2. Peer Review Report Summary

Executive Summary

2.1 School Context

Diamond Valley College is a single campus school of Years 7 to 12, situated in the picturesque northern suburbs in the Shire of Nillumbik. It draws students from a range of distinct and diverse communities. These include the nearby communities of Diamond Creek, Wattle Glen and Hurstbridge; the more rural areas of Kinglake, Arthurs Creek, Strathewen, St Andrews, Panton Hill and Kangaroo Ground; and the growth corridor through Mernda, Doreen and Laurimar. As a result more than 500 students travel to school by bus. Student enrolment has increased since 2008 and was 841 in 2014, but dropped to 807 in 2015 due to the first intake of Year 7 at Hazel Glen College in Doreen. This reduced Year 7 intake will continue to impact the school over the next five years as the new school grows each year, until the College stabilises its enrolment.

The College has established programs to foster the school core values of respect, responsibility and excellence. For example, there are awards for students who demonstrate these values and they are consistently reinforced on a daily basis. The school is now a calm and orderly environment with respectful relationships between students and staff. The new school uniform reflects the high expectations of students’ behaviour and learning.

One strategy the school has used to build relationships is the programs offered, for example, Year 7 and 8 students study Personal Development for Learning, Year 9 study Healthy Pathways and Year 10 study Individual Pathways. The teachers have refined their teaching skills over the last four years, implementing new approaches and integrating technology, such as iPads. The school has a rigorous Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) program that sits alongside the regular Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). In both pathways students can undertake Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses to support their future options, and the College’s students have demonstrated success in these courses.

Curriculum and student management are organised via a Junior Sub-School (Years 7 to 9) and Senior Sub-School (Years 10 to 12). A comprehensive core curriculum is in place at Years 7 and 8. An elective program begins at Year 9 alongside core curriculum areas. The Year 10 program is connected vertically with Years 11 and 12 and provides advanced placement units, through access to VCE, VET and VCAL courses. The elective program at Years 9 and 10 provides access to the popular High Resolves leadership and citizenship program. The College has an extensive extra-curricular program which includes the sport program which has seen increased student participation over the last four years; the Performing Arts program which involves weekly instrumental music tuition; two Performing Arts evenings each year; and a College Production, in 2013 and 2015. A study skills program involves students in a series of seminars and workshops throughout Years 10 to 12.
The school’s buildings have been maintained in excellent condition and facilities include a fenced set of all-weather tennis courts, an attractive Wellbeing Centre, an internal gym, and the Community Bank Stadium next door.
2.2 Summary of the School’s Performance

2.2.1 The School’s Performance against the Previous Strategic Plan

Diamond Valley College staff have been working over the last four years to improve student outcomes in terms of their achievement; their engagement with their learning and the school; and their wellbeing. In the current School Strategic Plan (SSP) from 2012 to 2015, the school set a number of goals and targets for improvement.

Achievement:

In literacy, the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data indicates that 18.6% of Year 9 students have had a high growth in their Reading since they began at the College in Year 7 in 2013. For Writing, 16.8% of Year 9 students in 2015 have had a high growth in their writing skills since Year 7 in 2013. In Numeracy, 25.5% of students have had a high growth in Numeracy from Year 7 in 2013 to Year 9 in 2015, which is above the State average.

The College’s VCE students have been successful over the last four years and four subjects had average scores above 30 in 2014, and eight VCE subjects had averages above the State mean. Three VET subjects also had average scores over 30, and all five scored VET subjects had averages above the State average. These are good achievements.

Engagement:

One factor in being engaged with learning is to be present at school and actively involved in learning activities. The 2014 absence rate at the College was 19.4 days/student, which is above the State average for secondary schools. A culture of it being “OK to stay away” is being addressed, including for family holidays and sports and excursions days. Teachers expect absences to decrease now that Compass is in use and parents are alerted more quickly to them. Parents, especially of senior students, need to be aware of the impact of absences on student success rates, for example in VCE, VET and VCAL.

The 2015 in-school survey data showed that “90% of students say they ‘always’ like to do well at school” and the attitude to school data on Student Motivation is quite high, in absolute terms, with a whole school mean of 4.14 (on a 5-point scale).

The partnerships that the school has formed with La Trobe University and other universities, the Nillumbik Shire and Rotary, are working towards building higher aspirations for Diamond Valley College students in the future.

Wellbeing:

The Personal Development for Learning program in Years 7 and 8, the Healthy Pathways program in Year 9 and the Individual Pathways program in Year 10 are all working to support students’ positive sense of direction. The Wellbeing Centre and staff are an asset to the school and the links with external support personnel are well utilised. The High Resolves leadership program, offered in Years 9 and 10 as part of the elective program, contributes to the range of leadership opportunities available. A staff team has been formed to implement the MindMatters framework across Years 7-10 and this will build awareness of mental health issues and their relationship with students’ resilience and learning.
**Productivity:**

Over the last few years, the staff have put considerable effort into rebuilding the College into a high performing, more academic school. This has included:

- Two appointments to Leading Teacher positions in charge of Learning and Teaching improvements and weekly in-school professional learning.
- The introduction of a more formal uniform, including blazers.
- The introduction of Compass to facilitate communication between teachers, parents and students; and
- The building of the Community Bank Stadium on school grounds - which is timetabled for 26 of the 30 periods in a week.

There is an improvement in the community’s attitude towards the College, evident in increased enrolments, positive parent comments and feedback from neighbouring primary school principals.

While the school is now in a deficit financial situation, this is largely due to the establishment of a new school at Doreen, Hazel Glen College, which has meant a drop of 60 students for the 2015 Year 7 intake. This will continue to impact the school as Hazel Glen grows one year level at a time and the College will become a smaller school. However, this will enable the school to focus on its strengths such as academic subjects, technology, the arts and sports, and continue its work in being a caring and supportive culture for all its students.

**2.2.2 Summary of the considerations for the next Strategic Plan**

During the Peer Review, the Panel discussed a number of areas of the College, and ways in which these can be built on in the future. In particular, the Panel thought that the Diamond Valley College Good Teaching Practice model had many strengths and it could be further developed in line with the new Education State priorities for school improvement.

**Achievement:**

Goal:

- To achieve higher levels of growth in all students’ in Years 7-12, across all capability levels and learning domains, ensuring that each student is appropriately challenged and supported to achieve excellence.

Key Improvement Strategies (KIS):

KIS #1

- Build teachers’ capabilities to implement the refined DVC Good Teaching Practice model.

KIS #2

- Design and implement a High Achievers Program.

KIS #3

- Create programs to increase the rate of growth in literacy and numeracy skills of every student at every level of capability across the school.
KIS #4
- Provide a rigorous and differentiated curriculum based on the Victorian Curriculum.

KIS #5
- Enhance teacher capacity to use accurate and purposeful formative and summative assessment across all learning areas and year levels.

Engagement:

Goals:
- To provide a stimulating learning environment where students have increased levels of challenge, cognitive engagement and independence with high expectations for their personal performance and future.
- To reduce student absenteeism.

Key Improvement Strategies (KIS):

KIS #1
- Build teachers’ capabilities to increase students’ levels of cognitive engagement.

KIS #2
- Develop strategies to decrease absences and retain current students as they move through the school.

KIS #3
- Devise a career development program across the curriculum for all students that raises aspirations and builds decision-making skills.

Wellbeing:

Goal:
- To actively promote student optimism and resilience and implement programs that ensure students feel respected and responsible for, and confident in, managing their own personal wellbeing.

KIS:

KIS #1
- Provide for the positive development of student wellbeing.

KIS #2
- Build more respectful relationships.

KIS #3
- Strengthen school pride.
Productivity:

Goal:

- To allocate resources (financial, human, time, space and materials) in a sustainable manner so that they effectively optimise student achievement, engagement and wellbeing.

KIS:

KIS #1

- Align all resource allocations with the strategic directions of the school.

KIS #2

- Strengthen pedagogical leadership capacity to provide strong distributed leadership across the school, Years 7-12, and in each Learning Domain.

2.2.3 Next steps

Diamond Valley College is well positioned to move forward in improving student outcomes. The College’s model of Good Teaching Practice is ready to be refined in light of the Victorian Education State Improvement Model and the College’s six theories of action for classroom teachers provide a solid platform for further actions that will lead to school improvement.