Peer Review Report Summary (to be published on school's website)

Executive Summary

2. 1 School Context

Lowanna College is a single campus Year 7-12 school with a current student population of 970. Whilst the student population has declined slightly in recent years, long term projections would indicate that its numbers will remain steady for the foreseeable future. Eighty percent of students in local primary schools transition to the College.

The College's staffs consist of an Executive Principal, four Assistant Principals, three Leading Teachers (five in 2017), the equivalent of 58.7 full-time teaching staff and 26.3 support staff.

The College offers a broad curriculum and is divided into three distinct Mini Schools (Junior years 7-8, Middle years 9-10 and Senior years 11-12), each with an Assistant Principal responsible for the teaching and learning program, student management and the welfare needs of students. The College offers a core program to Junior School students, a core and elective program for Middle School students, and VCE, VCAL and VETiS options for Senior School students.

Lowanna's current school improvement focus began in 2015 following the appointment of a new principal in the second term of 2014. To support the implementation of its improvement initiatives the school has adopted a new leadership structure and has committed resources to build the capacity of the leadership group including middle level leaders. Teacher capacity building has also been supported by the establishment of Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) led by a Leading Teacher. PLTs have been a means for staff sharing practice and collaborating on curriculum and assessment planning and documentation.

2.2 Summary of the School's Performance

2.2.1 Summary of the School's Performance against the Previous Strategic Plan

When commenting on the College's achievements it needs to be noted that the school is in the final year of a four year Strategic Plan and that the targets that were identified prior to the 2014 changes in school leadership no longer have much relevance for the priorities driving current school improvement initiatives. It also needs to be noted that many of the targets established in 2013 were based on an unrealistic assessment of the school's capacity to make rapid and sustained improvement. Nevertheless, as the discussion below reveals, the schools academic and student wellbeing outcomes could be described as being below what the school was aspiring to achieve.

The student achievement goals and targets were mainly related to student performance in NAPLAN tests and the VCE. The literacy and numeracy goal of general improvement for years 7-10 was largely achieved as the relative growth in student learning between Year 7 (2014) and Year 9 (2016) as measured by NAPLAN tests improved for numeracy and for

three of the four literacy areas (the exception being for Spelling). A four-year average of Year 9 NAPLAN scores of students in the top three achievement bands reveals that Lowanna student outcomes in reading have been within the range achieved by the middle 60% of government secondary schools, but below this range in numeracy.

The VCE improvement target of a mean score of 28 in relation to the schools all study score was not met however the school's actual score was similar to that of the middle 60% of government secondary schools. In summary, student performance targets were largely achieved in Years 7-10 but not in Years 11 and 12.

The goal of improving student engagement in learning was not met. Indicators of student engagement include school attendance, school connectedness and classroom bahaviour. Between 2014 and 2016 results from the Attitudes to School Survey that captures students' opinions about their schooling show those students' ratings for school connectedness and classroom behaviour declined. The total student absence rate increased between 2014 and 2015 and was above the state-wide absence rate.

The goal to improve the proportion of students exiting to further education and training was not met. The data tracking student destinations when they leave school reveals that 59.8% of Year 12 students exiting the school enrolled in full-time education post school. This percentage was 4% below the target set by the school. Course completion data reveals that the proportion of students completing VCE in 2015 was 10% below the proportion state-wide and a similar outcome was achieved for students enrolled in VCAL.

2.2.2 Summary of the considerations for the next Strategic Plan

Lowanna's 2016 Annual Implementation Plan is closely aligned with the Department of Education and Training's Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO) and establishes a reform direction that is endorsed by the review panel.

The panel is of the view that Lowanna's continuing school improvement agenda will be best served by the school focusing on strategies designed to enhance teaching effectiveness; instructional consistency; curriculum documentation and planning; the use of assessment for teaching and learning; leadership capacity; and student expectations. Work is already underway in relation to these 'priority' areas for future action but more needs to be done to embed improvement processes and practices across the school.

Evidence presented in the school's Self Evaluation and supported by panel discussion suggests that there is a need for greater school-wide consistency and efficacy in the design, delivery and assessment of curriculum and for teachers to become more collaborative so planning is improved and consistency in practice is achieved. The school's adoption of an instructional model and provision of professional learning to support all staff implement the practices associated with the model is strongly endorsed by the panel. The panel also recognises that implementation support will need to be ongoing over the duration of the school's next Strategic Plan.

As evidence suggests that teacher collaboration and quality feedback are effective improvement levers, the panel is of the view that ongoing support will be needed to grow the practice of teachers providing their colleagues with honest and constructive feedback. It also strongly supports the school's adoption of Professional Learning Teams and views these as being an important vehicle for cementing teacher relationships and building trust which are prerequisites for building a strong professional learning culture across the school.

Panel discussions also identified the need for the school to supplement current professional learning opportunities with a school-wide professional learning program focused on developing and extending all teachers' generic classroom management and instructional techniques as this too will help to establish greater consistency in the use of evidence-based practices across the school. An allied panel discussion highlighted that VCE teachers are functioning in a context where teaching and learning is high stakes, highly competitive, prescriptive and time-bound. In order to respond to this context the panel suggests that greater opportunities may need to be provided for VCE teachers to investigate, share, document, observe, practice and implement those strategies and techniques that are most effective for lifting VCE results.

The panel, supported by evidence from the student opinion survey, considers that the school should continue to adopt initiatives designed to strengthen the student learning culture, and in particular advises that the school adopt strategies to promote authentic relationships, high expectations and high effort.

The panel supports the actions that the school has taken to strengthen leadership capacity and suggests that leadership capacity building initiatives be extended to include all staff with leadership/responsibility roles.

2.2.3 Next steps

The panel considers that the school is systematically establishing the conditions needed for improvement. The initiatives undertaken in 2015 (e.g. the establishment of PLTs, an instructional model and leadership capacity building) provide a good foundation upon which further improvement initiatives can be built. The leadership team is united around a clear reform agenda and is growing the capacity of team leaders to support their teams to implement improvement practices.