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Ranford Primary School An Independent Public School

Performance study report
Expert Review Group
June 2014



Department of
Education

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1: Introduction

1.1 BACKGROUND

The Expert Review Group (ERG) has been established to strengthen the Department of Education's quality assurance processes. The ERG provides authoritative studies of schools whose performance demonstrates exemplary practice.

On 7 May 2014, the Department of Education's Director General invited the Principal of Ranford Primary School to participate in a study of exemplary practice at the school.

In June 2013, the Department of Educational Services conducted an independent review of Ranford Primary School to determine the extent to which it had met its commitments as outlined in its Delivery and Performance Agreement and associated Business Plan.

1.2 CONTEXT

Ranford Primary School opened in 1999 to cater for the rapidly growing population in the Canning Vale area. It was selected as an Independent Public School in the second round of schools identified in 2010.

The school enrolls some 600 students from Kindergarten to Year 7. An emerging feature of the school is the proportion of students for whom English is an additional language. There are 92 students in Stage 1 and 2 who attract special funding. There is also a significant number of other families who may not speak English at home, taking the overall percentage English as second language students to approximately 47 per cent.

Staff range from graduates to those with many years of experience. Some are from the eastern states while others are from overseas. Four teachers have Level 3 status and a further six are senior teachers.

There have been extended periods of leadership team stability, with the foundation Principal still leading the school.

The school has a National Index of Community Socio Educational Advantage value of 1061.00, placing it in the State decile rank of 2.

1.3 PERFORMANCE STUDY APPROACH

Discussions were undertaken between the school and the ERG on how best to conduct the study. Broad lines of interest emerged and provided pathways to understanding the success achieved by Ranford Primary School.

A team of four, including an ERG Director and three substantive Independent Public School leaders, spent five days at the school as part of the study.

Interviewees included the Principal, two deputy principals, 33 teachers, nine education assistants (EAs), the registrar, one school officer, the library officer, the chaplain, the school psychologist, three Student Councillors, student representatives from Years 3-7, the cleaner-in-charge, two school canteen representatives, four parents and representatives of the School Board and Parents and Citizens' Association (P&C).

2: Summary of findings

- 1 The school's leadership team is characterised by an expert blend of relational leadership skills, augmented by highly developed talents and instincts for providing instructional and emotional support. The team has built a school-wide commitment to high standards of student learning.
- 2 The foundation Principal has been the driving influence behind the embedding of a highly effective, collaborative and supportive school culture. Detailed organisation, targeted research, high visibility and effective communication are key features of her unrelenting focus on high expectations.
- 3 There is a deep belief that every child is capable of successful learning. The high priority given to data analysis provides a strong platform for differentiated class lessons. Teaching practices involve a combination of explicit teaching and structured school-wide learning programs, supported by an appropriate blend of technologies.
- 4 Highly structured collaborative meetings are at the heart of a very effective process for ensuring teachers share knowledge, expertise and experience. They have been central to the successful implementation of school and systemic reform, in particular the Western Australian Curriculum and Assessment Outline.
- 5 Staff, both individually and collectively, are empowered to explore options and opportunities that will add value to their understanding of how students learn best. A highly reflective ethos is the basis for an internal accountability self-assessment process that values a balance between evidence and professional insight.
- 6 Curriculum delivery and design is complemented by detailed assessment and reporting protocols. The translation of whole-school planning into class planning is coherent for both the phases of learning and from one year level to the next. Teachers, supported by education assistants, scrutinise closely the progress of individuals and, where necessary, prepare and monitor comprehensive individual education plans.
- 7 School values are at the core of an orderly, safe and nurturing learning environment. The processes and systems for the management of student wellbeing and behaviour are well established and are respected by staff, students and parents.
- 8 Genuine relationships between staff have been built on trust and mutual respect, ensuring unanimity of purpose and direction. The school is identified as a place where students learn and adults work. The focus for adult learning is the improvement of student learning.
- 9 Resource deployment is strategic, operationally sound and timely. The astute management of resources ensures efficient day to day budget operations, effective workforce management and the capacity to pursue innovative professional learning initiatives.
- 10 The school's practice of valuing families and the wider community as genuine partners is appreciated and endorsed by the School Board, Parents and Citizens' Association and parents.

3: Study of findings

- 1 The school's leadership team is characterised by an expert blend of relational leadership skills, augmented by highly developed talents and instincts for providing instructional and emotional support. The team has built a school-wide commitment to high standards of student learning.**

“Central to my conception of a good school and healthy workplace is community. In particular, I would want to ... work in a school that could be described as a community of learners, a place where students and adults alike are engaged as active learners in matters of special importance to them and where everyone is thereby encouraging everyone else's learning.”¹

Ranford Primary School is just such a school.

Atmospheres of trust, shared vision and openness create positive school conditions. These conditions are developed through strong interpersonal relationships between the leadership and the staff, influencing the professional attitudes that define the character and purpose of a school.

The Ranford Primary School leadership's moral imperative is to create the conditions for high levels of job satisfaction and staff cohesion by placing at the core of its role active support for staff in doing their job.

By defining expectations, sharing decision making and undertaking regular and positive interactions, the leadership has nurtured a level of school-wide commitment that goes well beyond individual agendas. 'It is all about the team' is a persistent refrain from staff.

The elements necessary for effective schools are widely known and described in research², however, the formula is less well known. At Ranford Primary School, the formula involves trust, loyalty and commitment to the team goals.

The staff see the leadership team having a unanimity of commitment and purpose that transcends their individual strengths and personalities.

At the instructional core of the leadership team are high levels of curriculum knowledge and delivery skills. These include a deep understanding of and commitment to students at educational risk and the modelling of behaviours they want to see in staff and students.

Each member of the leadership team is seen as being a 'good' teacher. As one staff member commented, 'they walk the talk!' Others remarked on the high levels of personal accountability demonstrated by the leaders.

A feature of the school is the emphasis on internal accountability, which precedes any form of external accountability. In turn, teachers exhibit admirable levels of personal accountability, which translates into peer accountability. This has an extremely powerful influence on the way in which staff support each other's professional growth.

¹ Barth, Roland S. (1990). *Improving Schools from Within*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 9.

² National School Improvement Tool, State of Queensland (Department of Education, Training and Employment) and the Australian Council for Educational Research 2012

Coherence and alignment of expectations of responsibilities, both individually and collectively, for staff across all year levels is very strong. The continuity of message and mutual respect shared among staff from Kindergarten to Year 7 is profound.

The leadership is acutely aware of the need to differentiate staff development on the basis of experience, expertise, aspirations and professional interests. By acknowledging strengths and capacity, the leadership ensures that staff feel valued and respected for what they bring to the school as individuals.

Staff acknowledge the manner in which issues and concerns are raised and managed. Interactions are seen as timely, thoughtful and calm. Opportunities to clarify and resolve problems, through balanced two-way discussion, are viewed by staff as a reflection of the high levels of emotional intelligence exhibited by the leadership. Personal issues are treated with respect and discretion and 'wrap-around' support is available when needed.

The Ranford Primary School 'playbook' is a file (the 'Red' File). It includes the plans, policies and procedures to be followed by teachers. The file captures both the high standards required and the spirit in which they are to be delivered. It is under constant review to meet point in time needs of staff. It forms the centrepiece of the induction process for newly appointed staff.

2 The foundation Principal has been the driving influence behind the embedding of a highly effective, collaborative and supportive school culture. Detailed organisation, targeted research, high visibility and effective communication are key features of her unrelenting focus on high expectations.

"I'd like to work in a school that constantly (is) searching for the optimal relationship of low anxiety and high standards."³

Over many years, researchers have studied how and to what degree principals influence school effectiveness. In particular, evidence⁴ suggests that successful principals build a culture of shared norms and values, genuinely involve staff in decision making, are highly visible in the day to day work of the school and insist on the maintenance of high standards in all facets of work undertaken in the school.

The basis of the Principal's credibility at Ranford Primary School is a combination of professional knowledge, organisational attributes, interpersonal skills and a widely held belief among all staff that 'she would never ask anybody to do anything she wouldn't do herself'.

The calm, yet earnest and sincere leadership style of the Principal is balanced with a passionate commitment and a healthy sense of humour.

As a well-known and respected educator over many years, the Principal has guided the development of teachers' understanding of how students learn best.

A mantra staff shared with the study team reflects the intellectual robustness of pedagogical discussions promoted at the school. 'Do your research and be informed' is a refrain used by the Principal to encourage the highest standards of educational debate. It is also a trigger for the fostering of innovative and enterprising initiatives through a well-developed professional learning agenda.

³ Barth (1990), 10.

⁴ AITSL Australian Professional Standards for Principals (2011), Education Services Australia as the legal entity for the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs

The articulation of the school's educational beliefs about how children learn best is clear and unambiguous. These beliefs anchor the wide-ranging discussions between the leadership and staff and across the school community more broadly.

Change management processes reflect best practice in ensuring school-wide acceptance and sustainability. They provide time to consider the need for change, marshal evidence to support change, define the moral purpose for change and build capacity to adapt to change.

This approach was well illustrated at the time of the ERG study, as the school had commenced a process for reforming its approach to performance management.

Communication processes are highly valued and respected by staff. They have been tailored to suit the context of the school, which includes a significant number of staff on leave and part-time staff. Every effort is made to ensure that meetings are conducted to maximise staff participation. However, to accommodate those who are unable to attend, there are processes for keeping everyone informed of the outcomes. Staff embrace their role and responsibilities in the communication process.

Exchanges between the leaders and staff are characterised by respect, a genuine desire to hear what people have to say and a commitment to taking all views into account in subsequent decision making. One staff member remarked that the Principal holds the view that 'there is a leader in everyone'.

The knowledge that they are respected for their views and contribution to the school generates widespread interest among both teaching and non-teaching staff in undertaking leadership roles. The practice of having education assistants lead some meetings and share professional learning experiences is an impressive feature of the distributed leadership culture of the school.

Distinct role relationships characterise the professional and social exchanges between staff at the school. The spirit of 'we've got each other's back' is credited by many staff as beginning with the leadership team. A set of mutual dependencies is embedded in these relationships, creating a sense of collaborative empowerment.

3 There is a deep belief that every child is capable of successful learning. The high priority given to data analysis provides a strong platform for differentiated class lessons. Teaching practices involve a combination of explicit teaching and structured school-wide learning programs, supported by an appropriate blend of technologies.

A combination of factors contributes to the belief that every child can be successful at Ranford Primary School. These include high standards and expectations for all students, sound curriculum design, alignment of instructional practices and assessment processes and a supportive learning environment across the school.

Detailed data gathering, analysis and application enables teachers to optimise student learning strategies. To determine what suits each individual learner's needs, detailed analysis and discussion of data enables teachers to put in place strategies to meet individual learning needs. The depth of information teachers have on each individual student is commendable and helps to determine the best pathway for learning.

The strategy of gathering data to identify areas of strength and weakness and then remodelling teaching style is exemplified in the Ranford Early Years Prevention Strategy

guide. This is an explicit guide for the early years to direct teaching: its impact is evident in the high standard of writing displayed in classrooms.

Point in time application of differentiated learning enables individualised support to be provided to English as an additional language/dialect students who are above, on and below the expected level. There is a concentrated effort to improve the performance of below-benchmark and low-achieving students.

High achievers are further supported with extension work, both within the classroom and in specialised classes through cross setting. Staff examine the evidence and design 'what fits their students best' forms of learning by reviewing new trends in education. The question behind every decision is 'Is this right for Ranford Primary School?'

The school motto, 'Respect, Perseverance and Success', encapsulates the emphasis placed on attention to detail and the rewards that come from setting high standards. Daily work pads are mandatory but can be either digital or hard copy. A model daily planning format is provided to ensure a consistent approach to planning.

Dedicated support by a skilled specialist teacher enables a wide range of technologies, including interactive whiteboards, iPad[®]s, touch television screens and laptops, to be incorporated creatively into student learning. There is an obvious sense of competence and confidence among staff and students in the use of digital learning.

Comprehensive, integrated school planning has provided many benefits for student learning. Ranford Primary School has a commitment to school-wide programs that not only emphasise high standards of student learning but also foster the development of social and emotional resilience.

The school has developed strategies to utilise technology and the online 'Improve' assessment tool and intends to progress the use of the Department's 'Connect' communication tool.

Proficiency in numeracy and literacy is promoted by having older students coach younger students and timetabling uninterrupted literacy and numeracy blocks.

Teachers are keen to share what they know. The refinement of their teaching practice is assisted by a high level of sharing, modelling of lessons and curriculum planning. Innovative 'Back to Front' mathematics is common practice for numeracy teaching.

The distinctive 'Red' file distils the school's philosophy about teaching policy and practice and is used and applied by the staff. This results in a remarkable consistency in teaching practice across the school. Teachers truly own and value its contents as a reference point. It is seen to play the part of a 'third deputy' in terms of the support to daily teacher activity it offers.

New teachers are given the file before the start of the new school year as part of their comprehensive induction to ensure a sound understanding of the way things are done at the school.

Ranford Primary School provides an excellent range and variety of educational experiences and opportunities for its students. The atmosphere of rich interaction between students from different classes and year levels is exemplified by the school-wide Maths Morning observed during the study visit.

Classes, which are grouped around phases of learning, are mixed and then rotate through a series of activities for a full morning. The ease with which students from different classes

work together is a strong endorsement of the school-wide cooperative learning and student social cohesion existing at Ranford Primary School.

Teachers have developed a capacity for making judgements about student achievement through effective internal moderation. Common assessment tasks are used as a core assessment strategy and are directly linked to the Western Australian Curriculum and Assessment Outline.

The staff value greatly the depth and breadth of knowledge and skill demonstrated by the deputy principal responsible for leading curriculum design and implementation. In particular, the development of curriculum assessment devices enables teachers to make regular, informed decisions about the design and delivery of their learning programs.

Cross-curriculum capabilities are embedded in various aspects of curriculum design, such as the print rich kitchen garden. Signage throughout the garden provides a springboard for students to engage in higher-order thinking.

An attractive fence mosaic installation changes according to the event of the day. Designs are facilitated by the science specialist teacher, who enjoys utilising the school's fish pond and recycled materials for investigations. The school prides itself on being a 'green school.'

4 Highly structured collaborative meetings are at the heart of a very effective process for ensuring teachers share knowledge, expertise and experience. They have been central to the successful implementation of school and systemic reform, in particular the Western Australian Curriculum and Assessment Outline.

The leadership team has created a school culture in which collaboration is valued highly. It is evident from our discussions with the leaders, teachers and non-teaching staff that they see themselves as partners in the development and delivery of the school's programs. This partnership extends beyond the classroom to all elements of the school's Business Plan.

The school's organisational structure (which can be described as 'flat') provides for strong linkage between the Business Plan, classroom practice and a clearly articulated assessment schedule, which is adhered to by all staff. All staff are expected to contribute to the school's planning and review process by being active members of one of the Learning Area Teams.

A member of the wider school leadership team is associated with each Learning Area. The role of the Learning Area Teams is to review student performance data regularly and share their analyses to inform classroom planning and the Business Plan.

Assessment is undertaken regularly, with set timelines for classroom teachers to report on student progress. The assessment data are collated at class and year level and then aggregated at the whole-school level. This information is fed back to all groups and used by class teachers in their collaborative groups to guide their classroom planning.

Formal opportunities for staff to collaborate, in year levels, are provided through the provision of common year level duties other than Teaching (DOTT) time. While many schools provide common DOTT time, there are four distinctive characteristics relating to collaboration at Ranford Primary School:

- A strong focus on the use of student performance information
- A high level of discussion and sharing with colleagues in relation to classroom practice

- An openness to ideas and experimentation
- An appetite for learning, with teachers being open to observation and peer feedback.

While the school provides the structure for year level collaboration, there is clear evidence that more extensive collaboration occurs continuously, both formally and informally, within year levels, across year levels, between staff with common interests or particular expertise and with the leadership team.

The leaders are viewed by all staff as being highly approachable and having an extensive range of expertise and knowledge. The strength of the partnership between them and the staff is evident in the level and quality of the school's consultation processes.

The leadership team encourages and provides opportunities for staff to contribute to the development and implementation of school and wider system education initiatives. 'In house' assemblies, in which the Principal takes the entire student body with the support of education assistants, are conducted regularly throughout the year.

These assemblies provide teachers with additional opportunities to meet and engage in meaningful educational discussion and planning. For these meetings, staff are provided with clear expectations. Staff meetings are also used as occasions for staff consultation.

The high level of professionalism, strong collaboration and clear focus on improvement has enabled the school to be highly proactive in engaging with and implementing the Western Australian Curriculum and Assessment Outline. The leadership team has ensured that staff have engaged with the Australian Curriculum from an early stage and contributed to the development of the widely used common assessment tasks.

In essence, there is a commitment among all staff to teaching excellence.

School expectations are articulated to new staff through a comprehensive induction program. All staff are provided with the documents that articulate clearly the school's expectations of students and staff.

When asked how they know what they have to do, new staff all refer to the documentation. Similarly, when asked how they know how they should work together, they reply, 'you just know'.

It is apparent that the school's culture is so embedded and valued that new staff see it and feel it.

5 Staff, both individually and collectively, are empowered to explore options and opportunities that will add value to their understanding of how students learn best. A highly reflective ethos is the basis for an internal accountability self-assessment process that values a balance between evidence and professional insight.

The leadership team, in keeping with the flat organisational structure, has developed a strong sense of empowerment among the staff. It encourages everyone to engage in meaningful professional learning that will lead to improved practice.

All staff believe that they are viewed as professionals and are expected to continually develop their professional knowledge. Teachers are encouraged to use their knowledge and

expertise in the design and delivery of learning programs for all students. The underlying principles that guide practice are 'do the research, be informed, walk the talk'.

All staff who attend professional learning activities are required to share their learning with peers. This is now an accepted practice and the quality of the information shared is of a high order.

While the school has clear expectations about learning programs and assessment, teachers' professional judgement is valued and there is a high level of trust and respect among peers.

Each year level is provided with additional support staff to meet the needs of all students, including those needing remediation or extension. It is the responsibility of the collaborative group to determine the best use of these resources to meet the needs of students. The expertise of support staff is utilised and they are included in the planning process.

Support programs are not seen as being separate but as complementary and adding value to the class program. Class teachers remain engaged with and accountable for the achievements of their students who are involved in support programs. The support groups are flexible and are reviewed on a regular basis by the teachers.

To ensure the quality of the teaching program across the school, careful consideration is given to teacher selection and placement. Purposeful attention ensures there is a good blend of expertise and experience within teaching groups. In addition teacher quality and currency is maintained by identifying what is important and investing heavily in these priorities.

At every opportunity, the school leaders converse with teachers regarding students, assessment and teaching and learning programs. Staff are well aware of the leadership's expectations and maintain high-quality teaching to improve student standards. Staff also have high expectations of themselves and their colleagues and there is a strong sense of accountability to one another.

Practices and procedures are under constant review in terms of their relevance and practical application. As noted earlier, those relating to performance management are being reviewed, as feedback has revealed that they no longer meet the school's needs. Through a process of school-wide consultation, changes to procedures are being developed.

The steps that are taken to facilitate productive engagement with the staff ensure that any changes will be understood and accepted.

There is a high level of commitment among all staff and this is demonstrated clearly by the strong work ethic: staff view teaching as a vocation and put in the hours necessary to provide high quality learning programs, a supportive learning environment and opportunities for parent engagement.

6 Curriculum delivery and design is complemented by detailed assessment and reporting protocols. The translation of whole-school planning into class planning is coherent for both the phases of learning and from one year level to the next. Teachers, supported by education assistants, scrutinise closely the progress of individuals and, where necessary, prepare and monitor comprehensive individual education plans.

At Ranford Primary School, all teachers are involved in discussion about what teaching and learning should be like in the school. They recognise and value the level of follow up and follow through on agreed actions from the leaders and their peers. This gives the school curriculum coherence and continuity for sustained student growth and improvement. Teachers discuss alternative teaching approaches, observe each other's classes, re-examine content and identify and solve problems collaboratively.

The product of extensive discussion on the teaching and learning at Ranford Primary School is the Business Plan. It has six focus areas:

- teaching (excellence in teaching)
- learning (maximising student achievement)
- relationships (positive partnerships)
- leadership (committed and innovative)
- environment (safe, supportive and values orientated) and
- resources (resource rich and capacity building).

There are up to twenty 'milestones' for each focus area.

The existence of a safe, calm and values-based learning environment, conducive to rich learning, is obvious in every classroom.

A dominant feature of the plan is cutting-edge curriculum design that caters for all learners.

Careful thought has been invested in the analysis of data to create the plan's achievement targets. The early years of education have featured strongly, with improvement targets for both literacy and numeracy. Teacher judgement is valued and is a pivotal part of the plan.

The focus on academic achievement is balanced by a concerted and unconditional concern for the development and maintenance of the students' social and emotional health and wellbeing. The frequent expressions of appreciation and acknowledgement of this aspect of the school by parents are further strong endorsements of its policies.

For parents of children arriving at the school for whom English is an additional language, the specific attention provided by the school to meet their needs was identified as a major incentive for sending their children to Ranford Primary School. Students expressed their appreciation for the way in which the school welcomed them and included them with the support of specialist teachers and support staff.

A state of the art tracking system has been designed and refined by teachers to provide easy access to all student records, including any histories of intervention. Hyperlinks lead to essential documents, such as Individual Education Plans and Individual Behaviour Plans. The leadership team is adding new data fields in readiness for the 2015 school year.

The school values the skills and experience of all staff, including education assistants, who are regarded as being vital to the success of the delivery of effective learning programs. In

partnership with teachers, they prepare and provide support to students, monitor student activities and share observations on performance.

Teachers express admiration and appreciation for the passion and expertise of the education assistants on whom they rely, in conjunction with the English as an additional language specialist staff, to deliver the learning strategies within the Individual Education Plans. Systemic reforms in the early years of education indicate an emerging role for education assistants in the integration of technology into instruction. Students in the early years at Ranford Primary School are exposed to far more rigorous instruction than is common in public schools because education assistants are regarded as educators.

The school's unique customised digital Social Matrix is admirable. It has evolved over many years and its high quality data bank ensures a seamless transition of student records from year to year. Teachers own it and shape its many features. The technology specialist teacher continuously upgrades this exceptional tool to ensure quick and easy access to the entire history of every student.

Ranford Primary School has a long-standing reputation for a strong commitment to the provision of an inclusive education for all students. Parents of children with learning difficulties are effusive in describing the quality of support provided through carefully considered, customised programs.

Effective early intervention is essential to enhancing the education of diverse groups of learners. The highly detailed Individual Education Plans include comprehensive student profiles that identify curriculum differentiation at the strand level.

For academically gifted students, challenge programs, such as the Speak up Awards, motivate them to perform at a high level.

The Individual Education Plans are built on each year, with former class teachers and education assistants having a particular interest in the progress of the students for whom they have been prepared. Documented plans for students with special needs are also detailed and thorough. The work and effort of the deputy principal in supporting the development and implementation of the Individual Education Plans is acknowledged and appreciated by staff.

Grouping plans that involve cross-setting for numeracy and literacy learning have enhanced student achievement. Teachers state that these plans are both instructionally effective and supportive of the needs of students.

The school psychologist observes that the leadership team's genuine interest in students demonstrates a well-developed 'wrap around approach'. The support for students is described as being 'unwavering and unconditional' as well as 'sophisticated' and 'strategic'.

7 School values are at the core of an orderly, safe and nurturing learning environment. The processes and systems for the management of student wellbeing and behaviour are well established and are respected by staff, students and parents.

School values are visually prominent, promoted strongly and well understood by staff, students and parents. Through its values, the school has established clear expectations about learning, responsibility and behaviour. It is evident that the values underpin all the

interactions in the school. Parents are very complimentary about the school's approach to values.

A real sense of calmness is apparent in moving about the school. There are routines in place and clear expectations for students when they arrive. Those who come early are supervised.

As students arrive and prepare to go to class (before commencement of the first period), they are expected to 'get organised and be ready to start the day'.

Before and after school, staff are highly visible and there is a great deal of positive informal interaction with parents and students.

Rather than having a set of rules to cover every situation, school values guide student behaviour. Students are acknowledged frequently for demonstrating these values in various settings around the school. The friendly and harmonious relationships between students during recess periods are obvious. Students are well aware of the values and through informal encounters with students, the ERG team heard them comment that, by everybody following the values, they feel safe at school.

The school's approach to behaviour management as described in school documentation under the heading, 'Motivating Student Learning', focuses on nurturing and building positive relationships. The staff and school leaders are continually teaching the children about the school's values, both formally and informally. As one teacher on duty remarked, "there are teachable moments both in and outside the classroom".

All students take part in formal values lessons through the Bounce Back program. Specialist teachers teach mindfulness practices in this program cultivating high levels of optimism which impacts positively on children's learning. The school chaplain also provides additional support for individuals and groups of students.

In the classroom, teachers manage their own students and are given the flexibility to implement their own classroom behaviour plans based on the school's values. At the whole-school level there are procedures provided to support teachers and students who are experiencing difficulties in the classroom or playground. Students who are not demonstrating the values are counselled by the school leaders and provided with opportunities to reflect on their behaviour in a very private and caring manner. It is the school's practice to 'reward publicly and discipline privately'.

Parents are kept well-informed about their children's behaviour via their communication diary. Green stickers are placed in the diary when a child demonstrates the values and an orange sticker if they have not and have had to be counselled.

The behaviour management approach can best be described as one that places an emphasis on promoting and recognising positive behaviour. The values are modelled by all staff in their interaction with students, parents and their peers.

Observations suggest that the values approach has a very positive effect on the students, as their interactions with teachers and peers are praiseworthy. In particular, they demonstrate high levels of tolerance and acceptance of each other and their individual differences.

8 Authentic relationships between staff have been built on trust and mutual respect ensuring unanimity of purpose and direction. The school is identified as a place not only for students, but also an adult work environment. The focus for adult learning is improved student learning.

“I would welcome the chance to work in a school characterized [sic] by a high level of collegiality, a place teeming with frequent, helpful personal and professional interactions. ... I would like to go each day to a school to be with other adults who genuinely wanted to be there, who really chose to be there because of the importance of their work to others and to themselves.”⁵

School leaders who report that they greatly enjoy teaching spend less time in the office and more time coaching and developing staff. This is the case at Ranford Primary School.

The relationships built through the leadership are intentional, not incidental. Their in-class presence allows them to be attuned to and in touch with the intricate web of relations that influences the school’s ethos.

The relationships between the leadership and staff are a powerful force in driving school and student success. Grounded in a clear purpose, ethical decision making, the empowerment of others and a commitment to inclusive practices, they provide an outstanding backdrop for the persistent school mantra, ‘it’s all about the kids’.

Their presence and support in the classrooms is the most common characteristic of the leaders’ relational leadership, according to staff. Parents also endorse strongly the work of the leaders, led by the Principal, in connecting the school to parents and the broader community so successfully. They describe the leadership as well-defined, visible and accessible.

In recent times, attitudes toward performance management have reflected dissatisfaction with rating scales, processes and a failure to provide timely and effective feedback. At the time of the study, the leadership had set in motion a process to reform the school’s performance management processes.

The performance management reform process has been well planned, as witnessed by the ERG team in the early stages of implementation. It invites staff to reflect on past practices, reminds them of systemic imperatives and makes clear that all options and ideas will be carefully considered.

“Collective decision making with broad teacher buy-in, a crucial ingredient for reform, occurs more readily in schools with strong relational trust.”⁶

The conditions for school-wide buy-in to reform at Ranford Primary School were established early in the life of the school and have continued to evolve over time, responding to changes in student and staff profiles.

Because of these conditions and the personal integrity of the school’s leadership, both school-based and complex systemic reforms have been implemented successfully.

The culture and efficacy of an organisation and the wellbeing of its employees is strongly

⁵ Barth (1990), 9.

⁶ Bryk, Anthony S. and Schneider, Barbara (2003). Trust in schools: A core resource for school reform. *Educational Leadership*, Vol 60, Number 6, 3.

associated with high levels of positive organisational relationships. Vision, values, leadership style and emotional skills are central to the relational leader being able to improve the wellbeing and emotional literacy of all.

A school is also an adult work place. Building and maintaining the adult intellectual, emotional and social wellbeing of the staff are important considerations for the leadership team at Ranford Primary School. While intellectual intensity is applied to meeting challenges at the school, there is also humour in the daily social discourse between staff. Off-site meetings, study tours and guest speakers on topics that challenge traditional paradigms also add to the professional rigour promoted at the school.

The leadership uses differential tactics to mobilise staff to improve their practice in the pursuit of school goals. It understands that efforts to influence others are more likely to succeed if staff are respected for their individuality. Together with the other members of the leadership team, the Principal encourages staff to use their initiative, have confidence in their own judgements and explore leadership opportunities.

Emerging from this approach is a universal feeling of professional contentment and satisfaction with the positive and productive working alliances that exist in the school.

9 Resource deployment is strategic, operationally sound and timely. The astute management of resources ensures efficient day to day budget operations, effective workforce management and the capacity to pursue innovative professional learning initiatives.

“Schools are large public enterprises involving the expenditure of significant public funds. Managing resources effectively and efficiently as well as meeting public sector requirements are core responsibilities of all public school principals.”⁷

There is no dichotomy between leadership and management at Ranford Primary School.

The maintenance of quality management processes, including planning, budgeting, organising, staffing and problem solving, are fundamental to the school's success and are interwoven skilfully with the school's leadership narrative.

Success in resource deployment has supported persistent school improvement, provided opportunities for innovation and created an agile response when the need for change arises.

A strong sense of pride is evident in the school, with the buildings and grounds being maintained to the highest possible standards. The signage in particular enhances the appearance of the school and assists visitors greatly in navigating around the large site.

A long-standing and highly successful partnership with the local municipal council allows the school the use of outstanding sporting facilities.

A carefully crafted strategy for the replacement and renewal of the physical assets of the school is apparent. Specialist programs are funded with appropriate resources to maximise their school-wide impact and astute investment in people through professional learning encourages acceptance of change through personal and professional growth opportunities.

A school-wide focus on the use of technology is supported enthusiastically by teachers and

⁷ O'Neill, Sharyn (2012). *Public School Leadership: An Initiative of the Director General's Classroom First Strategy*. Perth: Department of Education, 4.

adds diversity to teaching practices. Using technology, teachers design tasks built on prior knowledge to engage students in challenging and meaningful ways.

The registrar plays a key role in supporting the development of the budget and provides ongoing advice on the progress of expenditure through timely and thorough monitoring. As a member of the leadership team, the registrar also ensures that the Finance Committee is kept fully informed on patterns of expenditure for the purposes of short, medium and long-term budget adjustment.

The registrar's support function includes training newly appointed cost centre managers, undertaking comprehensive reporting to the School Board and interacting daily with the leadership team.

The school's Business Plan states that 'workforce planning is future directed and considers the needs of students and staff, taking into account workload, staff wellbeing and system level requirements' and conversations by the leaders with staff are open and transparent with regard to the school's priorities for workforce management.

Personal planning, focusing on training and qualifications, work fraction, leave planning and wellbeing, is balanced with professional planning, which attends to contract management, work preferences, aspirations and experience/expertise. Staff understand the leadership's position on the development and management of the school's workforce profile. Diversity, balance and sustainability through training are key management characteristics pursued by the leadership.

Staff are selected and deployed in ways that match their skills and the needs of the students. Should tension between the interests of staff and the needs of students arise, the final determination is based on the concept of 'best fit', where the interests of the students prevail. Staff report that when they are placed in a somewhat unfamiliar role, they are provided with a range of support measures, including mentoring, coaching and, if required, specialist training.

Trust, collaboration and a sense of moral purpose are fundamental to the sustainability of the school's focus on building and maintaining a professional learning community.

The priority of developing both the individual and collective performance of staff is seen by the leadership as maximising the school's professional capital. This is done largely capitalising on the knowledge and skills of the people working at the school. However, opportunities, including overseas study tours, add richness to staff learning experiences.

Induction for new staff is targeted and comprehensive, concentrating not only on professional needs but also on the personal wellbeing of the individual. At the core of the induction process is the 'Red' file.

10 There is widespread appreciation and strong endorsement from the School Board, Parents and Citizens' Association and parents for the school's practice of making clear that it regards families and the wider community as genuine partners.

The high level of community involvement has been described to the ERG team as one of the most enduring characteristics of Ranford Primary School.

That connection with families is a leadership imperative is apparent in the high quality communication processes, the feedback that is regularly sought through surveys and the

genuine, unequivocal welcome parents receive when they visit the school. As one remarked, 'it is as a school should be'.

From the outset, the school has recognised its special place in the emerging community that it serves. One fine example of the many opportunities it has taken up was the creation of a tranquil peace garden, to provide a place where the community as a whole could commemorate important events such as ANZAC Day.

The school extends its positive image and reputation beyond its boundaries by having regular displays in the local shopping precinct. Strong values and citizenship programs are featured through food hamper collections and other community support programs.

Every student has a communication diary, which is used for two-way interaction between home and school. In addition to references to daily occurrences, the diary is used to provide parents with a weekly account of the attitude and effort demonstrated by their children. This form of family engagement is endorsed wholeheartedly by parents.

Other forms of communication include a fortnightly newsletter posted on a secure section of the school's website, parent nights at the beginning of the year and a school Open Night in September to celebrate teaching and learning.

Events such as Science Week, Boys Campout and Ranford Reads to Babies (as part of International Literacy Day) bring the school and its families closer together.

The school chaplaincy program is another element of the school's connection with the wider community. A survey has revealed that parents view the chaplain as critical to meeting the pastoral care needs of the students.

There is a respectful, open and sharing relationship between the school and the School Board. The Board has complimented the school's leadership on keeping it fully informed on the implementation of the Business Plan. The Principal has been singled out for her passionate advocacy of the school and ethical approach to providing a very inclusive environment.

The Board is a committed advocate of the school's vision and is skilled in providing perceptive contributions to decisions relating to policy and planning. It respects how the leadership responds to challenges in pursuit of school improvement.

A school effectiveness survey, which was conducted to coincide with the end of the first three-year Business Plan and the Department of Education Services review in 2013, is seen as a further illustration of the leadership's desire to obtain honest feedback.

The representatives of the Parents and Citizens' Association (P&C) are highly complimentary of the leadership's role in creating a welcoming, positive atmosphere at the school, which starts with the very professional, courteous reception offered by those working at the front desk in the main office.

The P&C supports the school through the uniform shop, special events and sporting carnivals and considers it essential that it contribute to the school's success. The canteen offers quality food options and has collaborated with the School Board in an endeavour to introduce flexible time arrangements in a pilot lunch program.

4: Conclusion

Commentary on the work of schools is often broken down into the strategic and operational components of performance. While there is a legitimate place for such commentary, the importance of school culture and ethos is sometimes relegated to footnote status.

Successful organisations, including schools such as Ranford Primary School, have passionate, knowledgeable and committed leaders who promote a strong corporate culture, enunciate a clear vision and cultivate a united, empowered workforce.

The decision to study exemplary practices at Ranford Primary School was influenced by a number of factors, including persistent feedback on high standards of teaching practice, a widely admired inclusive ethos and quality school community relations.

Traditional values and courtesies underpin the framework of relationships among staff, students and parents at Ranford Primary School. These are complemented by traditional approaches to high standards of work presentation by students. High expectations in this sphere permeate all aspects of student activity.

The enterprising and optimistic commitment of all staff has a profound effect on students' belief in their own capacity to aspire for academic excellence. This spirit is also reflected in the promotion of strong school values, including respect, tolerance and mutual trust.

High levels of trust exist between the school and the broader school community. Strong alliances between parents and staff have created a mutually supportive and highly motivating learning environment.

The Expert Review Group performance study of Ranford Primary School, an Independent Public School demonstrating exemplary performance, is designed to acknowledge an example of outstanding school practice and share the findings for the benefit of all public schools in Western Australia.

5: Appendix: student achievement data

Figure 1 provides an analysis of progress and achievement in National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) 2011 to 2013 by Ranford Primary School students. Comparative measurements (represented by the 0 axes) are based on all students tested in the respective cohorts.

Compared with like schools, the progress and achievement of the Ranford Primary School students was higher in most areas assessed, particularly in numeracy and writing for Years 3 to 5 and Years 5 to 7.

Figure 1: Progress and achievement of students at Ranford Primary School and like schools in Western Australia in Years 3 to 5 and Years 5 to 7 in reading, numeracy, writing, spelling and grammar and punctuation, NAPLAN 2011-2013

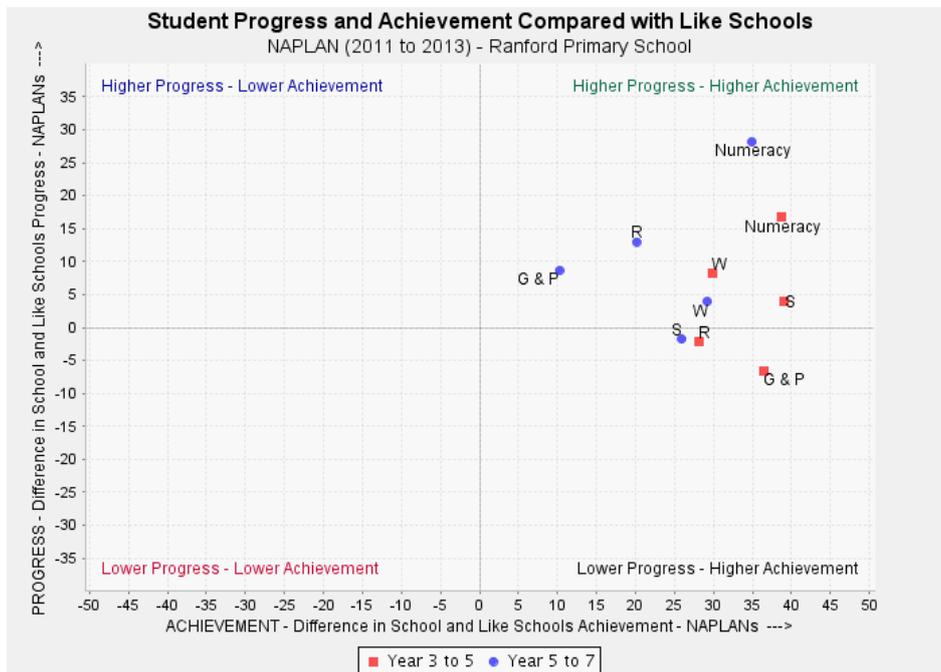
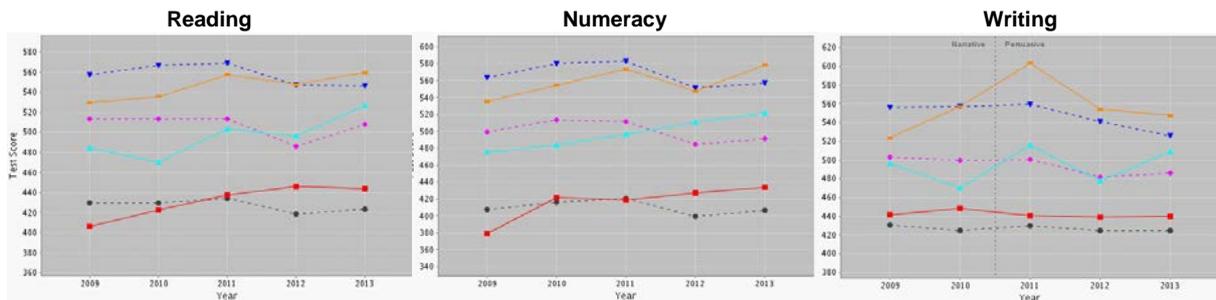


Figure 2 shows the mean reading, numeracy and writing scores of Years 3, 5 and 7 students at Ranford Primary School in NAPLAN 2009-13. In most instances, these scores were equal to or above those of students at like Western Australian schools. Year 3 students' mean scores in writing have been consistently above those of students at like schools for the entire period.

Figure 2: Mean scores in reading, numeracy and writing of Years 3, 5 and 7 students, Ranford Primary School and like Western Australian schools, NAPLAN 2009-13



Key

- Year 3 School (Red square)
- Year 3 Like Schools (Black circle)
- Year 5 School (Cyan triangle)
- Year 5 Like Schools (Magenta diamond)
- Year 7 School (Orange square)
- Year 7 Like Schools (Blue inverted triangle)

Students who score at or below the National Minimum Standards in NAPLAN are considered to be at educational risk. In all tests, Ranford Primary School had fewer students performing at or below the National Minimum Standards than like schools in Western Australia.

Table 1: Percentages of Year 3, 5 and 7 students at Ranford Primary School and like schools scoring at or below the National Minimum Standards, NAPLAN 2013

Test	Year 3		Year 5		Year 7	
	Ranford Primary School	Like schools	Ranford Primary School	Like schools	Ranford Primary School	Like schools
Numeracy	7	8	9	16	8	14
Reading	6	13	5	9	12	16
Writing	1	3	13	12	15	25
Spelling	1	6	6	12	6	14
Grammar and Punctuation	6	9	6	9	18	22

Key

	At least 10 per cent fewer students performing at or below the NMS, compared with like schools
	At least five per cent fewer students performing at or below the NMS, compared with like schools
	Within a range of plus or minus five per cent
	At least five per cent more students performing at or below the NMS, compared with like schools
	At least 10 per cent more students performing at or below the NMS, compared with like schools

The analysis of student performance in relation to NAPLAN 2013 higher proficiency bands shown in Table 2 indicates that in all areas assessed the percentage of students at Ranford Primary School exceeded those in like schools.

In eight of the 15 areas assessed Ranford Primary School exceeded like schools by more than 10 per cent. The results for Year 3 were exceptional.

Table 2: Percentages of Year 3, 5 and 7 students at Ranford Primary School and like schools in Western Australia scoring in the two top proficiency bands, NAPLAN 2013

Test	Year 3 (Bands 5, 6 or above)		Year 5 (Bands 7, 8 or above)		Year 7 (Bands 8, 9 or above)	
	Ranford Primary School	Like schools	Ranford Primary School	Like schools	Ranford Primary School	Like schools
Numeracy	56	39	39	25	40	37
Reading	51	45	37	38	34	30
Writing	62	52	37	22	33	22
Spelling	69	48	50	42	36	33
Punctuation and Grammar	69	56	58	44	30	37

Key

	At least 10 per cent more students performing at the two top proficiency bands, compared with like schools
	At least five per cent more students performing at the two top proficiency bands, compared with like schools
	Within a range of plus or minus five per cent
	At least five per cent fewer students performing at the two top proficiency bands, compared with like schools
	At least 10 per cent fewer students performing at the two top proficiency bands, compared with like schools