

TO: The Education and Training Committee, Parliament of Victoria

RE: Parliamentary inquiry into effective strategies for teacher professional learning

Submission from Glen Waverley Secondary College

13 June 2007

Glen Waverley Secondary College has been heavily involved in the delivery of professional learning to teachers over the course of the last decade. It is felt that the committee may benefit from the experience gained during this time, especially as it relates to terms of reference:

- a) the relationship between ongoing professional learning for teachers and teaching expertise;
- b) which factors will support high quality professional learning for teachers, including learning methods and environments for the development of professional knowledge, and the pedagogy relevant to professional development of teachers; and
- d) determining how best practice in ongoing professional learning for teachers can be delivered into schools and learning communities

The experience of Glen Waverley Secondary College suggests that professional learning has its most powerful effect when it is conducted in situ, is ongoing and is embedded in practice.

For over a decade the College has been offering a variety of streams of professional learning to its teachers, mainly delivered by the College's own teaching staff. Characteristically, the professional learning program is offered as a series of two-hour sessions, generally with three or four alternative offerings, at the conclusion of the school day on Monday afternoons. Many thousands of hours of professional learning have been delivered to teachers at the College since this program commenced. The main areas of focus have been developing expertise in ICT, sharing knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning, and building leadership capacity.

The overwhelming weight of research demonstrates that by far the most important factor impacting upon the quality of student learning is the expertise of the teacher in the classroom. Our approach to professional learning has been predicated on the understanding

that developing teacher expertise is the most powerful way we can impact positively upon student outcomes.

The myriad factors that combine to influence student learning, the turnover of staff we experience from year to year and the limited resources at our disposal to thoroughly research and evaluate the impact of our professional learning programs, means that it is difficult to quantify the benefit of the College's professional learning program in terms of improved student outcomes. There is no doubt, however, that a highly professional staff, actively sharing expertise in a climate where ongoing professional learning is encouraged and supported has raised the level of expertise of the teaching staff at Glen Waverley Secondary College. Qualitative evidence suggests that the impact on student outcomes has been extremely positive. The school performs above like school benchmarks and is highly regarded by the community for the quality of the learning programs it offers and the outstanding results consistently achieved by its students.

Glen Waverley Secondary College describes itself as a learning community and implicit in this is a strong expectation that teachers will apply themselves diligently to their own learning. The College's in-house professional learning program, however, relies upon the goodwill and commitment of staff to both deliver and participate in the various programs on offer. Staff delivering professional learning sessions are paid a nominal sum for their efforts from the College's professional development budget. Given the cost of externally offered professional development programs, this method of professional learning is economically attractive. From time to time the in-house expertise is augmented by buying in expertise from outside the College.

The advantages of offering the professional learning programs within the school are considerable. The uptake of professional learning is substantially increased and the cost moderate. Programs can be tailored to the school's identified priorities and this promotes consistency in approaches to teaching and learning across the form groups and across the year levels. The program is able to tap into the considerable expertise that resides within the College as experienced and/or innovative teachers are able to share their expertise with their colleagues. Teachers are comfortable in this learning environment, have the opportunity to follow up their learning, and can continue to explore an area of learning over a period of time. They are able to implement aspects of their learning in a sympathetic and supportive environment where further assistance and support is readily available.

The benefits of this approach to professional learning can be contrasted with externally offered programs. Such programs can be excellent and hugely beneficial, but often they are not. They are usually expensive, one-off events. A school's ability to involve large numbers of teachers in external professional development is limited. Much of the work in schools today revolves around teams of teachers operating collegially. External professional development often relies upon one or two being sent off to do the learning and then being responsible for sharing this learning with colleagues back in the school. Sometimes the richness of the original program is lost and people simply lack the energy to sustain the program. The multiple demands placed upon teachers can be overwhelming and this is one of the major disincentives to teachers investing in their own learning.

Glen Waverley Secondary College has also been involved in the delivery of system-wide professional learning through school-based practicum programs and annual conferences under Navcon Consortium banner. Four of the original Navigator Schools in Learning

Technologies, Glen Waverley Secondary College, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, Apollo Parkways Primary School and Essendon North Primary School have continued to work collaboratively to support teacher learning over the past decade.

School-based practicum programs operating at Glen Waverley Secondary College have attracted teachers from many parts of Australia and New Zealand. They provide an opportunity for professional learning programs focusing on ICT, pedagogy and leadership development within a school context. Participants engage in a series of workshops and are able to immediately test their learning within the context of the school in operation as they observe and participate in classes and engage with the College's teaching staff and students.

The annual Navcon conference has developed a highly successful approach to conference presentation. Navcon conferences are essentially an opportunity for practising teachers to share their work with other teachers through a wide range of workshops. Most Education conferences tend to be arranged around the theoretical constructs of academics and other researchers or writers. The practical teacher-to-teacher workshop-based conference model has proven highly successful and extremely popular. Since 2000 conferences have been held in Melbourne, Bendigo, Adelaide, Christchurch and in September 2007, on the New South Wales Central Coast.

The College's in-house professional learning program, the practicum program and the Navcon conferences share a common theme. They are delivered by expert **practitioners** to their peers; they are classroom focused and they provide a powerful model by which best practice can be shared in a profession which has traditionally been notoriously backward in exploring ways of sharing best practice.

Glen Waverley Secondary College is a large and well-resourced school. Strategic budgeting has enabled the College to develop and operate a professional learning program which has delivered significant benefits back into the College's classrooms. Many schools would find it difficult to allocate the resources necessary to replicate this model of professional learning. The Glen Waverley Secondary College experience would suggest that strategic budgeting on a systems level, and the sharing of resources between schools which have developed collaborative arrangements, should create the opportunity for schools to begin to implement similarly framed programs.

Promoting alternative models of practitioner-delivered professional learning, especially where this is complemented by the opportunity to see good practice in the context of a school, is a very powerful learning experience for teachers. Governments would be well-served by investigating models of delivery of this kind of professional learning.

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