School Review Report

Prepared for
Park Ridge Primary School
Eastern Metropolitan Region
School Workforce Reform and School Improvement Division
Department of Education & Early Childhood Development

2009

- School Number: 5281
- Principal: David Mann
- School Council President: Owen Warlond
- Type of Review: Continuous Improvement
- School Reviewer: June Wright
- Date of Review Meeting at school: 27th July 2009
- Date of this Report (final version): 14th August 2009
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1.0 Executive Summary

Park Ridge Primary School announces its vision to ‘learn, strive, achieve’ at the main entrance to the school. Located in Rowville, some 35km east of Melbourne, the school’s enrolment has changed dramatically since it commenced in 1990, firstly increasing to accommodate students from the surrounding new housing developments then declining as other primary schools were opened nearby. Student numbers have recently stabilized at around 550 a figure likely to be maintained in the immediate future. This has enabled the adoption of a proactive approach to school improvement. The past three years have seen a change of leadership, a heightened focus on teaching and learning, increasingly strong student attitudes to school and the development of a cohesive and dedicated teacher workforce. These impressive achievements lay the foundations for a continued improvement in student academic outcomes.

Students are drawn from a multicultural and relatively advantaged socio-economic background and families who value education. In general, student outcomes have met the standards expected by this profile with stronger results achieved in writing in the statewide testing program compared with those in reading and mathematics, both of which remain as future areas for improvement. Teacher assessments against the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) are restricted and notably so at the upper end of the ability range and this impacts on the delivery of curriculum to address the specific learning needs of students. Guaranteeing the accuracy of assessments and personalizing curriculum programs by ability will be part of the new strategic plan.

Educational leadership at the senior level is strong. Inquiry learning and the thinking curriculum have been implemented across the school. The staff profile is diverse in terms of experience but teachers are unified by their commitment and willingness to develop their skills, participate in professional learning and ‘value add’ to student learning, implementing the extensive extra-curricula program, for example. Extending leadership opportunities, encouraging teamwork and consistency and strengthening accountability requirements will further enhance the educational capacity of the school.

Parents support and participation is strong but a number of aspects of the parent opinion survey remain low. Raising the awareness of parents and encouraging their inclusion in discussions relevant to their child’s learning will be part of a focus on improving transition processes. In particular, students will be increasingly challenged in their learning (and supported to meet these expectations) as they progress through the school. Tracking and
monitoring student progress and a heightened focus on the transition to secondary school are further recommendations.

Students are safe and happy at school: the learning environment is stimulating and classroom behaviour is sound: connectedness to peers and learning are strong. Student leadership has been extended into new activities such as the sustainability program and increasingly students have a ‘voice’ in the school community. Amongst the very high student attitudes to school in 2008, levels of motivation are slightly reduced. Building this aspect and the active participation of students in all aspects of learning will be a future focus. Attention will also be given to identifying and addressing issues surrounding student attendance.

Sound organisational health and effective resourcing of classroom programs and professional development underpin the potential of Park Ridge Primary School to successfully undertake the next stage of its learning journey. The following recommendations are consistent with the focus of the school’s work and reflect the school’s own conclusions. Appropriate measurement indicators and targets and an indication of the scope of each strategy are included in the body of the report.

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<td>Implement a whole school approach to the teaching of English and mathematics based on the accurate assessment of student ability and the delivery of a personalized curriculum program that addresses the needs of all learners</td>
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<td>Sustain a focus on distributed leadership, teamwork and professional learning to deliver best practice teaching and learning that engages and challenges all students</td>
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<td><strong>Pathways and Transitions</strong></td>
<td>Maintain high expectations of students as they progress through the school and enhance the engagement of students and parents in the learning journey</td>
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2.0 Methodology

Park Ridge Primary School viewed the preparation of its school self-evaluation (SSE) as the culmination of a four year focus on data and review. An inclusive approach involving the school leadership team, curriculum leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff, school council, parents and students was adopted. The principal and assistant principal documented the findings and completed the final report after gaining feedback and assistance from school stakeholders, the regional network leader and the principals from cluster schools. This process resulted in a comprehensive and perceptive document presenting a variety of viewpoints.

The reviewer June Wright visited the school on 15\textsuperscript{th} July 2009 to meet with the principal and confirm the arrangements for the review process. At this meeting, the reviewer received a copy of the SSE, data including the School Level Report, copies of the most recent parent, staff and student survey results, the 2009 Annual Implementation Plan and a number of documents relating to school operations. A tour of the site helped set the context for the data analysis.

The review meeting was held on 27\textsuperscript{th} July at the school. Attending the meeting were:

- Principal: David Mann
- School Councillors: Janelle Dinnie, Mandy Hagan
- Assistant Principal: Graeme Lloyd
- Leading Teachers: Kirsten MacFadyen (Curriculum), Assunta Mancini (SWC)
- Teacher Leaders: Melissa Roberts (English, year 6), Sue Cornish (Reading Recovery), Connie Epstein (Mathematics), Rachel Manning (prep), Barb Warden (year 1), Andrea Scott (year 2), Jenny Crynes (year 3), Shae Edwards (year 4), Kirsten MacFadyen (year 5),
- Regional Network Leader: Gray Ryan (Knox Network, Eastern Metropolitan Region)
- School Reviewer: June Wright

A number of student leaders from years 1 to 6 met with the reviewer at lunchtime on the review day. They provided some valuable insights into the school’s operation.

The reviewer will present a summary of the process and the findings to the staff and the school council/community on 20\textsuperscript{th} August 2009. This report was finalised after consultation with the school. Copies have been sent to the School Workforce Reform & School Improvement Division of the Department of Education & Early Childhood Development, the Eastern Metropolitan Region and the school itself.
3.0 School Context

Situated just off Wellington Road in the eastern suburb of Rowville within the city of Knox, Park Ridge Primary School has been through a number of significant changes since it opened in 1990. From an initial figure of 300, its enrolment rose to 934 in 2000. Since then, changes in the local educational provision have seen a steady decline in student numbers to around 550 in 2009. The community demographic is multicultural, with the 11% of the students (or their parents) who were born in a non-English speaking country coming from 44 different nations. Over the past three years the school’s SFO percentile (a socio-economic indicator) has increased to the 64th percentile of state primary schools in 2008, slightly higher than in the previous two years. It can therefore be expected that the school will consistently exceed the state mean benchmarks.

Park Ridge is surrounded by a high quality housing development and bounded by the junior campus of Rowville Secondary College on one side. The school’s facilities are excellent. Separate brick buildings and some portable classrooms surround an open courtyard meeting space in the centre of the school. A gymnasium, library, art room and music complex and a dedicated computer laboratory comprise the specialist teaching areas. Playground equipment, a fitness track and extensive grassed (real and artificial) areas encourage student activity. Large shade cloth sails provide an attractive ‘sun safe’ feature.

The 24 classes are structured on a year level basis. The deliver of the VELS curriculum is well advanced: an inquiry-based integrated model across the learning domains and the thinking curriculum is offered at all year levels. Student needs are addressed through a number of intervention programs in English and mathematics. A range of extra curricula activities, clubs and camps supplement the formal curriculum. Sustainability is the basis of a range of emerging activities

Strong leadership is delivered by the principal (appointed at the beginning of the review period), a long standing assistant principal and two leading teachers. The staff profile is diverse in terms of experience, but united by a strong commitment to the school. Similarly, parents are most supportive of the school and its work.

The totems in the school grounds symbolize the values of excellence, teamwork, resilience, respect and recognition adopted through the You Can Do It program. The school's motto - Strive, Learn, Excel – is inscribed on the notice board at the entrance to the school, on parent information material and on the school’s website banner.
4.0 Evaluation of Performance

4.1 Student Learning

What student outcomes was the school trying to achieve?

The school aimed to improve student outcomes in English and mathematics – particularly in the Middle Years of schooling.

Target means and proportions of students above and below the expected standard were set for each year level. The targets detailed in the 2009 Annual Implementation Plan (AIP) focus specifically on year 4.

Targets were also set for some organisational health aspects. Thus, as indicators of changes to practice, 80% of staff were to agree with the items under supportive leadership, appraisal and recognition, participative decision-making and 85% with those in role clarity, and goal congruence.

What student outcomes did the school achieve?

Teacher judgements were reported against the Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) in 2006 and against the VELS in 2007 and 2008. In this time, the SFO density, an indicator of the socio-economic status of school families and a predictor of school performance, has remained relatively stable. Park Ridge Primary School sits at the 64th percentile of Victorian state schools in this regard and its performance can reasonably be predicted to fit within an SFO band of 54-74%. It could be expected that the school means would consistently (and noticeably) exceed the state mean benchmarks. On most occasions, both measures of performance have been achieved, but to a varying extent.

The assessment of reading (AoR) data indicates the percentage of children in each year from prep to 2 who are able to read graded unsighted texts with varying degrees of accuracy. Students reading at 90% accuracy or greater are deemed to be proficient at a level: those reading at 50% accuracy or less are potentially ‘at risk’. From 2006-2008, the proportions of proficient students at each of years prep, 1 and 2 exceeded the state benchmark and the predicted SFO performance. In the last two years, 100% of year 2 students were in this category. As a consequence, the proportions of students at risk have remained very low and well under the state benchmark.

Sound cohort growth is evidenced as students move from prep through to year 2, although there is a general decline in the proportions reading with 100% accuracy from prep to year 1 and, for 2006-2008, from prep to year 2.
The combined teacher assessments p-6 show stability from one calendar year to another. In 2008, the proportions of students achieving a grade of ‘A’ (above expectations by 12 months or more) or ‘B’ (above expectations) was greatest in reading (14% and 32% respectively). In the other strands, the comparatively low proportion of A students was a notable feature of the data – 7% in writing, 4% in number, for example: no more than 7% (in writing) were judged to be working below the expected level.

The comparative performance at an individual year level was inconsistent. Benchmarks are not yet available for 2008, but estimates suggest the comparative mean performance in reading and number (with the exception of year 5) matching or exceeding the expected standards. Across some of the other strands, the differential between the school mean and the state benchmarks, while mostly positive, was below what might be expected given the school’s SFO percentile rank. Aspects of the performance at years 2, 4 and 5 and in measurement, chance & data across the board, prompt investigation.

A general characteristic of the data is the decrease in the proportions of students above expectations in the upper levels. As one example, an average of 63% of p-2 students was in this category in reading in 2008 but the mean figure for students in 4-6 was 31%.

In addition, comparatively few students were assessed as 12 months or more ahead of the expected level as the decrease in reading from an average of 28% for p-2 to less than 4% for 4-6 illustrates. No students were graded at ‘A’ in a number of strands and year levels and none at any level in speaking and listening in 2008. Moreover, very few children at any level, any strand, were assessed as more than 12 months ahead.

The targets of the last charter were partially achieved. Benchmark comparisons for prep were consistently positive, and year 1 and 6 achieved some of the targeted mean scores. With the exception of year 5, the proportions above the expected level in reading exceeded the relevant year level targets but in the remaining strands this performance was more likely to be matched in the early years but not in the senior school.

External statewide assessments for years 3 and 5 were reported in the AIM tests up to 2007 and NAPLAN (conducted across the nation but reported in terms of state data) in 2008.

AIM mean scores in reading and number matched or exceeded the state mean and fell within the SFO predicted band in 2006 and 2007 – an improvement on the baseline 2005 results. Year 3 students performed strongly in reading, year 5 students especially so in number. As a result, the average growth in achievement of the matched school cohort, the students who were at Park Ridge for both the year 3 and year 5 AIM tests, matched the
state improvement rate in reading and was particularly creditable in number, well above the state and also exceeding the expected improvement of 1.0 VELS units.

The 2008 NAPLAN reading means tracked the state mean scaled score but were at the very bottom of the SFO percentile band. In absolute and comparative terms, the performance in writing was much stronger. Mean scores in number at year 3 were significantly below the state benchmark, but year 5 students performed strongly. At most, 8% of students were assessed as below or at the National Minimum Standards (NMS) in writing and number, 12% in reading. Around 60% of year 3 and 45% of year 5 students were assessed to be well above the expected standard in reading and writing. The proportions of students in this category were lower in numeracy and noticeably so at year 3 (35%).

While only a guide, the cohort growth from 2006-2008 suggests a reduced average improvement in reading and number but strong growth in writing.

Conclusions

• Comparisons with the state benchmarks are generally positive, but not consistently at a level predicted by the SFO percentile band.

• The range of teacher judgements is very narrow compared with that delivered in the statewide testing.

• Proportions exceeding the expected standard decrease as students progress through the school.

• The 2008 NAPLAN data raises concerns about the whole school program in reading and the p-2 program in number. Performance at year 5 in writing and numeracy was strong.

While not all targets have been met, the school has made some progress towards the achievement of its student learning goal, especially in relation to improvement in the Middle Years (years 5 and 6). However, in comparative terms, English (comprehension) and mathematics remain areas for future improvement.

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

The period under review has seen a number of initiatives implemented. The significant impacts are outlined and referenced throughout this report to the eight elements of the Effective Schools Model.

The school’s vision and goals appear to be embedded in practice. Amongst the staff, role clarity and goal congruence scores, (the targeted indicators of changed practice), have improved over the past three years, ranking close to state primary school median benchmarks in 2008. There is no doubting the commitment of all staff. A renewal of the
common purpose in the light of the new strategic intent and the identification of the expectations of all staff in delivering this would now be appropriate.

The **professional leadership** at the principal class level changed at the beginning of the recent review period. The current principal, an experienced assistant principal, and two leading teachers with responsibility for curriculum and student welfare, together with coordinators of English and mathematics and each of the year level teams make up the distributed leadership team. While the personnel are diverse in terms of experience and background, there is a shared determination to ‘make a difference’ for students. The adoption of VELS terminology – teaching and learning and school wellbeing for the leading teacher positions, for example – and a heightened focus on leadership (as opposed to coordination) is suggested for the future.

**A focus on teaching and learning** is the core business of all staff and consistently modeled across the school. A number of statewide initiatives have been implemented over the past three years and, in each case, the emphasis has been on developing agreed understandings, embedding best practice in all classrooms, sustaining and further improving implementation. The success of this targeted approach is evident in the consistent application of the interdisciplinary VELS domain of thinking as a learning tool for both students and staff.

In essence, therefore, Park Ridge operates as a **learning community**. There has been a significant investment in targeted professional development over the review period that is now starting to show results (in writing for example). Teachers are beginning to use reflective journals to embed their learning and, in discussion with the reviewer, students recognized that ‘teachers are learners too’. Classrooms are open to visitors, learning walks are a regular occurrence, and an action based approach to improvement is encouraged. This will be enhanced and extended in the future to ensure consistency and cohesion.

There are undoubtedly some very talented students at the school but the truncated VELS data suggests that teachers are reluctant to assess them at the actual level of operation, in part, review participants suggested, to ensure the succeeding teacher has ‘room to move’. The school acknowledges the inconsistencies in its student assessment data and the need to triangulate its teacher judgements with other testing regimes. Raising teachers’ awareness of the VELS progression points above and below as well as at the level they teach is an aspect for immediate attention. The need for consistent, regular moderation across the whole school, and for level 4 with a secondary college, was identified by the review meeting (moderation of writing is already underway). The increased use of On
Demand testing from year 3 on will have the added benefit of increasing students’ familiarization with the AIM/NAPLAN format.

Accurate assessment data will enhance **purposeful teaching** - teaching to the point of need – and the delivery of a curriculum differentiated by ability. Currently, a range of support and extension programs are offered to cater for the needs of students, especially those at either end of the ability spectrum. Developing a scope and sequence in reading and number is a suggested starting point to encourage the consistent differentiation of programs in English and mathematics: the use of common planning proformas that demonstrate differentiation is a further recommendation.

The ability grouping of students across a level, in mathematics perhaps, would better target programs to student need, hone the expertise of teachers and, at the same time, reduce their workload. A similar approach is already utilized in prep, where teachers ‘specialise’ in one aspect - library, computers, the perceptual motor program – and teach this to all the groups at the level.

The variation in the outcomes between the strands is no surprise to the school. Earlier in the review period, professional development targeted improvements in English but more recently the focus has swung to mathematics. The appointment of Michael Ymer from the beginning of 2008 to lead teachers in planning and developing units of work in mathematics is a sound strategy and the school is now looking for common rich assessment tasks that enable students to demonstrate the extent of their knowledge and assist with the moderation of assessments of this subject area.

The decline in reading standards is attributed to a reduced focus on comprehension, particularly at p-2 and this will be addressed in the new planning period.

The continued high participation rate of the parent survey means that these results can confidently be taken as a reflection of parent opinion generally. Across the three years, variable scores related to learning – teacher morale, stimulating learning, school connectedness have remained relatively stable and low, in the first quartile of state primary schools. The school suggests this may be due to a lack of awareness, since the highlighting of aspects of the extra-curricula program is credited with a significant rise in the ranking of this variable with no change to actual practice. School improvement and general satisfaction have improved to the state median and increasing proportions of parents expressed overall satisfaction with the education their child receives at Park Ridge – 93% in agreement, 24% strongly so in 2008.

Year 5 and 6 students ranked teacher effectiveness, teacher empathy and stimulating learning on or above the state median. Overall girls were more positive than boys, year 5
slightly more positive than year 6. There was consensus amongst the students from years 1-6 who spoke with the reviewer that teachers were nice, learning was fun and interesting, that most time the standard of work was ‘just right’ but that some work in mathematics was ‘pretty easy’. The reduced levels of student motivation – the lowest ranked variable across the survey as a whole and at the individual year levels – may well reflect a lack of challenge (and connect to the restricted assessments at the top of the ability scale).

Integrated units built around an inquiry model form part of the year 5 and 6 curriculum and several exciting and interesting examples were outlined to the review meeting. Building the levels of challenge, engagement and participation in all classrooms and every curriculum area, including the interdisciplinary strands such as ICT, will be future whole school focus for action.

Data has assumed an increasingly high profile in guiding the decisions of the school leadership. Park Ridge gained accreditation in the performance and development initiative in 2007 and the conversations relevant to performance review are focused on building the achievement levels of identified individuals, especially those known as the ‘soft Cs’ (students who are ‘just’ underperforming) and backed up by observations as part of the learning walks. It is suggested that the understanding and ownership of class and year level data (and the responsibility for consequent action) be a team responsibility in future. It is also recommended that teams assume the accountability for a wide range of student outcomes – behaviour, attendance, wellbeing, as well as learning – with team members taking individual or joint responsibility for one aspect, thus encouraging all teachers to participate at a leadership level. In addition, the support and the induction of teachers new to the profession and/or the school could be a team responsibility.

The organisational health of the school appears to be strong. Non certificated sick leave was below the respective mean for educational support officers (ESOs) and teachers in 2007 and 2008. All variables of the staff opinion survey have improved over the review period: compared to primary schools across the state, the majority ranked close to or above the state mean in 2008. Staff opinion of the learning environment was especially encouraging, with at least 97% agreeing the school had created an environment that promotes excellence in the school’s teaching and learning practices and maximizes the learning outcomes for students. Sound levels of motivation indicate there is the capacity in the school to further improve outcomes in the future.
How effectively did the school manage its resources to support improved student outcomes?

A range of resources have been strategically employed to advance the school’s teaching and learning agenda.

- The appointment of a leading teacher as curriculum coordinator and teacher leaders as professional development and subject conveners has supported curriculum change. The staff opinion survey supports the effectiveness of this approach.

- Class teachers have been allocated to best ensure a mix of skills and expertise across each year level team.

- Scheduling an additional class group (over DEECD room entitlement) has enabled class sizes to be kept low.

- Additional preparation time – 4 hours as opposed to the 2.5 hours that is the norm – has encouraged best practice.

- Teacher professional leave has been a significant catalyst in encouraging changed practice and resulted in the development of units of work based on the thinking curriculum and the recent focus on mathematics curriculum and pedagogy.

- Mathematics resources have been purchased and distributed to classrooms to encourage a renewed focus on the use of concrete materials.

- Consultants have worked with the school to develop explicit teaching strategies over the past three years. There is some evidence that this has been successful. The current (and future) focus on comprehension will consolidate this work.

- The school is well resourced for ICT: smartboards have been purchased and placed to encourage access for each class. The reviewer can attest to the widespread and varied use of these resources.

- Funds have been fully expended to support the achievement of the school’s learning goal. Over the past three years, the account balances per student have improved, but remain below the state median.

- The Rowville cluster of schools have developed a common approach to middle years programming that has supported the implementation of the years 5 and 6 curriculum.
What can the school do in the future to continue to improve?

The new strategic plan aims to consolidate the initiatives of the recent review period. The accuracy of teacher assessments needs to be guaranteed (and reflect the range of students’ abilities) so that explicit skills teaching can occur: enhanced teamwork should encourage consistency and best practice in all classrooms: data should be distributed and analysed on a classroom and year level basis: the performance review processes should be aligned to the strategic plan and focus on collective and individual accountability for a range of improved student outcomes.

The following are suggested for implementation in the new strategic plan and should be read in conjunction with the analysis and recommendations in sections 4.1 and 4.2. They include the recommendations of the SSE and the discussions at review.

Goal

Improve the learning outcomes of all students p-6 in reading (comprehension) and mathematics

Targets

These are set by the school in collaboration with the Eastern Metropolitan Region and should reflect improved achievement against the school’s past performance. It is suggested that targets quantify the percentage of students at each year level who, by the end of 2012, have achieved above and well above the expected VELS level in all strands in English and mathematics.

Targets should be set for years 3 and 5 NAPLAN performance. The NAPLAN targets should include reading, writing, spelling and numeracy. A target to reduce to nil the students achieving on or below the NMS could be considered and a further target to increase the percentage of students attaining bands 5 and 6 at year 3 and bands 7 and 8 at year 5 could be considered.

To monitor cohort growth over time in English and mathematics, targets should be set that reflect at or above the expected mean yearly VELS growth (1.0 VELS level at prep and 0.5 for years 1-6).

Milestones to indicate improvement include:

- Curriculum documentation and work plans throughout the school showing the differentiation of EN and mathematics programs by ability

- Attaining level 5 accreditation on the Performance and Development initiative matrix.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Improvement Strategy</th>
<th>Implementation Actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implement a whole school approach to the teaching of English and mathematics based on</td>
<td>• Maintain a focus on data, evidence, assessment ‘for’ learning. Drive student outcome data through to the team and classroom level. Develop action plans to address identified issues  \n• Employ definitive common assessment tools that accurately reflect the intention of VELS and enable students to demonstrate their abilities (especially those above the expected cohort achievement level) – utilize standardized tests, On Demand testing, efficient and effective diagnostic tools  \n• Regularly moderate across VELS levels and, as appropriate, with a secondary school  \n• Explicitly teach to the point of need. Review planning procedures. Develop a differentiated curriculum, review timetabling and class schedules, regroup students by ability where appropriate  \n• Develop a whole school scope and sequence in reading (comprehension) and number  \n• Modify and redesign integrated curriculum units as needed to ensure a major focus on inquiry learning, an awareness of the needs of contemporary society, explicit development of literacy and numeracy skills and appropriate challenge for students at all ability levels</td>
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<tr>
<td>the accurate assessment of student ability and the delivery of a personalized curriculum program that addresses the needs of all learners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sustain a focus on distributed leadership, teamwork and professional learning to deliver</td>
<td>• Renew the college purpose and the individual and collective responsibilities and expectations of all staff in the light of the new strategic plan  \n• Incorporate contemporary terminology in leadership roles, titles etc  \n• Raise the status of level teams. Ensure a focus on teaching and learning and holistic student outcomes in every team. Review leadership roles in line with this  \n• Build the instructional leadership capacity of all leaders to drive change  \n• Utilise the e5 Instructional Model to enhance teacher practice  \n• Align the performance review process with the strategic plan: tie targets to student outcomes and team performance: mandate where appropriate  \n• Maintain a focus on professional learning in the key areas of reading (comprehension), writing and mathematics that encourages a consistency of best practice – modeling, coaching, peer observation, leadership walks  \n• Embed teaching and learning strategies that engage students in the thinking curriculum, brain based strategies, reflection and personal goal setting  \n• Sustain a commitment to ICT and e-learning  \n  • scope and sequence skill development through the school  \n  • extend hardware provision – Smartboards, additional peripherals  \n  • provide appropriate computer assisted learning programs  \n  • develop an e-learning strategy: professionally develop all staff to deliver this</td>
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<td>delivering best practice teaching and learning that engages and challenges all students</td>
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4.2 Student Pathways and Transitions

What student outcomes was the school trying to achieve?

The school aimed to provide effective school transition processes for all students at key points in their schooling and included in this the move from kindergarten to prep, from one year level to the next, from teacher to teacher and between primary and secondary schools. Ultimately it is hoped that transition in all its facets will be seamless (SSE).

There were no specific measures relevant to this area, although indicators covering student absence, motivation and learning confidence were included in the 2009 Annual Implementation Plan.

What student outcomes did the school achieve?

General feedback from parents and teachers substantiates the effectiveness of the prep transition program. 90% of the intake has attended preschool and reportedly, they are eager to start their education at Park Ridge, settle in promptly and are happy to be at school.

For students who enter at all year levels and those who start school post January, the orientation into school is reported to be generally smooth and effective.

Parent approval of the general transition processes has improved slightly over the result in 2006, but still ranks relatively low at just above the state 25th percentile. However, at least 85% of respondents endorsed the individual items with at least 22% registering their level of agreement as strong. Approval of the preparation for the next stage of education was slightly reduced.

Park Ridge students proceed to a number of state and independent secondary schools. The proportions remaining in the state education system has varied from 70% to 80% depending on the year. Verbal feedback from parents supports the success of the school’s initiatives to prepare students for this important transition.

As detailed in the student learning section of this report, while a range of support program are available for students with different needs, the extent to which the curriculum is consistently differentiated within the classroom is in doubt. The decline in the proportion of talented students in the upper grades suggests the need to focus on maintaining and building learning pathways through the school.

Given a lack of specific evidence, a rigorous evaluation of the achievement of the school’s goal is not possible. However, there is sufficient anecdotal evidence to suggest the school has partially achieved its strategic intent in pathways and transitions.
Why did the school achieve / not achieve improved student outcomes?

Enrolments have decreased by around 13% and prep numbers have dropped by 25% over the last four years, largely due to the opening of a new primary school in the immediate locality. In this time the school has had to deal with a number of attendant challenges associated with declining numbers. In the short term at least, enrolments are expected to stabilize around the 2009 figure of 550. The review meeting heard the community perception of Park Ridge was strong and increasing.

The SSE provides an extensive list of transition and orientation activities for incoming prep students and their families. The preptastic program, run for one hour a week in term 4, introduces children to a range of activities in the specialist subjects and concludes with sessions in the last two weeks held in prep classrooms with their soon to be prep teacher. At the same time, ‘experienced’ mothers welcome the new parents to the school and add a personal touch to the information disseminated at the prep parent information night. Initial testing of prep students takes place in February and the grade 5 buddy system helps the new children settle in. Anecdotal evidence indicates that the program is deemed to be very successful by parents and staff (SSE).

There is a consistent transition process and an effective orientation program for students entering Park Ridge post prep.

Currently, a number of activities encourage the smooth transition between the year levels. Teachers meet to pass on information relevant to the learning of individuals and groups of children: class allocations for the coming year take the preferences of parents and students and current teacher knowledge into account: all students go to their new teacher and new classroom for an orientation program two days prior to the end of term and parent receive information relevant to the new grade. In effect, these processes define a ‘right of passage’ at each stage of a student’s learning journey. Utilising this concept to reinforce high expectations of students (academic, behavioural, social etc) at each VELS level transition is recommended. Thus, the move from years 2 to 3 might see a focus on comprehension and preparation for a pen license, years 4 to 5 require a student know their multiplication tables. This concept is already in place in year 6, where the use of a diary, a focus on organizational skills, maintaining a significant body of work etc is already part of the preparedness training for secondary school.

The perceived lack of challenge in some programs and the disparity between assessments (year 2 to 3 for example) support the need for this approach.

Students enrolled in the PSD program have Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and these form the basis of the following year’s program. Students accessing literacy support and the enrichment mathematics class run by the assistant principal also follow a personalized
program, but these ‘pathways’ are not necessarily sequentially developed. The decline in the proportion of talented students in the school assessments (see 4.1) and the proposed differentiation of the curriculum highlight the need for a more rigorous monitoring of all student pathways. The adoption of an electronic tracking program to better record the corporate knowledge of each child as they progress through the school is recommended.

Park Ridge and the adjacent junior campus of Rowville Secondary College collaborate in a number of projects, including student activities such as cross age tutoring and, in the past, a curriculum/teacher sharing program (with primary teachers visiting the secondary site, but not the reverse). Reportedly, the year 6-7 transition has received less attention from the secondary school in recent years. Primary students do attend open nights and an individual report on each student is forwarded to the year 7 coordinator (and utilized). Action from both sectors will be needed if the aimed for ‘seamless transition’ is to become a future reality.

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

Resources – teachers, time, administration, parent information and funds – have been appropriately employed to support the transition programs at all levels. The skill of the prep and level 4 transition coordinators, the office staff and assistant principal are to be commended.

Students are an excellent resource and their inclusion in the transition programs encourages a successful orientation for incoming children. The mysteries and myths about secondary school are (hopefully) dispelled by the exit students who come back to speak with grade 6.

The school’s website provides a comprehensive view of school operations and valuable information for parents and their children. However, the lack of information under many of the site headings (enrichment/extension program, for example) is disappointing and not constructive.

Park Ridge is part of the Knox Network of schools in the Eastern Metropolitan Region. The network strategic plan and regular collegiate activities will continue to encourage a collective approach to common issues within this group. In particular, the perceived mismatch between the students final primary school assessments and their academic program on entry to secondary school is being considered by the network.

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

The need to raise the expectations of all students has been acknowledged. A review of the present student goal setting practices – purpose, scope, quality – across the whole school, the inclusion of parents in three way goal setting in term 1 and reflections on progress after reports are issued in June are suggested strategic actions to accomplish this.
The following are suggested for implementation in the new strategic plan and should be read in conjunction with the analysis and recommendations in sections 4.1 and 4.3. They include the recommendations of the SSE and the discussions at review.

**Goal**

To improve transition practices into, through and beyond the school to maximize student learning

**Targets**

Improved parent opinion of the transition processes measured by the DEECD and school-developed opinion surveys, especially for exit year 6 students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Improvement Strategy</th>
<th>Implementation Actions</th>
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</table>
| Maintain high expectations of students as they progress through the school and enhance the engagement of students and parents in the learning journey | • Review and document the preptastic program: include a formal survey of new parents in March of each year.  
• Raise the expectations of learners at each of the internal transition points  
• Ensure information appropriate to each child’s learning pathway is documented and transmitted  
• Raise the expectations of students at each of the internal transitions. Identify the requirements of the coming year and support students to meet them. Up date parent material as appropriate.  
• Consider including parents in the identification of their child’s learning goals – academic, organizational, personal – and the achievement of these with, where appropriate, the development of an ILP program  
• Develop a sustainable focus to track students’ progress – academic, attendance, programs, behaviour etc - through the school. Investigate electronic tracking programs.  
• Record the academic entry point of all students transferring into the school so their learning journey is initiated.  
• Communicate with parents and develop appropriate interventions if student progress slows. Contact parents with good news on a regular (and early for new enrollees) basis  
• Strengthen the links with Rowville Secondary College and include greater interaction between primary and secondary staff through curriculum sharing, teacher exchanges and shadowing  
• Develop a survey instrument for ex students and conduct parent, teacher and ex-student forums to inform the year 5 and 6 program and the post primary school transition processes |
4.3 Student Engagement and Wellbeing

What student outcomes was the school trying to achieve?

An improvement in the levels of student engagement and wellbeing was the goal of the recent strategic plan, with increased scores in nominated variables of the staff and student opinion survey set as targets. Improving the scores for score student motivation and learning confidence to at least 4.53 and 4.55 respectively was especially relevant. In addition, the average absence rate across the whole school was to be less than 11.5 days per student.

What student outcomes did the school achieve?

While the school’s data has remained positive compared with the state benchmarks, the last three years have seen a steady increase in the whole school student absence rate. In 2008, the average number of days absent per student trailed the state mean by just 0.2 days. With the exception of years 5 and 6, all individual year level rates increased and significantly so in prep, 1 and 2 where the final figures in each case were above the relevant state mean benchmark. The attendance of students in year 6 improved over the review period and, together with year 5, it would appear that these figures will fall within the SFO percentile band, unlike those in the former year levels.

Student attitudes to school have varied in the period 2006 – 2008. Scores for the student relationship variables of peer connectedness, student safety and (particularly) classroom behaviour all improved over the three years.

In 2008, students at years 5 and 6, boys and girls, believed they were safe at school and this was endorsed by the consistent and relatively sound ranking for this aspect in the parent opinion survey.

School connectedness – do students enjoy attending school, feel they belong – and peer connectedness – do they feel socially connected, get along with their peers – are indicators of student engagement and wellbeing. All students (except, in the case of school connectedness, year 5 boys), ranked both elements above the state median benchmark. Parents also rated peer connectedness as strong but were much more qualified about connectedness to school, ranking this in the bottom quartile. However, around 87% of parents agreed that their child enjoyed the learning they did at school. Student opinion of the extent to which learning was stimulating supported this parental endorsement although, again, year 5 boys were relatively less positive.

Student motivation indicates the extent to which students are motivated to achieve and learn and here the responses of both parents and students prompt concerns. In terms of the state benchmarks, parents ranked this aspect in the first quartile. Across the school as a whole and at each year level, students ranked this lowest of all survey elements largely as a results of the
very low perceptions of girls. However, while their motivation to learn and achieve was qualified, with the exception of girls at year 6, students’ confidence in their ability to learn was stronger.

Staff believed students to be really motivated to learn and always keen to do well: there was unanimous approval of these items in the staff opinion survey.

The specific strategic plan targets have not been achieved. However, the comparatively strong levels of wellbeing (measured by the morale and distress variables of the attitudes to school survey) support the partial achievement of the school’s goal.

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

A visitor to Park Ridge cannot help but be impressed by the warmth, friendliness and strength of the relationships between all members of the school community. The reviewer’s observation of the good order of the school suggests that respectful behaviour is highly valued by students, teachers and parents. A *safe, secure and orderly learning environment* clearly exists at the school.

Facilities are impressive. Classrooms, identified in Indonesian, the school’s Language Other Than English (LOTE), provide an exciting, stimulating learning environment. Most have an external door, some are paired or grouped around an open space, making collaborative teaching a future possibility. Specialist facilities include a gymnasium, art room, music centre and a dedicated computer laboratory. Two large playground installations protected by shade sails, a fitness track, several extensive grassed areas and the provision of a number of seating areas provide opportunities for active and passive play.

In her brief visits to the school, the reviewer observations confirmed students were well behaved and engaged in class activities. The student and staff surveys endorse the good behaviour of students in classrooms and around the school. Students in year 5 and year 6 ranked classroom behaviour higher than any other survey aspects, in the top quartile: on average, teachers reported spending around 11% of class time dealing with student misbehaviour: 97% of staff agreed that ‘students are generally well behaved in this school’. These are very positive results compared with primary schools across the state.

By contrast, parent opinion ranks classroom behaviour comparatively low. The school leaders have worked hard to encourage open and effective communication and the improved survey rankings for parent input and approachability highlight the success of this strategy. Encouraging teachers to contact all parents on a regular basis (and early for students new to the school) with a positive message about their child’s learning, behaviour etc may help balance any negative perception.
The reviewer met with a group of year 5 and 6 students during the review meeting. These children were articulate, reflective and respectful of the opinion of others. They gave examples of the positive climate, indicating that there were occasionally some issues but ‘teachers deal with it straight away’ and highlighted the ‘mateship, friendship and care for each other’ as a strength of the school.

Attendance figures are inflated by the poor attendance of just a few students. A review of the procedures in this area is recommended: removing the outliers from the data (and case managing these) will deliver a more realistic view of attendance across the school and focus any consequential action. Raising the awareness of parents is suggested – defining what is ‘good’ attendance, highlighting the link between attendance and achievement, for example.

A number of proactive programs initiated during the recent review period are listed in the SSE. These include:

- You Can Do It and restorative practices, aimed at building student resilience and effective conflict resolution procedures across the whole school.

- programs to target the needs of specific cohorts, the Kool Kids – Positive Parents for ‘at risk’ students in years p-2, LAMP leaders for ESL students and new arrivals and gender-based approaches such as Girl Power.

- a heightened focus on authentic student participation and leadership through weekly class meetings to articulate issues and develop solutions, an active Junior School Council, the House Sport competition and student management of activities such as school assemblies.

- the formation of the Environmental Leaders for Sustainability (ELFS) group.

An extensive range of extra-curricula activities – academic (science, book club), artistic (school choir, music classes, Wakakirri), sports training, multicultural cooking classes - supplement the formal school program. Parent and student approval of this aspect is strong.

The school is to be congratulated for its success in building student connectedness to school. Encouraging the active engagement of students in learning is an emerging focus. As one example, the development of a ‘homework choice’ program at year 4/5 has encouraged student to select from a number of options – including music practice, sports training as well as from a number of academic pursuits such as reading – and monitor their own progress. Student feedback to the reviewer strongly supported this approach but parental approval was far more qualified. The adoption of consistent approach to homework and the further development of assessment as learning, autonomous learning and negotiated curriculum
approaches are recommended future approaches to increase the intrinsic motivation of students.

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

Despite the difficulties inherent in a declining enrolment situation, student welfare has remained a high priority. Maintaining a full time position has not been feasible, adjustments to the timetable have enabled the student welfare coordinator to address the immediate concerns of staff, parents and students. The provision of a speech pathologist and educational psychologist through DEECD and school funds has extended this support.

The SSE pays tribute to the work of Park Ridge staff, recognizing that *teachers giving freely of their time enabled the provision of extra-curricula activities and teachers’ willingness to embrace new initiatives and inculcate them into their programs was exemplary.*

The school council has been proactive in its support of the school: a parent representative has developed a facilities master plan that has encouraged a prompt, targeted and effective response to resource development.

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

The new strategic plan should aim to institutionalize the sound initiatives introduced during of the recent review period.

The following are suggested for implementation in the new strategic plan and should be read in conjunction with the analysis and recommendations in sections 4.1 and 4.2. They include the recommendations of the SSE and the discussions at review.

**Goal**

To improve levels of student motivation and engagement in learning

**Targets**

Each year under review, for each student cohort, aim to improve the student motivation variable score of the attitudes to school survey

**Milestones** may include improvement in relevant variables of the parent opinion survey, including approachability, stimulating learning, student motivation and school connectedness
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Improvement Strategy</th>
<th>Suggested actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enhance opportunities for student leadership, the expression of the student voice and</td>
<td>• Fully implement the DEECD <em>Engaging Schools are Effective Schools</em> program</td>
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<td>the active participation of students in learning</td>
<td>• Review attendance recording practices. Develop an Individual Attendance Plan (IAP) for students at risk. Raise parent awareness of the impact of absence on student learning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Undertake a collaborative review of homework practices involving teachers, parents, students. Develop relevant guidelines, assure consistent practice</td>
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<td>• Support the effective coordination of student welfare needs and the extension of appropriate community links</td>
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<td>• Embed restorative practices and resilience programs across the school</td>
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<td>• Enhance the provision of an inclusive environment that acknowledges the benefits of a multicultural society and the talents of students across the full range of multiple intelligences</td>
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<td>• Build the focus on sustainability and student participation in this</td>
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<td>• Expand student leadership opportunities and formally report such activities as part of VELS personal and interpersonal learning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Explore opportunities to enhance the expression of the student voice especially in assessment ‘as’ learning and classroom programs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Investigate the provision of a learning mentor program to build student aspirations and maximize learning potential</td>
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