# PLC Progress Report

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*Below are the commendations from the report provided to the school by Mr Sloper*

## PREFACE:

The purpose of the report is to draw upon the latest research into the practices of successful Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), to evaluate advances made and challenges faced during your school's journey towards becoming a PLC. Information for the report was gathered by collecting relevant data from the school, reviewing schoolwide products and artefacts and interviewing leadership and teaching staff On-site.

## SECTION 1: Transforming Collaboration

Establishing schoolwide norms

A clear mission and vision has been developed for the school based on the definitions and format used by the Ballarat Diocese. These "school-wide" norms set the broad parameters which guide the school on its journey to become a Professional Learning Community. The school's mission and vision highlight the central theme of a PLC in creating "a learning culture which results in success for all".

The school has developed four key over-arching commitments to guide the professional behaviours of all staff members as they go about their work of improving student learning. These over-arching commitments reinforce educators' need to know their students and the curriculum, to use data to monitor their effectiveness, to work interdependently to provide quality learning for students, to constantly seek ways to improve their skills and practice and to have a deep belief that all students can learn.

The "school-wide norms" are based on the need for teachers to work together collaboratively on key issues of curriculum, assessment and instruction. The "school-wide norms" were seen by staff, as determined through the survey administered, to support the school's mission of achieving high levels of learning success for all students.

The staff norms focused on professional behaviours required to be exhibited during meeting participation and how decisions were going to be made. The school had a set protocol for the follow up of breaches to these meeting norms.

The "school-wide norms" (i.e. the mission, vision, commitments and staff norms) were clearly documented in the school's Pedagogical Framework and other school documents.

Establishing schoolwide structures

The school has developed a sophisticated network of meeting structures to support the collaborative work of teachers at the school. The school has established a meeting structure which allows teachers to meet weekly for an extended period of time to honour the important work that they are being asked to do.

The school's meeting structure ensures a coordinated approach is taken across the school to continue to develop the school as a Professional Learning Community. This includes regular meetings of the school's leadership team, PLC leaders and in sub schools. The collaborative teams meet as a Junior School (Prep, Year 1 and Year 2) and a Senior School (Year 3, Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6). Each meeting is lead by one of the Assistant Principals and a PLC leader.

The staff also meet as a whole school to continue school-wide professional learning on key aspects related to the PLC work (i.e. a recent focus has been Common Formative Assessment).

Staff members' positive perception of the structures established at the school were very strong and indicated that team members were clear on their role and responsibilities at the collaborative team meeting, and had adequate time to meet and complete the tasks that they were being asked to focus on in their collaborative team meetings.

All staff agreed or strongly agreed that the school ensured that the collaborative meeting time is protected, indicating that the leadership of the school was giving the highest priority to the work of the teams.

The structures put in place had evolved over time in response to the context of the school and continued enhancements were being considered for the coming year to continue to progress the work of the collaborative teams (i.e. PLC Leaders being taken out of their classroom role).

## Building a collaborative school culture

My observation of both collaborative teams meeting on the day of my visit allowed me to observe the establishment and use of the team norms which each team had. Each team had a team member who reminded the team of the norms at the start of the meeting and a focus norm for the meeting was selected.

The team norms aligned with the "school-wide norms" and were designed to ensure that the meeting was as productive as possible. The staff indicated in the survey that they understood the role of the norms and that the norms detailed the specific behaviours that were expected of all team members.

Each team had a breach procedure to follow when norms were broken which aligned to the school-wide procedure. Staff indicated a high level of agreement that they understood the breach procedure and recognised that the procedure would be implemented if a breach of the norms occurred.

The norms were referenced on the meeting agenda as a visible reminder to team members.

Each meeting concluded with a reflection on the team's success in regards to the nominated norm.

## SECTION 2: Transforming Curriculum

### Identifying essential content

The school has been involved in the development of Power Standards and targets in the area of mathematics as their first area of focus for entre into the PLC work. This has allowed the school to develop a process for undertaking this work and to "learn by doing". The school is now moving onto the area of English, and adapting their approach as they discover that the way this curriculum area and content is written is different from the area of maths.

The Essential Content (Power Standards and targets) have been identified using a school-wide approach and this content has been clearly documented by the teams. The school has been mindful in establishing the essential content that it is guaranteed and viable (i.e. the content being delivered is the same in each classroom teaching the same content and that there is adequate time to ensure that students reach the required level of proficiency). There is a strong level of agreement among the staff that the majority of instructional time is devoted to ensuring students master the essential content.

The school has developed its own process for analysing the curriculum (in the area of maths and currently working on the area of English) and developing the Power Standards and "Important to Know". The teaching emphasis and learning cycles have then been created around the Power Standards.

The school is aware that these need to be continually revised and evaluated to ensure that, as the cycles of learning are taught, they refine, adjust and amend what they have developed as they "learn by doing".

There was a high level of agreement among staff that all students, in each year level, have access to the same essential content and that the content developed can be taught in the time available.

### Creating learning goals

In the area of maths (which has been the school's focus) the Power Standards have been broken down into associated targets that represent the specific learning goals that underpin the achievement of these Power Standards.

It was clear from the team meetings observed, and the discussion of post-assessment data, that collaborative team members had an agreed process to ensure that Power Standards and learning goals were aligned and delivered at a similar time in classrooms of the same year level. This meant that teachers delivering the same content where doing it at the same time ensuring that they could then compare and discuss the learning data of students.

The school had developed a set of proformas (i.e. Power Standard Learning Cycle Planner) that clearly detailed the Power Standard and targets (learning goals) that teachers were focusing on in each unit/cycle of learning.

Teachers indicated that they had "paced" the Power Standards so that they had sufficient time to teach the required content and for students to reach mastery in them. At one of the meetings teachers adjusted the pacing guide based on evidence of student learning, thus emphasising that they were focused on student learning over merely covering the content.

## Constructing proficiency scales

The school is currently exploring the use of "proficiency scales" to assist them develop a clear pathway for student learning. This is occurring in the focus area of mathematics.

Staff indicated that they are developing and strengthening their ability to develop a clear and consistent understanding of what the learning pathway is for each unit/cycle of learning.

The targets identified in maths identify the specific skills and knowledge students need to be proficient in to be "at standard" in each Power Standard. There seems to be clarity in teachers minds about what it is they want the students to know and be able to do to have achieved the Power Standard.

Work is continuing to identify the prerequisite skills that students might need to have mastered as the "stepping stones" to the "at standard" targets and in identifying ways students might apply these "at standard" targets if they are already proficient or become proficient in a unit/cycle of learning.

I encourage the school to continue developing this level of work.

## Making learning student friendly

It is the school expectation that teachers share the Power Standard (learning goal) and targets (success criteria) with students in the areas that are the focus of core instruction.

Teachers indicated that this is happening to some degree across the school, but it may not be as consistent across all classrooms.

As the focus has been on developing the Power Standards and the targets, students have more likely been informed about what it is they need to do and know to be "at standard" rather than necessarily knowing the prerequisite skills and possible way they might apply these skills once they are proficient. This is a great start and provides students with a clear understanding of what proficiency "looks" like. The school is working on extending this to the prerequisite and application skills through the development of "proficiency scales".

The school is moving on to the development of the English Power Standards, and once these have been developed, the development of the associated targets will continue to progress this work.

## SECTION 3: Transforming Assessment

## Using proficiency scales as the basis for assessment

In the two meetings I observed, great emphasis was given to the discussion of student learning progress as revealed by the analysis of learning data gathered through the use of common assessments. The school has developed a consistent school-wide way of presenting and tracking student learning data. The common assessments developed assess clearly the targets associated with the Power Standard being focused on during the learning cycle. This provided a strong framework for the development of the common assessment.

All staff surveyed expressed clearly that they felt collaborative teams had a "framework" for designing assessments.

In the focus area of maths, collaborative teams clearly develop assessments which checked student understanding of the "at standard" targets for the Power Standard being taught. Collaborative teams administer an assessment prior to the learning cycle to ensure that they have a clear understanding of the students level of understanding prior to commencing teaching the required content.

Collaborative teams use the assessment data to differentiate the subsequent instruction to meet the specific needs of the cohort, groups of students, or individual students.

The proformas developed by the school allow the team to identify students who might need additional instruction, who are working towards proficiency and who might require extension.

The progress of these students is measured using a post-assessment which allows the "growth" of students from the initial starting points can be checked.

## Designing an assessment blueprint

The leaders of the collaborative teams have ensured that processes are in place to guarantee a strong match between the assessment items developed and the content being addressed. As mentioned previously, the pre-assessment and post-assessments are based on the targets identified for the Power Standards.

Collaborative team members make sure that they construct an adequate number of assessment items to ensure each target is being accurately assessed. Teams are being mindful of the number of items being developed and making sure the assessment is not overly complex.

## Scoring and discussing the results of assessment

All teachers indicated that the collaborative teams ensure that assessments are administered uniformly and scored consistently by all team members.

Collaborative teams are aware of the need to ensure that there is clarity about what answers they are marking as correct to ensure that the data provides an accurate basis for discuss and analysis. Some of these points/considerations are recorded in the documents created by the collaborative team.

Collaborative teams are aware of the need to revise assessments created and to make changes and alterations to increase their effectiveness in future use.

The team discussions observed on my visit showed that the learning data was referred to and analysed by each collaborative team. The data was presented as year level data, which meant that the data was relevant and related to the direct learning in two of the team member's classes. As such, and quite naturally, this meant that these two teachers were more heavily engaged in the discussion of the data than the other teachers (from the other year levels), but these other teachers seemed interested in the discussion of their colleagues and listened as theses teachers discussed and analysed their data.

The discussions indicated that the data gave the teachers a great insight into the learning needs of their students and what they would need to do next to assist their continued learning.

## Devising meaningful SMART goals

Staff indicated through the survey administered, and as validated through the meetings attended, teams developed SMART goals for each cycle of learning, based on the pre-assessment that the team administered. This SMART goal was recorded on the planner used and indicated the level of student proficiency that the team of teachers was trying to achieve over the course of the cycle of learning.

In the meetings I attended (a review of post-assessment data) the SMART goal was referred to and used as a way of monitoring whether the cycle needed to be extended or whether the team could move on to another cycle of learning.

There was a high level of agreement by staff, as evidenced through the survey administered, that the SMART goals created focused on gains in student learning, and strong agreement that the SMART goals were based on a realistic understanding of where students were at in their learning as determined through their pre-assessment.

# SECTION 4: Transforming Instruction

## Planning for high quality instruction

The structures and process developed by the school ensure that teachers are clear about what it is they want the students to learn through the learning cycle (i.e. Power Standards and targets). The next step for the PLC journey will be to start to inquire into and undertake action research into best teaching and instructional practice while doing the "work".

The school has developed processes which allow teachers to "pace" the content to ensure that key content is given the greatest focus and the cycle "paced" according to time needed for students to master the content.

## Planning after assessment

As previously indicated, in the area of maths the school uses assessments as a way of determining the students' level of understanding before the commencement of the learning cycle, and with the implementation of "quick checks" (formative assessment strategies), this can be extended to during the learning cycle.

Based on this current reality, teachers indicate that they are adjusting their level of instruction, lesson type or instructional strategy based on the results of the assessment.

The results of the assessments are being used to group and regroup students.

## Systematically inquiring into teaching practice

Teachers indicated that they collaboratively plan lessons or sets of lessons that they agree to implement in their classroom and this is a great step towards getting teachers to have rich and meaningful discussions about the teaching approach they are going to use. Traditionally in schools, these planning sessions have started by focusing on the development of activities. By shifting the starting point to discussions of teaching approach/practise first, before moving on to activity development, teachers will become more focused on the teaching approach they might use in their classrooms.

The school also has developed a schedule of meetings for teachers teaching the same year level which could easily support this process.

# SECTION 5: Transforming Teacher Development

## Facilitating professional learning

The school has all the elements (particularly in their focus area of maths) to ensure that they can continue strengthen focus of the collaborative team meeting to improving student learning through the job embedded professional learning that happens at each team meeting.

It is pleasing to note that all teachers surveyed understood that this should be the main focus of collaborative team meetings.

## Enhancing reflective practice

The school has a documented pedagogical model which outlines some research-based approaches drawn from the work of Marzano, Timperley and Hattie.

Aspects of the model are used as the basis of professional learning at staff meetings.

## Providing peer coaching

The school is already considering this as the next step in their PLC journey and are developing school structures for 2017 to allow this to occur.

The school should celebrate that it is at the point where staff are more open to the opportunity for feedback on their performance and are interested in continuing to develop their skills and practices. This is a testament to the work done over the last few years to get teachers to be more collaborative and to develop a greater sense of trust in each other.

## Performing instructional rounds

The school's existing pedagogical model provides a possible launching place for the introduction of instructional rounds or "walk throughs", if this is an area the school wanted to pursue.

Observation of staff participation at team meetings on the day I visited the school, and the survey results, indicate that the good will of staff and levels of trust provide the potential to extend the opportunities for teachers to receive genuine feedback on their work and ways to get better at their craft.

The school has invested heavily through the implementation of the PLC process to develop a culture of learning at the school. This focused primarily on students' learning; the opportunity exists to shift this to educator learning as well.

## SECTION 6: Transformative Leadership

## Leading a professional learning community

The school leaders all demonstrated a commitment to the PLC journey through their actions and behaviours. The team seemed to have a good understanding of where they were at in the journey and knew that there were areas that required continued development and refocusing. (In their planning for 2017, the leadership team had already started planning structures and organisational procedures to allow for the continued strengthening of the current school practices.)

The school has a clearly defined leadership structure in place that is focused on continuing the development of the school as a Professional Learning Community. Distributive leadership principles are evident in the school's leadership structure.

Staff indicated, through the survey conducted, that school leaders are aware of the work of collaborative teams. The staff indicated a strong level of agreement that school leaders implement processes and structures that ensure that they are an integral part of the PLC process.

Staff reported that school leaders where accessible to collaborative teams and ensured that the collaborative team practices align with the school's ideals and beliefs.

Teachers recognised that the leaders of the school were keeping administrative tasks from intruding on the collaborative team meeting time/agenda.