



The role of broad based reporting in school Improvement

Marcellin College: a case study

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1. Introduction

Marcellin College in Bulleen is a Catholic Secondary School for Boys located in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. The school of over 1,200 students from Years 7 to 12 is well-resourced, ideally located in terms of enrolments, and well-placed to address the needs of Catholic families in the eastern suburbs in the education of their sons. The school was founded in 1950 by the Marist Brothers, a teaching Order originating in France in the early 19th century. The Order was founded by Marcellin Champagnat, a French priest who saw in the chaos of the French revolution, the need to provide an education founded on Christian principles for rural children in the impoverished southern provinces of France. The work of the Brothers was a missionary one, and the Order moved overseas into the Asia-Pacific and Australasia. Their work in Australia is centred on over fifty schools established at different times in each of the States and Territories.

Key to the mission of the school is the need to meet the needs of all students, ranging from those who are academically able to those who need additional support. Indeed the philosophy of the college impels us to show preferential treatment to those most in need in the community in which the school serves. Identifying and addressing the specific learning needs of the students is therefore a priority. Like many schools, Marcellin

aspires to educate 'holistically', not confining itself solely to the academic but rather offering a wide ranging co-curricular programme, faith education, community service and leadership opportunities.

2. The Marcellin College Strategic Plan: an imperative for change.

The Marcellin College Strategic Plan titled, *Beyond 2000, Building a Learning Community*, was introduced in 2001 in response to the school community's need to address perceived deficiencies in the educational process at the school. The research primarily involved qualitative data gained from a number of interviews of sample groups of students, teachers and parents. In addition, quantitative data was gathered in relation to specific indicators such as academic results, attendance records and instances of behavioural problems. The final report presented at the beginning of 2001 provided an insight into the educational health of the college. In addition to the report I, as the new principal of the school undertook to meet with each of the 90 teachers on staff as well as selected groups of students and parents to determine directly their perceptions of the quality of learning and learning relationships at the school. Whilst recognising and celebrating the many positive attributes of the school, there was a clear imperative for improvement in areas ranging from academic performance through to work ethic and general

engagement by students in the life of the school.

The first premise in understanding improvement in service delivery in schools is the realisation that institutions are cultural entities. As such, change may only be effected through an understanding of the organisational culture of the institution. Culture is defined by Shwartz & Davis (1981) as,

'... a pattern of beliefs and expectations shared by the organization's members that produces norms that powerfully shape the behaviour of the individuals and groups in the organization.' (p. 33)

To measure success and to effect change involves operating at the cultural level. This 'subjective side of organizational life' (Meyerson, 1991, p. 256) is a powerful determinant of method of service delivery and the ability of the organisation to adapt.

So what about the 'Marcellin Culture' was in need of change? Marcellin could be described as an advantaged school in a number of ways. The school itself is well resourced with extensive facilities, a hard working and committed staff and to some extent a selected entry based upon religious affiliation and geography. The enrolment policy of the college determines that students are generally drawn from a number of locally based Catholic primary schools where there is a generally shared ethos and understanding as to the nature of education and the mores surrounding values and beliefs. As the enrolment policy is based largely upon geographic and demographic considerations, the student body is drawn from predominantly comfortable economic backgrounds. The Federal Government measure of the economic background of parent populations is designed to assist in the level of government funding allocated to each

school. The SES indicator provides an insight into parental background in terms of financial resources and ability to contribute to the cost of the student's education. Marcellin has an SES rating of 114 which places its parent population as one of the most advantaged economically in the Catholic sector (Catholic Education Office, 2004).

Culturally the college population is predominantly Anglo Saxon with strong Italian influences, but largely with students born in Australia with English as the language spoken most often at home. Therefore, the boys at Marcellin come from financially secure homes where English is the first language. They come to a school which is well-resourced compared to other schools in the Catholic sector, the government sector and indeed many independent schools. The findings of the Beyond 2000 report therefore seem on the surface to be quite puzzling.

Firstly, the college has underperformed at the VCE compared to 'like schools' for a number of years. Whilst it is recognised that boys fare less well than girls in the VCE, when compared to other Catholic boys' schools with a similar demographic, measured by SES, Marcellin was significantly underperforming. The most disturbing indicator was the expected percentage of 'excellent' scores where two similar Catholic boys' schools in the eastern suburbs were more than doubling the Marcellin percentage. Further indicators which illustrated the problem were the results of student tests. At Marcellin, students are tested for literacy and numeracy as they enter the school in Year 7. All students undergo career wise testing during Year 10 which also gives an indicator of 'latent ability'. They are again tested in Year 12 with the General Achievement Test (GAT) which provides data as to their potential ability as opposed to their demonstrated ability in the VCE. In all indicators, the students

coming to Marcellin are ranked higher than students across the State. Therefore, our students are slightly more able than the State average, but traditionally have achieved less well than the State average in the VCE and considerably less well than their counterparts in Catholic boys' schools with similar SES. Suffice to say that as this data becomes increasingly accessed by parents and the wider community through such media as 'league tables', serious questions begin to be raised regarding the academic programme of the school.

The second indicator which was identified both in the research and in direct observations during 2001 was the issue of non-engagement by a significant number of students in the wider life of the school. This was evidenced by absenteeism from classes and in particular from wider school functions such as Founder's Day events and athletic and swimming Carnivals. Whilst there was a consistent core majority of students who attended and participated in these activities, there was an equally significant number who did not. The number was large enough to dissuade effective intervention to ensure attendance and compliance to school expectations. This problem with enforcement exacerbated the original problem.

The third indicator of underperformance was in regard to work ethic particularly in the 'middle years' of schooling, that being Years 8, 9 and 10. While in general the wider school population was on 'amicable terms' with their teachers, there were concerns raised in the report regarding work ethic in general and work submission in particular. The rate of non-submission of work in the middle school was put as high as one-third - a third of the class might not submit the required work by the published due date. This was attributed in the report and in subsequent discussions with teachers to an

insufficient work ethic on behalf of the boys and an indisposition toward academic vigour. This was often attributed vaguely to 'cultural factors' although it is difficult to defend the argument that external factors regarding learning were the sole cause. The boys came from over twenty primary schools in the area whose students also attended other secondary schools which perform more credibly in the VCE. Their counterparts in other schools were on average doing better than they were. The second reason given for this by some experienced members of the teaching staff was that the boys did not try to do well in their work due to a fear of not performing. It was deemed preferable to not try and fail rather than try and risk underperforming. This is borne out in the wider research in terms of boys' underperformance. Martin (2002) attributes a good deal of underperformance by particularly male students as a means of failure avoidance. If one does not try then there is little investment in the success or failure of the enterprise. To try and not succeed is the worst case scenario for many students and lack of effort is deemed to be preferable.

The fourth indicator of underperformance, identified by both students and parents, was a little more difficult to quantify. The phenomenon can only be described as an 'anti-intellectualism' prevalent amongst the students and indeed amongst some of the faculty itself. The perception amongst the boys was that it was 'not cool' to be too clever. This was borne out by a climate amongst the more able students of 'surreptitious success' and 'hiding one's light under a bushel'. The approach amongst the students of doing 'just enough to get by' is borne out in an analysis of results which suggest a 'flattening off' of scores at the 'top end'. In terms of the school, the rewards for

sporting success were clearly manifested in the array of trophies and pennants dispensed with suitable gravity at College assemblies and noted in detail on college honour boards. The absence of similar recognition of the prowess of the academically able and for students involved in the vast array of other activities such as performing arts and community service was palpable. In my interviews with staff, there was a commonly used oxymoron that we 'were a sporting not an academic school'.

The avowed aims of the school are to encourage the development of 'the whole person' yet our measurement of that growth appeared to be failing in a number of areas. The reporting process did not seem to have sufficient impact upon student work ethic or performance and there was no real overview of the students' involvements in their six years at the school. Our information on students and our ability to track their performance and involvement was confined largely to traditional reporting methods and the vagaries of the sporting honour boards. Aside from the local considerations, the wider context for boys' schools in particular was worrying.

3. Findings on Boys' Education: the imperative to respond

A good deal of anecdotal information surrounding the perceived problems with boys has been in schools for a long time now. My own experience as Deputy Principal of a large coeducational secondary school was that approximately 90% of the serious disciplinary matters referred to me in the school involved boys. This was in a school population where the boys made up fewer than half of the student numbers. The problems in terms of discipline seemed to be matched in the area of curriculum where boys tended to be under represented in subject prizes and girls were more prominent in school productions and student leadership. These observations were

borne out with a number of studies suggesting the long-held view that boys were underperforming at school.

In 1994, the New South Wales Minister of Education received a report into the education of boys by the NSW Government Advisory Committee on Education, Training and Tourism (O'Doherty 1994). *The Inquiry into Boys' Education, Challenges and Opportunities* provided an understanding of the issues surrounding boys' education and offered a number of recommendations to remedy the perceived problems. The recommendations were wide-reaching involving not just how boys are taught but also an assessment on the needs of boys in terms of the whole schooling experience. The report lists many examples which give cause for concern about boys' education. These include '... lower retention to Year 12 and poorer academic outcomes compared to girls. Boys are over represented in programs for students with learning problems, particularly problems with literacy. Students identified as having behaviour problems are overwhelmingly boys.' (O'Doherty, 1994, p. 3)

Under the heading, *Performance*, the report identifies a range of indicators whereby male students are underperforming compared with girls in the NSW government school sector (O'Doherty, 1994, pp. 12-13). These indicators are mirrored in other school sectors. They include:

- an over-representation of boys in special education programmes - 65% of students in special education classes are boys;
- a greater percentage of boys than girls leave school early without completing their HSC;
- boys achieve lower literacy scores than girls in Years 3 & 6 and are outperformed in HSC English;

- boys perform slightly better in numeracy testing but tend to enrol in the easier mathematics classes at the senior level than the girls;
- girls have outperformed boys in terms of TER scores since their introduction in 1991; and
- the above findings are exacerbated by socioeconomic factors.

The report goes on to identify differences in participation rates with boys tending to choose the easier subjects or moving into TAFE or other options prior to the HSC. The findings of the committee in terms of student conduct were equally significant. Issues such as a tendency to be uncommunicative and disengaged from the learning process, a failure of leadership in terms of boys' abilities and inclinations and higher incidences of misbehaviour and anti-intellectualism were all identified as key inhibitors to learning.

Boys do not want to be seen to excel except on the sporting field. They fear ridicule and often are the victims of bullying if they stand out academically or in non traditional areas such as music, dance and drama. Students at a number of High Schools visited reported that boys do not like to be praised; it is not cool to achieve.' (O'Doherty, 1994, p. 16)

The report goes on to identify the wider issues surrounding boys including the higher incidence of crime by male offenders, the higher incidence of youth suicide, and a greater tendency than young women to an insecure future.

A further study (Martin, 2002) titled, *Improving the Educational Outcomes for Boys* was submitted to the ACT Department of Education, Youth and Family Services. The report, released in December 2002, involved an extensive literature review; a survey measuring motivation of students in ACT Government high schools; interviews with student focus groups;

interviews with teachers; and consultations with researchers. The research indicated a number of factors impacting upon learning in the classroom. In addition it too identified school-wide factors that can affect learning outcomes. Strategies which promote and endorse the academic life of students have the opportunity to enhance learning for individual students. (Hill and Rowe, 1996) These factors include a school-wide focus on learning, effective teaching, monitoring of individual student's progress, the active involvement of students, the use of a variety of teaching methods and effective role modelling by both teachers and students.

Many of the findings of our strategic planners were consistent with the wider literature on boys' education. In particular, motivational issues arising from fear of failure, lack of extrinsic rewards for success, teaching and learning styles, and issues surrounding literacy which were all evident at Marcellin are deemed contributory factors for boys in the wider sphere. The fact that Marcellin was underperforming in key indicators compared to other schools, but also compared to 'like schools' where gender and demographics were the same, suggests that there were further issues needing to be addressed. These were described earlier as 'cultural issues' whereby the specific dynamics of the school community were not conducive to effective learning for boys. These 'cultural considerations' seemed to revolve around perceptions of the students' capacity to learn both by themselves and by their teachers, as well as insufficient valuing of learning - both the process and the outcomes. These issues along with the global concerns regarding boys in schools were to form the basis of the school-wide structural, policy and process changes to take effect over the ensuing years.

The data had been collected and the literature was providing the insights into those things that needed to be done. Whilst the research into boys' education has major implications for pedagogy in the individual classroom, the overall structure and practice needed to be addressed first. The college needed to look at the various aspects of its operations and how we managed information. What do we assess and how do we assess it? This is the role of leadership in the school. To create the climate whereby system change was possible. Macro reform was to precede micro reform.

Leaders in successful quality settings have been able to conceptualize the theory in ways that translate into practice, steer the change process and guide the people in determining not only how to perform their jobs, but even more importantly, what their jobs should be. (Siegal & Byrne, 1994, p. 52)

4. Broad Interventions to effect cultural change

Based upon the findings of the literature and the needs identified in the strategic plan, the leadership team set upon a course of systems review and systems change. These initiatives range from the general structure of the college, the ways in which we relate to the students, the ways that their work was being valued and the ways in which the students were held accountable to that work. This phase of 'building a boy-friendly school' preceded the initiatives to help foster the further development of boy-friendly classrooms. The specific interventions were as wide ranging as:

- lowering the class sizes in the core subjects at Years 7-10 from 31 to 26 students so that teachers are given better opportunities to work individually with students;
- the Work Submission Policy which establishes clear expectations of all students regarding submission dates

and quality of work and keeps parents informed of problems in study performance;

- the Student Progress Committee which intervenes with those individuals who are not progressing due to under-engagement in their studies;
- the new process for subject selection which better monitors subject choices for the VCE so that students are choosing subjects more wisely based upon interests and abilities;
- the institution of 'academic colours' which celebrate the efforts and achievements of the students in their studies;
- the institution of extension classes in Year 12 in addition to the study skills classes to help students learn how to learn;
- an increased emphasis upon professional development of staff and the institution of staff appraisals so that we are reflecting upon our own work practices and affirming good practice;
- the commencement of a major building programme in the areas of Visual Arts and Technology to celebrate and foster the students' evident interests and skills in these two areas;
- imparting a vision to the students that they have the capacity to aspire to personal excellence in their studies; and
- building a 'case management approach' to the management of students.

5. Enhancing relationships

The October 2002 *Report into Boys' Education* by the House of Representatives found that the, '... relationship that a teacher establishes with students is important for all students although the need for the teacher to establish a connection with individual students is more important for boys, and particularly

critical for difficult boys. There is widespread agreement among good teachers on the necessity of establishing a good relationship with boys and the adage that 'boys learn teachers not subjects'. It is equally true that good teachers primarily teach students, not content. Both are consistent with the views of boys themselves.'

The Marist philosophy of the school had always placed great emphasis upon pastoral care and knowing the students. This was effectively reinforced through the vertically-based pastoral groups where students joined the small group of 24 students at Year 7 and stayed with the group and the pastoral leader until the end of Year 12. This did much to foster the relationships in the group and develop an effective working relationship between the pastoral carer and the boys over a number of years. The benefits of this model were not fully optimised due to the key student management personnel being arranged on a year level basis. Thus the chief disciplinarians were only able to establish a working relationship with students for a year before the students moved on. In addition information pertaining to the students was often not communicated effectively to the responsible person in the following year.

Following a review in 2001, the College instituted a full vertical system based upon the 'House' model. House coordinators were appointed to lead the teams of pastoral leaders and join them in forming the longer term relationship with the students over their six years at the school. The key relationships are therefore longer-term and the interactions with the students are on a more regular and meaningful level. The importance of relationships cannot be overstated particularly in the case of male students who often perceive the worth of their school experience through their

assessment of their relationships with their teachers.

Amongst the most consistently cited factors were: a good relationship between student and teacher, the teacher's enjoyment of teaching and working with young people, the teacher striking a good balance between asserting authority and being relaxed and tolerant... (Martin, 2002, p. 13)

The role of House coordinator which superseded the year level coordinator's role placed far greater emphasis upon building pastoral relationships. Where the year level coordinator was primarily a disciplinarian, the House coordinator is a leader in the wider sense. In addition to the significant benefits arising from good working relationships, the House coordinators are better able to track the progress of students over time and those accountabilities are more appropriately enforced. In addition, processes were put in place for the better management of student information to assist pastoral carers in their roles. Over the past two years, there emerges with each House an identifiable House identity whereby there is greater connection between the students and the mission of the House. Since the introduction of the House system, attendance and participation in sporting carnivals and other College celebrations has reached 98% in 2004 after a low of approximately 78% in 2000. The role of the House Coordinator is also more clearly defined as a leadership role in the college allowing for greater dispersal of leadership and engagement of staff in the leadership of the school.

6. Accountability: student conduct

A key understanding of boys in schools is that clear and unambiguous expectations need to be established and enforced consistently in order to create an orderly environment. Stadler (2004) in her paper at the Boys' Education Conference identified the need to establish clear,

unambiguous expectations of conduct, enforced without anger and with a view to gaining cooperation. Clear and consistent school-wide expectations of conduct remove the 'personality factors' from the potentially difficult area of discipline. Concerns regarding student accountability identified in the earlier Marcellin review were exacerbated by the perception that discipline was enforced inconsistently leading to an unsettling affect upon students and a lack of confidence by some teaching staff. In response to this, in Term 1 of 2001 a new discipline code was introduced outlining the various instances of misconduct, the level at which it would be dealt with and the member of staff responsible for its enforcement.

This discipline code is renegotiated with the students at the end of each year and appears in college publications on the college website, in each of the classrooms and importantly is accessed by teachers on the reporting database. Students will regularly now refer to a 'level infringement' and know in advance the likely outcome. Teachers adhere to the code which is enforced across the school thus removing the 'personalities' from the equation. Discipline is now perceived to be a matter of policy rather than whim. The process of consultation at the end of each year serves to re-educate the students to the contents of the code and allows issues of conduct to be discussed between pastoral teachers and their students in their pastoral groups. The code defines expectations in areas previously seen as inconsistently applied, for example the wearing of the uniform and attendance at school. In both areas there has been considerable improvement.

7. Accountability: student work

The problem of poor work ethic is a complex one. Issues surrounding fear of failure, lack of motivation and lack of engagement require a variety of

interventions to change student mindset. However, greater accountability towards the submission and quality of student work across the school has been achieved through a raft of policies designed to create a greater sense of accountability for students. These policies are made practical by the use of the online reporting database developed at the school in 2003 to track student progress. The first of these is the Work Submission Policy which requires all students to submit work by the due date. Failure to do so leads to a consistent process of renegotiating submission dates and automatic contact being made with pastoral teachers, House Coordinators and parents. In the early stages of this policy a large volume of letters were being generated due to failure to submit work by the due date. After two years in operation, the frequency of non work submission has dropped substantially.

To ensure the quality of the work, the Student Progress Policy introduced in 2003 is designed to identify those students not achieving in their studies without suitable cause. After the mid-year reports, all students in the college are reviewed by House to determine if they are progressing appropriately in their studies. Those students with an insufficient work ethic are referred to the Student Progress Committee which then case manages them until the end of the year. The committee will involve students and parents in a series of interviews and may even require students to undertake additional work prior to them being recommended for promotion to the next year level. Approximately 80 students each year from the cohort of 1,200 are referred to the committee. In that time only five students have failed to graduate to the next year level due to unwillingness to engage in their studies. The success rate with the other students who have been referred, as well as the overall deterrent effect of the referral process, has seen a

greater urgency amongst the student body in terms of their studies.

The third policy designed to enhance student accountability to their studies is the Subject Selection Policy. Prior to the implementation of this policy in 2003, students were largely able to select their subjects at Year 11 and 12 with little or no restrictions placed upon them. The new policy requires all students to have their subject choices endorsed by their current subject teacher and they must discuss their overall programme with their pastoral leader prior to submission of their choices. The process requires a good deal more consideration and allows for more suitable choices to be made. When taken in context, each policy (Work Submission, Student Progress, Subject Selection and Graduation) injects a greater sense of accountability and monitoring of the students' passage through the school. The automatic nature of progression and the sense that one does not have to work until the realities of Year 12 have all but disappeared.

8. Valuing student involvement

Accountability addresses one part of the issue of student engagement in their studies and in the wider life of the school. Perhaps more important are the opportunities that need to be created to celebrate that engagement. As stated previously, the sporting prowess of the college had enjoyed appropriate recognition for a number of years. Not surprisingly the college has done very well in terms of sport. In 2002 a new series of awards was introduced across the school to recognise both academic life and contributions to the community. The first of these were Academic Colours to be worn on the blazer pocket to recognise those students who have shown excellence and/or endeavour across a range of their subjects. This initiative was at first met by some staff members with considerable scepticism as they believed

that the students would be too embarrassed to wear them. On the contrary, by appealing to the boys' desire to be recognised, the colours are much sought after by the students. There is no discrimination between achievement and endeavour in the awarding of colours, thus all students regardless of ability have access to them. This largely accounts for both their relevance and popularity.

Many schools receive good results with a policy of small rewards which build to major awards and recognition by the school at Presentation Day or on Assembly. These merit awards are often used to good effect to encourage non traditional modes of behaviour, and to break down stereotypes. They can be given according to the circumstances of the particular child. (O'Doherty, 1994, p. 30)

To ensure a steady stream of recognition of students, awards for learning, 'Altissima Awards', and for service, 'House Awards', are given at regular House assemblies throughout the year. This ongoing recognition helps to form part of the students' résumés which build over their time at the college and which are generated by the reporting database. These awards coupled with recognition of subject 'dux' at the beginning of each year have done much to put academic life more fully on the agenda. The service awards are used to recognise a range of contributions by the boys and are often targeted to encourage students who would in other ways receive little recognition. The academic awards by valuing both excellence and endeavour in equal parts broaden the range of opportunity and allow for greater access for a greater number of students. At the end of each year the students 'graduate' from one year level to the next at House graduation Ceremonies where their efforts in a range of school based activities are recognised.

There also needs to be whole school recognition and celebration of academic development, skill and knowledge building and personal academic bests. This must include not only students who excel in exams and assignments but also those who make significant improvements and reach personal bests. (Martin, 2002, p. 50)

9. The need for a different approach to student assessment

Importantly, the many initiatives introduced including accountabilities, rewards, recognition, awards, discipline codes, and closer monitoring overall identified the need to better manage information relating to the various aspects of the students' lives whilst at school. Previously, our assessment was confined to student reports and parent-teacher interviews, an inadequate methodology when taking into account the complex nature of the school and the various dimensions of the students' lives. It was determined that to improve our reporting processes we would need to better manage the various types of information and centralise our data. Over a period of four years this was done by the development of the reporting database which is truly 'holistic' in its approach to case managing students. The database provides a vehicle whereby student files are centralised online and where every aspect of the students' work at the school is recognised.

In *Guiding Principles for Success in Educating Boys*, the report to the Australian Federal Government (2003) states,

Improving the educational outcomes of boys requires a whole school approach based on a common vision and a coherent, integrated set of programmes across the broad range of activity noted in this report (i.e. pedagogy, curriculum and assessment; literacy and communication skills; student engagement and motivation; behaviour management

programmes and positive role models for students) ... This approach should be integrated with existing school improvement strategies and should engage the broader school community.

The online database developed by the College provides the single operating system which brings all information relating to students into one place. Entries include:

- all discipline matters reported through the database and under a consistent format;
- all work issues including work submission and standard;
- past student reports;
- attendance records;
- student involvement in various school activities including community service and co-curricular;
- subject awards for endeavour and achievement;
- academic, sporting and service colours;
- all communication with parents and interventions with the student;
- records of testing; and
- personal files on each student appropriately secure.

In return, the database produces:

- graduation certificates
- pastoral and academic reports
- House service awards
- community service certificates
- subject awards certificates
- references
- summaries of all entries.

The database facilitates a whole-school approach to the management of students. It allows for consistency in the key areas of assessment and reporting and allows an expansion of what is assessed and reported. Access to this level of information is helpful to subject teachers, pastoral carers, administrators and ultimately to the parents and the students.

The school-wide approach requires a comparison of the quality of teaching learning, engagement and motivation at the school prior to the interventions of the strategic plan with the perceived improvements following the school-wide intervention using the database as the primary tool. By comparing outcomes across a range of indicators to the baseline findings in 2000, we can determine if after four years of school-wide intervention, there has been a significant or measurable shift in the learning climate of the school. Whilst cultural change can take many years to come into effect, early indicators will provide some insight into the possibilities of school improvement and addressing the needs of boys through a school-wide approach.

Research shows that school level action can strongly support teacher and class level action to enhance the educational outcomes of all students. Students can benefit from schools effectively modeling principles of gender equity, addressing an anti academic culture, building a proactive and optimistic school culture, valuing student input into school policy and procedures, celebrating academic excellence and personal bests, developing a staff structure and mix that sends appropriate messages to students and developing school-wide pedagogical leadership roles to support strategies in the classroom.’ (Martin, 2002, p. 52)

10. Monitoring of student learning: accountabilities and encouragement

The range of policies designed to monitor student learning and engender greater accountability among the students have done much to inject a sense of urgency into their studies. Teachers have recognised greater adherence to deadlines and submission dates across the school, with the greatest improvement coming in the middle school (Ryan, 2004). The requirements of the VCE have always provided consistency in terms of work submission, and the junior students had

tended to submit work on time. The benefits in Years 8, 9 & 10 have been clear. A focus group of parents surveyed in March of this year reinforced the view that there appeared to be a greater sense of urgency amongst students in the knowledge that the Work Submission Policy enacted through the database would inform parents swiftly of problems with work and that the Student Progress Committee would intervene when students were not committed to their studies (Parent Forum, March 2004). This and the tighter procedures surrounding subject selection have led to a greater adherence to work requirements. There is no clear empirical evidence yet as to whether the actual quality of the work has improved along with the improved frequency of submission. A longer-term study is required to determine whether the benefits of greater accountability in terms of learning rather than just adherence were in evidence. There was clear support from staff members in terms of the consistencies arising from the use of the new college database which is used to affect these policies (Ryan, 2004, p. 3).

In terms of the new system of awards, the institution of academic colours, and the Altissima and House service awards have all become a part of the general life of the college. These are easily generated in a range of forms and are prized by the students. There has been widespread acceptance of the awards system by students, parents and staff. They have gained legitimacy in the school previously thought to be unattainable for academic and non-sporting co-curricular pursuits. The only critical feedback received has been from the Sports master who expressed his concern at a staff meeting this year that sport might be undervalued! The academic and service awards have appealed to the boys’ need for ongoing and timely recognition for their efforts. This motivator has been stronger, along with a fear of the

consequences of the Student Progress Committee. A combination of 'carrot and stick' has appeared to work for many students.

11. The building and promotion of a learning culture

The cultural dimension of change appears to be the greatest challenge in terms of the complexity in affecting cultural factors and the subsequent time frame required to do so. Ryan (2000) identified a wealth of strengths which can be attributed to the existing culture of the college. These included a hard working and dedicated faculty, good levels of parental support and a reasonably happy student population. The imperative of developing a more robust learning culture was the clear finding of the report and the major direction of the subsequent strategic plan. This imperative was given added impetus with the more ready access to statistical data indicating academic under-performance at the VCE level. The unofficial position of the College in terms of results was that, 'We don't discuss results'. Unfortunately, that position was becoming increasingly unsustainable in the face of 'league tables' where parental expectation and the reality were clearly not being reconciled. Indeed, the findings of the review and the clear evidence of the VCE data were a compelling reason to move with some haste to finding solutions.

The cultural dimension began to be addressed with the *Beyond 2000 Strategic Plan, Creating an Authentic Learning Community*. The focus was clearly on widespread intervention across a range of areas. The plan itself called for a re-invigoration of the approach taken to learning and teaching. The move of the school from a paradigm whereby the sense of achievement based upon student pastoral care and sporting prowess was to be challenged by an assessment of academic credentials and much more

ambitious expectations of reporting and assessment was one fraught with challenges.

12. Discussion

Four years on from the school review in 2000, Marcellin College is in many ways a very different place. Opinions might vary on whether that difference is for the good or not. The strategic plan review conducted this year has produced a range of data which provide some clear indications as to how the progress has been received by the school community.

First and foremost there have been clear indicators of improvement in the general cultural health of the community. Issues surrounding overt student misconduct have been addressed leading to greater accountability and enforceability of school expectations amongst the students. A number have complained that the school has 'got too tight', but this is more than matched by fewer instances of off task or disruptive behaviour and less likelihood of misunderstanding expectations. Instances of truancy, uniform infringement and the allegation that students regularly re-offend have markedly decreased. The opinion of parents expressed in a series of parent forums conducted at the school bear out these findings. There is a perception amongst the parents recorded from these focus groups that discipline is appropriate and expectations are both more clearly defined and regularly enforced. The College Council too in a series of discussions has indicated that issues of order have been addressed. In terms of boys, there is clearly a better pastoral and disciplinary management through firm, clear and consistent expectations imparted through the discipline code and the new House structure and enforced through universal staff use of the reporting database. Boys like to know where they stand.

Secondly, accountability to studies as indicated previously has improved with greater diligence in terms of the submission of work. Teachers indicate that the smaller classes are more 'user friendly' and that there is a greater sense of accountability by the students in terms of their studies. At the senior school this is evidenced by better and more focused attendance at practice exams and preparedness by Year 12 students to engage in extension classes after school. All teachers are now proficient with the use of the college online database, the use of which has led to uniformity in discipline, reporting, assessment and parental contact. The database has been a tool whereby we are able to hold students more accountable to their studies. We are able to encourage students with a range of awards and opportunities for recognition, and parents are provided with a 'global assessment' of their sons' competencies and involvements. As a school which values 'the whole person', we are now able to identify the many facets of the students' lives and report appropriately on them to parents both formally and informally, and to outside bodies through comprehensive data which provides for better certification and more detailed references after their six years at the school. The changes to our assessment and reporting meant that we reported more frequently on a broader range of matters to parents and to students. Our assessment now better performs the twin purposes of greater accountability and greater encouragement for the student. In return our teachers have appropriate access to excellent information pertaining to their students. These student profiles include:

- personal and family details (access limited);
- literacy and numeracy testing both of the individual and his class group;
- student involvement in the wider life of the school;
- past performance in studies and conduct;
- records of academic achievements and involvements;
- attendance records;
- service to House, the college and community groups;
- notes to file by teachers; and
- correspondence from the college to home.

All are accessed in one place by teachers on their notebook computers. The questions: 'What has this student achieved' and 'What can he do?' are better answered.

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