

Low SES School Communities Smarter Schools National Partnership evaluation

Case studies of staffing, management and accountability initiatives

Second Progress Report

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CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON
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Glossary

AL	Accelerated Literacy
AR	Accelerated Reading
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
COAG	Council of Australian Government
EARS	Executive Assessment and Review Schedule
ESL	English as a Second Language
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
HAT	Highly Accomplished Teacher
HSC	Higher School Certificate
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
KLA	Key Learning Area
LBOTE	Language Background Other Than English
LOP	Leader Of Pedagogy
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy
PARS	Principal Assessment Review Schedule
PBL	Positive Behaviour for Learning
PLP	Personal Learning Plan / Professional Learning Plans
PSFP	Priority Schools Funding Program
PSP	Priority Schools Program
SAO	School Administrative Officer
SLSO	Student Learning Support Officers
SMART	School Measurement Assessment and Reporting Toolkit
TARS	Teacher Assessment and Review Schedule
TPL	Teacher Professional Learning

1. Introduction

The University of Melbourne's Centre for Research on Education Systems (CRES) has been commissioned on behalf of the NSW Minister for Education to undertake an evaluation of school staffing, management and accountability initiatives in the NSW Smarter Schools National Partnership on Low Socio Economic Status (SES) School Communities, henceforth referred to as the Low SES SSNP.

This evaluation is one of two that address initiatives under the National Partnership Agreement on Low SES SSNP:

- *Evaluation of School Staffing, Management and Accountability Initiatives* being conducted by CRES
- *Evaluation of School External Partnerships* being conducted by the University of Canberra's Education Institute in conjunction with CRES.

The evaluations have their origins in the 2008 changes to Commonwealth-State funding arrangements and the Council of Australian Government's (COAG's) subsequent approval of the National Education Agreement and creation of the Smarter Schools National Partnerships. The evaluations address aspects of the bilateral National Partnership Agreement for Low SES School Communities between the Commonwealth and New South Wales and the associated implementation plan.

Case studies of Low SES SSNP initiatives

This report is part of the agreed work program for the evaluation of school staffing, management and accountability initiatives. It is the second progress report of the evaluation and presents seven case studies of schools that have implemented a range of staffing, management and accountability initiatives as part of the Low SES SSNP. The case study research component is one of the five inquiry components of the evaluation design. The other four research components, outlined in Section 2 are data-base development and analysis, literature review, school plans/reports content analysis and stakeholder surveys.

The case studies provide a snapshot of how the schools in different settings have designed and implemented Low SES SSNP initiatives, in particular those related to school staffing, management and accountability initiatives. Case study schools highlight differences in the emphasis placed on initiatives directly related to staffing, management and accountability. They provide insights into the diversity of interpretations, priorities and applications of the Low SES SSNP reform agenda.

This report includes some consideration of the benefit and impact that the initiatives may be having based on changes in student performance as well as non-academic outcomes related to the way teachers and schools work.

Method

The case study method entailed a set of steps including selection of schools, initial contact with schools to obtain consent to participate, telephone interviews with principals, school

visits, follow up contact, and data analysis and report writing.

Selection of schools

The schools were selected in consultation with authorities from the relevant sectors. An important consideration was that schools selected were not being overburdened by participation in any other SSNP evaluation activity. It was also important to select schools that, as a whole, represented some of the diversity of Low SES SSNP schools in New South Wales in relation to school type, sector, gender, size, and student characteristics.

The Low SES SSNP school database, school websites and individual school plans were analysed in order to select case study schools that were implementing relevant initiatives.

Initial contact with schools

The research team worked in partnership with sector authority representatives to help contact and seek the participation of the selected schools. After being advised of the evaluation by sector authorities, selected schools were contacted by the evaluation team at the end of Term 1, 2012, with an invitation to participate in the evaluation projects.

A follow up telephone conversation provided an opportunity to discuss the evaluation project with principals, especially the implications of participation. One school declined the invitation to participate because of timing, and consequently an alternative school was selected. This telephone meeting together with email contacts allowed researchers and schools to develop an agreed schedule and protocols for school visits.

Telephone interviews with principals

Telephone interviews were held with each principal to ensure understanding about the evaluation project, to engage them in the development of a detailed school profile database and to plan for the school visit. The following key documents were prepared to facilitate the telephone meeting with principals. These documents were emailed to principals in advance of the telephone interviews:

- individualised information sheet for each school
- school profile developed using system level data, 'My School,' the school website and the 2011 NSW SSNP Annual Report where available
- semi-structured interview schedule framework, detailing questions related to: school leadership, parent/guardian and community member involvement at the school, parent/guardian involvement at home, parent/guardian and community member involvement in school decision making, other external partnerships, impacts and indicators
- template to facilitate the development of the plan for the school visit.

Schools were informed that the evaluation project aimed to:

- describe the specific initiatives / strategies implemented by schools as part of their Low SES SSNP participation
- identify factors that were critical to implementation
- determine the extent to which initiatives had led to change or improvement

- identify resources used to implement initiatives
- assess the implications for sustainability and transferability.

Principals were invited to review their draft school profile statement. This profile included school details such as student characteristics, staffing information, student performance, financial information, sources of funding and NP financial information.

School visits

School visits were undertaken from the end of May to the end of June 2012. Individual and group interviews were held with principals, school leaders, Parents and Citizens Association members, teachers, and the key professional and paraprofessional staff. School visits included a tour of the school, and opportunities to observe and participate in relevant activities and to gain insights into the relevant school operations.

The critical task for the researchers was to gain insights into the development, implementation and review of Low SES SSNP initiatives in schools:

- what funding had been allocated and how it was used
- how schools conceptualised the Low SES SSNP
- key staffing, management and accountability initiatives
- critical activities, what were they aiming to achieve, how were they linked to the Low SES SSNP reform agenda
- perceived challenges and impacts.

Schools also provided relevant documentation to assist the research process.

Follow up

The researchers followed up with individual schools in order to complete interviews or to seek clarifications and confirmations.

Data analysis and report writing

The interviews were transcribed and the data was analysed according to themes. A case study reporting format was determined and individual cases studies developed.

Profile of the case study schools

The schools selected as case studies are located across five regions, include primary, secondary and combined schools, and schools with diverse student populations in terms of numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students and students with a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE). All of the selected schools started to implement the Low SES SSNP in 2009/10.

Case study schools

The following tables detail school information and characteristics of case study schools participating in the evaluation of staffing, management and accountability initiatives. Table 1.1 lists the schools and provides information relating to school type, sector, region, and

enrolments.

Table 1.1 List of case study schools and characteristics

School Name	Sector	Region/Diocese	Type	School Size
Regional Central School	Government	Northern Riverina	K-12	<150
South West High School	Government	South West Sydney	7-12 Girls	700-1,000
Regional High School	Government	Western NSW	7-12	700-1,000
Valley Public School	Government	Hunter Central Coast	K-6	200-300
Catholic College	Catholic	Sydney Archdiocese	7-12 Boys	>1,000
Western Public School	Government	Western Sydney	P-6	200-300
Chambers Primary School	Government	New England	K-6	200-300

SSNP funding

Funding received by case study schools for implementing Low SES SSNP initiatives in 2012 is identified in Table 1.2. The table also lists other sources of funding received by schools in 2012 to support various targeted student needs. Differences in funding levels for Low SES SSNP reflect differences in the numbers of student enrolment.

Table 1.2 Low SES SSNP 2012 funding to case study schools and additional program funding received

School Name	Low SES	C4E ¹	PSFP/PSP ²	Norta Norta ³	ESL ⁴
Regional Central School	\$144,052	✓			
South West High School	\$923,647		✓		✓
Regional High School	\$767,598			✓	
Valley Public School	\$259,574	✓			
Catholic College	\$1,092,000				✓
Western Public	\$247,824		✓		✓
Chambers Primary School	\$200,000		✓	✓	

Notes:

¹ Centre for Excellence schools receive funding to employ a Highly Accomplished Teacher (HAT), a paraprofessional and are allocated \$50,000 for resources.

² Since 2006, the Priority Schools Funding Program (PSFP) has been incorporated into the Priority Schools Programs (PSP). The PSFP focuses on improving students' literacy, numeracy and participation outcomes. It provides additional assistance to government school communities to reduce the achievement gap for students in schools with high concentrations of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds. The PSP supports schools serving high concentrations of Low SES communities in NSW. Schools are provided with additional funding, staffing and consultancy support.

³ Norta Norta funding provides tutorial assistance for senior Aboriginal students; independent learning hubs for Aboriginal students from K-12 and tutoring/mentoring/leadership programs for Aboriginal students in middle and senior years.

⁴ \$136 million was distributed through ESL funding during 2011/2012. This funding supports newly arrived migrants students through intensive language instruction and specialist English teacher positions.

Staffing characteristics

In developing a picture of case study school environments it is important to understand schools' individual staffing profiles. Table 1.3 shows selected teacher characteristics of government case study primary and secondary schools. Unfortunately comparative databases are not available to develop comparable profiles for Catholic case study schools. For comparison, each table includes values for all primary and secondary schools participating in the NSW Low SES SSNP.

Table 1.3 Selected teacher characteristics of case study government schools

		<i>All govt secondary schools in Low SES SSNP</i>	<i>All govt primary schools in Low SES SSNP</i>	<i>Regional Central School</i>	<i>South West High School</i>	<i>Regional High School</i>	<i>Valley Public School</i>	<i>Western Public School</i>	<i>Chambers Public School</i>
Sex (%)	Male	42.1	19.0	42.9	23.8	42.1	21.4	7.1	18.2
	Females	57.9	81.0	57.1	76.2	57.9	78.6	92.9	81.8
Age of teachers in years (%)	Under 30	12.3	9.2	7.1	14.3	10.5	7.1	21.4	9.1
	30 to 49	49.1	48.0	57.1	58.7	43.9	64.3	57.1	40.9
	50 and older	38.6	42.9	35.7	27.0	45.6	28.6	21.4	50.0
Years of service of teachers (%)	Less than one year	5.9	4.6	0.0	6.3	5.3	7.1	7.1	0.0
	1 to 3 years	15.4	14.4	7.1	14.3	15.8	21.4	28.6	9.1
	4 to 9 years	23.8	20.0	21.4	12.7	15.8	21.4	21.4	31.8
	10 or more years	54.9	61.0	71.4	66.7	63.2	50.0	42.9	59.1
Years in current position (%)	Less than one year	12.0	13.6	7.1	9.5	8.8	28.6	7.1	9.1
	1 to 3 years	31.0	31.6	28.6	23.8	33.3	28.6	42.9	36.4
	4 to 9 years	30.4	32.6	50.0	27.0	42.6	35.7	35.7	40.9
	10 or more years	26.6	22.3	14.3	39.7	33.3	7.1	14.3	13.6
Teachers leaving for any reason %		10.7	12.9	7.1	6.3	3.5	7.1	0.0	0.0
Average days sick leave per teacher		6.4	6.5	3.6	5.3	5.4	9.1	5.1	6.6

Source: Based on data supplied by NSW DEC. Sick leave is for only part of 2011, all other values for 2010. Values for schools with few teachers can change substantially from year to year. The evaluation team was not able to compare Catholic school staffing data.

Notes: Care is required not to over-interpret the values in Table 1.3 because values for any particular school can shift substantially from year-to-year, especially for smaller schools.

The teacher characteristics provided in Table 1.3 and 1.4 are the sex, age and experience (years as a teacher and years in current position) profiles of the teaching workforce in 2010, the per cent of teachers who left the school for any reason during 2010, and the average number of days of sick leave for teachers for the first part of 2011. Levels of sick leave and turnover of staff are potential teacher satisfaction measures. Turnover also bears on the efficacy of provision of increased professional development and on the ability to develop on-going relationships with students and parents. Experience measures at least partly reflect the

impact of mobility over time—a school with a highly mobile labour force, all else equal, might be expected to have a teacher workforce with a lower level of experience.

The results in Table 1.3 are not always consistent, but suggest that of the three primary schools included in the table, the teaching workforce of Chambers Public School is the more experienced and stable. The teaching workforce of Western Public School is possibly the least experienced. The results also suggest that of the two secondary schools included in the table, the teaching workforce of South West High School is more experienced and stable than average. The turnover of case study schools has been relative low in comparison with all government schools in Low SES SSNP. Variation in staff stability amongst schools is attributed to a number of factors, including school culture, quality of leadership, and opportunities available to staff. Regional High School's lower turnover than South West High may be explained by differences in the availability of teaching opportunities in local areas.

As is evident in Table 1.4, which identifies length of time that school principals have been at the school, most of the case study schools have principals who have been in their positions for more than five years. A new principal commenced in Term 2, 2012 at Western Primary School. All principals with the exception of the principal of Regional Central School had held principal positions prior to taking up their current positions. The principal of Regional Central School had previously held an assistant principal position.

Table 1.4 Leadership Tenure

School Name	New Principal	Longer Term Principal
Regional Central School		5 years
South West High School		7 years
Regional High School		1 year
Valley Public School	commenced T3	
Catholic College		5 years
Western Public School	commenced T2	
Chambers Primary School		7 years

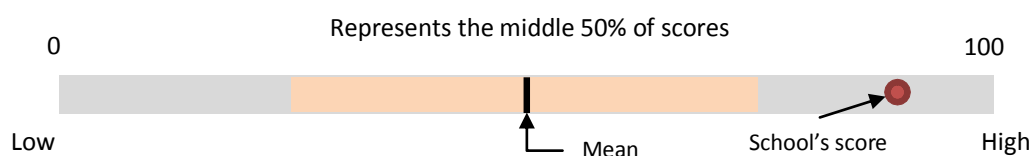
School profile

Each case study provides a profile at the beginning of background information related to the following six key measures:

1. **Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA)**¹ is a scale developed by ACARA as a measure of educational advantage based on the socio-educational characteristics of the populations that schools serve.
2. **LBOTE** is a measure of the number of LBOTE students expressed as a percentage of all enrolments.
3. **ATSI** measures the number of students who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander as a percentage of all enrolments.
4. **National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)**² mean scores for selected dimensions for 2010 are provided. The results are based on reading, one of four literacy components in the program, and on numeracy.
5. **Attendance** is a measure calculated at a school level as the average number of school days attended by all students as a percentage of the total number of possible school days.
6. **Completion** was determined by expressing the number of achieved senior school certificates as a percentage of the school enrolment

All figures related to these measures are based on 2010 data. The use of 2010 provides a profile of schools early in the participation of schools in the Low SES SSNP.

Information relating to the measures is presented in a range of scales (see below) that are inclusive of all government, Catholic and independent schools in NSW. Each scale commences with the minimum possible value at one end and the maximum possible value at the other end³. The salmon banding represents the middle 50 per cent of schools. Mean state values are identified in the middle of each scale, represented by a black vertical line. The red dot indicates the school's score on the scale.



¹ The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is a scale that enables meaningful comparisons to be made across schools. It has been developed specifically for the *My School* website for the purpose of identifying schools serving similar student populations. The variables used in calculating a value on the ICSEA scale include student-level data on the occupation and education level of parents/carers, and/or socio-economic characteristics of the areas where students live, whether a school is in a metropolitan, regional or remote area, proportion of students from a language background other than English, as well as the proportion of Indigenous students enrolled at the school. In using the ACARA data associated with The My School database (including the ICSEA calculations and school financial information) our interpretation is of course subject to the caveats associated with that data as set out on the My School website. More details can be found at: http://www.acara.edu.au/myschool/myschool_glossary.html.

² NAPLAN is an annual national assessment for students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9. Assessment is undertaken in four areas or domains of: reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy.

³ Please note that the minimum and maximum numbers for scales differ as they reflect the possible range in school samples.

Structure of the report

The case studies are provided in separate chapters, starting with Regional High School in chapter three. The case studies provide insights into contextual circumstances, school goals and intentions, initiative implementation processes and challenges and impacts. They provide an opportunity to examine factors critical to effective implementation of initiatives.

Following the case studies is an analysis which attempts to synthesise some key themes and issues that emerge.

Before turning to the case studies, some background information on the Low SES SSNP is provided in the next chapter.

2. Evaluation of the Low SES SSNP staffing, management and accountability initiatives

Background to the National Partnerships

The Smarter Schools National Partnerships are agreed educational reforms or service delivery improvements. They have been designed with clearly defined outputs and benchmarks that support the goals set by the National Education Agreement and the vision of the Melbourne Declaration of Goals for Young Australians. All policy documents represent a commitment to lifting education outcomes for Australian students made between the Australian Government and the Governments of the States and Territories, developed through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

The Melbourne Declaration of Goals for Young Australians defines key goals for the Australian education sector to work towards, to ensure that ‘Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence’ (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) 2008). It places importance on all young Australians becoming successful learners, confident and creative individuals as well as active and informed citizens. The declaration confers the importance of targeted support to help disadvantaged young Australians, so that all students ‘achieve not only equality of opportunity but also more equitable outcomes’ (MCEETYA 2008: 15).

The National Education Agreement was signed in partnership with the Commonwealth and all State and Territory Governments in 2009, as a joint commitment for all Governments and sectors to work together to improve student outcomes and realise the vision of the Melbourne Declaration. The National Education Agreement’s central objective is that all Australian school students acquire the ‘knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society and employment in a globalised economy’ (COAG, 2009). The National Education Agreement demands a best-practice approach to resource allocation, where accountability and reporting is at the forefront. This reporting can henceforth be used as an evidence base to support further reform and system improvement. To support the ambitious goals of the National Education Agreement, funding arrangements were changed to an ongoing arrangement through the Intergovernmental Agreement, rather than the former quadrennial arrangement (COAG, 2009).

The three Smarter Schools National Partnerships in NSW are:

1. Improving Teacher Quality
2. Literacy and Numeracy
3. Low Socio Economic School Communities.

All Partnerships are designed to complement one another, as they share common objectives and theoretical framing, and are built upon a solid evidence base.

Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership

The improvement of teacher quality underpins all SSNPS as evidence shows that it is the single greatest in-school influence on student engagement and achievement. The National Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality recognises that the quality of teaching can

overcome location and other disadvantages. Under this partnership, a range of reforms target critical points in the teacher ‘lifecycle’: to attract, train, develop, and retain quality teachers and leaders in schools and classrooms (Smarter Schools National Partnerships, 2011).

The broad areas of reform include:

- attracting the best graduates to teaching through additional pathways into teaching
- improving the quality and consistency of teacher training in partnership with the universities
- developing National Professional Standards for Teachers
- national consistency in teacher registration to support improved mobility in the workforce
- developing and enhancing the skills and knowledge of teachers and school leaders through improved performance management and professional learning
- increased teacher retention through in-school supports and rewarding quality teachers and school leaders in rural/remote and hard-to-staff schools
- improving the quality and availability of teacher workforce data.

Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership

The Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership sought to improve literacy and numeracy skills for students, particularly students from ATSI and low SES backgrounds. The Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership focused on three key areas:

- quality teaching of literacy and numeracy
- stronger school leadership
- effective use of student performance indicators to identify where students need support.

Participating schools selected a focus on either literacy or numeracy. They used funding to implement one whole school /class program and one individual student intervention program. Though this partnership has now ceased schools also in the Low Socio-economic Status Schools National Partnership may elect to use SSNP funding to continue programs.

Low Socio Economic Status School Communities National Partnership

The Low SES SSNP targets schools in low socio-economic school communities, to improve student education and life opportunities. Schools that are participating in the Low SES SSNP may choose to implement strategies from six areas of reform, though reform areas 1 and 4 are mandatory for all schools.

Government schools are required to implement all six reforms areas.

Reform Area 1:	Incentives to attract high-performing teachers and principals
Reform Area 2	Adoption of best practice performance management and staffing arrangements that articulate a clear role for principals
Reform Area 3:	School operational arrangements that encourage innovation and flexibility
Reform Area 4:	Provide innovative and tailored learning opportunities
Reform Area 5:	Strengthen school accountability
Reform Area 6:	External partnerships with parents, other schools, businesses and communities and the provision of access to extended services (including through brokering arrangements).

These three SSNP agreements have been designed to function independently, but they ‘are tightly integrated and mutually complementary processes of reform’ (Smarter Schools National Partnerships, 2011: 2).

New South Wales policy context

New South Wales has aligned the various goals of State and Federal education reform, including the COAG targets, the National Education Agreement (NEA), the National Partnerships as well as the NSW state plan, ‘NSW 2021; a plan to make NSW number one’. The five targets for school education, taken from the NSW state plan include:

- Increase student achievement in literacy and numeracy
- More students finish high school or equivalent
- Schools have high expectations for all their students
- Improve the quality of all teaching
- Public schools have more options for local decision making.

(NSW Government, 2011)

These targets show a clear congruence to the ambitious targets of the National Partnerships and the Melbourne Declaration of Goals for Young Australians. The NSW Department of Education and Communities, the NSW Catholic Education Commission and the Association of Independent Schools NSW are all involved in the Smarter Schools National Partnerships. The three sectors have collaborated extensively to implement the three Smarter Schools National Partnerships.

Participating Schools

The selection of schools participating in the Low SES SSNP by their sector (government, Catholic, and independent) and their type (primary, secondary, combined, special) was based on their score on the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ (ABS) Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD). The index was created using 2006 census data for the social and economic characteristics of mostly small geographic areas across Australia. Values for

the index were linked to parent address information to provide a nationally consistent measure for each school.

Government schools were selected on the basis of additional state-level criteria:

- new or continuing schools supported through the Priority Schools Program (PSP)⁴ and not already included in the IRSD-based list
- 30 next most disadvantaged schools identified by the PSP survey as meeting the criteria for the Priority Action Schools (PAS)⁵ Program
- schools not already selected and in which more than 25 per cent of total enrolments were Aboriginal students (averaged over a 3 year period)
- schools located in remote areas of New South Wales as identified by the ABS's Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA)⁶

Table 2.1 shows the characteristics of the schools participating in the Low SES SSNP. The table also shows the year in which schools joined the partnership. Since schools are each expected to participate for four years, the overall Low SES SSNP will conclude in 2015. All cohorts have now commenced their involvement in the Low SES SSNP and the partnership is at peak participation.

As at June 2012, 635 NSW schools are participating in the four year Low SES SSNP, of which 86.5 per cent are from the government sector, 9.7 per cent from the Catholic sector and 3.8 per cent from the independent sector. The majority of the schools participating in the Low SES SSNP are primary (434 or 68.4 per cent), with smaller numbers of secondary (111 or 17.4 per cent), combined (60 or 9.4 per cent) and special (30 or 4.7 per cent) schools. Not all the combined schools include Year 11 or 12 students.

⁴ The PSP provides additional funding, staffing and consultancy support for schools in New South Wales serving high concentrations of low socio-economic students. Participating schools were identified in a voluntary survey of government schools in 2004. These resources are provided in addition to the resources provided to all government schools.

⁵ Since 2006, the PAS program has been incorporated into the PSP. Priority schools with the deepest needs are provided with further support through the PAS program. The criteria for selection to the program include the level of SES, academic and other achievements, school size and the number of beginning teachers. These schools are targeted as centres of innovation for improved teaching and learning practices through specialised programs and new approaches to staffing and resource allocation.

⁶ ARIA is an index of the accessibility of places to service centres, or conversely of remoteness of places. Geographical areas are given a score (continuous between 0 to 15) based on the road distance to service towns of different sizes. Scores for regions are derived by averaging scores of 1 km² grid.

Table 2.1 Schools participating in the Low SES SSNP by sector, type of school and the year of joining the initiative, NSW

	2009/10		2011		2012		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
All	52.0	331	30.0	191	18.0	113	100.0	635
Sector								
Government	89.1	295	85.9	164	80.5	91	86.5	550
Catholic	6.9	23	11.5	22	14.1	16	9.7	61
Independent	3.9	13	2.6	5	5.3	6	3.8	24
Type of school								
Primary	66.5	220	78.5	150	57.4	64	68.4	434
Secondary	18.1	60	14.7	28	20.0	23	17.4	111
Combined	12.1	40	2.1	4	13.9	16	9.4	60
Special	3.3	11	4.7	9	8.7	10	4.7	30

Sources: www.nationalpartnerships.nsw.edu.au/resources/documents/SchoolList-LSES.pdf, My School website and selected school web sites.

Note: Schools commencing in 2009 and 2010 are combined for reporting purposes.

Evaluation of the staffing, management and accountability initiatives

The school staffing, management and accountability initiatives evaluation project is evaluating the extent to which schools in the Low SES SSNP in NSW are demonstrating improvement related to five reform areas:

- Reform Area 1. Incentives to attract high-performing teachers and principals
- Reform Area 2. Adoption of best practice performance management and staffing
- Reform Area 3. Operational arrangements encouraging innovation & flexibility
- Reform Area 4. Provide innovative and tailored learning opportunities
- Reform Area 5. Strengthen school accountability.

Reform Area 6⁷ is being addressed through the *Evaluation of School External Partnerships* being conducted by the University of Canberra's Education Institute in conjunction with CRES. While aspects of the two evaluations have been conducted collaboratively, the project identities, conception and deliverables remain separate. This collaboration minimises the burden on schools, their communities and staff members involved in the administration of the Low SES SSNP in the government, Catholic and independent sectors in NSW.

⁷ Reform area number six addresses external partnerships with parents, other schools, businesses and communities and the provision of access to extended services (including through brokering arrangements).

The findings from this evaluation are intended to inform policy making and practices at NSW state, regional and local school levels across all sectors of schooling. The challenge in this evaluation is identification of the unique effects of the *school staffing, management and accountability initiatives* on schools and students. The following factors are being considered as part of the evaluation exercise.

- Confounding effect of participation by schools in other National Partnerships designed to improve educational outcomes. For instance, schools may also be participating in the *Literacy and Numeracy* and *Improving Teacher Quality* Partnerships.
- Number and combinations of reforms that schools may choose to implement and the varying levels of resources they may allocate to these reforms.
- Reallocation of existing resources to the *School Staffing, Management and Accountability Initiatives* from other programs and the loss of potential benefits from these other programs.
- Limited time span in which the initiatives can have an effect and in which to monitor any changes in outcomes.

The effects of interest to this evaluation are of three types:

- **immediate** effects of the particular incentive e.g. attracting and retaining principals and teachers
- **intermediate or indicator** effects on e.g. school attendance and student and school community engagement
- effect on the **overall learning and engagement** of students as might be reflected in external test results e.g. NAPLAN scores, in school-based assessments or in Year 12 completion rates.

In addition to identifying the size of any effects of the particular reforms implemented by the schools, the evaluation will attempt to produce some estimate of the value of a reform in terms of the size of its effect per dollar expended. A reform that produces a smaller improvement on say literacy than another reform might nevertheless be more cost effective if it is cheaper to implement.

Multivariate statistical analysis will enable the size of any effects of the initiative and of elements within the initiative to be estimated. Comparisons will be made in order to control influences on outcomes outside the initiative affecting all schools. Several comparisons are potentially available for this evaluation, each of which has its own limitations:

- *Differences within the participating cohorts.* Each cohort offers the opportunity to evaluate differences in the outcomes across combinations of reforms. Such comparisons can be either cross-sectional at a point in time or changes over time, where a school's initial outcomes are effectively used as a control to remove any prior differences.

- *Differences between cohorts.* The entry of schools to the initiative in four cohorts over four years provides the opportunity to make comparisons among cohorts on the basis of their length of participation in the partnership. The advantage of between-cohort comparison is that the comparisons are made among schools in low SES communities only.
- *Differences among all schools in New South Wales.* The comparison is then with schools engaged in the Low SES SSNP with schools that are not engaged in the Low SES SSNP. The comparison group now includes schools with substantially higher socioeconomic student profiles. While these differences can be used explicitly in any statistical modelling, a focus on change scores for outcomes will add to the statistical power of the control for differences in SES. Additionally customised comparisons with schools that were very nearly selected for the program can be made (that is, schools with lower SES scores, but not sufficiently low for selection for this initiative). Care will need to be taken to identify any ceiling effects in outcome measures such as NAPLAN scores and to identify interaction effects.

Evaluation design

In designing the evaluation project, five inquiry components have been identified: database development and analysis; literature review; school plan/ reports content analysis; stakeholder surveys; and focus school case studies.

1. Database development and analysis

To understand fully the unique context and operating environment of each school, a database is being built. The database contains a rich and detailed profile of each school's characteristics, circumstances and its programs and initiatives relevant to the National Partnerships. To minimise the burden on schools, in the first instance data has been obtained from the central administrative sources, such as Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in relation to NAPLAN, and information that has already been collected from schools by system authorities relating to initiative implementation, funding and school and student characteristics.

This data will be the basis for a consolidated database of NSW schools to be developed over the duration of the project to inform evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of selected reforms of the Low SES SSNP. Some possible outcome measures include: NAPLAN performance in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9; school-based assessment and reporting mechanisms; Year 12 or equivalent attainment (where relevant); student destinations (where relevant); student turnover, attendance and retention; school satisfaction (parents, students), student and school community engagement (through surveys of parents and students), evaluation of the effectiveness of their initiatives by schools and staff turnover and levels of absenteeism.

The database will be analysed using appropriate multivariate statistical techniques.

2. Literature review

A second source of data is the review of literature relating to three high use terms within educational research and policy arena: staffing, management and accountability. The literature review included a consideration of the rationale for focussing on low SES school

communities.

3. School plans/reports content analysis

A third source of data will be a content analysis of the school plans and information provided for annual reports. These plans indicate the school context, the National Partnership reforms with which the school is engaged, the priority areas, strategies and source of resources, intended outcomes and targets and responsible parties.

4. Stakeholder surveys

A fourth source of data is information provided through school-based online surveys. In order to understand the impact and challenges of initiatives at the school level, surveys of school principals and teachers as well as more targeted student surveys will be undertaken.

The aim of these surveys is to collect more detailed information on the practices and processes that will help to assess the impact of school staffing, management and accountability initiatives at the school level. These surveys will be undertaken in collaboration with the external partnerships evaluation to minimise the demands made on schools. Surveys of principals and teachers aim to assess the value of selected reforms of the National Partnerships initiative and the value of particular initiatives specifically supported by initiative funding within school settings. They are seeking information about synergies with other programs, cooperation with other schools or community groups, difficulties in the implementation of the initiatives and any effects associated with redirection of resources and estimates of the extent of funding for particular initiatives.

The issues to be explored through the surveys have been identified in consultation with stakeholders. The design of the surveys has also taken into account the data being collected through other surveys, such as the situational analysis scans, other reports and the Cross-Sectoral Impact Survey (CSIS)⁸.

5. School case studies

The case studies provide a fifth source of information. The case studies enable an exploration of the richness and extensiveness of the schools' implementation of the Low SES SSNP. Significantly, the case study methodology provides insights into the ways in which contextual variables interact with conceptions by stakeholders and planning and delivery processes. The purpose of the case study exercise is to:

- document, describe and rationalise the development and implementation of the initiatives or strategies that are being implemented by schools
- understand the relationship that the Low SES SSNP has to the broader strategic direction of the school, contributions of other targeted funding programs as well as the overall goals and targets
- identify resources used to implement initiatives and relationship between funding

⁸ The Cross Sectoral Impact Survey (CSIS) investigates the impact of the SSNPs. It was first administered to all schools involved in the NSW SSNP in 2011, and will be re-administered to each school at key points in their SSNP participation.

programs

- develop insights into factors that enable success and to better understand the diverse and complex challenges facing schools in their implementation efforts
- identify the effects of interest to this evaluation: the immediate effects of the particular initiative; the intermediate or indicator effects and the effect on the overall learning and engagement of students as might be reflected in their performance
- determine the impact and the extent to which initiatives have led to school improvement, in particular, in relation to reform areas
- assess and identify the implications for sustainability, transferability and areas that may benefit from policy attention.

3. Western Public School

Western Public is a preschool to Year 6 school with around 210 students in the primary school and 40 preschool students. The school is located in the Western Sydney Region. In line with changes in its neighbourhood, the profile of the student population is changing from families in public housing and rental homes to mortgage-holders and two income families.

The school's Low SES SSNP aims are to improve the quality of teaching, school planning and accountability processes. The school established a new executive leadership model to improve leadership effectiveness in the school. The executive team was expanded to include stage and learning area coordinators. Members of the new executive team had access to a mentor and also had opportunities to participate in team based leadership training programs.

A key goal of the school is to build teacher capacity by implementing a whole of school approach to professional learning. Student achievement outcomes are used to inform the design of professional learning activities. The professional learning needs of the staff as a whole and of individual staff are identified and an implementation plan is developed.

The school is seeking to improve its planning and accountability processes. It has enhanced its school plan development process by better aligning professional learning with the improvement of student programs. New methods for involving and seeking input from staff, students and community members have also been developed. Teachers are required to ensure that they use reflective journals or learning logs which incorporate relevant Low SES SSNP professional learning activities.

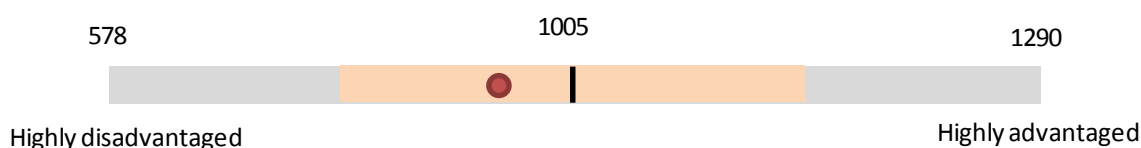
The Low SES SSNP funding has provided the school with scope to focus on establishing, implementing and continually reviewing its organisational change management model. Change is based around an approach that asks staff to stop and reflect, plan together, learn, discuss, debate and work on issues and problems collectively. Mentoring support and leadership skill training is designed to permit staff to implement change and manage stakeholder relations. Staff believe that programs, such as, Accelerated Literacy, Athletics and the home reading strategy are effective and that the investment in professional learning has improved teacher capacity and the learning environment for students.

School profile

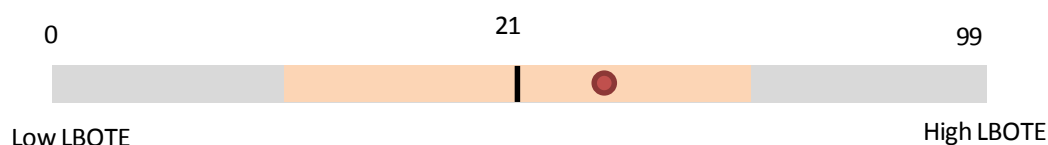
Student characteristics

The school's ICSEA value was 973 in 2010, which is below state mean. The school's LBOTE intake was 37 per cent in 2010, which is above the state mean (21 per cent). Of the 26 different ethnic groups, the largest group is Fijian Indian followed by other Islander groups. The school's ATSI student intake was three per cent in 2011, which is below state mean (seven per cent).

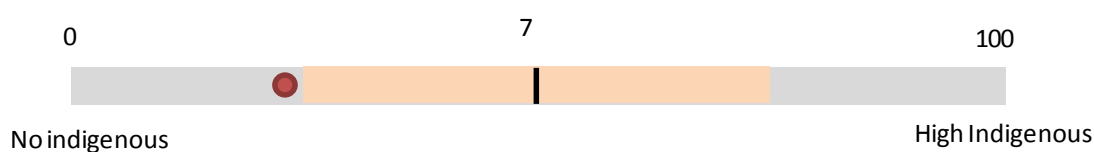
ICSEA = 973



LBOTE = 37%



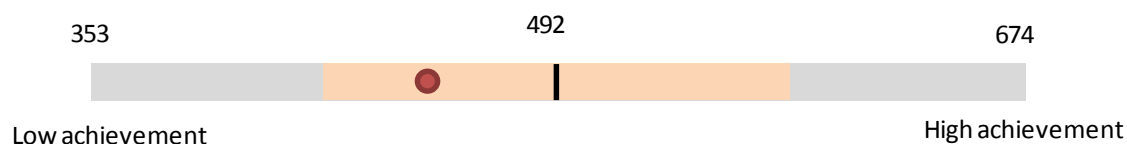
ATSI = 3%



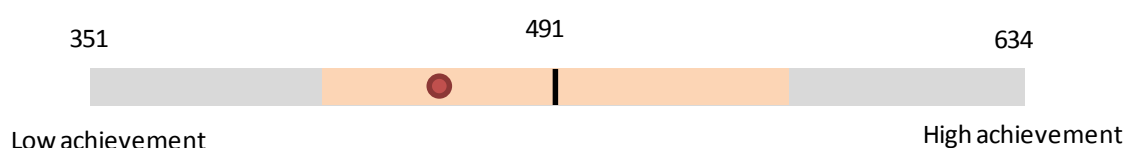
Student performance

In 2010 the school's NAPLAN results for reading and numeracy in Year 5 were below means for like schools and for the state overall. The school's Year 5 mean numeracy NAPLAN score was 430. The school's Year 5 mean reading NAPLAN score was 454. In 2010, the school's student attendance rate was 92 per cent.

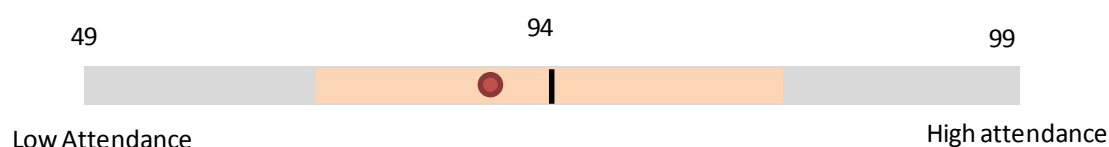
NAPLAN Year 5 numeracy = 435



NAPLAN Year 5 reading = 445



School attendance = 92%



Leadership and staffing

Principal tenure

Over the last five years there have been four principals (including one relieving principal). The current principal commenced at the start of Term 2 in 2012.

Staffing

The school has a total of 19 teaching and non teaching staff employed.

A comparison of Western Public School with all NSW Government primary schools participating in the Low SES SSNP for selected characteristics of teachers indicates:

- lower-than-average turnover of teachers (0.0 per cent compared with 12.9 per cent)
- younger than average teaching workforce—21.4 per cent of teachers are under 30 years (compared with 9.2 per cent overall) while only 21.4 per cent are 50 years or older (compared with 42.9 per cent)
- less experienced teacher workforce in terms of years of service—35.7 per cent have three or fewer years of service compared with the average of 19.0 per cent, while only 42.9 per cent have 10 years or more service compared with the average of 61.0 per cent
- slightly less experienced workforce in terms of teachers' years in their current position, with 50.0 per cent with three years or less in their current position, compared with 45.2 per cent overall and proportionately fewer (14.3 per cent) with ten years or more experience in their current position compared with 22.3 per cent overall
- average of 5.1 days of sick leave per teacher, which is slightly less than the average of 6.5 days for all Government schools in the Low SES SSNP.

SSNP funding

SSNP

The school entered the Low SES SSNP in 2010. The school's 2012 Low SES SSNP funding allocation was \$247,824

Other funding

The school is also in receipt of \$35,000 under the PSFP.

Low SES SSNP Initiatives

As part of the low SES SSNP, Western aims to improve the school staffing, planning and accountability processes as well as general educational provision for students. In some respects, the school was well placed to implement Low SES SSNP as a result of having undertaken a recent school review and also from the learning it gained from being a part of the Priority School Program (PSP) program, and the implementation of change associated with that scheme.

The school's Low SES SSNP funding is being used to:

- release an assistant principal to coordinate the Low SES SSNP at the school and manage its reporting and accountability
- release stage coordinators and KLA coordinators to attend executive meetings and for coordination of work in the school, including communication with families. The time is also used to access mentoring support, for engaging in leadership professional learning, and contributing to review and planning processes.
- release time for teachers to be trained in Accelerated Literacy and to implement professional learning activities. Funding is also used to cover costs of other professional learning programs.
- employ SLSOs (0.8 FTE) to support literacy and numeracy programs
- employ a speech pathologist (0.2 FTE) to provide intervention support
- employ an SAO (0.2 FTE) to provide data management and purchase resources
- purchase literacy and numeracy materials to establish and maintain programs
- contribute to NP regional coordination and administration.

The PSFP funding is used to provide literacy and numeracy support to students.

Key initiatives

Enhancing leadership effectiveness

Initiatives established to enhance the effectiveness of leadership include the establishment of a new school executive model and investment in leadership development and training.

Executive model

As part of the SSNP strategy the executive team was expanded to enable stage coordinators and key learning area coordinators to join the principal and the two assistant principals at the weekly executive meeting. The aim was to involve a broader range of leaders in school decision making.

In 2012, under the leadership of a new principal, the executive structure has been modified. As there is a perceived need to better prepare for the national curriculum, it was considered important to take a more focussed approach on KLA coordination and development. Therefore, stage coordinators are no longer members of the executive team and the assistant principal has the responsibility to oversight this area. The existing executive team members have an increased level of responsibility and accountability. They are required to play a role in curriculum leadership and to manage change at the school as well as representing the school at cluster and regional level and to participate in specialist networks.

Leadership development

The executive team was also mentored by a principal mentor who provided advice and guidance to its members. The mentor delivered modules from the DEC Team Leadership for School Improvement accredited course to the executive as well as to key staff from a nearby school. The view expressed by participants was that the training helped provide them with planning tools, prepared them for change and developed their engagement skills. They saw the scenario and solution based approach as an effective way of improving their needs identification and strategic thinking skills.

The consultant was always on call, provided support to the inexperienced principal, supported staff to share learning, brought in new ideas and was always helping to tweak to make things better (Executive team member).

The mentor also met with individual staff members who were aspiring to take on leadership positions. The mentor worked with individuals to help formulate their goals, determine areas requiring assistance (such as application and interviewing skills), provided details of contact and resource people, and gave feedback on leadership capacities and areas requiring further development.

Building teacher skills

Western is aiming to improve the quality of teaching through providing greater access for teachers to professional learning, enhancement of the performance management of staff, provision of mentoring support, and support for resource development.

Professional learning

A whole school approach is being adopted to the provision of professional learning and as part of this student outcomes (including school NAPLAN performance and other measures such as Best Start) are being used to better guide teaching. All teachers are provided with access to SMART data on the DEC network and use the associated applications. This is designed to enable them to analyse data and plan strategies and practices in the classroom⁹. The professional learning needs of the school as a whole and of individual staff members are

⁹ The school has set literacy and numeracy targets to improve for Years 3 and 5 as well as Kindergarten to Year 2 students. Targets to improve learning outcomes and attendance rates of Aboriginal students have also been set.

then identified and a plan of action developed:

We use NAPLAN alongside school planning. The data tells us things that we don't like to know. One of our trends is that our top kids do not make good growth. Our bottom kids make huge growth ... The data tells us that our kids can achieve... We are not challenging our top kids enough, pushing them enough. We know that when the disengagement starts to happen (Executive member).

All staff members were trained in Accelerated Literacy and are provided with refresher training as required. New staff members also receive training. By training all staff in the program, the school hopes to better target areas of need. For example, student performance on NAPLAN has highlighted the need to improve grammar skills. To address this, the school has developed a strategy to skill the staff in the *Prioritising Grammar* program.

Performance management

Through the implementation of TARS, each teacher is expected to maintain a reflective journal/learning log and in so doing have an accurate record of professional development activities¹⁰. Teachers are required to record the rationale and to outline the learning strategy for each professional development activity. These learning priorities are assessed by their supervisor.

Staff members who were interviewed reported that the TARS implementation has had both strengths and weaknesses. According to some, it has assisted the exchange of information between the teacher and the supervisor, and facilitated development:

The TARS process has helped me to set my goals ... I want to keep growing and to work out how to do that. I keep a journal because I am required to but also because I would keep notes anyway on new ideas I collect (Early career teacher).

The teachers identify personal goals that are linked to the school plan. They are also required to identify strategies to achieve these goals (Executive member).

But TARS is also considered by some to be too formal. According to some teachers, the TARS policy is clear but there is concern about its implementation, with some feeling that TARS is not as dynamic as it should be because it is implemented more as an event and not as an ongoing process. In addition, it is not well linked to the broader context of the school, and this restricts the capacity for the process to contribute strategically to achieving school goals. It therefore has the potential to add more value to individuals and the school as a whole, but this hasn't worked effectively as yet because of TARS itself. The same applies to the Executive Assessment and Review Schedule (EARS) process. It requires an explicit link to the school plan.

The quality of the process has been enhanced by NP funding, through the provision of release time for teachers to plan, implement and record their learning. The quality of the conversations has been perceived to have improved in consequence.

¹⁰ The school has set targets to improve the teacher quality in the context of both the NSW Quality Teaching model and the NSW Institute Professional Teaching Standards. Targets are also set to increase the level of staff competency and confidence in the use of available ICT and in integrating its use in all KLAs, to build capacity to implement the national curriculum and to improve understanding and knowledge of Aboriginal Australia.

Mentoring

According to teachers there is a strong ‘informal’ process of peer mentoring that has developed at the school, through the growing “sharing and working together culture”. Teachers are supported in their professional role through provision of access to demonstration lessons, feedback on their teaching and assistance with lesson and program planning. Formal mentoring support is also available through membership of cluster and regional networks (such as ESL and Reading Recovery).

The mentoring support built into the school culture is considered by many of the staff to be invaluable. New staff members are included and supported in their roles. They are provided with guidance and supported to improve classroom practice and to achieve school goals. In particular, they are mentored in Accelerated Literacy pedagogy and in guided reading. Mentors visit their classrooms to support their professional formation and to strengthen the guided reading group methodology:

I worked alongside another teacher, planned with other teachers... I have had the opportunity to watch other teachers give lessons. Other teachers have also come to watch me teach. They have given me feedback based on what they saw (Early Career Teacher).

Shared professional resources

Teachers have developed a professional resource bank, containing a range of tools that are filed on a share drive and able to be accessed from classrooms. It is continually expanded and improved and includes assessment tasks in all KLAs. These are moderated both within and across stages (during stage meetings and planning days) in order to achieve more consistent teacher judgement on ratings and grading. Through this process of discussion, teachers are able to identify discrepancies; for example, teachers have developed a matrix for talking and listening, incorporating the principles of consistent teacher judgement.

Learning support

In addition to the welfare team, the school learning support team assists classroom teachers through a variety of programs including Reading Recovery, early school support and personalised learning plans for specific students.

The team meets on a regular basis to consider individual cases. It comprises the principal, school counsellor and ESL and Reading Recovery teachers. Classroom teachers are invited to attend and the school counsellor follows up as necessary with families. A referral system that is initiated by the teacher and authorised by stage coordinators is in place. About 15 students are prioritised for case management at a time.

The learning support team also contributes to the effective reporting of students’ progress to family members.

Improving school planning and accountability

School plan

The Low SES SSNP planning enabled the school to review the existing process of school plan generation. It built on the school's cyclic review, which includes obtaining the views and input of teachers, families and students. As the Low SES SSNP process required a higher level of detailed planning, it provided better guidance about planning and change. The published guidelines and templates supported a stronger self-evaluation process and helped the school strive to be more transparent and therefore more accountable. The school reviews literacy and numeracy and whole school themes on an annual basis. An additional area that is linked to the school's plan (such as ICT, leadership and teaching and learning) is also reviewed annually.

Involving key stakeholders

The school makes efforts to involve different groups within the school community in its planning process. For example, the literacy and ICT teams made contributions to the school plan development for the first time in 2011. The student representative council (consisting of two students from each class) provides feedback to the school on ways of seeking feedback from students, including surveys. The school learnt from analysing survey responses that many of the students were dissatisfied with the quality of books the school used for the home reading program. The school responded by upgrading the collection and purchasing new material. Methods for seeking input from family and community members include holding community cafe events, and inviting parents to engage in activities that they can succeed in by providing them with opportunities to use and share their talents.

Information systems management

The school has developed a school level database that is used for tracking the progress of all students. By using SMART and the school level system teachers are able to benchmark student progress against region, state and national levels.

The school data includes Reading Recovery and ESL assessment information. It is used to inform the development of intervention strategies. Teachers and the counsellor use the data to address specific needs of students (e.g. integration). In particular, the data assists teachers to track student progress over time and to make judgements to inform reporting to families.

Conclusion

The school was well placed to implement Low SES SSNP as a result of having undertaken a recent school review and also from the learning it gained from PSP implementation. Through the Low SES SSNP, Western Public was able to further develop its "model for effective implementation of change". Central to this model is a systemic, holistic and integrated approach, which involves a multipronged approach across various levels:

- *Strategic planning*: requirement for school leadership to commit to whole school change and incorporate in school planning and review processes. Two factors are of central significance: the necessity to start with student data and the importance of

getting ownership and commitment by all stakeholder groups. Inclusive and collaborative practices need to be reflected at all levels of the school.

- *Building leadership capacity*: requirement to enhance leadership skills of all staff members. Leadership is considered by many of the staff members to start in the classroom as teachers have an important influence.
- *Managing the knowledge and information*: requirement to have effective systems in place – that is, access to the state student performance database as well as the school level database. This data informs needs analysis and decision making.
- *Enhancing quality teaching*: facilitation of continuous learning for staff is essential for achieving school goals and is also relevant for their growth as professionals. Of significance is the training model implemented. This model requires all staff members involved in the delivery of an innovation to be trained at the same time. This provides common direction and focuses people to work towards the same goal and in so doing they are able to experiment, trial, assess and improve.
- *Resourcing the delivery*: requirement for relevant and effective programs (such as, Accelerated Literacy and Mathletics) and learning materials and tools, including systems for organising these resources i.e. a resource bank that is easily accessible.

Low SES SSNP funds provided the school with the opportunity to focus on establishing, implementing and reviewing its model of implementation of change. There is strong support in the school for allowing time for people to stop and reflect, plan together, learn, discuss, debate and resolve.

There is a perception that the professional dialogue in the school has improved. Staff members were described as more willing to discuss and debate and in so doing able to better address issues of curriculum and pedagogy.

Areas requiring further development are also evident. Staff members pointed to the implementation of the performance management system and mentoring support for early career teachers as an area requiring further effort.

The school is now at a new turning point. With a new principal and the restructuring of the leadership model, the school community is re-conceptualising school leadership. A conversation about how best to use the SSNP funds in subsequent rounds has also started. The focus is now on streamlining the planning systems and processes of decision making. There is a view that more time could have been taken initially to establish the Low SES SSNP initiatives and to consider how best to allocate the funding. School community members indicated that the school was under pressure during the establishment phase to decide how to spend a large amount of money in a short period of time. To maximise the benefit of the funding, the school has made a commitment to improving the process for developing the Low SES SSNP strategy. There will be a strengthening of processes related to costing the implementation and seeking approval from the finance committee. School teams will then be expected to develop management plans to deliver strategic objectives and to account for outcomes.

4. Chambers Public School

Chambers Public School is a kindergarten to Year 6 public school catering for over 220 students in the New England Region.¹¹

The school's Low SES SSNP focuses on a number of initiatives that include developing leadership capacity, improving staff performance, updating and improving staff skills, improving student welfare and discipline, and improving assessment and school planning.

Low SES SSNP staffing and accountability funds are being used to release executive staff members to oversee and monitor school programs, release teachers to engage in professional learning, employ an SAO to monitor enrolment and develop strategies to minimise absenteeism, employ an AEO, employ Aboriginal SLSOs to assist students not meeting benchmark levels, and to employ a speech pathologist.

The school has restructured the executive staff portfolio to enable the executive members to address the leadership dimensions outlined in the NSW Quality Teaching Model. Strategies to build leadership capacity include providing opportunities for members of staff to have periods acting as principal or deputy principal, undertake professional learning, and access mentoring support.

Executive staff members are allocated time to work with teachers in classrooms, providing mentoring support and guidance and modelling teaching and learning strategies. The professional learning strategy focuses on building the capacity for teachers to achieve literacy and numeracy targets and to cater for diverse learners through individualised learning approaches. The school is implementing a range of student welfare and student learning strategies.

In terms of impact, the school believes that its new approach to managing student behaviour and discipline has stabilised previously declining student enrolments. Playground conflict, incidents and suspensions have decreased. The school believes that it has become a safer and more work oriented environment for students.

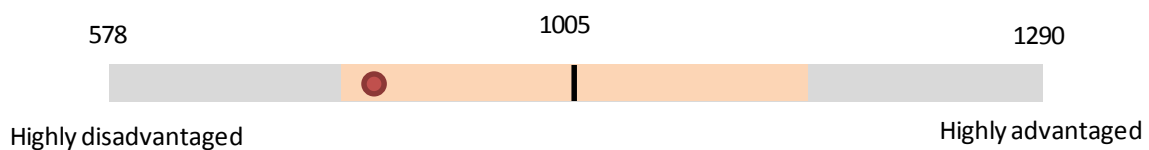
¹¹ The enrolment has increased from 168 in 2010 to 225 students in 2012, with an expected growth rate of six per cent per year.

School profile

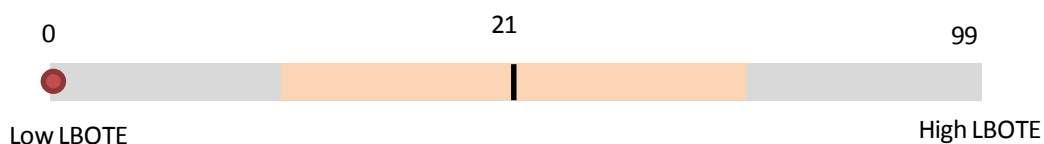
Student characteristics

The school's ICSEA value was 837 in 2010, which is below state average. The re-zoning of the school several years ago and nearby schools has diversified the school's SES profile. The school is now attracting a broader SES cross-section and in particular an increasing number of families from a higher SES background. The school's intake of LBOTE students in 2010 was zero per cent. The percentage of students who identify as ATSI has decreased from 38 per cent to 29 per cent in 2010, which is still above state mean (seven per cent).

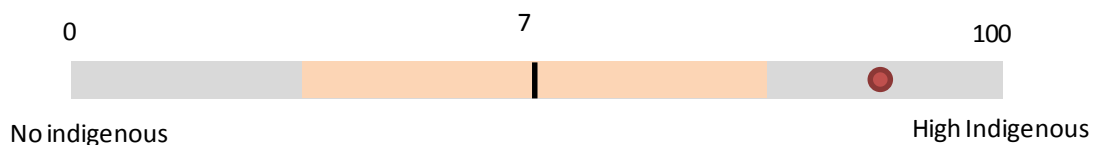
ICSEA = 837



LBOTE = 0%

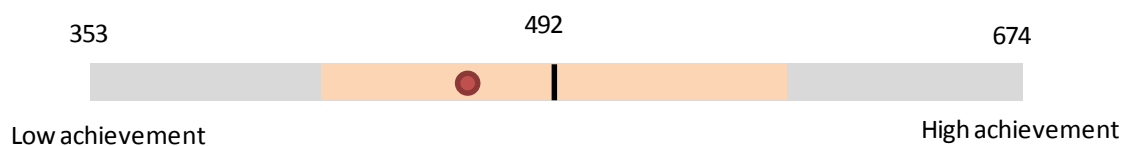


ATSI = 29%

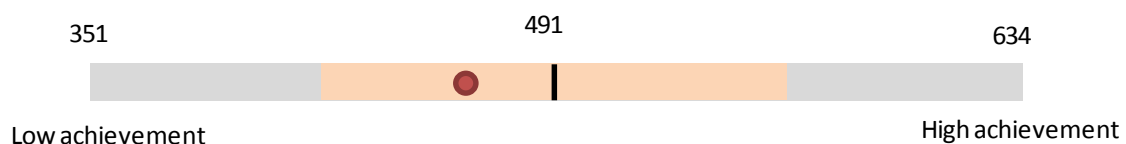


Student performance

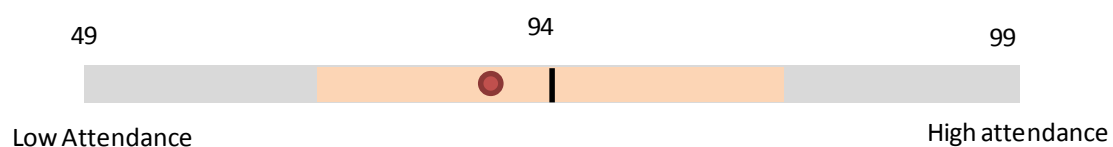
NAPLAN Year 5 numeracy = 447



NAPLAN Year 5 reading = 431



School attendance = 92%



The school's Year 5 NAPLAN numeracy score in 2010 was 447, which is below the state mean (492). The school's Year 5 NAPLAN reading score in 2010 was 431, which is also below the state mean (491). The school's student attendance rate in 2010 was 92 per cent, which is only slightly below the state mean (94 per cent).

Leadership and staffing

Principal tenure

The principal has been at the school for seven years.

Staffing

The school's total staffing allocation is 25.5 Full Time Equivalent (FTE). The staffing retention rate has been high at the school. There were several changes for 2012 due to leave replacements and two transfers to other positions. Twenty per cent of teachers have post graduate qualifications.

A comparison of Chambers Public School with all NSW government primary schools participating in the Low SES SSNP for selected characteristics of teachers indicate:

- lower-than-average turnover of teachers (0.0 per cent in 2010 compared with 12.9 per cent)
- slightly older than average workforce, although the proportion under age 30 is similar to the average (9.1 per cent compared with 9.2 per cent)
- Chambers Public School, however, has a higher than average proportion of teachers aged 50 years or older and a lower than average proportion aged 30 to 49 years
- slightly more experienced teacher workforce in terms of years of service - the difference is not at the upper end of the distribution (10 years or more) but between the lower (where the school is under-represented) and middle (where the school is over-represented) categories
- slightly less experienced than average workforce in terms of teachers years in their current position, but with much of the difference restricted to the categories of ten or more years where Chambers is under-represented—13.6 per cent compared with 22.3 per cent—and four to nine years, where the school is over-represented—40.9 per cent compared with 32.6 per cent
- average of 5.1 days of sick leave per teacher, which is slightly less than the average of 6.5 days for all Government schools in the Low SES SSNP.

SSNP funding

SSNP

The school entered the Low SES SSNP in 2010. The school's Low SES SSNP funding in 2012 was \$200,000.

Other funding

The school also receives \$29,000 through PSFP. The school has accessed North North funding (\$5,600 per annum) and National Partnerships Improving Teacher Quality funding. North North funding was used to employ an Aboriginal tutor (0.6 FTE).

Low SES SSNP Initiatives

The school is working on enhancing its leadership and teaching skills and capacity. To do this the Low SES SSNP funding is being used to:

- release executive staff (0.2 FTE) to oversee and monitor school programs and teaching and learning.
- release teachers to engage in professional learning

The school is also using related funding to:

- employ a SAO (0.2 FTE) to monitor enrolment and develop strategies to minimise absenteeism
- employ an AEO at 0.6 FTE
- employ Aboriginal SLSOs (1.4FTE) to assist students not meeting benchmark levels
- employ a speech pathologist (0.2 FTE)
- purchase ICT to install the SMART technology in every classroom, interactive white boards
- allocate a contribution to the regional Low SES SSNP.

Key initiatives

Developing leadership capacity

The school is aiming to strengthen leadership capacity. The school has restructured the executive portfolios around the dimensions outlined in the NSW Quality Teaching model. Expectations, responsibilities and roles for each executive member have been articulated, with roles allocated based on the strengths of individual staff members. This approach is consistent with a distributed leadership model:

My view is that in a Low SES school you need every teacher being a leader. You can't have two or three teachers carrying the workload for everyone else. It just won't work (Principal).

The model mandates flexibility for all leadership roles at the school. An important priority for the school is the continual mapping and cross referencing of roles and responsibilities in order to enhance knowledge, skills and understanding of leadership.

The strategies implemented to develop leadership capacity are:

- *providing opportunity for leadership roles* Executive members are provided with the opportunity to act in the role of principal, when possible, and experienced staff backfill executive positions. Selection is based on consideration of expressions of interest from staff. Senior staff members are encouraged to perform leadership roles more broadly when available within the DEC. The principal indicates that a number of staff move in and out of executive roles. There are also staff members who don't want to have executive roles but who take on team leader roles for a year-level.
- *undertaking professional learning* All executive members are encouraged to seek professional development opportunities to increase leadership capacity. The school is enabling executive members to access training in the *Marzano Leadership Course*. All executive members were also trained in *Learning Management and Business Reform* (LMBR) to facilitate effective transition to the new management system.

The school is placing greater emphasis on training the executive and senior teachers to increase their capacity to lead teachers in classroom learning and management. The principal supported one of the teachers to attend the Darwin University for AL. She currently leads the school's Accelerated Literacy program.

The school is focusing on increasing professional learning in literacy and numeracy to assist leaders to demonstrate a range of teaching and learning strategies, and to engage teachers in action research and lesson study activities. Staff members are also encouraged to share their learning with professionals outside the school, through becoming members of networks or participation in regional activities.

- *accessing mentoring support* The school has engaged a consultant to provide mentoring support or to be 'critical friend' to all executive staff.

Building teacher skills and capacity

Several measures have been implemented to improve teacher skills and capacity. Members of the executive staff work in classrooms, interact with teachers, and provide mentoring support and guidance. The role of the assistant principal for teaching and learning has been established to undertake regular monitoring of classroom teaching, provide in-classroom and programming support, observe lessons, facilitate professional learning, and support the implementation of the Quality Teaching model.

The principal supports executive staff members to undertake performance management through supervision, professional learning, teamwork and provision of advice and feedback. Mentoring support provided by the principal is informal but can be formalised if necessary.

The principal is responsible for implementing the Executive Assessment and Review Schedule (EARS) which means that executive staff members are expected to conduct self-

assessment and to develop individual professional learning plans. These are reviewed on a regular basis. The professional learning and leadership directorate toolkit provides the school with a way of identifying and developing the individual professional learning plans.

The NSW Quality Teaching model and the NSW Institute Professional Teaching Standards provide the background and context basis for the TARS process. Teachers are required to demonstrate and address elements of the Quality Teaching model through discussion with their supervisors highlighting practices that reflect Professional Teaching Standards.

The school has two graduate teachers who commenced on a casual basis. Beginning teachers are assigned to an executive staff member and a teacher mentor (to facilitate the process of 'becoming an effective teacher'). In addition, the principal also performs a mentoring role in collaboration with staff. The principal observes classroom activity and lessons, consulting with teachers and providing feedback.

Updating and improving teacher skills

The school's professional learning strategy aims to lift the capacity of teachers in order to achieve literacy and numeracy goals and targets (using ICT to enhance teaching and learning). The use of NAPLAN data to inform programming is a priority. An analysis of NAPLAN data has identified the need for teachers to better understand the procedures for marking 'writing'. Teachers are being given access to planned professional learning activities that link with objectives and strategies outlined in the school plan.

Paraprofessional staff members are also supported to develop new skills necessary for implementing management and operational systems, policies and procedures. These skills are consistent with the local schools/local decision framework and the school's framework for management, student welfare, program planning and strategic organisation.

Professional Learning Plans

All teachers are required to develop an individual professional learning plan that is aligned to the annual management plan. A priority for 2012 is to improve this alignment and to more accurately reflect the school's strategic direction. The individual professional learning plan is regularly adjusted in accordance with the needs of staff members.

Model of learning

The school has been working in partnership with researchers at the University of New England (UNE) for the last two years. UNE provides teachers at the school with 'scaffolding' information about current trends in education, and theoretical and practical advice relating to Accelerated Literacy.

Team learning and planning is central to this model of learning. Teachers are allocated to teams based on their professional learning needs. They may work together driving curriculum implementation and developing scope and sequence of learning (from kindergarten to Year 6 for all KLAs). Classroom teachers may develop class programs for literacy that cater for all students, using a range of both school based and system based assessment tools to inform teaching and learning. Assessment tasks may also be planned to develop consistency in teacher judgement of student attainment.

The school structure and organisation has been reorganised to enable teachers to learn and plan in teams. Tuesday afternoon staff meetings are scheduled for professional learning. Decision making and general business items, including the implementation of the program to monitor delivery strategies, occur at the Tuesday morning meetings.

Improving assessment and school planning and accountability

The school has established an effective assessment management system, using NAPLAN data for school planning and accountability.

Assessment management system

Students are assessed in order to both inform educational provision and report on student progress and learning. To that end a school wide system has been established, implemented and continually evaluated. The elements of this system include:

- Implementation of a *regular program of stage / grade assessment* across the school, such as, Best Start assessment of all Kindergarten students during weeks 1 and 2 (Term 1) with analysis informing teaching. In addition, Reading Recovery, spelling, diagnostic reading assessments and ‘literacy three’ assessments and the ‘weekly go check’ tests (that is, the mathematics assessment tasks) are implemented by all class teachers to enable benchmarking against achievements. The speech pathologist assesses students in order to identify expressive and receptive language issues.
- *Recording assessment data* on tracking sheets and updating them according to school policy requirements. Teachers upload their assessment data onto the central server at the school and executive staff members are responsible for ensuring that all teachers comply with this requirement.
- *Collection and monitoring* of students’ school based literacy and numeracy performance data. Data is analysed by designated personnel. For instance the deputy principals analyse patterns and trends in student performance and identify areas requiring attention.
- *Analysis of school based and SMART data*
- Class programming for whole classes, and targeted intervention programs for groups or individual students.
- Overall school planning and programming, with a focus on documentation and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the school plan.

Using NAPLAN data

All students at the school are required to sit for the NAPLAN test in Year 3 and 5, including special needs students. The NAPLAN results are used to help teachers identify areas of learning in which students are performing well and areas that require attention. Teachers mark students’ NAPLAN writing tasks at the school, and design a matrix of interventions for students based on results. Moreover, the school uses results to reflect on the relationship

between the investment in professional learning and teaching outcomes.

School planning and accountability

The planning process recommended for Low SES SSNP initiatives is seen to complement the established processes and to avoid duplication of effort. The Low SES SSNP planning tools are considered to be effective because they have enabled the school to undertake more in-depth processes. The school has been responsive to the requirement to integrate the Low SES SSNP planning process within the overall school management plan and overall annual school report. The requirement to annually assess a KLA and a style of management is also incorporated in the overall planning process. Furthermore, the cyclic evaluation (together with the alignment of the annual school report and the school annual management plan with state and school-based targets) helps to drive the development individual and corporate professional learning goals for the year ahead.

It sounds a bit complicated but it's worked. Obviously we do need to report, but if we embed our goals and targets into the Low SES SSNP plan, based upon the knowledge that we've gained, and then it guides our further learning and our future teaching. (Principal)

The target setting process is considered to be effective as it encourages realistic judgements about how to improve the school's performance. Some challenges related to target setting include the skewing effect of class cohorts that have a low number of students. This means bell curves will not be evident and that the overall average results would be unreliable. However, the target setting tool is enabling the school to moderate the highs and lows and the increasing number of student cohorts is enabling standard deviations to be normalised.

The principal involves not only the executive team but the whole staff in setting the school targets as well as monitoring and reporting on target attainment. Literacy and numeracy teams are formed to undertake this exercise in order to effectively plan for the future. Families are also involved in the process. They are informed about school targets and are provided with a copy of the school's annual Low SES SSNP report. There are also parent representatives on school target teams, who report to the parent body. The principal reports on and provides a copy of the annual management plan to the Parent and Citizen Association.

Improving student welfare and discipline

In order to address the connection between falling school enrolments, poor school performance and problematic student behaviour, the school endeavoured to address student behaviour in the first instance. To that end an expanded system of student welfare has been established. This system comprises of a number of significant elements:

- *You Can Do It* program, adopted two years ago, refocused the school's vision for student welfare. The program focuses on the teaching of attitudes and skills related to getting along, being organised, resilience and confidence, and having persistence. The teaching occurs throughout the year in all classes during personal development lessons. Learning is reinforced on a daily basis, in a range of settings through the use of consistent language.
- *PBL program*, also adopted two years ago, provides the basis for all aspects of the student welfare policy. Students are encouraged to adopt approaches of Trusting,

Welcoming, Taking Pride and Always Striving (T.W.P.S.). These values have become a part of the school culture.

- *Anti-bullying policy* is a fully operational community initiative. The policy endeavours to ensure that every child is safe from bullying.

The school developed a new approach to allocating students a level to reflect the standard of their behaviour. At the beginning of 2012, all students were classified to be at level one. This means that all students started the year with a record of acceptable behaviour. Students remain at this level conditional to application of consistently acceptable behaviour. Staff indicate that students are more motivated to maintain their level rating.

These programs and initiatives aim to improve student achievement through active student engagement. They reflect a values and 'strengths based approach' that is integrated into the culture of the school. Rather than adhering to a deficit model of consequences, incentives are used to encourage positive behaviour. Staff also electronically track student behaviour.

The values and approaches underpinning the school's welfare system inform the content of personal development lessons and more generally classroom teaching and learning. They inform the implementation of school interventions, programs and initiatives (such as, newsletters and the dissemination of weekly awards at assemblies).

The school's student welfare system was developed through a whole school and community approach. Students provided a high level of input into the development of the PBL and You Can Do It programs. Aboriginal students are being re-engaged through the provision of additional incentives, such as, rewards and merits. Family members have been given opportunities to provide input and feedback. Teachers, too, have been supported to use a range of strategies to improve student behaviour and engage them in learning.

It's about everyone being on board, and owning what they're on board about... And we did that as a community. (Principal)

The school is seeking to continually improve the welfare system. The establishment of a chaplaincy program is being considered to enhance the school's capacity to address a range of social issues that are impacting on the education of students.

Impact and outcomes

As a result of these changes teachers who were interviewed described the school as a safer, happier, work oriented environment than prior to the implementation of the changes. The change has been progressive. School leaders report that students are more engaged because the 'right conditions for learning' have been established. More specifically, the student welfare program is aligned to school plan goals and targets:

We've been able to create an environment so that the kids know exactly what they have to be doing at any particular time (Principal).

We used to have a more punitive system but now children are rewarded for good behaviour. We've been able to create a sense of belonging for the children (Principal).

Playground conflict and incidences have decreased, according to the school. The school's

suspension rates have decreased from 200 per annum (five years ago) to 50 per annum in 2011. This result has been achieved despite the increase in student enrolment over recent years:

We used to have a lot of racial type stuff happening in the school. Four years ago you couldn't walk through that playground without a fight happening. We haven't had a punch up in 18 months. The kids we have now have grown up through the school from kindergarten and we've been able to mould them over the last three or so years into the PBL way of saying and doing. There's been a shift because we do things differently now. (Principal)

The students' PLPs, and the school's student performance tracking system, enable staff to better target individual learning needs and facilitate progression and transition.

We've gone from a very disengaged school five years ago to a place where, through PBL and "You Can Do It", we have very well behaved students and our reputation in the community has gone up exponentially (Principal).

In 2012¹² the school was granted the New England award for student wellbeing. There has been a positive impact on the rate of Aboriginal student absenteeism, which has fallen. The increased student engagement has provided strong feedback to the school community. Responses to the *analytical framework for effective leadership 2011 survey* indicate that staff acknowledge the school's progress in establishing effective student welfare and discipline policies, structures and procedures and in ensuring consistency in the use of language and approach across the school. In particular, the collaborative, whole school approach to 'taking responsibility for all students' is considered by staff to be a key achievement.

Conclusion

The staff members interviewed as part of the evaluation reported that in their view the school's Low SES SSNP initiatives have been successful. The school has restructured the executive staff portfolio to enable the executive members to address the leadership dimensions outlined in the NSW Quality Teaching Model. Strategies to build leadership capacity have provided opportunities for staff members at the school to have periods in leadership roles, to undertake professional learning, and access mentoring support.

Executive staff members are allocated time to work with teachers in classrooms, providing mentoring support and guidance and modelling teaching and learning strategies. The professional learning strategy focuses on building the capacity for teachers to achieve literacy and numeracy targets and to cater for diverse learners through individualised learning approaches. The school is implementing a range of student welfare and student learning strategies.

In terms of impact on student outcomes, the school believes that its new approaches to staffing and management in conjunction with its new policies on student behaviour and discipline have stabilised previously declining student enrolments. Playground conflict, incidents and suspensions have decreased. The school believes that it has become a friendlier, and more work oriented environment for both students and teachers.

¹² 100 schools entered the competition of this award.

5. Regional High School

Regional High is a public high school catering for over 700 students in western NSW. The school's Low SES SSNP strategy is to enhance student engagement and performance through improvement of staff performance and accountability, better management of student attendance, and improvement of teaching and learning.

The school has a large Aboriginal student population, and low attendance has been a major issue. A key initiative is student attendance management. The initiative is structured around personal contact through phone calls and home visits. Paraprofessional staff members are used to complement the work of teaching staff by maintaining contact with families of students with poor attendance records, noting developments and organising strategies for assisting those students to re-engage with school. Paraprofessional staff members also have an important role in managing the student attendance database. The school believes that the attendance initiative has raised staff awareness about the importance of student engagement and attendance. The school has experienced recent improvements in attendance and attributes the improvement to this initiative.

Low SES SSNP funding has enabled the school to resource a professional learning strategy, which is integrated into the Teacher Assessment and Reporting Schedule (TARS) process. The broader aim of this strategy is to change the school culture, with teachers becoming more adaptable and open to suggestions for improving their teaching practice. Training in student data analysis has increased staff use of evidence to inform decisions related to lesson planning and student achievement.

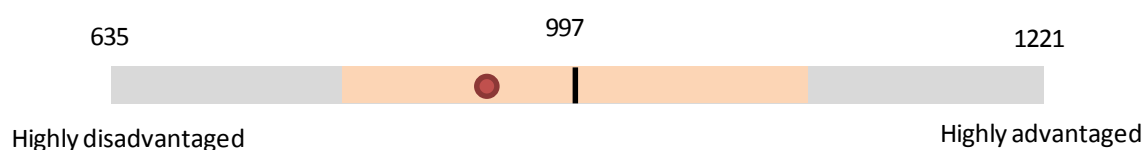
The school has attempted to improve teaching and learning by promoting evidence-based decision-making, re-structuring the timetable, improving literacy and numeracy classroom support, and providing welfare assistance to students. A cross school committee has been established to coordinate initiatives with feeder primary schools. The school believes that Year 7 students and staff are now better prepared for the start of the year. It is hoped that teachers will gain better knowledge of the needs of students to enable more strategic planning for the delivery of teaching and learning programs.

School profile

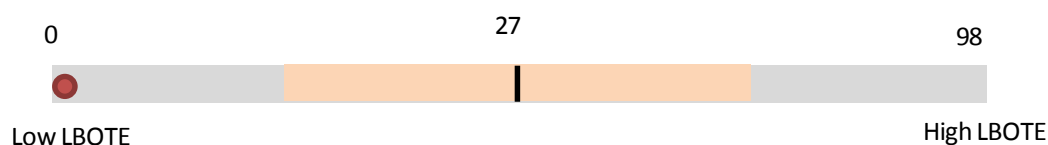
Student characteristics

In 2010, the school had an ICSEA value of 925, placing it below the state average for secondary schools in terms of educational advantage and disadvantage. The school community is culturally diverse. Although enrolments are predominantly Anglo-Celtic, there are also a significant number of students from Southern European backgrounds as well as some students from Asian backgrounds. These cultural groups are represented at the school representative council level. The proportion of students with a LBOTE background is 2 per cent. The school has an ATSI student enrolment of 14 per cent, which is above state average.

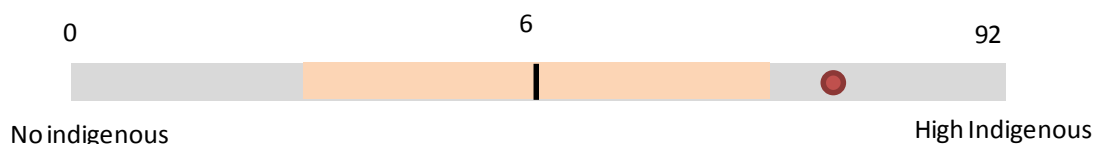
ICSEA = 925



LBOTE = 2%



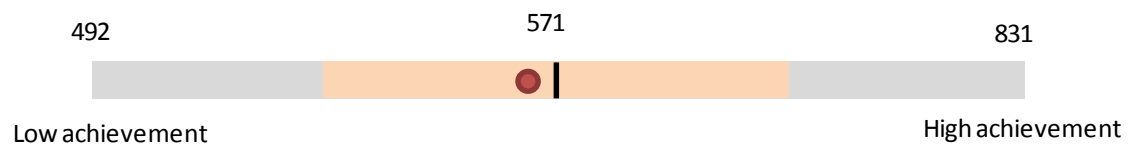
ATSI = 14%



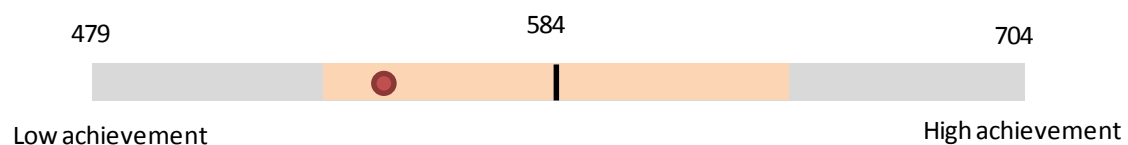
Student performance

The school's 2010 NAPLAN performance is lower than the state average—approximately in line with its lower ICSEA value. The bottom and middle student cohorts perform well compared with other schools in the region. The school's mean score for NAPLAN Year 9 numeracy was 568, which is below state average (571). The school's mean score for NAPLAN Year 9 reading was 555, which is below state average (584). The school's attendance rate was 90 per cent in 2010 which is an improvement from 86 per cent five years ago. Year 12 retention at the school was 74 per cent in 2010 which is markedly lower than the NSW average of 82 per cent.

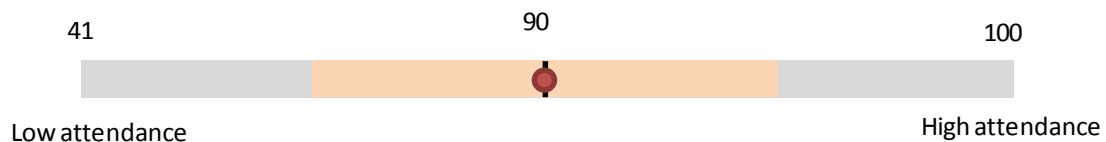
NAPLAN Year 9 numeracy = 568



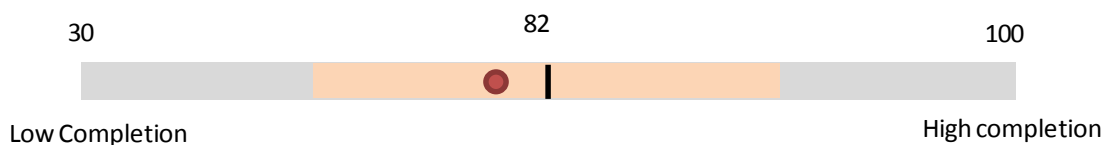
NAPLAN Year 9 reading = 555



School attendance = 90%



School completion = 74%



Leadership and staffing

Principal tenure

The principal commenced at the school at the start of 2011. The previous principal had been at the school for nine years.

Staffing

A comparison of Regional High School with all NSW government secondary schools participating in the Low SES SSNP for selected characteristics of teachers indicates:

- lower-than-average turnover of teachers (3.5 per cent compared with 10.7)
- teaching workforce that is older than average—45.6 per cent of teachers are 50 years or older, compared with 38.6 per cent overall
- more experienced teacher workforce in terms of years of service, with 63.2 per cent having 10 or more years experience compared with the average of 54.9 per cent

- more experienced teacher workforce in terms of the years in which teachers have been in their current position, with 33.3 per cent having 10 or more years experience compared with the average of 26.6 per cent
- average of 5.4 days of sick leave per teacher, which is less than the average of 6.4 days for all government schools in the Low SES SSNP
- growing number of new and early career teachers—about seven to eight teachers are in the first five years of their careers and most of these were graduates when they came to the school.

Low SES SSNP funding

The school joined the Low SES SSNP in 2010 and its 2012 funding allocation was \$767,598.

Other funding

The school also received \$8,000 through Norta Norta funding to provide tutoring support for Indigenous students.

Low SES SSNP initiatives

In relation to staffing, management and accountability, the school's Low SES SSNP funding is being used to:

- cover costs for professional learning of senior staff, teachers and paraprofessionals (i.e. release time, activity costs and resources)
- employ a head teacher for teaching and learning (1.0 FTE)

Low SES SSNP funding is also being used to:

- employ an attendance officer (1.0 FTE)
- employ an Aboriginal student attendance officer (0.6 FTE)
- cover higher duties for head teacher (welfare)
- provide two non-SSNP local primary schools with funding to deliver intensive literacy support to targeted students at their schools and facilitate transition from primary schools
- purchase teaching and learning material and resources
- contribute to SSNP regional coordination and administration¹³.

¹³ Low SES SSNP schools allocate a negotiated amount of money from their individual school budget allocation to resource regionally based support or collective initiatives. Funding is used by region to employ of a Low SES SSNP regional coordinator to facilitate effective communications between schools and DEC, hold network meetings and provide individual consultancy advice to schools regarding, program administration, implementation and reporting and accountability.

Key initiatives

Improving staff performance and accountability

A head teacher for teaching and learning was appointed with Low SES SSNP funding to assist in driving the reform in performance management. In the past, the TARS process was very informal and it operated as a one off compliance event:

It was based on someone's judgement whether they were a good teacher or not. They did the minimum. There was no formal conversation, conferencing or questionnaires (Executive member).

In 2010, a quality team committee was established to develop the TARS strategy that is consistent with both the NSW Quality Teaching (QT)¹⁴ and aligned with the NSW Institute Professional Teaching Standards¹⁵. The school was committed to a performance for improvement approach that is more positive and forward looking. Interested faculty representatives were invited to participate and were released to attend the committee meetings. The committee developed a basic framework that was in line with the Teachers' Federation requirements. It also needed to articulate an implementation process.

Each teacher is now provided with a folder containing the school's formal document (i.e. TARS at Regional) which was developed by the school. It outlines seven performance standards that teachers need to meet¹⁶. The document also outlines the process to realise them, including the requirement to develop a PLP.

The school's professional development targets are expected to be achieved through this mechanism. A target has been set to decrease the number of teachers who are in phase 1 of the Classroom Learning Activity Scale (CLAS) technology framework by 12.5 per cent per annum in the areas of integration of ICT, online presentation, assessment and professional contribution¹⁷. The school has also set a target to increase the explicit programming of gifted and talented, numeracy, literacy, Aboriginal education and ICT strategies in teaching programs by two Key Learning Areas KLAs per annum¹⁸.

Conferences between teachers and supervising teachers are expected to occur twice a term. Teachers observe the classrooms of other teachers at the school or teachers at another school.

¹⁴ The purpose of the NSW QT model is to identify pedagogy as core business of the profession of teaching. The model focuses the work of school leaders and teachers in improving pedagogy, and hence improving student learning. The model can be applied across all key learning areas from Kindergarten to Year 12. Three dimensions of pedagogy have been linked to improved student outcomes: promotion of intellectual quality; promotion of a quality learning environment; and pedagogy that develops and makes explicit to students the significance of their work.

¹⁵ The Purpose of the NSW Institute Professional Teaching Standards is to set the benchmarks of effective teaching practice, using standards as common reference points. The NSW Institute of Teachers will manage an orderly transition from these standards to the National Professional Standards for Teachers for all teachers with mandatory accreditation requirements. The transition arrangements to HAT and Lead Teacher standards will be determined once key national procedures and support mechanism are in place.

¹⁶ Teachers are expected to: know their subject content and how to teach it to their children; know their students and how they learn; plan, assess and report for effective learning; communicate effectively with their students; create and maintain safe and challenging learning environments through the use of classroom management skills; continually improve their professional knowledge and practice; and be actively engaged members of their profession.

¹⁷ That is from 48 per cent in 2009 to zero per cent by December 2014.

¹⁸ That is from zero to eight KLAs by the end of 2014.

Teachers may choose to undertake an assessment or review of their own teaching. They document, in a diary form, the content of conferences with supervising teachers. Teachers are expected to keep a register of all professional development and training programs they have undertaken.

Senior staff members receive informal mentoring support in conjunction with scheduled conference meetings (related to the performance management system). The mentoring support becomes formal if necessary. They are encouraged to participate in leadership development activities (i.e. regional leadership conferences, mentoring programs and targeted professional learning).

Every second week I meet with my mentor. It's a scheduled time. He keeps me on track. I seek advice about the direction to take. I value his knowledge and feedback. I feel affirmed to know that I'm on the right track. I can go to him for advice... My head did not work that well to start with when I took on the job. I had a whole lot of things going on in different directions. It did not take long for me to be able to get on top of things (Head teacher).

The school strategy requires the head teacher (teaching and learning) to monitor and facilitate implementation of TARS. She supports faculty head teachers to consider the bigger picture when implementing TARS. She provides relevant school and student performance data in order for faculties to make informed judgements and decisions. She also encourages senior staff to help each teacher to pursue the key questions:

- What can I as a teacher do to help address the targets of the school plan?
- What do I need for my career aspirations?

The school plan and timetable include key TARS activities (such as the conferences that are held each term). NAPLAN and other student assessment data are used to guide conference topics to best address staff needs.

The head teacher (teaching and learning) assists head teachers to implement TARS with their staff and supports them to develop individual digital PLPs. Head teachers support classroom teachers to develop strategies to improve student learning. They encourage teachers to identify student areas of need and encourage students to become independent learners.

The head teacher (teaching and learning) is also responsible for supporting beginning teacher induction. New Scheme Teachers¹⁹ are assisted to meet their registration requirements. A new program has been developed, documented and is being implemented. The program is formal and assists early career teachers to:

- become oriented, learn about the school and the classroom, address time management and other areas of need (Term 1)
- design teaching and learning programs and student assessment tasks (Term 2)
- undertake professional learning activities in order to meet the Institute qualification requirements (Term 3)
- articulate assistance required regarding re-orientation and preparation for the following year (Term 4).

¹⁹ Teachers who have never been employed to teach in NSW before October 1, 2004 (either on a permanent, casual or temporary basis) or who have not been employed as a teacher during the last five years are new scheme teachers under the Institute of Teachers Act 2004.

The head teacher (teaching and learning) is responsible for the overall collation; analysis and reporting of staff PLPs. She assists the school executive to plan staff professional learning and oversee the implementation and review of the school's professional learning strategy. Professional learning is built into the year level and KLA group planning process.

Given the size of the school, there is a need to meet complex and diverse needs. E-learning continues to be an area of focus for the school. In Term 2, 2012 professional development focused on ICT, including the use of ITeach21, smart boards and Abode. This was partly a response to the access of students to laptops and the hesitation of many teachers in their use.

The school's professional learning strategy includes learning that is KLA or school based. It also incorporates individual based learning. Senior staff are also supported to effectively perform their management roles. They are assisted to develop skills and capacities related to staff performance and development, planning, budgeting, reporting and accountability.

The head teacher (teaching and learning) organises whole school learning programs, including the engagement of presenters/facilitators. Individual staff are encouraged to take up relevant opportunities. Funding is provided for registration, accommodation and release time to attend professional learning events. Head teachers are expected to exercise their responsibility in driving TARS in the school. Each term, they are required to report and present to the staff the various actions and achievements of the program.

Benefits and impacts

Low SES SSNP funding has provided teachers with time to work with the head teacher (teaching and learning) on the TARS reforms. The funding has enabled the school to resource the implementation of its professional learning strategy. This strategy has been developed in response to the whole school analysis of need, as evident in TARS.

In the first year of SSNP there was a level of change in the school. The new TARS was being implemented alongside other structural and content changes. Teachers reported a mixed reaction to the new TARS strategy. Some responded well to the formal structure, performed well and were affirmed. They used TARS as a planning tool and it enables them to think about positive future direction. While it is still reported that some staff, 'just fill in the boxes', the new TARS strategy helps school leaders to identify high performing staff and staff who need additional support. It also helps staff to be more accountable and has provided guidance for school direction and in planning targeted professional learning.

School leaders indicate that at the beginning of SSNP implementation, the pace of change resulted in staff resistance. But, in time, according to the school leaders, most of the staff responded positively to the opportunities provided for professional learning. The school has also been able to use funding to support the professional learning of paraprofessional staff as they have important responsibilities and perform essential roles²⁰.

²⁰ Paraprofessional positions have been created to provide in and out of classroom support to students by providing personalised teaching and learning assistance. Paraprofessional staff also support teachers to have more time to focus on student learning. Schools have also created operational paraprofessional positions to help ease the administrative work load of the school executive. The key positions include: community engagement and/or student attendance officer, technology learning facilitator, business management and information management support officer.

School leaders reported in interviews that the school culture has changed as a result of the investment in developing the overall process of facilitation of staff reflection on their performance as well implementation of professional learning. School leaders indicate that teachers are becoming more adaptable and open to suggestions for improving their practice:

People are now actually talking about outcomes and targets...They actually talk about the *School Measurement, Assessment and Reporting Toolkit (SMART)*²¹ data and the culture of using data. You see it come up in the programs, the thinking and the product that is developed. You see the change in the development of the way they talk about their pedagogy. You can see how they are thinking about learning in their classroom through their efforts to use ICT (Executive member).

The feedback from staff through surveys conducted within the school, support the view that teachers have become more engaged.

However, a few staff members are still hesitant and unwilling to move away from entrenched practices. Measuring the direct impact of investment in professional learning is perceived to be difficult. At times there is evidence of change though the take-up and application of new ideas, however, at other times the impact of learning is less evident and more incremental, for example, with regard to investment in ICT professional learning:

The introduction of the *Digital Educational Revolution (DER)*²² did nothing to change the ways of many of our teachers. It's put it out there. It's given them information. It has tried to give them skills to be able to move into 21st century teaching (Executive member).

All members of staff were trained in the 'eight ways' program by an Aboriginal educator over a two and a half day program. The responses of staff members suggested that the program highlighted the need to be more responsive to the interests and needs of Aboriginal students. Faculty teams have since worked on developing their own strategy for including cultural content in the design and delivery of classroom teaching programs.

School leaders perceive the training in student data analysis to be having an impact:

Having had access to the two-day intensive NAPLAN training, teachers were

²¹ The School Measurement, Assessment and reporting Toolkit (SMART) system is a power diagnostic tool that provides feedback on the NAPLAN results to NSW schools and their communities. The tool reports on a range of data for each of the five test scales of NAPLAN (i.e. reading, writing, grammar and punctuation, spelling and numeracy). Numeracy sub-scales have also been developed to provide additional analysis for diagnosis and planning purposes (i.e. numeracy, pattern and algebra and measurement, data, space and geometry). The web-based SMART system also reports on Essential Secondary Science Assessment (ESSA) results and is available to schools as a centralised system and is accessed through the Department of Education and Communities (DEC) portal. Principals and their dedicated officers are responsible for providing and maintaining access to SMART for the staff at their school. Schools are able to display the performance of individual students, compare performance of students in Year 3,5,7 and 9 and analyse changes and trends over time.

²² Digital Education Revolution (DER) aims to contribute to sustainable and meaningful change to teaching and learning in Australian schools that will prepare students for further education, training, and live and work in a digital world. The Australian Government invested funding to support the effective integration of ICT in schools in line with the Government's broader education initiatives, including the Australian Curriculum. An element of the DER initiative is the National Secondary School Computer Fund, which provides computers for students in Years 9 to 12.

provided with the bigger picture and with the possible strategies. They walked away with a hit list (e.g. commas, paragraphs). When kids did the NAPLAN, teachers were walking around supervising saying 'Paragraphs must be working. There are a lot of them!' I'm looking at those people as seeds in other faculties to raise awareness and providing them with strategies (Head teacher).

The question of whether there should be greater accountability for professional learning expenditure by individuals was raised. Currently, the key accountability is the requirement for head teachers to report and present to their actions and achievements to the staff.

There is no accountability to say to other staff - yes I have for example incorporated the learning into my teaching. Some faculties are doing better than that. The TARS does not necessarily make people accountable. (Head teacher)

Teachers recognise that the implementation of new learning is an indicator of success (of the professional learning strategy). Although they report that they are building their knowledge base and developing new skills, they indicate that there should be more emphasis on the application of learning:

But now that we have this knowledge we need to spend the time changing our ways. The biggest problem with all of these changes is the time needed to change programs, to practise, to feel confident in front of class, or gather resources so that you can go fully equipped into the room. (Head teacher)

Senior staff members indicate that they have benefited from the investment in the professional learning. However, there is variation in the level of change arising from new learning. According to the Principal, change is most evident in teachers who demonstrate a higher level of strategic thinking. School leaders are committed to developing a more strategic approach to identifying teachers who are looking towards promotion positions, to ensure that they are exposed to promotion opportunities.

Evidence-based decision making

The school spends "much more time looking at data and planning right down to the teacher level" (Executive member). Teachers have been trained and are using the SMART online. The analysis of SMART and other data is used to inform target setting related to attendance, retention, suspensions, programming and professional development. All faculties are involved in development of targets and plan for and implement strategies to achieve school targets. The school also undertakes faculty reviews as part of the improvement process and involves external people to provide a broader perspective.

Managing student attendance

A key mechanism for increasing the level of engagement of all students is through the promotion of school attendance²³. The school is seeking to address the persistently high level

²³ The school has set 2012 targets to increase the average growth mark in the NAPLAN year 9 numeracy test and in the School Certificate mathematics test. Targets have been set to increase the average growth mark in the NAPLAN tests (i.e. Year 9 reading, writing, spelling and grammar), and in the average mark in the School Certificate in English literacy test. The school has set targets to increase attendance and retention rate and to decrease suspensions rates. A number of targets have been set to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

of student absenteeism. Presently, more than 60 of the 700 students have poor attendance records and require intervention support. A further 10 students enrolled rarely attend school. This group has a disproportionate effect on attendance rates as the absence of only a few students for 200 or so days each can increase the school's average absenteeism rate substantially.

The school's concern is that the longer students stay away, the harder it becomes for them to engage in learning and settle into the routine, pattern and social fabric of school life. Re-engagement may present new problems for the students who may also be subjected to bullying behaviour.

The school reports that the Low SES SSNP provided the school with an opportunity to address attendance issues. It has provided school leaders and staff with time to plan and implement strategies that may be difficult to implement otherwise. Implementing the strategies has not been simple—a cultural change has been required to improve student attendance. An attendance team was established, supervised by the head teacher (administration) and staffed by two paraprofessionals—an attendance officer and the Aboriginal student attendance officer that have been funded through the Low SES SSNP. The attendance strategy is multi pronged:

You just have to do lots of little things. It just allows us to do lots of little things because some things work with some groups and not others. It has a small impact on different kinds of kids but together it adds up. (Executive member)

The key strategies include collating attendance information and monitoring, mapping and analysing patterns; undertaking intervention work with students; and working in partnership with families and the broader community. More than an hour every day is spent reviewing attendance and absences in all class rolls for each period. The attendance team then follow up with students who have been absent from school or absent from one or two classes during the day. Team members reinforce the importance of good attendance. They also facilitate ongoing communication with the families of the students.

Since the implementation of the attendance management strategy, the school reduced the number of days of absence. School data demonstrates an improvement in the percentage of students with a record low absence rate (per term). The school data indicates that prior to the implementation of Low SES SSNP, 5% (40 students) had (on average) two or less days of absence. This rate improved to 19% (137 students) in 2010 and 25% (185 students) in 2012. Additionally, the number of eligible Aboriginal students losing ABSTUDY²⁴ payments dropped from 45% for the first 3 terms of 2009 to 29% for the same period in 2012.

Working with students

An aim in working directly with students who have poor attendance records is to try to help raise their expectations and show them the links between being at school, how well they do in school and opportunities after leaving school. All the students receiving support through the attendance initiative and the learning support unit are required to develop Personal Learning

²⁴ ABSTUDY is a Federal Government scheme that provides assistance to ATSI students who are studying or undertaking an Australian apprenticeship. Students receiving ABSTUDY benefits are penalised if they have unexplained or unjustified absences totalling more than 15% of a term.

Plans (PLPs). Aspirations for the future and the requirements necessary to fulfil those aspirations are incorporated in the PLPs.

We usually ask the kids what they want to do when they leave school. They might need their Higher School Certificate (HSC). Have they thought about how they are going to get there? Some say - I'll leave school and get a job... The PLP is handy because when you meet with the parents you can go back and see what the child wants to do short and long term. You can reinforce that. (Executive member)

The school's attendance strategy is complemented by existing region-based services. The community engagement and Aboriginal student assistant officer provides informal individual support to students. The students may be provided with in-class tutoring support or counselling advice (related to self-esteem, peer interaction or family and community based concerns). School leaders report that the school has a policy and procedure in place to determine the type and level of intervention support required before a student is referred to the regional office for the Home School Liaison Officer (HSLO) service.

At meetings with the student, reasons for poor attendance are discussed. Some students are targeted for additional activities, such as, guidance in developing their Personalised Attendance Plans (PAPs). The planning process incorporates the development of responsibilities for them, their families and the school. If the implementation of the PAP does not bring about an improvement in the student's attendance, the school seeks the support of the HSLO. For many of the students the solution often requires a cross-agency approach. Standard schooling may not be appropriate for some students. Attendance issues may be addressed through home schooling or through distance education.

Working with families

The attendance team identifies families requiring intervention support. The aim is to establish ongoing telephone contact, build rapport with families and intervene if necessary. The Aboriginal student attendance officer follows up through face-to-face contact. The past practice of sending families written correspondence is perceived to be ineffective. The attendance strategy focuses on the personal aspect of communication; that is, getting to know students and their family.

The face-to-face contact is really effective. It allows you to build a good rapport with parents who are more inclined to ring and to tell us what is going on... It was often too easy for parents to say yes to their kid if they did not want to go to school. With somebody visiting, they feel more empowered to manage the kids. (Executive member)

To encourage family members to inform the school about absences, the school provides a school calendar that includes tear off paper slips that are easy to use. The student is provided with a slip to send to the school. This strategy is designed to assist families who are busy or who experience literacy difficulties. Copies of the calendar are also being sent to partner primary schools.

Now it's not uncommon to have parents ringing to say their child will be away - before it was rare. We have created an expectation about them contacting us. They are comfortable in doing so. (Executive member)

(In the past) many of the parents were not comfortable about coming into the

school. The parents (now) approach me to tell me about why their kids are away. They apologise for not ringing. That is because I have sent them a note and they are happy to keep contact. (Attendance Officer).

By improving the communication from home to the school, the number of “please explain absence” letters (generated for parents after an absence has been unexplained for more than 5 days) declined from an average of 120 per week at the beginning of the implementation of Low SES SSNP to 50 per week. Additionally, the number of students signing out from sport afternoons each week (parent condoned absences as well as legitimate sickness) has dropped from an average of 42 per sport day (8% of junior school) prior to the implementation of the Low SES SSNP to an average in 2012 of 10 per sport day (2%).

Attendance management impact

School staff report that attendance has improved from 86 per cent in 2008 to 90 per cent in 2011. The school has reduced the size of the poor attendance group. However, the greatest achievement has been to lift the overall attendance rate of the majority of students. The school has a merit system and rewards students who miss less than three days per term. In the first year of the program the school allocated 60 certificates per term. In the last term 600 students received merit certificates.

The attendance of Aboriginal students has improved. Staff members report that even though the statistics are skewed by a small number of Aboriginal students who are habitual absentees, the reality is that most of the Aboriginal students have improved their attendance rate. The success of the initiative is seen to be largely attributed to the personal contact through phone calls and home visits. Paraprofessional staff efforts complement the work of teaching staff. They maintain contact with families noting developments and organising strategies for assisting students to reengage with school. Paraprofessional staff members also have an important role in managing the student attendance data base.

The attendance initiative has also raised staff awareness about the importance of student engagement and attendance. Teachers are expected to produce timely and accurate rolls for each class. The initiative could be effectively implemented in other schools, conditional to staff having the commitment, attitude, and willingness to work hard to achieve success. Financial resources are also needed to support the staffing required to make things happen. The principal is currently exploring how to retain the staffing at the end of the SSNP funding.

Sustainability of any gains without on-going funding would require a persistent community-wide change in attitudes to school attendance. It might be expected that without continuing funding any improvement in attendance would persist for several years, eroding gradually as students from new families enrol at the school unless the change in community-wide attitudes persists.

Conclusion

A key feature of the low SES SSNP strategy at Regional High School is an emphasis on improving the system for managing staff performance and accountability and in facilitating essential training and development. The school is building the leadership capacities of senior staff, particularly in relation to enhancing skills in undertaking performance management of staff and in developing professional learning plans. Senior staff members believe that this has been part of a broader change in the culture of the school. Given the diversity of staff

backgrounds and needs, the impact of staff development has been variable. The challenges for the school are to enhance the integration of learning and application and to place greater emphasis on the application of new learning.

The school has attempted to improve teaching and learning by promoting evidence-based decision-making, re-structuring the timetable, improving literacy and numeracy classroom support, and providing welfare assistance to students. A cross school committee has been established to coordinate initiatives with feeder primary schools. The school believes that Year 7 students and staff will now be better prepared for the start of the year. It is hoped that teachers will gain better knowledge of the needs of students to enable more strategic planning for the delivery of teaching and learning programs.

6. South West High School

South West is a public high school catering for around 880 girls in the South Western region of Sydney.

The school's objective is to lift the overall quality of teaching in all classrooms. The focus is on effective leadership, the establishment of a clear strategic direction and on the delivery of quality programs. To promote these goals, Low SES SSNP funding is being used to establish a new staffing arrangement. The school employs a head teacher for technology, a head teacher for creative and performing arts, three School Learning Support Officers (SLSOs), one transition teacher/learning and support teacher, up to four teachers to resource the reduced teaching load (i.e. one 75 minute period per fortnight) of all staff for professional development and to cover release time provided to Quality Teacher Mentors (i.e. three periods per fortnight), and a part time School Administration Officer (SAO) to assist with Low SES SSNP administration.

Low SES SSNP funding is being used to develop a more holistic approach to improving the quality of teaching and school accountability. Teachers are allocated a timetabled professional learning period once a fortnight and provided with access to mentoring support and expert input and guidance. Their learning activity is linked to the school management plan and to the targets set for the year. Teachers are accountable for their professional learning time and for the specialised professional learning support accessed through the TARS process.

Teachers believe that the professional development time is helping them to improve the quality of their teaching and to be able to attend to their professional learning needs. Through the strategic partnership with the University of Newcastle teachers have been working on improving understanding of lesson structure, content and impact. Teachers claim that they are placing more emphasis on reflecting, planning and preparing lessons to enhance the quality of lesson delivery.

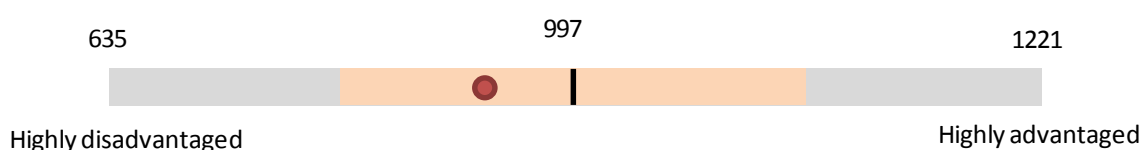
To improve school accountability, internal and external evaluations are undertaken to assess and report on effectiveness, impact and future directions.

School profile

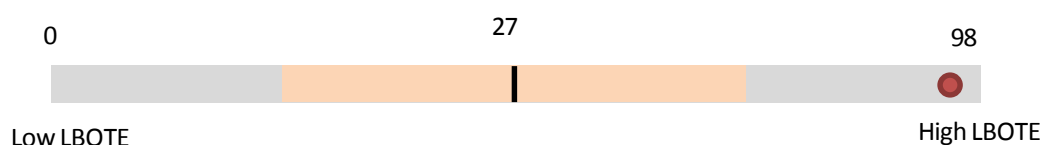
Student characteristics

In 2010, the school had an ICSEA value of 961 placing it below the state average for secondary schools in terms of educational advantage and disadvantage. The school's LBOTE student population is very high (92 per cent), reflecting a large and diverse student body in terms of language backgrounds. There are 46 language background groups represented - the majority from Arabic, Vietnamese and Turkish backgrounds. About one per cent of students are from ATSI backgrounds.

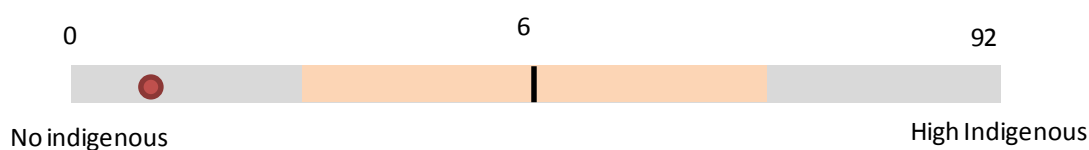
ICSEA = 961



LBOTE = 92%



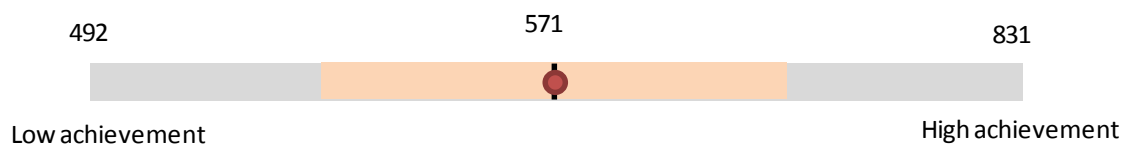
ATSI = 1%



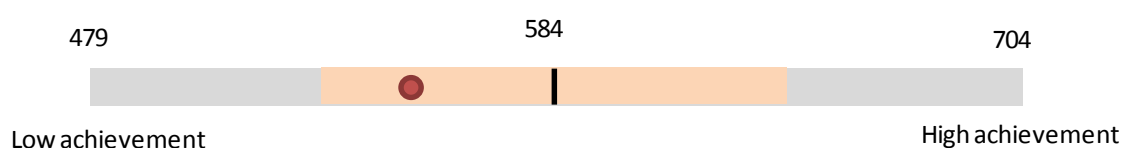
Student performance

The school's Year 9 NAPLAN numeracy score in 2010 was the same as the state's average (571). The Year 9 NAPLAN reading score for the school in 2010 was 557, which was below the state mean (584). The average attendance rate for Years 7-12 was 93 per cent in 2010, higher than the state rate for secondary schools (90 per cent). The school's 2010 completion rate was 86%, which was slightly above state average.

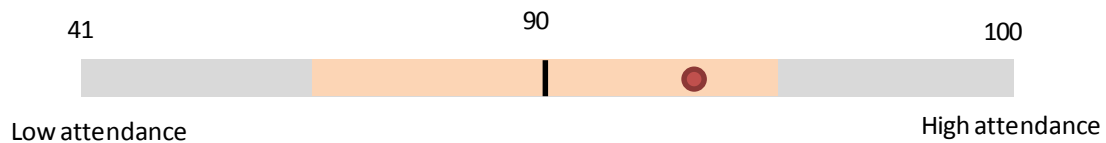
NAPLAN Year 9 numeracy = 571



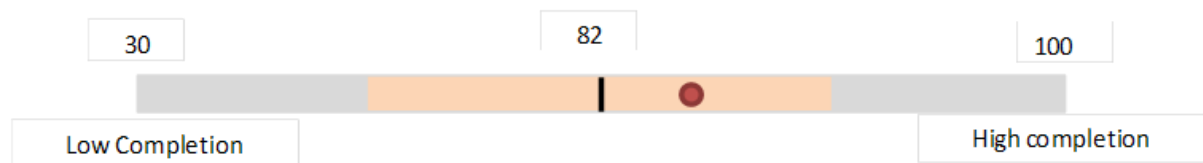
NAPLAN Year 9 reading = 557



School attendance = 93%



School completion = 86%



Leadership and staffing

Principal tenure

The current principal has been in her position for more than seven years.

Staffing

The current staffing profile is 78 teaching and non-teaching staff. Staff retention has remained strong. The level of staff experience ranges from early career teachers to teachers with many years of experience. Eighty six per cent of the teachers hold post graduate qualifications. A significant number of staff have an ESL background.

A comparison of South West High School with all NSW government secondary schools participating in the Low SES SSNP for selected characteristics of teachers indicates:

- lower-than-average turnover of teachers (6.3 per cent compared with 10.7 per cent)
- younger than average age profile of teachers, mostly because of a higher proportion of teachers aged 30 to 49 years (58.7 per cent compared with 49.1 per cent) and a correspondingly lower proportion of teachers 50 years or older (27.0 per cent compared with 38.6 per cent)
- a more experienced teacher workforce in terms of years of service, with 66.7 per cent having 10 or more years experience compared with the average of 54.9 per cent
- a more experienced teacher workforce in terms of the number of years for which teachers have been in their current position, with 39.7 per cent having 10 or more years experience compared with the average of 54.9 per cent
- average days of sick leave per teacher (5.5) below the average for all Government schools in the Low SES SSNP (6.4).

Low SES SSNP funding

The school entered the Low SES SSNP in 2010. The low SES SSNP allocation in 2012 allocation was \$923,647.

Other funding

The school accesses English as a Second Language (ESL) funding to employ 1.6 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) ESL support. It also receives \$104,600 from Priority Schools Funding Program (PSFP), as well funds to support the employment of a teacher (0.2 FTE) as part of the Priority School Program (PSP) staffing supplement.

Low SES SSNP Initiatives

The school's objectives are to lift the overall quality of teaching in the school, through a focus on effective leadership and strategic direction and a focus on quality delivery in all classrooms.

The Low SES SSNP funding is being used to:

- employ up to four teachers to supplement the reduced teaching load (i.e. one 75 minute period per fortnight) of all staff for professional development and to cover release time provided to Quality Teacher Mentors (i.e. three periods per fortnight)
- employ a head teacher in technology and a head teacher in creative and performing arts
- employ three Student Learning Support Officers (SLSO)
- employ one transition teacher / learning and support teacher
- employ one 0.5 FTE SAO to assist with Low SES SSNP administration
- contribute \$20,000 for NP regional coordination and administration.

The school chose not to employ a Highly Accomplished Teachers (HAT)²⁵. To avoid duplication of function, the school chose to enhance the existing organisational structure to meet Low SES SSNP program objectives. There was a preference for using experience within the school rather than engaging one or two people from outside of the school to be role models and mentors²⁶.

²⁵ In government schools, 'quality teacher' positions are known as HATs. Unique to NSW, the new classification offers an additional career progression for excellent teachers. The HAT is paid a higher salary than other classroom based teachers in recognition of the high quality of their teaching and their ability to cultivate the teaching skills of their colleagues. HATs remain classroom based, enabling them to continue to refine their own teaching practice while sharing their expertise with their colleagues. HATs work with all staff in their school but have a particular focus on beginning teachers and on the co-ordination and supervision of professional experience for trainee teachers in conjunction with university partners. They also work with experienced staff applying to achieve accreditation at higher levels with the NSW Institute of Teachers and support quality teaching in cluster schools. As at 30 June, 2012, 117 HAT positions had been created in NSW government schools, 81 HAT equivalent positions in NSW Catholic schools and 41 equivalent HAT positions in NSW independent schools (NSW, 2012)

²⁶ The school challenged the assumption underpinning the HAT model, that is, that the consultancy model is

Key initiatives

Implementing a new professional learning model

The school has developed a professional learning model which has the following features:

- *Timetabled professional learning period*: Each teacher is allocated one period per fortnight for teacher professional learning.
- *Mentoring support*: A team of quality teacher mentors has been engaged to stimulate activity and provide support to teachers
- *Expert input and guidance*: The school established a partnership with the University of Newcastle in 2010 to support the school to meet its quality teaching goals
- *School plan*: Teacher learning activity is linked to the school management plan and the targets for the year
- *Accountability for professional learning time*: Teachers are required to account for the professional learning period by recording the activity in their log book. The learning and application of learning is discussed at the TARS meeting
- *Evaluation of the model*: The school undertakes internal and /or external evaluations to assess effectiveness, impact and future directions.

Timetabled professional learning period

The timetabled professional learning period was introduced in 2011. Each teacher is allocated one period per fortnight for teacher professional learning. Teachers may also make a submission to the principal for further payment to cover additional hours of applied learning after work. This initiative provides further incentives to staff to take up opportunities for learning and professional achievement.

Teachers are required to negotiate learning activity plans with their head teachers. The use of this time by individuals and faculties varies. Time may be used to pursue areas of interest or need, or planned TARS activity. For example, teachers in the English faculty use their allocated time to locate effective resources to develop lessons targeting specific skills. Maths teachers are using their professional learning time to develop new skills and capacities, such as, learning how to modify assessment tasks and to create different feedback sheets.

Teacher professional learning includes school based professional learning workshops and training and development courses operated by DEC, universities, approved providers and private companies. Teachers participate in whole school programs. They may access these programs on an individual basis. The school strongly supports the following approaches:

- *Peer learning*: Teachers working together on the *Learn, Apply, Tell and Embed*

the best way to achieve reform

(LATE) after hours model, a method developed by the academic Linda Darling Hammond (2000).

- *Observation of teaching*: This approach is perceived to facilitate a “huge learning curve for observer and the observed” (Principal).
- *Action research*²⁷: This approach has been developed through the partnership with the University of Newcastle
- *Coding lesson*²⁸, followed by discussions with colleagues and critical friends: This approach has also been developed through the partnership with the University of Newcastle

Teachers are encouraged to use evidence to inform judgement and decision making. The analysis of student performance data and other relevant databases is an important part of the evidence-based approach.

The school’s 2011 annual report outlines achievements in professional learning²⁹. Ninety-six per cent of staff participated in professional learning activities, the average expenditure being \$1,900 per teacher for the year (South West High School Annual Report, 2011).

The main priorities for professional learning have been related to improving student achievement in literacy, numeracy, the school certificate and HSC, improving levels of student engagement and retention, building teacher skills and capacity, and raising skills in connected learning. All staff participated in module one of the professional learning program ‘teaching English language learners’ to support teachers in providing innovative and tailored learning opportunities for LBOTE students. Thirty-five per cent of staff completed all six modules and were successful in gaining accreditation for the course.

Connected learning has been a strong focus of professional learning. In 2011, 70 per cent of teachers were trained in *Interactive Whiteboard (IWB)* applications; ten per cent were trained in *modular object orientated dynamic learning environment (moodle)*³⁰ with a view to implementing the platform in 2012, and five per cent now have the expertise to maintain and update the school website. In addition, teachers attended workshops to support the use of laptops in the classroom and the mathematics staff worked with the regional technology

²⁷ Action research processes assist teachers to investigate and better understand their practices. DEC has developed the Leading Action Research in Schools program to support school teams to lead educational change in their schools. The examination of practice drives the action research cycle of continuous learning. The research cycle is enacted through specific steps: selection of focus area; development and implementation of plans; observation and collection of data; followed by analysis; reflection; and re-planning for action.

²⁸ Lessons are observed and parts of the lessons are coded using the Quality Teaching Dimensions and Elements followed by professional dialogue. This method assists teachers to improve their pedagogy by analyzing lesson content and process. Learning is collaboratively designed, focused on pre-determined goals, observed by others, reflected upon and discussed. Of central importance is the development of a common language for understanding teaching goals, processes and outcomes.

²⁹ DEC has established myPL@Edu, a NSW DEC online professional learning record management system recording all registered, non registered and developed professional learning courses and programs accessed by teachers.

³⁰ Modular object orientated dynamic learning environment (moodle) is a free-source software package designed to create internet-based courses and websites. Typical features include assignment submission, discussion forums, file downloads, grading, instant messages, online calendars, online announcements, online quizzes and wikis.

consultant to develop skills in Google Sketchup.

Early career teachers participated in regional and school based induction programs to help prepare them to meet the demands of the NSW Institute of Teachers as well as respond to school based issues. Two early career teachers were accredited at the level of professional competence with the NSW Institute of Teachers.

Mentoring support

The school's Quality Teaching (QT) Mentor program was established in 2012. Underpinning the development of the mentoring model was the importance of recognising the existing skills and abilities of teachers at the school. The model was designed to complement the timetabled professional learning period and support the provision of customised professional learning for individual teachers. QT mentors allocated to each faculty provide peer support and engage in collaborative and innovative learning with teachers.

Teachers also have access to mentoring support provided by head teachers, complementing their supervisory role. Mentoring support activities are diverse and are determined by need and relevance, for example, some staff members are mentored in ways that can help them take up middle management positions, while new teachers are assisted in ways to help them adjust to the culture, expectations and accountability requirements of the school.

An important part of the role of the QT mentors is to support early career teachers. Mentoring support is provided to early career teachers as part of the induction program, implemented in Term 1 by the head teacher (teaching and learning). The program includes weekly meetings and aims to assist teachers to settle into the school. It also aims to help teachers to meet probationary requirements as well as the new requirements for new scheme teachers relating to accreditation.

Mentoring may be individual, team based or related to action research. Some examples include:

- discussion and evaluation of new strategies
- classroom demonstration and/or observation related to implementation of new strategies
- development of presentations and reporting to others
- validation of learning activities related to the NSW Teachers Institute
- extension of e-learning through initiatives implemented through the partnership with the University of Newcastle.

Expert input and guidance

The school established a partnership with the University of Newcastle in the first year of the Low SES SSNP funding. The University of Newcastle was well placed to assist the school, given its role in developing the NSW Quality Teaching model, which was developed based on a productive pedagogy study. Academic researchers have worked with each faculty to develop quality assessment tasks guided by the QT framework and the targets and planned student achievements outlined in the school plan. Teachers from the Technical and Applied Studies (TAS) and social science KLAs used action research that incorporated student, parent and teacher surveys to evaluate the quality of stage 4 assessment tasks in their KLAs.

The University of Newcastle researchers also focused on improving the quality of teacher lesson delivery. Lessons were observed, coded and evaluated against the standards articulated in the QT model. Teachers filmed a number of their lessons to support this process and ultimately gained a deeper understanding of the practices which best support student engagement and achievement. The partnership with the University of Newcastle is viewed by the school as important way of improving the quality of teaching and enhancing student learning.

Accountability for professional learning time

Teachers are required to account for the professional learning period by recording the activity in their professional log. The Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) supervisors are required to note records and endorse activity facilitated through funding for the after work learning strategy. There is an acceptance by the teachers of the necessity for accountability for professional development and planning time provided:

It would be very easy just to waste the allocated time and waste the school's money. Instead we have to prove that it is money well spent and we do something on our own to show that it's a good investment (Teacher).

The timetabled professional learning initiative is designed to enhance the TARS process. Teachers referred in positive ways to the time they spend reflecting on practice and setting learning goals. The TARS process now aligns individual activity with goals and targets outlined in the school plan and it works to reinforce continuous improvement through professional learning and engagement:

Quality teaching and the TPL are really about the school targets and meeting those targets. TARS feels like it is on a larger scale, in terms of Professional Development (PD), over a broader period of time... All the time we are thinking about what we're doing and trying to improve the process so that we can get better outcomes. And it's happening (Teacher).

Some teachers suggest that teachers' improvement programs could be enhanced by adding an extra first step to the structured procedure (that is, access to support provided by a quality teacher mentor).

Evaluation

As part of the school's overall accountability, internal and/or external evaluations are undertaken to assess effectiveness, impact and future directions. In 2011, two evaluations were conducted, one on the evaluation of the effectiveness of the timetabled professional learning period, and one on the TAS and social science KLAs action research initiative.

The school conducted an evaluation to assess the effectiveness of allocating a timetabled professional learning period to enhance quality classroom practice and deep curriculum knowledge. All staff members were involved in the evaluation process. The evaluation indicated that most teachers maintained a teacher professional learning log to track and monitor progress, and professional learning activities undertaken during the designated period were considered to be closely aligned with school targets.

A survey undertaken by all staff during Term 2, 2011, indicated a very high level of satisfaction with timetabled professional learning time. Ninety five per cent of staff stated that the teacher professional learning period was very useful and 92 per cent endorsed the initiative by recommending that it continue in 2012. More than 50 per cent of staff utilised the period to apply the principles of the QT framework to teaching and learning. Fifty-eight per cent of teachers developed technology expertise while a small number participated in online learning.

Given the positive evaluation of the timetabled professional learning period, the initiative is continuing in 2012. It was recommended that staff be encouraged to work across KLAs and access expert teachers both within and outside the school context to build deep curriculum knowledge and enhance teaching and learning practices. The necessity to accommodate individual staff needs required a more flexible approach to professional log record keeping in TARS.

The evaluation of the TAS and Social Science KLAs action research, conducted in partnership with the University of Newcastle, found that:

- where practices (in relation to expectations, assessment criteria and feedback) were inconsistent or not explicit, students were unable to access the task adequately and/or did not achieve a high standard
- students perceived teachers to be positive and supportive, but thought that teachers could place more emphasis on expectations and feedback
- family members were aware of the assessment tasks but thought that they provided little assistance
- teachers expressed a desire to work more collegially to develop assessment tasks with explicit quality criteria and marking guidelines to ensure consistency of grading and achieve higher student learning outcomes.

The school is responding to the major recommendations from the evaluations. These relate to the importance of undertaking more collegial professional learning to ensure that assessment tasks clearly incorporate the elements of the QT framework. The specific areas for focus are explicit quality criteria and high expectations. Other areas for focus are the implementation of consistent practices in marking of assessment tasks, and the provision of constructive and instructive feedback to students.

Implementing a new approach to teaching

Each teacher's work load has been reduced by one period per week to assist them to work on improving the quality of their teaching, by giving them space for extra planning and reflection. They are expected to focus on their own classroom practice and are encouraged to make time to observe each other's teaching. To avoid disruption to classroom teaching, four teachers have been employed to backfill teachers when on release.

The school's classroom teaching model emphasises planning and preparation, staffing differently by allocating support teachers and paraprofessional staff, strategic class organisation and the enhancement of student engagement through connected learning.

Teachers are given additional time to plan, and to improve the design of lessons. The additional class-release time is viewed favourably:

I think it's a case of bringing significance into the classroom, and into what the kids are aware of and what they know, and what they know culturally at home, that they can relate to at home. I think also that you set clear goals for each lesson and they will work towards it if you give them clear direction. And they'll do it happily instead of thinking why are we doing this. They need clear direction (Teacher).

Teachers have access to SMART and NSW Board of Studies data. They are expected to be aware of junior students' NAPLAN performance, and use the data as a basis for planning lessons and delivering structured and targeted learning activities in each lesson. Data allow teachers to better target areas of student weakness. Support teachers have an important role to perform in this regard, assisting the classroom teacher to develop class profiles of students. Teachers are also expected to use the data to assess effectiveness of teaching strategies.

The employment of additional support teachers and paraprofessionals has broadened the options available for classroom learning. The additional paraprofessional staff members support classroom teachers in various ways, by analysing data and profiling students, developing resources, team teaching, and working more closely with targeted students or students who require special intervention.

The school's ICT capacity has been expanded (new cabling, wireless connectivity, remote access, interactive whiteboards and provision of laptops). As a result of the Federal Government's DER initiative a total of 509 laptops have been issued to students in Years 9-11. The laptops have become a feature of teaching and learning in the school. Teachers have been given training in the use of whiteboard and multimedia presentations in teaching³¹.

Conclusion

Low SES SSNP funding has enabled South West High School to place greater focus on the quality of teaching, mostly by providing its teachers with more time to plan their lessons and better access to professional learning time and specialised learning support.

Initial assessments suggest that investment in staff development has provided benefits in terms of more capacity, and better staff planning. Teachers who were interviewed suggested that the additional professional learning time they were given had helped to improve the quality of their teaching and to help promote skill development. The additional planning time has been used to think about how best to deliver their lessons, reflect on the impact they are having, make changes and devise new strategies. Some teachers report an improvement in the quality of student work. Executive members of staff reported that teachers have become less resistant to new ideas and more open to embracing new ways of working in collaboration with others, since the implementation of the low SES SSNP initiatives.

³¹ The school has set targets to increase (by 5 per cent) teachers' satisfaction in their ICT usage in teaching and professional learning and increase the competency of Years 9-12 teachers in the use of DER laptops. There is also a target to ensure that all students utilise ICT facilities to enhance their learning.

7. Regional Central School

Regional Central is a K-12 public school catering for around 120 students in the Northern Riverina area of NSW. The school's Low SES SSNP focus is to improve the quality of teaching by developing knowledge, skills and capacities associated with pedagogy for the 21st century. The school has chosen to support teacher learning through action research, which is designed to assist teachers to find solutions through a collective process of action and reflection.

Low SES SSNP funding has been used to employ casual staff to backfill staff on release, providing leaders and teachers with release time to focus on collaboration and classroom planning. All teachers are provided with four days release per year to work on action research learning projects. Some of these projects include Accelerated Literacy (AL), secondary literacy strategies, Accelerated Reading (AR) and Taking Off with Numeracy (TOWN), e-learning action research project). The funding has also been used to cover costs associated with professional learning activities such as program registration, travel and accommodation, and the purchase of teaching, learning and ICT resources.

School leaders are given release time to help facilitate cultural change that is intended to underpin improving the quality of teaching in the school. School leadership is expected to be the main driver of cultural change by providing clarity of vision and purpose with a focus on the importance of engaging students, staff and school community members. Teachers are given release time to better plan and to focus on becoming better facilitators of learning. Opportunities are provided for teachers to improve their knowledge and skills and become better positioned to implement the national curriculum and more progressive pedagogical practices. It is hoped that more effective use of technology will permit teachers to use their time more efficiently.

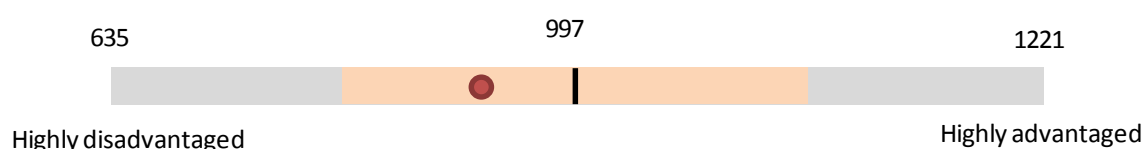
Staff reported that students are beginning to show improvement in their learning and independent study skills, as a result of the changes. Teachers reported that their own levels of engagement have increased and that they are working harder. They reported that in their view student behaviour is becoming less of an issue in the classroom because both they and their students are becoming more engaged with their learning.

School profile

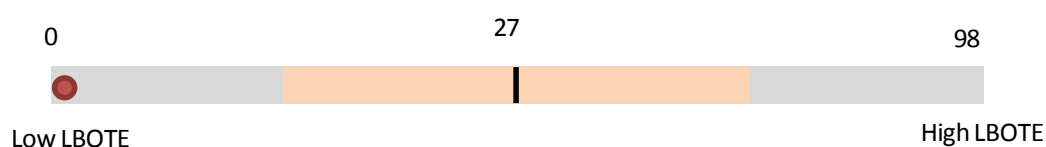
Student characteristics

In 2010, the school had an ICSEA value of 952, placing it below the state average for secondary schools in terms of educational advantage and disadvantage. In 2010, 3 per cent of students had a LBOTE background, which is also below the state average for secondary schools. The school's ATSI student enrolment was 7 per cent.

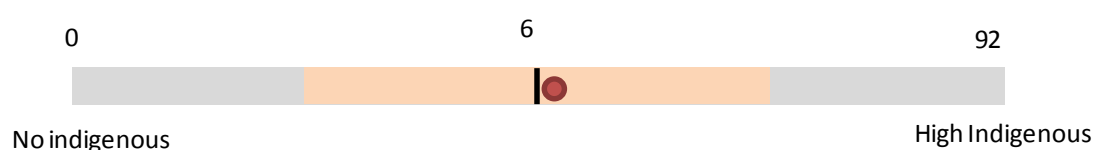
ICSEA = 952



LBOTE = 3%



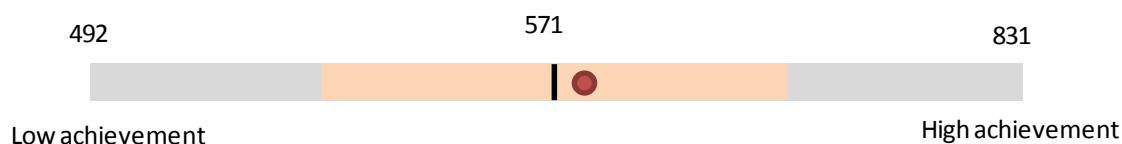
ATSI = 7%



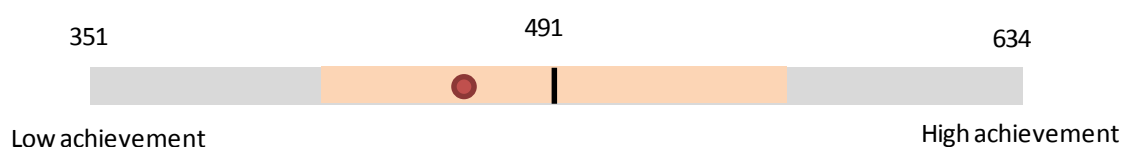
Student performance

The school's mean Year 5 numeracy NAPLAN score was at the state average of 492 in 2010 while the school's mean Year 5 NAPLAN score for reading was 473, which is below state average (491). The school's mean Year 9 numeracy NAPLAN score was 591, which is above the state average (571). The school's mean Year 9 reading NAPLAN score was 549, which is slightly below the state average (584). The school's attendance rate was 94 per cent in 2010, which is above the state average for secondary schools. The school's senior secondary school completion rate was 71 per cent in 2010, which was below state average.

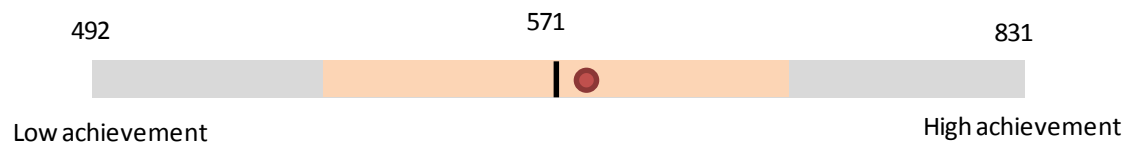
NAPLAN Year 5 numeracy = 492



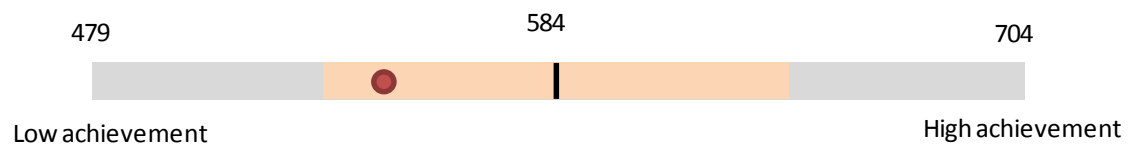
NAPLAN Year 5 reading = 473



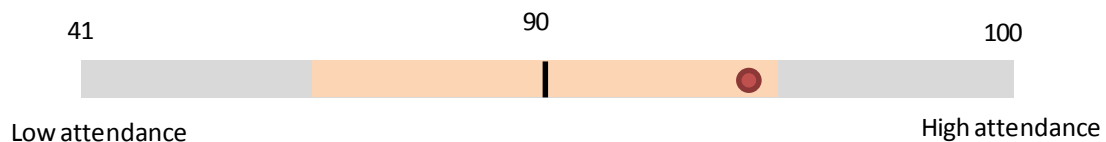
NAPLAN Year 9 numeracy = 591



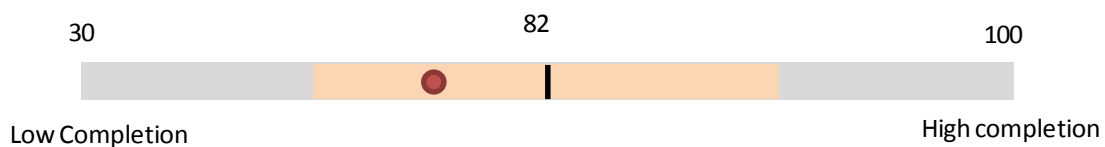
NAPLAN Year 9 reading = 549



School attendance = 94%



School completion



Leadership and staffing

Principal tenure

The leadership of the school has been stable. The principal was appointed at the beginning of 2008 after the previous principal completed a five year appointment.

Staffing

The school has 14.6 FTE teaching staff. There has been a high level of staffing stability over the years. The school has attempted to fill some vacancies with graduate teachers, in order to develop a more balanced age profile and support succession planning for the future. To support retention of quality staff, teachers were selected to fill temporary and long-term contract positions on the basis of demonstrated experience and skills. This approach, according to the principal, has in the main been successful in bringing staffing stability in hard-to-staff areas such as science, which has previously experienced a high turnover. Of critical importance in selecting graduates is establishing, at the point of selection, how well the candidate understands the rural context of the school and trying to assess in some way the

capacity of the graduate to adjust and connect with the life and culture of the school and wider community.

A comparison of Regional Central School with all NSW government secondary and primary schools participating in the Low SES SSNP for selected characteristics of teachers indicates:

- staff retention was strong with 7.1 per cent teachers leaving in 2010, compared with 10.7 per cent (secondary) and 12.9 per cent (primary) across all NSW Low SES SSNP schools
- lower proportion of teachers below 30 years of age than the overall for Low SES SSNP primary and secondary schools
- lower proportion of teachers that were 50 years or over, 35.7 per cent compared to 42.9 per cent across Low SES SSNP primary schools and 38.6 per cent across Low SES SSNP secondary schools
- higher number of teachers who had 10 or more years of experience, 71.4 per cent compared with 61 per cent across Low SES SSNP primary schools and 54.9 per cent across Low SES SSNP secondary schools
- lower proportion of teachers who had less than 10 years of service compared to Low SES SSNP primary and secondary schools
- proportion of teachers who had been in their current position for less than a year and 10 years or more was lower than the Low SES SSNP average
- proportion of teachers who had been in their current position for one to nine years was higher than the Low SES SSNP average
- teachers took an average of 3.6 sick leave days in the first half of 2011, compared with the average 6.4 days across primary and 6.5 days across secondary schools participating in the Low SES SSNP.

SSNP funding

SSNP

The school entered the Low SES SSNP in 2010 and the 2012 funding allocation was \$144,052. The school is also receiving funding as a Centre for Excellence in the Improving Teacher Quality Smarter Schools National Partnership.

Low SES SSNP initiatives

The school was well placed at the end of 2009 to address the objectives of both the Low SES SSNP and the Improving Teacher Quality SSNP, having undertaken extensive recent reviews and developed strategic priorities and future directions.

Low SES SSNP funding allocation is being used to:

- Employ casual staff to backfill staff on release, providing leaders and teachers with

release time to focus on improving the quality of teaching. All teachers are provided with four days release per year to work on action research learning projects. Some of these projects include: AL, secondary literacy strategies, AR and TOWN, e-learning action research project

- Cover costs associated with professional learning activities, such as program registration, travel and accommodation
- Purchase teaching, learning and ICT resources
- Contribute to SSNP regional coordination and administration

Centre for Excellence resources are used to:

- Employ a HAT to improve teaching practice throughout the hub school of Regional Central, and partner spoke schools through targeted data analysis and providing advice and support on quality teaching practices. The HAT's main focus has been on enhanced 21st century pedagogy through team teaching, targeted professional development and a range of action research projects
- Employ a paraprofessional to provide learning and technical support
- Deliver professional learning and purchase resources (\$50,000).

Key initiatives

Building staff skills and capacity

Teachers are managed and developed through the performance management process, professional learning and mentoring support.

Performance management

The TARS and Executive Assessment and Review Schedule (EARS) process is being used to facilitate a process of more continuous improvement in the quality of teaching as evidenced against a quality standards framework. As the framework is being redeveloped at the national level, the school is seeking to ensure that the process reflects the new changes, including the introduction of leadership standards. Staff members are expected to demonstrate professional growth over time in order to meet TARS or EARS accountability requirements.

Teachers are required to keep electronic Professional Learning Plans (PLPs), on the school moodle to be available for others to view. This enables the school leadership to access information about the courses teachers are delivering, about the teaching and learning strategies they're implementing, about the assessment tasks they are administering, and with student work samples and their grades. As part of the TARS process, executive members of staff go into classrooms and provide informal learning and support through professional dialogue. The school also plans, through the Centre for Excellence, to incorporate video analysis of lessons into the process. The creation of a culture of growth and professional

learning is viewed as important.

Professional Learning

The school gives teachers access to professional learning in their subject area, in areas relating to the school improvement plan, as well as access to leadership programs. Teachers can also use four days a year for professional learning in areas identified in their PLPs. For this, each teacher discusses and negotiates a proposal with the principal.

Professional development activities include skills development relating to 21st Century learning and pedagogy, literacy and numeracy, use of technology, Accelerated Literacy training, supporting special needs students (particularly those with autism), data analysis, and the national curriculum. Teachers work together on school-based action research projects and they are also given time to research, visit other schools, observe others, collect feedback, develop strategies or attend an in-service or participate in workshops (that enable hands on learning and have practical applications).

There is an understanding that teachers have a broad range of needs and that they differ in their skill and ability levels. Therefore, the school recognises the ‘differentiated teacher learning outcomes’ from the investment in professional learning. Teachers reported changed attitudes and practices, increased level of effort, motivation, professional satisfaction and willingness to collaborate with their peers.

Mentoring support

The school established a peer mentoring program earlier in the year, through the Centre for Excellence program. Two staff members were trained to be mentors (one executive and one class teacher). Feedback is positive, with participants suggesting that the training had made them reflect on their approach to teaching and their questioning techniques. “By just doing the talking it makes me reflect on my own processes. We can move ahead and explore new things”. (Teacher)

Early career teachers report being provided with time and given support to meet accreditation requirements and to also be trained in the key school initiatives. An induction meeting was held earlier in the year for new teachers. The teachers were familiarised with key school policies (e.g. the school discipline plan, occupational health and safety) and time was provided for questions and discussion.

The induction process here is brilliant. People are very welcoming. You are made to feel like one of the family. Your role is acknowledged and you feel supported.
(Early Career Teacher)

The school also informally supports graduates. For example, the new Physical Education teacher, at reporting time was provided with feedback on a few sample reports prior to writing the reports. The teacher was also provided with an additional day (funded through the New Scheme Teacher budget) to write her first reports. This strategy was designed to build a strong base for effective reporting and to develop a strong sense of accountability to parents.

The school plans to develop a more formal induction program for graduates in collaboration with a neighbouring school. The experience has been that readiness levels after training differ

vastly. Graduates can feel under pressure when they cannot live up to the expectation that they be up to date with learning technology. Another area of potential stress for graduates is behaviour management, as their training may not have adequately prepared them.

Conclusion

The Low SES SSNP funding has provided the school with time to facilitate cultural change to improve its quality of teaching and teacher and school accountability. School leadership has been a significant driver of cultural change and has sought to provide clarity of vision and purpose as well as direction and strategy. In particular, there is a strong focus on the highest leveraging strategies because they have the greatest impact on student achievement. Some of these include provision of feedback to students, meta-learning and school self evaluation.

Teachers are seeking to develop skills in a range of areas, including e-learning through action research. The goal is to motivate them to change their practices and to become better facilitators of learning. Teachers report that there is a culture of strong engagement of students, families and teachers. Students are showing improvement in their learning and independent study skills. Teachers have noted that student behaviour management is becoming less of an issue in the classroom because students are more engaged in activities. Family members of students have noted that teacher engagement has increased and believe that ‘teachers are definitely working a lot harder’.

Teachers have been given more opportunities to improve skills and to become better positioned for not only the 21st century learning but also the national curriculum. They are being supported to develop professionally and to understand their role, responsibilities and accountabilities. Teachers have been released to participate in relevant activities. Leaders are confident that the school has the capacity to make the necessary adjustments in order to effectively manage change.

8. Catholic College

Catholic College is a systemic school in the Sydney Archdiocese catering for around 1,100 boys in Years 7 to 12.

The college's Low SES SSNP funding is being used by the college to (1) employ two full time Leaders of Pedagogy (LOPs) to design and manage a range of programs and projects, (2) provide higher duty allowances and two-period release time to various learning coordinators in order to help facilitate the development, implementation and ongoing review of programs and project, (3) to cover costs associated with professional development and training of staff, such as, teacher release time, course costs, travel, accommodation, speakers and consultancy fees, and (4) employ a school counsellor as well as pay for counselling services provided by an external provider.

Strategies implemented to facilitate change include a focus on building teaching skills, including the capacity to use student performance data to inform decisions related to planning and teaching practice. In terms of classroom practice and student learning initiatives are focused on the implementation of peer mentoring support programs, and teachers becoming more proficient in the use of integrated, connected and cooperative learning approaches.

The LOPs are the focus for facilitating cultural change in the college and have a brief to improve teacher knowledge and skills and implement innovations in teaching and learning. For example, teachers are using cooperative learning as a way to try to improve learning outcomes, a development enabled through the establishment of a learning space for both teachers and students.

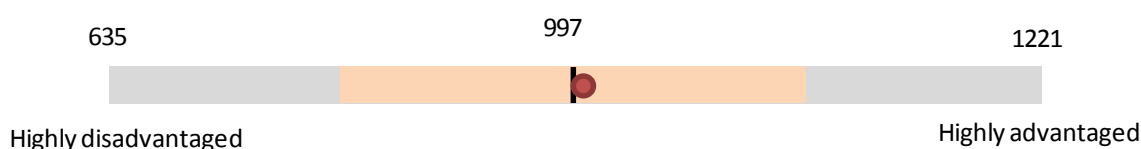
The college is attempting to change the profile of its workforce to achieve a balance of experience and age. Early career teachers have been recruited and are being encouraged to become actively engaged in the life of the school and given additional responsibilities and opportunities to help retain them. For example, the creation of assistant co-ordination positions was implemented to provide the early career teachers with additional opportunities to develop skills and to contribute at the management level.

School profile

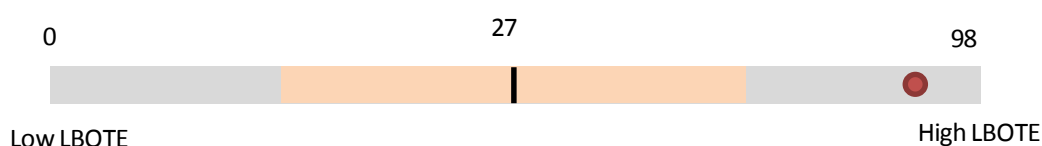
Student characteristics

In 2010 the college's ICSEA value was 1001, which is slightly above the state average. In 2010, 82 per cent of students were identified as LBOTE, which is significantly above state mean. None of the student population identified as ATS

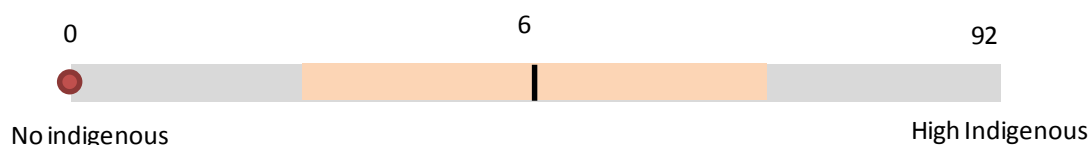
ICSEA = 1001



LBOTE = 82%



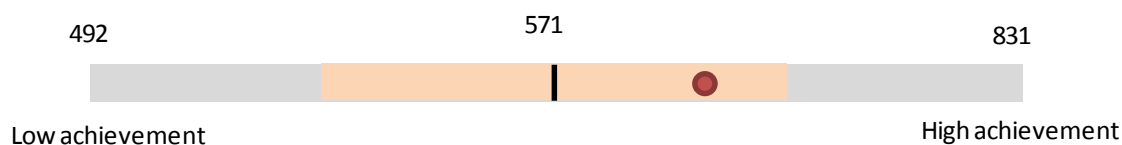
ATSI = 0%



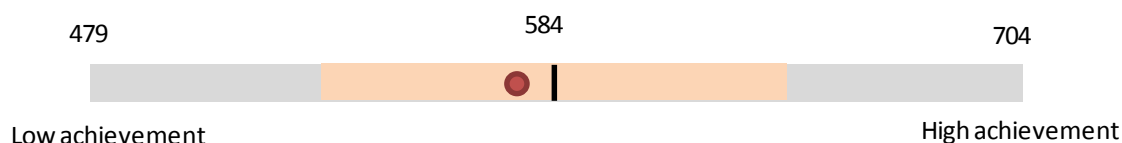
Student performance

The college's Year 9 numeracy NAPLAN score in 2010 was 610, which is well above state mean (571). The college's Year 9 reading NAPLAN score was 571 in 2010, which was lower than the state average (584). The average student attendance rate for the college during 2010 was 95 per cent, which is higher than the state mean (90 per cent). The college's completion rate in 2010 was 91 per cent, which is above state mean (82).

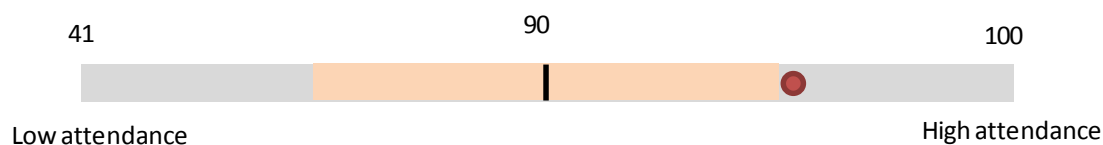
NAPLAN Year 9 Numeracy = 610



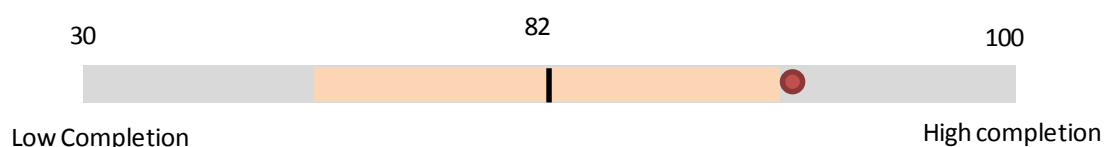
NAPLAN Year 9 reading = 571



School attendance = 95%



School completion



Leadership and staffing

Principal tenure

The college principal has occupied this position for five years

Staffing

The college has a total of 106 full and part time staff members employed (79 teaching and 27 non teaching). Staff retention has been stable over time. The teacher retention rate from 2010 to 2011 was just under 95 per cent (Catholic College Annual Report 2011). Many of the teachers have been at the school for more than 15 years. One staff member has been at the school for 51 years.

SSNP funding

SSNP

The school entered the Low SES SSNP in 2011 and the Low SES SSNP 2012 funding was \$1,092,000.

Other funding

The school also receives ESL funding to employ additional staff (1.2FTE).

Low SES SSNP Initiatives

Low SES SSNP funds have been used to:

- employ two full time LOPs to design and manage a range of programs and projects related to the six reform areas

- provide higher duty allowances and two-period release time to the stage 4 and stage 5 learning coordinators, the literacy coordinator, the ESL coordinator, the transition to work / further education coordinator, and the learning matrix integration coordinator. The purpose of the release time is to facilitate the development, implementation and ongoing review of programs and projects.
- cover costs associated with professional development and training of staff, such as, teacher release time, course costs, travel, accommodation, speakers and consultancy fees.
- employ the school counsellor (0.2EFT) and pay for counselling services provided by an external provider.

The college's Low SES SSNP strategy aims to improve student performance, particularly in literacy and numeracy, through targeted strategies focused on the professional development of the school staff using a collaborative and community focused model.

The establishment of the Leaders of Pedagogy (LOPs) strategy by the Catholic Education Office Sydney supported the college's aspiration for enhancing its professional learning community. The Catholic Education Office Sydney allocated two fulltime LOP positions to the college for the purpose of coordinating the SSNP initiatives and projects, managing the Low SES SSNP budget and proposals, and reporting. The LOP positions were considered to be catalysts for enhancing the college's professional learning community and for 'de-privatising the classroom'. The LOPs do not have a teaching load and are free to work collaboratively with teachers inside and outside the classroom. The LOPs may demonstrate teaching techniques or provide feedback on teaching. They may assist with necessary preparations required for implementing innovative or e-learning methods.

The LOPs are required to have not only strong pedagogical skills but also excellent interpersonal and communication skills. A strong capacity in using learning technologies is also considered to be important. The LOPs are expected to lead by 'inviting' staff to participate in the professional learning community and supporting them to take control of their own professional learning. The emphasis is on peer learning and support. In making appointments to these positions the principal selected two people with complementary skills.

The principal views the Low SES SSNP reform areas to be consistent with the priorities and direction of the school. Therefore it has been possible to incorporate the SSNP strategies within the broader school planning processes. The college has a five-year management plan that is based on a cyclical process of continual development and is managed by the Catholic Education Office, Sydney. The resource 'How Effective is our Catholic school?' is used to assist the review and improvement processes. The annual plans are developed and based on input by staff. They detail specific school strategies, including those related to SSNP projects.

The Catholic Education Office, Sydney also coordinates key SSNP activities and facilitates network meetings for principals, LOPs and other relevant personnel.

Key initiatives

Engaging staff

The strategies developed to increase the level of staff engagement include the creation of teacher learning community groups, the establishment of a collaborative learning space, the

implementation of 'strategy a month' initiative, the implementation of 'instructional rounds', and using learning technologies and provision of access to professional learning activities.

Teacher learning community

The college is strengthening the partnership between teachers and the leadership team by improving consultation and decision making processes. To that end, six staff learning community groups have been established. A teacher belief statement was initially articulated for teaching for the 21st century. Groups identified teaching qualities necessary for engaging students and key challenges were identified. Teachers are released to meet and investigate these areas, within or outside the school.

These learning communities are overseen by the LOPs. The themes for the groups are identified in response to emerging needs and school priorities. Teachers nominate for membership of the group of their choice. A staff member chairs the meetings and reports ideas and suggestions to the leadership team. The LOPs assist with the decision making and follow through process.

The learning community group strategy, according to both the leadership team and teachers, has been successful in better engaging staff in school based decision making. The leadership team identified three core and underpinning themes for the college as a result of the input and feedback from learning communities. These themes are collaborative learning spaces, literacy and improved pedagogy.

Collaborative learning space

In recognition of the limitations of traditional classrooms and to encourage teachers to use cooperative learning methods, a large open space has been created. The space is timetabled for use by teachers across KLAs for 70 per cent of the time. Teachers are also able to book further sessions in the remaining time. The open space enables two to three teachers to engage up to 60 students to learn in groups. The condition for use is that teachers are willing to be observed and are open to discussion about teaching methods.

The strategy has been successful, according to participating teachers. Although some teachers were initially reluctant, now most teachers access the resource and the space is utilized most days. The college is now preparing to create another collaborative learning space in another building to meet increasing demand.

Strategy a Month

The LOPs also use the collaborative learning space to conduct a mini 'teach-meet' session once a month. Teachers are invited to attend, share best practice and learn new skills and strategies from their colleagues. A morning tea is provided. The strategy of the month technique was designed to establish cooperative structures for staff and to support the implementation of cooperative learning strategies in classrooms.

This strategy is in its second year of operation. In the first year the LOPs presented teachers with a range of strategies and ideas for consideration, implementation and review over the month. Handouts and notes were provided. At the following month's meeting, a few staff presented and shared their experiences of these strategies. In this way teachers were able to learn from each other about what works and under what circumstances. More recently, the

LOPs have encouraged teachers to take more initiative in the running of monthly meetings. Teachers are now suggesting innovative teaching and learning strategies that could be shared at these meetings. Between 30 and 40 staff members attend these meetings every month.

Instructional rounds

The LOPs are also responsible for facilitating ‘instructional rounds’³², that is, a school-wide approach for using data to help a school community understand what is happening in practice and what problems are being experienced. The instructional round methodology has been developed for the purpose of improving whole school practice.

The instructional rounds technique enables the school community to focus on a problem of practice. For instance, the college is now exploring the question of how literacy is enhanced in classrooms across KLAs:

If that's your problem of practice you go into a whole lot of classrooms, just for 10 minutes and just collect data about what's happening. You just observe and collect, you don't make any judgements about what's happening. Then you're able to create a picture about what's happening. It's addressing a whole school problem of practice (LOP).

The benefit of this technique is that it enables teacher professional learning to be integrated into a process for improving whole school practice. Teachers develop by observing others and/or getting feedback, collecting, analysing and reporting on data.

Using learning technologies

The college is trying to develop a more coherent school-wide vision and design for e-learning as well as increasing staff capacity to use ICT for contemporary learning and office systems. Teachers are supported to engage in new ways of teaching using technology. The provision of laptops to students provided the school with the incentive to use the available technology. Teachers indicate that by using the new learning technologies, there is less reliance on traditional chalk and talk methods.

Some teachers have been trained to use learning technologies through the ‘Horizon Project’. This project aims to engage students by connecting them with the technology (by using the web 2.0 tools). A paraprofessional staff member provides technical assistance to the staff if required. Another example is staff training to deliver the ‘Read and Write’ gold assertive technology literacy program for Mac books.

³² Instructional Rounds is developed by Thomas Fowler-Finn from Harvard and it is a network approach to instructional leadership, the emphasis is on developing a learning community of instructional leaders for district administrators, principals, assistant principals and teachers. The approach includes a variety of network implementation models, including working within one school system, working with the leadership of multiple schools or school systems, a ‘train the trainer’ model and other services streamlined to client needs. The instructional rounds model cultivates leaders from within educational organisations and helps them to understand and improve the level and quality of their teaching and learning. Robert J. Marzona utilises instructional rounds methodology. He considers it to be a tool that can be used to enhance teachers’ pedagogical skills and develop a culture of collaboration, the primary purpose is for observing teachers to compare their own instructional practices with those of teachers they observe. The chief benefit of the approach resides in the discussion that takes place among observing teachers at the end of the observation as well as in subsequent self-reflection.

Professional Learning activities

The college is seeking to make the delivery of professional development more targeted, concise and delivered in short blocks of time, up to one and a half hours. Whole day sessions are seen to have limited impact because teachers feel “bombarded with information” and as a consequence “you lose them’ (Principal).

The preferred approach is the implementation of symposiums or sessions at staff meetings, providing staff with short learning sessions, inside and after school hours. Session themes to date have included topics such as brain based learning and student-staff wellbeing, persuasive writing, data analysis, e-learning, HSC questions and rubrics, Board Of Studies (BOS) verbs, establishing teacher learning communities, VETiS, and Google documents.

Building workforce capacity

The college is committed to sustainable staffing processes consistent with the vision of a professional learning community. There are several key processes outlined below.

Building management and leadership capacity

The principal considers the school’s leadership team to be critical to overall effectiveness of school leadership and management. The leadership team comprises staff of a range of ages and levels of experience. Staff members identified as having leadership potential are encouraged to aspire to take up leadership positions.

Retaining early career teachers

To prevent the college from ‘losing young staff’, the school implemented a *Leaders of Learning* initiative established in early 2012 to promote and meet high aspirations. Assistant coordinator positions have been established at the school to provide early career teachers with some additional opportunities for advancement. One of these areas is in student welfare with early career teachers being given responsibility for contributing to management of aspects of the school’s student welfare program. Such positions provide early career teachers with release time to focus on their additional responsibilities.

Appraising leaders and teachers

There is an appraisal process in place to review the performance of staff holding positions of responsibility. The principal is reviewed after four years, senior staff after three years and new staff after two years.

The appraisal process requires staff members to fill out relevant forms and comment on the designated areas of leadership and nominate a number of colleagues to comment on performance. Feedback is collated and submitted to the supervisor. The final step involves a meeting in the principal's office. In this process there is an opportunity for the staff members to also comment on their supervisors.

Underperformance of teachers is also addressed through this process. The principal has the option of reducing the length of the contract period pending progress and this option has been exercised in some instances. Teachers are encouraged to use their feedback to embark on an improvement program. The college’s appraisal process is increasingly using evidence to reflect on performance and development. Staff are encouraged to collect quality data to

support their assessments. Appraisal is considered to be a necessary part of developing as a professional.

All staff members are required to undertake the Personnel Performance Professional Review (PPPR). The review process focuses on setting goals at the beginning of the year in the context of the overall school plan. These goals are reviewed at the end of the year. Teachers are also required to develop Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), which may include the identification of mentors. The Low SES SSNP has enhanced this process:

People have more freedom to choose a course that the school might otherwise not have been able to fund. They also have more sharing and reflection time. We make sure that if they go away for professional development, we allow time for them to share with the rest of us (Senior staff member).

Staff perceptions of the PPPR processes are mixed. While some view the process as top-down and bureaucratic others value the flexibility in the process. Some teachers expressed the view that the process lacks rigour and accountability.

I would like to see the process having more teeth... You can set goals you have already achieved and nobody will question that. There needs to be more rigour around goal setting and choice of mentor (Senior staff member).

I'd also like to see more accountability built into it. I'd like to see some measure for the goal and some sort of recognition that they have achieved it (Senior staff member).

The Archdiocese of Sydney is planning to establish an appraisal process for all teachers that is similar to the one used by Catholic College staff holding positions of responsibility.

Mentoring

An important aspect of the role of the LOP is the use of mentoring as a strategy for facilitating learning and change in teaching practice as well as supporting professionalism and accountability.

The LOP is a mentor to five staff members who have invited him to be their mentor to assist them to meet desired goals. Through the college's PPPR process staff may nominate mentors to assist them to meet designated goals.

New teachers are provided with a mentor to assist them to settle in and participate in the life of the school.

When I first came there were meetings with the principal every week to see how we were doing, and to see that all our paperwork was up to date with the Institute of Teachers, etc. I got to know how the school runs and what the values and expectations are (Teacher).

The college implements a formal mentoring program for the New Scheme teachers in conjunction with services provided to them by the Catholic Education Office Sydney. Experienced teachers are assigned as mentors for graduates by the college. They meet with them and provide necessary and relevant assistance. The benefit is considered to be mutual for the graduate teacher and the experienced teacher. Mentors teachers feel affirmed when

they are selected but they are also able to learn about new innovations from working with their mentees. Early career teachers value the support provided, assisting them to settle in and to try different ideas.

Staff members in new roles or positions of responsibility are also provided with mentoring support. Informal mentoring also occurs through every day interactions with staff, through team planning, committee work and staffroom activity. Coordinators use the mentoring strategy to bring about changes in practices.

Developing data literacy

A key element of the college's Low SES SSNP strategy is the improvement of data literacy of all staff. This is considered to be important for informing decision making and shaping teaching practice. In addition to NAPLAN, HSC and School Certificate data, the college also collects school level data through, for example, reading comprehension tests, literacy pre-test for Supplementary Reading Assistance (SRA) and *Making up Lost Time in Literacy (MULTiLit)* and the Tests of Reading Comprehension (TORCH) test. Engagement and attendance data and survey data of teachers, families and students is also valued. Teachers are provided with opportunities to develop skills in data analysis and reporting especially in relation to:

- transitioning students to Year 7
- tracking of students
- profiling students and class groupings
- guiding teaching and interventions
- providing evidence
- finding solutions to problems or answers to questions.

Supporting student wellbeing

The college supports student wellbeing through a range of strategies. Counselling services are offered by the school counsellor who is funded through the SSNP program. Students have access to a three-hour pastoral care session every term. The program addresses issues such as cyber bullying, time management, and communication. Guest speakers are often engaged to work with students.

In 2010, the college piloted the Rosemount Program. The program is delivered by Rosemount, a Church based organisation associated with Catholic Care, and targets boys requiring social and emotional support. Some of the participating boys have autism and behavioural difficulties. The program's methodology reflects a cohesive, research based framework. The college identified students who may benefit from participation in the program and interviews were held with students and their families. Most of the students were willing to participate and some families declined because of the perceived stigma that may be associated with the program. Other families gave their approval after further discussion about the benefits of the program.

There are 20 Year 8 and 9 students and 25 Year 12 students participating in the 2012 Rosemount Program. The Year 8 program 'My Friends' focuses on social interactions while the Year 9 program assists students to cope with emotions and manage anger and bullying behaviour. Year 12 students are assisted to help deal with academic stress and anxiety.

Conclusion

Low SES SSNP funding has enabled the college to bring about cultural change through the implementation of a wide range of diverse and complementary strategies designed to facilitate cultural change in the college. Investment in cultural change is seen to be sustainable.

A key focus of the Low SES SSNP in Catholic college is the implementation of a model of professional development that is collaborative, community-focused and that has the potential to facilitate change and achieve continuous improvement. The LOPs initiative is successful in facilitating change through experimentation and innovation.

The key successful strategies include: the establishment of key coordination positions; and the provision of time to teachers to learn, research, experiment, implement and review new approaches and practices. These new approaches and practices include: peer mentoring support programs; student assessment activities; providing alternative pathways for students; provision of welfare support to targeted students; and integrated, connected and cooperative learning methodologies.

Additionally, the college is prioritising workforce reform through retention, succession and recruitment strategies. Opportunities are provided to staff to access mentoring support and early career teachers' high aspirations are being met through the creation of additional assistant coordinator positions. The emphasis on teacher standards and professional accountability is also considered to be a high priority.

9. Valley Public School

Valley Public School is a kindergarten to Year 6 Government school catering for around 240 students in the Hunter Central Coast region.

The school's Low SES SSNP activity focuses on four key initiatives: improving staff supervision and support, implementing individualised professional learning activities, lifting literacy and numeracy results, and better engaging students in learning.

The school is trying to improve staff performance and accountability through a more intensive model of supervision and professional learning support. Every teacher is required to develop an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) that identifies goals and identifies strategies for achieving the goals. Teachers, where the need is identified, are targeted for professional learning support.

Funding from the Low SES SSNP has provided the school with more time for staff to plan, implement, and review designated programs. Staff members reported that their skills have improved as a result of the focus on individualised plans and professional development, and better access to relevant resources.

In the area of teachers and the raising of literacy and numeracy standards, the school uses the NSW Quality Teaching (QT) model to guide practice, trying to have key model questions embedded in teaching programs and ensure that assessment tasks are consistent with QT model principles. The goal is for teachers to demonstrate the elements of the QT model and Consistent Teacher Judgement (CTJ) through program design, lesson delivery and assessment strategies. These approaches differentiate the curriculum and model explicit teaching, guided and independent reading and writing skills.

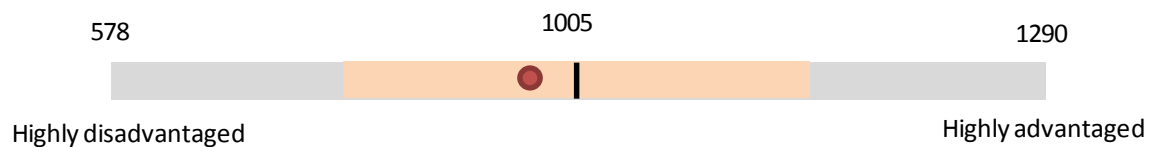
The school is trying to raise the overall level of student engagement by improving wellbeing and discipline policies and practices, improving outdoor and playground facilities, making better use of ICT, and working on a program for transition to secondary school. Teachers are mentored and supported in order to help improve their practice. They are provided with assistance with regard to implementing evaluation strategies, accessing opportunities to observe model lessons or be observed, developing resources and shared analysis of student work.

School profile

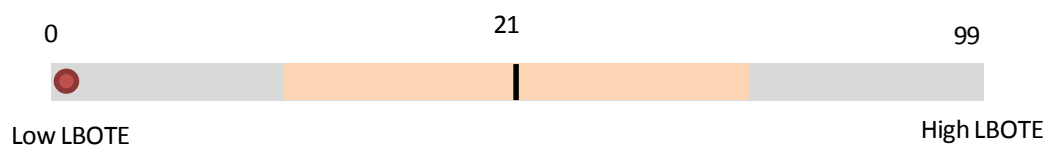
Student characteristics

The school's ICSEA value in 2010 was 950, which is below the state mean. Three per cent of students came from LBOTE families, which is well below the state mean (21 per cent). In 2010, six per cent of students identified as ATSI, which is below the state mean.

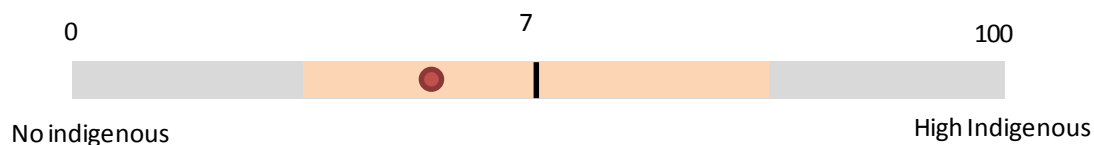
ICSEA = 950



LBOTE = 3%



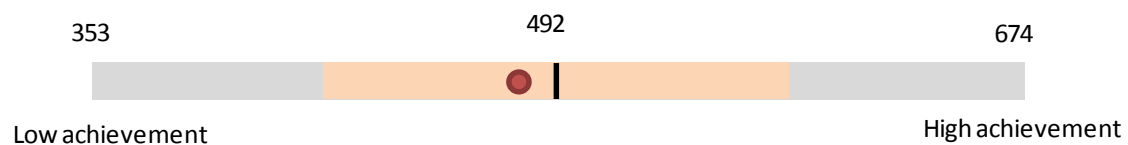
ATSI = 6%



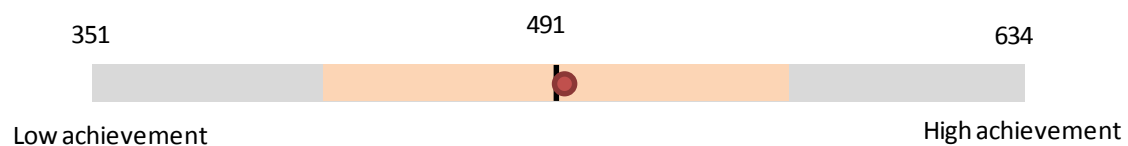
Student performance

The school's NAPLAN results are close to the mean for all schools and above that of like schools. In 2010 the school's mean Year 5 numeracy score was 482. The school's Year 5 reading NAPLAN mean score was 493. The student attendance rate in 2010 was 94 per cent.

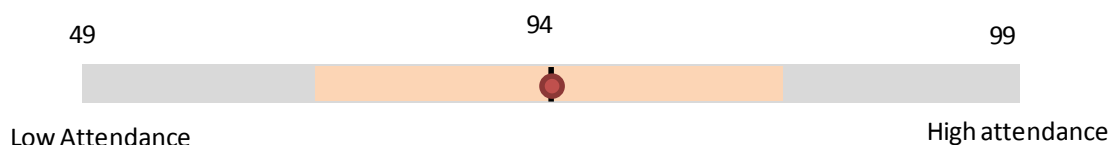
NAPLAN Year 5 numeracy = 482



NAPLAN Year 5 reading = 493



School attendance = 94%



Leadership and staffing

Principal tenure

The principal has held the position since the beginning of Term 3 and was a past member of the staff who sought additional leadership development opportunities in another SSNP school. The previous principal had completed a five-year contract and retired in the middle of 2011. The assistant principal held the relieving principal position for a year.

Staffing

The current staffing complement is 19 teaching and non teaching staff.

A comparison of Valley Public School with all NSW government primary schools participating in the Low SES SSNP for selected characteristics of teachers indicates:

- lower-than-average turnover of teachers (7.1 per cent compared with 12.9 per cent)
- younger than average age profile of teachers, with a higher proportion of teachers aged 30 to 49 years (64.3 per cent compared with 48 per cent) and a correspondingly lower proportion of teachers 50 years or older (28.6 per cent compared with 42.9 per cent)
- slightly less experienced profile of teachers compared to the average for all Low SES SSNP schools fewer than average years in the teaching service, with more having three years or less service (28 per cent compared with 19 per cent), and fewer with 10 or more years experience (50.0 per cent compared with 61.0 per cent)
- teachers with less experience at the school (in their current position) than average with substantially more having been in their position for less than one year (28.6 per cent compared with the average for Government low SSNP schools of 13.6 per cent) and proportionately fewer having been in their current position for 10 years or more (7.1 per cent compared with the average of 22.3 per cent)
- average days of sick leave per teacher (9.1) somewhat above the average for all Government schools in the Low SES SSNP (6.5).

SSNP funding

SSNP

The school entered the Low SES SSNP in 2011 and the 2012 funding allocation was \$259,574. It has been in receipt of National Partnership on Improving Teacher Quality

funding as a Centre for Excellence since 2010 and this funding has been extended into 2012.

Low SES SSNP Initiatives

The Low SES SSNP funding is being used to:

- employ casual teachers to backfill for Stage 2 and 3 teachers undertaking professional development on AL, and to release stage groups for program development, implementation and evaluation
- employ a SAO (0.2 FTE) to support administrative processes, including the purchasing and maintenance and monitoring of learning resources
- employ a speech pathologist (0.2FTE) from Term 3, 2012, to support speaking and listening skill development. The speech pathologist provides teachers with strategies and resources.
- cover costs associated with professional learning programs and teaching and learning resources.

The Centre for Excellence funding allocation is used to:

- employ a HAT to model high quality teaching as well as those in five other schools in the region.³³
- employ paraprofessionals: a learning facilitator (0.6 FTE) and a technology learning facilitator (0.4 FTE)
- an additional \$50,000 was allocated in 2010 and 2011 and was used for professional development course costs, development work, technology, and learning resources.

The Low SES SSNP and Centre for Excellence programs are complementary.³⁴

Key initiatives

The school is focusing on two key initiatives in relation to staffing, management and accountability:

³³ The teacher holding the HAT position returned to her substantive position in 2012. As the school has not been successful in recruiting a new HAT, funding is used to employ an additional classroom teacher on higher duties to release an assistant principal from classroom duty to support remedial strategies and the middle band children in literacy and numeracy development.

³⁴ As the school established the Centre for Excellence program a year earlier, it used Low SES funding to build on strategies established through the Centre for Excellence program. For example, at the beginning of 2011 staff received four days' training in AL using Centre for Excellence funding. In 2012, an additional group of staff received training in AL. Furthermore, Centre for Excellence funding was used in 2011 to purchase speech pathology services. Students in Kindergarten and Year 1 were screened and reports prepared for the school including recommendations for follow up. Low SES SSNP funding is used to implement responsive strategies.

- improving teacher professional learning support
- implementing individualised professional learning plans

Building teacher skill capacity and support

Mentoring is an important element of the school's supervisory and support model. It incorporates classroom lesson observation and feedback and team planning, teaching and review. Individual teachers are targeted for professional learning intervention. Strategies are devised to support their development, including the provision of release time. Mentors customise their approach to meet the specific needs of individuals. For example, early career teachers have specific needs relating to beginning a career in teaching. Opportunities are created for teachers to work together on programming and student assessment. The school's mentoring program utilises the skills of highly experienced teachers. These teachers, irrespective of whether they aspire to positions of leadership, are encouraged to share their skills and support school management.

The assistant principal has a critical role in the school's supervisory and support model. Teachers are being encouraged to develop their leadership skills; they chair team meetings, participate in developing activities and present to others. The assistant principal also facilitates team planning, professional learning and development for all staff.

There are new expectations and opportunities for teachers to work together. Professional standards provide teachers with guidance about expectations related to their work, behaviour and accountabilities. New staffing arrangements, allocating additional professional and paraprofessional support staff have created opportunities for the school to develop innovative approaches to team work. They are trialling and experimenting with various team teaching and class grouping approaches.

Paraprofessionals have opportunities to be trained to support the delivery of programs, such as MiniLit and Accelerated Literacy. They work with targeted students on specific learning programs under the supervision of classroom teachers.

Individualised professional learning

Every staff member develops an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) at the beginning of the year and in each plan teachers are expected to identify the means to address and work to meet their professional learning needs. They are asked to consider the way in which their plan will help the school to meet its strategic goals and targets.

To facilitate development, teachers are given access to training and professional learning opportunities. In recent years, they have had access to SMART data training, either through direct access to training programs or via trained staff. Other areas of training include:

- literacy programs (Kindergarten and Stage 1 teachers)
- Accelerated Literacy program, with a focus on consolidation, reflection and support for teachers (Stage 2 and 3 teachers)
- communication for the classroom
- speaking and listening skills program developed through the Speech pathology service delivered by Hunter Valley Speech Pathology
- Athletics program ongoing professional learning

- assessment and analysis techniques (for example, Newman's Analysis, rich assessment task development and assessment and reporting strategies).

Although teachers may appreciate opportunities to learn and to spend more time of quality preparation, there are challenges associated with spending time away from teaching. Teachers expressed concern about the impact on their teaching commitments, classroom discipline and relationship with students and parents. Parents expressed concern about the impact that whole staff training in Accelerated Literacy had on the teaching program at the beginning of the year. The challenge has been to ensure that the classroom program was able to be delivered effectively and consistently in partnership with casual teachers.

The school has taken steps to minimise disruption of the professional learning program. The two assistant principals attend targeted professional development activities. They work to ensure that teachers are informed about new strategies and programs. Similarly, connected classrooms enable teachers to participate in video-conference meetings and professional development activities.

Key challenges

The consultation team identified the following implementation challenges:

- establishment of the program during a time of leadership change,
- finding and communicating a direction,
- meeting DEC requirements and expectations.

The school established the Low SES SSNP under the leadership of a relieving principal. The Principal has just retired and the relieving Principal led the school through the preparation, establishment and initial implementation of the two SSNP initiatives.

Teachers suggested that the school was overwhelmed by the requirement to simultaneously develop, implement and account for both the Centre for Excellence program and the Low SES SSNP. There were challenges in implementing the range of strategies related to the reform areas and other school based priorities.

Moreover, some teachers believed that the inexperience of the executive team made the establishment of the program challenging. The establishment processes could have been improved by increasing the level of staff and community involvement in decision making, and in so doing ensuring greater ownership by staff and community members.

Teachers reported that the school did not have enough time to consolidate the new practices because it was implementing a number of new initiatives over a short period of time. The pressure impacted on the professional relationships, "staff started to talk about each other but I think the executive learned from that" (Teacher).

Some staff members indicated that the school plan was not used or understood. Moreover, there is a tension between being responsive to students in the classroom and implementing documented strategies within specified timeframes.

Teachers reported that the increased level of autonomy for expenditure of SSNP funding came with an increased level of accountability and reporting. The burden of reporting and accountability is time consuming and is detracting from the educational delivery.

Conclusion

The Low SES SSNP has provided the school with the opportunity develop a new model of staff development and supervision. Assistant principals have been given additional time to provide instructional leadership to teachers and to manage their performance. Teachers have been given more assistance in analysing students work, devising lessons, developing resources and monitoring and evaluating their programs.

The requirement for each staff member to develop and implement ILPs is assisting individual teachers as well as the school focus on goals and improvement. School leaders are able to be more strategic about targeting staff training and development by implementing individualised and groups based professional learning activities. The school is releasing teachers for professional development, for team teaching, for reporting on professional learning activities and for engaging in whole school planning and development activities. Teachers are being given additional time for professional learning activities in planning, implementing and reviewing ‘best practice’ teaching and learning programs, such as Accelerated Literacy.

10. Conclusion

This report is one of a series of reports planned as part of the evaluation of Low SES SSNP staffing, management and accountability initiatives. It provides case studies of several schools that have implemented a variety of initiatives associated with developing and retaining high quality teachers and leaders, implementing innovative teaching and learning approaches and strengthening accountability practices. The case studies highlight not only different approaches to the implementation of Low SES SSNP initiatives but also diverse contexts which influence the decisions related to strategies and resourcing. Schools differ in the way they have incorporated their Low SES SSNP initiatives into their school accountability and development models.

Key areas of focus

An analysis of the staffing, management and accountability case studies reveals that the schools have focused on five key areas:

1. *Investing in teacher quality*

All case study schools have invested in teacher professional development, in recognition of research evidence indicating that the quality of teaching is an important influence on student achievement. A number of innovative professional learning models and approaches are being implemented involving collaborative learning, targeted as well as whole of school professional development, lesson coding, more extensive analysis and use of student performance data in teacher appraisal as well as in evaluation of pedagogy, feedback and observation of new practices, and engagement of experts, consultants and training institutions to help support teacher professional development.

2. *Building leadership capacity*

Many schools are working to build leadership capacity. Teachers and school leaders are being supported in many instances to help develop leadership skills through the provision of targeted professional development, and some principals are focussing on leading through collaboration and instruction. Some of the schools are making use of formal leadership development program while some schools identify aspiring staff to take on leadership roles and provide opportunities to gain experience in key positions such as managing areas of development and acting in roles as assistant principal and principal, when possible.

3. *Staffing flexibly and sustainably*

Schools participating in the case studies recognised that additional incentives are required to not only attract high quality early career teachers but to also retain them, particularly promising early career teachers. Some of the case study schools reported providing mentoring and coaching support as well as additional release time for meeting accreditation requirements and familiarisation with the key school initiatives. School leaders highlighted the importance of developing more formal induction programs for graduates and in supporting early career teachers to further develop their student behaviour management skills. In order to establish appropriate conditions to promote and retain quality teachers, some case study schools have identified and established new roles and responsibilities to support the

school's change management process and the changed operation. Rather than establishing HATs, case study Government secondary schools have established or extended head teacher positions.

4. Implementing innovative teaching and learning approaches

The goal of the Low SES SSNP reform of flexible and innovative approaches to teaching and learning requires schools to work on building better strategies and processes, and design and implement a culture that supports the achievement of school goals and targets. Some schools have focused on strategies targeting specific student performance targets, strategies related to engagement, participation and academic performance. The strategies include a more holistic approach to student welfare, an intensive check and connect approach to attendance, more intensive training around literacy and numeracy performance, stronger use of student data to assess practices and provide student intervention support, and the use of connected learning approaches.

5. Building organisational capacity and a culture of accountability

SSNP reforms require schools to implement structural changes in the school, in order to create a culture of accountability and high expectations. To do this, some schools are building knowledge management systems and planning, decision making and reporting and accountability processes and structures. A stronger focus on quality leadership, with a view to leading by example, is one of main efforts in this area.

Initial outcomes

Information collected from the staffing, management and accountability case study schools indicates that an important outcome of the implementation of initiatives is a perceived change in school culture and staff attitudes, skills and understandings.

Some case study schools indicated that an outcome evident from the implementation of Low SES SSNP initiatives has been a change in the culture of the school. Principals in those schools reported that teachers and students were becoming more work oriented, and teachers have an increased awareness of school goals and targets. Increasingly there is a stronger professional dialogue with a greater sense of openness to new ideas, willingness to discuss, debate, experiment and resolve.

Case studies also demonstrate positive effects of initiatives on student attendance, engagement and performance.

Some examples of key outcomes include:

- Regional High School has demonstrated an increase in the overall student attendance as a result of the implementation of the school's attendance initiative.
- Levels of poor behaviour of students in Chambers Public School students are declining and the suspension rate has fallen as a result of the prioritisation of the school's student welfare and behaviour policy and practices.
- The strategic partnership with the University of Newcastle has enabled teachers at

South West High to become more innovative in creating lesson structure, content and impact. To enhance the quality of delivery, teachers are placing more emphasis on reflecting, planning and preparing lessons.

- Western Public School's investment in Accelerated Literacy and its distributive leadership model shows signs of paying off. Student levels of engagement and skill development have increased, according to staff.
- Teachers at Catholic College are using cooperative learning methods to improve learning outcomes. This development has been enabled through the establishment of a learning space for both teachers and students and the provision of assistance by the leaders of pedagogy.
- The greater use of ICT is working to better engage both the teachers and students at Regional Central School. Teachers report increased use of technology in their planning and in provision of individualised support to students. Students, according to the school, have become more responsive and motivated to use learning technologies.
- The supervision of teachers at Valley Public School is building the teachers' skills resulting in the delivery of quality programs.

The specific nature and degree of impact of the different initiatives is difficult to ascertain due to a range of things:

- confounding effect of schools' participation in other funded programs as well as the how much might be expected as part of mainstream educational provision funded through the core or general recurrent budget
- number and combinations of reforms schools choose to implement and the varying levels of resources they may allocate to these reforms
- reallocation of existing resources to the initiatives from other programs and the loss of potential benefits from these other programs
- time span over which the initiatives can be expected to have an effect and over which to monitor any changes in outcomes
- student intake and population differences amongst schools and differences within and between student cohorts
- staff profile differences of schools (including learning styles and rates) and change management capacities.

Some case study schools have identified and point to areas of improvement associated with the staffing, management and accountability initiatives that they have implemented. For example, schools point to improvements in student attendance, teacher confidence in implementing new practices, quality of leadership and decision-making, and the process of

staff performance review. Although some schools have identified immediate or indicator effects of this kind, few are yet able to point to improvements in student achievement or quality of learning or student retention. These sorts of outcomes of student engagement and learning may take longer to reflect the changes schools are making, though at some schools there are already some encouraging signs.

Fundamental to the improvement of student learning and performance is creating a supportive and positive school culture. This means building a culture that supports, values and promotes high expectations and achievement for all, a desire for continuous school improvement and public accountability, provision of learning support to staff and students, and the of teachers as learning leaders and schools as communities of learners. All case study schools have invested in building human resource capacity, with a view to strengthening school culture, and they are working towards building a critical mass of better skilled teachers in order to induct, train and develop new teachers to the school.

Some of the case studies do provide evidence that an important outcome of the implementation of initiatives to date has been a change in school culture and staff attitudes, skills and understandings. Several principals reported that teachers and students had become more work-oriented, that teachers had become more aware of school goals and targets and that increasingly there is stronger professional dialogue involving openness to new ideas. The case study schools also demonstrated various positive effects of initiatives on student and teacher engagement in the school community.

However, case study schools are at different stages of development with regard to developing an achievement focussed culture. Some schools are more advanced in their efforts to establish whole of school approaches to implementation of SSNP initiatives, and to creating effective learning communities. Other schools have yet to bring about the significant changes to the culture of the school, though all have taken steps towards this. Some schools have found the implementation of the Low SES SSNP to be challenging. Although they have developed strategies and approaches, some find it difficult to disentangle goals, strategies and financial arrangements. At the school level, the implementation of initiatives associated with various special-funded programs and broader recurrent funding, is often integrated. Schools are responding to ongoing changes in the environment and to accountability and reporting requirements. They are simultaneously, developing, implementing, monitoring and reporting on different and often competing priorities. Given the blurring of program boundaries, schools can find it difficult to partition out the impacts and effects of the individual initiatives and strategies. This, therefore, is also a challenge for evaluation.

In summary, this report offers useful insights into what is being done by a number of schools in response to the implementation of the Low SES SSNP staffing, management and accountability initiatives. Several themes emerge regarding the implementation and effect of the various staffing and accountability initiatives including the efforts schools are placing on building leadership capacity, the importance schools are now giving to better and more strategic use of data in performance review and providing specific supports for students at risk, and creating a culture of accountability and high expectations. Specific schools can be identified that are making important strides towards creating explicit structures and supports to encourage the development and retention of high quality teachers and leaders, and creating more innovative approaches to student learning and well-being. The experiences and practices will be of use to other schools and will help inform related and future work on the evaluation of the staffing, management and accountability initiatives.

11. Next Steps

This report is the second of six progress reports that will be provided from this project before a final report is submitted in November 2014. The proposed evaluation program includes the following research components which will inform the remaining progress reports:

- creating a database detailing each school's characteristics, circumstances and its programs and initiatives that are relevant to the National Partnership. The database will include secondary data sources as well as information from primary data collections. Database development and analysis will enable a series of comparisons to be undertaken including a study of:
 - (1) trends and changes in patterns of student outcomes (such as, attendance, NAPLAN, Year 12 retention and results) in Low SES SSNP schools,
 - (2) matching trends and patterns of student outcomes of a sample of Low SES SSNP schools with similar schools (using techniques, such as, Regression Discontinuity Method), and
 - (3) analysis of trends and patterns of student outcomes across school types and sectors.
- undertaking a content analysis of school plans and reports for the purpose of identifying schools that are placing greater emphasis on the implementation of staffing, management and accountability initiatives. The content analysis report will describe the nature and scope of initiatives by school type.
- administering annual school-based surveys of principals and teachers in order to obtain more detailed information about staffing, management and accountability initiatives at the school level.
- carrying out analyses of the Cross-Sectoral Impact Survey (CSIS), which is being administered by to principals, executive staff and teachers in a sample of schools. The three surveys in the series focus on educational shifts in areas such as leadership capacity, teacher development and practice, cultural change, monitoring and accountability, school system and alignment and community engagement.
- conducting additional case studies to further explore issues and themes emerging from school plan content analysis, data development and analysis and surveys of stakeholders. For example, there may be value in exploring the implementation of initiatives in schools with high staffing turnover.

In terms of the evaluation program, immediate next steps include the:

- preparation of the third progress report, focussing on analysis of data from the survey of principals and drawing where appropriate on related databases,
- conducting an on-line survey of teachers at schools which will go into the field in early 2013. The survey is designed to capture the views of teachers about the staffing, management and accountability initiatives,
- conducting another set of case studies of schools that have implemented a range of staffing and management initiatives. The case studies support the broader inquiry of the project by providing a snapshot of the implementation of the initiatives in different school settings. A report on the 2013 case studies will be provided mid-year,
- using data collected from all sources, including administrative data sets and student achievement data, to examine whether the various initiatives being implemented across schools and the increased flexibility in staffing practices in schools have led to improved student outcomes, and
- The final report of the evaluation is to be submitted on 28 November 2014, presenting overall findings and providing an assessment of the impacts of the national partnership initiatives.

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