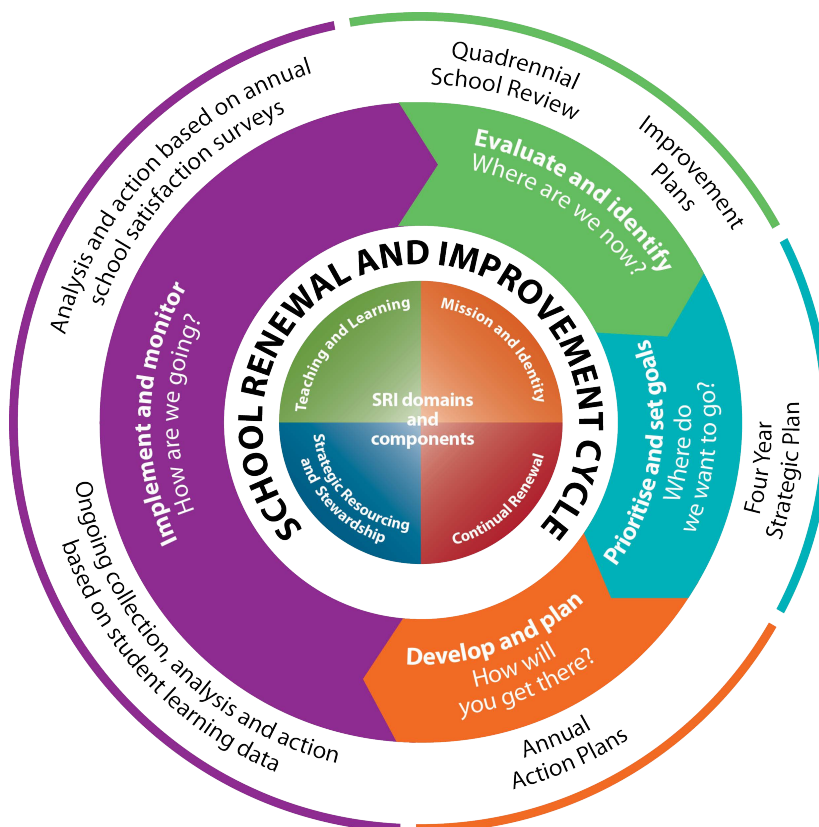


**Diocese of Toowoomba  
Catholic Schools**

# St Francis de Sales school Clifton

## TCS Quadrennial school review Full report



October 2019



## Foreword

*Although much has been written about school reform in past decades — national reports, studies, descriptions of findings — insufficient attention has been given to the important relationships among the adults within the school, and to a consideration of how the abundant untapped energy, inventiveness and idealism within the school might be encouraged.*

Roland Barth, Harvard Graduate School of Education

The philosophical approach to the review is based on Appreciative Inquiry, a well-established approach used by organisations varying from international corporations to not-for-profit social organisations. Appreciative Inquiry begins with the assumption that there are good things happening in the organisation and identifying these. It then moves to what people see as areas needing attention, improvement or change. The key principle is that these are placed in the context of what the organisation does well, so it moves beyond a problem-solving agenda to an improvement agenda.

Appreciative Inquiry aims to bring ownership to the school. The review team hears ‘the story’ of the school through its stakeholders, and this informs the key findings and improvement strategies that the review team has recommended. Exactly how the school addresses the key findings and improvement strategies is left for the school to determine, but it is mandatory for the school to address them over the following four years.

Leaders of continuously improving organisations bring a learning mindset to the work of their staff. They focus on establishing disciplined processes for developing, testing, and improving core work and programs to build capacity. They invest time and energy in enabling staff to embed these processes into day-to-day work and to create an organisational openness to review and change.

**Park, S., Hironaka, S., Carver, P. and Nordstrum, L. (2013). Continuous improvement in education, Carnegie Foundation, Stanford.**

# Methodology

The review was conducted from Monday 14<sup>th</sup> – Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> October

## Reviewers

*Suzanne Cavanagh – Senior Education Leader, Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office (Chair)*  
*Jim Midgley – Director, Teaching & Learning Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office*  
*Terry Carter – Manager, Teaching & Learning Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office*  
*Chris Rosentreter – Principal, Sacred Heart Primary School Toowoomba*

The review consisted of structured interviews of the following school community members

- School Principal
- School staff x 9
- Parents x 20
- Students x 18

## School Renewal and Improvement (SRI) domains and components

The reference document for the review was the SRI domains and components from the Toowoomba Catholic Schools (TCS) School Renewal and Improvement Framework.



### Domain 1 Teaching and learning

Component 1.1 Students and their learning

Component 1.2 Curriculum structure and provision

Component 1.3 Pastoral care and student wellbeing



### Domain 2 Mission and identity

Component 2.1 Religion curriculum

Component 2.2 Religious life of the school



### Domain 3 Continual renewal

Component 3.1 School improvement culture

Component 3.2 Community partnerships



### Domain 4 Strategic resourcing and stewardship

Component 4.1 Staff development and wellbeing

Component 4.2 Use of resources facilities and the learning environment

## Prologue

The review panel would like to thank the St Francis de Sales School community for the open and honest way in which they have approached this quadrennial School Renewal and Improvement review. The team experienced a trust and willingness from all involved, with staff, parents and students wanting to contribute their perspective on where they see the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Throughout the week the panel experienced a school that presented a very friendly, calm but enthusiastic school community.

We believe we have received an accurate portrait of the school. This is a community which holds the school in high regard, looking for ways to enhance the lives of the children in their care. Parents interviewed are appreciative of the efforts of the school leadership and staff in their efforts to provide a quality education and environment for their children. The staff continuously look for ways to better understand how the students learn, and how to best meet their learning needs.

There is a strong sense of camaraderie. A professional commitment to building efficacy around teaching and learning is apparent amongst all the staff. A challenge for the staff is to track and more closely examine student data to enhance cohort performance. There is a willingness from all to learn together and build collective efficacy in a common approach for student improvement.

The students are confident and friendly, happy and settled in an inclusive environment.

The review team trusts that this report is empowering for the school and wishes the school community well as it moves through this important phase into the strategic planning cycle.



## Domain 1 Teaching and learning

### Component 1.1 Students and their learning

#### Findings

The panel found that the school is united in beliefs about learning and learners. Staff believe that all students can learn with the right assistance and opportunity. Many students can articulate what learning is and what learners need to do. Some can articulate the required dispositions for learning and describe the “learning pit” and their position in relation to their learning journey. There is a variance in students’ ability to describe the learner’s dispositions and at this stage there is little evidence of visual reference to this meta language around dispositions.

The learning environment is safe, tolerant and inclusive, and differentiated practice is an obvious focus apparent in classrooms. This is evidenced in planning and in individual student progress. Parents articulate and appreciate the teachers’ ability to ensure inclusivity and equality for all students. This is addressed not only in terms of resource allocation but also in terms of student support from teachers and school officers.

The leadership is collaborative, and the Principal highly regarded for his ability to listen to the opinions and ideas of others. Students describe staff as approachable and say that the Principal has clear expectations around behaviour, manners and consequences. Individuals speak of the growth in capacity and capability of the Principal to the point where his reputation for calmness, consistency and levelheadedness is appreciated and well respected in the community.

The staff have fully embraced the Reading Improvement Strategy (RIS) and high impact strategies are embedded in classroom practice. Teachers say that they are united in expectations and agree on school wide approaches.

#### Improvement strategies

- Develop a whole of school approach to composing, unpacking, embedding, marketing and displaying the dispositions of a St Francis de Sales learner.

#### Explicit Improvement Agenda

The Principal and Middle Leader are well aware of student achievement data and trends. This awareness of whole school performance and general data literacy is not yet evident across the whole staff.

Teachers suggest that there is “nowhere for students to hide” and that they are well aware of the individual progress and capability of each student.

Underlying causes for inconsistent trends in NAPLAN data are being investigated. Broader issues such as student attendance, parental engagement with their children’s learning and oral language deficits in early years, have been identified as areas for focus. Accessing local community-based speech therapy support is a challenge for parents and the school.

The leadership team presented the following as current areas of focus over the last 12 months:

- Consistency of communication
- Parent engagement
- Student attendance

#### Improvement strategies

- Engage staff in professional development aimed at building their ability to analyse school-wide, group and individual student achievement data so that teachers are able to use it to enhance their work with their students.

- Investigate and address the reasons for a declining trend in Year 5 NAPLAN progress data (same cohort growth from Year 3 to 5).
- Continue to build on the quality of communication both within the staff and with the parent community.
- Investigate ways to further improve student attendance rates.
- Investigate ways to strengthen parent engagement in the life of the school.
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- Continue to explore the requirements of a community-based speech therapy group (BushKids) in terms of speech and language support offerings from a whole community perspective.

## Analysis and Discussion of Data

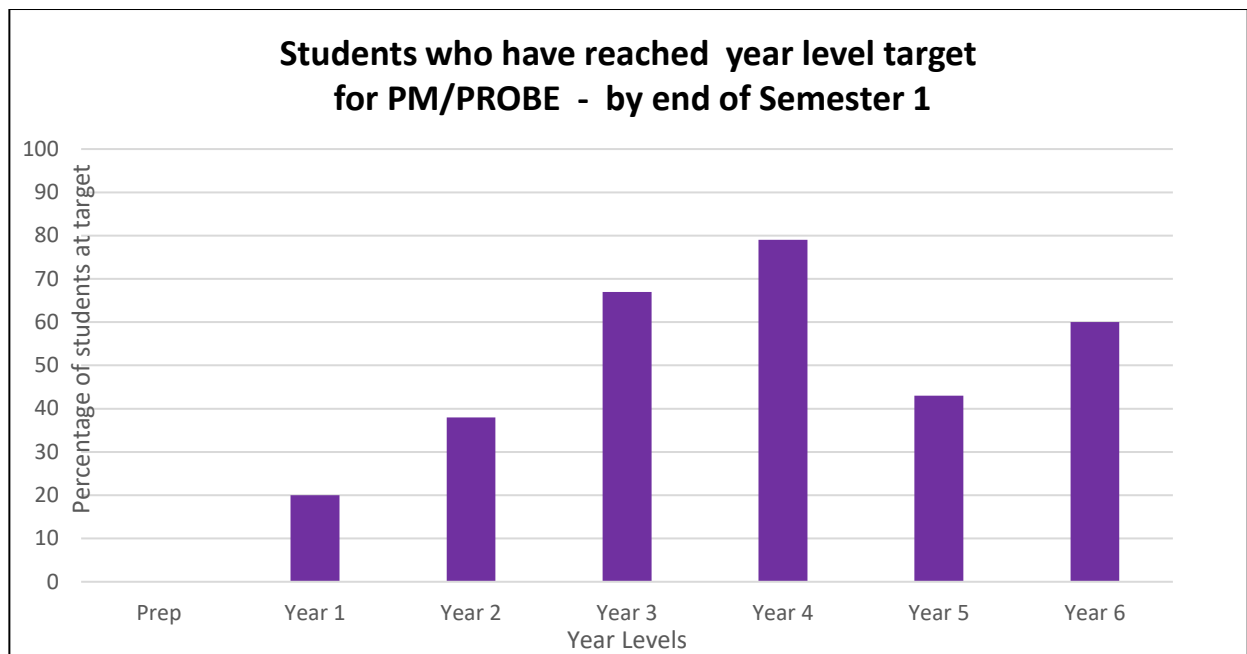
A student data wall shows students' growth and progress towards diocesan reading targets. The wall is active and up to date and is referred to in occasional review and response meetings. The panel found that whole school discussions around NAPLAN data are inconsistent. Generally, teachers appear unaware of the declining results against National and state averages from Year 3 to Year 5. High staff turnover provides challenges around induction to ensure consistency of approaches.

Contextually it should be noted that small cohorts tend to influence NAPLAN data in extremes. The panel noted that this is not the case at this school in 2018 and 2019 cohort results. The current Year 5 (2019) cohort of 7 students consists of 6 students who were at the school in 2017. Similarly, the 2018 Year 5 cohort was mostly the same student list in 2016 in Year 3. The trend has been that as Year 3 students, they perform at well above state and National mean and then in Year 5 perform well below National mean in the last two years.

Year 3 NAPLAN has consistently been above state and National mean scale scores and in 2019, all Year 3 students are above national minimum standard. Year 5 NAPLAN is trending downwards in all 5 domains with this decline evident since 2017. In 2019, 70% of students are above national minimum standard.

In December 2018, 100% of Year 4 and Year 6 students reached the Diocesan reading targets. In Years 2, 3 and 5, more than 80 % of students reached Diocesan reading targets.

From the graph of reading data below, produced by the leadership team, it can be seen that the majority of students in each class have made average to high growth in reading during this six month period. The school and class teachers are aware of the low growth in Prep, and Years 2 and 5 and have been working to address those students' needs.



### Improvement strategies

- Engage teachers in analysing the recurring issues related to content and concepts that are evident in NAPLAN results in Year 5, with a view to examining scope and sequence across Year 4 and Year 5 to ensure that, if gaps exist, they are addressed.
- Consider the possible impact of staffing changes on academic results and what can be done to support teachers new to the school to quickly and consistently meet pedagogical expectations.

### Learning culture

The panel found that the learning culture is influenced positively by the leadership in the school. Teachers and parents speak positively of the leadership in the school. They speak of a leader who is level-headed, fair, calm and respectful. They describe him as well respected around town.

*Brendan can see other people's points of view (Staff member).*

Students describe the Principal as a fair and consistent person who makes his expectations clear and models these expectations.

Teachers appreciate the focus on the learning agenda. They describe a history of a school that was always good at showing the *face of Jesus* and describe the academic agenda as running a distant second. Teachers describe the last three years of leadership under current TCSO direction and the current Principal as them being treated as professionals. They say it is noticeable that expectations are clear and that "we are all travelling in the same direction". The "academic success for all" pillar is described by some teachers as the real challenge as it requires differentiation. Associated Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) accountability requirements are impacting on teacher well-being.

Teachers new to the system express appreciation for the system support received from the TCSO and describe this as exemplary. Teachers feel they are part of the bigger picture and believe that the current expectations are based on evidenced-based research that has immediate practical and positive impact on their practice and therefore student academic achievement.

*We are not left wondering as teachers. We are professionals and need to be accountable and we are well supported in this with clear expectations and agreed ways of doing things (Staff member).*

Teachers describe the RIS high yield strategies as bringing great success to their work and can see the effect in the students' work. Recent additional support on the phoneme program is also starting to have a positive impact. Teachers feel professionally supported by the leadership team in the school wide approach introduced to teaching phonemes (sounds that distinguishes one word from another).

A number of students describe learning as: *"knowing lots of strategies and knowing which strategies to apply"*.

### Improvement strategies

- Engage the allocated Inclusion Coach to share the latest in Planning for Personalised Learning (PfPL) routines and expectations which should be less onerous on the teacher and Learning Support Teacher (LST) and of more practical benefit to the student.
- Ensure that the evidence requirements for NCCD do not supersede the benefits for the student.
- Continue to embed the Phoneme program across the school and ensure the capacity exists in leadership to monitor and provide feedback to new staff to ensure continuity and consistency every year.

## Component 1.2 Curriculum structure and provision

### Findings

#### Systematic curriculum delivery

The panel examined curriculum delivery and planning through the recorded evidence in the Diocesan Learning profile (DLP) - the mandated tool for recording planning and assessment for all Primary schools in the Toowoomba Diocese. A review of the DLP for St Francis de Sales Primary School reveals that the leadership team has strong supervision of curriculum and planning. The panel determined that the issue of a decline in student achievement in Year 5 results does not lie in curriculum content or scope and sequence of learning, as these are found to be very satisfactory.

The Principal demonstrates good oversight of curriculum monitoring and this is evidenced in the DLP. He has endorsed all learning areas in the school learning framework. The class programs, class structure and standardised test records are complete.

In specific learning areas, the panel found the following:

- English Unit development is as per RIS recommendation with Years 3-6: 8 units; Years 2-3: 3 units; Prep: 6 units.
- Unit planning P-6 is comprehensive with strong alignment through Unit overview, Learning Intentions, Success Criteria and Assessment.
- A balance of text types across reading and writing exists.
- Student assessment literacy is the focus of the assessment record.
- There appears to be no record of the assessment strategy, type, task and/or purpose.

In the Mathematics area, there is:

- A comprehensive scope and sequence completed for years P – 6.
- Unit planning Prep–Year 1 and Years 4-6 is comprehensive with strong alignment from Overview, Learning Intentions and Success Criteria.
- Unit planning for year 2-3 has only 2 units. Each unit has 7 or 9 learning cycles.
- Each unit lists Learning Intentions and Success Criteria.
- Assessment Years P - 6 refers to formative and summative strategies.



For the Science curriculum:

- Scope and sequence complete
- P-6 Unit overviews
- P-6 copied from Primary Connections include unit title and overview.

Unit planning includes:

- Comprehensive Learning Intentions & Success Criteria.
- Assessment record focusses on diagnostic, formative and summative strategies.

HASS/HPE/Civics all have:

- Scope and Sequence completed for all Learning Areas
- Unit planning Yr P-6 includes Unit title, Overview, Learning Intentions & Success Criteria and Assessment varies from Learning Area to Learning Area.

In class unit planning in the DLP, Planning for Personalised Learning (PfPL) data entry is evident at 'Master Class grid' level for students across all classes. There is occasional evidence of this information being considered at unit plan level. Other areas of planning demonstrate little understanding of adjustments required to support and provide differentiation of curriculum.

There is a wide variance of understanding around the use of Learning Intentions and Success Criteria at unit and lesson level. Units and lessons include Learning Intentions (LI) and Success Criteria (SC). These are often the complex sentences from a content descriptor and aren't always aligned with unit or lesson activity or assessment.

Assessment strategies are recorded on the general tab in the DLP but not always evident in the class observations or assessment task tabs. Recording of class observations has begun and is yet to be completed in some cases.

The Panel finds the decline of Year 5 results across domains in NAPLAN is not a result of curriculum delivery and suggests a focus on this issue is required. The implications are that the changing individual characteristics of learners and their circumstances need to be explored and addressed as a whole staff.

### Improvement strategies

- Continue to invest in teacher training and support around the use of the DLP.
- Examine how the LI and SC can be linked more coherently to class lessons, and to formative and summative assessment.
- Conduct an in-depth analysis of each cohort to determine the wellbeing needs that are possibly impacting on learning progress.

### Professional Learning Community (PLC)

The staff understand and adhere to planning expectations. They share discussions around the needs of the students and how to maximise well-being and student learning. Staff are yet to identify the Year 5 NAPLAN trends as a whole of school responsibility.

Professional development (PD) occurs regularly at most staff meetings and involves topics associated with the school strategic plan goals. Leadership members who attend the TCSO PD events share these learnings during these PD meetings.

The PLC is agile and proactive. An example is staff having concerns about the impact of domestic violence on student well-being. The PLC researched and heard from experts on how best to support students affected by this.

## Improvement strategies

- Share the Year 5 NAPLAN trends and name them as a whole school focus to analyse. Design a whole school strategy in response.
- Decide how the academic achievement agenda can be named and addressed as a key component of the school strategic plan.

## School Context

Some parents speak positively of the school's engagement with regular curriculum in-services. They describe the teachers as being up to date and well informed about what works best and what is best practice. They can also list the recent curriculum and pedagogical events and the changes in teaching practice.

The community generally agrees that multi-age classes and the regular movement of teachers requires the prioritising of consistency in teaching practice. This necessitates that significant thought be given to induction and consistent messages provided to teachers around expectations in a community with a high staff turnover and shared teaching roles.

Parents speak of the school's flexibility and willingness to provide experiences suited to the rural context. All parents interviewed claim the school prepares students well for the secondary portion of their educational experience. Parents suggest that St Francis de Sales students perform well in the secondary school environment and transition experiences are provided for Year 6 students to support this.

Some parents suggest the sharing of an overview of the curriculum expectations would be useful. They believe that engagement with their child's learning would be enhanced if they had a greater understanding of what is being covered each term. They mention that often this is brought up in class newsletters but parents new to the education experience say they would appreciate learning more about the elements of the curriculum.

## Improvement strategies

- Document and implement an induction program for all future new staff to ensure that key elements of the school wide approaches and expectations are understood and mastered.
- Consider how the Learning Intentions and Success Criteria of each year level curriculum can be shared in advance with parents.

## Component 1.3 Pastoral care and student wellbeing

### Findings

#### Student social and emotional wellbeing

The staff and entire community of St Francis de Sales school demonstrate an outstanding commitment to student social and emotional wellbeing. The panel heard overwhelmingly positive praise for the nurturing environment that is provided for students. It is clear that student wellbeing is at the centre of all processes and procedures. Students' individual needs are promptly identified and responded to and parents express great appreciation for the difference that this approach makes to their children. Many references were made to the family atmosphere of the school and the genuine care and concern for students. Opportunities for School Officers to enhance the support provided in this area could be further explored.

*I absolutely love this school. There is zero tolerance for bullying (Parent).*  
*It's all about the kids. People come here for this reason. It's all kid related (Parent).*  
*We have a gardening club. They have sensible hobbies that we do well (Student).*  
*They give us email access to contact teachers (Student).*

*We are being prepared for high school and we are feeling more grown up. The classroom environment is more focused on us being more grown up...we feel like we are being treated more like Year 6s (Student).*

### Relationships

Positive relationships between staff, staff and students, staff and parents, students and students are clearly observable and are a significant factor in the students' learning and the positive feel of the school. Staff use research and evidence-based practices such as the Zones of Regulation and the Learning Pit to support students in their approaches to learning. Parents indicate that their children bring this language home and it helps with their discussions about learning at home.

*I have two different learners. They are in different places in the Learning Pit. Sometimes learning can be uncomfortable. We use the language of Learning Pit and Zones now at home. It supports their learning. It puts their problems into perspective. The visual representation of the Learning Pit and the language of the Zones has assisted the children and our family (Parent).*

*The relationships with the teachers and the students are very important – they make a difference. Children aren't just faces in the crowd. The teachers work hard with each person – to give them the tools – they know the children. You don't get to see this in all schools (Parent).*

Parents note an improvement in the celebration of the indigenous culture over recent times and suggest even greater engagement with local indigenous groups is possible.

### Effectiveness of systems and structures

The school uses the You Can Do It program to promote resilience, persistence, confidence, organisation and getting along. School Counsellor time is being carefully considered in order to increase support for in-class programs. As students' needs change over time with higher social and emotional needs, there are opportunities for School Officers to be more involved in this area.

*Our school counsellor has been very supportive – I was directed towards her for advice and support and guidance for what is on offer (Parent).*

### Improvement strategies

- Investigate opportunities for School Officer professional development through, for example, connecting with the Australian Teacher Aide Association.
- Review the Indigenous Education Plan with particular reference to and engagement with the local indigenous community.



## Domain 2 Mission and identity

### Component 2.1 Religion curriculum

#### Findings

*I think we do a wonderful job in the classroom teachings. The children are always engaged and the teachers are always teaching age appropriate lessons (Staff Member).*

#### Systematic Curriculum Delivery

The school has a well-developed and systematic delivery of the Religious Education (RE) curriculum. The RE curriculum is followed by all the classroom teachers with planning evident in the Diocesan Learning Profile (DLP). Teacher planning clearly shows that RE is taught across the week for 2.5 hours in each class.

The school has multi-age classes and the RE Learning Area Programs (LAPs) effectively cover all the year level achievement standards and content descriptors reflecting the needs of the classes. The RE units are completed and recorded onto the DLP for all classes by the classroom teachers.

#### Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Staff use the PLCs as an opportunity to workshop the Catholic social teachings and to gain more understanding about the Catholic tradition. The panel heard that from the beginning of Term 3, teachers chose one of the Catholic social teachings to support their unit of work. They implemented this perspective to support their RE unit and re-contextualised the teachings to suit the children's world. In this way staff are able to explore social justice imperatives across the curriculum. The Education Officer: Religious Education workshops the staff during the PLCs through the year.

#### School Context

The Principal also undertakes the Assistant Principal Religious Education (APRE) position in the school. The panel heard that the school considers academic learning an integral element of the Catholic tradition. Parents comment favourably on the way in which religion is taught, not just in lessons throughout the week, but seen as an essential part of the school's way of life.

The school has clear expectations around the provision of learning experiences which are rigorous and locally relevant to students. Differentiation in teaching and learning is considered when planning for RE lessons. Students interviewed stated a positive response to RE lessons and to the Catholic identity of the school. The RE program and classroom practices reflect the diversity that students and their families bring to the school and into the classroom. Of students surveyed, 65% responded that they like RE lessons "most of the time" and "always" and 35% of students responded that they liked RE lessons "some of the time". This compares very favourably with the Diocesan averages of 41% and 15% respectively.

The teaching and learning of religion is supported by using a wide range of relevant resources drawn from within and outside the Diocese and school. There is the same expectation of staff for planning, assessment, feedback and reporting as in other key learning areas. Though Census data nominates 50% of the student population as Catholic, there is a low percentage of parents and families who are practising Catholics in the local parish. Family Mass is celebrated regularly throughout each term and attended by some families and staff. Staff who do attend Mass are acknowledged and appreciated by local families and parishioners.

Most students are actively and successfully engaged in the learning of religion and the school's most recent survey data indicate 100% of the students surveyed recognise that they learn about God and the Church at school.

## Component 2.2 Religious life of the school

### Findings

#### Evangelisation and formation

Teaching staff took part in a two hour PD focussing on the Religious Life of the School (RLOS), analysing each of the four elements of RLOS and making connections to what is currently in place at St Francis de Sales and establishing a plan for moving forward. This forms part of the school's strategic plan.

Signage around the school ensures that the community identifies St Francis de Sales as a Catholic school.

Nell's Garden, which is a nominated quiet place located in the school grounds, celebrates the Benedictine values and highlights St Francis de Sales' connection with the Benedictine Order.

There is a prayer space/table in each classroom to display religious artefacts as a focal point for the students.

#### Prayer and worship

*We are always going to liturgies and Mass. We went to morning Mass with the parish. Fr Rod invited us over and we got more engaged because he invited us to sit up around the altar (Students).*

In 2018, the school's Annual Action Plan (AAP) focused on bringing traditional prayer into the daily school routine. Children can recognise the value and place of traditional prayer in their lives. There is active engagement of staff, students and parents in communal prayer in classrooms and whole school opportunities. Parents comment to the panel that the children learn and know traditional prayers.

Regular community liturgical opportunities are organised by the Principal / APRE and class teachers including parish Sunday Mass. This is seen as a positive connection to the parish with the school by all involved. Liturgical celebrations are tailored to suit community needs.

*The school encourages the family's involvement in participation in Masses (Parent).*

The panel heard from many staff, parents and students how much they value the Parish Priest, Fr Rod McGinley. Staff and students have a positive relationship with him.

*They love Fr Rod. He has a wonderful relationship with all the children and the staff. He always has a tale to tell – he's great (Staff member).*

#### Social action and justice

*You can see Jesus in the kids – this is done really well here, in their interactions with each other and the wider community (Parent).*

It was noted by parents that the school promotes a strong sense of Catholic values through the way in which the staff encourage the students to support others through service provision. Parents comment favourably on the student involvement in Mini Vinnies, being active in raising money for Caritas, connecting with local social action groups such as Lifeline and the Retirement/Nursing Home. They see this as social justice in action and making a strong contribution to the local community. It is noted by some parents that reaching out to other local groups in the community would build mutually beneficial relationships across a broader sector in the town.

*It's important in knowing how to give back to others (Parent).*

## Improvement strategies

- Continue to contribute to the local community through outreach and social justice activities
- Investigate availability of local groups that could be invited into the school community



## Domain 3 Continual renewal

### Component 3.1 School improvement culture

#### Findings

##### Collective Teacher Efficacy

St Francis de Sales School has a number of staff who work in part-time roles and are present in the school on different days. To cater for this, staff meetings have been deliberately timetabled so that as many staff as possible are able to attend. This has led to more opportunities to create collective efficacy and to tap into the shared wisdom of the group.

Staff meetings have transitioned from an administrative focus to now having a greater emphasis on the staff working together as a professional learning community. At the start of the year, staff set goals focusing on one related to the school's goals as articulated in the Annual Action Plan (AAP) and one professional goal that was measurable and related to data literacy (eg, standardised testing, Year 5 Writing). As the staff continue to build their professional practices, it is intended that their goal setting process will be enhanced with a mid-year 'check-in' and end-of-year review to identify strengths and areas for growth in the future.

A data wall has been created to track student progress in the Reading Improvement Strategy (RIS) and is available for all staff to view and use. As staff confidence and competence with the use of the RIS data wall increases, it is intended that they will transfer this knowledge to co-creating other targeted data walls in classrooms.

The panel heard consistently that staff willingly take on new challenges and new learnings. They demonstrate that they are flexible and keen to adopt and adapt new methods based on research and evidence. For example, teachers are both modelling and using the concepts of the Learning Pit with their students to embed meta-cognition and students being able to articulate where they are in their learning journey. This is accompanied by the use of learning intentions and success criteria to make explicit what it is the students are required to learn.

The leadership team observes in classrooms and gives feedback to teachers as a follow-up. Swivel equipment is available and teachers are encouraged to film teaching and learning episodes and self-assess on the use of various strategies. Although it can be challenging to manage in a small school, a future focus on peer observation and feedback could provide a natural 'next-step' in the journey of collective teacher efficacy.

*We work as a team and support each other.*

*We are treated as professionals.*

*We are not left wondering as a teacher, we are accountable. I love it.*

*We are focusing on academic success for all (Staff members).*

##### School Culture

St Francis de Sales School is well-known and acknowledged in the town and surrounding area. Throughout the review process, the panel consistently heard from staff, parents and students that the culture of the school is a very positive one where the students are encouraged and supported in their learning and acknowledged for their efforts, and where all are welcome.



Staff new to the school express appreciation at the way they were welcomed and the support they were given as they established themselves in the school. Other staff were very generous in their support and helpfulness.

It is noted that the staff “go above and beyond” and take active leadership roles beyond the classroom. The panel commends the staff for their dedication, hard work and involvement in all aspects of school life. Extra-curricular activities are provided by staff in their own time. These include: playgroup, sport coaching, art, athletics, ten pin bowling, gardening club and putting up displays.

*This school has a whole village approach (Parent).*

*The sense of community is wonderful. Relationships between staff members, staff and students, staff and parents and school and community are strong (Staff member).*

*Relationships are built very quickly, staff are very welcoming, students are easy to build relationships with (Staff member).*

### Improvement strategies

- Investigate ways to enhance the existing staff goal setting process to incorporate check-ins and reviews.
- Explore other topics which could be used to represent student growth on data walls.
- Encourage student self-assessment and self-management through the co-creation of data walls in classrooms
- Consider strategies that might be tried in a small school to allow for peer observation and feedback in classrooms

### Component 3.2 Community partnerships

#### Findings

##### Partners

St Francis de Sales School has some long-established and effective partnerships and continues to seek ways to both enhance those and create new ones. The school's positive reputation continues with past students who are role models in the community – these past students are present and well-regarded in the community.

The staff of the school support the school's involvement with a range of community activities. Some of these include: Country Week window display; Iris and Rose Show (entries from the school in the garden and colouring-in competition); student visits to Nirvana Aged Care; Clifton Show display; attendance at ANZAC Day services; and the Show and Shine Fundraiser (school-organised car show).

The school staff facilitate parent engagement through increased opportunities for parents to learn about school programs and procedures. They have offered presentations on the Positive Parenting Program (PPP), *BushKids*, Zones of Regulation and the diocesan-wide mandated Reading Improvement Strategy (RIS). The staff take a collective approach to presenting information that helps with parental knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning in the school.

The school also has a mutually supportive relationship with the parish. Staff and students attend Family Masses each month, the school newsletter is placed in the church and the parish newsletter is available at the school.

The staff commend the “fabulous Parents and Friends Association (P&F)” who are committed to fundraising. The P&F now includes a focus on building community spirit, as well as on their fundraising activities which is intended to enable resources to be purchased for the school to support them in achieving whole school goals.

Parents comment that staff come to as many out-of-hours school functions as possible and their presence is both acknowledged and greatly appreciated.

Students themselves are able to identify the partnerships the school has within the community. They cite the school's play group as a positive way the school engages with community.

*I like the way the school is involved in the community. We are definitely a part of the life of the town (Staff Member).*

*I think the parents have a voice within the school when talking about improving the school. The Principal is open to hearing what parents have to say (Parent).*

*Having the staff at Clifton events – races, triathlon etc. - makes a difference and builds community (Parent).*

## Procedures

The school identifies the importance of developing relationships with the local kindergarten and works on developing a collaborative partnership. The kindergarten students are invited to the school to participate in transition days and this is ably supported by the school's Learning Support Teacher.

Transition arrangements for students who go on to the local state high school are of high quality and effective in supporting their transition.

## Student needs

The school maintains regular contact with the Toowoomba Catholic School Office's (TCSO) School Inclusion Coach, Occupational Therapist, Speech Language Pathologist and other required services in order to enhance the learning outcomes for students with particular needs.

Parents express appreciation for the way in which they are supported and the level of trust that exists between the school and families.

*I know that if my children have had an upset at school that I will always be contacted. Equally, if they've had a bad start to the day at home, I trust the teachers enough to let them know that as well (Parent).*

## Improvement strategy

- Align future P&F financial support with the school's future strategic plan.



## Domain 4 Strategic resourcing and stewardship

### Component 4.1 Staff development and wellbeing

#### Findings

*Our school has a genuine sense of community and inclusiveness (Parent).*

The staff understand, contribute to and are committed to the values and beliefs of the school. The staff's commitment to the school is widely evidenced. Their voluntary engagement with out-of-school hours events is particularly noted.



Flexible working arrangements for staff are evidenced within the school. At all times, the decisions around these arrangements are based on the needs of the students and the welfare of the staff.

The panel heard consistent affirmations of the school's culture of care towards its students. The school has a staff member designated as Wellbeing Champion who works with the Education Officer: Wellbeing from the Toowoomba Catholic Schools Office. The Panel saw consistent evidence of the staff's positive interactions, cohesion and mutual support.

The school utilises a variety of strategies to communicate with all stakeholders in an effective and transparent manner. The school's leadership team has identified that this is an area that could benefit from further development.

The school has effective health and safety practices and responds promptly to any identified safety issues.

The school has begun to implement Toowoomba Catholic Schools Performance and Development Procedures. The panel heard that the teaching staff were embedding high impact strategies in the teaching and learning processes. There is evidence of effective collaboration with Education Officers from the TCSO.

Parents have noticed and acknowledge the efforts around improving communication. They suggest consideration be given to a whole year school calendar. Parents new to the school would like to know more details around the expectations of events. For example, descriptions detailing purposes and procedures for excursions, gala days and other events would be appreciated

### Improvement strategies

- Continue to explore ways to make the most effective use of different communication strategies.
- Maintain the ongoing implementation of the Performance and Development Procedures.
- Explore the possibility of publishing a whole of year calendar providing some detail of school events
- Consider the timing of calendar information and sharing details around specific expectations of each event

## Component 4.2 Use of resources facilities and the learning environment

### Findings

*The school is well resourced and I think my children have the same opportunities as children in much larger schools (Parent).*

The school has processes to identify and respond to student needs through the allocation of staff and resources. This is evident in the class structure and teacher allocations in 2019. The school has clearly articulated school-wide strategies and programs in place to support students requiring additional support. The school's work in this area is widely affirmed by the school community.

The school provides equitable and coordinated access to a variety of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) resources to enhance student learning. The school recently completed an assessment by an external company of hardware and software in order to complete an eLearning Plan.

The school effectively uses its physical environment and available facilities to maximise student learning. The school grounds and buildings are well maintained and visually appealing. The play areas provide multiple places for the students to play, including a large undercover area. The school has two sets of playground equipment, both of which are shaded and well-maintained.

The school has developed a Masterplan to guide future capital development.

The learning environment presents as purposeful and well set out. There are a variety of displays of student work both inside and outside the classrooms.

The school has several initiatives in place to support recycling and sustainability.

### Improvement strategies

- Review the school's existing Masterplan to ensure it aligns with the school's strategic plan.

## Conclusion

The panel found that St Frances de Sales Catholic School has a secure place in its rural community. It is held in high regard and seen as an integral part of the local area.

There are positive relationships among staff, students and parents. The high level of camaraderie and professional commitment to build collective efficacy around student improvement is apparent amongst all the staff. Teachers appreciate the focus on the learning agenda. Teachers acknowledge that the leadership under TCSO direction and the current Principal enables them to be seen as, and to feel like, professionals.

Underlying causes for inconsistent trends in NAPLAN data are being investigated. Broader issues such as student attendance, parental engagement with their children's learning and oral language deficits in early years, have been identified as areas for focus.

The implications are that the changing individual characteristics of learners and their circumstances need to be explored and addressed as a whole staff.

It is the hope of the panel that the findings of this report will be used as a foundation to confirm, encourage and guide strategic goals and directions for the future of the school.