Priority review report summary –
Wangaratta High School - School Context

Wangaratta High School (Wangaratta HS), a rural school of 900 students at Year 7 to Year 12, is located in the township of Wangaratta, about 230 km north east of Melbourne. Formerly part of the Hume Region, the school is now part of the North Eastern Victoria Region (NEVR), which incorporates the former Eastern and Northern Regions.

Enrolments have declined over the review period with 985 students in 2013 and 905 students in 2015. Enrolments have declined steadily since the school merged with Ovens College in 2007 which at the time increased the roll to 1400 students.

Wangaratta HS offers a broad range of core programs Years 7–10, as well as a comprehensive range of senior pathways including the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). Co-curricular opportunities include sport, music, drama, talented writers club, overseas exchange programs and opportunities for student leadership, with an active Student Representative Council (SRC) and prefect team.

The innovative Year 9 Community Leadership Challenge provides all Year 9 students with the opportunity to make a contribution to the local or global community. Key highlights have included expeditions to Vietnam and Borneo. A similar trip to China is planned for 2016.

Significant individual achievements in music, visual communication, media, design and technology and photography have seen students recognised in State excellence awards. Teams of students have recently won the State Battle of the Bands and Victorian Ski championships.

The current facilities at Wangaratta HS vary in condition. The facilities have been enhanced by the addition of a relatively new set of flexible learning spaces (Senior Years Learning Community), a modern and very welcoming administration area, and new accommodation for performing arts and the canteen. Old Light Timber Construction (LTC) buildings which house the middle years’ students remain at the school, and are in poor condition. Until a new set of buildings for these students is completed, the school will continue to operate without an oval, on which the senior school buildings were constructed.

Summary of the School’s Performance

2.2.1 The School’s Performance against the Previous Strategic Plan

Wangaratta HS achieved mixed results against the implementation of the previous School Strategic Plan (SSP).
Student Learning

In the area of student learning, National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) average scores have matched the Victorian median. However, adjusted results at Year 9 show that results do not match those of like schools. The target to increase rates of High learning growth and reduce the rates of Low growth were not met, with lower than expected rates of high growth between Year 7 and 9 for both Literacy and Numeracy.

A target related to teacher judgements in the previous SSP aimed for 85% of students to achieve at or above the expected level (i.e. be awarded an A, B or C). Teacher judgement data indicates that this target was met for many groups of students, with results ranging between 60% - 100%, with most results ranging between 75% - 85%.

The targets related to senior students were met, with more than 6% of students achieving a study score of 40 or more and completion rates for VET and VCAL exceeding the State average. However, these outcomes need to be viewed within the context of a decline in overall student numbers which resulted in a smaller number of students actually achieving a 40+ score and completing VET and VCAL and a corresponding decline in overall VCE outcomes.

The targets related to improvement in the Attitudes to School Survey (ATS Survey) were not met. Results from this survey declined in all areas across the review period.

Student Engagement and Wellbeing

Absence rates have deteriorated over the period 2013–2015, and are higher than expected against like schools. Absence rates remain above the State average.

Attitudes to school results, as measured in the Attitudes to School Survey, are very low in all areas. All in the first quartile, these results are well below State and region means and show a declining trend 2013–2015 that has seen the school fail to meet the targets set in 2013.

Whilst the Parent Opinion Survey (PO Survey) target in the previous SSP related to Student Safety was met, the target related to Approachability was not. Generally, Parent Opinion results have declined in most areas over the period 2012–2014.

Student Pathways and Transitions

The Parent Opinion target in the previous SSP to improve the variable score for Transitions to a mean of 5.35 was not met. However, the score did improve to a mean of 5.26. This improvement reflects the implementation of a comprehensive transition program based on a collaborative school cluster project.

Conclusions

Whilst there has been some progress towards the goals and targets set out in the SSP under review, in many areas these have not been fully reached, particularly in relation to
the goals and targets related to student engagement and achievement.

2.2.2 Summary of the review findings against the Terms of Reference

1. To what extent do classrooms, teachers’ program plans and observable teacher practice reflect the agreed Wangaratta HS whole-school approaches to teaching and learning; with the result that learning is genuinely personalised, curriculum is differentiated and students are highly engaged, motivated and involved in stimulating and engaging inquiry?

Over the review period, Wangaratta HS has developed a very strong and explicit improvement agenda that has included the design of powerful processes related to classroom instruction, assessment and curriculum planning. However, the review process revealed that, at this stage, few of these initiatives have been adopted consistently across the school in a form that sees them embedded and applied with confidence by teachers in classrooms.

2. To what extent are high expectations and high aspirations shared by teachers, students and parents?

The leadership team, teachers and parents claim to have very high expectations for students at Wangaratta HS. However, a number of students spoken to during the review exhibited a less enthusiastic attitude towards learning and their future; and some teachers expressed apprehension about recent changes in demographics, raising concerns about the willingness of some students to learn. This attitude of both staff and students, low staff survey results for “Academic Emphasis” and observations that many students were not challenged in classrooms indicate that at this stage the school has not been providing the learning environment required to realise the desired high standards and high expectations.

3. To what extent is there evidence of effective professional relationships, professional trust and productive partnerships between school staff and between staff and leadership that result in building individual and collective efficacy?

A number of structures and processes are in place to facilitate collaboration, communication and professional learning. These include Domain teams, Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) and Teacher Triads. However, this review has revealed a lack of clarity about the exact role and purpose of these forums. For example, many staff were unclear about the different expectations for domain teams, professional learning teams and Triads. It was also evident that some team structures, e.g. Triads, have not been engaging in the work prescribed and therefore have not been meeting the outcomes and expectations placed upon them, particularly those related to professional learning and coaching. There is evidence that a strong partnership and effective communication between
staff and leadership does not exist. The leadership team has not been visible, accessible and engaged in supporting teachers in their classrooms and leaders have not been fulfilling their documented role related to coaching.

There is evidence that staff morale has been low and that opportunity for staff to contribute to the school’s policy direction and to plan and work together has been very limited. This situation has been exacerbated by the reluctance, inability or refusal of some staff to implement new initiatives and the resistance of some staff to change. There was little evidence of a culture that supports staff unity, consistency of practice, and a willingness to embrace change. The above issues significantly inhibit the school’s capacity to build individual and collective efficacy.

4. To what extent is Professional Learning well-planned, comprehensive, aligned with school priorities and based on sound principles of coaching, reflective practice and action-learning?

Planning for Professional Learning has been very comprehensive and has focussed on key priorities such as Quality Learning and the school’s explicit instructional model. However, there have been a number of factors that have resulted in the intent of professional learning not being fully implemented and embedded across the school. These have included:

- Duplication in team structures and confusion about the role of forums such as PLTs, Domain teams.
- Limited coaching and feedback on performance.
- Lack of direct support for new initiatives among staff.
- Lack of instructional leadership – concerns that leaders are not visible, accessible and in classrooms supporting teachers.
- Rapidly changing priorities: taking on new initiatives before current ones are fully embedded and consolidated.

5. To what degree are there well-understood whole-school approaches to engagement, wellbeing and behaviour management and to what extent are these approaches consistently implemented across the school?

Although the school has initiated a number of strategies and actions to address wellbeing and behaviour issues, including a dedicated wellbeing centre, behaviour management process, Restorative Practices and Mentor Teacher program, consistent and effective management of student wellbeing issues and behaviour remain major challenges. This situation is having a significant impact on teacher morale, effectiveness of staff and perceptions of safety. It is clear that the above initiatives, whilst strong in intent, are yet to be applied consistently and rigorously across the school.

Management of behaviour is an area of particular concern to staff many of whom feel a lack
of support from members of the leadership team in management of difficult students.

Despite this, during classroom visits reviewers found that most classrooms were calm and interactions between students and staff were, in the main, positive and respectful.

**6. To what extent have relationships with the community and community perceptions of the school impacted on enrolments and viability?**

Discussions with parents and other members of the Wangaratta community reveal that the school has suffered significant negative perceptions during recent years. These perceptions, some of which are inaccurate, generally relate to size of the school, concerns about academic achievement and rigour and student behaviour. This has resulted in declining enrolments, concerns about future viability and a drift to local independent schools.

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<th>2.2.3 Key findings</th>
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<td>1. The school has a clear vision and an explicit school improvement agenda, which has seen the design of a number of evidence-based initiatives related to classroom pedagogy, curriculum planning and student wellbeing. However, many staff lack confidence and full understanding of these approaches and these initiatives are not fully supported by all staff. This has led to these initiatives not being consistently implemented and embedded across the school and in classrooms.</td>
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<td>2. A culture of effective educational leadership with high levels of visibility, accessibility and support for staff is not evident, impacting on staff morale and professional respect and trust between leadership and staff.</td>
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<td>3. Leadership is not effectively distributed due to a lack of role clarity, particularly of Leading Teachers.</td>
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<td>4. Confusion and uncertainty about the role of current team structures and a lack of effective professional learning, coaching and reflective practice within teams of teachers has impacted detrimentally on the development of the staff as a collaborative team who share responsibility for improving outcomes for students and implementing change.</td>
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<td>5. There is a lack of clarity around student behaviour management, consistent support from leadership and expectations of staff.</td>
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<th>2.2.4 Next steps</th>
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<td>This school is at the initial stage of readiness for achieving school-wide improvement. Whilst there is evidence of comprehensive planning of a range of appropriate initiatives, there are a number of fundamental issues which are hindering the school’s capacity to secure these improvements which will need to be overcome in the short term.</td>
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