School Review Report

Prepared for
Avondale Primary School
Western metropolitan region
School Workforce Reform & School Improvement Division
Department of Education & Early Childhood Development

2009

- School Number       4812
- Principal           Mr Paul Mulroyan
- School Council President Mr Tony Baldwin
- Type of Review      Continuous
- School Reviewer     Dr Libby Tudball
- Date of Review Meeting at school August 24, 2009
- Date of this Report (final version) October 27, 2009
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1.0 Executive Summary

Avondale Primary School is a friendly, caring and reflective learning community that is committed to continually striving for learning excellence, the development of core goals and values, and a shared whole school vision that reflects key trends in education. The school has a strong philosophy expressing the view that ‘every student can attain high levels of academic achievement, and be a responsible community member’. The school has a well-founded reputation in the local community, and more than 30% of current parents attended the school, so have maintained their connection to the local community. Parents express very positive views about all aspects of the school including school improvement, approachability of staff and the learning focus. The review has demonstrated that Avondale Primary School has a strong culture of continuous school improvement. The school population is expected to grow in the coming years as a result of local housing development, and the staff will therefore expand, so school leaders have stressed the importance of continuing to redefine school programs and goals.

The school has had a major focus on literacy and teaching and learning in the previous strategic plan, and also aimed to provide a safe and stimulating environment for students. The distributed leadership model and sharing of professional learning that is being developed in the school will ensure that the school is focusing on key strategies for improvement that are also a core part of the Western Metropolitan region’s vision. Hallmarks of the school’s ripple chart outlining their vision include the emphases on developing pedagogy to improve student learning outcomes, the continued implementation of a school based mentor/coaching program to support teacher professional learning and school change, and a focus on the central importance of responding to evaluation data. Recent staff opinion surveys do show that there is room for further improvement in some areas of professional interaction in relation to curriculum planning, participative decision making and clarity about professional roles, so the school is to be commended for their proactive work that has been commenced in this area. Open communication amongst the staff, and a shared focus, are key elements of effective schools. School morale has grown substantially over the past three years, as have staff attitudes to the efficacy of appraisal, so these efforts need to be maintained in the next strategic plan. Clearly there is strong staff collegiality, since 2009 data shows that 95% say they receive support from colleagues.

Student learning
There is much to be celebrated at Avondale Primary School. Teachers remain at the school because of their shared sense of commitment, the fact that they gain satisfaction in their
work, and the recognition that they have a direct and valued influence on the children. Prudent use of resources and strategic focusing on professional learning has supported teachers in providing high quality programs for all students. A key emphasis has been on improving practice through sharing of strategies across the school, and encouraging openness to trying new pedagogies.

The period since the last School review has been a challenging period with considerable curriculum change and range of new educational initiatives associated with the DEECD Blueprint and the introduction of VELS. The school review has demonstrated that at Avondale Primary School, the teachers have worked collegially to plan, share the load, and implement the necessary changes, but they do need to continue in the process of embedding VELS and ensuring student achievement of progression points. Teachers have identified the need to look closely at assessment, since there is a bunching around ‘satisfactory’. Through peer moderation it is hoped that teachers will more readily recognise a range of achievement levels in classes, including higher achievers.

In the review discussions it was also recognised that there needs to be an ongoing emphasis on effective use of Information and Communication Technologies as tools for learning and to monitor and record learning progression. Careful planning and use of resources will be necessary to maximise access to and use of cutting edge technology in a rapidly changing Information Communication Technologies (ICT) environment. The school already has 7 data projectors across classrooms, and a range of ICT programs being utilized across programs.

The review data tracking staff views on students’ attitudes to learning shows that 100% of staff believe Avondale Primary students are motivated and keen to do well, with maximum effort put into their learning, but they believe there is scope for students to be involved more in decision making. The school could consider looking more closely at the VELS personal and social learning domain that includes goals for students to learn more about themselves and their place in society, and about how to stay healthy and active, and to develop skills in building social relationships and working with others. Students need to take responsibility for their learning, and learn about their rights and responsibilities as global citizens. This report includes suggestions for how this area of the curriculum could be further developed, while at the same time maintaining the strong emphasis on the central areas of literacy and numeracy.
The school has received accreditation for being a Waterwise school through City West Water, in recognition of their programs including ‘water warriors’ and work in monitoring local water quality. Teachers express a desire to continue their focus on sustainability. Review data showed that staff believe students in the school are highly motivated, so the area of sustainability is one area where students could be even further engaged. However, there is scope for further good practice to grow through programs based on authentic and purposeful themes and topics, and through student centred and investigative learning strategies including inquiry methodology and the E5 DEECD initiative. Review data showed that 100% of staff are sure that students in the school are encouraged to experience success and there is a clear view that students are treated as responsible young citizens. It is important for efforts in this area to be maintained.

The Avondale Primary School Level Report (2008) showed that students have achieved some very good academic results, with prep-2 reading results well above the SFO percentile range, and results above the state mean in reading and writing, and on the mean in speaking and listening. The students are also achieving pleasing results in the NAPLAN year 3 and 5 reading and numeracy assessments. Similarly, the results for mathematics show that the school is achieving highly in terms of the SFO range, and the results in mathematics are marginally stronger than for English. However, the school does recognise the need to maintain efforts in these key areas. The school has achieved sustained progress in the previous Charter period (2005-2009) in each of the review areas of student learning, well being and engagement, and pathways and transitions, but also recognises the need to continually develop school effectiveness.

**Student wellbeing** is strong at Avondale Primary School, with students expressing very strong student connectedness and feelings that their teachers have strong empathy with their needs. The students who were interviewed spoke enthusiastically about their school. They enjoy coming to school. They were able to clearly articulate views on how they learn and what helps and hinders their learning. Several students commented that this school helps students ‘who aren’t as good at some areas’, ‘challenges you if are ready to learn more’ and is ‘a good place to be’. While all students feel safe, boys in particular feel very safe in the school. All students believe that behaviour is very good, so clearly there is a well developed sense of discipline, and clear expectations for how students should behave that is consistent across the school, but in particular in grade 6. One area requiring continued attention is the need to reduce student absence, perhaps through the ‘It’s not Ok to be Away’ program.
In regard to **student pathways and transitions**, the aim in the last strategic plan was ‘to develop in students the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed for a seamless transition through the stages of learning as described in the VELS’. The school has provided a range of programs to support transition from re-school into prep, and from year 6 to secondary school. There is a view that further developments in tracking students’ achievement through school and ensuring that records and strategies are shared.

It is evident from the review that the school leaders wish to ensure that Avondale Primary School functions as a highly effective professional learning community, and they value the highly committed teachers and administrators. The reviewer noted the great deal of effort that is expended to develop and share common understandings and expectations. The review showed that the school wishes to continue to improve their professional culture and to share what works. Integral to this view is recognition of the need to meet diverse learner needs through an engaging and differentiated curriculum, and shared views of pedagogy developed by the teachers.

The School Self-Evaluation (SSE) report prepared for the review is exemplary. It provides clear insights into what the school has aimed to achieve, and analytical comments on the school’s track record in the past three years. Embedded in the report is a clear desire amongst the professionals to learn from each other, through team teaching and sharing of practice, as well as learning from carefully selected external consultants, and for these ideas to inform further growth and development in the school.

The community of Avondale Primary School has utilised the review process to reflect on their successes, and to consider the future directions of the school with reference to student needs and interests, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) policy, and larger questions of relevance to the school, in setting a vision for the future in all areas of school planning. The thorough planning of the Avondale learning model will encourage thinking about teaching and learning, and open an frank communication amongst all staff will drive further development. Strong emphasis should also be on conversations about what is to be taught, why and how, with particular reference to coverage of all elements of VELS since this curriculum does include each of the key elements of student learning in terms of personal and social learning, discipline based, and
interdisciplinary learning including using ICT, creativity, thinking and communication, all important parts of educating young people for the 21st.

Avondale Primary School moves into the next phase of Strategic planning with a very clear vision that ‘every student can attain high levels of academic achievement, and be a responsible community member’ so the following core goals are recommended:

**Student learning:**
- To maximise achievement levels for all students through the development and implementation of the Avondale school learning model encouraging collaborative teaching across the VELS.

**Student wellbeing and engagement:**
- To provide a safe and engaging learning environment that fosters inquiry based learning, develops student leadership, and improves students’ social competencies and responsibility.

**Student pathways and transitions:**
- To provide a smooth and seamless transition for students in their movements from pre-school through the year levels and into secondary school.

**The review process:**
While the school data and evaluation is very positive, and there is much to celebrate in the school, the review has led to the identification and clarification of areas the school can focus on for further development. This Executive summary includes suggested targets and key improvement strategies that may be developed through each of the annual implementation plans 2010 - 2013.

It is hoped that the achievement of the challenges set for the school in the goals and key improvement strategies, developed through the school’s own careful planning and the review process, will result in growth and development for the whole school community at Avondale Primary School. I wish all members of the school community well in their endeavours.

Dr. Libby Tudball, School Reviewer
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<th>Goals for student learning</th>
<th>Targets</th>
<th>Key Improvement Strategies</th>
<th>Suggested actions (optional)</th>
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<td>1. All students deemed capable to achieve at or above the expected VELS level as measured by teacher judgements. 2. Improve student outcomes from grade 3 to grade 5, so that the % of students in the top two NAPLAN bands is maintained in English and % of students in lower bands is reduced, and P-2 English online assessments show improvement each year 3. Improve student outcomes from grade 3 to grade 5, so that the % of students in the top two NAPLAN bands is maintained in Mathematics % of students in lower bands is reduced.</td>
<td>1. Build effective teaching, learning and planning teams to further embed each VELS level. 2. Continue to develop the Avondale planning, sharing and reflecting teaching model. 3. Use the collaborative model to further implement VELS across all domains including inquiry based pedagogies 4. Explicit teaching in literacy and numeracy. 5. Utilise ICT for effective learning. 6. Improve focus on assessment strategies of, as and for learning.</td>
<td>1. Redefine leadership roles and further develop team protocols for communication and role clarity 2. Set and plan clear learning goals around inquiry based topics that interest students and are VELS based 3. Develop and maintain programs to track and meet individual student needs. 4. Explicit focus on English and Maths (VELS). 5. Share and build on existing practice in ICT. 6. Focus on assessing learning in staff PD and with students.</td>
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<td><strong>2. Student wellbeing and engagement:</strong> To provide a safe and engaging learning environment that fosters inquiry based learning, develops student leadership, and improves students’ social competencies, motivation and responsibility</td>
<td>1. Increase student opinion on decision making to 75% by 2012</td>
<td>1. Engage students in authentic and purposeful learning that increases their engagement and responsibility 2. Develop a greater focus on personal and social learning and civics and citizenship 3. Develop understanding and implementation of the E5 model of inquiry based learning.</td>
<td>1. Review curriculum themes 2. Audit coverage of VELS personal and social learning and civics and citizenship. 3. Staff workshop on E5 and thinking strategies, with a specific focus also on girls’ motivation.</td>
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<td>3. Student pathways and transitions</td>
<td>4. Continue to build student and parent understanding of core school values: respect for each other and the environment, care and compassion, do your best and cooperate.</td>
<td>4. Continue explicit classroom focus on developing understanding of core school goals and values.</td>
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| To provide a smooth and seamless transition for students in their movements from pre-school through the VELS levels and into secondary school. | 1. In 2010 develop and administer a survey of parents re: “Through School Transitions”, and improve satisfaction levels by 2013 as compared to the 2010 benchmark data.  
2. In 2010 develop and administer a survey of students re: “Transition to Secondary School” and by 2013 improve satisfaction levels as compared to the 2010 benchmark data. | 1. Teachers share and reflect on units and teaching strategies to create consistency and common understandings as students move through VELS levels.  
2. Ensure common understandings within whole school frameworks.  
1. Increase teacher sharing, reflection and learning about through school classroom practices in staff meetings and in classrooms.  
2. Review resources and budget to ensure “transitions” is appropriately funded. |
2.0 Methodology

Avondale Primary School undertook a rigorous self-evaluation process that involved all staff, the school council and parents, in reflecting on the previous Charter period (2004-2008). The evaluation included many discussions, both formal and informal, involving staff in whole group meetings as well as the school council. Initially the staff worked through each section of the school data in bi-weekly meetings, and the principal collated draft statements before posting them on ‘google docs’ to allow further input from staff and council. Parents were also consulted and invited to provide input. The groups looked closely at all available data, including school level reports and survey data, in order to analyze what the information revealed about the achievements of the students and school community, and areas requiring emphasis in the next strategic planning period.

Members of the school leadership team played a key role in providing their views throughout the review. On the review day, other members of staff involved more closely in the three student outcome areas – student learning, student pathways and transitions and student engagement and well-being in the school from early years to year 6, were involved in discussions in each of these areas, to ensure representative views.

The reviewer made a preliminary visit to the school to meet the principal, Ms Paul Mulroyan and key staff, to visit classrooms, and to look at the school grounds and facilities. Arrangements for the review panel meeting and for access to copies of the school level report and all necessary data were made during the visit.

The review was held on August 24, 2009, with the following key panel participants as well as staff members from across all school levels:

The School review panel:

Mr. Paul Mulroyan       Principal and chair
Mr. John Dainutis      Regional Network Leader
Mr. Peter Crowley      Western Metropolitan regional office
Dr. Libby Tudball   School Reviewer
Ms. Lindsay Grant       School Council representative

Student focus group

A focus group discussion was held with a group of students representing the views of students in years 4-6.
3.0 School Context

Avondale Primary School was established in 1961, and is located on an attractive, well-maintained site, close to all amenities, approximately 10 kilometres north-west of Melbourne. The school is situated in a geographically definable area surrounded on three sides by the Maribyrnong River. The school has strong links with the local community and supports a range of community and DEECD activities, including CASES training facilities.

Enrolments have been progressively increasing since the mid 1990s to the current 2009 figure of 292. Avondale Primary School has a current enrolment of 292 students. Several medium and high density housing developments in the immediate and adjacent neighborhoods are currently under construction. Enrolments are expected to continue increasing at 5% per year for the foreseeable future. There are six junior grades and seven senior grades. Each department in the school has two Professional Learning Teams based on VELS Levels. Specialist classes are provided in LOTE (Italian), Physical Education and Information Technology.

Avondale Primary School has a clearly defined philosophy based on the view that every student can attain high levels of academic achievement, and be a responsible community member. The school vision states: ‘We aim for students:

- to have an enthusiasm for learning
- to develop a broad and strong base of knowledge and skills
- to think and act with competence, objectivity and creativity
- to show respect and sensitivity to others through their experience of living in a learning community
- to show a capacity to lead, to share and to co-operate with others
- to accept responsibility and discipline
- to find reward in participating, doing our best.

The school vision is to maintain a caring and supportive environment that promotes in every student a desire to achieve, self-confidence, personal pride, social skills and a knowledge of society and their place in it’.
4.0 Evaluation of Performance

4.1 Student Learning

What student outcomes was the school trying to achieve?

In the school self evaluation it is noted that there were two overall priorities in the last School Strategic Plan: Literacy and Teaching and Learning. 'The school set out to improve the achievement of students overall, but particularly in the middle years, and to further develop teaching strategies that support exceptional children. This included both those ‘at risk’ and those achieving at a high level. It was also planned to improve reporting processes

In the 2005 School Strategic Plan the specific goals in the area of student learning were to:

1. Improve student achievement against the English Domain Standards in the VELS at all year levels from Prep to Year 6.
2. To improve student achievement against the Mathematics Domain Standards in the VELS at all year levels from Prep to Year 6.

The school targets set were:

- To increase the growth in Reading achievement from Year 3 to Year 5 as measured by the AIM to a full two years of growth in mean terms.
- To increase the proportion of students at each of Prep and Years 2, 4 and 6 assessed as meeting (i.e., established or above in the current terminology) English and Mathematics standards appropriate to that level, to at least 90% by the end of 2008.
- To reduce the proportion of students who fail to meet expected levels in English and Mathematics, to no more than 5% by the end of 2008.

What student outcomes did the school achieve?

The data tracking the school's achievement in student learning demonstrates considerable success across all areas. The School Self-Evaluation (SSE) report noted that it was difficult to 'accurately state whether the school fulfilled the first target, as the AIM was replaced by the NAPLAN which presents scores on a different scale'. However, it can be concluded that in relation to VELS levels and state mean data, the school met its intended target one year earlier than anticipated. In numeracy, the school exceeded the state mean but did not meet its intended target by 2007.
The SSE noted that ‘efforts to improve English appear to have been reasonably successful. Overall, CSF and AIM means for the school tend to be around those of the like group. However, there are some concerns for one or two cohorts for which achievement was a little lower. AIM data tend to be a little higher than CSF assessments, with Reading means generally at or above those of the like group in the past five years. Participation rates in the tests occasionally dropped below 80%, indicating some caution is needed in considering results. This also has some influence on measures of added value. Nonetheless, the “added value” for the cohort of students moving from Years 3 to 5 tends to be above that of the like group. In some years there has been considerable difference in the means for Reading and Writing, with Reading the stronger. This may stem from higher achievement of girls than boys in Writing. In some years the difference between the two groups has been higher than that across the state’.

‘Results in Mathematics have tended to be marginally stronger than those for English. This is particularly the case for Number, for which means are a little higher than for Measurement. Year 3 AIM means have remained above those of the like group over the long term and were at or above the 75th percentile in 2004. Again some caution is needed in view of low participation rates in some years. The “added value” for students from Years 3 to 5 is generally similar to that of the like group’.

The Principal noted that mathematics is an area that the staff considered carefully in their self evaluation for the review and there will need to be ongoing attention to the area. However, ‘it is Reading and Writing that is critical to future success for students’ and the school does wish to ‘continue to support students in the early years that are so critical to reading development’.

**Why did the school achieve / not achieve improved student outcomes?**

Planning for effective learning is a strong feature of school organisation at Avondale Primary School. There has been a coordinated effort to increase professional sharing throughout the previous strategic planning period. This has been particularly evident in 2009 when key staff have worked together to develop and embed the Avondale school learning model and to particularly feature school based coaching and sharing of effective pedagogies to improve teacher, and subsequently student learning. One of the strongest features of Avondale Primary School is the strong collegiality amongst the staff. They are working together effectively to ensure that curriculum scope and sequence is well planned, and they utilize appropriate teaching and learning strategies to ensure successful learning for all students.
The school staff opinion data shows very high levels of staff optimism about the students’ motivations and capacity to learn. The school leaders work effectively as a team, they value the commitment and hard work of the teachers, and there is a strongly collaborative culture established in the school.

The teachers represent a mix of highly experienced teachers and newer members of the profession. The school leaders have identified areas where support needs to be provided for student who are both higher and lower achievers across the various school year levels. During the review, junior school staff stressed the need to continue Reading Recovery activities as well as providing opportunities for enrichment activities for students deemed to be beyond the level of other students. They also commented on how important it is to maintain buddy reading systems for those who don’t read frequently at home.

The school has also developed some very explicit strategies for developing literacy including for example, deconstructing text for meaning to meet needs of students with a language background other than English who enter at prep.

In a school website document (2009) the principal notes that: ‘Student achievement is the primary motivation and measure of the school’s success. Success is more than academic achievement measured in a student’s assessment results; it also includes student participation in a wide range of artistic, sporting, civic and cultural activities as well as the development of self-knowledge’.

Avondale Primary School has achieved continual improvement in all AIM data over the last seven years. This improvement is due to a focus upon student learning as the paramount concern in staff professional learning activities. Time is provided weekly for staff to share experiences, read research articles and discuss issues concerning student learning. The school leaders and teachers are also very aware of the need to continue with an explicit focus on literacy and numeracy as core aspects of student learning, and this is emphasized in the Avondale school learning model. Teachers from the prep-2 levels commented during the review that there are very clear structures in place to ensure effective learning where the teachers support each other, share resources, reflect on what works and what needs changing, and they appreciate the fact that they are provided with regular planning time. Regular targeted professional learning programs have also been well planned and utilized, and the Performance and Development culture is well established in the school, particularly through their own school based coaching model. Teachers work with leaders to address what the data reveals as requiring improvement, and then work to develop that area.
While the teaching and learning resources in the school are adequate, and most teachers have embraced and are using new technologies in their classrooms, the staff articulate the view that the small learning spaces and single classrooms constrain some aspects of effective learning they could develop. The older style buildings do not allow for open learning, team teaching with year level groups combined, or banks of share computers. It is the hope of staff that there will be opportunities to improve building resources in the coming years.

**How effectively did the school manage its resources to support improved student outcomes?**

The school reviewer is impressed by how carefully and effectively the school leaders have utilised human, physical and financial resources to support improved student outcomes, particularly through the policy of sending staff to targeted professional learning programs and then encouraging the sharing of knowledge amongst colleagues. Resource use has been planned to maximise the efficacy of teacher professional learning with the aim of improving student learning. The principal noted in the school self evaluation that ‘discretionary expenditure to support multi-literacies, numeracy and reading comprehension has seen improvement in teacher skills and knowledge in all areas’. It has also allowed the purchase of new equipment. Staff did comment during the review that they would like to see teaching and learning resources more centrally located for better access, and would like to see improvements in the learning spaces.

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

The Avondale School leaders and staff have a very positive attitude to continuing school improvement and a considerable amount of work has already gone into the development of clarity about the school values, and the creation of a learning community that encourages learning for all. It will be important that all staff, parents and students continue to be involved in this process of identifying and then enacting the school vision. During the review process, the principal noted that he believes: ‘we have effective teams now, but readily concede the point that they can be better. The question is how does one measure team effectiveness? What actions (professional learning) or measures will be associated with this key strategy?’ The reviewer has recommended that staff continue their excellent collegiality through school based coaching, but during the coming period for planning, also include a more explicit focus
on further embedding VELS curriculum, paying particular attention to tracking individual students’ progress through progression points.

The suggested core goal for improvement in student learning for the next strategic planning period is:

*To maximise achievement levels for all students through the development and implementation of a school curriculum model encouraging collaborative teaching and differentiated learning across the VELS.*

During the review it was clear that teaching staff and team leaders agree that the implementation of the VELS still requires continued thinking and development regarding how curriculum can be planned to ensure achievement of learning in each of the areas of personal and social learning, discipline based learning and interdisciplinary learning, in a manner that differentiates where individual students have reached in terms of their own progression. The development of individual learning plans can greatly assist in this process. It can be a very positive experience for students and their parents to be able to see and understand the way that they have progressed over each school year. There also needs to be continued reflection on the Principles of Effective Learning.

One specific area identified during the School review for improvement is the need for teachers to moderate assessment to ensure consistency of teacher judgements against VELS standards, and the need to broaden teacher knowledge in terms of state-wide expectations. One way for teachers to develop a better understanding of the VELS levels is for teachers to work together to plan inquiry based units and themes across the VELS domains.

In the next four year Strategic planning period, there will be ongoing new initiatives in the use of ICTs that the school will need to respond to including the Ultranet, and new ICT strategies that are even more focused on student learning. During the review, it was identified for example, that the school will need to continue to implement effective use of ICTs including the use of blogs, wikis, WebQuests, and other uses of the internet for active learning. The school should continue to monitor the development of individual growth in the EPotential continuum, and in particular to use the excellent and diverse strategies found on the website: [http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/elearning/planning/default.htm](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/elearning/planning/default.htm)

More specifically, the following goal, targets, strategies and actions for the continued improvement in student learning have been identified through the School review process in consultation with the reviewer, the Principal and review panel:
### Goal for student learning
To maximise achievement levels for all students through the development and implementation of the Avondale school learning model encouraging collaborative and shared teaching across the VELS.

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<td>2. Set and plan clear learning goals around inquiry based topics that interest students and are VELS based</td>
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<td>3. Improve student outcomes from grade 3 to grade 5, so that the % of students in the top two NAPLAN bands is maintained in Mathematics and % of students in lower bands is reduced.</td>
<td>3. Use the collaborative model to further implement VELS across all domains including inquiry based pedagogies</td>
<td>3. Develop and maintain programs to track and meet individual student needs</td>
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| 1. Explicit teaching in literacy and numeracy. | 4. Explicit teaching in literacy and numeracy. | 4. Explicit focus on English and Maths (VELS). |
| 5. Utilise ICT for effective learning. | 5. Utilise ICT for effective learning. | 5. Share and build on existing practice in ICT |
| 6. Improve focus on assessment strategies of, as and for learning | 6. Improve focus on assessment strategies of, as and for learning | 6. Focus on assessing learning in staff PD and with students |

### 4.2 Student Pathways and Transitions

What student outcomes was the school trying to achieve?

In the previous strategic plan (2005-2009) the goal was to develop in students the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed for a seamless transition through the stages of learning, as described in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards.
What student outcomes did the school achieve?

In the review discussions, it was made clear that ensuring the effective and smooth transition of students from pre-school into school, and from year 6 into secondary school has been a strong focus, and there are many strategies in place to assist students move to the next year level. As a result, Avondale Primary School has provided an effective transition program for students moving from pre-school to prep, that has meant students settle very easily into the school. Parents feel that information about the school is provided, and it is particularly straightforward for those families who move form the pre-school that is located adjacent to the school property. Teachers working in the prep area of the school noted during the review that new students settle quickly, and programs in place to assess student learning needs are effective. The strong parent satisfaction levels in terms of school connectedness is evidence of this success.

It is difficult to assess the success of year 6 transition other than anecdotally, but the feedback the school receives from parents and past students is that transitions are smooth.

Why did the school achieve / not achieve improved student outcomes?

The reviewer noted that the school has a very warm and welcoming culture, and staff who are approachable and communicative, and these qualities are recognised and valued by parents and students. Parents are given a school prospectus that explains the school’s core vision, values and goals. Transition programs at Avondale are seen as a positive experience for the prep level students. During the review, teachers from the prep level expressed confidence in the way they start the school year. They also believe that the school is very welcoming for students and parents, and the strategies they use for evaluating student individual learning needs early in their programs mean they are working effectively with the students. The teachers said that the early years in the school are well resourced and supported. The buddy program where prep students have a senior partner is also working effectively.

In the senior school, activities are planned throughout the year to assist the year six students with the transition to secondary school. Programs are designed to provide opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning. They have opportunities to find out about and visit local schools. The school makes sure that all grade six students are aware of information nights at the various secondary destination schools, and have a strong track record in preparing their students academically for the next stage of their schooling.

As the year six students leave, there is a special farewell program that recognises students as individuals.
How effectively did the school manage its resources to support improved student outcomes?

It is evident that human and financial resources are utilised effectively to plan the pre-school transition activities. It requires careful use of teacher time and expertise to organise the number of pre-school visits and activities that will appropriately engage the students so that they develop a positive view of transition.

Some attempts have been made to improve through school transitions, but further resources could be dedicated to this goal in the next strategic planning period.

What can the school do in the future to continue to improve?

The review has revealed that closer analysis of student pathways and transitions throughout the school could be enhanced, particularly from year 4 – 5. Students interviewed during the review said that they have found it easy to move from each year level as the school is such a caring community, and teachers are seen to be approachable, but students did note that expectations do sometimes vary amongst different grade teachers. Teachers expressed the view that there should be a closer focus on the transition of individual learners in their achievement in VELS progression points.

There can also be continued attempts to develop individual portfolios to track student learning. Some teachers have begun to develop these portfolios online, and discussions could occur amongst the staff to share the efficacy of these strategies, so that assessment data and analyses of student development and learning can be accessed by teachers from year to year, so individual learning needs can be met.

The school will also need to continue collaborating with local pre-schools, and particularly Avondale Kindergarten, to ensure that students enter Prep appropriately prepared for school.

The following goal, targets, strategies and actions for the continued improvement in pathways and transitions have been identified through the School review process in consultation with the reviewer, the Principal and review panel:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal for transition and pathways</th>
<th>Targets</th>
<th>Key Improvement Strategies</th>
<th>Suggested actions (optional)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. To provide a smooth and seamless transition for students in their movements from preschool through the VELS levels and into secondary school. | 1. In 2010 develop and administer a survey of parents re: “Through School Transitions”, and improve satisfaction levels by 2013 as compared to the 2010 benchmark data.  
2. In 2010 develop and administer a survey of students re: “Transition to Secondary School” and by 2012 improve satisfaction levels as compared to the 2010 benchmark data. | 1. Teachers share and reflect on units and teaching strategies to create consistency and common understandings as students move through VELS levels.  
2. Ensure common understandings within whole school frameworks. | 1. Increase teacher sharing, reflection and learning about through school classroom practices in staff meetings and in classrooms.  
2. Review resources and budget to ensure “transitions” is appropriately funded. |

### 4.3 Student Engagement and Wellbeing

The school set out to achieve a range of desired outcomes relating to student well being: particularly with regard to providing a safe and stimulating environment for students. 

The aim identified in the last School Strategic Plan was: 

*To develop students who have strong social competencies and resilience, a positive valuing of self and a conscious personal and social values base; have skills in cooperation, communication and negotiation; and are independent of mind, responsible, persevering, self-regulating and reflective.*

**The school targets were:**

1. The identification of programs / pedagogical approaches that contribute to developing students’ community building and team worker skills as part of a curriculum plan to implement VELS by the end of 2006.
2. Student opinion that falls within or exceeds the middle 50% for all variable items by the end of 2008 for both boys and girls in Years 5 & 6.

3. A progressive reduction in student absenteeism so that the average absences at each year level are no more than statewide benchmarks by the end of 2008

**What student outcomes did the school achieve?**

The self evaluation report notes that the ‘first target was met with the implementation of the *You Can Do It* program that develops a sense of community and assists develop team skills among students. The low incidence of bullying and other inappropriate behaviours is testament to the success of this program. The third target was also realised. The 2008 School Level report clearly shows that student absences have been below the statewide average in most grades and the aggregated data shows that as a whole, the school consistently has fewer student absence days that the state average.

The student opinion data for 2009 shows that the students have a positive view of teacher efficacy and empathy, strong school connectedness and motivation, as well as a sense that students in the school are very well behaved.

In terms of achievement of the broader overall goals for students’ wellbeing, the reviewer found that the staff opinion data demonstrates that while there is room for improvement, staff see the students as motivated and well behaved, but would like to see them even more involved in decision making and engagement with curriculum decision making to build their confidence, problem solving skills and social competencies.

**Why did the school achieve / not achieve improved student outcomes?**

The school leaders and teachers work very hard to ensure students’ wellbeing and engagement. On the review day, the parent representative wished to record her appreciation for all that the staff do to promote the happiness and wellbeing of her children. She commented that teachers are approachable and accessible. The students were able to list many features of the school programs that they really value including ‘fun activities such as camps’, ‘special events, the buddy program, art, music, the school concert and physical education’. The students interviewed by the reviewer were all completely positive about the support of their teachers. The reviewer particularly focused on asking boys in the focus
group questions about their attitudes to school, in an attempt to identify any differences, but the boys interviewed were in fact very positive about their school experience.

Teachers agreed that processes to actively utilise school data to attempt to address areas that have been identified as requiring improvement are now in place. The reviewer noted that teachers believe that year 5 students and boys in particular, should be a focus in the next strategic period, and teachers should use inquiry methodology and authentic and purposeful tasks to generate enthusiasm and motivation.

**How effectively did the school manage its resources to support the achievement of improved student outcomes?**

School resources have been effectively managed to support student wellbeing and engagement. As noted above, the school began to implement the You Can Do it program and funded a welfare officer in this area.

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

The school continues to provide a safe and friendly environment for its students and has revised the reporting process. There will be a need to maintain efforts in encouraging student attendance as it remains an issue for the school. The principal noted that ‘students with high absence sometimes demand a high share of resources and we will need to continue to support these students. Although this may lead to some individual successes, it is unlikely to substantially drop average absence levels. Perhaps we need to concentrate more on students who are away from school for 10 to 30 days each year to improve overall attendance’.

The overall goal for the next strategic planning period is to provide a safe and engaging learning environment that fosters inquiry based learning, develops student leadership, and improves students’ social competencies and self esteem. Achieving these aims will require a whole school approach that is consistent with the Avondale learning model being developed. This goal requires an even more student centred approach to learning where students ask questions about what they are learning, such as why and how, and where the purposes of tasks are meaningful and authentic. Consistent with some teachers’ views expressed during the review that new themes and approaches should be tried, the reviewer recommends that specific areas of VELS should be focused on that are strongly related to current issues, students’ rights and responsibilities and developing understanding of the wider world. The recommendation is that there be a focus on the interpersonal and personal
learning goals in VELS. There is excellent advice provided in the VELS on curriculum that focuses on students learning to work with others by:

- building positive social relationships,
- working and learning in teams,
- managing and resolving conflicts.

VELS advice on student personal learning is that ‘as they progress through school students need to be encouraged and supported to take greater responsibility for their own learning and participation at school. This involves developing as individual learners who:

- acquire self knowledge and dispositions which support learning
- can learn with peers, including by seeking and responding appropriately to feedback
- increasingly manage their own learning and growth including goal setting and managing resources to achieve these
- recognise and enact appropriate values within and beyond the school context.’

Further details are provided at this site:

The reviewer also recommends that in planning curriculum related to the wellbeing and engagement goals and targets, teachers consider a strong focus on civics and citizenship and education for sustainability. The core expectations for this area identified in VELS are:

‘Students need to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviors that enable them to take action as informed, confident members of a diverse and inclusive Australian society. They need to understand the political and legal systems and processes and the history that underpins them. This involves a focus on students:

- understanding their identity and roles in their community
- knowing their rights and responsibilities as citizens
- appreciating Australia’s role in the global community
- having the knowledge, skills and behaviours to participate in society and take responsible action in relation to other citizens and the environment at a local and broader level.’

Further details are provided at this site:

There is also a wealth of practical resources and case studies on civics and citizenship at
http://www.civicsandcitizenship.edu.au/cce/
In the review discussions it was identified that developing some specific programs addressing motivation and engagement of students at year 5 and 6 levels would be advantageous. Developing understanding of some of the key aspects of civics and citizenship would also be very relevant to students at this level. A focus on the areas of VELS suggested above in curriculum planning could lead to very positive engagement.

A further suggestion discussed during the review with staff is that Avondale PS should continue to be a school with a focus on sustainability. While some programs are already well recognised, it would be an excellent addition if students were given opportunities for some global or Studies of Asia focus in the curriculum in addition to . The reviewer recommends that in planning curriculum, teachers look closely at the planning advice and learning goals and emphases explained in the VELS level 4 geography standards.


Also, the following websites provide excellent resources:


Educating for a Sustainable Future – A National Environmental Education Statement for Australian Schools provides a nationally agreed description of the nature and purpose of environmental education for sustainability through all years of schooling, including a vision and a framework for its implementation. See:


Developing a focus on these suggested curriculum areas should also be a support in the achievement of the overall goal for improving student learning.

The school reviewer was very impressed by the high level oral language communication skills of the students who participated in the review student focus group discussions. It is clear that further developing student engagement in discussions about what they are learning, why and how would be advantageous in this school where students are already achieving high levels in their learning. Challenging students to think about the purpose of their learning, involving them in inquiry and utilising strategies suggested in the E5 program will assist in this process. This could also have a positive effect on increasing levels of student motivation. It will be important to ensure that girls are strongly involved in these conversations, since their motivation levels, as expressed in the attitudes to school survey results do need improvement.

Teachers expressed the view that students are motivated when they take risks in their learning, tackle challenging content and try new strategies, and this is to be encouraged.
The development of a whole school discipline policy though involvement of parents and students is highly recommended. This could also be a key strategy in developing more student engagement in defining the vision and goals for the school. Students could be encouraged to express their points of view about what makes a positive classroom and school environment, what should be the expectations for student behavior and what should be the consequences for students who don’t meet expectations. Students expressed the view that they would like to see very clear school rules, where all the teachers say and act in the same way about actions like behavior in the playground. There seems to be a need for teachers to be clear and consistent in applying rules and expectations.

Through the school newsletter, students could be asked to write more regularly about what they are learning, why and how, and their views. Parents certainly expressed a desire to know more.

Hartwell Primary school is already functioning as a learning community where the wellbeing of students is at the centre of planning. The following goal, targets, strategies and actions for the continued improvement in student wellbeing and engagement have been identified through the School review process in consultation with the reviewer, the Principal, Review panel and RNL:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal for Student wellbeing and engagement: 1. To provide a safe and engaging learning environment that fosters inquiry based learning, develops student leadership, and improves students’ social competencies and self esteem.</th>
<th>Targets</th>
<th>Key Strategies</th>
<th>Improvement Strategies</th>
<th>Suggested actions (optional)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Improve the “Student Connectedness” score [Years 5/6] on the Student Survey from 4.27 to 4.5 by 2012. 2. Improve the “Student motivation” score on the Student Survey from 4.46 to 4.62 by 2012. 3. Improve the “Classroom Behavior” score on the Parent Opinion Survey from 4.02 to 4.4 by 2012, and the “Effective Discipline Policy” score in the Staff Opinion Survey from 3.5 to 4.0 by 2012.</td>
<td>1. Redefine whole school discipline welfare including staff, parent and student opinion. 2. Develop understanding and implementation restorative practices. 3. Develop understanding and implementation of the E5 model of inquiry based learning. 4. Build student and parent understanding of core school values and the Hartwell view on rights and responsibilities. 5. Engage student leaders in building a whole school focus on sustainability to build their connectedness and social competencies.</td>
<td>1. Revisit and refine existing welfare documents. 2. PD on restorative practices. 3. Staff workshop on E5 and thinking strategies, with a specific focus also on girls’ motivation. 4. Provide explicit curriculum focus on developing understanding of core school values, personal learning and civics and citizenship. 5. Year 5 students are responsible for building ‘Green teams’ who are active in environmental programs that are also a feature of a special sustainability program at this level.</td>
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