Vision for Learning: CHS Learning Community

Preamble: The 2010-2013 Strategic Plan identifies key directions for the school in regard to Student Learning, Engagement and Wellbeing and Pathways and Transitions. The Strategic Plan can be read in full and is in a Year of Review with a Self-Evaluation currently in progress. In this paper the educational vision for the school based on the Strategic Plan will be detailed. The objective is to make links between the strategic planning work undertaken over the last 3 years with wider research and school based practice and to provide guidance for the school community in developing projects and programs for the future.

The central focus of the school is improving learning outcomes for all students

Key questions:
How do we improve learning?
How do we support collaboration and agreed approaches to learning?

2010

- The Strategic Plan developed in 2009 and implemented from 2010, prioritised the development of agreed approaches to teaching and learning ensuring that the expertise of teachers is shared so that all students benefit. Research tells us (Hattie1) that the biggest difference between students’ achievements is not between schools but between classes within a school based on who the teacher is. James Stronge’s2 research details that a child without the benefit of a good teacher for a year will fall behind further than a year in regard to his peers and may never make up the ground lost.(link) Conversely the impact of high quality teaching leads to strong learning growth.
- Research tells us that the single biggest impact on learning that the school can control (Hattie3) is teacher practice and this is where our energies need to be. Therefore the most effective strategy is through teachers collaborating in planning and assessment and co teaching. Through these approaches transference and enrichment of practice is most likely to occur.
- In 2010 an organisational model was developed in which planning time for teachers became the priority in the meeting schedule. The model was developed by the Leadership Team and consultation to refine the model was undertaken in focus groups throughout Terms 2 and 3, 2010. The organisational model has 5 Strategic Teams and 7 Implementation Teams. Each of the 4 Teaching and Learning Teams have an average of 16 hours meeting time per term.
- With the guidance of Julia Atkin the Leadership Team of the school asked, “What is effective teaching and learning?” and “What is our educative purpose at CHS?” The answers to these questions formed the basis for moving forward with agreed approaches.
- A working party was established to develop a program for Year 9 students later to be called Connections. This team worked with Julia and was also engaged in reflecting on the key questions relating to educative purpose and effective teaching and learning. Students’ capacity to be responsive and creative 21st century learners with the ability to manage themselves and their own learning and work with others emerged strongly. The working party agreed that the program would be based on a collaborative structure with 4 teachers working with 100 students at a time in order to achieve the objectives. 6 Principles were developed for the program. These principles were also used to later inform the Design Brief for the Enterprise Centre.
- In 2010 a Design and Development Team was established charged with responsibility for the development of a Design Brief for the architects to use in the design of a new building. The team commenced their work led by Dr Julia Atkin with the question: “What do we want for teaching and learning at CHS?” Another key area related to improving learning is that we also know a key discriminator for student achievement at VCE; what ensures that a student of capacity reaches their full potential is independent and self-managed learning, understanding exactly where they are at in their learning and identifying how to take the next step. In 2010 teachers in the Design and Development Team identified student passivity and teacher dependence as challenges to be met in improving learning outcomes at VCE.
2011

- In 2011, the Learning Statement was the product of responses to the key questions. Focus teams drawn from parents and students as well as teachers completed a reflective task based on their recollections of an experience of learning well. A synthesis of all education documentation produced by the school over 10 years was undertaken by the Leadership Team. These processes led to the development of The 4 foundation principles which provide the basis for all teaching and learning developments in the school.
- In 2011 Teaching and Learning Teams were implemented allowing teachers to meet twice a week planning curriculum and ways of teaching which is consistent and high quality. Each TLT is led by a Leading Teacher who is a member of the Student Learning Team. Expert teachers are key members of each team leading small collaborative teams in the development of agreed learning approaches for each subject taught. Moodle provides the vehicle for publishing the agreed curriculum and is accessible to teachers, students and parents.
- The Connections Program was launched with students located in the Library while the building, a new base for year 9 students was designed and constructed. The program was refined and developed further through the year.
- As mentioned, in 2010, The Design and Development Team identified concerns about the passivity and teacher dependence of VCE students. A key discriminator for student achievement at VCE, what ensures that students of capacity reach their potential is independent and self-managed learning. These learning dispositions were identified as essential to the development of the Connections Program and also led to initiatives such as the High Achievers’ Assembly and the publishing of student results in prominent places in the school.

2012

- The Learning Landscape (2012) took the work commenced with the Learning Statement further by providing 6 features which should be evident in all learning across the school. Initially developed by the Leadership Team, consultation with parents, students and teachers led to refinements.
- During 2012 the focus for development was twofold: Differentiation and Assessment and Reporting (Monitoring Growth). Manuals to assist teachers were developed for each of these closely linked features of the Learning Landscape. One of the central features of this curriculum documentation is acknowledging multiple entry points to learning; students below, at, above and well above and multiple exits from learning. Consequently the use of data to understand where students are at in their learning both prior to new learning, during learning and at the end of units of learning is essential as are Rubrics for tracking and reflecting learning growth.
- Teachers developed Rubrics in the collaborative teams during TLT sessions and used Rubrics in Years 7-10 in 2012.
- In 2012 arrangements were put in place for a change to the day structure. The 4 period day would allow for both frequency of contact with teachers and length of periods allowing for deep learning.
- The day structure changes also provided for Learning Mentor sessions across the school based on 4 key principles (Day Structure). A central feature of these weekly sessions are learning portfolios maintained by students to enable them to reflect on their learning and monitor their growth, assisted by Learning Mentors.

2013

- Providing for the development of learning which equips students for life in the 21st century is also central to the development of improved learning for our students. These features are evident in the Learning Landscape which promotes collaboration, deep learning and negotiation as well as the monitoring of growth and the community of learners.
- In 2013 a teaching and learning coach, Esther Weichert has commenced working with teams of teachers, starting with Year 9 and 10 English and Maths teams in the Enterprise Centre to help them collaborate and design curriculum together. The Enterprise Centre is a learning environment designed to support learning which is differentiated and encourages independence.
Instructional Rubrics are the key tool for teachers to use in Monitoring Learning Growth and Esther Weichert is supporting teachers to develop these within their collaborative teams. Esther has also been working with the SLT and staff in implementing the Learning Design Process and in developing learning maps and sequences. This provides a consistent approach to curriculum development which prioritises Differentiated Learning or multiple entry points and Assessments or multiple exits which assist teachers and students to track the growth of learning.

In February 2013, Boot Camp was instituted for Year 12s, further promoting a culture of excellence featuring former Year 12 students who have achieved outstanding results as key presenters and mentors.

Learning Portfolios implemented with a 75 minute period allocated per week across the school to enable students to conference with their Learning Mentor; reflecting upon and monitoring growth. Students in the Senior School are in House based groupings and a House Leader. Groupings, Learning Mentors and Leaders are intended to remain consistent for the 3 years in the senior school.

In the Junior School Learning Mentors are teachers taking students for 2 subjects (Year 7 and 8) or a Connections teacher (Year 9). At each Year level a Student Learning Development Leader or House Leader takes responsibility for identifying developmental needs and developing responses. Student voice is actively sought and incorporated.

Starting in Year 12 is not enough, it must start earlier. The Connections program is one way we are building a culture of independent learning. There is more to be done.

Where to next?

Bringing the Learning Landscape into widespread use, ongoing refinement and development:

- Collaboration: Continued work on agreed approaches to teaching and learning in teams and documenting the products. Learning together will lead to achieving better outcomes than learning alone
- Monitoring Growth: Using data and developing Instructional Rubrics, providing ways for students to take responsibility for their own learning including the use of Learning Portfolios and conferencing with mentors
- Deep learning: Focus on creativity and problem solving and understanding of the learning process
- Differentiation: Deliberate planning for learning which is inclusive of all and ensures all students are challenged by learning
- Negotiation: Ensuring that student voice is present in every learning setting and what is learned, how it is learned and the way learning is demonstrated is part of the learning process
- Community of learners; Students, Parents and Staff all share the school’s vision for learning.

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