



**ACT**  
Government  
Education and Training

# EXTERNAL VALIDATION REPORT 2015

for

ERINDALE COLLEGE



## Introduction: Overview of the Validation process

As part of the Territory's school improvement approach, public schools and colleges in the Australian Capital Territory are required to participate in an External Validation process every four years. This document captures the findings of the panel during this cycle of validation.

In broad terms, the panel sought to determine, through evaluation and validation, the extent to which the school is meeting its agreements, achieving its priorities, and addressing its challenges: in the context of a continuously improving educational environment.

External Validation was conducted over three days and involved a wide variety of data gathering approaches including observations, interviews and documentation. This approach provided evidence for the panel to consider against the nine inter-related domains in the National School Improvement Tool that informed our commendations and recommendations.

### Section A: School context

Erindale College is unique in the ACT in that it is part of the larger Erindale Education and Recreation Complex (EERC). This complex includes a modern 450-seat theatre which students can access and high quality productions are presented both by the college and community throughout the year. The Erindale Library, with its very extensive collection, is open during the day and evening all year round and is again used by college students and staff as well as the general public. The Active Leisure Centre facilities are available for student use and include a 25-metre swimming pool and fully equipped gym. The College Principal is also the General Manager of the EERC. The Business and Facilities Manager, Information Technology Officer, Finance Manager and Building Service Officer all service the complex, not just the college.

The college is made up of academies and all students are placed in an academy based on their strengths, interests, study focus or desired pathway after college. College Link is based within academies and is a mandatory course for all students. In College Link, teachers aim to mentor, and coach students towards success.

Data compiled from the MySchool Website, Education and Training Directorate (ETD), Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS) Data and Erindale College MAZE analysis describes a declining enrolment from 2011 to 2013. Since then the enrolment has flattened with the current student population being 565. The college population over the last four years has also skewed towards a 60:40 percent male to female enrolment. The percentage of English as an additional language or dialect (EALD) students has been similar over the period; however the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students has increased and the panel agreed with the college that this may be attributed to the implementation of successful strategies in the Mindyigari Centre. In 2013, a manager of the Mindyigari Centre was employed to lead and support the Indigenous students of the college. The numbers of students enrolled in the Talented Sports Program (TSP) has increased significantly since 2012 with 40 percent of total enrolments in 2015 coming from TSP.

ICSEA values were not available for 2014 and 2015, however the college examined parent education and occupation levels for the 2014 student cohort. The data as recorded in MAZE revealed that 50 percent of parents had educational backgrounds at Year 12 Certificate level with little or no formal post-secondary school education.

Over the life of the plan the college has had a relatively stable leadership team with only one School Leader C position changing in that time. The retirement of a deputy principal in 2014 resulted in restructuring of the executive team. Late in 2013, a deputy principal for the

Tuggeranong Network Sustainable Living Trades Training Centre was appointed. This role is shared among the seven secondary school settings in the Tuggeranong Network.

Over 30 percent of teachers have been transitioned since 2010 with a strategic re-shaping of the profile of the teaching staff to bring in new educators. However the panel found that the numbers of new educators, educators in their middle years of teaching and experienced educators has not significantly changed since 2011. The Administration team has been steady with three staff changes occurring since 2011. During 2009 and 2010 this team facilitated a review of the demands on teacher time of unnecessary administrative duties. The review delivered significant changes to the roles adopted by members of the administration team with key activities such as the role of Staffing Officer being delegated to senior members of the administration team.

The panel noted the priority given by the college to the creation of specialist programs and multiple pathways for students. These programs include:

- the Talented Sports Program (TSP)
- the SUMMIT program, a specialist program in Mathematics and Science for talented year 10 students
- the 'Big Picture' Academy (BPA)
- the Mindyigari Centre
- the Tuggeranong Sustainable Living Trades Training Centre (TSLTTC)
- the Cambridge International Education.

### **Evidence cited and its validation**

BSSS data

Erindale College (EC) MAZE.

### **Section B: School performance**

Erindale College has, as stated in its School Plan, sought to create a learning community with a diversity of life pathways for students.

The Year 12 cohort has decreased by one-third, going from 341 in 2011 to 226 in 2015. Despite the decrease in overall numbers, the percentage of students achieving an ACT Year 12 Certificate has climbed. In 2011 only 72.7 percent of students were awarded the certificate compared to 85.8 percent in 2014. In 2012 and 2013, this percentage peaked over 90 percent.

There has been a decline in the percentage of year 12 students receiving an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) and this translated into a downward trend in percentages of students securing an ATAR over 80 or over 65, which are the main round cut-offs for the Australian National University and the University of Canberra respectively. The median ATAR has remained relatively stable during the last four-year period.

However there has been a significant increase in the number of students engaging in Australian School-based Apprenticeships (ASbAs) with 76 students engaged in this pathway in the last two years (2013/2014) compared with only 16 students in the previous two-year period (2011/2012).

Post-college destination data for the period 2011 to 2014 shows graduates attending in greater proportions than the ACT rate at Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) or TAFE as well as

further training with other providers. Erindale College students are also being employed at a rate greater than for the other colleges in the ACT.

Over the last year the executive team has discussed what other data is available to describe the performance of a greater cross-section of the student population than the BSSS data reveals. Although some data was mapped of NAPLAN performance and ATAR achievement, the panel agrees with the school leadership team that collection and analysis of data will need to continue into the next planning period. For the student cohort pursuing 'A' packages, the college devised a Grade Point Average (GPA) approach. This approach is predicated on the fact that student work is allocated grades with selected work samples moderated by all college teachers from across the ACT. This moderation produces a confidence in teacher professional judgement, which is the basis of the GPA approach. The 'Average Grade Point Average' (AGPA) outcome of a random sample of twenty students from each of the graduating cohorts for the years 2011 to 2014 resulted in each of these averages being above the midpoint of five; with five representing a 'C Grade' achievement for every subject for every semester over the two-year enrolment period for every student. As part of the College's planning of this next stage, the panel would encourage school leaders to conduct more research and seek to innovate around a systematic approach to the collection, analysis and use of student achievement and wellbeing data in all its possible forms.

Following interviews with students and parents the panel noted high levels of satisfaction in the areas of the college giving students opportunities to do interesting things, the college providing a wide variety of pathways for students and teachers knowing their students. This was also reflected in the Satisfaction trend data 2011 to 2014. Teacher's perceptions of the quality of education students are receiving at the college is lower than their self-perception of the teaching they are delivering, which they regularly put at or above the level for all ACT colleges.

In 2013, an expert facilitator coordinated a review of the college's approach to professional learning using the Change2 processes. A teacher-team reviewed and made recommendations that led to the introduction in 2014 of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) as a foundation for professional learning. One result of this was the professional learning program focusing on teachers becoming better at disciplinary literacy, a need supported by research, testing and data analysis of student literacy limitations. The panel commends the school leadership team in its commitment to finding ways to improve on student outcomes and recommends that in the next stage of planning the college adopts a sharper focus on teachers' understanding and using effective teaching methods, including explicit instruction to maximise student learning.

### **Evidence cited and its validation**

BSSS data

Post-college destination ETD data

EC Grade Point Average data

EC Vocational Education data

Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey data

NAPLAN.

## Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

In its 2011 – 2015 Strategic Plan Erindale College identified two priorities for improvement. These were:

1. Create a culture of high expectations in learning and teaching with educational leaders enhancing teacher performance with strong evidence of student achievement.
2. Create a learning community with a diversity of life pathways for students.

Collaborative forums were conducted with staff, student leaders, the College Board, and the Parents and Citizens committees to determine the two important priorities for the 2011 – 2015 Strategic Plan.

### **Strategic Priority 1: Create a culture of high expectations in learning and teaching with educational leaders enhancing teacher performance with strong evidence of student achievement.**

Over the life of the plan the college staff satisfaction data continued to show a disconnect between the teachers rating their overall satisfaction with their work at the school (95 percent for 2014) and the college has high expectations in all that it does (77 percent for 2014). The senior leadership team was also concerned with teacher perceptions of their professional work approach and their perception of the quality of education delivered at the college.

In the 2015 Annual Operating Plan one of the targets identified for this priority was every teacher actively participates with one Professional Learning Community (PLC) specialist team in the focus areas of Literacy; Professional Practice and Learning Technologies; Getting to Know Every Student. The teacher responses to questions in the School Satisfaction Survey relating to their engagement in high expectation professional learning have shown improvement with a significant gain in 'I get constructive feedback about my practice', increasing from 54 percent of staff indicating this was the case in 2012 to 79 percent in 2014

Within this priority was the target to improve student literacy in years 10 and 11. The PLC focusing on this area developed a 'startup toolkit of literacy strategies' focusing on Tactical Teaching. The panel acknowledges and commends the commitment of the school leadership team to finding ways to improve on student outcomes. Through classroom observations, student, staff and parent interviews it was evident to the panel that teachers are responding by becoming better discipline literacy educators.

In the 2014 Annual Operating Plan the college set a target for the improvement in student literacy of at or above an average of four on a Likert scale of one to five. However the college reported problems associated with large numbers of students with literacy gaps and they did not pursue the college-based surveys opting for a case management approach.

As part of the College's planning of this next stage, the panel would encourage school leaders to conduct more research and seek to innovate around a systematic approach to the collection, analysis and use of student achievement and wellbeing data in all its possible forms. Teacher capacity will need to be further developed to ensure their curriculum design, teaching and assessment methods are exemplary, and their collection, storage, analysis of data presents evidence to inform their practice.

### **Strategic Priority 2: Create a learning community with a diversity of life pathways for students**

The effectiveness of the Talented Sports Program has seen the continued enhancement and expansion of the number of programs and pathways offered to students at Erindale College. The

Big Picture Academy, the Mindyigari Centre, the Tuggeranong Sustainable Living Trades training Centre and the recent introduction of the Cambridge International Examinations strengthen the diversity of life pathways for students.

To provide a diversity of pathways for students the college recognised the essential need to 'Know Every Student' (KES). This goal became a regular priority in each AOP after the review of College Link (Link) pastoral care program. This goal became the work of one of the PLCs in 2014 and 2015. Interviews with students and parents confirmed that Erindale was a place where students felt safe and supported. Students could clearly identify at least one adult in the college who could assist them with issues whether they be academic or social and emotional. In some cases the key person was their Link teacher however for many it was a teacher in their Academy.

The panel were impressed with the work occurring in the Mindyigari centre in ensuring positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. In 2015 the retention rates from year 11 to year 12 was 97 percent. The target of 10 percent improvement on the 2013 attendance rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students proved difficult to measure. The 2014 Mindyigari Centre report indicates that all thirteen year 12 students had written pathways plan and had set clear goals for the future.

The Tuggeranong Trades Training Centre was officially opened in June 2014. While the Tuggeranong Trades Training Centre did not meet the target of two whole of network classes offering Certificate III courses or equivalent, at the end of 2014 a successful trial of Automotive as an Early Access Training (EAT) for students in years 10 to 12 in the Tuggeranong Network schools was completed.

The panel saw evidence of the strengthening of the year 10 in college program. Interviews with students in both the Summit and Talented Sports Program confirmed that the early move to the college was worth it and the college was able to better meet their needs.

The panel was impressed with the college's endeavours to embrace all dimensions of student wellbeing. The panel also commends the college on the many pathways available to students. It was however evident through feedback from all stakeholders that the college needs to review its accredited courses and their method of delivery to optimise student achievement.

## **Reflections**

The leadership team clearly articulated the importance of observing and giving feedback on teacher performance as a means to improve teaching practice, however they also spoke of the challenges encountered and how only a small number of staff participated in instructional rounds. The panel recommends that in the next stage of planning the college adopts a sharper focus on teachers understanding and using effective teaching methods, including explicit instruction to maximize student learning. The college cited early success in the PLCs and the panel recognises that PLCs could be the vehicle to improve teacher pedagogy.

The college articulated their lack of success in developing sound data sets as an evidence base of student achievement. They admitted their reliance on the traditional data sets provided by the BSSS. As part of the college's planning of this next stage, the panel would encourage school leaders to conduct more research and seek to innovate around a systematic approach to the collection, analysis and use of student achievement and wellbeing data in all its possible forms. Teacher capacity will need to be further developed to ensure their curriculum design, teaching and assessment methods are exemplary, and their collection, storage, analysis of data presents

evidence to inform their practice. The panel found clear evidence that students would like a greater voice in how they are taught and on their progress.

In the college's pursuit of 'Know Every Student' (KES) and concerns raised by teachers, the college introduced online literacy testing for all new enrolments in 2012. The panel has been impressed with the college's preparedness to identify the learning challenges faced by students at the college. There is evidence of a school wide commitment to every teacher meeting the literacy needs of every student.

Feedback from all stakeholders resulted in the challenge to the executive team of inspiring students to hold 'high aspirations and expectations' and of engaging teachers with this same ambition. Clarity about what students are expected to learn and be able to do, high expectations of every students learning, explicit teaching of skills and content, individualised attention as required and timely feedback to guide student action should now be key elements of the college's continued development in the area of improved teaching and learning.

## **Section D: National tools self-evaluation results**

### **National School Improvement Tool**

At Erindale College the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) was the focus of several formal staff meetings and several executive team meetings. They used a staff professional learning meeting early in March 2015 as a forum to introduce the tool and a methodology for determining their status. In further sessions, they used a range of collaborative processes to come to a consensus on their status on three domains:

- Domain 1: An explicit improvement agenda.
- Domain 3: A culture that promotes learning.
- Domain 5: An expert teaching team.

Academy groups then explored the other six domains in follow-up sessions to give their assessment of their status on each of these. The executive team took these responses and used them to discuss the different perspectives. A working draft arrived at by the executive team was on display on their data walls in the conference room with an invitation for all staff to make individual comment. The panel was provided with detailed evidence that this was a worthwhile and engaging endeavour. It was clear that many staff took up the opportunity and made contributions regarding priorities from the Annual Operating Plan (AOP) such as supporting literacy development in students; increasing attendance, retention, and completion by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students; and reflections on how to enhance the efficacy of PLCs. From here a 'draft NSIT summary' was created. The external validation panel was provided with the draft is the current status for the purpose of deliberation and confirmation. The college executive stated that it still needs 'further reflection and development'. They suggested this would occur when they move into the formulation of the School Plan for 2015-2019.

The College Board was introduced to the NSIT but have yet to affirm the current draft assessment. Whilst undertaking the external validation process, the panel met a range of parents, including the board chair. The panel explicitly referred to the NSIT during these discussions and was able to ascertain that whilst the parent group did not yet have fluency with the NSIT, there was high congruence around performance against domains and the relevant descriptors.



The panel largely agreed with the findings of the college self-assessment.

In validating the college's journey against the National School Improvement Tool the panel noted the following in relation to the **Explicit Improvement Agenda** domain.

- *School leaders can describe the improvements they wish to see in student behaviours and outcomes. This agenda is communicated in staff meetings, school newsletters, parent-teacher meetings and on the school website using a variety of formats to suit local needs.*
- *The principal and other school leaders articulate a shared commitment to improvement, (eg, plans for improvement may lack coherence, be short term or without a whole-school focus).*
- *The leadership team has analysed school performance data over a number of years and is aware of trends in student achievement levels.*
- *Targets for improvement are not specific (e.g. not accompanied by timelines).*
- *The school leadership team is clearly committed to finding ways to improve on current student outcomes. This is reflected in an eagerness to learn from research evidence, international experience. Staff of the school tells stories of significant student improvement.*
- *Although there is an expressed commitment to improvement, this is not reflected in a high level of enthusiasm for personal change on the part of staff. The communication of performance data to the school community tends to be sporadic*
- *Staff tends to 'explain' current achievement levels in terms of students' socioeconomic backgrounds and/or geographical location*

It was evident that the college had committed to a range of processes to advance their improvement agenda; via the parent open night, a specific PowerPoint, also presented at staff meeting, P&C, school board meetings, and through its Website and newsletters. There was compelling evidence that a shared commitment to improvement had occurred through a range of meeting formats and processes such as college executive meetings, individual conversations with staff via the Annual Professional Discussion (APD), the AOP, and School Plan. Whilst there is comprehensive analysis of external factors such as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results, BSSS certification data, Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA), and the educational background of parents, as well as data analysis of student literacy limitations via tests provided by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), the panel noted targets are present, yet lack specificity of action including outcomes and timelines.

The range of programs and initiatives provided by the college was inspiring. This list included Cambridge International Examinations (CIE), the Learning Academies, College Link, PAY/TTC, Mindyigari Centre, the PLC conference in Melbourne, a Change2 program focussed on PLC, the Big Picture Academy, individual conversations with staff support on turnaround stories, a 2014 Tuckwell scholar, and the consistent success of Indigenous students.

Although the panel strongly agreed that there is an expressed commitment to improvement, all staff need to ensure high expectation irrespective of socioeconomic status (SES) and disadvantage. Fulfilment of a purposeful improvement agenda will require a college executive unified and cohesive in their commitment. The panel noted a minority element of staff who tend



to 'explain' current achievement levels in terms of students' socioeconomic backgrounds and/or geographical location.

Within the **Analysis and Discussion of Data** domain, the panel verified the following.

- *There is evidence that the principal and other school leaders view reliable and timely student data as essential to their effective leadership of the school.*
- *School leaders pay close attention to data provided to them about the performance of the school (e.g. NAPLAN results; Year 12 results) and identify areas in which the school is performing relatively poorly or well.*
- *The school has ensured that appropriate software is available and that at least these assigned staff has been trained to undertake data analyses.*
- *Tests (e.g. commercially available reading tests) may be used by some teachers, but generally are not used as part of a whole-school assessment strategy.*
- *An ad hoc approach exists to building staff skills in the analysis, interpretation and use of classroom data.*
- *Teachers routinely use objective data on student achievement as evidence of successful teaching.*
- *The school can illustrate through case studies, meeting minutes and project plans how data have been used to identify priorities, take action and monitor progress.*
- *School data are presented to staff in meetings, but presentations tend to be 'for information' rather than a trigger for in-depth discussions of teaching practices and school processes. Information about the school's performance is communicated to the school community, but may lack explanation or analysis. There is limited engagement with parents and families around school data.*

The panel found substantial evidence of the use of data across the college, in all Academies and programs, however students and parents report that it is not always timely or valuable. It was agreed, in discussion with school leaders and staff, that the approach to building staff expertise with data was ad hoc. Exemplary practice in the use of data was noted in the specialist programs and with specific cohorts of students e.g. Knowing Every Student, Link, TSP leaders, Big Picture. However, there is a significant pocket (50 percent) of compliant and 'accepting' students who accept the passive status quo. The panel recommends that Erindale College increasingly focus on the use of objective data as some data appears to be weighted to the subjective for many students.

The panel noted the following in relation to domain 3, **A culture that promotes learning**.

- *Classrooms are generally orderly, although some are more so than others. Non-attendance is an issue for a small minority of students. However, many other students appear to be minimally engaged in productive learning activities.*
- *There is a strong sense of belonging and pride in the school.*
- *Individual talents are valued.*
- *The school has clear expectations for how students should behave and interact with one another, and in the main, relationships are caring and respectful. Some staff time is taken up dealing with behaviour problems.*

- *Respectful and caring relationships are reflected in the ways in which staff, students and parents interact and in the language they use in both formal and informal settings. Parents and families are encouraged to take a genuine and close interest in the work of the school and are welcomed as partners in their children's learning. There are agreed guidelines on such matters as greeting visitors, taking messages, and responding to queries promptly and respectfully. Staff morale is generally high.*
- *Most parents take an obvious interest in their children's learning.*

The panel verified through classroom observation, and discussion with teachers and students, that classrooms are focussed on student learning and wellbeing. The college has identified a review of the Accredited package as a priority. Student specific turnaround stories are compelling examples of the efforts of individual and teams of staff, as well as students evolving. Students in specific programs (TSP, Summit, Big Picture) receive a personalised and tailored education. The panel agreed that relationships are universally caring and respectful, which was evident across a range of classroom observation and discussion. The panel considered this, along with other evidence such as direct conversations/interviews with parents, to be supportive of the claim that respectful and caring relationships are active and authentic.

In consideration of the domain **Targeted use of school resources** the panel verified the following.

- *The principal and other school leaders have given a very high priority to understanding and addressing the learning needs of all students in the school. This is reflected in the implementation of systematic strategies for identifying student needs and the development of creative school-wide solutions for addressing those needs.*
- *The principal and other school leaders have introduced programs and strategies to identify and address the needs of students in the school*
- *The school has developed processes (eg, systematic testing and assessment) for identifying student learning needs, although there may not always be good school records of student achievement and progress.*
- *The school deploys staff in ways that make best use of their expertise (e.g., specialist reading/science teachers).*
- *Programs to meet individual learning needs (eg, programs for gifted students, students with learning difficulties, students for whom English is a second language, Indigenous students, and refugees) are prioritised, where possible, in the school budget.*
- *Physical spaces and technology are used effectively to maximise student learning. Learning spaces are organised for whole group work, small group work and individual work. (applicable to specialised programs and specific student cohorts)*
- *Physical learning spaces are used creatively and technology is accessible to the majority of staff and students.*

The panel found compelling evidence to confirm the college is applying its resources in a very targeted manner, particularly to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of students requiring additional support for successful graduation. There was a strong commitment to infrastructure, capital works, and significant physical upgrades to support this focus, as evidenced by the establishment of the Mindyigari Centre, the Big Picture Academy, the Student Services centre, Healthy Eating Cafe, and the Trade Training Centre. Embedded into these facilities were a range

of successful initiatives and intervention programs such as College Link, Summit, Learning Academies, and e-knex.

The college committed to applying time, money, and personnel toward 'game-changing' professional learning such as the PLC Conference in Melbourne, a Change2 process on PLC, and a systematic literacy focus. Conversations with staff confirmed that the executive were unified and committed in responding appropriately to the needs of individual learners. Teaching and learning spaces continue to be reconfigured to provide a more contemporary and 'human' learning landscape.

Over recent years the school executive explored innovations within the administrative staffing structure. Reduction of administrative workload for teachers was a key priority. Based on internal human resources (HR) data, teacher timetables, and conversations, the panel considered this to be a highly successful strategy in effecting an enhanced pedagogical focus from teachers. The principal is to be commended on 'sharp' and proactive recruitment practices. The panel found evidence of a college prepared to speculate on staffing innovations with well-calculated risk-taking, including the recruitment of someone being interviewed on ABC radio. The success of this action resulted in gaining a key staff member for the Mindyigari Centre.

One of the signature attributes of Erindale College is its place within a larger precinct. The panel noted the connectedness, synergy, and ensuing value-adding of the adjoining Leisure Centre, Theatre, library, and Community Education Program.

In validating the college's journey against the National School Improvement Tool the panel noted the following in relation to the domain **An expert teaching team**.

- *There is evidence that the principal and other school leaders see the development of staff into an expert and coherent school-wide teaching team as central to improving outcomes for all students.*
- *there may not be a coherent, documented learning plan.*
- *There is a documented professional learning plan and the school has arrangements in place for mentoring and coaching.*
- *The principal and leadership team are seen as supportive of, but not generally involved in, the day-to-day practice and learning of teachers.*
- *Attention is paid to strengths and weaknesses in the school-wide team,*
- *Teachers are open to constructive feedback and provide feedback to colleagues, although there may not be formal mentoring or coaching arrangements in place. The school is implementing a formal process for conducting professional discussions with staff.*
- *The school's professional learning agenda is made explicit to staff at induction, and in staff handbooks. Where it is necessary to manage unsatisfactory staff performance, this is done professionally and effectively, and in accordance with agreed guidelines.*

The panel noted a range of evidence in support of the claim for a school-wide, professional team of highly able teachers. This was seen in comprehensive documentation such as school plans (annual operating and strategic), annual school board reports, and teacher self-reflection in satisfaction surveys. However through observation of lessons and discussions with staff including subject heads, it was apparent that a culture of continuous learning is not universal at Erindale College. A commitment to professional learning was present, stronger with some staff

and learning academies. This was evident in planning and strategising around literacy, differentiation, and the inclusion of all abilities into assessment. Additionally some staff were able to speak with fluency and belief about the active professional improvement via the emerging PLCs and a recent Change2 program. Staff collaborating in the area of coaching and mentoring is limited. The panel noted an absence of a pedagogical framework. Discussions around pedagogy are not explicit, and it is clear it does not form the backbone of all teacher improvement dialogue. Whilst the learning agenda is evident in the Erindale staff handbook, the executive need a common dialogue and strategy around how to collaboratively plan, deliver and review the effectiveness of lessons. There is an imperative for a coherent structure around curriculum, otherwise there can be no consistent dialogue with staff around improvement.

The panel found evidence that Erindale College recruits with a focus on addressing strengths and weaknesses, and commits to retention of staff who are the most-enabling.

Difficult conversations around performance are in evidence, as is the effectiveness of these conversations.

Within the **Systematic curriculum delivery** domain, the panel verified the following.

- *The school has a clearly documented whole-school plan for curriculum delivery. This plan is aligned with the Australian or other approved curriculum and, where appropriate, system curriculum documents. The plan makes explicit what (and when) teachers should teach and students should learn.*
- *The curriculum delivery plan reflects a shared vision (by the school's governing body, principal, school leadership team, and teachers) for the school, and provides a context for delivering the curriculum as detailed in the Australian or other approved curriculum and, where relevant, system curriculum documents.*
- *The school has a documented plan for curriculum delivery that includes year level and term plans.*
- *A strong alignment has been achieved between the overall curriculum delivery plan, term and unit plans, classroom teaching and the regular assessment of student progress in relation to curriculum expectations. Considerable attention has been given to ensuring 'vertical' alignment of the curriculum so that there is continuity and progression of learning across the years of school, with teaching in each year building on to and extending learning in previous years.*
- *The school curriculum plan and curriculum delivery (including the time allocated to particular learning) balance requirements to address all learning areas, to give priority to English, mathematics and science, and to embed the fundamental skills of literacy, numeracy and higher order thinking in all school subjects.*
- *The school places a priority on making the curriculum locally relevant and accessible to all students and values and builds on to students' existing knowledge and varying backgrounds.*
- *The school leadership team ensures that the enacted curriculum remains a focus for discussion among, and collaboration between, teachers and that the curriculum plan is the reference against which flexible delivery is designed, assessment tasks are developed and student learning is reported. Curriculum delivery is designed to meet the needs of the*

*range of students within each year level as well as those with disabilities and other particular needs.*

While the panel recognised a clear passion for curriculum amongst almost all members of the college community, the panel did not find universal progress in this domain. Instead it found universal aspiration. There is evidence of alignment between curriculum priorities, the leadership of the college, teaching staff, students and their families. The shared understanding around literacy, assessment, academic organisation and varied learning pathways is clear. Compelling evidence was found in classroom visits that showed strong prioritised metalanguage and general literacy skills. Additional evidence consisted of the presentation of student learning data, curriculum documentation, and dialogue with staff, parents and students. There is strong evidence that the school recognises wide areas of challenge amongst the student demographic, and that instilling within that demographic, the need for high expectations of self would be of lasting benefit to students. The panel does not yet see that this is an outstanding strength, rather this is an impressive initiative that is beginning to enhance student achievement and opportunities at Erindale College.

Panel conversations with a variety of teachers clearly demonstrated a widespread agreed ownership of literacy across the curriculum. Data around literacy strengths and weaknesses is systematically and widely shared and informs teaching practice. Conversations with staff show a common language and a shared understanding of the importance of consistent teaching and learning expectations. There is real integrity in this college's successful commitment to the provision of appropriate and rigorous curriculum pathways for the range of student aspirations within their care. The college leadership's effective planning around curriculum provision is of a very high standard evidenced by data driven analysis, demographic analysis, conversations with the college leadership and student feedback. A significant innovation around this planning is the college's preparedness to build relationships with, and to talk to, feeder high schools and previous high schools in ascertaining student need and aspiration.

In evaluation of the domain **Differentiated teaching and learning** the panel verified the following.

- *It is recognised throughout the school that some students require significant adjustments to their learning programs (e.g., accelerated programs, special support) if they are to be optimally engaged and challenged, and individual learning plans have been developed for those students requiring them. Differentiation is a priority of the school and a feature of every teacher's practice.*
- *Teachers also are encouraged to respond to differences in cultural knowledge and experiences and to cater for individual differences by offering multiple means of representation, engagement and expression.*
- *School leaders are committed to success for all, but do not drive a strong classroom agenda to assess and identify individual learning needs or to differentiate teaching according to students' needs.*
- *Planning shows how the different needs of students are addressed, and how multiple opportunities to learn are provided; they include multiple pathways for transition to external studies (eg, apprenticeships) for students in Years 10-12. Students' workbooks also illustrate differentiated tasks and feedback.*

- *Reports to parents show progress over time and include suggestions for ways in which parents can support their children's learning*

Whilst the college leadership team understands the imperative for the use of differentiated teaching as a strategy for ensuring that every student is engaged and learning successfully, active promotion is yet to be achieved. Conversations with college leaders identify a small cohort of students who are not being optimally challenged or inspired by their teachers or the learning program. There is a belief held by a number of stakeholders that the college has more work to do in the engagement of some students in successful learning, particularly those undertaking non-T courses. Programs such as the Big Picture, Summit, and Mindyigari are very successful in providing significant adjustments to learning programs for individual students. As a further example of meeting the learning needs of a diverse student population, the panel noted that the newly introduced Cambridge International Education program is an initiative to attract students seeking university entrance. However teaching and learning programs for students undertaking the accredited package require ongoing work to be more engaging, challenging and meaningful. The panel also noted strong evidence of clear communication with parents on student progress.

In validating the college's journey against the National School Improvement Tool the panel noted the following in relation to the **Effective pedagogical practices** domain.

- *School leaders are committed to continuous improvement in teaching practices throughout the school and expect team leaders and teachers to identify ways of doing this, although the principal and other senior leaders may not themselves have clear positions on the kinds of teaching they wish to see occurring across the school or be 'hands on' in driving improved teaching practices.*
- *There is a particular focus on improved teaching methods in reading, writing, mathematics and science, and professional learning activities are focused on building teachers' understandings of highly effective teaching strategies in these areas.*
- *Clarity about what students are expected to learn and be able to do, high expectations of every student's learning, explicit teaching of skills and content, individualised attention as required, and timely feedback to guide student action are key elements of the school's push for improved teaching and learning.*

The panel verified and endorsed the accuracy of claims against this domain at Erindale College via its articulated professional learning plan, the Annual Operating Plans, Annual School Board reports and in general communication with the community. Further improvements to effective pedagogical practices will be enhanced through the adoption and implementation of a clearer curriculum framework. The panel commends the college's work in the area of professional learning around pedagogical practice and would encourage continued prioritisation in this area. The panel found a strong desire to develop and maintain a culture that provides every student with the opportunity to be engaged, challenged and to learn successfully.

Evidence for this finding was in college documentation, interviews with students and parents, and with the enthusiasm and passion driven by the principal and many other staff. In this challenging area for all schools, Erindale College has the opportunity to make significant progress in its next School Plan. The energised culture of the college supports increasingly bolder conversations about clarity of expectations of student learning and an emphasis of high expectations. This was evidenced through conversations with the entire Erindale community –



staff, students and parents. Pleasingly, minor pockets of lethargy amongst some stakeholders have not impeded in any way the energy and progress of the Erindale community in this area.

Within the **School-community partnerships** domain, the panel verified the following.

- *The school has established one or more partnerships with families, local businesses and/or community organisations with the express purpose of improving outcomes for students. Partnerships have generally been initiated by the senior leadership team and have their support.*
- *Each partnership has been established in response to an identified need. Considerable effort has been put into understanding students' needs, identifying appropriate partners to address those needs, planning the details of partnership programs and clarifying partner roles and responsibilities.*
- *Each partnership brings staff and students of the school together with external partners such as families, other education or training institutions, local businesses and/or community organisations.*
- *Attention has been given to communication and to the sharing of experiences within the partnership; however, there may be no formal plan for reviewing the partnership's outcomes and effectiveness.*
- *There is evidence that the school's partnerships are being implemented as intended. However, there may be limited evidence of improved student outcomes as a result of partnership activities – possibly because there has been insufficient time for them to demonstrate an effect.*

In authenticating the college's claims of success in partnerships, networking, and collaboration, the panel sought evidence from all stakeholders and a wide range of data. This included Annual Board Reports, interviews with board members, acquittal against targets set in operational and strategic plans, and panel dialogue with students and their parents. Additionally the panel conducted visits to facilities across the Erindale precinct such as the Trade Training Centre, Erindale Library, Theatre, Fitness Centre, and Community Education Program. The panel noted that existing partnerships are enduring, highly successful, and embedded as a 'signature' identity of a rich and rounded college education. These continue to be key attractants for prospective student enrolment, making Erindale the college of choice for certain student cohorts. The college continues to explore new opportunity including relationships with the Australian Institute of Fitness, Capital Training, Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT), and other industry associations.

Recently Erindale further enhanced its reputation as a leader of vocational pathways for senior secondary students in the ACT by becoming a self-regulated registered training organisation (RTO). The Talented Sports Program (TSP) program has very clear and productive links with the sports industry and sporting organisations which underpin the authenticity of the program and its deserved territory and national reputation for success. The panel also noted the success of students in industry training awards and subsequent post-school employment. Erindale's success in this domain is attributed to all partners and stakeholders having a high level of understanding of, and commitment to, the purposes of the partnership. Without exception clear objectives have been set, and are expressed in terms of improved outcomes for students. The college is still developing new relationships with other industry, community and educational



providers and there is every evidence that these relationships will be fostered through the experience and energy provided by the college.

### **National Safe Schools Audit Tool**

At the time of the external validation panel's visit, Erindale College had not completed the National Safe Schools Audit. They propose to undertake this later in 2015. The panel noted through both discussion and direct observation, from all stakeholders, that the absence of the National Safe Schools Framework Audit Tool (NSSFAT) in no way indicated any concerns regarding student wellbeing. On the contrary, there was overwhelming evidence, through its programs, initiatives, resourcing, and targeted recruitment of staff, that the college is a senior secondary exemplar in creating a safe, supportive and respectful learning and teaching community. At Erindale College the risk from all types of harm is minimised, diversity is valued, and all members of the college community feel respected and included and can be confident that they will receive support in the face of any threat to their safety or wellbeing.

## **Section E: Commendations and recommendations**

### **Commendations**

Erindale College is commended for the comprehensive preparation of the school summative validation documentation, the welcoming nature of the college towards the panel, and for the integrity with which subsequent data, documentation, class visits and interviews were arranged. Senior executive openly discussed the progress of the college, its current challenges and its suggested way forward were clearly articulated in a professional and manner. Erindale College is commended for the following:

#### **1. Establishing a respectful and responsive learning community**

The panel commends the leadership of the college in its endeavours to create a learning community that is inclusive of all stakeholders, respectful of a wide diversity of student needs, committed to the professional growth of its staff, and for its recognition of the primacy of effective teaching and learning in a school. The college has established a culture where the opportunity exists for all students to learn successfully in their own ways and at their own pace. Individual talents are valued and enhanced. At Erindale College respectful and caring relationships abound and are reflected in the ways in which staff, students, parents and community agencies interact and in the language they use in both formal and informal settings.

#### **2. Generating a professional approach to successful teaching and learning**

The panel confirmed a strong commitment by the leadership and staff of the college for a shared vision for quality teaching and learning, collaborative strategic and educational planning, and for sharing the responsibility for the vision and identity of the college. This has enabled the school to build a school-wide professional environment where teachers are encouraged to be highly able, to take an active leadership role within and beyond the classroom, and to share the responsibility for student learning and success.

#### **3. Innovating with a contemporary view towards the future**

The panel commends the college for its wide range of programs designed to meet the specific needs of students. The college applies its resources (staff time, expertise, funds, facilities, materials) in a targeted manner to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of all students. It has school-wide policies, practices and programs in place to assist in

identifying and addressing student needs. Flexible structures and processes enable the college to respond appropriately to the needs of individual learners.

#### **4. Maximising student learning through a sustained staff focus on literacy**

The panel was impressed with the preparedness of staff to identify the learning challenges faced by students at the college. Generally declining student achievement became evident from the results of the college's online literacy testing. Literacy tests provided by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) revealed significant challenges in relation to the literacy gaps evident in many of the student's backgrounds. The college's professional learning program focussed on developing better teachers of disciplinary literacy; a focus cultivated by their research, testing, and data analysis of student literacy limitations.

The college leadership team is clearly committed to finding sustainable and embedded ways to improve on student literacy outcomes. This is reflected in an eagerness to learn from research evidence, international experience and from the professional judgement of teachers. There is evidence of a college wide commitment by every teacher in meeting the literacy needs of every student.

#### **5. Targeting improvements in the use of school resources**

The college continues to scope the innovative use of administrative staff to free up teacher time so they can increase their focus on teaching practices. A range of initiatives (eg; Student Services staffing) is being implemented to make more effective use of available resources which better responds to the needs of individual learners and their specialised programs. The school deploys staff in flexible ways that make best use of their expertise, as evidenced by the Mindyigari Centre, Link Program, Summit, and e-knex.

#### **6. Comprehensively addressing student well-being**

The panel was impressed with the college's endeavours to embrace all dimensions of student wellbeing. The college's provision of many pathways, the integrity with which they allow those students to choose those pathways and with structures and resources that promote safety and student self-esteem is commendable. Teachers are encouraged to respond to differences in cultural knowledge and learning styles and abilities to optimise student achievement.

### **Recommendations**

The panel recommends Erindale College pays attention to the following opportunities for improvement during the next planning cycle.

#### **1. Establishing explicit college-wide targets for educational improvement**

The panel acknowledges the considerable progress that has been made towards consistency of approach in the area of teaching and learning. The panel recommends that in the next stage of planning the college adopts a sharper focus on teachers understanding and using effective teaching methods, including explicit instruction to maximise student learning. Establishing visible and dynamic teacher learning communities will consolidate this culture of continuous professional improvement. The presence of an already explicit curriculum framework provides the necessary form and meaning. It will be necessary to build a common language around pedagogy, and the

consistency of purpose about desired outcomes for each student. Whilst energy and professional goodwill are evident, and the college is a fertile environment, the focus must now more keenly embrace learning initiatives, differentiation, and quality teaching that is active, visible, and shared.

## **2. Prioritising the college-wide analysis and discussion of systematically collected data**

Crucial to Erindale College's next performance cycle will be a greater focus on analysis and discussion of data. As part of the college's planning for this next stage, the panel encourages school leaders to conduct more research and seek to innovate around a systematic approach to the collection, analysis and use of student achievement and wellbeing data in all its possible forms. Teacher capacity will need to be further developed to ensure their curriculum design, teaching and assessment methods are exemplary, and their collection, storage, analysis of data presents evidence to inform their practice. The panel found clear evidence that students would like a greater voice in how they are taught and on their progress. Clarity about what students are expected to learn and be able to do, high expectations of every students learning, explicit teaching of skills and content, individualised attention as required, and timely feedback to guide student action should now be key elements of the schools continued development in the area of improved teaching and learning. The panel noted inconsistent use of objective data to support ongoing decisions around successful teaching.

## **3. Engendering self-belief and enhancing active promotion**

The panel found that this college is a place of high morale amongst the staff and many students and their families. It is recommended that all staff be further encouraged to own the many achievements of the college and to be powerful advocates to the broader community on those achievements. The college can now actively seek ways to enhance community perception, building on their strong sense of belonging and pride in the college. The introduction of Cambridge International Education and the completion of the Trades Training Centre present opportunities to create a new education enterprise to attract students from all backgrounds who wish to pursue an education that is constructed around their talents and passions. School leaders need to collaborate with partners in the Tuggeranong network, Universities and CIT and industry networks. The culture of belief in the ability of all students to achieve their optimum is commendable and the panel recommends that this be continued.

## **4. Reviewing the current non T course package**

The panel was informed by staff, students and parents that the current non T courses need review. Its effectiveness and required improvement necessitates formal and comprehensive input from all stakeholders, including feeder high schools and CIT. There is opportunity for Erindale College to lead, on behalf of ETD, a systemic approach to addressing the essential literacy and numeracy requirements for successful completion of apprenticeship qualifications at CIT. The pre-apprenticeship year 12 program (PAY) may address this current lack of targeted focus. The non T courses currently lack opportunity and motivation for some Erindale students. Staff already see the imperative of 'inspiring these students to aspire for more'. A package offering even tighter alignment to vocational pathways will significantly enhance post-school success for a large cohort of Erindale graduates.

## Record of Validation Process

The following people were members of the external validation panel for Erindale College conducted on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> to Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2015.

Name: Frank Fogliati

School: Black Mountain School

Name: Robin Morrell

School: Lyneham High School

Name: Michael Lee

School: Mackillop College

As chair of the panel I endorse that this is a true and accurate record of the findings from the external validation process.

Name: Frank Fogliati

Signature: 

Date: 23-9-2015

As principal of Erindale College I accept the Validation Report on behalf of the college community.

Name: Michael Hall

Signature: 

Date: 23 rd Sept 2015

As co-director of Quality Learning Australasia, external lead validators for the conduct of validation process in ACT public schools, I concur that the panel acted within the guidelines set by the ACT Education and Training Directorate.

Name: Jane Kovacs

Signature: 

Date: 23/9/15