



ACT
Government
Education and Training

EXTERNAL VALIDATION REPORT 2015

for

NARRABUNDAH 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

Narrabundah College is a government senior secondary co-educational college located in the inner south suburb of Narrabundah, near the parliamentary triangle. Originally established in 1961 as Narrabundah High School, a year 7-12 setting, Narrabundah College was subsequently formed as a result of the ACT developing its own education system in 1974. This system change meant that public high schools would only teach from grade 7 to 10, and that grades 11 and 12 would be completed at a separate college. The pre-existing Narrabundah High School was re-purposed as Narrabundah College and was the first school in Australia to offer the International Baccalaureate, starting the program in February 1978.

Narrabundah College consists of several buildings including the large 'S Block' which was originally the segregated senior building for years 11 and 12 prior to the school becoming a secondary college. In addition to a quadrangle and a canteen, the college also has spacious playing fields, established gardens, mature shade trees, and is close to golf courses, public ovals and the local shops.

With more than thirty percent of the enrolled students being born overseas, the Narrabundah College has successfully established a supportive multi-cultural school community with an emphasis on inclusiveness. The college provides an extensive range of courses which effectively address the needs of students from a wide range of international backgrounds. In 2015 nine languages were offered, with over 600 students studying a second language. In addition to the ACT Year 12 Certificate and International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma, the college also offers the French Baccalauréat and is a Registered Training Organisation.

Narrabundah College has an international population with students from 57 countries and speaking approximately 60 different languages and dialects. The diversity is reflected in specialised programs and events. In addition to the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate Narrabundah offers the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma and the French Baccalauréat. The college has a strong reputation for academic success with the majority of graduating year 12 students going directly onto further education at universities and specialist tertiary institutions.

In 2014 the college gained accreditation as a Mind Matters School. Since the previous validation, The Curriculum of Giving Framework has been introduced. The student population has been stable over the past four years, the current population is 940 students. Data indicated the number of students on Individual Learning Plans has doubled over the life of the plan to 16 in 2015.

There have been significant changes in Narrabundah College's leadership profile since the previous validation report. A new principal was appointed in 2011 and a new deputy principal was appointed in 2014. Five new executive teachers were appointed over the time period in mathematics/Information Technology, certification, English/history, English as a Second Language/languages and Student Services.

The stable student numbers has enabled the college to maintain around 80 teaching staff each year. The large number of staff nearing the end of their placement in 2012 resulted in a significant change in staffing at the beginning of 2013, with nearly one in four staff members being new to the college. One new educator who was appointed in 2010 successfully undertook assessment for accelerated incremental progression in 2014.

During the life of the college's strategic plan, administrative tasks for teachers was identified as an issue. To overcome this burden, the responsibilities of administrative staff were reviewed and changed. This included processing student absence forms, updating electronic rolls for excursions, organisation of parent/teacher interviews and the enrolment process for new students. In the last four years, two administrative staff have retired and been replaced with permanent officers.

The school has maintained a healthy financial balance throughout the four year cycle as evidenced in the Annual School Board Reports (ASBR). At the college all students are encouraged to study six lines, which increases the number of staff required. The college is funded at the same amount per student as other colleges where the requirement is for five lines of study. Therefore this remains a significant and ongoing expenditure adjustment for the college as it must be factored into the annual calculation of staffing cost.

System changes that have influenced the college over the life of the strategic plan include Teacher Quality Institute registration and professional learning requirements, the introduction of the Australian Curriculum at the senior secondary level and the implementation of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) standards at system level, which impacted on the writing of reports for pre-service teachers, probation and contract teachers.

The college has a very active Board and Parents and Citizens (P&C) association. The Curriculum of Giving has created formal and informal partnerships including volunteer work at Marymead, Malkara, Narrabundah Early Childhood Centre, Telopea Park School as well as opportunities for students to be involved in Dance Festival, sport, and work experience.

Evidence cited and its validation

My School website
Planning and performance data
MAZE data
Special consideration lists
Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS) certification data
Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) count
Annual School Board Reports
Staffing Points Return Census.

Section B: School performance

Over the life of the strategic plan students at Narrabundah College have continued to show strong academic achievement. This is evident in over 97 percent of the cohort receiving a year 12 certificate from 2012 through to 2014. The total number of students gaining a Tertiary

Entrance Statement, thus qualifying for an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR), has been maintained and in some cases has increased (86.4 percent in 2014). In addition to this, students have broadened their participation across extra-curricular activities and other opportunities over the same period.

There has been a significant decline in the number of students attaining vocational certificates and statements of attainment due to an overall increasing percentage of students who are completing ATAR courses in preparation of university entrance. There was also a decline in the number of students with vocational qualifications, due in part to the above statistic, but also driven by an increase in the number of students completing structured workplace learning (SWL) units and work experience (WEX) placements.

The Post School Destination graphs confirm students from Narrabundah College transition to tertiary institutions at a significantly higher rate than the system average. This has been a consistent trend over the four year period. From 2011 to 2014 the ACT Scaling Test (AST) mean for Narrabundah College has also remained high and has been consistently above the system mean of 150. The resulting median ATAR for the college has also remained at a high level of between 82.1 - 86.35.

The college collected data showing the difference in percentile rank of National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) to ATAR to see if there was value added. The graphs indicated there was an improvement in the percentile ranking for students from their year 9 NAPLAN to their year 12 ATAR. The college stated it is clear from the graphs and the average difference table that the Narrabundah College programs met the needs of its diverse student cohort and had a significant positive impact on developing and extending students over the two years.

Early in the life of the strategic plan the college decided to expand students' experiences and skills over their two years at college. The Curriculum of Giving was launched in 2013. The introduction of the Curriculum of Giving was supported by professional learning from Dr Thomas Nielsen in 2013 and 2014. His research reinforces the concept that giving not only supports academic outcomes, but also has a positive impact on mental health and well-being. The framework expanded opportunities in the areas of the environment, social, charity and community, college ambassadors and sporting events. Although the data indicated a significant number of students undertaking some of these opportunities, the panel noted through conversations with some students that these extra-curricular activities need to be better publicised. Discussion with a body of student representatives revealed the methods by which events were promoted did not always reach their intended audience.

The college qualified as a Mind Matters school in 2014. The Mind Matters survey results for 2014 indicated that although students generally felt safe at the college there was still work to be done regarding supporting students with mental health and wellbeing issues. Over 20 percent of students indicated they did not learn or get information regarding health issues, including mental health and wellbeing. The panel acknowledges the efforts of the college to support students through a comprehensive and well-resourced Student Services unit.

Data collected by the college shows the number of documented cases of students with learning difficulties has risen over the last four years. In 2011 eight students had Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and this has increased to 16 in 2015. Additionally the number of students accessing learning support, through the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD), has risen from 73 to 95 in just two years. The college reported that all staff had been trained in making reasonable

adjustment for students and resources were spent on a learning space, technology and staffing. Additionally a number of staff have received specific training in strategies for supporting students with dyslexia and more general literacy support. The panel noted that further work is required by teachers in differentiating lesson delivery and assessment.

Stakeholder satisfaction data indicated that Narrabundah College is a high performing school. Student, parent and staff satisfaction in the college is above the overall satisfaction for colleges in the ACT. Student satisfaction trend data showed an improvement from 2013 to 2014 in students reporting that they are using feedback. 'Teachers provide me with useful feedback about my school work' was below system average and students stated to the panel that this feedback was generally about summative assessment tasks and not given in a timely fashion to allow for student skill improvement.

College attendance rates are consistently high, with between 93 and 98 percent of students receiving certification. Generally the college has very few suspensions and satisfaction surveys report above system level satisfaction with student management at the college. The spike in suspensions in 2013 correlated with the new college policy regarding student smoking on college grounds. Although the population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is small (12 in 2015) all have Personalised Learning Plans and are in regular contact with the Indigenous students' coordinator and receive tutorial support.

The college collects feedback from students using satisfaction surveys, the Mind Matters Survey, student forums such as the Student Governance Group as well as from unit and course evaluations. This feedback is used to inform decisions from the classroom level to the strategic plan. Feedback Day 2015 was changed making it easier for all students to attend and all staff reported a very high turnout. The college has student information sessions, three formal reports per year and one mid-unit report in the middle session. The college also has two yearly Parent Teacher Interviews and end of year interviews for year 11 students which parents praised as providing ample opportunity for formal discussion of student learning.

Evidence cited and its validation

Annual Board Reports

Strategic plan & Annual Operating Plans

Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey Data 2009-2014

2014 Mind Matters Survey

Suspension days data 2011-2014.

Section C: School improvement planning and implementation

Priority Areas

Narrabundah College identified the following priorities for their 2012-15 Strategic Plan:

Priority 1: Improve staff communication and collaboration across the college.

Priority 2: Build teacher capacity to deliver quality curriculum through school focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning practices.

Priority 3: Better cater for individual needs of students to ensure successful outcomes for all.

These priorities were identified as a result of recommendations from the External Validation Report in 2011 and data from staff satisfaction surveys. They were determined by consultation with key stakeholder groups including the School Board, staff and students.

Achievements

Priority 1: Improve staff communication and collaboration across the college.

The performance measures used by Narrabundah College to measure Priority 1 were staff satisfaction surveys and Quality Teaching Rounds (QTR) college based data. Targets were established each year.

The target of 100 percent of staff actively involved in professional learning each year was not met but there was an increase from 88 percent in 2012 to 96 per cent in 2014. Effective communication between teachers and executive staff rose and the 70 percent target was achieved in 2014. Effective communications amongst all staff did not meet its target, remaining at 61 per cent in 2014, as for 2013, but exceeded the 2014 target for all ACT colleges. The panel noted that Narrabundah has a strong subject faculty structure and the physical location of faculty staffrooms may be a contributing factor to this result. It was noted that the college reported that 100 percent of staff collaborated with staff outside their own faculty area through various committees, professional practice and in implementing whole school Curriculum of Giving Framework. The panel recognised staff meetings could be used as a vehicle to sharpen whole school attention on core learning priorities and recommended maintaining commitment to improving their effectiveness.

Priority 2: Build teacher capacity to deliver quality curriculum through school focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning practices.

The college recorded 100 percent of staff involved in Quality Teaching Instructional Rounds. Staff reported to the panel varying degrees of satisfaction with the process and its effectiveness in providing feedback on their teaching practice. Many staff articulated the importance and richness of the professional conversations after classroom observations but commented on a reluctance to give critical feedback. The panel noted that data from the coding of lessons against Quality Teaching model may indicate a hesitation by some staff in providing critical feedback.

High expectations and high student achievement were also targets set by the college under this priority. The panel acknowledges the maintenance of excellent results each year in the proportion of students achieving year 12 certification and the number of students receiving an ATAR. The college identified that students needed more scaffolding in each subject area especially when transitioning from high school to year 11 college in session one. Whilst the panel recognises that there has been a focus on differentiating assessment tasks further upskilling of staff is required.

Priority 3: Better cater for individual needs of students to ensure successful outcomes for all.

In determining progress against this priority the college used system survey results for students, staff and parents as well as the percentage point increases in students undertaking a VET course over the life of the plan.

The target of a five percent increase of students undertaking a VET course was not met, with only 200 students in 2014 compared to 311 in 2013. The 2014 Satisfaction Survey indicated the college did not meet the target to improve by two percentage points staff agreement with the statement "I cater for the different needs of all students". The panel recognises the teacher investment in student success but some staff and some students report that the mode of lesson

delivery may not be meeting the needs of all students in the classroom. Student agreement with the statement “I was given adequate advice when choosing courses to study” increased by two percentage points to 60%, from 58% in 2013. This met the college target. Parent agreement with the statement “The individual needs of my child are catered for by the school” increased to 76% in 2014 from 60% in 2013. This substantially exceeded the target of 65% agreement. Parents commented to the panel how Narrabundah provided a stimulating package, setting students up for success.

Satisfaction survey feedback indicated the need to improve the effectiveness of feedback to students. The college changed the timing of the Feedback Day and this was reported as positive by both students and staff. Some students, in conversations with the panel, expressed concern that feedback was often provided too late for them to improve their skill level and affect their grade. Students reported the effectiveness of the conferencing feedback sessions employed by some teachers.

Reflections

Narrabundah College used the Stakeholder Satisfaction Surveys as a significant resource for feedback and have used them as the basis to effect changes to improve student outcomes. The panel agrees with the leadership team that the college has maintained excellent results over the past four years and it is a high demand college. The college has also been responsive to data collected on improving student outcomes through the improvement of teaching practice. The introduction of Quality Teaching Rounds (QTR) saw, by 2013, 100 per cent of staff receive formal feedback and undertake lesson coding. Whilst teachers reported it was largely a positive experience to receive feedback about their practice, the panel found evidence, in discussion with individual teachers, that engagement with QTR was at times superficial and lacked rigour. The panel agrees that it is an imperative for the college to continue to be committed to have the best teachers and as evidence by research the QTR is one vehicle to achieve this.

The college’s commitment to supporting students, not only academically, is supported with the introduction of the Curriculum of Giving Framework, the registration of the college as Mind Matters School and the introduction of the Study Hub. Operating out of the college library, and supported by staff rostered on duty, the Study Hub provides a safe environment for students to further their learning after-hours. The panel spoke to students who were researching material, completing assignments, engaging in joint tuition, and preparing for tests. The panel found some evidence, through discussion with some students and some teachers and observation of classes, of the need to further explore options, including pathways for students who will not be going onto university

Evidence cited and its validation

Annual Board Reports

School Plan (2012-2015)

Annual Operating Plans

Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey Data 2009-2014

2014 Mind Matters Survey

QTR Summary Codes and 2014 Program Evaluation.

Section D: National tools self-evaluation results

National School Improvement Tool

The principal and one deputy principal attended the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) training in term 1, 2015. The senior executive determined that the major stakeholders for the self-evaluation process were executive staff, classroom teachers, students and parents. Representatives of each of these groups completed the self-evaluation to ensure that there was input from the full school community.

At the college's Executive Conference the attending staff, including two administration staff, worked in groups to discuss and evaluate each domain. Decisions regarding placement of the college in each domain were based on consensus from each group and from existing evidence. This process was repeated at a staff meeting with classroom teachers, with students from the student governance group and parents from both the school board and P & C.

The panel noted that self-evaluations from the four groups exhibited inter-group variations of one and sometimes two performance ratings, demonstrating how the school improvement process was perceived by the different stakeholders.

In order to reconcile these disparate ratings between stakeholder groups, and also to verify the high frequency of staff self-rating at the outstanding level, the panel spoke with a significant number of staff (in excess of 20, achieving a sample size of approximately 25 percent). The panel also reviewed a significant range of evidence including documentation such as the School Plan, Annual Operating Plans, discussion with representatives of each stakeholder group (staff, students, parents), and informal meetings with a wide cross-section of staff.

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.

- *The principal and other school leaders articulate a shared commitment to improvement*
- *The leadership team has analysed school performance data over a number of years and is aware of trends in student achievement levels.*
- *The school leadership team is clearly committed to finding ways to improve on current student outcomes.*
- *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.*

There is an improvement agenda within the college founded upon QT rounds, focusing on scaffolding, literacy, feedback and differentiation of assessment tasks. However, some staff are not yet fully engaged in improving these targets. The panel noted some staff had difficulty in identifying current school priorities. An explicit improvement agenda was not readily articulated by all. Responses were varied, generic, and quite often incorrect (as cross-referenced to the 2015 Annual Operating Plan and 2012-2015 Strategic Plan). In attempting to moderate and summarise these responses the panel could not find a uniform or consensus position which aligned with the written improvement agenda as detailed in the college plans.

There was recognition by some staff that communication across the college needed improving, with some staff describing staff meetings as 'haphazard'. If school-wide targets for improvement are to be communicated more robustly, with accompanying timelines, the panel

noted that the current rate of attendance and engagement at staff meetings would need to be addressed.

An improvement target identified by a number of staff related to the benefits of classroom observation and the professional conversation that followed. However these same staff also acknowledged a reluctance to give constructive (both accurate and critical) feedback on classroom practice. The panel noted that when asked about how Quality Teaching (QT) scores were derived, it was apparent a few staff did not take Quality Teaching Rounds (QTR) seriously when coding lessons.

For those students undertaking an accredited package, with or without a vocational pathway, the panel noted, in discussion with a few staff, an absence of common dialogue, shared repertoire, and mutual engagement. For those staff it seemed targets for improvement with this cohort were neither clear or explicit.

Within the **Analysis of and discussion of data** domain, the panel verified the following.

- *School leaders pay close attention to data provided to them about the performance of the school and identify areas in which the school is performing relatively poorly or well.*
- *One or more members of staff have been assigned responsibility for implementing the annual plan, analysing the full range of school data, and summarising, displaying and communicating student outcome data for the school. The school has ensured that appropriate software is available and that at least these assigned staff have been trained to undertake data analyses.*
- *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.*

Whilst the panel noted a comprehensive suite of summative data of student reporting, it could not always ascertain how this directly impacted on the classroom practice of every teacher. Conversations with teachers revealed a detailed understanding of concepts such as statistical significance, though not all teachers framed learning in terms of 'value-added', 'growth', and 'improvement'.

The panel noted that the majority of each year's student intake at Narrabundah College enrolled with fewer, in comparison to the ACT average, academic, behavioural, and attendance issues. Therefore the challenge for the college is to show how improvements can be attributed to data collected and used. The panel could not find evidence that teacher intervention was able to 'produce unusually good outcomes given their student intakes and circumstances', as defined by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), rather that students continued to learn at consistently high rates.

The panel commends the college on its connection with students through Student Services section, noting evidence of the annual collection of data on every student's wellbeing.

The college is justifiably proud of the academic achievement of its students, this is consistently published via a range of communication portals - website, newsletter, etc. The panel noted the comments by some parent representatives that there was at times 'an overemphasis on celebrating ATAR success'.

With respect to the domain **A culture that promotes learning**:

- *There are very few obvious behavioural, attendance or engagement problems and behaviour management takes up very little, if any, time of school leaders and classroom teachers.*
- *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.*
- *Staff morale is generally high.*

The panel noted a number of successful initiatives supporting students' academic and wellbeing journey through Narrabundah College. These included Study Hub, Curriculum of Giving, MensLink, and Sexual Health, Lifestyles and Relationships Program (SCHLiRPS). At the Study Hub conversations with students revealed a deep and energised connection with their subject matter. Typical comments were based on the powerful and significant difference an individual teacher could make. "They engage your imagination and transform a subject." Overwhelmingly students felt connected to the life of the college and supported in dealing with any difficulties. The panel through conversations with some students and staff noted that some students undertaking accredited (A) study were often not engaged in their work to the same extent as the tertiary (T) students.

The panel confirmed that teachers enjoyed their work as typified by 'I love teaching at the college, the kids are great'. Whilst the panel noted positive and caring relationship between teachers and students, the college is yet to establish a consistent collegial culture of mutual trust and support amongst teachers and school leaders. The panel met with some staff who are yet to embrace a focus upon, or show commitment to, the systematic implementation of the Quality Teaching Rounds (QTR).

The panel commends the college for its commitment in inviting parents into classrooms as guest speakers and role models.

In examining the **Targeted use of school resources** domain, the panel noted the following.

- *School records of individual student needs, achievements and progress are maintained centrally and shared across year levels.*
- *The school deploys staff in ways that make best use of their expertise (e.g., specialist reading/science teachers).*
- *The principal and other school leaders have introduced programs and strategies to identify and address the needs of students in the school and are sourcing and applying available resources to meet those needs.*
- *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.*
- *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, refugees) are prioritised, where possible, in the school budget.*
- *Learning spaces are organised for whole group work, small group work and individual work.*

- *Physical learning spaces are used creatively and technology is accessible to the majority of staff and students.*

The panel noted there are well-established practices and programs in place to assist and support student needs, i.e. Study Hub, Community of Giving, WEX, Learning Support, Student Services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) support. The panel noted that although there is scope for many different initiatives and that this is occurring for the majority of students, there are some students who are still not involved.

The use of scaffolds is evident in some teaching areas however the panel noted that further professional learning and refinement is required in creating assessment tasks that can engage the students with the task as well as giving explicit quality criteria.

Discussion with a few parents revealed that better communication is required for work experience (WEX) and it would be welcome as part of the next School Plan. Parents placed high value on WEX, stating that 16 and 17 year olds benefit from this opportunity. Interestingly parents did not mention the physical infrastructure of the school as a matter of importance for improvement. Instead parents spoke positively of the shared ownership of space by teachers and students across the college as evidenced by creative displays of artwork. The parent group recognised the value of ongoing pedagogical expertise stating the college the must be committed to having the best teachers to ensure the best results for students.

Although the panel spoke to students involved in a variety of activities available at the college to promote well-being, several students also indicated that activities, programs, and resources to improve physical health and fitness, in particular, were lacking at the college.

Some staff commented that IT hardware and systems could be improved, with others adopting a watch and wait approach for Google Apps for Education (GAPE).

In regard to the domain **An expert teaching team**, the panel noted the following.

- *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*
- *Teachers visit each other's classrooms*
- *The school is implementing a formal process for conducting professional discussions with staff.*
- *The school provides opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles outside the classroom*

Over the life of the plan, QTR has been a major focus at the college for the improvement of teaching practice. However the panel noted, from the data relating to lesson coding, that this was not completed well. Many teachers had recorded very high ratings for all elements within a single lesson. When questioned teachers reported they had not always been honest or constructive in their feedback on observed shortcomings in teacher practice.

“It is tokenistic and will never work with its current frequency and format”, commented one teacher. Staff reported that ‘teachers talking to teachers is the best way to make improvements’.

The panel noted that not all teachers could articulate the focus of the school-wide Professional Learning (PL) plan.

In reflecting on the **Systematic curriculum delivery** domain, the panel validated the following.

- *The school's curriculum delivery plan identifies curriculum, teaching and learning priorities and requirements. 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 curriculum plan and curriculum delivery (including the time allocated to particular learning) balance requirements to address all learning areas.*
- *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.*

The panel noted the broad selection of courses and units available, particularly for those undertaking a tertiary entrance (T) package. A typical parent comment was 'a stimulating package setting kids up for success'. Conversations with all stakeholders revealed that Narrabundah College remains the college of choice due to this range of subjects, attracting 65 percent out of area enrolment. The panel observed a general overreliance on BSSS data and the prioritising ATAR attainment as the drivers of curriculum. It was noted that delivery was often dominated by the need to expose students to content rather than skill development.

The panel validated the following in consideration of the domain **Differentiated teaching and learning**.

- *School leaders are committed to success for all*
- *Some use is made of assessment instruments to identify individual strengths and weaknesses and starting points for teaching*
- *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.*
- *Regular assessments of student learning are undertaken, but these often are summative*
- *Reports to parents show progress over time*

The panel could not find evidence that differentiation was effectively delivered college wide. A predominate focus upon content sometimes eclipsed considerations of process, learning preference, and individual interest. The reliance upon summative assessment made some students feel their learning was passive and generic. In some faculties the opportunities to undertake accredited (A) study is limited. There were few purely accredited classes, and many students are enrolled in combined T and A classes.

The panel noted the following regarding the domain **Effective pedagogical practices**.

- *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.*
- *Professional learning activities are focused on building teachers' understandings of highly effective teaching strategies*

- *Clarity about what students are expected to learn and be able to do, individualised attention as required, to guide student action are key elements of the school's push for improved teaching and learning.*

The panel found evidence of clarity about what students should learn and be able to do (as deemed by BSSS), and noted that high expectations were held for learning of the majority of students. Whilst content and skills were explicitly taught, particularly for tertiary (T) students, many students commented that feedback was often too late for them to make improvements that would see an improvement in their course grade.

The panel formed the view that to ensure that every student is engaged, challenged and learning successfully, a greater focus needs to be given to student voice. Whilst student-directed learning is not universal, there was clear evidence of emerging exemplary practice in this regard across many faculties. Teachers self-identified a need to further develop their skills around applying formative assessment to student work.

The panel noted and commended a 'high results' culture. It was also affirming to note that the college has introduced the QTR as a key improvement strategy. However the effectiveness of this approach was not reiterated by all staff to an extent that would allow the panel to believe that more effort is not yet needed to achieve an embedded, sustained, and high-effect system.

In the final domain, **School-community partnerships** the panel acknowledges the diversity of established community partnerships and found the following.

- *The school leadership team makes deliberate and strategic use of partnerships with families, local businesses and community organisations to access intellectual, physical and/or other resources not available within the school for the purposes of improving student outcomes. The school's partnerships are being successfully implemented and appear to be adequately resourced and sustainable.*
- *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. All partners have a high level of understanding of, and commitment to, the purposes of the partnership and clear objectives have been set, expressed in terms of improved outcomes for students.*

The panel noted a range of long-standing and successful partnerships with tertiary institutions, foreign embassies, businesses, and international communities. There was evidence for students completing a tertiary entrance package that this provided opportunities to increase their engagement, expand their interests, and succeed in transitions beyond college. However in conversation with some students not seeking to continue academic study beyond college (students undertaking accredited study and/or vocational pathways) the partnerships appeared to be unplanned and infrequent. These students were unable to articulate what they wanted to do in the future other than obtain their year 12 certificate. There is an imperative to inspire these students to aspire. The panel noted, in discussion with both staff and community, that better communication would inform them that WEX is available to all students.

National Safe Schools Audit Tool

The National Safe Schools Framework audit tool was completed by the college's Student Services and senior executive staff. Student Services is comprised of four student advisors, a school psychologist, the TACO officer and the learning support teacher.

The audit identified that the college has strengths in the following domains:

- 1 Leadership commitment to a safe school
- 2 A supportive and safe school culture
- 5 Positive behaviour management
- 7 A focus on student well-being and ownership
- 8 Early intervention and targeted support
- 9 Partnerships with family and community

Areas for improvement were identified as:

- 3 Policies and procedures
- 4 Professional learning
- 6 Engagement, skill development and safe school curriculum

Evidence used in completing the self-evaluation process included the 2014 stakeholder satisfaction survey data and the 2014 MindMatters survey. The panel noted the college is performing well (at or above system-level) in many areas including, support for the management of student behaviour, the value of community partnerships, students being treated fairly, and opportunity to be involved in college activities.

Analysis of results from the audit tool suggested the college focus on domain 3: Policies and procedures. The policies and procedures have been updated and shared with staff, with further work to be undertaken in optimising how best to reach the wider community.

Domains 4 & 6 (professional learning and engagement, skill development and safe school curriculum) were also recommended for improvement. These domains correlated with some student concerns from the MindMatters Survey. Whilst the college acknowledged it had existing programs and events such as N day, college walk, Menslink, SHLiRPs, Paul Dillon and Thomas Nielsen as guest speakers, UN day, peer education and volunteering, it sees this as an area to further address. The safe school audit also recommended professional learning as a domain for improvement. Professional learning was completed by staff for Curriculum of Giving and for MindMatters training, but again the data suggests this is an area they need to further address.

Section E: Commendations and recommendations

Commendations

Narrabundah College is commended for the following.

1. Academic drive of students

The college continues to cement its strong reputation for the academic success of students, with an overwhelming majority of graduates moving directly onto higher education. The panel confirmed, in conversation with students, parents, and staff, that the college actively value-adds to the innate academic drive students bring with their enrolment at Narrabundah College. With a 65 percent of students coming from outside the Priority Enrolment Area (PEA), students and their families arrive with very high expectations of success in standardised performance data and benchmarks. These include the Tertiary Entrance Statement (TES), Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), the International Baccalaureate, the French Baccalauréat, and acquittal against Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS) Certification. The college prioritises meeting the ACT's need for students to attain outstanding academic success. It ferments these students' enthusiasm for academic learning and encourages them to take responsibility for academic achievement. The panel found active academic synergy between student and teacher; where teachers inspire students, and students inspire teachers. "The college has taken innate ability and made them [students] something more, engaged their imagination and transformed a child's academic focus" (quote from a parent)

2. Teacher investment in student success

The college ensures its vision of 'discover, develop, excel' underpins and supports a range of high-quality practices and programs, focused on improving student learning outcomes. The panel found compelling evidence, validated through conversations with parents and students, that many teachers are actively invested in individual student success. One parent summarised this as "a focus on specific learning outcomes for an individual student, rather than generic outputs". The college has purposefully established practices and programs such as Study Hub, off-line classes, study tutorials, conferencing one-on-one, and connections with businesses, universities, embassies and past students to set up guest speakers. In addition to supporting a student's academic journey, the panel found evidence of a broader community through programs exemplified by United Nations Day, the Curriculum of Giving, and peer education.

3. Inclusive environment

The college has established a genuinely inclusive environment, successfully nurturing the authentic acceptance of the full range of student diversity. Support mechanisms for students dealing with academic and social/emotional issues are in clear evidence. The school has actively sought ways to enhance student achievement and wellbeing through a range of proactive and responsive range of programs and initiative such as Mens Link, Sexual Health, Lifestyles and Relationships Program (SHLiRPS), and a student services section offering a suite of relevant. Conversations with students, and their parents, confirmed that this supportive environment significantly draws prospective enrolment to the college. Parents also commended the genuine and overt presence of student achievement, as evidenced by students 'owning the space' throughout the college. The panel noted that the majority of display items were student-generated or student-derived. Parents praised this shared

ownership of teaching and learning areas, as well as responsive and timely pastoral care intervention.

4. Broad selection of tertiary (T) courses and units

The college is to be commended for offering an extremely broad selection of courses and units. The panel noted, in conversation with a range of students undertaking tertiary packages, that Narrabundah is the college of choice because of this availability and the opportunity it affords. Typical parent comments: “a stimulating package”, “sets kids up for success”. The panel noted Narrabundah College, with its 65% out-of-area enrolment, continues to successfully capture key market share of specific demographic cohorts such as the ‘triple science, double maths’ package. The Languages Centre has established an enviable reputation in languages, providing both tertiary (T) and accredited (A) study in nine languages. More than sixty per cent of Narrabundah students study a language other than English from this extensive offering.

Recommendations

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

1. Review of non-tertiary course packages

Whilst Narrabundah College is driven by a belief that every student is capable of successful learning, the panel found evidence, in discussion with students and teachers, as well as observation of classes, that there is a need for the college to review existing non-tertiary course packages. There is an imperative to explore options, including transition to post-school pathways for students who will not be going onto university. In discussion with the panel, students undertaking an accredited (A) package were unable to articulate what they wanted to do after leaving college. Typical comments included “I am unsure of my pathway” and “I just want to get my year 12 certificate”. The panel recommends the college develop a highly successful learning culture, such as already exists for tertiary students, that will promote aspiration and enthusiasm within students completing accredited study and undertaking vocational pathways. Supporting all Narrabundah students to become enthusiastic and independent learners, through greater opportunity and choice, will strengthen the college’s standing in the realm of public education.

2. Differentiated teaching and learning

While the panel recognised that there has been a recent focus on differentiating assessment tasks, the complexity of discipline literacy, and its associated technicality, is still being delivered in daily lessons at the same rate despite the differing learning abilities that may be sitting within the one class. In particular the panel noted that many classes contained both tertiary (T) and accredited (A) students, yet the instruction was undifferentiated. One tertiary student described this: “everyone is valued, but the difficulty is the mode of delivery which is the same”. The panel found evidence (lesson observation, interviews, course outlines, etc.) that in some classes teachers teach the same curriculum to all students with similar levels of individual support. Staff recognised that differentiation of instruction, assessment, and grading could be a priority in the next school plan.

3. Student voice and student-directed learning

In discussion with a range of students the panel found evidence that student voice could receive greater acknowledgement. Many students reported that now, in their final years of

secondary education, they wanted to take greater responsibility for their own learning and participation at Narrabundah. "A great teacher listens to students and isn't stuck with their own ideas; they can shift from teacher-directed to student-directed tasks and allow for student voice in both the topic and the assessment. These teachers will determine the student's interest, rather than blindly following established topics." (year 12 tertiary student). Whilst the panel noted a range of teacher practice in providing students with greater control, ownership, and accountability over a student's education, this was in the minority with some students stating they were reluctant to give feedback or making requests because they did not wish to appear ignorant or challenge a teacher's authority. Students said learning was more meaningful when co-directed. "Some teachers know a lot but don't connect with kids. These teachers don't understand *now* time."

4. Timely feedback to enhance student learning

It was noted that the college is fully compliant with the BSSS course accreditation processes, calculation of unit and course scores, and processes regarding unit assessment and awarding of grades. In discussion, both teachers and students, told the panel of an over-reliance on summative assessment, at the expense of routine data, and its evaluation and discussion with students. Some students commented that feedback was given but at times it was too late to make any improvements that could positively influence their grade. More contemporary practice was noted, with students talking favourably of the conferencing style of feedback given by a number of teachers. However they said this was in the minority. Although they asked for help to recognise their progress and respond to enhance their achievement, overall they felt that the current summative feedback was focussed on reporting and certification. On a positive note some teachers were able to discuss the emerging, though sporadic use, of formative exemplars. "Teachers learn best from listening to students. We are the reason for them being here" (year 12 student)

5. Systematic strategies to identify excellent teaching

Whilst it was noted that Quality Teaching Rounds (QTR) is an improvement focus, the panel found that some staff have not yet fully embraced it. Whilst many teachers expressed that they learned a lot from talking to colleagues and observing others teach, there was not a reliable method for collecting and interpreting evidence to identify excellent teaching and learning, and share successful strategies within and across faculties. Some teachers reported that the QTR coding already undertaken was inaccurate due to teachers inflating scores, and that it could have been more honest and constructive about shortcomings. Other staff questioned the purpose of QTR when it was done so infrequently, believing it to be tokenistic. Discussion with parents revealed an imperative, "a priority for the next school plan is to be committed to have the best teachers". A representative student stated "School is a learning environment. It shouldn't be any different for teachers"

6. Effective communication

Through discussion with a range of stakeholders the panel noted an opportunity to improve communications within the college. It was felt that staff meetings could be sharpened to focus the whole school's attention on core learning priorities. Staff reported that attendance would improve if there was clarity of purpose and greater relevancy. Students reported that they don't always know what is going on as the current communication pathways of N groups and TV monitors are ineffective. Students are seeking a more contemporary and immediate mode of delivery.

Record of Validation Process

The following people were members of the external validation panel for Narrabundah College conducted on Monday 3rd to Wednesday 5th August 2015

Name: Frank Fogliati School: Black Mountain School

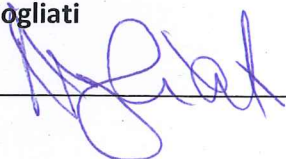
Name: Robin Morrell School: Lyneham High School

Name: Darren Leach School: St Edmund's 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: _____

24.9.2015

As principal of **Narrabundah College** I accept the Validation Report on behalf of the school community.

Name: Kerrie Grundy

Signature: _____



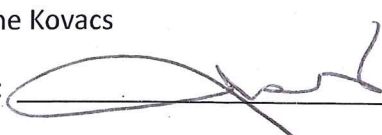
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24.9.15

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: _____

24/9/15