Staff are able to avail themselves of flexible work arrangements such as part-time work when it does not detract from the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Staff express appreciation for their ability to be able to do this.

Parents interviewed express gratitude for the strength of commitment and service that the staff provide to the school community. They comment on the personalised approach that staff extend to students and their families. One parent comments:

"I can't fault the teachers, they go above and beyond."

The students interviewed consistently express appreciation for the way their teachers interact and work with them. One student comments:

"We have the best teachers and they are not just our teachers, but people we can talk to."

The staff speak very positively about the team culture that exists in the school. One staff member comments:

"Everyone's input is important and that this is encouraged by the Principal."

Caring for the individual

Staff interests and talents are deployed in ways that best provide a variety of learning experiences for students. As an example, the Year 4/5 class teacher also teaches Music and Indonesian, and is seen as a 'keeper' of the school culture (as well as the school's 'Poet Laureate').

The leadership team ensures a safe environment for staff and students, with documented protocols that are visibly displayed.

Attraction, selection and retention

A number of staff comment that new staff appointed by the Principal consistently bring the same values and beliefs that underpin the St Stephen's school culture.

New teachers express appreciation for the effectiveness of their induction, both personal and professional.

Nurture and empowerment

Staff members interviewed report that walk throughs and peer observations are now an accepted part of professional practice within the school and are used to enhance collective efficacy, teacher skill level and holistic knowledge and support of student learning.

The school has a published teacher goal setting procedure and discussions with staff indicate that the alignment of teacher goals to school and system goals is occurring. The goal setting document clearly articulates the AITSL Standards required of teachers and is aligned to TCSO's expectations and the school's AAP. The document clearly identifies a timeline for goal setting and review. Teachers report that goal setting is embedded practice, as is regular review both in PLT settings and individually with the Principal. Current goal setting is closely linked to the RIS and the Lighthouse Schools—Mathematics Project. Teachers also report how they use their goals to frame and align student learning goals.

A highlight of the school culture is the collegiality that extends horizontally and vertically through year groups via the PLTs, which are guided by four documented and agreed principles of practice.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), mainly hand-held devices, are being used in classes across the year groups, with students at ease with using them in their learning. Staff convey that at this stage younger students are not displaying basic computer skills such as logging in and use of the mouse.

Teachers communicate with one another about their use of ICTs in class. A co-ordinated agreed and documented approach to the use of ICTs in class across all year groups from Prep to Year 6 is not yet in place.

Improvement strategies

- Broaden the ICT skills of younger students to include basic computer skills such as logging on and using a mouse.
- Begin work on collaboratively establishing an agreed and documented approach to teaching and learning through ICTs in class by staff across all year groups.

4.2 Use of resources, facilities and the learning environment

Findings

Resources

The school has a well-equipped and orderly library. A wide range of book and non-book resources is readily available to staff and students. Classrooms appear to have considerable resources available to augment teaching and learning. Significant numbers of laptop computers and tablet devices were in use in the classrooms visited during the review. The school subscribes to schoolwide licences for Reading Eggs and Mathletics. All classrooms have digital/interactive projection devices. All classrooms use 'phonic ear' type voice amplification systems used by both staff and students. Classroom furniture supports contemporary teaching practices.

The school is well served by a group of Teacher Aides who assist within the learning environment. A timetable has been developed by the Middle Leader and Learning Support Teacher (LST) to make maximum use of Teacher Aides during the literacy and numeracy blocks. Whilst visiting classrooms during the review, it was noted that Teacher Aides were actively working with individuals and groups of students. Teacher Aides report that they generally operate in well-established routines with clear guidelines regarding their responsibilities.

It is clear that the staff of the school know their students and take collective responsibility for their well-being. One teacher commented that, "We all share the load – every child is known." The PLT meeting is a forum that is regularly used to identify students with emerging, additional or special needs. From PLT discussions, it is practice to refer students where significant concerns have been raised, to the Special Needs Committee. PLT's meet during assembly time on Wednesdays on alternate weeks (ie Prep, 1,2 & 3 one week, and Years 4, 5 & 6 on the alternate week)

The PLT meetings have a focused agenda linked to professional learning of staff and meeting the needs of students. Minutes of meetings are readily available for follow-up. The LST plays a key role in data collection, storage and analysis to inform teacher planning and pedagogy. One teacher comments, "At every staff meeting we are engaged in professional learning, and the PLT's are good for sharing and learning from each other, whilst making teachers more accountable for learning and assessment." It is evident that initiatives are aimed at improving student learning and achievement, and there is a shared understanding among the teachers that Literacy and Numeracy development are key agenda items for the year's work as a team.

Facilities and Learning environment:

The school has extensive outdoor areas with grassed, hardcourt and seating areas, and there is a variety of fixed outdoor play equipment for student use. The grounds are well maintained with a number of garden beds adding to the visual amenity of the school. The outdoor areas are clean and tidy. The entrance gardens provide a pleasing visual welcome to the school. A groundsman is employed for one day per week to maintain the gardens and grounds, and he also attends to minor maintenance issues. It is obvious that great pride is taken with the school's physical appearance. The school has been awarded a prize in the Carnival of Flowers Garden competition, and the school is presently preparing flower beds for this year's competition. Staff report that the school is well maintained and when issues do arise, they are addressed promptly by the Principal. Some external paint deterioration is evident particularly on guttering and fascia boards, and quotes have been obtained from professional painters to attend to these repairs.

The school water bore has been brought back into service and improvements are being made to the grounds and gardens irrigation system in order to address watering issues. The school also has rainwater tanks for garden use and drinking. The school plans to link the various buildings on the site with covered walkways to allow for all weather access, and there are also plans to provide a shade cover over the senior fixed play equipment.

The interior of the school is well maintained and in quite good condition given the time elapsed since the most recent internal refurbishments (particularly in the main school building). Several water damage marks exist on the plaster ceilings in a number of areas in the main building, with wall and ceiling surfaces needing a freshen-up with paint. The Principal confirms that the leak sources have been investigated and plans are under consideration to address roof storm water management. The Principal also confirms that a Maintenance Plan exists with an associated budget allocation.

Teaching spaces, the library and staffroom are light, airy and colourful with quality floorcoverings and areas for the display of student work, notices, religious art and teaching charts. All buildings are air conditioned.

With the increase in the number of staff members with added responsibilities (APRE, Middle Leader, LST and School Counsellor) the school has plans to refurbish the foyer and front office area to provide more office and meeting spaces.

Improvement strategy

- Undertake the various improvements to the built environment that are already identified by the school.

Conclusion

In the view of the review team, St Stephen's Catholic Primary School is in a very good place on its teaching and learning journey. With a strong Catholic ethos, a collegial culture of evidence-based teaching and learning, and a widespread climate of trust, respect and care, the school presents as a thriving learning community.

A distributed leadership model is evolving in a way that sees staff acting as parallel leaders, strengthening and broadening the work of the leadership team, while parents also have significant input, seeing themselves as partners in their children's education. With the inclusive student leadership model currently being developed in which all Year 6 students have leadership roles, a distinctive St Stephen's approach to leadership appears to be developing with common principles applied to adult and student leadership. The review team sees this as having great potential to enrich the school culture, and encourages the leadership team to continue to build on it.

The review team offers the hope that the findings and improvement strategies in this report will contribute to enabling the school to continue and build on the current high quality work with its students. We thank the school community for the positive way they have embraced the review process, and wish the school well as it continues with its improvement and renewal processes.