

# **National School Improvement Tool School Review Report**

**To: Penola Catholic College, Broadmeadows, Victoria  
School Number - 1363**

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Principal: Chris Caldwell

Reviewers: Ron Bamford - ACER School Improvement Consultant  
Christina Rogers - ACER School Improvement Consultant  
Victoria Myers - Regional Principal Consultant, Catholic  
Education Melbourne.

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## Company Information

COMPANY	The Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd (ACER)
ABN	19 004 398 145
COMPANY ADDRESS	19 Prospect Hill Road Camberwell, Victoria 3124 Australia
WEBSITE	<a href="http://www.acer.org">www.acer.org</a>
TELEPHONE	+61 3 9277 5555
FAX	+61 3 9277 5500
CONTACT PERSON	Pauline Taylor-Guy
EMAIL ADDRESS	Pauline.Taylor-Guy@acer.org
DIRECT TELEPHONE	+61 3 9277 5402
MOBILE	+61 (0) 447 789 128

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACER	Australian Council <i>for</i> Educational Research
DET	Department of Education and Training
EYLF	Early Years Learning Framework
KLA	Key Learning Areas
LMS	Learning Management System
LBOTE	Language background other than English
NSIT	National School Improvement Tool
SCSEEC	Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood

## Foreword to the principal

Thank you and congratulations on your school's decision to engage in the ACER Committed to Excellence (c2e) program by commissioning a National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) Review.

The NSIT was endorsed by the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) at its meeting on 7 December 2012 and has been made available to all Australian schools for use in their school improvement planning from 2013.

The NSIT Review is specifically designed to equip Principals, boards and staff with the data they need to plot their school's current position against international effective practice and to plan a focussed approach to school improvement appropriate to the context of their school.

This report details the key findings of the NSIT consultants who conducted the review of your school.

The report provides feedback on the assessments made against each of the nine interrelated domains of effective school practice, gathered through evidence collection and consultation within your school. Summary findings and comments are also provided at the conclusion of each domain assessment.

The review team has also concluded with a set of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations to assist in future planning and to support school-wide improvement.

We hope you find the information in this report a valuable contribution to assisting with your journey to set goals and develop strategies to improve student learning and foster a culture of excellence in your school.



Professor Geoff N Masters  
CEO, ACER



## 1. An explicit improvement agenda

The school leadership team and/or governing body have established and are driving a strong improvement agenda for the school, grounded in evidence from research and practice and expressed in terms of improvements in measurable student outcomes. Explicit and clear school-wide targets for improvement have been set and communicated to parents and families, teachers and students, with accompanying timelines.

Low	Medium	High	Outstanding
<p>There is no obvious plan for improving on current achievement levels. School leaders appear to be more focused on day-to-day operational matters than on analysing and understanding school data, setting targets for whole-school improvement or communicating an improvement agenda to the school community.</p> <p>Minimal attention is paid to data and there is very limited communication of school results or of intentions for improvement to parents, families and the wider school community.</p> <p>Expectations for significant school improvement are low and staff tend to 'explain' current achievement levels in terms of students' socioeconomic backgrounds and/or geographical location. There is little evidence that the staff of the school have a shared commitment to improving outcomes for every student, and this appears to be contributing to a culture of underperformance. There is little evidence that the school is looking to external sources to identify evidence-based strategies for improvement.</p>	<p>The principal and other school leaders articulate a shared commitment to improvement, but limited attention has been given to specifying detail or to developing a school-wide approach (eg, plans for improvement may lack coherence, be short term, or without a whole-school focus). Plans for improvement do not appear to have been clearly communicated, widely implemented or to have impacted significantly on teachers' day-to-day work. Targets for improvement are not specific (eg, not accompanied by timelines).</p> <p>The school's focus on data are driven more by external requirements (eg, NAPLAN, My School) than by an internal desire for good information to guide school decision making and to monitor progress.</p> <p>Although there is an expressed commitment to improvement, this is not reflected in a high level of enthusiasm for personal change on the part of staff. The communication of performance data to the school community tends to be sporadic and/or is limited only to information that the school is required to report.</p>	<p>The school has developed an agenda for improvement in partnership with parents and the community and school leaders can describe the improvements they wish to see in student behaviours and outcomes. This agenda is communicated in staff meetings, school newsletters, parent-teacher meetings and on the school website using a variety of formats to suit local needs.</p> <p>The leadership team has analysed school performance data over a number of years and is aware of trends in student achievement levels. Targets for improvement are clear and accompanied by timelines.</p> <p>The school leadership team is clearly committed to finding ways to improve on current student outcomes. This is reflected in an eagerness to learn from research evidence, international experience and from other schools that have achieved significant improvements.</p> <p>There is evidence of a school-wide commitment to every student's success and staff of the school tell stories of significant student improvement.</p>	<p>The school leadership group, including, where appropriate, the governing council, has developed and is driving an explicit and detailed local school improvement agenda. This agenda is expressed in terms of specific improvements sought in student performances, is aligned with national and/or system-wide improvement priorities and includes clear targets with accompanying timelines which are rigorously actioned.</p> <p>The school improvement agenda has been effective in focusing, and to some extent narrowing and sharpening, the whole school's attention on core learning priorities.</p> <p>There is a strong and optimistic commitment by all staff to the school improvement strategy and a clear belief that further improvement is possible.</p> <p>Teachers take responsibility for changes in practice required to achieve school targets and are using data on a regular basis to monitor the effectiveness of their own efforts to meet those targets.</p>

## **Domain 1 findings**

- The Penola Catholic College *School Improvement Plan 2014-2018* describes student outcomes and student outcome targets relating to Catholic culture, NAPLAN, VCE and student wellbeing. The target relating to the VCE median score was well known across the college, however staff were less conversant with other targets.
- Sustained improved results in growth in NAPLAN (writing) over the life of the plan has been acknowledged and celebrated.
- In discussions with staff, students, and parents, the review team noted a strong shared understanding of whole-school literacy as a key improvement strategy over the life of the plan. College newsletters, college board reports, Parents and Friends minutes and various staff communications demonstrated an ongoing commitment by the college leadership team to communicate the improvement agenda and results to the college community. In classrooms, the review team noted that all teachers had implemented literacy strategies, to varying degrees, with some attributing improved student outcomes in VCE and NAPLAN (writing) to this initiative.
- The review team found that the Renaissance Learning program has had an impact on student and teacher understanding of reading ages and appropriate text selection at the Glenroy campus.
- The college leadership team has forged several partnerships with universities and other schools to discuss research evidence in the development of the key strategies within the strategic plan.
- The Curiosity and Powerful Learning Framework is being adopted by the college as a model of school improvement that has been communicated to staff. The review team has noted that teachers are articulating learning intentions and success criteria in their lessons.



## 2. Analysis and discussion of data

A high priority is given to the school-wide analysis and discussion of systematically collected data on student outcomes, including academic, attendance and behavioural outcomes, and student wellbeing. Data analyses consider overall school performance as well as the performances of students from identified priority groups; evidence of improvement/ regression over time; performances in comparison with similar schools; and, in the case of data from standardised tests, measures of growth across the years of school.

Low	Medium	High	Outstanding
<p>There is very little evidence of school leaders' practical use of school-wide student outcome data. There is either no annual data collection plan for the school or the plan is being implemented in a minimalist fashion. The school makes little or no use of tests beyond those that the school is required to use. Teachers do not systematically analyse test and other data for their classes and teachers make little use of data to reflect on their teaching. The school is unable to demonstrate how data have been used in meetings or with parents to analyse and discuss current achievement levels and strategies for improvement.</p>	<p>School leaders pay close attention to data provided to them about the performance of the school (eg, NAPLAN results; Year 12 results) and identify areas in which the school is performing relatively poorly or well.</p> <p>Tests (eg, commercially available reading tests) may be used by some teachers, but generally are not used as part of a whole-school assessment strategy.</p> <p>An ad hoc approach exists to building staff skills in the analysis, interpretation and use of classroom data.</p> <p>Software may be used for the analysis of school results, including the performances of priority groups, but analyses generally do not extend to studies of improvement or growth.</p> <p>School data are presented to staff in meetings, but presentations tend to be 'for information' rather than a trigger for in-depth discussions of teaching practices and school processes.</p> <p>Information about the school's performance is communicated to the school community, but may lack explanation or analysis. There is limited engagement with parents and families around school data.</p>	<p>There is evidence that the principal and other school leaders view reliable and timely student data as essential to their effective leadership of the school. There is a documented school plan and timetable for the annual collection of data on student achievement and wellbeing.</p> <p>One or more members of staff have been assigned responsibility for implementing the annual plan, analysing the full range of school data, and summarising, displaying and communicating student outcome data for the school. The school has ensured that appropriate software is available and that at least these assigned staff have been trained to undertake data analyses. Time is set aside (eg, on pupil free days and in staff meetings) for the discussion of data and the implications of data for school policies and classroom practices. These discussions occur at whole-school and team levels. The school can illustrate through case studies, meeting minutes and project plans how data have been used to identify priorities, take action and monitor progress.</p>	<p>The principal and other school leaders clearly articulate their belief that reliable data on student outcomes are crucial to the school's improvement agenda. The school has established and is implementing a systematic plan for the collection, analysis and use of student achievement data. Test data in literacy, numeracy and science are key elements of this plan.</p> <p>Data are used throughout the school to identify gaps in student learning, to monitor improvement over time and to monitor growth across the years of school. A high priority has been given to professional development aimed at building teachers' and leaders' data literacy skills. Staff conversations and language reflect a sophisticated understanding of data concepts (eg, value-added; growth; improvement; statistical significance).</p> <p>Teachers are given test data (including NAPLAN) for their classes electronically and are provided with, and use, software (eg, Excel) to analyse, display and communicate data on individual and class performances and progress, including comparisons of pre- and post-test results. Teachers routinely use objective data on student achievement as evidence of successful teaching.</p>

## **Domain 2 findings**

- Staff discussions and perusal of school documents provided evidence of a focus on NAPLAN, VCE, the Renaissance Learning program, and PAT and School Improvement Survey data. The review team found that data had been discussed in a variety of contexts but a deep and systematic analysis of these data sources (with the exception of VCE) to inform college-wide and classroom practice was not yet evident.
- Penola Catholic College is yet to document a college plan and timetable for the collection and analysis of student achievement and wellbeing data.
- Staff reported that collaborative teams are trying to interpret available data but are impeded by the data systems currently available. The new ‘Data Dashboard’ is expected to provide improved data access for all staff.
- The review team found inconsistent college practice around analysing and using classroom data, including college report data, to inform classroom practice.
- Through discussions with leaders and teachers the review team identified a strong and universal need for further professional learning in data literacy.

### 3. A culture that promotes learning

The school is driven by a deep belief that every student is capable of successful learning. A high priority is given to building and maintaining positive and caring relationships between staff, students and parents. There is a strong collegial culture of mutual trust and support among teachers and school leaders and parents are treated as partners in the promotion of student learning and wellbeing. The school works to maintain a learning environment that is safe, respectful, tolerant, inclusive and that promotes intellectual rigour.

Low	Medium	High	Outstanding
<p>Behavioural problems, disengagement and non-attendance are issues for a significant proportion of students. In a number of classrooms students are clearly not engaged in productive learning activities.</p> <p>The school may have policies and agreed procedures relating to student behaviour, but these appear to have had little impact in practice. Much of the time of school leaders and teachers is taken up dealing with inappropriate behaviour. Interactions between parents, staff and students are not always productive and respectful. Staff tend not to value or engage parents as partners in student learning.</p> <p>Some teachers appear to work in isolation from colleagues. Staff morale is low and staff turnover is high.</p>	<p>Classrooms are generally orderly, although some are more so than others. Non-attendance is an issue for a small minority of students. However, many other students appear to be minimally engaged in productive learning activities.</p> <p>The school effectively implements its policies, for example, by ensuring that disruptive behaviour, bullying and harassment are dealt with promptly. The school has clear expectations for how students should behave and interact with one another, and in the main, relationships are caring and respectful. Some staff time is taken up dealing with behaviour problems.</p> <p>Most parents take an obvious interest in their children's learning. Engagement is primarily through regularly scheduled parent-teacher interviews.</p> <p>Staff morale is satisfactory.</p>	<p>The 'tone' of the school reflects a school-wide commitment to purposeful, successful learning. There are very few obvious behavioural, attendance or engagement problems and behaviour management takes up very little, if any, time of school leaders and classroom teachers.</p> <p>There is a strong focus on quality learning and on the creation of a culture in which all students are expected to learn successfully, in their own ways and at their own pace. Individual talents are valued. Class 'busy work' is kept to a minimum, and an attempt is made to ensure that all students are engaged in challenging, meaningful learning.</p> <p>Respectful and caring relationships are reflected in the ways in which staff, students and parents interact and in the language they use in both formal and informal settings.</p> <p>Parents and families are encouraged to take a genuine and close interest in the work of the school and are welcomed as partners in their children's learning.</p> <p>There are agreed guidelines on such matters as greeting visitors, taking messages, and responding to queries promptly and respectfully.</p> <p>Staff morale is generally high.</p>	<p>The school ethos is built around high expectations and a commitment to excellence. There is an expectation that every student will learn and achieve positive outcomes. Classrooms are calm but busy and interruptions to teaching time are kept to a minimum. There are no obvious behavioural problems, very high rates of school attendance and engagement, and staff morale is sustained at a high level. There is a happy, optimistic feel to the school.</p> <p>High levels of trust are apparent across the school community. Interactions are focused on the learning and wellbeing of students and on continually improving the school's ability to meet the needs of all students. Parents and families are valued as partners in student learning, and parents, school leaders and teachers work together in mutually supportive ways. There is a strong sense of belonging and pride in the school.</p> <p>A strong collegial culture has been established. Teachers have an overt and shared commitment to the improvement of teaching and an openness to critique by colleagues. This is reflected in the fact that teachers regularly invite leaders and colleagues to visit their classrooms to observe their teaching.</p>

### **Domain 3 findings**

- The Catholic identity of the college, and its Josephite charism, are clearly articulated by the principal and college leaders and were identified by teachers as providing the moral imperative that underpins their respect and concern for students, and their desire to offer students the best education possible.
- The college leadership team has developed and implemented policies and practices for student behaviour and attendance. The approach to managing behaviour at the college is underpinned by restorative justice practices. Teachers and students reported that behaviour can impact on the learning environment.
- The general atmosphere within the college, in classrooms and external spaces, was largely orderly and positive.
- In the School Improvement Surveys, the lowest levels of student satisfaction reported related to “stimulating learning” and “classroom behaviour”.
- Some staff reported that engaging students is a challenge.
- The deployment of MyPenola has provided parents with an opportunity to better understand their child’s learning program and performance. Parents expressed their appreciation for the way teachers are using MyPenola to enable them to engage with their child’s learning. Students expressed their appreciation of how MyPenola can support their learning through access to extra resources and teacher feedback.
- Staff reported workload issues relating to the change process and requested a clear staging of implementation in future planning. Staff have acknowledged that several workload issues have been addressed.

## 4. Targeted use of school resources

The school applies its resources (staff time, expertise, funds, facilities, materials) in a targeted manner to meet the learning and wellbeing needs of all students. It has school-wide policies, practices and programs in place to assist in identifying and addressing student needs. Flexible structures and processes enable the school to respond appropriately to the needs of individual learners.

Low	Medium	High	Outstanding
<p>The improvement of student outcomes does not appear to be the driving consideration in the allocation of school resources (eg, the use of discretionary school funds). There is very little, if any, systematic testing of students to identify individual learning needs. The school does not always make best use of available staff expertise. School leaders have developed very few, if any, school-wide policies or programs to address individual needs, which are left to classroom teachers. School learning spaces tend to be used traditionally, with limited flexibility to support different kinds of learners and learning.</p>	<p>The school uses its human and physical resources to address the needs of students, although this may not be preceded by a systematic analysis of those needs. Specialist diagnostic testing is organised for a small number of students with special needs, but teachers do not routinely administer tests to better understand specific learning difficulties (eg, problems in learning to read) or individual learning needs (eg, LBOTE, gifted). There are very few school-wide programs or policies designed to address the learning needs of particular student groups (eg, gifted students, students with disabilities, students for whom English is a second language). School leaders encourage teachers to address individual learning needs in classrooms, but there are very few agreed school-wide strategies for doing this. Physical learning spaces are used creatively, and technology is accessible to the majority of staff and students.</p>	<p>The principal and other school leaders have introduced programs and strategies to identify and address the needs of students in the school and are sourcing and applying available resources to meet those needs. The school has developed processes (eg, systematic testing and assessment) for identifying student learning needs, although there may not always be good school records of student achievement and progress. Programs to meet individual learning needs (eg, programs for gifted students, students with learning difficulties, students for whom English is a second language, Indigenous students, and refugees) are prioritised, where possible, in the school budget. Physical spaces and technology are used effectively to maximise student learning. Learning spaces are organised for whole group work, small group work and individual work.</p>	<p>The principal and other school leaders have given a very high priority to understanding and addressing the learning needs of all students in the school. This is reflected in the implementation of systematic strategies for identifying student needs and the development of creative school-wide solutions for addressing those needs. A school-wide process has been established for identifying specific student learning needs. This process includes systematic testing to establish learning gaps and special needs. School records of individual student needs, achievements and progress are maintained centrally and shared across year levels. A range of initiatives (eg, across-class and across-grade groupings for literacy and numeracy; the sharing of specialist teachers with neighbouring schools, if they exist) is being implemented to make more effective use of available resources to enhance teaching and learning. The school deploys staff in ways that make best use of their expertise (eg, specialist reading/science teachers).</p>

## **Domain 4 findings**

- The learning and wellbeing needs of students enrolling at Penola Catholic College are identified through transition into Year 7 discussions with feeder schools and the collection of data including NAPLAN and PAT.
- Students with an EAL/D background who have limited English are assessed and, as required, provided with extensive support through an intensive literacy support program. EAL/D classes are also available in every year level. Significant college resources have been prioritised to support the learning and wellbeing needs of these students.
- Ninety-six students have been identified for funded support and these students have personalised learning plans which outline the recommended support measures to be implemented. Learning enhancement teachers and learning support officers meet the needs of these students.
- Systematic testing (PAT) supports the identification of learners who may require additional support for their learning in literacy and numeracy in years 7 and 8. Referrals from teachers is the primary mechanism by which other learning needs of students are identified.
- Significant funds have been allocated to improve the learning environment of the college, with a number of buildings refurbished/built in this strategic planning cycle.
- While learning spaces tend to be used traditionally, some classroom environments support alternative learning approaches. Resources have been allocated to provide access to learning technologies for students and teachers. The reviewers observed variable use of technology and learning spaces to maximise learning.
- A ‘Jump start’ program supports selected Year 9 students to engage in schooling.
- A whole-of-college approach to the identification of, and response to, students with gifts and talents was not evident.

## 5. An expert teaching team

The school has found ways to build a school-wide, professional team of highly able teachers, including teachers who take an active leadership role beyond the classroom. Strong procedures are in place to encourage a school-wide, shared responsibility for student learning and success, and to encourage the development of a culture of continuous professional improvement that includes classroom-based learning, mentoring and coaching arrangements.

Low	Medium	High	Outstanding
<p>The development of a professional school-wide team does not appear to be a driving consideration of the principal or other school leaders (eg, no reference is made to the National Professional Standards for Teachers, there are no mentoring arrangements in place, teachers work largely in isolation from one another ‘behind closed doors’).</p> <p>There is little evidence that school leaders are proactive in the recruitment and retention of staff.</p> <p>There is little sense of a whole- school coordinated approach to professional learning and a low priority is given to enhancing staff performance.</p>	<p>The school undertakes professional learning activities, although these may not always focus on the development of knowledge and skills required to improve student learning and there may not be a coherent, documented learning plan.</p> <p>The principal and leadership team are seen as supportive of, but not generally involved in, the day-to-day practice and learning of teachers.</p> <p>Teachers are open to constructive feedback and provide feedback to colleagues, although there may not be formal mentoring or coaching arrangements in place.</p> <p>The school is implementing a formal process for conducting professional discussions with staff.</p> <p>The school’s professional learning agenda is made explicit to staff at induction, and in staff handbooks.</p> <p>Where it is necessary to manage unsatisfactory staff performance, this is done professionally and effectively, and in accordance with agreed guidelines.</p>	<p>There is evidence that the principal and other school leaders see the development of staff into an expert and coherent school-wide teaching team as central to improving outcomes for all students.</p> <p>There is a documented professional learning plan and the school has arrangements in place for mentoring and coaching. Teachers visit each other’s classrooms and welcome opportunities to have principals and other school leaders observe and discuss their work with them.</p> <p>Attention is paid to strengths and weaknesses in the school-wide team, with strategies in place to recruit staff with particular expertise, to train staff to address particular needs, and to support staff who find it difficult to commit to the school’s improvement agenda.</p> <p>The school provides opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles outside the classroom.</p>	<p>The teaching staff of the school are experts in the fields in which they teach and have very high levels of pedagogical knowledge and skill, including expert knowledge of evidence-based teaching strategies. Teachers and school leaders take personal and collective responsibility for improving student learning and wellbeing, working together and learning from each other’s practices. The sharing and showcasing of best practice are common. In team meetings there is an emphasis on the joint analysis of student work and on teaching strategies for improving student learning. Teachers collaboratively plan, deliver and review the effectiveness of lessons.</p> <p>School leaders place a very high priority on the ongoing professional learning of all staff and on the development of a school-wide, self-reflective culture focused on improving classroom teaching.</p> <p>School leaders participate in professional learning activities, learning alongside teachers, and the school supports teachers to continue formal study and celebrates professional success.</p>

## **Domain 5 findings**

- The strategic introduction of the Curiosity and Powerful Learning program (with its Theories of Action) and the literacy program are key vehicles through which the principal and leadership team have enacted their commitment to building the capacity of the teaching team at Penola Catholic College in order to improve student learning outcomes.
- The significant resources committed to the introduction of formalised coaching is building a self-reflective improvement culture in which there are multiple opportunities for leaders and peers to observe and provide feedback on teaching practices.
- The Annual Review Meeting (ARM) process is implemented and is being revised to enlist Heads of Learning in the process. They will undertake classroom observations of staff as part of the process.
- Planning and coaching teams meet to share and reflect on curriculum planning and practices.
- The college's comprehensive Position of Leadership (POL) structure is focussed on providing opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles that address student learning and teacher capacity. These include the literacy coaches, the Success Coordinator, the Student Enhancement Coordinator, and the Student Inclusion Coordinator, among others.
- An effective induction program provides new staff with access to all the policy documents and college processes that they require in order to understand the college's professional learning agenda and expectations of staff. A mentor is assigned to support new staff as they become familiar with college operations.



## 6. Systematic curriculum delivery

The school has a coherent, sequenced plan for curriculum delivery that ensures consistent teaching and learning expectations and a clear reference for monitoring learning across the year levels. The plan, within which evidence-based teaching practices are embedded, and to which assessment and reporting procedures are aligned, has been developed with reference to the Australian Curriculum or other approved curriculum and refined collaboratively to provide a shared vision for curriculum practice. This plan is shared with parents and families.

Low	Medium	High	Outstanding
<p>School leaders and teachers have limited familiarity with national or system-wide curriculum documents.</p> <p>The school may have a documented plan for curriculum delivery but there is little evidence that the whole-school plan drives the lesson plans of individual teachers.</p> <p>The enacted school curriculum is not seen as a central concern of all teachers (eg, it is not a regular topic of conversation, a focus for assessment design or a framework against which student learning is reported).</p>	<p>The school has a documented plan for curriculum delivery that includes year level and term plans, but the progression of learning from year to year is not always obvious and the relationship between the pieces of the plan (the year, term and unit plans) would benefit from further clarification.</p> <p>School leaders talk about embedding fundamental cross-curricular skills such as literacy, numeracy and higher order thinking within all subjects, but there is little evidence that school-wide strategies are in place to drive a consistent approach.</p> <p>Literacy tends to be seen as the responsibility of English teachers and numeracy, the responsibility of mathematics teachers.</p> <p>Discussions about curriculum delivery tend to be sporadic and reactive with a year level focus rather than being driven by a leadership team with a whole-school approach.</p>	<p>The school's curriculum delivery plan identifies curriculum, teaching and learning priorities and requirements. The curriculum delivery plan reflects a shared vision (by the school's governing body, principal, school leadership team, and teachers) for the school, and provides a context for delivering the curriculum as detailed in the Australian or other approved curriculum and, where relevant, system curriculum documents.</p> <p>The school curriculum plan and curriculum delivery (including the time allocated to particular learning) balance requirements to address all learning areas, to give priority to English, mathematics and science, and to embed the fundamental skills of literacy, numeracy and higher order thinking in all school subjects.</p> <p>The school leadership team ensures that the enacted curriculum remains a focus for discussion among, and collaboration between, teachers and that the curriculum plan is the reference against which flexible delivery is designed, assessment tasks are developed, and student learning is reported. Curriculum delivery is designed to meet the needs of the range of students within each year level as well as those with disabilities and other particular need.</p>	<p>The school has a clearly documented whole-school plan for curriculum delivery. This plan is aligned with the Australian or other approved curriculum and, where appropriate, system curriculum documents. The plan makes explicit what (and when) teachers should teach and students should learn. The curriculum delivery plan is being implemented throughout the school and is shared with parents and the wider community.</p> <p>A strong alignment has been achieved between the overall curriculum delivery plan, term and unit plans, classroom teaching and the regular assessment of student progress in relation to curriculum expectations. Considerable attention has been given to ensuring 'vertical' alignment of the curriculum so that there is continuity and progression of learning across the years of school, with teaching in each year building on to and extending learning in previous years. General capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities are understood, valued and used as active learning streams for all students. A high priority in curriculum planning is given to the progressive development of students' deep understandings of concepts, principles and big ideas within learning areas, as well as to the ongoing development of cross-curricular skills and attributes, including teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving, and the evaluation of information and evidence. The school places a priority on making the curriculum locally relevant and accessible to all students and values and builds on to students' existing knowledge and varying backgrounds.</p>

## **Domain 6 findings**

- Curriculum planning and documentation is underpinned by the college's Teaching and Learning Policy and is highly consistent. Curriculum templates guide teachers' planning and ensure alignment with the Victorian Curriculum and the renewed Religious Education Framework.
- Curriculum documents include a narrative that articulates the purpose of the unit, prior knowledge being built on, and expectations for learning, as well as challenges and opportunities that might present themselves and how teachers might address these. Staff rated 'Curriculum Processes' highly on the School Improvement Surveys.
- The learning program addresses all areas of the curriculum, giving priority to English, mathematics, religious education and science. While core skills in literacy are taught explicitly across curriculum areas, the review team found less evidence of a whole-of-college approach to numeracy and the development of higher order thinking skills.
- An extensive VCE, VET and VCAL program provides for the needs, learning styles and aspirations of students.
- Curriculum documents and student reports show alignment between curriculum delivery and the Victorian Curriculum, although there is variability in how the Capabilities and Cross Curriculum Priorities are taught, assessed and reported.
- The college has not yet developed a formal professional learning plan, but its Professional Learning Policy identifies learning opportunities for staff within the college and via external sources.
- Clear expectations and structures are in place for teachers to work collaboratively to develop and review the curriculum.

## 7. Differentiated learning and teaching

The school places a high priority on ensuring that, in their day-to-day teaching, classroom teachers identify and address the learning needs of individual students, including high-achieving students. Teachers are encouraged and supported to monitor closely the progress of individuals, identify learning difficulties and tailor classroom activities to levels of readiness and need.

Low	Medium	High	Outstanding
<p>School leaders do not place a high priority on teachers identifying and addressing individual learning needs, but are more focused on ensuring that all teachers are teaching the core year level curriculum.</p> <p>Little or no classroom use is made of assessment instruments to establish starting points for teaching. Assessments tend to be used only to establish summatively how much of the taught content students have learnt.</p> <p>Teachers tend to teach to the middle of the class, with the expectation that some students will not master the content, and finding ways to occupy more able students who finish work early.</p> <p>Reports to parents tend to be summative reports of how students have performed, with little guidance on what parents might do to assist in their children's learning.</p>	<p>School leaders are committed to success for all, but do not drive a strong classroom agenda to assess and identify individual learning needs or to differentiate teaching according to students' needs.</p> <p>Some use is made of assessment instruments to identify individual strengths and weaknesses and starting points for teaching, but this appears to be at the initiative of individual teachers rather than a school-wide expectation.</p> <p>Some use is made of differentiated teaching (eg, differentiated reading groups in the early primary years), but in most classes teachers teach the same curriculum to all students with similar levels of individual support.</p> <p>Regular assessments of student learning are undertaken, but these often are summative and disconnected (eg, relating to different topics) rather than exploring long-term progress in students' knowledge, skills and understandings over time.</p> <p>Reports to parents generally do not show progress or provide guidance to parents on actions they might take.</p>	<p>School leaders explicitly encourage teachers to tailor their teaching to student needs and readiness. This includes the systematic use of assessment instruments (standardised assessment tasks and teacher developed assessment tools) to establish where individuals are in their learning and to identify skill gaps and misunderstandings. Teachers also are encouraged to respond to differences in cultural knowledge and experiences and to cater for individual differences by offering multiple means of representation, engagement and expression.</p> <p>Planning shows how the different needs of students are addressed, and how multiple opportunities to learn are provided, including multiple pathways for transition to external studies (eg, apprenticeships) for students in Years 10-12. Students' workbooks also illustrate differentiated tasks and feedback.</p> <p>Reports to parents show progress over time and include suggestions for ways in which parents can support their children's learning.</p>	<p>The school leadership team actively promotes the use of differentiated teaching as a strategy for ensuring that every student is engaged and learning successfully. It is recognised throughout the school that some students require significant adjustments to their learning programs (eg, accelerated programs, special support) if they are to be optimally engaged and challenged, and individual learning plans have been developed for those students requiring them. Differentiation is a priority of the school and a feature of every teacher's practice.</p> <p>Regular data on the achievements, progress, strengths and weaknesses of individual students are used in all classrooms to make judgements about individual needs, to identify appropriate starting points for teaching and to personalise teaching and learning activities.</p> <p>Reports to parents and carers include details of how learning opportunities have been tailored to individual needs and of the progress individuals have made.</p>

## **Domain 7 findings**

- The Accelerated Learning Program provides opportunities for high performing students in years 10-12.
- Teachers reported that providing high quality differentiated learning experiences for the range of students is challenging. There is limited evidence that teachers are routinely using data sets to intentionally plan, and document, differentiated learning experiences.
- Classes in English and mathematics have been structured in a way that provides opportunities for students who are capable of extension, and support for those requiring additional assistance.
- Expectations for differentiated practice are articulated in the college's Teaching and Learning Policy.
- There is evidence that teachers are endeavouring to make the appropriate adjustments for students with Individual Learning Plans. The learning enhancement/student inclusion teams are supporting teachers to pinpoint where students are in their learning and make appropriate adjustments to their teaching programs and assessment.
- The Renaissance Learning reading program is supporting the literacy needs of all students in Year 7 and Year 8. Data are collected at regular intervals to monitor progress, provide feedback and tailor a reading program for each student.
- The MyPenola online platform provides opportunities for continuous feedback and reporting to parents and students about their progress.
- The review team noted that the reporting processes do not yet provide advice to parents in how they can support their child's learning.

## 8. Effective pedagogical practices

The school principal and other school leaders recognise that highly effective teaching is the key to improving student learning throughout the school. They take a strong leadership role, encouraging the use of research-based teaching practices in all classrooms to ensure that every student is engaged, challenged and learning successfully. All teachers understand and use effective teaching methods—including explicit instruction—to maximise student learning.

Low	Medium	High	Outstanding
<p>School leaders do not appear to have strong views on the characteristics of highly effective teaching. There is little evidence that they are driving an agenda to change or enhance teaching practices across the school.</p> <p>The principal and other school leaders spend very little time on issues related to teaching. Questions of pedagogy appear to be viewed solely as the responsibility of teachers. There is little obvious school-wide discussion or consideration of highly effective teaching methods.</p> <p>There may be a lack of explicitness about what students are expected to know and be able to do as a result of classroom activities, very little explicit teaching, limited attention to individual learning needs, or low expectations on the part of teachers that all students in the room will master the content of lessons. Classroom activities frequently have the appearance of ‘busy work’.</p>	<p>School leaders are explicit about their desire to see effective teaching occurring throughout the school, but are less clear about what this might look like. They do not appear to be driving a strong agenda to improve and/or enhance teaching practices across the school, except perhaps indirectly through a focus on school results and targets. School leaders take a close interest in the school’s literacy and numeracy results, but generally do not engage in discussions with staff about effective teaching strategies.</p> <p>Discussions of specific teaching practices are rare and generally occur only in the context of concerns about a teacher’s performance.</p> <p>There is some clarity about what students are expected to learn, but a lack of balance in teaching methods (eg, over-reliance on whole-group teaching or very little explicit teaching).</p>	<p>School leaders are committed to continuous improvement in teaching practices throughout the school and expect team leaders and teachers to identify ways of doing this, although the principal and other senior leaders may not themselves have clear positions on the kinds of teaching they wish to see occurring across the school or be ‘hands on’ in driving improved teaching practices.</p> <p>There is a particular focus on improved teaching methods in reading, writing, mathematics and science, and professional learning activities are focused on building teachers’ understandings of highly effective teaching strategies in these areas.</p> <p>Clarity about what students are expected to learn and be able to do, high expectations of every student’s learning, explicit teaching of skills and content, individualised attention as required, and timely feedback to guide student action are key elements of the school’s push for improved teaching and learning.</p>	<p>The principal and other school leaders have accepted personal responsibility for driving improvements in teaching throughout the school. They demonstrate a strong conviction that improved teaching is the key to improved student learning and have clear and well-known positions on the kinds of teaching that they wish to see occurring.</p> <p>All teachers and leaders are committed to identifying, understanding and implementing better teaching methods, and a high priority is given to evidence-based teaching strategies (strategies that have been demonstrated through research and practice to be highly effective.)</p> <p>School leaders spend time working with teachers to improve their teaching practices, including modelling, evaluating and providing feedback on classroom teaching.</p>

## **Domain 8 findings**

- The college leadership team has identified and is implementing a pedagogical framework (the Curiosity and Powerful Learning program). Teachers have been supported with professional learning to implement the ‘theories of action’. The framework is in the early stages of implementation.
- There has been a sustained and intense focus on the teaching of literacy across the curriculum. Literacy coaches spend time working with teachers modelling effective teaching strategies and providing feedback.
- The review team observed Learning Intentions and Success Criteria in classrooms. Clear alignment between the stated learning intention and the curriculum was not always obvious. Students articulated that, in the main, there is some clarity about what they are learning in classes.
- Students reported that the feedback they receive from their teachers is variable in terms of detail and how well it guides their learning. A common approach to the development of rubrics is supporting a more consistent approach.
- Through the college’s involvement in the multi-modal project in partnership with the Australian Catholic University and Deakin University, there is a focus on the teaching of literacy in science.
- Reviewers observed whole group teaching occurring in many classes.

## 9. School-community partnerships

The school actively seeks ways to enhance student learning and wellbeing by partnering with parents and families, other education and training institutions, local businesses and community organisations. Parents and families are recognised as integral members of the school community and partners in their children’s education. Partnerships are strategically established to address identified student needs and operate by providing access to experiences, support and intellectual and/or physical resources not available within the school. All partners are committed to the common purposes and goals of partnership activities. Procedures are in place to ensure effective communications and to monitor and evaluate the intended impacts of the school’s partnerships.

Low	Medium	High	Outstanding
<p>There is no evidence of planned, deliberate partnerships with other institutions or organisations. Contacts with families, other education and training institutions, local businesses and community organisations, when they occur, are limited to isolated events. Although references may be made to ‘partnerships’, these partnerships are not based on collaboratively planned programs of activities with clear goals, roles and responsibilities.</p>	<p>The school has external ‘partnerships’, but rather than being built around a coherent, jointly planned program of activities to improve outcomes for students, these ‘partnerships’ tend to be mutually convenient arrangements (eg, exchanges of expertise or the sharing of facilities between institutions or organisations). Such ‘partnerships’ often are established by individual members of staff and have limited whole-school support or engagement.</p> <p>The student needs that partnerships are designed to address may not be made explicit and, rather than being carefully planned, individual partnerships tend to be opportunistic in nature. Communications between partners are largely unplanned and infrequent.</p> <p>No plans exist to systematically review the effectiveness of partnerships, which typically are very dependent on the efforts of a small number of individuals and so have limited sustainability.</p>	<p>The school has established one or more partnerships with families, local businesses and/or community organisations with the express purpose of improving outcomes for students. Partnerships have generally been initiated by the senior leadership team and have their support.</p> <p>Each partnership brings staff and students of the school together with external partners such as families, other education or training institutions, local businesses and/or community organisations. All partners have a high level of understanding of, and commitment to, the purposes of the partnership and clear objectives have been set, expressed in terms of improved outcomes for students.</p> <p>Attention has been given to communication and to the sharing of experiences within the partnership; however, there may be no formal plan for reviewing the partnership’s outcomes and effectiveness.</p> <p>There is evidence that the school’s partnerships are being implemented as intended. However, there may be limited evidence of improved student outcomes as a result of partnership activities – possibly because there has been insufficient time for them to demonstrate an effect.</p>	<p>The school leadership team makes deliberate and strategic use of partnerships with families, local businesses and community organisations to access intellectual, physical and/or other resources not available within the school for the purposes of improving student outcomes. There is a range of currently operating partnerships, each carefully planned and designed to enhance student outcomes (for example, to broaden student knowledge, build new skills, develop more positive attitudes, increase engagement levels, create applied learning opportunities for students, or facilitate successful transitions to work or further education or training).</p> <p>Each partnership has been established in response to an identified need. Considerable effort has been put into understanding students’ needs, identifying appropriate partners to address those needs, planning the details of partnership programs and clarifying partner roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>Careful consideration has been given to the benefits of the partnership to each participating partner. Explicit processes are in place to ensure ongoing and effective communication – sometimes across networks of partners – and there are documented plans for monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of each partnership. The school’s partnerships are being successfully implemented and appear to be adequately resourced and sustainable. There is clear evidence that partnerships are having their intended impact.</p>



## **Domain 9 findings**

- The review team found that Penola Catholic College has created many high-level partnerships to support student learning. Some partnerships have specified student outcomes and a timeline for review, others are more loosely constructed but still have student learning as a focus.
- Through the Broadmeadows School Network, partnership leaders are working together in the implementation of the Curiosity and Powerful Learning Framework in their schools.
- The University of Melbourne Network of Schools provides Penola Catholic College with access to researchers and the opportunity to work with other schools in identifying and implementing high yield strategies.
- Australian Catholic University and Deakin University partner with Penola Catholic College in a project that focusses on multimodal literacy learning in senior school science.
- The college partners with feeder primary schools to support student transition.
- The Latrobe University Equity Access and Pathways partnership aims to raise student aspirations and increase the number of students opting for a university education.
- University of Melbourne partners with the college to enable Year 12 student learning of Italian on campus.
- ACU and CTEC partnership aims to increase the number of preservice teachers choosing the Broadmeadows area as a preferred area for employment.
- The college accesses a broad range of agencies and organisations to support the spiritual and wellbeing needs of students and their families.



## Commendations:

- At Penola Catholic College the Catholic faith and its Josephite charism is lived and embedded in all activities.
- The leadership team has developed, and is driving, a strong improvement agenda in literacy across the curriculum that is underpinned by research and focussed on improving student outcomes. All teachers have readily embraced the initiative and are making significant changes to their classroom practice.
- The college has sustained commendable growth in student achievement in NAPLAN (writing) as a result of a focussed effort on whole-of-college literacy.
- The college is commended for its initiative in establishing and resourcing an intensive literacy and wellbeing program for students who are new arrivals in Australia and who have limited English. In doing so, the college has re-engaged a number of older students who were previously not attending school because of this language barrier.
- The strategic appointment of a Literacy Leader and three literacy coaches has successfully enabled the college to embed desired literacy strategies and pedagogical practices through a program involving a large number of classroom visits, coaching conversations and professional learning presentations.
- The college has developed significant partnerships to support student learning. This reflects an eagerness to learn from research evidence and international experience, and from other schools that have achieved significant improvements.
- The Student Services team has an extensive wrap around service that meets the needs of all students.

## Affirmations:

- The implementation of the Curiosity and Powerful Learning Framework has resulted in a whole-of-college focus on the effective pedagogical practices expected in all classrooms. Although in the early stages of implementation, more consistent practice is already evident in classrooms in the ‘theories of actions’ that have been introduced. A sustained focus on further elements of the framework in the next planning cycle will continue to support more consistent approaches in the use of research-based teaching practices in all classrooms.
- The leadership team in initiating a new data system and then working to improve the analysis of student achievement data.
- The curriculum templates and planning processes developed to support teachers’ planning, have enabled a high level of consistency in curriculum planning and delivery.
- The significant investment of resources to improve/maintain the grounds and facilities has resulted in more flexible learning spaces and an aesthetically pleasing college environment.
- The leadership team is applying resources in a targeted manner to support strategic priorities. Of particular note is the significant investment in human resources to implement a whole-of-college approach to literacy across the curriculum.
- There has been significant progress in developing a culture of openness to feedback among teachers through classroom observations and peer-to-peer feedback. A planned process for more regularly receiving and responding to student feedback will allow new insights into the efficacy of teaching practices that support the learning of all students.
- The priority given to staff meeting in planning and coaching teams (PCTs) is building strong collaboration among teachers focussed on building teacher capacity and consistency of teaching practices. Further development of the PCTs will support staff to take personal and collective responsibility for achieving the college’s commitment to improving student learning and wellbeing outcomes.
- The use of the MyPenola platform for continuous reporting is providing timely and detailed feedback to students and their families about academic progress.

## Recommendations:

- With regard to the development of the Penola Catholic College *School Improvement Plan 2018-2021*, it is recommended that the current strategic agenda is enhanced by incorporating more explicit targets for student achievement that are effectively communicated to the college community. The plan should clearly articulate the strategies for improvement in a timeline that acknowledges capacity for change. Progress towards targets should be monitored and initiatives and programs systematically evaluated for their effectiveness in producing the desired improvements in student learning and performance.
- It is recommended that the leadership team develops and documents a data plan that will guide college-wide analysis and discussion of systemically collected data on student outcomes including academic, attendance and behavioural outcomes, and student wellbeing. The plan should ensure that teachers and leaders are supported in building their capacity to analyse and use data.
- It is recommended that the staff build a common understanding of differentiated practice across the college. Teachers should be supported to tailor their teaching to student needs and readiness by strengthening their capacity to use a range of data sets to establish where individuals are in their learning and identify gaps and misunderstandings. There should be a college-wide process for identifying students with gifts and talents, so that high achieving students, in particular, are appropriately engaged, challenged and extended in all classes.
- Leaders and teachers should continue to develop and refine the whole-of-college curriculum plan with a particular focus on the progressive development of students' deep understanding of concepts, principles and big ideas within learning areas. The process should ensure that the general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities are explicitly taught and assessed. The college should review guides to making judgements to ensure a strong alignment between these and the Achievement Standards of the Victorian Curriculum.
- Leaders and teachers should continue to implement the college's pedagogical framework to ensure the consistent use of contemporary evidenced-based teaching practice to maximise student engagement.

## Further details

Information about the ACER Committed to Excellence (c2e) program and the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) is available at: <http://www.acer.edu.au/nsit>