



Catholic Education Office
Archdiocese of Melbourne

External Review Report

Prepared for

St Francis Xavier's Primary School
Box Hill

2010



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| • School E Number | E1117 |
| • Principal | Carmel Purdey |
| • Parish Priest | Fr Anthoni Salvaraj |
| • School Reviewer | Maree Xuereb |
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Executive Summary

Since the last review St Francis Xavier's Primary School Box Hill has worked energetically and effectively to develop in all spheres of its operation. Significant to the achievements are the building of a strong staff climate and a focused approach to learning and teaching aligned to the School Improvement Framework. The period is marked by the achievement of exemplary leadership and management practices, involving professional and distributed leadership. High levels of performance and development have been built into the staff culture.

The school is being successful in the sphere of **Education in Faith**. It is aware of making religious education relevant and, in the Franciscan spirit, grounded in Catholic tradition and spirituality. The school recognises its mission, articulated by the pastoral leader that *the school community is the faith community in today's world*. Survey responses from staff are high; pedagogical practices are progressive and engaging for students. Although lower overall than those of staff, student scores are in the top quartile of schools for faith education opportunities and the school's practices in compassion and social justice. The school demographic is changing and 72% of Prep students are Catholic, a reduction of 20% since the 2006 Review. By contrast with staff and students, parent scores in the Catholic Culture Survey are markedly lower and are decreasing. Nevertheless parents verbally affirmed the school's Education in Faith, the opportunities to participate in liturgy and the teaching of values. For improvement it was agreed that the goal for the next period will be to build understanding of faith in life based on the Gospel within a contemporary world; with the principal strategy being to deepen teacher knowledge and skills in embedding religious education in inquiry based learning.

In the sphere of **Learning and Teaching** student responses for Engagement exceed Victorian School Benchmarks and parents believe their children are well connected to the school. Students are motivated and engaged in their learning; learning confidence has increased. Staff are seeing greater levels of student orientation and student decision-making, together with improvements in learning and teaching. However standards in reading have declined recently at Years one, three and five and the school has not met the expected standard in numeracy in 2008-2009. The school is aware that it needs to monitor the effects of demographic changes and transience and factor them into its processes, practices and teaching strategies. In the discussion of the Effective Schools research, the review panel identified that accountability is high and the school focuses well on learning and teaching. Mean survey scores were all high from the research, 'How our Best Performing Schools Come out on Top', (Zbar et al DEECD September 2008). The school is successful in *Tailoring Initiatives to the Overall Direction of the School* and has taken up many projects to strengthen its practice. The school is

cognisant of current pedagogy, holds high expectations for students and is proactive in collecting and analysing data to identify student needs and monitor progress. Despite the implementation of inquiry based approaches and increasing levels of student ownership of learning, parent survey perceptions that learning could be more stimulating is a school challenge. The school is providing intervention for literacy and numeracy; however it is mindful of ensuring that all staff accept responsibility for student learning regardless of their role. For improvement it was agreed during the review that the school will work to deepen student learning through highly effective pedagogical practices with a specific focus on reading, spelling and on mathematical language and concepts. As the school is starting to set individual targets for students, the reviewer suggests that the school investigate personalised learning approaches. It is also recommended that the school build on the learnings from the Contemporary Learning project to strengthen practice and utilise opportunities to link with global perspectives.

In **Student Wellbeing** the school is being successful in its focus on developing students' knowledge, skills and understanding in social competencies and personal learning. Students' connectedness to their peers and to the school has increased; their survey scores for Wellbeing, Engagement and Relationships exceed Victorian School Benchmarks. In the review panel discussion of the Effective Schools research the stimulating and secure learning environment was rated highly. Parents commend the fact that, through values education introduced last year, they are enabled to engage with their children in discussion connecting values education with faith education. Students have a clear understanding of school expectations through the Restorative Practices strategy and parent committees have had input into wellbeing policy development. To strengthen what is already occurring, it was agreed that the future goal will be to improve students' ability to understand, value and respect themselves and others, so as to positively interact with their peers and adults.

The staff climate, due to highly effective practices in **Leadership and Management**, exceeds the Victorian Schools benchmarks. In discussing elements of effective schools and examining the survey based on Zbar et al research, it was evident that there is a shared belief amongst staff that leadership and management practices are strong features of the school. The school has participated in many PD projects; staff consider that leadership demonstrates the ability to access initiatives then embed them into school practice to drive further improvement. There is a clearly articulated distributed model of leadership; an indication of professional growth is that nine staff presented workshops last year for peers in other schools at the CEOM East Central Zone Symposium. Since the last review, the school has engaged in PD and practices to improve staff organisational health and performance. In 2008 Performance and Development Culture (PDC) verification was obtained at Level 4 for the school's use of multiple sources of feedback on teacher effectiveness. In fact the school has developed a model where all in the community are encouraged to contribute to decision making. Currently the staff are involved in another PDC element, the articulation of individual teacher development plans based on

individual development needs, student learning and school priorities. It is intended to continue strengthening the staff climate, with a focus on effective team collaboration leading to improved student learning and ongoing improvement.

In the sphere of **School Community** the school is *in the care of the Franciscan Friars* and an integral part of the Parish. The school climate is positive; a spirit of collaboration and cooperation is evident. Many families are involved in active and close connection with the school through the School Education Board, Parents and Friends Association and as helpers supporting school and classroom programs. Mirroring the situation at the 2006 review, parent surveys are less affirming than the school desires; it is endeavouring to understand the reason for responses so much lower than those of staff and students. In the discussion of the Learning Community element of the Effective Schools research, it was decided that a future goal will be to strengthen the school community by building a learning-centred community that fosters social and cultural inclusion and connectedness. For improvement it is recommended that the school develop partnerships with *all* parents and the community. The reviewer also suggests that the school reflect on its beliefs about the manner in which families can be involved in school life and arrange activities that involve participation of parents together with their children.

It would be evident from the above summary that St Francis Xavier's school is operating highly effectively. It is anticipated that the following suggested goals, intended improvement outcomes and key improvement strategies, derived from the school's self reflection and during the review process over two days in the school, should form a helpful foundation upon which to develop the School Improvement Plan for the next period.

Sphere of Schooling	ADVICE ON BROAD GOALS	INTENDED IMPROVEMENT OUTCOMES	FIRST ORDER KEY IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES
Education in Faith	To build an understanding of faith in life based on the gospel within a contemporary world	That students will be purposefully engaged in Religious Education to make connections with their own life	<p>Utilise the diverse range of expertise and knowledge of the school and global community</p> <p>Differentiate teaching to ensure progress for all students</p> <p>Deepen teacher knowledge and skills in embedding Religious Education in inquiry-based learning</p> <p>Maintain and embed a Restorative Practice approach</p> <p>Revise and deepen the staff's engagement with Performance and Development Culture</p>
Learning and Teaching	To deepen student learning through highly effective pedagogical practices	<p>That student achievement in literacy will improve with a specific focus on reading and spelling</p> <p>That student achievement in numeracy will improve, with a focus on mathematical language and concepts</p> <p>That student engagement will increase through purposeful teaching and deep learning</p>	
Student Wellbeing	To improve students' ability to understand, value and respect themselves and others	That students can positively interact with their peers and adults	
Leadership and Management	To strengthen the staff climate	That teams will effectively collaborate resulting in improved student learning and ongoing improvement	
School Community	To build a learning centred community that fosters social and cultural inclusion and connectedness	<p>That all families feel valued and understood</p> <p>That student learning is supported through partnerships with parents and the community</p>	