

## **LINK 14: Enactment case study: Lansdowne Crescent Primary School**

Bill Mulford and Bill Edmunds (University of Tasmania)

### **1. Introduction, focus and school selection**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

In our interview with the Minister for Education (and now also Premier) for this research project he stated “[W]hat I’ll be really interested in out of this research is [how we translate the] pretty lofty ideals of equity, prosperity and democracy [into practice]. How do you translate [public purposes] into how school operate, what they do on a daily basis? ... That’s really hard stuff.” This chapter seeks to provide a rich, longitudinal case study of one Tasmanian primary school that can answer the Minister’s question.

#### **1.2 Focus**

This case study focused on the public purposes of education. It sought to clarify what is meant by terms such as public good or common good which are often used in education debates but rarely explained. In particular, the case study explored how a Tasmanian school community understands the public purposes of education, what strategies they are using to advance these purposes, and what factors help or hinder their realisation.

The case study is organised around the following areas: introduction, focus and school selection; school profile, including location, mission, priorities, parent body, demographics, teaching staff, resources, and student performance; methodology, including school acceptance of involvement, documentation and visits, and observations; results, including from and about the principal and senior staff, teachers, students, and parents and community; conclusion.

#### **1.3 School selection**

For the case study we sought a school that was performing at a high level both in terms of its student literacy and numeracy results and social skill development, was reputed to be enacting the public purposes of education (although the major purpose of the study was to clarify and describe these), had an enrolment in excess of 300, and for ease of contact was within reasonable travel distance from the University of Tasmania’s Hobart campus of the Faculty of Education.

The Tasmanian Principals Association (TPA), a sub group of the Australian Government Primary Schools Principals Association, provided the researchers with a list of 23 primary schools in southern Tasmania with student populations in excess of 300 and short listed six that they considered were worthy of selection. One of the major criteria in this short listing was whether or not the school had been heavily committed to the Tasmanian Department of Education’s Essential Learnings Curriculum (ELs) with its strong links to the public purposes of education. For example, the five goals articulated in this curriculum were:

1. Responsive and continually improving services that ensure all Tasmanians develop the knowledge, skills and confidence they need;
2. Enriching and fulfilling learning opportunities that enable people to work effectively and participate in society;
3. Safe and inclusive learning environments that encourage and support participation in learning throughout life;

4. An information rich community with access to global and local information resources so that everyone has the opportunity to participate in, and contribute to, a healthy democracy and a prosperous society; and,
5. A valued and supported education workforce that reflects the importance of teaching as a profession.

Whilst Goal 1 relates mainly to private purposes of schooling it is clear that Goals 2-5 exemplify public purposes. These goals are strengthened in complementary statements of value, purpose and the essential learnings themselves, such as social responsibility involving building social capital, valuing diversity and acting democratically (see Tasmanian Department of Education, 2002).

The researchers then employed a substantial data base developed during recent research projects undertaken by the University of Tasmania, Faculty of Education Leadership for Learning Group, that included performance data from most Tasmanian schools on literacy and numeracy and, most importantly, the development of student social skills (see: Edmunds et al, in press; Ewington et al 2008; Gurr et al, 2007 & in press; Mulford, 2005, 2007a & b, 2008; Mulford & Johns, 2004; Mulford et al, 2005, 2008 a & b, & in press).

Despite its high socio-economic status (or, more correctly in the Tasmanian context, low Education Needs Index (ENI)<sup>1</sup>) one of the six nominated schools, Lansdowne Crescent Primary School (LCPS), was achieving above what would be expected, i.e., in the top 17 % of schools or above the regression band in both literacy/numeracy and social skills<sup>2</sup> (see Charts 1 and 2). On the basis of this additional evidence, the TPA supported the selection of LCPS as the case study school.

## 2 Profile of Lansdowne Crescent Primary School (LCPS)

### 2.1 Location

LCPS is located in the suburb of West Hobart and is within three kilometres of the Hobart city centre. The school describes itself as being situated in pleasant surroundings, enjoying an unsurpassed view over the city to the Derwent estuary and eastern shores of Hobart (see photo). The school consists of four blocks of classrooms in well laid out spacious grounds.

Children from Kindergarten to Grade 6 are enrolled and are taught in both single and composite class groups of students.

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<sup>2</sup> Tasmanian schools are classified according to an Education Needs Index (ENI) ranging from 1 (low needs) to in excess of 100 (high needs).. The Index for each school is derived using socio-economic data from the Australian Census, size of centre (town, locality), distance from the Department of Education district administration office and the number of students receiving government financial student assistance. The ENI impacts on the numbers of teachers and the level of funding received from the Department of Education by schools. Schools with higher needs receive additional staff and finance to enable them to make better provision for students requiring additional learning support. Most of the high needs schools in Tasmania are located in suburban government funded broad-acre welfare housing areas and in more isolated communities.

In order to avoid over-interpreting small differences in scores in our research, and given the negative correlation of scores with ENI, adjusted scores were also calculated. These adjusted scores were based on the number of points above or below the regression lines. Schools were given an adjusted score of 3 if they were in the top 17 per cent, 2 in the middle 66 per cent or 1 if in the bottom 17 per cent. This is illustrated in the Charts which show primary schools by mean/median Literacy/Numeracy and their mean Social Success Index scores, with the solid arrows indicating scores of 3, between the black lines scores of 2 and hatched arrows scores of 1. Lansdowne Crescent Primary School scored 3 in both areas and is indicated by the oval (each oval is a Tasmania primary school) next to the box containing 'LCPS'.

<sup>2</sup> Student performance in literacy/numeracy was supplied by the Tasmanian Department of Education and social skills was derived from teacher and principal survey responses to survey items such as students are able to solve conflicts through negotiation, are able to listen to others and want to have an influence, do not accept discrimination, have adopted democratic values, are responsible and democratic, and understand that bullying is totally unacceptable.

Five other government primary schools are located within a three kilometre radius resulting in a high level of competition for students. LCPS has a policy of only taking students from within its own area. The enrolment capacity has easily been achieved from within the designated feeder area resulting in a turning away of students from other locations. Approximately 335 children attend the school. This is the school's highest student enrolment. Enrolments in the previous five years have ranged from 271 in 2003 to 296 in 2007.



Chart1: Primary literacy/numeracy by ENI

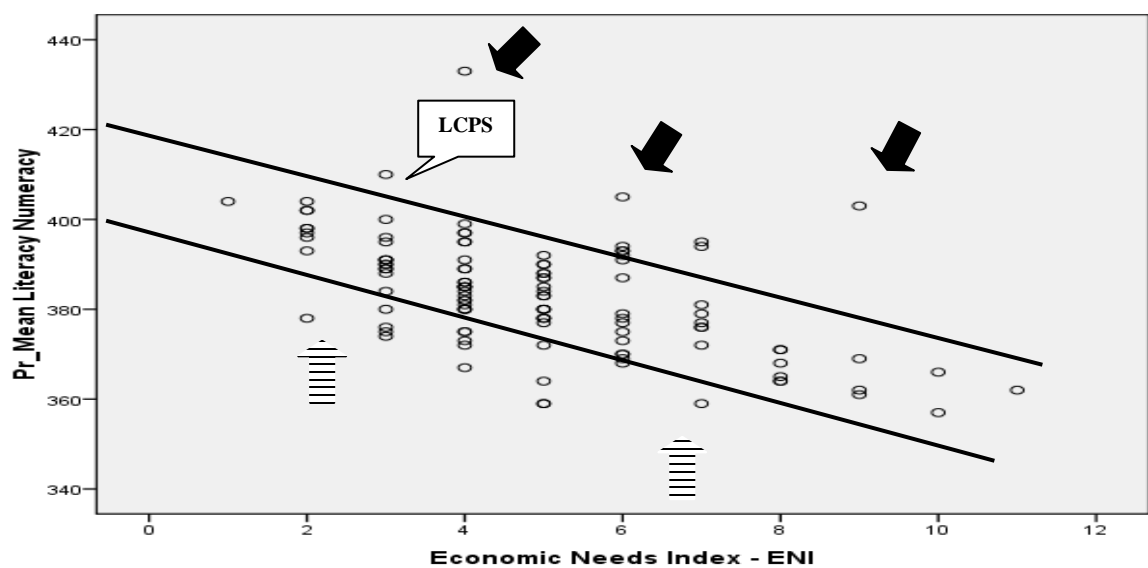
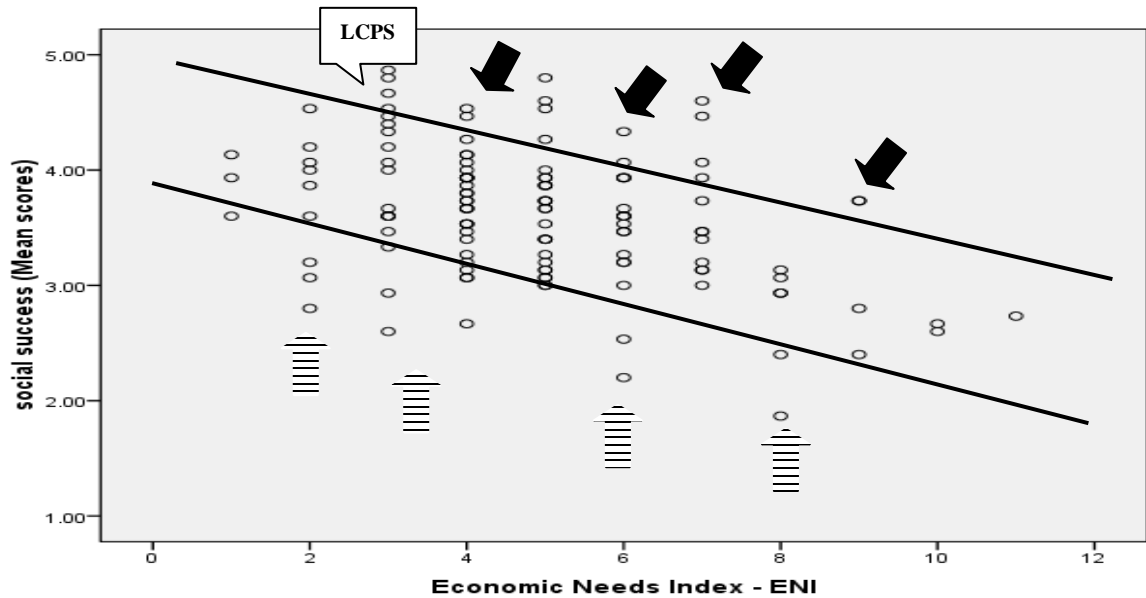


Chart 2: Primary social skills by ENI



The school buildings are a mix of architectural styles (see photo below) as additional classrooms and facilities have been added to meet the changing needs of the school during the almost 100 years of its existence.



During the period of the case study, the school was under-going a major redevelopment program with temporary classrooms being replaced by permanent structures and the original, main building, being upgraded. The works program included the construction of two new classrooms (see photo below), the refurbishment of four classrooms and the library in the original section of the school. Whilst this redevelopment caused much dislocation and inconvenience to teachers and students it was observed to have minimal effect on the

continued delivery of learning programs and relationships within the school community. A feeling of optimism and belief in the long term benefits of the upgrade appeared evident among school personnel.

The upgraded facilities were officially opened in September 2008 by Lisa Singh MHA and Duncan Kerr MHR, both of whom are members for Denison, the electorate in which the school is located. During the opening, the principal and members of state and federal parliament all made mention of the very high levels of cooperation between the school staff, students, parents, the project manager and the on-site foreman. In a sense, the notion that cooperation among all associated with LCPS is desirable and important (as observed by the researchers throughout this project, and detailed in later sections of this paper) was exemplified when Duncan Kerr called upon the principal, the project manager and the site foreman to join with him in the unveiling of the plaque marking the event.



The artwork commissioned as part of the redevelopment building program was particularly symbolic. A giant tree root has been sculptured to emerge from the hillside and designed as a seat on which students can sit and converse (see photo). The root is representative of the notion that primary education provides the foundation of student schooling and as such is most important. Yet to be engraved in the sculpture are three poems written by students, as follows:

- Different faces Surround me. Happy, laughing In their smiles I'm safe
- Sun on a quiet bench Beside gently swaying trees Leaves blow with the breeze
- Small skink running fast Straight through the playground Safe under a rock

The relocation of students following the completion of the works program has enabled some spaces to be better utilised. One example has been the creation of a gallery in which student work can be displayed and appreciated by those who enter the school. Visitors find that the school foyer is a busy, joyful place with welcoming administrative staff and quickly gain an impression of what is valued. On display are Department of Education Awards for Excellence, certificates of appreciation and awards from different organisations and community groups. There are fine examples of students' work, a parent noticeboard, the Code of Ethics for the Teaching Profession in Tasmania, a history cupboard that began in 1916 when the school was built, and pictures of the total school enrolment (2005 and 2007). The success of students and that of the school community is celebrated and represented in the school foyer.

## 2.2 School mission

The stated mission of LCPS is to:

Educate children in all areas of intellectual, physical, social, moral and emotional development.

The school's mission statement goes on to state that:

Learning takes place in an environment which is stimulating, supportive, aesthetic and effectively organised. We aim to be a centre for educational excellence set in a community which is fully involved in its activities and to work together with parents to create a climate where learning is valued, children

are safe and secure and where the partnership between school and parents continues to be productive and mutually supportive.

In brief, LCPS's mission is enacted through high levels of empowerment; empowerment of students, teachers and parents and members of the community.

The prominently displayed motto of LCPS (see the photo taken of a large wall in the playground) is:

Respect for One and All.



The notion of gaining respect and acting in a positive way is exemplified in the school's goals and Behaviour Support Policy statement:

Goals (include):

The goal for our students is self-discipline so that their actions will reflect a consideration of the rights of others as well as their own needs.

Our objective is to encourage students to develop positive attitudes towards themselves, the school, their peers and learning.

Behaviour Support Policy (includes):

The goal for our students is self-discipline so that their actions will reflect a consideration of the rights of others as well as their own needs. We believe the best way to promote self-discipline is to encourage students to realise that they are responsible for their actions and the consequences of their behaviour.

Our objective is to encourage students to develop positive attitudes towards themselves, the school, their peers and learning. We believe this can be achieved in a school where people's rights are acknowledged and respected. These rights imply certain responsibilities.

In brief, the school believes that the best way to promote self-discipline is to encourage students to realise that they are responsible for their actions and the consequences of their behaviour, that positive attitudes can be achieved in a school where people's rights are acknowledged and respected and that rights imply certain responsibilities. Although the behavioural policy statement contains a list of procedural steps for teachers to follow, the policy also clearly states that circumstances may dictate that teachers may not proceed through all steps of the policy, in order,

especially, if the physical safety of individuals is at risk.

And, that the empowerment of teachers is an important feature of the policy.

In all matters with regard to behaviour support the professional judgement of the teacher is paramount in ensuring successful outcomes.

### 2.3 School priorities

The Successful School Principals Project (SSPP – see earlier references on page 2), as part of an international research study during 2005 and 2006, surveyed schools in Tasmania to find out what their three major achievements were during the previous five years, their planned focus for the next five years and what matters weren't discussed in the school, but if they were, could make a difference. The responses by the principal of LCPS were as follows:

Achievements last 5 years (SSPP March, 2006):

- Improved relations between school and community
- Redistribution of leadership skills to a wider group
- Professional learning more focussed

Focus for next 5 years (SSPP March, 2006):

- Improved pedagogy in all classes to meet changing needs
- Improved physical environment
- Children taking more ownership of their own learning.

Matters not talked about (SSPP March, 2006):

- Nothing. We talk about everything.

The research team observed that there was indeed a focus on the achievement of improved pedagogy, physical environment and students accepting ownership of their learning. Children at LCPS are taught using a variety of teaching approaches ranging from large group activities to specialist programs. Students are encouraged to develop skills, knowledge and understanding across the whole spectrum of the curriculum so that each may have opportunities to realise their full potential. There is a strong sense of “community” within the school that is actively promoted by the principal and acknowledged and supported by the students.

Staff readily engaged parents and members of the wider community to assist in the provision of a curriculum that met the needs of particular students. For example, the use of visiting authors to stimulate the writing process in students at risk has proven to be most successful. Students are encouraged to participate in school decision-making processes and, as they progress from year to year accept increasing leadership roles when working with younger students. Members of staff are given opportunities to talk about everything. The inclusive nature of the school was constantly enacted by the principal, staff, parents and students.

### 2.4 Parent body

Parents are fiercely proud of their school. They, and their children, are strongly encouraged by the principal and staff to participate in and/or contribute to school decision-making. It is common to observe fathers, mothers and couples walking with their children (of all ages) to school each morning as a part of their daily routine. Fifty or more parents can be seen attending school assemblies. Grandparents are also seen to be attending assemblies and sporting activities.

The parent body, the School Community Association (SCA), is very active and raised some \$20,000 during the past twelve months. The SCA also sponsors regular activities on Friday evenings in which families, students and parents, can enjoy joint participation, such visits to

‘Skating World’. The school has a strong uniform policy resulting in all students wearing the uniform regularly.

## **2.5 Demographics**

The changing demographic in this inner-city area has seen the Educational Needs Index (ENI) for the school become lower in recent years. As indicated earlier, LCPS is now a comparatively low needs school with a needs factor in 2008 of 23. The ENI for 2008 is calculated from 2007 data by Educational Performance Services in the Tasmanian Department of Education (DoE). The higher the ENI number, the higher the educational need. Numbers range from 12 (low need) to 108 (high need). The number of students on the Severe Disabilities Register in August 2007 was three. Four students self-identified as Aboriginal. The student enrolment did not fluctuate markedly during the year (between March and August 2007, six students left the school and two students arrived).

## **2.6 Teaching staff**

The full time equivalent (FTE) number of teachers allocated to the school for 2008 was 16 and included the principal and two Advanced Skills Teachers (Senior Staff). The actual number of teaching staff is, in reality, much higher than sixteen due to the large number of teachers working part-time and/or shared with other schools. The senior staff have the equivalent of two days release from their class during which they undertake their across school duties. One teaches kindergarten in order to gain release time while the other must be replaced on an upper primary class by a part-time teacher. The Student-Teacher Ratio (inclusive of the principal) in March 2007 was 18.8 to 1. The students are distributed across 14 classrooms, five of which are paired spaces that are shared by two teachers, some working part-time or engaged in other duties for part of the week, operating in tandem with each other.

## **2.7 Resources**

The total School Resource Package (SRP) provided by the DoE for 2007 was \$299782.11. Of this amount, funds provided that directly relate to student learning are General Support Grant (Per Capita \$74362, Educational Needs \$15452), Information and Communication Technologies \$19239 and Student Assistance Scheme \$3763. A 0.9 FTE of a teacher was allocated to support the Flying Start Program, a literacy support program used to support students in their early years of schooling.

## **2.8 Student performance**

March 2008 School Performance Indicators released by the DoE’s Educational Performance Services Unit show that, on a comparative basis across Tasmania, LCPS is performing at above average levels in measures of student, staff and parent satisfaction. The absentee rate for students during 2007 was 5.5%, which was categorised as average. Student achievement on the Kindergarten Development Check, which is designed to assist teachers in the early identification of any kindergarten student who is at risk of not achieving expected developmental outcomes and may require a specific intervention program and/or support from specific support personnel (e.g. “Increasingly cooperates with other students in extended play situations) was above average. Student performance is also categorised as above average in Reading, Mathematics, and in the state-wide Literacy and Numeracy Monitoring Program for Year 3 and Year 5 students.

The value added results (provided by the DoE) for student improvement from year 3 to Year 5 (2005-2007) showed above average improvement in reading, writing and numeracy. Student assessments taken from the DoE’s Student Assessment and Reporting Information System and provided to the school by Educational Performance Services indicate that in all year levels students are performing above the state mean in English-literacy, Mathematics-literacy,



and Health and wellbeing, and were all trending upwards. Wellbeing includes items for teachers, students and parents related to the public purposes of education, such as:

- Staff - supportive leadership, professional interaction, participative decision-making, curriculum coordination,
- Student - student motivation, student decision-making, purposeful teaching, teacher empathy with students, and
- Parents - satisfaction level of parents, student social skills, school improvement and classroom behaviour.

Data from the 2008 National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) indicated the following percentages of LCPS Year 3 students were at or above the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile – Reading 33%, Writing 40%, Spelling 30%, Grammar and Punctuation 32%, and Numeracy 42%. The results for Year 5 students were Reading 47%, Writing 29%, Spelling 29%, Grammar and Punctuation 41%, and Numeracy 50%. Except for Year 3 Reading (97%), 100% of Year 3 and 5 students were at or above national minimum standards in these areas.

### **3. Methodology**

The case study required the school's acceptance of involvement, agreement on available documentation and visits, and observations that could be undertaken, as well as the approach employed in data collection.

#### **3.1 School Acceptance of Involvement**

The researchers first met with LCPS's principal Peter (Pete) Marmion in December 2007 to invite him and his school to participate in the research project. Pete indicated that he was keen to participate but wanted to gain staff acceptance prior to confirming acceptance on behalf of the school. Just prior to the end of the 2007 school year, at a meeting of staff, the teachers agreed to participate in the case study. The principal and staff saw their inclusion in the project as a means of obtaining external feedback on their goals, aspirations and enactment of these, and viewed the project as a professional development exercise.

Immediately prior to the start of the 2008 school year the research team attended the school's first staff meeting and outlined the scope of the case study. Teachers welcomed the input and were keen to participate. It became evident that they were very proud of their school. The researchers also observed proceedings during a subsequent staff meeting and noted that all teachers had the opportunity to place items on the agenda. Each item is treated with respect, valued and discussed in turn. Before the conclusion of the meeting each teacher, in turn, is asked if they have other items of business or matters to add. The researchers were given an open invitation to attend any or all school activities.

The research team also attended the first Parent Community Association Meeting for 2008 and provided information about the case study and invited their participation. Parents expressed interest and welcomed the opportunity to contribute their views as to the public purposes of education in their school. The intention was for members of school Community Council to be interviewed in May 2008. As the research team were leaving the meeting, a parent who was training to be a teacher approached us and volunteered that:

The success of the school is due heavily to the principal, Pete Marmion.

#### **3.2 Documentation and Visits**

The study has employed multiple data sources (triangulation) including documentation, visits/interviews and observations.

##### **3.2.1 School documentation**

The researchers were provided with access to:

- ❑ Principal's application for LCPS;
- ❑ School policies (including literacy, numeracy and behaviour management);
- ❑ 2007 school magazines that are edited and compiled three times a year by year 6 students;
- ❑ School newsletters to parents from 2005, 2006 and 2007;
- ❑ 2008 School newsletters (Newsletters from the school to parents were E-mailed each week to the researchers.);
- ❑ DoE principal and school performance data; and
- ❑ Written comments by students who had left at the end of the previous year.

### **3.2.2 School visits and interviews**

Initial visits were focused on the researchers developing an understanding of the goals and aspirations of staff and parents, the many facets of the school, and the manner in which it functioned. Observations were recorded and pertinent comments of parents, teachers and students were noted.

Over an eight month period visits included:

- ❑ attending three staff meetings;
- ❑ attending a School Community Association meeting;
- ❑ attending a parent meet-the-teacher and barbecue function;
- ❑ observing students arriving with parents on the first day of school;
- ❑ observing the school's Daily Fitness Program in operation;
- ❑ attending the school athletics carnival;
- ❑ attending school assemblies, including the opening of the school's new facilities;
- ❑ meetings with the principal and senior staff; and
- ❑ interviews with senior staff, teachers and parents (all of which were taped).

### **3.3 Observations**

Observations made during the visits were recorded, reviewed and analysed to identify and distil the public purposes and the manner in which they were enacted in the school. As an integral part of the process the researchers maintained a list of items to follow up with the principal and staff. Observations, for example, about the relationships among and between members of the school community, the focus on inclusion and support, the emphasis on participatory decision making, including, the participation of parents in the life of the school, the multiple, layered purposes evident in the enactment of school activities, and school assemblies are included in relevant sections of this document.

### **3.4 Data collation**

There are a number of ways the case study data could have been presented. We have chosen another form of triangulation, that is to first detail the evidence from, and about, the principal and senior staff. From this data, as well as that on the school's profile, we reach tentative conclusions about how LCPS understands the public purposes of education, what strategies they are using to advance these purposes, and what factors they see as helping and/or hindering their realisation. We then test these tentative conclusions through the evidence from, and about, the teachers, students and parents and wider community. The results section, which follows, employs this sequence.

## **4 Results**

### **4.1 Principal**

Prior to becoming Principal of LCPS, Peter Marmion had gained four years experience as a senior teacher and 14 years as a principal in three different primary schools. Peter, or Pete as he likes to be called, had also spent one year working in an environment centre providing support to teachers. Pete has been principal of this school for six years.

Outside the school Pete is highly respected by his professional colleagues and is an executive member of the Tasmanian Principals Association. He has undertaken a mentoring role as part of the Tasmanian Education Department's Principal Mentoring Project, is a member of the Department's School Improvement Board and is actively involved in organising professional development for principals, particularly as a member of organising committees for principal conferences.

Pete has major roles outside the sphere of schools. He is a tutor for Adult Education environmental programs, and co-leads a weekend course entitled 'The Magic of Melaleuca' in the remote South-west of Tasmania. He is a member of the board of Huon Valley's Learning and Information Network Centre (LINC) that brings together a number of government and community organisations such as the library/online access centre, Centrelink, Service Tasmania, Business Enterprise Centre and the Magistrates Court under one roof. For 11 years Pete has been Chair of Southern Training Employment and Placement Solutions Ltd (STEPS) which provides housing, training and employment for those less advantaged in the Huon and greater Hobart communities. Pete also has many memberships of cultural and sporting groups in the local community. Pete lives in and commutes daily from a small rural centre south of Hobart.

Pete's application for the position of principal at LCPS confirms his desire to be part of:

a vibrant and unique school community.

He saw this community having a commitment to:

building a culture of continuous improvement.

Three cornerstones were identified by Pete for building a culture of continuous improvement:

students,  
teachers, non-teaching staff, and after-school care staff and  
parents carers and community members.

His stated outcomes arising from a culture of continuous improvement were:

- Strong collaboration
- Caring relationships
- High and achievable expectations
- Opportunities for all
- High literacy and numeracy achievements for students
- Parents valued
- Highly skilled teaching and non-teaching staff
- Teachers making a difference
- Targeted, quality professional development meeting staff's needs to address needs of students
- Clearly articulated leadership roles
- Quality physical learning environments
- High levels of enthusiasm and energy
- School community feeling of pride and strong sense of ownership of their school

He saw the centre piece for achieving this culture as the development of:

a community working and learning together.

His more detailed strategies for leading pedagogical and curriculum change were grouped under four key headings. A sample of items, considered to provide indicators of his leadership style, is listed under each heading (See Appendix 5 for a full list of items):

- ❑ Classroom programs
  - Ensure clear goals for learning are in place and fully understood by children, parents and teachers
  - Ensure classroom time is focussed on what is worth knowing, valuing and understanding
  - Ensure high expectations for both teaching and learning are in place
  - Ensure there is a supportive school climate ensure provision is made for a variety of learning styles
  - Ensure success is celebrated
- ❑ Intervention
  - Carefully track each child's progress as they move through the school
  - Ensure multi-layering of the curriculum
  - Ensure teachers understand the accountability of their role
  - Ensure teachers understand that different objectives can be set for each child within the same teaching context
- ❑ Professional learning
  - Ensure professional learning is staged, site based and owned by all staff
  - Ensure there is sufficient time for reflection
  - Ensure high but achievable expectations are in place
  - Ensure staff are working in collegial teams
- ❑ Parents and community as partners
  - Ensure ongoing literacy and numeracy training for parent volunteers
  - Ensure all classrooms have a welcoming atmosphere for parent involvement
  - Involve parents in assessment and reporting procedures

Despite this ambitious agenda, Pete was also very clear in his view that successful change would be

a slow and measured event.

However, during the case study Pete expressed major concerns about the sometimes debilitating role politicians and Departments of Education can have in this change. For example, Pete said the school saw curriculum, especially literacy, as being “a much bigger animal than politicians and departmental administrators believe”. He elaborated by stating that the school

would never treat children with the disdain of getting them barking at print with idiotic things like Spalding. What the school is doing is teaching literacy in the richest possible environment – we have people like Christa here today inspiring children!

As the incoming Deputy President (Primary) of the Tasmanian Principals Association, Pete was also very worried by the DoE's range of one-off yearly surveys to evaluate the performance of schools and their principals, especially as these results were soon to be made publicly available on the DoE web site. He himself had had a very disappointing experience with these surveys. In the 2007 results, the interstate consultants who were contracted to develop, run and interpret survey results in Tasmanian schools indicated that he needed to show more empathy. While he joked about this at the first staff meeting for the year, it was clear in subsequent discussions that this advice had weighed on his mind over the Christmas holidays. Advice from the 2008 survey suggested he involve staff more in decision-making. When compared to our findings, this advice is absurd. It also demonstrates a potential weakness of these one-off, 'one size fits all' approaches to school and principal evaluation. Given the increasing public availability of such questionable survey findings and advice, there is the potential for great damage to be done. In the case of Pete he has and continues to feel much unnecessary anguish over this situation and is keen that it not happen to other principals.

#### **4.2 Senior staff**

LCPS has two senior staff members, Chris Topfer and Ed Glover who clearly complement Pete's leadership. Christine (Chris) Topfer teaches Kindergarten and has for many years been a leader of teachers in the development of exemplary literacy teaching programs. Chris provides educational leadership for classes Kindergarten to Year 3 and coordinates the school's literacy program. Chris is also responsible for the school's professional learning program. For seven years Chris was a District K-6 literacy support teacher and a Department of Education Principal Education Review Officer responsible for moderation. In 2007 she was a member of the National Education Professional Associations group that developed a working paper on 'Developing a twenty-first century school curriculum for Australian students'. She is currently the National Vice President of the Australian Literacy Educators' Association. For five years Chris also lectured at the University of Tasmania Bachelor of Teaching students in Literacy in Primary and Middle Years.

Ed Glover has brought a range of experiences to his role at LCPS. He has been a principal of small rural schools and been acting principal of larger school settings. Ed teaches a Year 5/6 class three days a week. He provides educational leadership across years 4 to 6 and is the manager of students with special needs. Ed coordinates the student reporting process and is the school's super user or key person responsible for ensuring data is entered appropriately on the Department of Education's Student Assessment and Reporting Information System (SARIS). Ed works with teachers in the formulation and enactment of moderation processes in numeracy and coordinates the National testing of literacy and numeracy in Years 3 and 5. Ed has an administrative role in timetable coordination, negotiating teachers' duty rosters and acting as principal when Pete is out of the school on other duties. Among his more informal roles, Ed says he

tries to bring some fun into the staffroom and school and hands out tongue in cheek certificates every Christmas for "memorable events" that have happened during the year.

Both senior staff have extensive teaching experience, particularly in schools with students with high needs. Each is committed to building positive relationships with students, teachers and parents. The range of skills attributed to the senior staff was observed to be extensive and complementary.

Pete, Chris and Ed were asked what factors contributed to the success of LCPS. Pete responded by highlighting the primary focus on children:

That purity of having that focus on children whilst still recognising that teachers are dealing with their own children and elderly parents and their illnesses. You keep focussing on what's good for kids . . . and that keeps the factionalist approach sometimes seen in schools out of it because that [factionalist approach] is a high or low moral ground type of argument.

We noted that Pete continually stressed at meetings that children provided the focus for what happens in the school. In addition, and as evidenced both during conversations between the principal and students and between the principal and senior staff, the principal clearly knew the family circumstances of each child and could provide an assessment of each child's progress.

As the following statement from Pete indicates, in this priority focus on children the public purposes of education were as, if not more, important than private purposes of education.

We have some exceptionally bright children here who read and write very well but they aren't always able to work with or listen to others. These children will never be good citizens unless we can help them develop these missing social skills. Part of our success comes from our ability to do this and, interestingly, it results in even better reading and writing.

Reinforcing this position is a statement in a recent LCPS's submission to the DoE which noted:

At Lansdowne Crescent we intentionally build strong positive relationships across the whole school community. Literacy learning is embedded in this culture, connecting hearts, bodies and minds. ... Although our children achieve highly, we continue to strive for improvement. We know the success our children achieve is due not only to increased teacher capacity and focused teaching but also to the breadth of opportunities children are offered that relate their learning to the world around them.

Pete also expressed the belief that there is a lot of luck in that, somehow, he has always managed to have high quality staff. He and his senior staff also stated that for a school, community or society to function properly, everyone needs to be given an opportunity. However, they are quick to point out that equity doesn't mean the same for everybody. The senior staff acknowledges that the challenge in their school, where most children come from loving, supportive households, is to keep at the forefront of their minds the significant number of students who don't. For example, Ed stated:

It was interesting with the debate over school camps. People said, initially, "Why bother?" Some of the kids go to Canada skiing, to France, on safari in Africa, go to New Zealand, or go to Fiji to swim. But we also have someone like [Freddy] who doesn't have these experiences. We agreed that he deserves to have these experiences as much as any other child.

Ed describes the school's sense of community in the following terms:

country school in the city. There is a huge sense of community here. People want to be here. It's a positive place. People want to be positive. People want to be supportive. People want to help kids. This afternoon there were over a hundred parents and kids all just sitting around and organising their social calendars – at a quarter past three on a Monday afternoon!

Pete added that at a recent meeting of principals one mentioned with some pride that he had actually spoken to five parents on a particular day. Peter added that, by way of contrast, he and his senior staff speak to the large majority of the parent population EVERY day,

it's just that they [the parents] are here!

Chris added, by way of example, that that very afternoon they'd had a group of parents near the Kindergarten talking about that area of the playground.

They just kept coming. There were fifteen in the end to share their opinions and ideas.

Pete explained that, as a staff, they try not to be competitive. They strongly believe that when professionals work together everyone starts lifting their game – bit by bit, all the time. He used the example of a teacher new to the school:

I was a bit nervous about a new teacher coming into the school. To my mind she was a bit of an unknown quantity – but – she just arrived here, we were all welcoming, she had lots of support and now she's running with it. She's telling me all the positives – it's not as if I went out searching for them. However, I don't want her to stand there telling us how good we are because the school is imperfect – we can always be better!

Chris believes that the sense of community evident in the school is so positive that it helps staff keep tensions and pressures in perspective.

Even if you have a bad day, or something happens in your life, or whatever, it never stays. It moves on. Everything is moving so fast, in a positive way, that no-one has time – even those suffering at home, or at school . . . [It's like going] for a ride down the river. It's flowing so fast in a positive direction that they just get caught up and keep coming and contributing, even if they're wrapped in cotton wool for a while, they come and contribute!

Pete cited the case of a teacher whose family circumstances placed her under enormous pressure. Everybody supported her. She would come to school where everyone gave her a hug and helped her in every way they could.

Although we're very much focussed on children, that can only work if you [staff] are looking after each other. At the start of the year I said to staff, "We want to be family friendly and us three [senior staff] will do whatever we can to support you. Just because you are a teacher doesn't mean you can't go and watch your kid run in an athletics race, or if your partner wants you with him because he's having a major operation – well, that's where you've got to be. Forget school!" It's not because school's unimportant. It's like money in the bank, in a way, because if you are supporting people like that they give you heaps back.

In comparison, some schools I've been to don't understand this important point. At a school I was at when a best friend's father died and I asked the principal if I could go to the funeral he said, "No." I didn't go. I should have just taken a 'sickie' and gone. I'm still upset about this after many, many years. I left that school two months later because I wasn't going to work with that principal any longer. I thought it was a petty thing for him to do. It's one of the reasons I have this philosophy now.

Chris experienced a similar event when working for a DoE school support unit. A close family member died. She hadn't seen him for two weeks because she was too scared to ask if she could leave 40 minutes early at half past four. This she sees, with hindsight, as silly. She strongly believes that:

When you treat people as professionals, that's what you get back.

It was evident during repeated visits to the school that the principal knew the names of each child, staff member, parent and community member and addressed each by name whenever they met and/or conversed. There was constant evidence of a high level of rapport between the principal and others with whom he came into contact. For example, visiting past students were warmly greeted by name and were welcomed into the school and the teachers were reassured at each staff meeting that if they had important family matters to attend to, support was readily available. A number of teachers confirmed that they had been the beneficiaries of that support, whether it had been the provision of time to attend their own child's school for a special occasion, or, when particular circumstances required the teacher to support a spouse, parent or sick child. Staff consistently expressed the view in discussions with them that they felt valued and important members of the family known as LCPS.

Pete believes that building trust within the school community, among staff, parents and children, is important for LCPS's success:

People so appreciate that trust. They're not going to abuse it. It really feeds on itself after a while and in the end it's contagious.

Pete includes children among those that appreciate trust. He thinks that he is lucky in so many ways to be working with the children in this school, who learn so easily. Pete thinks he's like a grandfather to these kids. He knows them all and takes an interest in what they do. He thinks "that's nice".

Here we know the kids. We know a lot about their families and their interests – so, it's like that lovely grandparent, uncle or aunty who takes another little bit of interest.

While students spend most of their school day in class groups, the school has for many years had the practice of grouping students in mixed age groups for particular activities, such as daily fitness. Chris elaborates:

Mixing kids up for daily P.E. and having them work together is like a family and is part of building that family feeling in the school. Another example is in literacy. Today we had Christa Bell, the author working with the children. We had to make a decision. Do we give her to a couple of classes where the teacher can follow up? In the end we decided to give her to Year 4, 5 and 6 children who were reluctant writers and then to our high-flying writers - so she had two workshops. Although they were from Years 4, 5 and 6, they all worked together. They were just part of a small community. ... I guess it's partly because they get so many experiences like that. It's what happens here. It's the way the children are encultured.

Pete says that often it's just a matter of catching the right moment. Chris believes that teachers at the school are flexible and can alter at short notice their programs to accommodate what "lands on the doorstep". They capitalise on opportunities as they arise. She provided the example of one student who had been a very reluctant writer. He hadn't been in the school for very long and "had a big chip on his shoulder". The boy had failed in literacy all through his school life. However

we just caught him. Today he walked up to me and shook my hand and said, 'I've done some [writing] but I don't want to share it'.

Chris cited the example of another boy from after-school care who she had worked with that day. The boy showed her some writing he had just been doing and asked if it was 'all right'. She responded:

"It's fabulous! Share it with Christa." [Yet] he was the one I thought was most disengaged about writing. He also said, "I'm writing a story at home on my laptop. I can't get it off!" There you go! He was the one I thought was least engaged today. He's going to be a writer now. That's why we give that sort of opportunity.

Ed and Pete then added:

Ed

That's what drives you nuts! We give kids all these opportunities, which is fantastic, and you forget that as a classroom teacher that it's all part of their growth – it's all part of what they are. There was a case two years ago when a high at risk girl walked in at two thirty in the afternoon and said, "I'm here Mr Glover". She'd been at school all day engaged in all these different things but they all just happened to fall on a Thursday.

Pete

Yes, she was one of the most highly at risk children I've had at this school but she went on to win one of the academic awards last year at high school.

Ed

Nice girl.

Pete

She could easily have been lost!

Ed

This school gives kids opportunities and these are embraced by the kids.... Some of my kids after the presentation (by Christa) today said, "Mr Glover, we're going to do some writing today." I said, "No you're not 'cause you're going to guitar". The kids embrace the activities and opportunities and value the experience. LCPS teachers, in their own way, also value the opportunities children are given here.

The school is seen as an important part of the community. Ed believes that the relationship the school has with the community has meant that there is very little vandalism, or "stuff like that". He sees the children wanting to look after the school, to protect the school. In contrast to some communities in which he has taught, Ed believes that the relationship this community and the kids have with the school is very positive. He cited the case of a child who was home schooled until this year and within three weeks of her enrolment at the school the family is going to bring their second child to school. Pete had met with the mother who had said that she was having difficulty "letting go", but had seen what the school could do. His response was:

'You don't have to let go. Our philosophy is that you can come and join us. We can find you something to do.' . . . She was so relieved!

"Lighting the fire within", added Chris pointing out that the staff saw literacy as including music, art, robotics and so much more (expanded in a later sub-section).



Pete strongly expressed the view that,

If we allow politicians to keep “dumbing” down what we do in government schools by severely limiting their priorities to areas such as literacy and numeracy, we won’t have a government school system – it’ll disappear!

There is a high level of congruence between the stated philosophy of the school and its enactment. Chris summarises this as “respectful and meaningful education”. Pete described it in the following way:

You pick up from being in the staffroom that there’s this real honesty in people. There’s a lot of humour – you can say a lot of things in jest. You can’t say things and not do them. There are people who just wouldn’t let you get away with it! We have a beautiful statement about equity. If we weren’t following it lots of teachers would say, “Stop! Hang on! Think about this!”

Sometimes you can get excited about something and think you are doing the right thing, and you’re not! That’s another strength of our school – the three of us come at things from such different angles that we are just not pushing the ‘party line’. In any conversation we have here we have a 360 degree view of things.

In fact, I know my gaps, my weaknesses, and when senior staff was appointed we looked for people who would fill in those gaps.

There is also a refreshing acknowledgement among the senior staff that tensions can still arise when carrying out their roles and duties. They are very conscious of who does what. Pete is adamant that role clarity is important, especially for upcoming activities, and who has carriage and responsibility for each activity. He knows that in something as complex as a school the principal doesn’t always get that right. He considers that although a school has high levels of complexity they haven’t room for overlap either. The senior staff may all talk about a particular topic, but as Pete states:

the staff has a need to know who is in charge of that bit, and that bit. This is most important in a school of some 330 students and nearly fifty staff [due to the many part-time staff]. Ineffective communication can potentially create a disaster.

### 4.3 Review

What have we so far learnt about LCPS and their understanding of the public purposes of education and their enactment? Evidence from the school’s profile and from and about the principal and senior teachers would suggests that public purposes of education are a crucial part of an excellent school. Given its earlier strong support for ELs, LCPS understood these public purposes to include:

- ❑ strong focus on social responsibility involving building social capital,
- ❑ valuing diversity and
- ❑ acting democratically.

LCPS sees that everyone should have the opportunity to participate and contribute in a wide range of areas. These understandings are reflected in the school’s mission, goals and motto as well as the feedback from the principal and senior staff. These understandings strongly embrace:

- ❑ democracy,
- ❑ equity,
- ❑ social and community development (including trust, respect, care and consideration of others, cooperation among all, and
- ❑ an acceptance of responsibility, including for environmental sustainability) and empowerment.

There is a high level of congruence between these understandings of public purposes and the enactment (what is done) in the school. The major strategies used to advance these purposes could be seen as including:

- ❑ Building a sense of community that values quality relationships that feature open lines of communication, high levels of trust, openness and honesty among staff, students and parents, and one in which each feels a sense of belonging and an ability to fully involved in working and learning together;
- ❑ A focus on children, knowing the names and backgrounds of each student and providing a wide and rich range of learning opportunities, including in areas such as literacy;
- ❑ Having high expectations and clarity of purpose ( sometimes multiple purposes), including a clear set of expectations for each learning activity;
- ❑ Being flexible and using mixed age groupings, as appropriate, to engender caring, sharing and mentoring among and between students as well as being able to seize the moment;
- ❑ Actively providing leadership roles and opportunities of increasing importance and complexity for students to aspire to as they progress through the school;
- ❑ Obtaining and developing high quality, empowered staff, who have leadership distributed to them, are involved in decision making based on evidence and know they are valued and viewed as professionals working together - supporting and complementing each other;
- ❑ Maintaining a positive approach and keeping areas of tension in perspective;
- ❑ The principal, senior staff and teachers having sustained, quality contact with the profession and a high number of parents and other individuals and groups in the community;
- ❑ Developing and sustaining, in a slow and measured way, a culture of continuous improvement.

Factors seen to help in the realisation of these public purposes include:

- ❑ A principal and senior staff who strongly espouses and act on public purposes;
- ❑ An empowered professional staff providing a rich educational environment that focuses on all children;
- ❑ Collegial teams and deprivatisation of practice;
- ❑ Targeted, owned, quality professional development;
- ❑ A supportive, engaged, partnered community;
- ❑ A quality physical environment;
- ❑ A state curriculum that gives priority to public purposes (e.g. ELs).

Factors seen as hindering the realisation of public purposes include (many by implication):

- ❑ An unsympathetic principal;
- ❑ A disempowered professional staff;
- ❑ A lack of teamwork and privatisation of practice;
- ❑ An unsupportive community;
- ❑ A narrow state curriculum and politicians and a DoE that give priority to a very narrow set of school outcomes, typically literacy and numeracy;
- ❑ Children without social skills, including some of the most gifted.

In order to ‘test’ these emerging conclusions on public purposes and their enactment at LCPS, the case study now turns to the views of, and evidence about, others in the school, that is, the teachers, students, and parents and wider community members.

#### 4.4 Teachers

High levels of respect and rapport were observed between the principal and teachers, and among teachers. Teachers newly appointed to the school reported that when visiting the school for the first time they were told by others on the school staff that, “You will enjoy it here!” They did. Teachers have been quick to emphasise that their colleagues were always prepared to offer support and assistance with planning programs, and provided guidance in identifying appropriate teaching and learning strategies most appropriate for particular students. Such high levels of collegiality among teachers were strongly encouraged and enacted by the principal and senior staff.

The supportive nature of this LCPS’s environment was consistently noticeable during each visit to the school, as exemplified in the following teacher comments:

- Everyone is supportive of each other. You’re looked after. People really care and [the principal] is just the same.
- You are told you are appreciated. You are really appreciated by each other and by [the principal].
- If you’ve got a leader who appreciates what you do, who tries to take the pressure off you so that you can just get on with the job that you want to do with the children. [When we have a leader] who also says “You look a bit tired today, I’ll go out and do your duty”, then we all feel that we can do that for other people as well.
- You are always listened to.
- I think we’re a whole staff. There is no segregation of staff. Cleaners, office, teachers – we’re all one!
- All are treated equally, in a professional manner.
- It’s not only about being a colleague as there are personal friendships here and a lot of support, not only for things that happen in school but for people’s health and well-being generally. People are there for you all the time.

The care and concern for each other has clearly resulted in a high level of commitment to the task of teaching. This, together with the resources such as the range of expertise and experience available within staff, enables an enthusiastic, high-energy ‘can-do’ approach to teaching, as reflected in the following teacher comments:

- Teachers are highly motivated here.
- We are a group with a lot of experience and are able to cope [with children’s different needs]. If someone doesn’t cope we are willing to share. We can cater for everyone because there is a pool of intelligence [among staff] that we can draw upon.

There is a clear de-privatisation of teaching practice with teachers noting that:

- Colleagues are always prepared to offer support and assistance with planning programs and providing guidance in identifying appropriate teaching and learning strategies for particular students
- I often work with a lot of different teachers and I’ve been astounded at the quality of the communication ... and how well we work together.

In respect of system curriculum pressures, teachers are clear that

- We know where we are going and take from curriculum and other system documents what we can use and what is consistent with where we are going.

Also, as noted by numbers of staff, the school had been

- committed to implementing the Essential Learnings Curriculum [with its strong public purposes agenda].

Decision making within the school was observed to be a participatory process, being very inclusive of teachers and support staff. This was particularly evident during staff meetings. Prospective agendas for staff meetings were placed on the staffroom notice board many days prior to the meeting. Staff was invited to add and prioritise items for inclusion at the next meeting. Each attendee at the meetings was asked in turn, and individually, if they wished to add information, or offer an opinion about any of the agenda items during the meeting proceedings.

As the following teacher's comment illustrates, the fact that teachers themselves were valued and cared for has had a flow on effect to a valuing and appreciating the contribution of parents.

- Parents are really supportive.

Many of the teaching staff were part time or had dual roles within the school. This necessitated the use of two teachers teaching in tandem on the one class group. There are several tandem teaching teams in the school. A high level of communication between tandem teacher team members was observed to be necessary to ensure that the transition from one teacher to another was as seamless as possible. The comment that follow is indicative of how well such teams function in the school:

- I often work with a lot of different teachers and I've been astounded at the quality of the communication between the two members of the tandem, how well they work together and how well they communicate about the needs of the children in their class. I don't think I've ever worked in a school where the tandems have worked so well. A couple of them have said that they've worked together for a long time.

As the following representative teacher statement indicates, students are also held in high regard by teachers:

- The kids are all pretty nice here. They've got a nice way about them.

Support for children by children is something that the staff of the school actively fosters in students and is a feature of how the school operates. An important aspect of the student peer support system is that older students are assigned to the kindergarten, preparatory and students new to the school to help induct these students into LCPS . Peers provide a supportive service to that student until he or she feels confident enough for that friendly support to be progressively withdrawn. The peer support system was observed to promote caring and sharing and a "we are a family" approach across the year levels.

The development of leadership skills and a spirit of cooperation in and among students is exemplified by and enacted during the daily fitness program (described below). However, teachers were quick to emphasise that the daily fitness program was but one of many programs. They hastened to advise that older kids are supportive of younger kids in the playground and that:

- We have book buddies as well.
- We have whole school assemblies in which the younger ones can see what the older ones can do, what they can aspire to.

The multiple, layering of purpose can be observed in the enactment of all of the school's teaching and learning programs, as seen, for example, in the school's literacy program about which it has stated:

- At Lansdowne Crescent we intentionally build strong positive relationships across the whole school community. Literacy learning is embedded in this culture, connecting hearts, bodies and minds.

As a result of its very high performance on the 2008 National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), LCPS was invited by the DoE to make a submission as to why it should be one of four schools to represent Tasmania at the Australian Education Ministers' First Biennial Forum to be held in December 2008, to showcase innovation and excellence in school education in the areas of evidence-based approaches to low socio-economic status, school workforce development, and literacy and numeracy. Two schools were subsequently successful, including LCPS. The forum is to be held at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in Melbourne. It was noted in the submission that LCPS's whole school literacy plan had been used as an exemplary model across the state and additionally, that the writing scope and sequence document was shared across the system. The school's submission included the fact that the school magazine, produced and published each term by Year 6 students, had won a national award.

The school's literacy plan is underpinned by the following beliefs:

- Literacy involves the mastery of skills and practices which enable us to communicate through spoken language, print and multimedia in a variety of situations;
- All children can be successful literacy learners;
- Engagement, motivation and enjoyment are essential for literacy learning;
- Meaningful, relevant, flexible and worthwhile curriculum opportunities enhance literacy learning;
- The literacy demands of contemporary life are changing and are now characterised by multi-modal tasks.

Contributing to the high performance of students is the school's stated model for value adding to literacy outcomes, considered to be possible in any setting. The model contains the notion of using data to support change, is about building teacher capacity, focuses on developing a whole school culture for professional learning, and targets learning opportunities to individual needs. Three factors the school considered to be important in this process are: maintaining a positive outlook, building supportive relationships and having high expectations for all children. The motivation and engagement for learning in LCPS is triggered through real life experiences and though varying from context to context, remains central.

Other examples of this multiple layering of priorities follow from the areas of music, daily fitness and writing for the school magazine (see the 'students' sub-section). Each example shows:

- Emphasis on the empowerment of students;
- Extensive use of mixed ability and age groupings;
- Extensive layering of purposes, for example, for enjoyment, participation, appropriate behaviour, leadership and skill development in oral and written language.
- There is an increased emphasis in these curricula from Kindergarten through to Year 6 in the public as compared with the private purposes of education and their enactment, especially in the leadership opportunities provided.

The music teacher, at an initial staff meeting, outlined to class teachers the extent and scope of a full and vital music program for the year that included the following elements:

- Choirs
- Strings classes
- Percussion classes
- 4 year 6 choir leaders
- Lunch time recitals by professional individuals and groups
- Audience etiquette

- ❑ Attending Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra recitals
- ❑ Learning to write performance reviews

The music program was observed to be typical of the multiple layering of purposes evident in the learning programs conducted by teachers and highlighted the multiple opportunities for, and levels of, student participation. The first layer was the opportunity to enjoy a range of musical activities and experiences as a participant in choirs, strings and percussion groups. The second layer included that of performer at school and community functions and learning the core skills of presentation and behaviour in such circumstances. A third layer was that of learning and practising to be a member of an audience through attendance at, for example, lunchtime recitals in the school auditorium or attending Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra recitals. A fourth layer, for older students, was the practice of learning to write performance reviews following presentations such as the Symphony Orchestra recitals. A fifth layer was the opportunity for students in years four and six to become choir leaders and practice the skills of leading, working and communicating with their peers.

Whilst many schools often achieve multiple goals when implementing learning programs, LCPS staff appears to deliberately intervene in the learning process to ensure that the layering of purpose described above is an essential component of enactment.

The layering of purpose and the development of leadership skills was also observed during the daily fitness classes conducted by year six students across all grades from Prep to Year 6. The program has been running for ten years and therefore has long been established as part of the school's culture. The school has been fortunate in that it has maintained the same part-time physical education teacher for that period.

In summary, key elements of the daily fitness program are:

- ❑ 20 minutes a day;
- ❑ Year 6 students are trained to lead ten groups;
- ❑ Groups are mixed – year 1s to yr 6s;
- ❑ Prep classes operate as discrete units;
- ❑ Year 6 students began participating in the daily fitness program when they were in Prep class;
- ❑ Year 5 students are leaders-in-waiting;
- ❑ Kindergarten classes commence in term 3 with leaders from Year 5;
- ❑ Activities change on a half term basis to maintain freshness;
- ❑ A teacher joins each group and was observed to join in;
- ❑ Student leaders are evaluated by the teachers in each group;
- ❑ Students were participating fully and enthusiastically;
- ❑ The PE teacher evaluates the physical development of each student in the school twice yearly;
- ❑ Teachers are most supportive of the daily PE program and see it as an important aspect of the school's learning program; and
- ❑ In addition to daily fitness classes, 93% of students participate in organised sports – many in multiple sports.

When asked about the multiple layered purposes evident in each learning activity, such as those described above in the music and daily fitness programs, the following comments were received:

- A very wise colleague said to me, “Wherever you teach, make sure you want to go there”. People put in the effort because they want to be here. The thing that enables us to do these things is the fact that we don't have to spend a lot of time dealing with the management issues that colleagues in other schools have to do. This year we had 14 students put their hand up to be president of the

- Student Representative Council (SRC), we had 11 students put their hand up to be secretary of the SRC. It's a cultural thing, it's inculcated into the school, somehow.
- It's a responsibility thing that we all work at; a rights and responsibility thing. It's a respect for one another. It's all linked.
  - The kids let us do that. The kids let us do the daily fitness. The kids let us do the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra [TSO] critique, because we can go to the TSO confident that the kids can sit there. We don't have to be continually watching kids and saying, "Don't ...." or "Put that kid down!" There is none of that stuff. .... It's a part of why we can do what we do and why we can generate the environment and the feel that the school has.
  - The parents endorse the teachers, the programs and everything. The whole thing becomes a partnership between home and school, which is ideal.
  - When you are not having to plan and plan and plan to please an individual [the principal], as you do in some schools, when you know you are supported by your principal, when you know the parent body is focussed, it's not hard to do.
  - When you know that 99% of the interactions you have with parents are going to be positive, and they have a question to ask, that's what's asked – the question. We had six parents who went on an excursion today and every one of those I engaged in informal conversation. It's about encouraging that partnership. People out there are very perceptive. I've had this thing about ... this school -while having all these layers and kids involved is great, it does create a very, very busy school environment, especially for the upper primaries. It is fantastic that the kids here are given so many leadership opportunities but we only have the kids in our class (Year 6) for eight and a half hours, the whole class, the whole thirty-one of them. I was getting a bit paranoid about that. Then I was speaking to a parent at parent/teacher meeting and their take on it was, "It's great that in Year 6 our child is given all these leadership opportunities that they wouldn't otherwise get in any other school. We understand therefore that in the academic program an allowance has to be made". They understand! It took so much pressure off me! I thought, well if that's how that person is thinking and they have a high profile in the school, fantastic! It's a community thing. For a city school it still has a huge sense of community. Everything we do here is well supported. For example, you raise \$25000 at a fair in four hours. People come from everywhere. It is a community school within the city! It's just great to be in such a positive atmosphere. Everyone's positive!

In summary, teachers reinforce many of the principal and senior staff's view of LCPS. They see it as a school giving high priority to the public purposes of education through being a community of professional learners. They think of the school as an extended family in which people are valued and cared for. Teachers say they are continually reminded through high quality communication by the principal and their peers that they are appreciated. Because of this sense of being valued, teachers expressed the belief that they are better able to do the job of teaching. The staff has very high expectations and see that there are fewer pressures to detract them from their primary task. All staff has the opportunity to participate in school decision-making processes. Staff are treated equally and in a professional manner. Teachers also feel supported by parents and consider themselves as partners in the provision of educational opportunity. As a consequence, teachers believe they are highly motivated and were observed to take a very professional, 'can do' approach to teaching. This was nowhere better illustrated than in the multiple, layering of purpose and use of mixed ability and age groupings observed in the enactment of many of the school's teaching and learning programs. It was also observed in teachers' confidence and ability to only take from system documentation what they can use and what was consistent with the already agreed upon direction for the school. Teachers used evidence to support change. Our observations led us to conclude that this professional, confident, positive attitude observed in teachers clearly permeated through to the students.

#### **4.5 Students**

Students perceptions of LCPS have been derived from observations made by the researchers and from comments reported by students in the school magazine and other documents held by the school.

Many students who were leaving the school at the end of their primary school years in December 2007 noted that the building of long-term friendships whilst attending the school was of great importance to them:

- I have made friendships that will last a lifetime.
- I remember when I first came to this school my friend Mischa showed me where to put my bag. .... I met Harrison in grade 4. I met Noah in grade 5. I met Oliver and Thomas in grade six.
- I remember when Hugh and I became friends.
- My friends are awesome and the teachers are great here.
- I love all the friends and all the teachers I've met.

From these and other comments made in their farewell to the school it is evident that students experience positive relationships with their teachers, for example one student wrote:

- The teachers are great and have made learning fun.

Students describe their experiences at the school in glowing terms and recommend others go to LCPS:

- I've been to four different schools and Lansdowne is certainly at the 'top of the charts'.
- Send your kids here!

The active, participatory, leadership roles that students are engaged in throughout their time in this school contribute to student's belief in themselves and their capacity to become engaged in the opportunities provided by the school. For example, in 2008 14 students put their hands up to be president and 11 to be secretary of the Student Representative Council. The following representative quotes express students' awareness and appreciation of the opportunities the school provided them:

- I have been given so many opportunities and experiences.
- I loved being a daily fitness leader; it was great to see so much enthusiasm in the kids! There have been so many great opportunities and experiences. I loved being a House Captain. I was so proud of my house, Wattle. I will miss [this school] greatly. I have wonderful memories of my time here.
- I love the art, Italian, Indonesian, the kitchen corner, and camp.
- I have really enjoyed all my years at this school. I can still remember the things we did in Kinder like painting and playing most of the time. As I went up the grades we started doing more work until Grade 2 when we started doing harder maths. I have enjoyed all the excursions we have been on and science activities. I'm looking forward to high school but will miss all my friends.
- In my time here I have been given a lot of opportunities like being House Captain and School Captain and being involved in all the competitions and excursions. Over all, I think I have had a great time.

Evidence suggests that Year 6 students have a sense of loss on leaving the school and acknowledge that the Year 5 students, as their successors, will set the example and inherit the leadership responsibilities in the following year. That is expected because that's the way things happen in this school.

- I can tell the grade fives will be great leaders of the school next year. I have learnt so much [at this school] and now I have to say goodbye – miss you guys!

High numbers of past students come back to and help out when secondary schools are in recess.

The principal was observed to regularly work in classrooms and accompany students and teachers on each class excursion and camp, irrespective of the ages of students in participating class groups. During conversations with him, Pete indicated that he saw his commitment in classrooms and being involved with class excursions as integral to his role. These excursions gave him the opportunity to work alongside teachers and students, thus building his knowledge, appreciation and understanding of each.

Students from past years who attended the meet-the-teacher and barbecue for parents, were observed to be warmly greeted by the principal, other adults and former schoolmates. High levels of mutual support, respect and approachability among students, parents and staff were



observed. Principal and staff clearly demonstrated their ongoing capacity to relate to and connect with the broader school community.

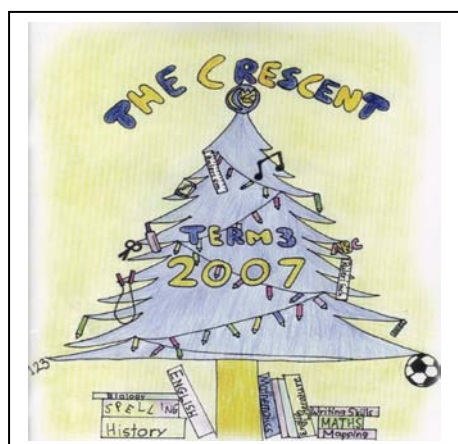
Similar observations were recorded during the school athletics carnival that was attended by large numbers of parents, grandparents and/or carers. Pete, as the announcer, called each child by name, and similarly, acknowledged the presence of parents and grandparents. Of particular note at the carnival was that all students participated, including a young child with Downes Syndrome. Each child was valued and supported by their peers and teachers and urged on by visiting adults.

There was evidence to suggest that students have an expectation that they will be given added responsibility as they progress through the school. Students know that when they reach Year 6, for example, they will be the leaders of the daily fitness program. It is important to note that the Year 6 leaders plan their program with the Physical Education (PE) teacher and then take full responsibility for the delivery to other classes, particularly as the PE teacher is only present in the school two to three days per week. The class teachers join fitness groups but stay in the background.

Year 5 students were observed to be leaders in waiting. These students looked forward to term three when they would have the opportunity to lead the Kindergarten students in a daily fitness program as preparation for their Year 6 roles. Apart from developing the skills required to successfully participate in each activity, plus the skills of leadership and 'followership', it was observed that during the daily fitness program there is also the stated intent to develop positive and caring relationships among students and between teachers and students. The daily fitness groups are comprised of mixed ages of children and include students from each of the classes, Years 1 to 6. Students are encouraged to assist and support each other.

An observed outcome of the daily fitness program is that students know the names of most of the other children in the school. Similarly, class teachers know the names of students in all other classes. This familiarity results in the high levels of caring, compassion and support for each other transcending class groups and year levels.

'The Crescent' is an extremely high quality, professionally printed, school magazine that is produced by Year 6 students each term, that is, three times per year. The magazine is an excellent record of the life of the school and portrays the multiple facets of school life. Circulation of the magazine is not restricted to the local community as an article contained photos of the publication being read in Maine, USA; Canberra, South Australia and Finland.



Three different editorial teams produce the magazine each year, one for each term. Participation is voluntary. Each term the positions of editor and reporters are advertised and students are invited to apply. The following is an example of one student's application for the position of editor:

I would be a good editor because I would be committed and organised. I would give up my spare time on working on the magazine. I would really like to be the editor because this is my last year and I would love the opportunity to really help my school and to get the most out of my last year in primary school. If you pick me as editor I promise that I will do my best to help make one of the best magazines ever!

The storywriter and the photographer are acknowledged at the end of each article in the magazine. The contents include an editorial, photographs of the editorial committee, a note from the principal, book reviews, accounts of experiences on school excursions, sports

reports, interviews with visiting authors, and items perceived to be of interest to the school community. In one magazine there was an extremely touching and sensitive article 'In Remembrance of Rhys', a student who had passed away earlier that term.

It is evident that there is a high level of expectation that children's writing will be such that it is appropriate for an audience much wider than that of the Year 6 classroom. There is an emphasis on presentation with care taken on layout and format, to achieve a balance of print and photographs and to create pages that are of interest to the reader. The reporting team practice interview techniques by interviewing visitors to the school, parents and fellow students. They then learn to write an article suitable for publication. Throughout the process, students enhance their skills of communication. In brief, the magazine presents as an opportunity for students to write for a purpose, in a meaningful context.

An analysis of the Term 3, 2007, copies of the school magazine, provides insights into the many public purposes of education enacted in the school. For example, the editor and his assistant editor claim that the magazine has been:

A terrific opportunity to work on the Editorial Committee and has given us heaps of skills for later life such as editing, photography and learning to work as a member of a team.

Also included in the Editorial is the notion of being task oriented, working to a deadline and reward for effort:

Thanks to the Editorial Committee for working so hard to get the magazine completed on time. Everyone put in so much time and effort and it has been great to watch. It has been really hard work but it has all paid off in the end.

Public acknowledgement for the achievement of the editorial committee in successfully compiling the eleventh edition of the Crescent Magazine was made by the principal in his 'From the Principal' segment. He describes the committee as:

A motivated and talented group of young journalists and the result is a highly readable and informative magazine celebrating another term full of highlights.

The principal has demonstrated a strong commitment to communicating meaningfully and effectively with the school community. He encourages and provides opportunities for students to do likewise. Such is the prestige with which the magazine is held, the school has seen fit to allocate a teacher for the equivalent of half a day per week to mentor the editorial team. That teacher's primary role is to advise and assist students, particularly, with their skill development in the presentation and communication of ideas.

Many of the magazine articles highlight the public purposes of education, for example in relation to an appreciation of and participation in the arts. The school provides a number of opportunities for such student participation. The Crescent Magazine reported that two students had danced in the Hobart production of the musical Cats. They wanted to be in the performance because

they thought it would be a good experience and that it would be really fun.

Afterwards the girls said that

The experience was really good for them because they learnt so much and had made lots of friends.

The performance of the two girls was also reviewed by some of their classmates. The inclusion of this article in the 'Crescent' is further evidence of the schools capacity to connect with the broader community and to enable students to utilise their talents and explore their potential as individuals.

A second example is provided by an article on the Prep classes visit to Mount Wellington where students found out about:

[The mountain's] importance with regard to water, wildlife and recreation. They discovered that [they] have a responsibility to help keep the mountain environment safe, clean and natural.

A third example is the story about Grade 3 students "reliving history" during a school camp. The students obtained a practical insight into the lives of their forebears and enabled them to connect with the past in order to make history 'live' and meaningful. The camp presented as an Activity Museum and gave students experiences such as washing clothes in a wash trough and wringing clothes using a mangle. Four additional activities were making bread, churning butter, making wax candles and spinning wool. The experience enabled students to make meaningful comparisons between then and now, to understand how living in a community has changed over the years. As city students they fed a variety of animals and can understand better the differences between city and country life.

A fourth example relates to students gaining an understanding of the different roles people have to ensure members of the community are healthy and safe. Following a fire safety program conducted in the school, in which all classes participated in five sessions with 'Fire-fighter Barry', Barry was interviewed by reporters from the Crescent Magazine. The article provides insights into Barry's personal life, what it means to actually fight a fire and suggested practical ways of making the reader's home fire-safe. Apart from describing the role of the fire service in the community several students were interviewed concerning the knowledge they had gained from the classes with Barry. One such report stated:

The most important thing I learnt from Fire Fighter Barry was that speed is everything. Get out of the burning building as quickly as possible. But Never Crawl Like an Army Commando! Gasses fall to the floor and you breathe them in if you're that close to the floor. So crawl on your hands and knees.

A final examples relates to an article on Literacy and Numeracy Week. It also provides an indicator as to how well teachers make these, often perceived as mundane subjects, 'live' in the hearts and minds of LCPS students. The article heading is catchy:

Sizzling Literacy and Numeracy Week

Do you think you are going to get a perfect job and earn lots of money? This won't happen unless you have good literacy and numeracy skills. At Lansdowne the kids have been all ears listening to people speak about literacy and numeracy, knowing that when they are older they will have to know a lot about it to get a snazzy job.

One of the activities during the week was that everyone in the school would 'drop everything and write' for fifteen minutes at 10.30 a.m. each day. Examples of how this school connects with its community to promote and engage students in literacy and numeracy activities are evident in the following extract:

Well known children's author, Margaret Wild, came to our school to talk to preps and grade two class



about literacy. We also had fifteen parents come to the school to talk about how literacy is used in their work and at home. This week was important for the children to learn that literacy will help you when you are at home as well as when you are at work. The parent speakers have jobs where literacy skills are important. We had nurses, editors, parents who are running a business, teachers, pharmacists and authors. The topics included working as an editor, writing job resumes, creating science reports, running a business, supporting

restorative justice, learning copperplate handwriting, nursing, writing a journal and working in a pharmacy. Our school had an assembly and that's where[the] student and editor gave a fascinating presentation about the difficult and lengthy process involved in producing the school's term two magazine. Students also listened to grade three radio plays. These plays were written and recorded by the grade three students with the help of writer in residence, Sam Adams. During the assembly we recognised our community tutors for their contribution to our school. Afterwards, the whole school enjoyed some sizzling bbq sausages. Mmmmmm.

A further example of the enactment of the public purposes in education is embodied in the work of the Student Council. This council meets once a month in the school library. The meetings are under the supervision of a senior teacher whom councillors say,

does a pretty good job, sitting around listening and keeping everything under control.

Each of the Prep to Year 6 classes elects a male and female class representative to council. Grade 6s, being the senior students have more. Each representative is required to make notes during the meeting and then take ideas and suggestions with their classmates upon their return to class. Students are clearly learning to operate in a democratic way. They also commit some time raising money for the benefit of people in less fortunate circumstances. Whilst the goal for 2007 was to raise \$950 for an outdoor chess table (see photo), it was noted that \$294 from the total raised (\$1,244) will go to the Red Cross to help the African people in Sudan.

Regular school assemblies are also conducted and provide yet another example of a school activity that had as its underlying purpose the empowerment of students within a community. These assemblies are run, in turn, by groups of three students from Year 6. The assemblies represent yet another opportunity for students to experience an up-front leadership role. The role demands that they negotiate with teachers the content of the assembly then to plan the assembly program. Students from classes presenting information or an item display and talk about the work done in the period leading up to the assembly. Teachers exercise care in determining the recipients of the Lansdowne Awards for selected students in their classroom, as the awards are not given lightly. Students are proud to receive these awards as they represent a public acknowledgement that, as individuals, they have achieved something special. The assembly leaders invite the principal to participate in the assembly.

All is not left to chance, however, as the principal was observed to coach assembly leaders. He asked each group what they would need to do for the assembly to run successfully. The coaching/mentoring points that the principal explored included:

- Encouraging students to speak up, speak clearly - not too fast, and to use silence and pause to gain attention;
- Collecting Lansdowne Awards (min of 2 per class) from teachers and compiling a list of recipients for publishing in the school newsletter;
- Procedures for setting up the assembly room;
- Showing leaders how to hold and use a microphone; and
- The participation of student leaders in a trial run on the morning of the assembly.

All Year 6 students are given the opportunity to lead at least one school assembly during their final year at primary school. Observations made during assemblies confirmed that the leaders conducted them in a competent and efficient manner and that the student audience and those students/classes presenting items conducted themselves in an exemplary manner.

In summary, there is a strong expectation on the part of teachers that students in this school will achieve their highest level in a wide range of areas, including the social. Students believe they are empowered and that the school fosters leadership attributes in them as they progress through the school. Students are given, appreciate, indeed, expect, increasing levels of responsibility. Students enjoy the range of learning opportunities provided by teachers. But,

most of all, students value the friendships of their peers and the high quality relationships experienced among them and their teachers.

#### **4.6 Parents and wider community**

Parents made exceptionally positive comments concerning the helpful and supportive attitude of the principal, the care and concern shown by staff towards their children and the quality relationships developed among all persons associated with the school.

The breadth of benefits the children derive from attending the school are encapsulated in the following representative and perceptive parental comments:

- [My kids] don't just come to school and go into a classroom. They come to school and get to make decisions, and talk about, not just things with the teachers and the principal, but with other kids. ... it's because of the attitude here, the way things are gone about . . . where the kids have a sense of being a part of everything that's happening.
- The kids have this sense of freedom yet they know there are boundaries. They still know what is O.K. and what is not O.K..
- [They receive] a very good education – not just academic – they're set up for life – a good grounding for any challenges that they may have to face when they are older.
- There is a valuing by students of who they are and what they can do – not necessarily just for academic achievement. The school celebrates all sorts of things kids achieve - whether its out there doing daily PE or a Grade 6 student caring for a Prep child. Those things are valued as much as winning a race or winning a science competition. ... We have the Lansdowne Award which is handed out in assembly. Teachers nominate students for particular things, all sorts of things, like being kind to someone or for sharing, or painting a lovely picture, or whatever – I really like that holistic type of education, it's not just about top academic achievement.
- There's a whole range of opportunities– like daily fitness, or the music, or the sports – there're so many wonderful opportunities students can tap into if they want to. On the other side, if there is a problem it's responded to.

Parents made particular comment about the positive and high quality relationships that they and their children experience in the school. The fact that all are working together toward a common end-point is greatly appreciated. Aspects of this view are sampled in the comments below:

- There is a sense that everybody knows where everyone's at and what they are doing. Also there's a sense of [everyone] working together. It's not a system that we're forcing on kids. It's not something we're doing to them – we're actually doing it WITH them.
- There's a sense in the school that it's the principal, teachers, parents and the children working together.
- There's a really positive air, everywhere.
- It's that openness to listen and spend the time.
- Teachers always know [about our children] because they communicate so well with each other.
- I did classroom help just recently. [The teachers] try to encourage you. They make use of parents who are an obvious resource.

One parent was able to make a comparison between LCPS and a school her children had recently attended in Melbourne:

- [In Melbourne] there were classes with two teachers in the classroom ... and many parents would go, "Oh no, my child's in a class with two teachers!" Here, it's really interesting because I don't have that concern any more. The teachers here work together and complement each other - like my eldest had two teachers. One is stricter and pushed her a little harder. The other is a bit kinder and gentle and warm and fuzzy. I thought, well, she gets both her needs met through the course of the week. ... They know what's going on and discuss what's happening with the child. When something is happening in the playground, or with their schooling needs, I know that when the next teacher comes on, they always know because they communicate so well with each other – whereas in the Melbourne school this didn't happen and it was seen as a real negative.

Parents also expressed their appreciation of both the many leadership opportunities teachers give students and the manner in which classes are mixed for some activities resulting in the

development of caring and supportive relationships between older and younger students. The mentoring of students through the peer support program is a particular example of this:

- When my daughter was in Kinder or Prep she didn't like things out of the ordinary. Her peer support person was a really 'way-out' girl and it was the best combination you could ever get. The things that she [my daughter] learnt from that Grade 6 student was more valuable than anything we could ever have taught her, that is, it was O.K. to be different. You don't have to look like everyone else. You don't have to do the things and conventions because everyone else does. This girl was very kind and loving. That peer support program is fantastic.

Parents acknowledged that in recent years the school's community had become more middle-class. Whilst there were concerns that their children had limited opportunities to mix with less advantaged children they were optimistic that their children had experienced the grounding to enable them to become caring citizens, as evidenced by the following exchange:

- There aren't many disadvantaged children at this school. There are some, I know. What do you think?
- We are middle class and becoming more so than we were in the past.
- Parents ask for more, receive more, expect more.
- We might be in a position to give more too. The kids are benefiting from that. I think it's a positive for our children.
- Hopefully we're raising caring children who learn leadership skills, have acted as a buddy and can think past themselves.

The principal is held in exceptionally high esteem by parents, as illustrated by the following comment.

- When you talk to the principal he says, 'What fantastic parents!', and that to him is very important, whereas we say, "What a fantastic principal!"

Parents articulated the view that whilst the principal had many things to do in his role, when he met with them they felt that they were the centre of his attention.

- There has never been a moment when we've been asked to come back or make another time, or, 'It's not convenient', or, 'It's too hard', or. . . . What the staff, and particularly [the principal], put into our children – my kids – is almost beyond what you would expect!
- The first time I came to the school I met [the principal] and he spent the whole morning showing me around the school. Then he said, "I'm just going to daily fitness – you can join me if you want, or you can have a look around." - It's that open-ness, to listen and spend the time! This is a really big factor. Every time I've had a question, especially with [the principal], he's right there. He manages to make you feel like he's not doing anything else important, - that you are the number one priority. It's pretty amazing! When you think about how many big issues he would be working with, he makes you feel that you are the only one that's really important, in that moment.
- I'll just concur with the two previous speakers. We moved out from England three and a half years ago. We came to this area by accident. Strangely enough, this was the only school we ever looked at. We were so impressed with [the principal], when we met him. He knew the name of every child who walked passed – we were just astonished – and they all knew him. He was friendly to us and everybody else. We thought, well, we're not bothering to look anywhere else, we need to find a house nearby!

Parents expressed high levels of satisfaction with and appreciation of the principal committing substantial amounts of his time to participating in class activities and excursions. Whilst parents acknowledged that participation enabled him to get to know each child as an individual being in his or her own right some expressed concern for his well-being.

- I'm sure [the principal] really enjoys [going on excursions], but how he juggles his diary to fit all these things in is amazing!
- I always worry about the pressure he puts himself under. I just remembered – I don't know if you are aware of the Grade 6 'right of passage', so to speak, that [the principal] started at the end of the year. In Grade 6 in the last couple of weeks of school he offers to take anyone who would like to go.... They got buses to the top of Mt Wellington and then spent all day walking to Lansdowne Crescent. It's like, 'the grand finale'. [The principal] goes with them. They walk down. They spend

the whole day talking about their time at Lansdowne. They have lunch somewhere [on the way down]. They get back to school about four or five o'clock, depending on how long [it takes]. That's sort of the final thing they do as a group. They'll remember that for the rest of their lives – the time they walked from the top of Mt Wellington back to their primary school with their principal.

The capacity of the principal to view what may seem to be negative experiences as being highly positive learning situations was of particular importance to, and greatly appreciated by parents, as the following exchange illustrates.

- My daughter who's in grade one had a terrible time with separation problems when she started at the beginning of this year - she was crying every morning and having to be pulled off me. Peter, who spends a lot of time in the Kindergarten and Prep classes, noticed this. She came home from assembly that week with a principal's award for bravery. I couldn't believe it! I said to her the following week, "You're happy to go to school now, when I say goodbye you're happy to be left?" She said, "Yes, that's because I got a principal's award for being brave, and I'm brave!" I just couldn't believe how effective that was.
- Something that was a major problem in your life was resolved.
- Yes, totally, and to recognise it and put it into a positive framework. I was focussing on her fear and he gave her an award for being brave, which is the flip-side. I just find that positive energy helped me be a better parent of a school age child, and that is reassuring. I just think the kids are noticed and their individual needs responded to.

Another parent commented:

- We went into parent/teacher one afternoon thinking that one of our children was doing O.K. and were told a few home truths. We came out absolutely shattered. We saw [the principal] the next day in the corridor and he said, "How did you go with parent/teacher?" I said we were just so upset. He turned the whole thing around and put a positive spin on it. It was like a weight was lifted off me. I couldn't wait to go home and tell my husband. Suddenly, it wasn't this huge problem that our son had. He turned it and focussed on our son's positive aspects – it was just that reassurance. Without this intervention everyone could have been suffering for ages. The children are getting a lot from the school and from parents being supported. We're all really benefiting.

Parents were seen to be welcomed into the school and were encouraged to participate in classroom activities. The first day of the 2008 school year, for example, we noted large numbers of fathers, mothers, grandparents, and/or carers walking into the school grounds with children of all ages. Many of the adults were observed chatting, after delivering children to their classrooms, lending support for the notion that the school operated as one, large, extended family.

The principal extended an open invitation for parents to visit the school to discuss matters of concern to them and/or to join in the life of the school. During the meet-the-teacher and barbecue for parents, one grand parent described Pete, the principal, as

one out of the box! He is so supportive of students!

Pete had been able to follow up a concern of the grandparent and the grandson during a class excursion to an environment centre. He had taken the opportunity to talk with the boy and address his concerns whilst both were participating in the excursion.

Parents were observed to be willing supporters of and wanting to participate in school activities. Around 20 parents and teachers attended the first SCA meeting for 2008. The Council is an active supporter of the school. A recent Fair had raised in excess of \$20,000 and the council was seeking input from the school in determining how student programs could be supported appropriately. This process began with the compilation of a wish list by parents and teachers, from which priority items for support would be chosen. A recent project of the Council had been to replace a tree house attached to an old oak tree with a free-standing structure that is greatly enjoyed by students of all ages.

The council reaffirmed its unqualified support for the school's participation in the Sustainable Schools Initiative. This initiative is an emerging priority within the school and being a leader on the subject, hosted an inter-school seminar during April 2008. LCPS has a School Environment Management Plan for 2008. The plan includes a definition of sustainability, a vision statement, a set of objectives and a list of knowledge and understandings. The project highlights the fact that students live and work within a community and as such they share a responsibility with others as to what happens within that community. Some of the elements in the School Environment Management Plan follow:

- ❑ Vision
  - ❑ To foster a sense of wonderment and awe and positive attitudes towards our environment.
  - ❑ To create an awareness of the fact that the way we live impacts on the Earth's finite resources (on which we depend).
- ❑ Objectives
  - ❑ To promote eco-literacy within the school community and build further links with the community.
  - ❑ To build the students' understanding of why a healthy, sustainable environment is important.
- ❑ Understandings
  - ❑ When we work together we can make more of an impact.
  - ❑ Each one of us can make a positive difference to the environment.

As part of the redevelopment of the school buildings water tanks were installed beneath the new classrooms that will provide water for school toilets. A kitchen garden, was being constructed by parent volunteers. In the meantime class groups are using foam and 'recycling' boxes filled with soil until the larger terraced garden is completed.

Pete, the principal, has taken the unique step of appointing an appropriately qualified parent as the school's 'resident' scientist for 2008. The 'resident' scientist, although not employed by the school, is a parent with qualifications in this area of science who has made himself available. The 'resident' scientist is on call to assist teachers and students undertake class projects, especially on the theme of sustainability.

As well as a very active and supportive parent community, LCPS has strong links to the broader educational and Tasmanian community. Conversations with the principal show that LCPS has established links with three neighbouring primary schools, one through discussions about student literacy, and the other two in a mentoring role. In addition, the principal and staff representatives participate in cluster school professional development meetings that have a focus on moderating and evaluating student performance in key curriculum areas, particularly literacy and numeracy. The school is a participant in the Sustainable Schools Initiative, an outcome being that Lansdowne students presented their studies on related issues to students in a neighbouring school. Students in the upper primary grades have regular contact with their peers in other schools through inter-school activities such as different sports, debating, musical strings program and choirs, leadership conferences, and film-making. Students have participated in Science Week activities and a drama production with the local senior secondary college and have hosted Vocation, Education Training students in the school office and the physical education program.

As noted earlier, the principal is in regular contact with other principals through his participation on the Executive of the Tasmanian Principals Association and has recently become Vice President (Primary). He is also a member of the Department of Education's School Improvement Board, as well as being a member of the board of the Learning and Information Network Centre (Huon) which provides community access to government services and the use of information technology systems. Pete's deep involvement in the not for profit, training and employment organisation, STEPS, brings him into contact with many people from all walks of life, but particularly, those in need.



Two staff-members are on the Department of Education's Information Technology/Media Standing Committee. Staff has also worked in conjunction with a neighbouring high school on a mentoring program for boys. The Faculty of Education at the University of Tasmania regularly sends its teacher education students to the school for their teaching practice sessions. The school has also hosted staff on a visit to Hobart from the Latrobe University (Melbourne). Staff have participated in inter-school professional development activities in the area of environmental sustainability, literacy, library related matters, the Early Years of schooling and transition from primary to secondary school. The school had been a host school for the Essential Learnings Curriculum that has now been replaced by the new Tasmania Curriculum.

In summary, parents like being appreciated by the principal and staff, and in turn, value the opportunities and experiences that the school gives their children. Parents are high in their praise of the quality relationships that have been nurtured between students, and among teachers, parents, students and the principal. Parents appreciated the many leadership opportunities teachers give students and the manner in which classes are mixed for some activities enabling the development of caring and supportive relationships between older and younger students, exemplified by the mentoring of students through the peer support programs. Parents commented particularly on the caring and supportive role of the principal and his capacity to be actively involved in the life of the school. They were complimentary about his participation in class programs and excursions and appreciated that he had an intimate knowledge of the progress being made by their children. They particularly appreciated being on first name terms with the principal and that their concerns were taken seriously and followed up at the earliest opportunity. Open lines of communication were evident at all levels within the school community. The parent community was observed to actively support and promote the work of the school and expressed delight at the range of opportunities experienced by their children.

LCPS also has strong links beyond the school to the profession in bodies such as professional associations, DoE boards and professional development provisions and the university, and broader community bodies serving public purposes, such as environmental, cultural and sporting programs, training and employment for the less advantaged and services access in rural communities.

## **5. Conclusion: What we found at Lansdowne Crescent Primary School**

At the end of the school priorities and principal and senior staff sections we summarised our tentative learnings about LCPS and their understanding and enactment of the public purposes of education. These learnings are summarised in the following Table along with the summary evidence from and/or about the teachers, students, and parents and wider community.

The first and most obvious observation about the summary Table is the wide congruence among role groups and data sources. In fact, such congruence could itself be seen as an important factor in successful public purposes of education enactment. Where there are added elements they arise from being specific to one or more roles, for example items about approaches to teaching and learning tend to be specific to the teachers.

LCPS clearly understands the public purposes of education to include democratic equality, which is about preparing all of its students to be active and competent citizens through respect and empowerment, a wide range of opportunities, social capital development, democratic processes, and valuing diversity and environmental sustainability. In terms of social capital, there is evidence at LCPS of all three forms, that is, within the school (bonding social capital), between the school and other schools (bridging social capital) and between the school and the

community (linking social capital) (Mulford, 2007c). The school not only strongly believes that achieving such public purposes is crucial in being seen as an excellent educational institution in today's and future societal contexts, but also contributes to the achievement of private purposes.

In terms of the enactment of the public purposes of education, LCPS has a strong focus on a community living and working together in a culture of continuous improvement. The community is seen as a means for achieving the school's purposes but also as an end in itself (that is, a public purpose) involving collaboration, caring and supportive relationships, trust, honesty, all being valued, positive enthusiasm, ownership, and pride in achievements. The professionals are seen as enacting this and other purposes by having children as their first focus (that is, all children), having high expectations, believing they make a difference, working in collegial teams, being flexible but having clearly articulated leadership responsibilities, owning their professional development, and seeing parents and community members as partners. Holistic education is stressed employing multiple layering of purpose in teaching and learning programs and wide use of mixed ability and age groupings. Enactment also involves learning, which is seen to derive from the provision of a rich environment and a wide range of opportunities, including for leadership and through strong links with the community, and a focus on continuous improvement.

LCPS recognises there are ongoing challenges. The 2006 SSPP research identified the school's planned focus for the next five years as improved pedagogy in all classes to meet changing needs, an improved physical environment and children taking more ownership of their own learning. As also noted early in this case study, the principal constantly acknowledges that

the school is imperfect – we can always be better!

#### Summary of LCPS and the Public Purposes of Education

Areas	Element	Data source			
		School profile, principal and senior staff	Teachers	Students	Parents, wider community
<b>Understanding</b>	<b>Characteristics:</b>				
	democratic processes, including involvement in decision making and respect and empowerment of all with responsibility	x	x	x	x
	equity, including a wide range of opportunities for all in a wide range of areas	x	x		x
	social capital, including social and community development (trust, care, respect, belonging, relationships, cooperation, etc)	x	x	x	x
	valuing diversity	x			x
	environmental sustainability	x		x	x
<b>Outcomes of:</b>	crucial for an excellent school	x			x
	contributes to achievement of private purposes	x			x
<b>Enactment</b>	<b>Culture:</b>				
	building a collegial community, which acts as a whole/ extended family with high quality relationships and friendships	x	x	x	x
	first and most important focus is children	x	x		x
	flexibility, openness and willingness to listen	x	x	x	x
	all (staff, students, parents) are positive, committed, highly motivated with a sense of ownership	x	x	x	x
opportunity to be part of a partnership involving ownership of everything that's happening e.g., parents	x	x		x	

	welcomed into and participate in classrooms				
	high levels of support and encouragement from, and partnership with, leaders, staff, students and parents	x	x	x	x
	culture of continuous improvement	x	x		
	sustaining change, especially that which value adds, in a slow and measured way	x			
	<b>Curriculum and Pedagogy:</b>				
	holistic education (not just academic)	x			x
	high, achievable expectations with clarity of purpose (clear goals for learning) and celebration of success	x	x		
	multiple layering of purpose in teaching and learning programs	x	x		
	a very wide range of opportunities in terms of student programs (PE, music, magazine, camps, excursions, assemblies, etc)	x	x	x	x
	emphasis on an environmentally sustainable school and community	x	x	x	x
	widespread opportunities for student empowerment and leadership	x	x	x	x
	flexibility, that is an ability to take advantage of what 'lands on the doorstep'	x	x		
	use of evidence/data to support change, including careful tracking of pupil progress	x	x		
	<b>Structure:</b>				
	leadership distributed to high quality, professional, empowered staff	x	x	x	
	highly professional, supportive, transparent, accessible principal	x	x	x	x
	clearly articulated leadership roles	x	x		
	wide use of mixed ability and age groupings, including peer support program	x	x		
	links to broader educational community, including mentoring, professional development and system leadership as well as for accountability	x			
	links to broader communities serving public purposes	x			x
<b>Helping factors</b>	principal and senior staff who espouse, model and act on public purposes	x	x	x	x
	empowered professional staff providing a rich educational environment that focuses on all children	x			x
	sharing, collegial teams of teachers involved in decision making and who have deprivatised their practice	x	x		
	high quality communication	x	x		x
	targeted, owned, quality PD	x			
	quality physical environment	x			
	a state curriculum that gives priority to public purposes	x	x		
	confidence and ability to take from system what the school can use and is consistent with already decided school direction		x		
	students who support, respect and value each other	x	x	x	
	supportive, engaged, partnered community	x			x
<b>Hindering factors</b>	unsympathetic school leadership	x	x		
	disempowered professional staff	x	x		
	competitive staff with a lack of teamwork and privatisation of practice	x	x		
	poor communication		x		
	unsupportive community	x	x		
	narrow state curriculum	x	x		

politicians and DoE that give priority to a narrow set of (private purpose) school outcomes	x	
children and parents without, and/or do not support the learning of, social skills	x	x
Etc ... (reverse of helping factors)		

It is clear that he considers it very important for staff to review progress and identify areas in which the school can improve its capacity to provide for all students in the school. Areas addressed in a whole staff professional development day conducted in October included clarifying roles required to take the school forward in 2009, developing teacher skills that would help them confidently multi-layer purposes in the delivery of classroom programs (particularly to ensure that the middle ability group of students in classes is catered for), improve the capacity of all Year 6 students to provide leadership across the school, improve the tracking of student progress in the senior grades, support children who “struggle to play” at recess and lunch times by providing a woodwork table for them to freely access, provide from school resources additional teacher aide time for students at risk who don’t fit the Department of Education’s funding criteria, focus the use of community tutors on gifted and mentoring programs for students who need support.

In addition, the principal sees himself as having an ongoing and increasing role providing a “buffer” between teachers and the system as there is a strong perception among teachers that the Department of Education is engaged in “Change for change sake!” and that actions taken by the Department have a tendency to “undermine teachers”. This position is reinforced by the collective principal and staff stance that they only take from the system what after careful collective consideration the school can use and is consistent with the already thought through school direction. An example of this is the fact that the ELs curriculum with its strong emphasis on the public purposes of education continues to permeate the every day life of the school and its community. What is sad about this situation, however, is that the school believes it cannot publicly state what it is doing in terms of the ‘old’ ELs curriculum fearing the disapproval of the Minister of Education and the DoE who have moved on to the ‘new’ Tasmanian Curriculum.

We conclude that LCPS is a ‘best practice’ school, including in the priority given to, their understanding of, and the successful enactment of the public purposes of schooling. The priority given to public purposes is clearly reflected, for example, in the school’s motto and goals. A high level of understanding of and success in enacting and achieving the public purposes of schooling is reflected in statements of how goals are to be achieved, the way the school is organised, run and lead, as well as in the curriculum.

In respect of the goal achievement, what is absolutely clear here is that at LCPS the students are the major focus with the way the school is organised, run and led always being filtered through what is best for the students. Democratic equality dominates. Everyone (leaders, teachers, support staff, community members, and students) has the opportunity and is encouraged and facilitated to participate fully in the way the school is organised, run and led. There is a very strong climate of care and concern with the highest emphasis placed on quality relationships. Each group supports and is committed to the other groups.

LCPS understands the elements that most help or hinder<sup>3</sup> achievement of the public purposes of education as being linked to the quality of leadership in the school (both in its role and distributed form), the level of empowerment (for students, staff and parents/community), the level of collegiality, including involvement in decision making and deprivatised teacher practice, system priorities that favour public purposes and allow choice to use only that which

<sup>3</sup> Although the hindering forces are more implied as the opposite of the helping forces rather than being specifically mentioned in the case study.

is consistent with the already decided school direction, and the level of support (from students, staff and parents/community). As we have seen throughout this case study, the role of the principal cannot be underestimated.

Finally, and in addition to the evidence we have detailed in this Chapter, the fact that the principal, senior teachers, teachers, and parents were so open and welcoming to our ‘prying eyes and ears’ only serves to reinforce our conclusion about LCPS being a best practice community of professional learners (see Chapter 2 and Mulford, 2007c) facilitating best practice in terms of the public purposes of education. It is rare indeed for a school and its community to open themselves to independent observers gathering in-depth data over an extended period of time.

## 6. References

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