



SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK



Diocese of Ballarat Catholic Education Limited School Improvement Framework

Characteristics of a Highly Effective Catholic School

2018



PREAMBLE

CHARACTERISTICS OF A HIGHLY EFFECTIVE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

The Characteristics of a Highly Effective Catholic School (CHECS) is the core school improvement document for all Catholic Schools in the Dioceses of Ballarat.

To improve student learning outcomes and develop coherence in school improvement practice there are a number of essential elements that need to be present. The CHECS document articulates these elements as the “Five Key Aspects of Catholic Schooling”;

- Catholic School Culture
- Community Engagement
- Leadership and Stewardship
- Learning and Teaching
- Wellbeing

Each of these aspects are then further defined through the “Components” for each of the Aspects, which bring a deeper meaning and understanding to each of the Aspects.

CHECS outlines the essential elements that underpin the practices that highly effective Catholic schools engage in to bring about school improvement and ultimately improved student learning outcomes. Whilst the Five Key Aspects are independently listed, they are intrinsically inter-dependent and schools will strive to dynamically interact across all of the key aspects if they are to achieve highly effective practices.

CHECS AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

CHECS provides a core point of reference for all school improvement activity and is central to the school improvement process. It serves to;

- Support schools in determining explicit, intentional and precise improvement planning decisions in relation to the School Improvement Plan, Annual Action Plans and Professional Learning Plans.
- Provide the core reflective tool for informing School Improvement Plans and Annual Action Plans
- Develop understanding as to what highly effective practices look like.
- Build a common language describing practices that highly effective Catholic schools engage in for school improvement.
- Act as a resource for collaborative conversations between leadership teams and teachers in the planning of school improvement and teaching practice.
- Build coherence in and across schools and system as they partner in school improvement.

THE CHECS SURVEY

As a component of the Ballarat Diocese “School Improvement Framework”, an online CHECS survey has been developed. The CHECS survey is an online tool that schools use to;

- Identify areas of strength and areas requiring improvement.
- Review the components of the Five Key Aspects and determine areas requiring further attention to inform future Annual Action Plans.
- Conduct a school self-assessment for the current year to determine if Annual Action Plans have been effective in embedding highly effective practices
- Engage leadership Teams and staff in conversations about improving professional practice.

USING CHECS

CHECS is designed to be used in a number of ways. Ideally schools would engage the document on a regular basis. Whilst it is the core document for setting the School Improvement Plan (every five years) it is also used on a yearly basis when working through the reflective phase of Annual Action Plans and informing the next Annual Action Plan. Leadership Teams and staff should engage with the CHECS document on a regular basis to build clarity of language and ultimately coherence within the school.

The CHECS document may also be used to inform leadership and staff Professional Learning Plans.

EVIDENCE BASE FOR THE CHECS DOCUMENT

ACER (2012) *“National School Improvement Tool”*

Ontario Ministry of Education (2013) *“School Effectiveness Framework”*

Catholic Education Office Sydney (2013) *“School Review and Improvement Framework”*

Catholic Education Office Sydney (2013) *“How Effective is your Catholic School?”*

Catholic Education Office Melbourne (2015) *“Performance and Development in Catholic Schools”*

Jensen, B. (2014) *“Turning Around Schools: It Can Be Done”* Grattan Institute

Department of Education and Training Victoria (2017) *“FISO Continua of Practice for School Improvement”*

Brisbane Catholic Education Office (2014) *“Delivering Excellent Learning and Teaching 2014 – 2016 Strategy”*

Educational Development and Review Pty Ltd (2007) *“Characteristics of High Performing Schools Which Consistently Improve (Drawing on the research of Zbar, Marshal & Kimber, Hattie, Fullan)”*

Characteristics of a Highly Effective Catholic School

Catholic School Vision and Mission

<i>Aspects</i>	<i>Components</i>
1. Catholic School Culture	<i>1.1 Religious Education</i> <i>1.2 Enhancing Catholic School Identity</i> <i>1.3 Social Action and Justice</i>
2. Community Engagement	<i>2.1 Partnering with Families</i> <i>2.2 Community Partnerships</i>
3. Leadership and Stewardship	<i>3.1 Shared Leadership</i> <i>3.2 Building Staff Capability</i> <i>3.3 A Culture of Continuous Improvement</i> <i>3.4 Stewardship Of Resources</i>
4. Learning and Teaching	<i>4.1 A Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum</i> <i>4.2 Effective Teaching</i> <i>4.3 Engaging Students In Their Own Learning</i> <i>4.4 Analysis and Use of Data</i> <i>4.5 Coordinated Strategies for Intervention</i>
5. Wellbeing	<i>5.1 Quality Relationships</i> <i>5.2 Wellbeing Practice</i> <i>5.3 Safe Learning Environment</i>

Characteristics of a Highly Effective Catholic School

Vision and Mission

The Vision and Mission of the school expresses its Catholic orientation in the midst of diversity across all aspects of life. The school shares in the mission of the Catholic Church and its Vision and Mission expresses this relationship. Similarly, the inspirational nature of the Vision and Mission informs and invites all members of the school community into relationship in the life-giving work of the school. In partnership, we learn from each other and flourish together. The Vision and Mission Statements are developed through dialogue that is representative of the school community.

Some of the observable practices that indicate high performance in this component:

- The school has clearly articulated Vision and Mission Statements that are accessible to everyone.
- The school's Vision and Mission Statements clearly reflect Scripture and capture the spirit of the Diocesan Vision.
- Faithful to dialogue, the school's Vision and Mission Statements are visually presented in key areas of the school and school publications.
- Opportunities are provided for the school community to regularly engage with its Vision and Mission so as to develop a strong awareness of its underpinning of the life of the school.
- The school honours the charism of its congregational heritage and its part in the Catholic tradition, and may be expressed in the Vision and Mission.
- The school Vision and Mission Statements are regularly reviewed.

1. Catholic School Culture

The Catholic school participates in the evangelizing mission of the Church and is the privileged environment in which Christian education is carried out.¹ All members of the Catholic school community are encouraged to develop their talents, in a culture of cooperation and solidarity. There is a commitment to promote the common good and work for justice and peace, within both the human and ecological family that constitutes all creation. Pursuit of the common good and active responses to the marginalised are foundational expressions of Christian spirituality.

Catholic schools participate in rich prayer and liturgical experiences that name and celebrate our faith and tradition. A well-developed and rigorous Religious Education program nourishes and acknowledges the heritage and context of each school.

1.1 Religious Education

Recognising the diversity our students, the influence of the Catholic tradition in helping them to work towards fullness of life will look different for each one. Through Catholic dialogue, together with learning opportunities that promote creative and critical thinking, wisdom and ongoing reflective practices, both spiritual and educational. Religious education engages the learner in all their diversity. The teaching of Religious Education utilizes Shared Christian Praxis (critically adapted and used hermeneutically) as the pedagogical approach aligned to the Awakenings Religious Education F-12 Curriculum.

Some of the observable practices that indicate high performance in this component:

- Dialogue with the Catholic tradition is encouraged in all learning and teaching opportunities.
- Post-Critical Belief is a defining feature of the learning experiences planned and taught throughout the school in Religious Education.
- Regular assessment opportunities that recognise both the cognitive and affective domains of learning inform learning and teaching.
- Students are given opportunities to reflect on their learning and identify directions for future learning.
- Teachers, faithful to their work in the Catholic school, are striving for expertise in theological knowledge and understanding of the Catholic tradition, as well as other religious traditions and world views.
- Teachers, recognising the diversity of their students, develop the skills to mediate for dialogue with the Catholic tradition.
- Teachers of Religious Education are suitably accredited.

¹ Congregation for Catholic Education (1997) *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium No. 11*

1.2 Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI)

Each Catholic school has an identity that gives expression to the Catholic tradition. The school accepts the challenge to enhance their Catholic identity, in dialogue, into the future. This Catholic Dialogue School model works from a stance of Post Critical Belief² and recontextualises the Catholic faith tradition for these times and into the future.

Some of the observable practices that indicate high performance in this component:

- The promotion of a Post-Critical Belief style is a defining feature of the learning and teaching experiences.
- The school exemplifies a commitment to recontextualising the Catholic faith tradition in the local context.
- While the Catholic tradition is core, all students are given opportunities through dialogue with the Catholic tradition to engage in learning experiences that recognise the riches of other faiths, beliefs and worldviews.
- In the diversity of the school community, all are invited to experience recontextualised prayer and liturgy which is reflective of a dialogical stance.
- Professional development opportunities are aligned to the Diocesan normative stance³ and respond to the needs of the school as reflected in the school's ECSI data.
- The school makes use of imagery, iconography, artwork and building design to enhance a recontextualised understanding of the faith tradition.

1.3 Social Action and Justice

Catholic school communities respond to an invitation to engage in the mission of the Church in the world. This engagement is reflected in living a life informed by the Gospel, and is reflected in teaching for, and witnessing to, justice, peace and ecological conversion.

Some of the observable practices that indicate high performance in this component:

- All relationships within the school community are based on the principle of the dignity of the human person made in the image of God, and all members are consistently challenged to respect and celebrate diversity.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage are acknowledged in a true spirit of dialogue and reconciliation.
- Recognising our preferential option for the poor and the vulnerable, Catholic Social Teaching is embedded and evident in policies, procedures and communications with the school community.
- Catholic Social Teaching is embedded and evident in the teaching and learning experiences across the school's curriculum, extending to and including stewardship of God's creation.
- All students are able to participate in projects and initiatives for justice within the school.
- Catholic Social Teaching, embedded in all school-based initiatives for justice, is made explicit.

² Didier Pollefeyt & Jan Bouwens (2014) Identity in Dialogue: Assessing and Enhancing Catholic School Identity. Research Methodology and Research Results in Catholic schools in Victoria, Australia. Zurich: LIT Verlag

³ Post Critical Belief Recontextualising Dialogue School

2. Community Engagement

This aspect of schooling recognises that strong partnerships between a school, its parents, caregivers, parish, diocese and wider community enhances student learning and helps cultivate a holistic learning environment. Parents, caregivers and families are recognised as integral members of the school community. The Catholic school invites and welcomes all to play a role in collaborating and engaging in dialogue with families, parish, other schools and the wider community to enhance the aspirations and outcomes for all students and families. Family and community engagement is acknowledged and valued. This engagement affirms the value of education for students. Partnerships promote greater community contribution, ownership and trust of school directions and decisions through open and authentic consultation.

2.1 Partnering with Families

The school actively seeks ways to enhance student learning and wellbeing by partnering with families.

Some of the observable practices that indicate high performance in this component:

- The school promotes, invites and prioritises effective and sustainable home/school partnerships for mutual benefit through allocating time, resources, facilities, professional learning and capacity building.
- There are open and effective communication strategies, policies and practices on student learning which values parental and caregiver engagement, builds respectful relationships and seeks to remove barriers to engagement in student learning.
- The school builds the capacity of staff and families to work collaboratively for school improvement and improved student learning.
- The school has extensive knowledge of students and their families including aspirations, needs and support requirements.
- The school systematically plans for the collection, analysis and use of data (feedback) to monitor and improve family engagement.
- Evidence of student learning is visible throughout the school community.
- The school has arrangements in place for communicating student learning and growth to parents and caregivers.

2.2 Community Partnerships

The school actively seeks partnerships within the parish and wider community to enhance student learning and wellbeing.

Some of the observable practices that indicate high performance in this component:

- Partnerships are established to address identified student needs that offer access to experiences and support resources not available within the school, including partnerships with the parish, other education and training institutions, local businesses and community organisations.
- The school builds partnerships with local businesses and community organisations to improve opportunities and learning outcomes for students.
- Partnership agreements are developed with clear understanding regarding purpose, roles and expectations and ongoing monitoring and communication.
- Partnerships are adequately resourced.
- The school systematically plans for the collection, analysis and use of data to ensure partnerships have their intended impact and mutual benefit.
- A School Advisory Council/Board meets on a regular basis, operates effectively and cooperates in the work of governance.

3. Leadership and Stewardship

Leadership in a Catholic school is a significant ministry in the mission of the Catholic Church. The school cooperates with the Governing Authority to ensure the leadership and stewardship policies and strategies are aligned to school improvement and support sound management and effective governance of the school. The school and its governing authority ensure that governance responsibilities and accountabilities are clearly defined, distributed, managed and monitored across the school. It facilitates a positive climate amongst staff and community and promotes a clear sense of purpose and direction. Resources are effectively utilised to improve student learning outcomes and teacher development. Procedures are implemented which meet the accountability requirements of the System and Federal and State Governments.

3.1 Shared Leadership

Leaders collaborate with staff to deliver high quality outcomes for all students. Leaders work in teams that provide effective leadership and promote collective responsibility for student outcomes. The school's leadership is supportive of staff members in their role and leadership aspirations. There is a clear focus on the understanding that leadership is a shared responsibility of all staff.

Some of the observable practices that indicate high performance in this component:

- Leadership actions are based on research and are aligned to the school's vision
- Staff and school leaders take personal and collective responsibility for improving student learning and wellbeing
- All leaders participate in new learning, investigations and problem solving with others
- Relationships between leaders and staff are positive.
- Leaders respectfully challenge and build the capability of all staff
- The school has clear processes to identify and develop leaders with clearly designated roles and responsibilities to support these processes
- Leadership actively supports innovation and intelligent risk taking by all staff
- The School works collaboratively with the Diocesan Education Community to build leadership capabilities across the diocese.
- There are sound recruitment, induction and performance management processes in place
- All school leaders cooperate in the work of governance

3.2 Building Staff Capability

The school has a clear strategy to build a professional team of highly skilled staff who take active leadership roles across the school. Effective 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 and a continuous and planned cycle of teacher observation and feedback.

Some of the observable practices that indicate high performance in this component:

- The principal and other school leaders collaborate with staff to build a performance and development culture.
- School leaders ensure that opportunities are created for teachers to work collaboratively and to observe and learn from each other's practices.
- All staff have a comprehensive *Professional Learning Plan* (PLP) which is linked to the vision and strategic direction of the school and is carefully monitored by the school leadership.
- School leaders ensure staff engage in professional learning that is informed by research-based best practice.
- All staff network with other schools, system and professional organisations to lead and share learning on school improvement.
- The school has in place practices that engage staff in coaching and/or mentoring.

3.3 A Culture of Continuous Improvement

The School has established a strong improvement agenda, grounded in evidence from research and practice and expressed in terms of improvements in measurable student outcomes. The school uses its data to set explicit and clear school-wide targets for improvement across the five Key Aspects of Catholic Schooling have been set and communicated to parents and families, teachers and students.

(Ref NSIT 2012, p2)

Some of the observable practices that indicate high performance in this component:

- The school leadership team and governing body have established and are driving a strong improvement agenda for the school.
- The school has set explicit targets for improvement in student learning and communicated these to parents, staff and the wider school community.
- School staff are united in their commitment to improve the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school and to address obstacles to school wide improvement.
- The school has a clearly articulated School Improvement Plan and Annual Action Plans.
- Improvement targets are set, progress is regularly monitored and initiatives and programs are systematically evaluated for their effectiveness in producing desired improvements in student learning and performance.
- The school actively engages with the Diocesan Education Community in the work of system improvement.

3.4 Stewardship of Resources

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

Some of the observable practices that indicate high performance in this component:

- The school ensures its human, physical and financial resources are flexibly deployed to best meet the needs of all students through engaging in strategic planning for school improvement that is informed by data, a School Improvement Plan and an Annual Action Plan.
- The school ensures policies and processes are in place to provide equitable access to education for all students, especially the poor and marginalised.
- The school deploys staff in ways that makes best use of their expertise to improve learning outcomes.
- The school employs sound financial management and accountability practices.
- The school has developed a Facilities Master Plan that is aligned to the school's educational vision.
- The school has processes and policies that demonstrate system and legislative compliance and accountability such as a safe work and learning environment.

4. Learning and Teaching

A school is a community of learners. It ensures that staff and students participate in high quality, planned contemporary learning, marked by the distinctive nature of Catholic faith and tradition. Teachers actively engage in professional learning that draws upon and builds understandings of a viable curriculum for all students. Theoretical perspectives underpinning effective teaching and learning practices are evident. Evaluative practices ensure a constant cycle of reflection and action that leads to improvement in all aspects of learning and teaching.

4.1 A Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

The school has a clearly documented, coherent and sequenced curriculum plan, inspired by the school's vision. This plan ensures consistent research based learning, teaching and assessment practices that are aligned with the mandated curriculum.

Some of the observable practices that indicate high performance in this component:

- Teachers have developed an agreed curriculum that is current, documented, relevant, needs based and rigorous.
- Classroom teaching plans indicate clear expectations and specific targets that are aligned to school-wide targets, curriculum documents and student needs.
- The curriculum ensures there is continuity and progression across all years of schooling.
- There is a strong alignment between the overall curriculum plan, term and unit plans, classroom teaching practices and the regular formative and summative assessment of student progress in relation to curriculum standards.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and heritage are recognised and included in the school Curriculum.
- The school prioritises and plans to ensure curriculum that is relevant to all students.
- The Victorian Curriculum Capabilities are embedded across all key learning areas.
- Curriculum is differentiated according to the learning needs of all students and allows for alternative educational pathways.

4.2 Effective Teaching

The school is driven by a deep belief that every student is capable of being successful as a learner. The school has in place agreed and effective pedagogical practices that lead to high quality teaching across the school. All staff recognise that highly effective teaching is the key to improving student learning throughout the school.

Some of the observable practices that indicate high performance in this component:

- Teachers set clear and rigorous expectations for all learners.
- Teachers know their students and what they know, how they learn, what they need to learn next and what teaching will support that learning.
- There is a clear statement of the school's agreed pedagogies.
- Teachers use school-wide, research-based pedagogical practices to ensure that every student is engaged, challenged and learning successfully.
- Students are provided with a range of learning experiences that are purposeful and interrelated.
- Teachers effectively use explicit instruction to maximise student learning.
- The school promotes a culture of inquiry and innovation, where creative exploration and independent learning are evident.
- Teachers engage in classroom observations, team teaching, coaching partnerships and constructive feedback processes for professional growth in teaching practice.
- Teams work collaboratively and interdependently to achieve common goals for which members are held mutually accountable.

4.3 Engaging Students in their Own Learning

Students are actively engaged in their learning by participating in goal setting, evaluation, reflection and feedback on their learning.

Some of the observable practices that indicate high performance in this component:

- Students are able to articulate the value and purpose of learning.
- Explicit learning intentions and success criteria are developed to give students a clear understanding of the purpose and outcome of the learning.
- Students regularly identify their prior learning and set learning goals.
- Students use rubrics and other strategies to assess and monitor their own learning.
- Students receive explicit feedback from their teachers in a timely manner.
- Students provide supportive and useful feedback to their teachers and peers.
- Students have opportunities to share their learning with their teacher(s) and parents and caregivers.

4.4 Analysis and Use of Data

Assessment practices reflect assessment for, as and of learning. A high priority is given to the school-wide analysis and response to systematically collected data on student outcomes, including academic, behavioural, Catholic identity and student wellbeing.

Some of the observable practices that indicate high performance in this component:

- Student achievement data is used at all levels to identify and monitor student achievement and to map individual student and whole school learning trends to inform whole school annual action plans.
- Through data analysis, appropriate starting points for learning for each student are identified in order to differentiate learning and teaching activities in order to meet the needs of all students.
- Teachers use formative and summative assessments to monitor and assess student learning and growth.
- Student achievement data is used at a whole school level to plan professional learning for teachers.
- Professional learning teams collect and analyse school-wide student achievement data in the development of team goals, targets and priorities with reference to State and Federal standards and targets.
- The school includes feedback from students and parents in its data gathering.
- The school provides opportunities to engage students and parents in analysing and responding to individual student data.

4.5 Coordinated Strategies for Intervention

Schools have in place a school-wide systematic approach to providing services and documenting interventions for students with diverse learning needs. These interventions are at increasing levels of intensity, based on progress monitoring and data analysis. The approach integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention and intervention system to maximise student academic and behavioural achievement. Researched-based scientifically validated instruction and interventions are provided within a multi-tiered approach in classrooms, small groups and one to one instruction.

Some of the observable practices that would indicate high performance in this component:

- Schools have in place agreed school-wide measures that allow for early and ongoing identification of students who require special consideration and further support with academic or behavioural learning.
- Schools differentiate/intervene for students who are well below or well above the expected standard for their appropriate year level.
- There are practices in place where targeted assessment data provides teachers with additional information to further direct adjustments to learning and teaching.
- The school ensures data analysis to develop and document targeted instruction and Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs).
- Decisions regarding appropriate intervention/s are made and resources to support the implementation of the PLP or targeted instruction strategies are identified, including identifying which staff will work with students.
- There is ongoing monitoring of student progress throughout the period of the intervention, with adjustments to learning and teaching, ensuring the student's ongoing success.
- Core classroom practice is minimising the number of students who will need further intervention

5. Wellbeing

This aspect of schooling is based on a deep respect for the dignity and the uniqueness of the human person “for we are God’s handiwork” (Eph 2:10), “Made in the image and likeness of God” (Gen 1:7). There is an intentional focus on the social, emotional and mental wellbeing of all members of the school community ensuring a culture of child safety. It promotes a sense of meaning and purpose in life that is supported by the spiritual dimension of a Catholic school. The wellbeing of the school community is an integral factor in effective learning and teaching and it will be enhanced by the creation of a culture of mutual trust and support among teachers and school leaders. Parents are treated as partners in the promotion of student learning and wellbeing.

5.1 Quality Relationships

The school culture expects and supports positive, respectful relationships between all members of the school community.

Some of the observable practices that indicate high performance in this component:

- The school has policies and practices to ensure all in the school community are treated with dignity and respect.
- There is an obvious culture of pride, hospitality and welcome.
- The school fosters and promotes staff and student safety, leadership, self-esteem and self-responsibility.
- The school has effective practices to promote, enhance and monitor staff wellbeing.
- The school has effective practices to monitor student behaviour and build a consistent whole school approach to student management.
- The school has clear processes to engage with, listen and respond to the full range of student perspectives and feedback.

5.2 Wellbeing Practice

The school implements clearly documented, evidenced-based curriculum and practices that ensure a safe learning and workplace environment.

Some of the observable practices that indicate high performance in this component:

- The school has well documented, accessible and implemented wellbeing policies and programs that develop resilience, protective behaviours and respectful relationships, consistent with Catholic teaching, the school vision and legal and system requirements.
- The school curriculum attends to the social emotional learning needs of all students.
- There is a highly effective, collaborative team approach to whole school wellbeing.
- The school effectively uses a wide range of data to monitor policy and practice.
- The responsibility for wellbeing is shared between the school, families and external agencies working in authentic partnership.
- The school promotes healthy living choices.

5.3 Safe Learning Environment

The school's learning environment is safe, respectful and inclusive and promotes intellectual rigour, celebrates achievement and supports self-responsibility. Safe, supportive and inclusive schools celebrate and protect diversity and understanding of others, acknowledging the rights of all in their diversity.

Some of the observable practices that indicate high performance in this component:

- Staff and students are engaged and motivated to learn.
- Students take an active role in promoting safety, positive behaviour and reducing inappropriate behaviour.
- Achievement is celebrated.
- The school and its learning spaces are welcoming, well-ordered and safe.
- The school supports the diverse needs of all learners.
- The school appreciates and values varying cultural backgrounds and works to build the cultural competence of staff, parents and students.